

The Tone of Your Sermon Should Match the Tone of the Text

A good suggestion from Calvin Miller's [Preaching...](#)

A brief word about genre: it exists; honor it. Paul's letters are different from the Psalms, from the minor prophets, from the Pentateuch. Preachers should not handle the Bible as though there is no difference between the various kinds and styles of biblical writing.

When preaching any passage, get in touch with the author.

- When you preach Jeremiah, find something of the melancholy in it and let the tone suffuse the sermon.
- When you preach Ecclesiastes, do it wistfully.
- When you're in the Psalms, let there be a hint of melody about it.
- Let the fire out of the Apocalypse and let courage bleed from Esther;
- let the wind blow in Acts.

Further, find ways of illustrating every individual sermon text with insights and moods that communicate the genre.

- T. S. Eliot will better illustrate the Psalms than will Billy Graham. Billy might do better in the book of Acts.
- Let the poets speak to Genesis 1, and the newspaper to 1 Thessalonians.
- Archibald MacLeish would do better commenting on Job than a prosaic commentator.
- Let Shakespeare's sonnets speak to Ruth and Frodo Baggins to the Christ-redemption passages.

Above all put on your touchy-feely wardrobe and pick up the agony and ecstasy and every nuance of form that rings through the various writers of Scripture. To understand this—to feel this—is to give a great gift to your auditors. The gift is one of tone, relationship, and the subliminal.

To fail to honor genre is to give your people the fuzzy notion that the Bible, like the Golden Plates of Nephi, was handed down from heaven as a single piece, and all of it is pretty much alike. But the biblical heroes were immensely different.

- Ezekiel borders on the neurotic,
- Isaiah on the elegant,
- Jeremiah on the morose,
- Micah on the visionary.

The task will not be easy. It is difficult work to make a genre live. It is like the studious work of an actor, who will study for weeks the part he wishes to portray before he ever steps out on stage to portray it. Then when at last he interprets the part, he is captive to it. The role alters the

player's complete personality, and the actor cannot easily shuck what he has worked so hard to gain.

Even within a single writer there will be various tones.

- Moses is a furious zealot in Exodus, but in Deuteronomy he is a reflective old man. Don't preach both passages the same way.
- Paul is firm and tough in 1 Corinthians, but he is moody and tender in 2 Timothy.
- Jesus is full of parables in Luke, but full of prayer and philosophy in John.

Giving these various moods and tempos, styles and emotions will bring to your people a rich sense of the varied nature of how God speaks through human agency. Let the Bible become as variegated to you as you would like it to be to them. God does after all speak in various ways his wonders to perform.

Read more from Trevin [here](#).