

## Engage360 Episode 137 | Challenges, Opportunities, and Trends in Modern Preaching; Mr. David Ward, Dr. Scott Wenig, Dr. Wendy Widder, Dr. Matt Wolf

[00:00:19] **Don Payne:** Hi friends, welcome to Engage360. This is Denver Seminary's podcast. We're glad you've joined us for today's conversation. My name is Don Payne. I'll be your host for this episode. Over recent years, forms of ministry have become increasingly specialized, which is a great thing because it allows the gospel to impact people and impact society in even more nuanced and personalized ways. Seminary degree programs these days are more creative and specialized than ever. And increasing numbers of people who attend seminary do not envision traditional pastoral or preaching roles. However, that trend towards specialization must never be allowed to eclipse the importance of the traditional ministry of preaching.

And Denver Seminary has a long and exemplary emphasis on preaching, which we're very grateful for. We still think that that's a central task in Christian ministry, because without faithful proclamation of the Word, and by the Word, I mean both the Gospel and the Scriptures, without that faithful proclamation of the Word, all other ministries are left without a gravitational center. And we have upcoming, this summer 2024, the next installment of the Shannon Preaching Lectureship and Seminar, which is going to feature our guests in this episode. First of all, author and Old Testament scholar, Dr. Wendy Widder, Dr. Scott Wenig, who serves as the Professor of Applied Theology and the Haddon W. Robinson Chair of Biblical Preaching. Rev. David Ward, who is currently pursuing doctoral studies in preaching and will be directing a Lilly Foundation-funded grant called The Compelling Preaching Initiative here at Denver Seminary. And then Dr. Matt Wolfe, who is the Lead Pastor of Arise Church here in Denver and also an adjunct faculty member with us in homiletics here at Denver Seminary.

So, I want to welcome each of you. Wendy, Matt, Dave, Scott, good to see you all.

[00:02:20] **Scott Wenig:** Thanks, Don.

[00:02:21] **Wendy Widder:** Thank you.

[00:02:22] **Dave Ward:** Doctor.

[00:02:23] **Matt Wolf:** Good to see you.

[00:02:24] **Don Payne:** All right, get us started, one or more of you. How would you assess the state of preaching in the church today? How does it tend to be viewed and valued? And why? What are its strengths, weaknesses, trends? All of that. Where are we today with preaching?

[00:02:42] **Scott Wenig:** Well, I'm going to kick this off, and I'm going to refer to a Pew study that was done about four or five years ago. So, this is a Pew Endowment study, and they came to the conclusion, after surveying hundreds and hundreds of people, that the single most important thing in the reason people choose to attend or not attend a church was because of the quality of preaching in that church. So, I think from a layperson's perspective, uh, not just the professional or the preacher's perspective, but the layperson's perspective, preaching is hugely, hugely important. Now, we're in the tradition of Protestantism, in the tradition of the Reformation. I realize there are other traditions. I get that because I'm a church historian, but for our tradition as Protestant Evangelical Christians, preaching is preeminent. I know that doesn't sit well with somebody, but the

statistics seem to bear that out. People go to church because of the preaching. So, I'll be quiet and let Matt and Dave weigh in, since they're better preachers than I am.

[00:03:49] **Dave Ward:** Well, I don't know if that's true. You know, I know last fall, Angie, my wife, and I went to hear Jerry Seinfeld at the Bellco Theatre in downtown Denver, where 5,000 people packed out that auditorium to hear this guy, Jerry Seinfeld, talk to us for over an hour using only a microphone and a spotlight. And we were enraptured by everything he said, because we were there to laugh and he made us laugh a lot, but I was thinking about that later. And I realized, you know, he's an almost-70-year-old Caucasian, Jewish American, and the audience was very diverse. And so, I thought, you know, the format is not the problem. If we have an issue of preaching, you know, one speaker speaking to an audience. People were, were there for that, paid lots of money for that, and you see that again and again. People listen to lectures, they'll listen to TED talks, they'll listen to spoken word performances. Preaching as a format is not outdated in our culture. It's still relevant as long as people feel like there's something of value or something of importance that's being said from the stage, the platform, the front. It's just a question of, are we going to speak God's word and life-changing truths to people or not?

