

**The Preaching of Alistair Begg:
Model for Expository Preaching**

Dr. Kelly B. Burton

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William Haslam was reading through his personal prayer book one afternoon. As he was reading Haslam decided he wanted to be a preacher. For years he labored at his local church trying to get the community to attend. But William knew something was missing in his life. One day his gardener got sick. William went to see him but discovered he was unable to say anything that helped or comforted him. One of William's friends went to see the gardener, talked to him about Jesus, and led the man to trust in Christ as his Savior. This deeply troubled William. Now he knew there was something missing. One Sunday morning he stood to preach from Matthew 22:42 under this heading: "What do you think of Christ?" During his sermon William was convicted by the words of God. His heart was broken. He felt the change sweep over him and so did one of the men in the church who stood and declared, "Hey everybody! The preacher just got saved!" Instantly the church began to rejoice. The Holy Spirit settled into the church and twenty people were saved that day.

Alistair Begg knows the power of the Word of God. His first words from the pulpit are always, "Please take your Bibles and turn to. . ." For those who listen to him regularly we know that his opening prayers whet the soul of his listeners, even demanding our attention of what is to come. His opening prayers are application-driven:

Let's take a moment and ask for God's help. Our gracious God and Father, at this point of the evening, and in light of all that clamors for our attention, we want You to help us. Please apply the truth of Your Word to our lives in such a way that it would be life changing. We believe that when the Word of God is truly preached, the voice of God is truly heard.¹

¹ Alistair Begg, "A Warning Against Laziness, Proverbs 24:23-24, 26:13-16," a sermon preached on the campus of Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL, September 1, 1999.

In October of 2015, this writer had the privilege to sit down with Alistair Begg and probe his mind about preaching.

Begg is as genuine in the pulpit as he is in person. His preaching is humble, creative, disciplined and delightful, all of which reflect the character of Alistair Begg. He stated in the interview, “God calls men to shepherd God’s flock and to care for its well-being, to show God’s people by example and instruction how they should live lives worthy of God their Savior.”²

Behind his effective public preaching ministry is a private spiritually disciplined man. Although Begg does not come right out and say it, he practices the spiritual disciplines of the Christian life by practicing the presence of God. This hour-by-hour focus emerges publicly in Begg’s life-application. Effective sermon application is rooted in the pastor who first allows the text to plow deep into his soul, revealing his own inadequacies; he receives the conviction and then asks God for the power to change. Life application in Begg’s sermons contribute to why he is so effective.

Begg follows the disciplined elements of expository preaching. He *explains* his text in its original context. He *illustrates* the text with current cultural experiences that reach everyone in his audience. He also draws from the old hymns to support his text. “Something you need to know about me is how much hymnody helps me to frame my thinking.”³ Begg also *applies* the text to his Parkside Church listeners with a clever humor that holds their attention. For example, his most effective applications come when he creates conversations with the characters in the text. His intimate knowledge of the text and the personalities of the characters enable him to sort of role play with the characters. This role play appeals to us all.

² Alistair Begg, interview with the writer October 1, 2015.

³ Begg, interview with the writer October 1, 2015.

All of the necessary elements of a text-driven expository sermon are present in Alistair Begg's preaching. Begg thinks of those elements as a telephone line. They are uniquely intertwined giving him what he calls "freedom in the pulpit." This writer believes that Alistair Begg is a modern-day Puritan and model for expository preaching. Seminaries teach it, authors write on it, but very few can model it as well as Alistair Begg.