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Knowing the Context: Frames, Tools, and Signs for Preaching (Elements of Preaching)

James R. Nieman

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While everyone might affirm that preaching needs to engage its listeners deeply, the initial move for novice preachers is to think this can be attained by livelier content and delivery of the sermon. All too quickly, however, one learns that there are many factors beyond what a preacher says and how she or he may say it that affect whether proclamation can actually be heard. Effective preaching requires the complex work of knowing the context in which preaching occurs, while avoiding the twin dangers of pandering to a situation's particulars or generalizing them into stereotypes. Knowing the Context reveals how to engage contexts for preaching, especially ways to examine contexts more responsibly, so that the sermon might more amply bring the word of Scripture to bear on the worlds and lives of listeners.

As one of the initial titles in the Elements of Preaching series, James Nieman shows how preaching is oriented to specific locales, cultural situations, audiences, and occasions. Unlike other books that tell preachers how to preach to specific audiences, Knowing the Context helps the reader analyze the situations in which they find themselves and shows how text and context are in a continuing dialogue and how to tailor sermons to their context.

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