[00:05:10] **Matt Wolf:** Yeah, I completely concur with those guys. What I've just discovered, even just personally, is that preaching still changes lives. And even this morning, I got coffee with a guy, we had just taught a message a few weeks ago on debt and how you should get out of debt from the Bible. And he was telling me this morning how they've changed some of their financial decisions. So, you see that preaching is leading to life change. And one cool thing is, not only are people listening to TED Talks, but now with the technology we have and formats, preaching has a secondary life in podcasts. I mean, even right now we're doing this podcast and people are listening to longform talking, right? Or in short clips on TikTok and Instagram, and it just gives a second life to people. And a lot of people are listening to that even before they set foot in a church building. So, it gives our preaching more impact. I got an email yesterday from a guy that I've known now for a few months, hasn't been to church in years, but has been listening to me because somebody shared a message on Spotify with him. And so, the fact that he's coming this Sunday for the first time, and he already has a relationship, has already heard preaching. So, I just think preaching has had its impact. And an even bigger impact than ever before. And we take a little clip from my message every single week and we put it up on TikTok. And I have one message. It's a minute long message, but it has six million views. So, if one person can hear six million. You know, my sermon, it was definitely not good enough to be heard by six million people, so don't go check that out. But I just think it has a second life, and it has an even bigger impact today than maybe it ever has.

[00:06:52] **Don Payne:** Wendy, what are your thoughts?

[00:06:55] **Wendy Widder:** Well, I think one of the great values of preaching, in our culture especially, is that it assumes that there's a source of truth outside of ourselves, and that just goes against the air we breathe. There are so many voices, more than ever, speaking to us and challenging and even discounting truth. And if we stop preaching what we claim to be the truth, what we believe to be the truth, then we buy what the culture is selling, and we legitimize that it's okay to make your own truth claims, you get to write your own script. We hold to the truth of the Bible, that it is the truth, is a source of truth, and Jesus claims to be the truth and we get at Jesus through the Bible, through preaching, we don't get to make him in our own image and the truth that we want him to be. So, I think that is just one of the really important things about preaching, is that it grounds people in what we believe to be true.

[00:07:57] **Don Payne:** Thanks for that. I want to loop back to something Scott said at the outset, which was the centrality of the role of preaching in Protestantism, particularly in Protestant Evangelicalism. And at the same time, I can recall within the last 20 to 30 years, there were some movements, some fairly aggressive movements afoot within Protestant Evangelicalism that were discounting or diminishing the role of preaching, questioning the value of preaching. Now that may have been a rather temporary thing, movement, or fad even, but I'm curious what led to that and what lingering effects do you see there might still be from some of that? Why do people question the value of preaching?

[00:08:44] **Dave Ward:** I'm wondering how many of those churches are still around.

[00:08:50] **Scott Wenig:** Yeah, I remember when there was some prominence given to some of those movements back in the 80s and 90s. I think a lot of people felt like, well, I'm just getting all this content, but I'm not really engaging people in a relationship. And I'm not really getting to know people and I don't even feel like I'm getting to know God better, so what we need to do is just circle up the chairs and share. And I wouldn't discount that, I mean, I think that that's part and parcel of being a Christian and getting to know people and having fellowship and relationship. Those are very, very important things. But I don't think that those can replace the centrality of the Word, as Wendy just said, especially now in a culture where there's so much question about does truth even exist? So, I think it's even more important now than it was 30 years ago.

[00:09:41] **Matt Wolf:** Yeah, and I would say that there's a reality that preaching alone can't make a disciple or can't make disciple makers. And so, people take that reality and stretch it a little too far. But yes, there needs to be more than just preaching. But I don't think we should remove the thing that Dr. Wenig pointed out has the biggest impact. If 83% of people pick which church they're going to go back to the next week based on their preaching, you can't make a disciple if they're not there more than one week. So, I think it should continue to be a part of the full discipleship package of what you do, in your ministry or your church.

[00:10:18] **Don Payne:** Yeah, you know, it's interesting. I really, I suspect that that was part of the reason for the kickback against preaching is that perhaps there were some overdone expectations of, or some perceptions of what preaching was expected to do. And you know, as people began to realize that preaching cannot do everything, I wonder if the pendulum swung because of that, so are we now experiencing the results of that pendulum swing the other direction and realizing if you do not have solid, reliable, sound preaching, you really pay a big price for that.

