

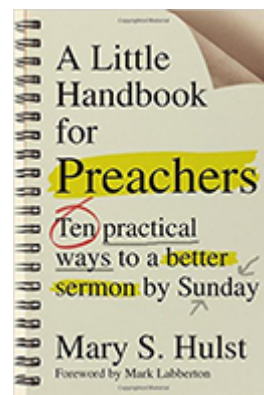
# Book Review: A Little Handbook for Preachers

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***A Little Handbook for Preachers: Ten Practical Ways to a Better Sermon by Sunday***

*By Mary S. Hulst (Intervarsity Press)*

This is not “your father’s preaching manual.” This is not a step-by-step approach on how to put a sermon together. Instead, Mary Hulst covers crucial, and often overlooked, ingredients needed to create good sermons. These ingredients can be mixed as one chooses and is able, but clearly all are important contributors to the best sermons.



Ingredients include the basics of preaching, like reaching people with crucial issues of content, interpretation and delivery. Hulst’s ingredients also cover the importance of a pastor’s lifestyle—including personal spiritual discipline, relationships with church members, the link between ministry and preaching, and getting sermon feedback from church members.

Ingredients often ignored in other preaching handbooks include “incidentals,” like the importance of dressing, grooming and gesturing. Hulst even addresses problem areas, such as when preachers take on the continual role of “parent,” scolding people about what they shouldn’t be doing. Or when preachers constantly focus on themselves with personal stories, leaving the audience impressed by the preacher but with no knowledge or memory about what was taught from the Scripture that day.

To fully cover each topic, Hulst adds ample amounts of real-life preaching challenges, illustrations, sermon outlines and Scripture analyses. While it is an enjoyable book to read, it is clear that to master her points, one would need to review and practice the material intently and often.

I do not know anything about the author, or the college where she serves as chaplain (Calvin College) or the seminary where she served as professor of preaching (Calvin Theological Seminary). But after reading this book, I know she would easily fit in as “our type” of Christian. She is a devoted follower of Jesus, takes a high view of Scripture, loves the local church, and her theology is trustworthy.

The book states it is for new or experienced preachers, and I’d agree. But it also says it is for the listening audience in the pews. That makes me a little uneasy. If the listeners read this book, it will inform them just how off-the-mark so many sermons are today.

I’m not sure how experienced preachers would feel about getting this book as a Christmas gift, even if they need it.

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