

# Preaching at The Bridge

## What Is a Sermon at The Bridge?

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1. Faithfully engages the biblical text.
2. Proclaims the Gospel.
3. Connects God's Word to the lives of God's people.
4. Engages the imagination.
5. Aims to transform, not just inform.
6. Leads to some kind of response.
7. Sends people out to live this truth where they live, work, and play.

*The sermon is a sacred event in which the preacher proclaims the Good News of Jesus, inviting the listener to surrender, trust, and active participation in the mission of God in the world.*

At the Bridge, we have three primary types of sermon series:

1. Exegetical: This is where we walk through a specific biblical text.
2. Topical: This is where we discover how God's Word equips us for modern issues, problems, and opportunities today.
3. Practice: At the start of each group's semester, we spend a few weeks introducing an ancient practice to focus on and live out as a community (i.e. sabbath, prayer, silence, fasting, etc.) See: [bridge.tv/practices](https://bridge.tv/practices)

## Preaching at the Bridge

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At The Bridge, we are committed to preaching that faithfully engages the biblical text, proclaims the Gospel, and connects God's Word to the lives of God's people. Our aim is not just to inform but to transform, leading to response, surrender, obedience, and mission.

To that end, we utilize a combination of expositional, topical, and practice-based preaching. Each serves a distinct purpose in forming our people in the way of Jesus, and all three are used thoughtfully and intentionally throughout the year.

- Expositional preaching walks through a specific passage or book of the Bible, verse by verse, allowing the structure and themes of the text to shape the message. This approach fosters biblical literacy, contextual understanding, and theological depth. It helps form our people in the full counsel of Scripture and reminds us that all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable (2 Timothy 3:16–17).
- Topical preaching addresses particular themes, questions, or challenges by drawing from various parts of Scripture. When done well, it is no less biblical. It simply begins with a contemporary concern or discipleship need and brings God's Word to bear on it. This allows us to speak prophetically and pastorally into cultural moments, formation gaps, and areas where our people need clarity, guidance, or encouragement.
- Practice-based preaching introduces and immerses our community in a formative practice of the Christian life, such as sabbath, prayer, silence, hospitality, or fasting. These series often coincide with the start of a group's semester, helping us not only teach about spiritual practices but actually live them together. This approach reinforces that following Jesus is an embodied, habitual way of life shaped by rhythms that retrain our hearts and reorder our loves.

We see biblical precedent for this variety. Jesus addressed topics drawn from everyday life, anchored His teaching in Scripture, and invited people into practices that formed their hearts and habits. The Apostles likewise demonstrated diverse preaching methods, from exposition in synagogues to contextual engagement in public

forums like Mars Hill (Acts 17). Paul's instruction to "preach the Word" (2 Timothy 4:2) does not prescribe a single method but points to the centrality of Scripture and the urgency of proclaiming it faithfully.

At The Bridge, the method of preaching follows God's leading. We continually ask: What is God saying to our church in this season? What do our people need to hear, practice, wrestle with, repent of, or step into? Whether we are walking through a Gospel, unpacking Romans, teaching on forgiveness, or inviting our people into sabbath, our aim is always to bring people face-to-face with Jesus and into deeper trust, obedience, and apprenticeship.

Regardless of method, faithful preaching requires deep study, humble submission to God's Word, and Spirit-led communal discernment. What matters most is not the category but the fruit: Is Jesus being exalted? Are people being saved? Are lives being changed? Is the Gospel clear? Are believers being rooted in Scripture, formed in Christlikeness, and sent into God's mission?

In short, we embrace expositional, topical, and practice-based preaching not as competing strategies but as complementary tools for making disciples who are with Jesus, becoming like Him, for the sake of the world.

## Church Calendar

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In addition to expositional, topical, and practice-based preaching, The Bridge intentionally follows the historic rhythms of the Church calendar. While we do not observe every feast or season, we embrace key moments that have shaped Christian worship for centuries. Seasons like Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost serve as anchors in our preaching and worship life, helping form our people in the story of Jesus across the year. These seasons remind us that the Gospel is not an abstract set of ideas but a lived narrative we inhabit together. As a result, our teaching, worship, visuals, and congregational practices will often reflect these rhythms, inviting our community to slow down, pay attention, and be shaped by the life, death, resurrection, and reign of Jesus.