[00:10:57] **Scott Wenig:** Well, I would also add this: I'm a self-proclaimed white American Baby Boomer Evangelical Christian. That's who I am, and I love preaching, but one of the things I've come to realize about our movement of Evangelicalism is, and I mean this, this is both a strength and a weakness, it's a populist movement. In other words, it's of the people. And it's always been that way since the Great Awakenings of the 18th and 19th century. But here's the thing about Evangelicalism that I've come to see that I think is kind of a downside to it, is it's notoriously faddish. So, what's the latest fad? What's the latest thing? Well, preaching is not a fad. I mean, preaching's got huge Biblical and historical chops behind it. And once again, it's just part and parcel of the worship of God and learning who God is and what He wants for our lives. It's not a fad, so I don't think you can ever discount it, even though sometimes in our movement, there's a tendency to discount certain things.

[00:11:59] **Don Payne:** I'd love to have several of you reflect on trends that you have seen in preaching. How has the role, the ministry of preaching changed in any way, for good or ill? Maybe over the long haul, or even within the last few decades?

[00:12:17] **Matt Wolf:** Well, I can say, you know, I studied preaching under Scott, under Dr. Wenig, I guess at the end of the first decade of the 2000s. And, you know, there was a big push, I think, because of Andy Stanley and his book, *Communicating for Change*. A lot more, you know, it was almost just talking. You know, we're talking together, even though I'm the main one talking as the preacher. But we're just going to talk. I'm not going to yell at you. I'm not going to preach at you. I'm just going to have a conversation. And I would say over the last, I don't know, six to eight years, there's been a much bigger push towards passion. Where is passion in the preaching? That if you're not passionate, then why are you even up there? It's a waste of time. And I think that's been a trend from my generation, a Millennial, you know, that we want passion. We want to see that. Whereas maybe the Baby Boomers were like, no, no, no. We've had the crazy passionate people yelling at us before. And now, you know, preachers like Craig Groeschel and Steven Furtick are so passionate, so much energy that, you know, people want to see that much energy. Cause it's like, oh, maybe you actually believe this.

[00:13:25] **Dave Ward:** I agree with what Matt just said. I think that preaching is less formal in its style than it once was, you know, back a hundred years ago. You know, you read sermons from that era, and it was very much more oratorical, you know, with rhetorical flourishes and a formalized spirit. You're hearing a speech oftentimes, or at least it reads that way. And increasingly, I think to Matt's point, it's gotten more conversational in tone, if not actually a conversation, but the way we present it is very much just like we're sitting across a table at Starbucks, and I'm just telling you about Jesus or explaining something in the Bible to you. And there's room for variance in that, in the middle. I'm more of a performer than, you know, just a talker. Kind of more of a, you know, presenter, you're sort of watching a presentation, but I'm not giving a speech as much as I'm, you know, doing that kind of thing. So, there's room for variance. It's a continuum, I think, but it's overall, the trend is, it's much less formal than it once was. And I don't think that's a bad thing. I think that just reflects the culture.

[00:14:39] **Don Payne:** You're reminding me of that rather famous quote from over a hundred years ago, I think the early 20th century, by the famous preacher Phillips Brooks, who called preaching truth through personality.

[00:14:54] **Scott Wenig:** I'm glad you mentioned that, Don, because I think it speaks to the reality that God raises up all kinds of different people to communicate His Word. And those people have different personalities, and they have different styles. I mean, one of the lectures I do in our Intro to Homiletics class here is I talk about speaking styles and I talk about talkers and speakers and orators. And I use those from the African American tradition as the exemplars of oratory because that came out of their history of slavery. The preacher was the guy, and he was oratorical and larger than life, and in many, many African American churches today, you still have that sense of oratory. That's not true in Asian or Anglo or even Hispanic churches nearly as much, but Matt had mentioned Andy Stanley, and I use him as kind of an exemplar of the speaker. Speakers are clear, they're presenters, they know where they're going to start and they're going to end. And then on this side of the equation, there are talkers. People who just have the gift of gab and they can get up, but they know where they're going. And I think that, you know, those are just kind of three examples of different styles that people can take on and communicate God's Word really effectively. Because I think you're absolutely right, and Brooks was right. It is truth through personality.

[00:16:16] **Don Payne:** I'm curious what challenges or headwinds each of you see today's Church facing with regard to preaching. Some of them may be, you probably alluded to these in your comments already, but what's the Church facing that might be new or different than it was in recent generations with regard to preaching?

