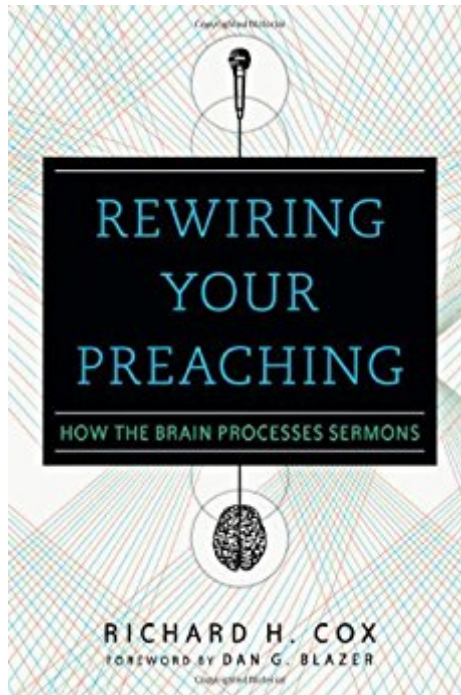


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# Rewiring Your Preaching: How The Brain Processes Sermons



## Synopsis

What preachers preach is not necessarily what hearers hear. Have you ever wondered why some hearers are affected by a sermon but not others? The issue may not necessarily be the content or delivery of the message. It may be how your hearers' brains process what you say. Modern neuroscience illuminates how our brains understand and hear sermons. Verbal stimuli can be accepted or rejected depending on the context of how they are received. The brain processes new information differently than information that reinforces already-held beliefs. To have long-term effect, new information must connect with previous memory. Psychologist, physician and preacher Richard Cox shows that better understanding of the brain can help preachers be more effective in their preaching. Intentional, purposeful preaching can actually produce new neural pathways that change how the brain thinks and how its owner acts. Our brains are intimately connected with how our bodies work, especially in how brain stimuli produce behavioral responses and how people experience comfort and healing in times of pain. God is at work in our brains to enable his people to hear him. Preach with the brain in mind, and help your hearers grow in mental, physical and spiritual health.

## Book Information

File Size: 1348 KB

Print Length: 182 pages

Publisher: IVP Books (January 6, 2013)

Publication Date: January 6, 2013

Sold by:Â Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00AE6OCC2

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Not Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #735,671 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #498

inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Religion & Spirituality > Christian Books & Bibles > Ministry & Evangelism > Preaching #1430 inÂ Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Ministry & Evangelism > Preaching #1749 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Religion & Spirituality > Christian Books &

## Customer Reviews

I'll admit, I was a little disappointed with this book. Even though the content was really good. It might have been the high expectations I went into reading it with. When I read the title, got through the introduction, I was hooked. I was expecting an earth shattering book on preaching. While there was plenty of really good things in it, it didn't stand up to the expectations I had. One of the more interesting aspects of the book, besides the scientific realities of the brain and preaching was the author's emphasis on how preaching heals. The author started with the healing of the brain, instead of the heart. This was interesting, because it is different than other preaching books. Cox said, "The human brain searches for evidence for any ability to heal. It yearns for wholeness and thus is in constant search for ways to correct the broken relationships between God and human beings and among human beings, to heal the soul, mind and body of each of us." While the heart drives the person according to Scripture, the mind is an important piece. The mind remembers and scientifically, drives the body. I think this is important for preacher's to keep in mind as it is easy to forget how God created us. As far as the science is concerned, the most important aspect to preaching was when Cox said, "The brain will not-and indeed cannot-occupy itself with unessential information. Only what is essential to the preservation and enhancement of the person is entertained, so the absolute core of all preaching must be to engage the thought processes that trigger the emotional underpinnings of personal reward. The mind responds to what is most urgent for survival, gratification and growth." If a preacher cannot make something important, people will forget it and not apply it.

In *Rewiring Your Preaching: How the Brain Processes Sermons* Richard Cox ((M.D., Ph.D. D.Min) issues a call to purposeful preaching . Cox is an ordained minister (PCUSA) and teaches in the department of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Duke Medical School. He believes that knowledge of modern medicine, psychology and neuroscience illumines how the brain makes sense of the sermon (or rejects it) and that this knowledge will help us preachers attend better to our task of proclamation. The Spirit of God is at work enlivening our preaching and speaking to hearts and minds in the congregation; however knowledge of how listeners' brains process external stimuli can aid us in our sermon writing and presentation. In fourteen chapters, Cox covers a number of aspects of preaching and the brain. In the first three chapters he addresses how the brain processes external stimulus, and in particular, preaching. It turns out that while the brain processes sermons

like other stimuli, it also sees preaching as unique. Only in a church is truth proclaimed from a pulpit, and despite scandals of clergy misconduct, people still regard preaching (and the preacher) as an authority in religious matters. Whether or not the preacher's message 'connects' with a hearer depends on how well the brain is prepared to 'hear.' All sound is heard and enters the brain, either as new information or confusion to be discarded. The difference is how the brain is prepared to hear the message and add new information to old. Cox calls the process religare- meaning 'tying back.' Through repeated listening to sermons and other messages about faith, the human brain is able to tie things together and make new connections. In chapters 4-7, Cox describes the power of the spoken word to impact the brain.

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