## Big Idea

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If you can't say the main point of your message in a single sentence, your community will never remember it. As Howard Hendricks used to say, "A mist in the pulpit is a fog in the pews."

I like to think in terms of head, heart, hands.

- What do you hope people will think? (head)
- What do you hope people will feel? (heart)
- What do you hope people will do? (hands)

## Presence, Formation, Mission

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Because our mission is to *be with Jesus, become like Him, for the sake of the world*, we plan our preaching calendar through the lens of Presence, Formation, and Mission. These three movements are not abstract ideas. They flow directly from the invitation of Jesus in Matthew 4:19:

"Follow me (Presence), and I will make you (Formation) fishers of men (Mission)."

Jesus' first call was not primarily, "Learn from me," or "Serve me," but "Follow me." It is a call that demands repentance, surrender, reorientation, and abiding. To be with Jesus is not passive. It means leaving nets behind, turning from old patterns, submitting to His kingship, and ordering one's entire life around His presence. Because of this, Presence in our preaching is never merely contemplative. It is evangelistic. It confronts competing

allegiances. It names sin. It invites people into the costly but life-giving decision to entrust themselves fully to Jesus.

Presence also speaks to helping our community slow down, pay attention, and become aware of God's nearness. Some series are intentionally crafted to cultivate intimacy with Jesus, recover rest, practice stillness, deepen prayer, or reorient hearts in a cultural moment defined by hurry and distraction. These messages remind us that discipleship begins not with doing but with abiding.

Formation then describes the Spirit's ongoing work in shaping us into Christlikeness. Jesus does not call us to follow Him and then leave us unchanged. He promises, "I will make you." Our preaching must therefore cultivate habits, virtues, practices, and biblical literacy that allow the Spirit to reshape our hearts, desires, and lives. These messages train people to live in the story of God, not simply hear it.

Mission flows naturally from Presence and Formation. The more we follow Jesus and allow Him to shape us, the more He sends us to neighborhoods, tables, workplaces, schools, jails, and the margins. Mission is not an activity for the spiritually elite; it is the overflow of a life surrendered to and formed by Jesus. Our preaching helps people see this biblical trajectory and equips them to embody it with courage, humility, and hope.

As we design each year's preaching plan, we zoom out to ensure a healthy rhythm of all three movements. Some seasons emphasize repentance and returning to Jesus (Presence). Others focus on practices that deepen discipleship (Formation). Others call us outward with clarity, compassion, and conviction (Mission). And many series intentionally interweave all three movements, because in the life of a disciple, they always belong together.

This framework keeps our preaching focused, balanced, and missionally aligned. Most of all, it keeps Jesus' invitation at the center:

Come to Me. Be shaped by Me. Be sent with Me.

That is the movement of the Gospel, and we want our preaching calendar to reflect it every single year.

## **Rhetoric and the Work of Preaching**

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While preaching at The Bridge is grounded in Scripture, shaped by communal discernment, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we also recognize that faithful preaching requires attentiveness to how truth is communicated. For generations, Christian preachers have drawn from the insights of classical rhetoric as a way of stewarding their words with wisdom, clarity, and pastoral sensitivity. Good rhetoric serves the Gospel by helping the preacher speak truth in ways people can actually hear.

Aristotle identified three core dimensions of persuasion, all of which appear in biblical preaching: ethos, logos, and pathos

Ethos refers to the character of the preacher. As Philip Brooks famously said, "Preaching is the sharing of the Gospel through one's personality." Our lives must inhabit the story we preach. If we are not being formed into Christlikeness, our words will eventually lose weight.

Logos concerns the clarity and coherence of the message. Faithful preaching uses Scripture thoughtfully and logically, whether moving deductively from biblical truths to daily application or inductively from lived stories to theological insight. Reason alone cannot transform a heart, yet biblical logic helps people see the beauty, coherence, and trustworthiness of the Gospel.