[00:16:37] **Matt Wolf:** I personally think one of the biggest difficulties we face as preachers, especially those of us who are preaching regularly in a church, is the frequency of attendance is down, and I don't know where he got the research, but Tom Rainer had an article a couple years ago on his Church Answers website that the average attender today is showing up 15% less than he did even five, ten years ago. And that 15% less, I figured it out, that means that over a span of two months, they're coming one less time. So, if they were coming, you know, six times in two months, now they're coming five. And because of that, that's less touch points for that person to engage with the preaching, the teaching. So, if you're trying to preach through a book consecutively, it makes it more difficult. So that's the challenge. I think the benefits of nowadays that we have is, like I mentioned earlier, the podcasts, that there is YouTube, that there is, they can wake up in the morning and if they've subscribed to whatever podcast app you're using, they have the message there. So, I, you know, the way we've handled it at Arise is to push, you know, every single beginning of a sermon series, we say, hey, this sermon series is going to last four or five, six weeks. We want you to commit to this entire series, even if you're traveling. So, subscribe right now before you forget, because this whole series matters. So, we repeat that over and over again. And just our phrase is "worship weekly, worship weekly." And we have to remind people that even if you're not here, you need to worship weekly. So, the negative is, they're not there in person. The positive is, they might actually be engaging with the Bible and with what we're teaching more regularly.

[00:18:13] **Dave Ward:** You know, Don, it's both a trend and a current thing. When I was in college, back in a prior century, I attended a Bible teaching church for four years, and I heard two sermon series. The pastor preached through Exodus for two years, and then he preached through Romans for two years. And he was a marvelous, gifted teacher, and he was very thorough, and Dr. Wenig met him and heard him teach, knows who he is. But I don't know anybody who could make that work today, and maybe it didn't work back then, either. He was a unique animal, but you know, to me, I feel like if a sermon series goes more than, I don't know, six, eight weeks on the outside, we're losing people, maybe because of what Matt said about frequency of attendance, maybe just kind of, you know, our attention spans are much more fragmented than they used to be. But, you know, I think it's more difficult to keep people with you for as long as you want, even in an individual sermon or certainly a sermon series, the longer you go.

[00:19:16] **Scott Wenig:** Another challenge that I think preachers today face, and they've always faced this to some degree, but I think it's even more so now: we live in a culture that is highly skeptical. And there's a lot of things in the Bible that seem to be off-putting to people. And those are what we call theological themes that really push hard against our humanity. Dave and I were talking about this earlier today. Maybe the judgment of God or those texts that in the Bible that deal with the judgment of God. Just a lot of things in scripture that are hard, I think, for people to hear. So, I think that that's a challenge. But it's also a good opportunity for those of us who preach to deal with those hard texts. So, one of the reasons, you know, we wanted Wendy to come in is because she's an expert on the Book of Daniel, and it's got a lot of apocalyptic stuff in there and it looks like it's not very relevant. My own feeling is it's incredibly relevant and maybe even more so in the coming years. But she could probably address the hard text issue from her perspective.

[00:20:20] **Don Payne:** Yeah, Wendy, you're the Biblical scholar among us, so we need to hear from you on that.

[00:20:24] **Wendy Widder:** I'm the "one of these is not like the other." Preaching is not my field, so I just am listening and taking in all these trends. Much of my church experience over the last two decades has involved jumping state lines and moving, and so I don't feel like I've had a sense of the consistency of what's going on in the pulpit, because I've sat behind or in front of, I guess, so many, so many pulpits. And even crossing denominations, which just mixes it all up. So, I appreciate your perspectives. Apocalyptic is certainly one of the more challenging parts of the Bible genres. And yet, I come from a background where, Daniel and Revelation, the primary value in those sorts of apocalyptic prophecies was being able to chart some timeline for the future and what was going to happen, and there were a couple of really terrifying movies out, and it really turned me off to that literature, which I think is probably true for people in my generation. I don't know how far down it goes, but when I was asked to study and teach the Book of Daniel, that's like the one book in the Old Testament I didn't want to do. But as I got into it and I realized what that literature is for, it transformed my view of it. And so, I think we come at hard literature sometimes with the wrong idea of what it's for and what its value is. And so, then we struggle to preach it, to understand it, and it is hard to understand, I'll give you that. But sometimes we get lost in the details that we shouldn't get lost in, and we miss the bigger picture of what the purpose of that kind of literature was. So, you can preach the entire Book of Daniel, and your congregation can take value from it, and can benefit from its message from start to finish.

[00:22:29] **Don Payne:** You know this really sets us up to talk a little bit about the nature of preaching with the entire canon of Scripture, and all of the different genres, whether that's the poetic books, the wisdom literature, narrative books, whatever. Because you know, it seems like we've come in, over what kind of period of time, I don't know, but we have come to view the word "preaching" or to use the word "preaching" in a pretty broad, flexible way of anything we're doing from a pulpit. Now, if we look at the way that word is used in the New Testament, particularly, that's, you know, the *kerusso*, the announcement, the proclamation. Preaching is proclamation. And you know, what are we proclaiming? Proclaiming the Lordship of Christ, we're proclaiming the Kingdom of God. And I wonder if that's something you'd want to reflect on is how our understanding of the nature and the definition of what preaching is fits with what it means to proclaim those things from the different parts of Scripture, as opposed, or maybe compared to just teaching our way through those parts of Scripture. What does it mean to actually preach, or proclaim, from the whole counsel of God?

[00:23:43] **Matt Wolf:** I've joked with some of the students I've taught over at Denver Seminary that if God in his wisdom is smart enough to give us different genres of literature, like, he didn't just write us a love letter. Yes, we have some of those, but we also have some narrative and Psalms and poetry. If God and his wisdom would do that, I think in the same way, we should be a little smarter than just having one type of sermon that we use over and over again. So, I would say part of that, there's something that happens in different genres, and I'm sure Wendy would be able to explain the two main genres of Daniel especially, but there's something that happens in those, with narrative that stirs our emotions when we hear stories, we connect to it on an emotional level. Same thing with poetry, it might touch even a deeper level in our souls. And whereas the Proverbs, you know, you engage a little bit more intellectually with those things. Which is great because I think Jesus taught us to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. So, in the same way, like when we preach through these literature, we should be seeking to stir emotions or to stir the souls or have people think a little bit more because all of those are part of how we truly worship God.

[00:25:01] **Dave Ward:** In Acts 20, Paul makes a point of saying that he has preached “the whole counsel” of God. You know, not just a slice of it. And he says, therefore, “I’m innocent of the blood.” You know, it’s like, listen, I’ve told you everything. I haven’t hidden things or held them back.

We believe that all Scripture is God-breathed and therefore is profitable. And that includes the Old Testament, even though, you know, we’re not under the old covenant, the way ancient Israel was. But still, we learn so much about the character of God, the mind of God, the actions of God, the heart of God from, you know, every book of the Bible. And therefore, we should certainly endeavor to preach through all of them. Preach the whole counsel of God. You know, if we have years to do it, then more the better. But even if we only have, a few times to do it for a guest speaker or an interim pastor or that, you know, teaching a class, whatever the case may be, certainly not to shy away or just kind of gravitate toward our favorite pet books or pet passages or pet sermon themes, I think is incumbent on us as leaders and preachers and teachers.

[00:26:13] **Scott Wenig:** Don, you’ll probably remember this because you and I overlapped when we were in seminary back before the Noahic Flood. But you know, I think back in the day, we always assumed, well, we’re going to teach young preachers to do Paul’s letters or James. You know, didactic literature because it’s easier, and over the years, having done that, I’ve come to the conclusion it’s not necessarily easier, because what they were trying to communicate was understandable in their culture in their day. But it’s 2000-years removed. All of that to say, I think what Dave and Matt have said, different genres communicate different things to different people in different ways. I mean, one of the things I’ve always appreciated about the Gospels, especially like Matthew and Luke, is they include a lot of Jesus teaching, much of which comes in parables. I mean, Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God all the time, but he doesn’t do a word study on *basileia*. He doesn’t really define what he means by the Kingdom. What he does is, He tells stories. The Kingdom of God is like this, or it’s like this, or it’s like this. And I mean, I’ve always loved parables because of that. And you see parables in the Old Testament as well at points. So, I think genre is just, it’s one of the beauties of the Bible that we want to mine.