Pathos reflects the emotional resonance of preaching. Jesus Himself engaged the emotions of His listeners with compassion, lament, righteous anger, and joy. Emotion is not a substitute for truth, yet it is often the doorway through which truth is received. Wise preachers steward emotion with humility, avoiding manipulation while helping people feel the gravity and goodness of the Gospel.

In all of this, rhetoric is never a performance tool. It is a pastoral tool, helping us communicate the Good News with integrity, clarity, and love. When used faithfully, it reinforces, not replaces, the conviction that preaching is a Spirit-led act of proclaiming Jesus for the transformation of God's people.

## **Teaching Team Process**

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At The Bridge, preaching is not a solo endeavor but a communal one. Each sermon is shaped through the collaborative work of our Teaching Team, a group made up of diverse voices and perspectives. About two and a half weeks before a sermon is delivered, the preacher submits a first draft to the team for review.

The team then provides thoughtful feedback that spans a wide range of areas: theological clarity, biblical accuracy, cultural awareness, and pastoral sensitivity. We consider how transitions flow, how humor lands, how different demographics might hear a statement, and how well the sermon connects to our mission of helping people be with Jesus, become like Him, for the sake of the world.

This process not only sharpens the preacher's message but also reflects the communal nature of discernment and proclamation. By bringing multiple perspectives to the table, we seek to ensure that what is preached is faithful to God's Word, attentive to our cultural moment, and compelling for the people God has entrusted to our care.

## **Congregational Feedback**

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In addition to the work of our Teaching Team, every week we invite a rotating group of people from our church to offer feedback on the sermon. We do this through a simple form that asks for reflections on what was most compelling, what could be improved, and what advice might be helpful for the future.

This process ensures that a wide variety of voices, from different ages, backgrounds, and experiences, are continually shaping our preaching. The form includes both qualitative and quantitative questions, ranging from clarity of the Gospel and the use of Scripture to how humor, visuals, or transitions were received.

By gathering feedback from the congregation, we not only refine the craft of preaching but also practice mutual discipleship. Listening in this way helps us see how God's Word is landing in real time, what resonates, what confuses, and what challenges or encourages our people. It also underscores that preaching at The Bridge is not a one-directional monologue but part of an ongoing dialogue between leaders and the congregation as we learn together what it means to be with Jesus, become like Him, for the sake of the world.

## **Annual Teaching Offsite**

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Each year, our Teaching Team gathers for an extended offsite dedicated to prayerfully discerning, dreaming, and designing the next 18–24 months of sermons at The Bridge. This offsite is one of the most important communal rhythms in our preaching culture because it embodies our conviction that preaching is not merely content creation but Spirit-led, community-shaped discernment about what God is saying to our church in this season and the next.

This day gives us space to step out of the tyranny of the urgent and into a posture of attentiveness. We listen to Scripture. We listen to one another. We listen to the aches, questions, hopes, and longings of our people. We listen for the Spirit's guidance as we ask:

Where is God already moving? What does our church need in order to be with Jesus, become like Him, and live for the sake of the world?

The offsite is intentionally structured around both strategic planning and spiritual discernment:

### 1. Prayer and Communion with God

We begin by grounding ourselves in silence, Scripture, and open-handed prayer. Because every sermon “always begins with dedicated, focused, earnest time in prayer, silence, and Scripture,” our long-range planning begins the same way.

### 2. Reviewing the Spiritual Landscape of Our Church

We discuss what we’re hearing from our congregants, small groups, staff, and ministry leaders. What themes are emerging? Where are people struggling, growing, or seeking understanding? What cultural realities are shaping their discipleship right now?

### 3. Identifying Core Discipleship Needs

We map out the major discipleship gaps that need sustained attention, biblical literacy, cultural engagement, spiritual practices, relational wholeness, formation in the way of Jesus, mission, and the big theological anchors that shape a resilient faith.