[00:27:37] **Don Payne:** Well, and I think that’s, that may be one of the biggest challenges that preachers face, is learning how to proclaim the Kingdom of God from every type of genre. Proclaim the Kingdom of God from anywhere in Scripture. That’s tough work.

[00:27:53] **Scott Wenig:** Well, it is. I would agree with that. And this is one of the other reasons we wanted to bring Wendy in because in my opinion, one of the main themes of the Book of Daniel is the Kingdom of God. God is king. He’s in charge. So, she can address that.

[00:28:08] **Wendy Widder:** Yeah, it’s totally all over the book. I mean, from the first chapter, which sets up the themes of where you’re headed, you’ve got God’s Kingdom versus Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom, and a constant battle, but there’s really no question who’s going to win it in Daniel. But I think part of the difficulty of genres is we, some of them, and apocalyptic is one of them, they’re unfamiliar to us and to our people. They weren’t unfamiliar to the original audience, so much of the challenge is educating your people on what the genre is and how does it function. And okay, now let me tell you what it’s doing now that you understand a little bit of how it’s working. And that’s hard. And it takes more time, and it takes more investment. And when people are not there or they’re there 15% less of the time, it just adds to the challenge of it.

[00:29:03] **Don Payne:** You know, you’re making me think about the difference between the methodologies of preaching and the theology of preaching. We do give a lot of attention, rightly so,

to the methodologies of preaching. I was trained deeply in that, but I've thought in recent years more about the theology of preaching, which is kind of what I was getting at with some of these Kingdom questions, these proclamation questions. And what does it mean to learn how to preach? Theologically, not just preach theological doctrines, but to preach from a theological vantage point. What unique challenges does that present to us in our preaching, whatever our methodologies are?

[00:29:40] **Dave Ward:** I think when I first wrestled with the question, what is God doing when I preach?

[00:29:49] **Don Payne:** Hmm.

[00:29:50] **Dave Ward:** It really helped my prayer life because I don't always know. And it may not be what I think He's going to do, or ought to do. But you know, if as a preacher, I should be very James 3:1, you know, "Let not many of you seek to become preachers." This is a big deal. My translation, sorry. But this is a very humbling thing. God doesn't need to use me to convey His Word to His people. He doesn't. He could remove me from the equation in any point and for any reason because he's God and I'm not. But trying to understand, okay, here's this text, and I've outlined this text, and I've prepared this message, I've got good illustrations, and I want to apply it specifically, and I've got it on paper, and I've got it, the question is though, okay, but how is God going to use this? What's the Holy Spirit's agenda? And there have been times where I've preached a message and someone has come up to me afterwards and said, oh, pastor, thank you so much, that was such a wonderful message. God really used that in my life. And I'd asked the question, okay, what did, what did you get from that? What did God tell you? And they told me something that was Biblical and of God that I didn't say in the message. And I'm like, Oh, okay.

[00:31:17] **Don Payne:** "I don't know how to feel about that. Thanks."

[00:31:19] **Dave Ward:** Well, I kind of do. And I kind of, I mean, it's like, all right, that's God sort of winking at me, saying, you know, "I had my agenda. It'd be nice if you had been on board with where I was going, but you don't have to be, that's okay. I still got it anyway." And so, it keeps me humble. It keeps me grounded. It keeps me dependent on the Lord because I know He has an agenda for the sermon that I'm going to give on this day to this group of people. And I, you know, I need to be as attuned with the Holy Spirit to that as I possibly can.

[00:31:50] **Don Payne:** I'd love to hear from any of you what you think needs to shift or maybe be rethought about the nature of preaching as we move forward into the coming years. What's gonna change? What needs to change, do you think? If anything.

[00:32:13] **Wendy Widder:** I'm not up on trends in preaching. I just know what my little church does. In my past, the Old Testament has been woefully overlooked. And Jesus and the apostles considered it Scripture, and they also considered it absolutely necessary for the message they were delivering, and that is still true. So, you know, when I hear New Testament sermons, and I can see the Old Testament that's there, and it is never brought up, I'm like, you missed it! You missed it! So, I think that's so important. The Old Testament is hard and it's big, I get it, but we miss, you cannot grasp the fullness of the New Testament message without it.

[00:33:04] **Dave Ward:** I agree with that. And I think there is a specific portion of the Old Testament that is very frequently neglected, the most neglected part in my circles anyway, are the Minor Prophets. And I think there's so much that the minor prophets have to say. Dr. Witter, could you



take this if you want and just run with that for a minute? There's so much for, you know, our culture talking about justice, talking about God's heart toward the oppressed, talking about God's coming judgment, even on His own people if they are doing wicked things. I think I'd like to see more Minor Prophet preaching in the future.

[00:33:43] **Matt Wolf:** I think one of the worst trends today is that people aren't preaching the Bible. And maybe that's every generation, but I have friends and I have been at events, and I've heard someone preach someone else's sermon. And hear it happen regularly. I think it's just a major issue, and this is one of the saddest examples, I'm not going to name any names in this, but I was preaching through a section of the Kings on Elijah and Elisha, so I checked out someone's book, a very popular preacher, and I read it, and I was like, oh, I don't remember that was in the text. This is his main point for his sermon. And then he said, oh, I borrowed this from this other famous preacher. I went back and listened to the other famous preacher, two of the most famous preachers in our country, and he had the same thing. And I was like, I don't remember that in the text. Well, it was actually from the KJV, and it was a mistranslation of a word, and we know now that that mistranslation was incorrect, and that's why I was like, eh, it wasn't in my NIV when I studied it, because that word was only in the old KJV. But yet, both these preachers are preaching something that's not in the text. And because they're borrowing it, and I know now, you know, it's second hand, then third hand, then all the other preachers around the country are using it. Whereas I think one of the most neglected verses in the entire Bible about the theology is 1 Peter 4:11. "If anyone speaks, they should speak the very words of God." You know, it's pretty simple right there. If you're going to preach, preach God's word. Don't preach somebody else's sermon. So, I don't know if any of those guys are listening to this podcast right now, but I would just say, just preach the Bible. Let God's Word do the work.

[00:35:24] **Don Payne:** Amen. What do the rest of you think? Trends and shifts in preaching that the church needs to be aware of?

[00:35:31] **Dave Ward:** I think technology is, is here to stay. And it, you know, with people live streaming or watching from home or watching after the fact on YouTube, TikTok, social media, what have you. I think it's just what is. COVID kind of kicked us all into that direction and I don't think there's any going back. I think there's, you know, Matt made the point earlier. There's some good and some bad with that, that you can get your messages or parts of your messages out there in ways that they wouldn't have been before. But also, you know, it can be a temptation for people to sort of not be embodied in a live experience. They'll just say, oh, I'll just watch later. And I don't think that's good. I don't think that's church as, 1st century apostles would have approved. So, you know, sometimes we need to learn how to, how do we preach into a camera? How do we preach knowing that there's an audience out there, potential audience out there, that isn't in the room? Those are questions I think previous generations haven't had to wrestle with.

[00:36:42] **Don Payne:** Yeah.

[00:36:44] **Scott Wenig:** I'm going to piggyback off of something Matt said just a moment ago about making sure that our sermons are Biblical and centered in Scripture. For my Old Testament Bible reading, I've been going through the Old Testament from Genesis on, and I'm in 2 Chronicles now, and I'm nearing the end of 2 Chronicles. And it struck me on numerous mornings as I'm reading this going through 1st Kings, 2nd Kings, 1st Chronicles, 2nd Chronicles. I mean, I know the monarchy was a very mixed bag for Israel. I get that. But I think what is very disturbing is these are God's people. They were given God's Word and yet they drift enormously spiritually and morally. And then it's like all of the sudden somebody somewhere rises up and says, oh, here's Scripture, we need to get back

to this. And it's like there's a revival. And I'm thinking, why is it so easy for us to get away from Scripture? And I think Matt's absolutely right. In our current cultural context, it's easy to get away from Scripture because Scripture pushes hard against us in some ways. It also shows us the love of God in deep, deep ways. We just celebrated that with the Cross and the Resurrection. But it seems to me, when we get away from Scripture, the temptation to drift from God and how He wants us to live becomes ever more present. So, I think Matt's absolutely right. We need to just preach the Bible in its fullness.

[00:38:20] **Don Payne:** Well, I really appreciate that. That's uh, that kind of leads us right into the reason that the four of you are gathered, which is our upcoming Shannon Lectureship and Seminar on Preaching. That's what brings the four of you together. And Scott, you're kind of the lead convener of this. So why don't you tell us a little bit about that?