### 4. Drafting Potential Series

Out of that shared discernment, we begin sketching possible exegetical series, topical series, and practice series, in alignment with our teaching philosophy: preaching that “faithfully engages the biblical text, proclaims the Gospel, connects God’s Word to the lives of God’s people, engages imagination, aims to transform, and sends people out to live the truth.”

### 5. Sequencing the Calendar

We arrange series into a coherent arc, attentive to the church calendar (Advent, Lent, Holy Week), formation rhythms, groups semesters, Baptism Sundays, and cultural moments, so that the year has both theological depth and pastoral intentionality.

### 6. Considering Diversity of Voice and Perspective

Because our preaching process is communal, we identify who will preach various series, ensuring a diversity of perspectives, styles, and experiences that sharpen the preaching and broaden the impact.

This annual rhythm anchors our preaching ministry in wisdom, unity, and foresight, helping us avoid reactive preaching and instead cultivate a long, faithful obedience in the same direction.

It ensures that our sermons across the year are not isolated talks, but a cohesive discipleship journey that forms our people over time in the way of Jesus. It gives us the margin to create thoughtful, biblically rich, creatively engaging, mission-driven preaching that serves the whole church.

Ultimately, the offsite allows us to hold the preaching ministry with open hands before God:

What does faithfulness look like in this next season? How can our preaching lead people more deeply into the presence of Jesus and more faithfully into His mission?

(We will, on occasion, survey the church, sometimes on high-visitor days like Easter, to get a sense of the needs, pain points, longings, and gaps our community is feeling to help inform our sermon planning)

## **Preaching Evaluation**

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These are in addition to the required theological, hermeneutical, ecclesiological grounding that every sermon at The Bridge is required to have.

### **Evaluation 1: The Teacher’s Triad**

People tend to learn 1 of 3 ways: Thinking, Doing or Feeling (Called to Teach by Dr. William Yount). Did my sermon connect with:

- Thinkers?
- Doers?
- Feelers?

### **Evaluation 2: Answering Every Audience's Questions**

Audiences subconsciously ask themselves 3 basic questions of any teacher:

1. Does the teacher know what he/she's talking about?
2. Does the teacher care what he/she's talking about?
3. Does the teacher care about me?

Did I answer all 3 questions in my sermon?

(Hints: the length of your sermon, your cadence, your vulnerability, etc. all help answer these questions)

### **Evaluation 3: Levity vs. Intensity**

Were there constant flows from moments of levity to moments of intensity?

Good questions to ask re: Intensity

- What was the most intense moment of my sermon?
- When did I "have them?"
- When could you have heard a pin drop?

Good questions re: levity

- What was the most fun moment of my sermon?
- Did I ever make them laugh so much they clapped?

(Axiom: If they're laughing, they're learning.)

### **Evaluation 4: Was I myself?**

Was it my voice or did I accidentally fall into the temptation of trying to emulate one of my heroes?

Another good question to ask is, "Who was I speaking to?" If I was speaking to my seminary professor, the biggest giver in the room, my biggest critic in the room, etc... I probably missed the actual audience.

### **Evaluation 5: Did the tail wag the dog?**

Did I rely too much on any illustration or story?

### **Evaluation 6: Were my stories/illustrations memorable?**

Will people remember the "why" of my illustrations or just the story itself? (Hint: Use the same verbiage when telling your story as when you apply your story.)

### **Evaluation 7: Personal Reflection**

Was there anything I learned about myself in this sermon? (Hint: This usually only comes from watching or listening to yourself.)

### **Evaluation 8: Audience Reflection**

Was there anything I learned about my audience?

- Did I learn anything about their sense of humor?
- Did I hit a limit on personal vulnerability that disallowed them from following the sermon?

### **Evaluation 9: Did I "miss" any subset of the audience?**

- Did women connect with my sermon?
- Did people of color connect with my sermon?
- Did high school students connect with my sermon?

- Did single people connect with my sermon?
- Did older adults connect with my sermon?

**Evaluation 10: Was the Gospel clearly and compellingly articulated?**

- The most important aspect of any sermon is the clear presentation of the Gospel for people to respond to.