[00:38:40] **Scott Wenig:** The Shannon Lectureship was established about 35 years ago by Judge Shannon and his wife. They endowed Denver Seminary with a very generous gift in order to promote Biblical preaching. Over the years, what we've done is we've brought in different people to hold forth in chapel. But since we started to do chapel very differently about four or five years ago, a couple of years ago, some friends of mine said, uh, basically you need to revision this, redo it. And so last year we held the first Shannon Lectureship with Doug Moo and Doug came in and taught us on the Book of Hebrews, and then Steve Matheson and I got up and tried to process our way through how we would preach different passages out of Hebrews. And I thought that the Lectureship went really well. I think everybody enjoyed it. Doug Moo was great, big hit, loved him. And I think overall it went really well. Well, this is our second Shannon Seminar, and my favorite Old Testament book is Daniel, and I had come across Wendy Widder a number of years ago and her commentary on Daniel, And I thought hey, you know what? I want to do Daniel this year, and if Wendy Widder will come and do Daniel with us, it's going to be fantastic, and she has very graciously agreed to come and walk us all the way through all those narratives and apocalyptic texts. And then Dave and Matt and I are going to team teach, try teaching on how to preach those narratives and apocalyptic texts. So, we're very, very excited about the Shannon Lectureship. June 3rd through 6th. And I want to encourage everybody who watches this podcast, this webinar, to come. It's \$150 if you're a pastor or a layperson. And if you're a student, you can sign up for it through Homiletics 690 for two semester hours of Homiletics credit, and I'll send you the syllabus. I'll let Dave and Matt and Wendy weigh in on their roles here.

[00:40:32] **Wendy Widder:** Well, I think my job is to teach you the Book of Daniel. I actually have preached through it, so I could give you some ideas on that too, but I have written actually two commentaries on Daniel, and it is a fantastic book with a really relevant message every chapter.

[00:40:51] **Dave Ward:** Why would you write a second commentary?

[00:40:54] **Wendy Widder:** They asked me to.

[00:40:54] **Dave Ward:** You not get it right the first time? Okay, all right.

[00:40:57] **Wendy Widder:** I know, they're both for Zondervan and they asked me to do the second one. I'm like, well, I just, I'm doing this one. Isn't that plagiarism? And they said, no, no, you just, you know, don't say the same thing. Like, okay. So anyway, and it's a totally different format. It's a part of their ZECOT series, Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament. Came out last fall. So, it is looking at the nitty gritty of the language and how the rhetorical arguments are shaped and how

that affects understanding the meaning, and it's just a fantastic book. And there's so much. It's so rich. So rich.

[00:41:31] **Don Payne:** That's great. Well, I want to thank all four of you, Wendy, Matt, Dave, Scott. Really enjoyed this conversation. Looking forward to what the Lord is going to do in hopefully lots and lots of people's lives through the Shannon Lectureship and Seminar this summer. Again, Scott, again, the dates?

[00:41:49] **Scott Wenig:** June 3rd, 4th, and 5th from 9 to 4 in the afternoon, and then Thursday, June 6th from 9 to noon, and we'll cover all 12 chapters of Daniel and do some discussion of narrative literature and apocalyptic literature, and once again, I think we're just going to have a great time. We did last year, and I'm very, very excited that Wendy's coming, and we're going to do the Book of Daniel. I'm so grateful for Dave and for Matt and their help, more than they know or think.

[00:42:14] **Don Payne:** Well, yeah, thanks to all of you and thanks for this great conversation. Friends, we're grateful that you've chosen to spend a little more time with us, and we hope as always that if you get a chance, you'll give us a rating, a review, wherever it is that you happen to listen to podcasts. And if you happen to have any questions or comments, we would be happy to receive those. We have a designated email address, [podcast@denverseminary.edu](mailto:podcast@denverseminary.edu). And as Scott mentioned, our general Seminary website is [denverseminary.edu](http://denverseminary.edu). You can get all the information you need there about the Shannon Lectureship and also more information about other resources that we have here at Denver Seminary. Advanced degree programs, you can get all of our episodes of Engage360, including full transcripts. So, friends, we're really grateful for your interest, your support, your prayers. Please keep those coming. We value you and hope that this is a gift and a good, encouraging resource for you. So, until next time in our next conversation, may the Lord bless you and keep you. Take care, friends.