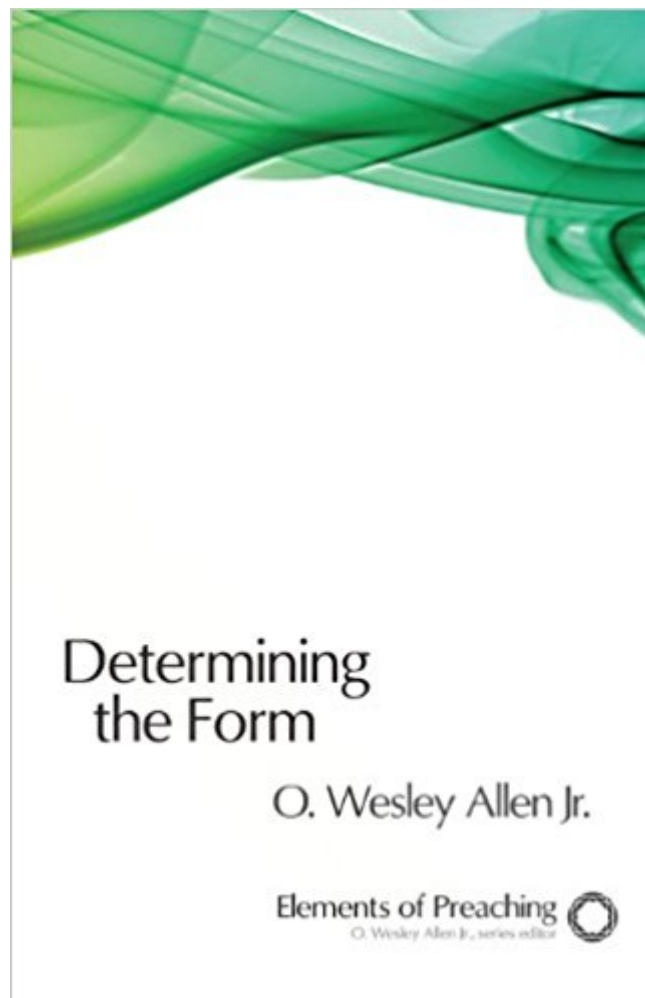




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# Determining The Form: Structures For Preaching (Elements Of Preaching)



## Synopsis

This fifth title in the Elements of Preaching series offers preaching students and clergy an overview of some of the most common sermonic forms and provides insights for determining which forms are most - and least - amenable to the claim that they want to make in their sermon. Many, if not most, sermons wind up being somewhat formless and thus less effective than they might be in communicating the gospel. Rather than training students in a single rhetorical form, this volume will demonstrate a variety of options without advocating for any particular form. Accomplished preachers can think of rhetorical strategy in a nuanced manner, but beginning preachers are well-served by having a knapsack of simple sermonic forms they can turn to when building a sermon out of a sermonic claim. This book will offer preachers a strong foundation in considering sermonic form and a handful of basic, reliable rhetorical structures to use in the pulpit.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

O. Wesley Allen Jr. is Assistant Professor of Homiletics and Worship at Lexington Theological Seminary, Lexington, Kentucky. An ordained United Methodist elder with a Ph.D. in New Testament, his books include *Reading the Synoptic Gospels: Basic Methods for Interpreting Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (2000) and *The Homiletic of All Believers: A Conversational Approach* (2005).

Review of "Determining the Form" O. Wesley Allen Jr. seems to be academically qualified to address the various structure of sermon for the modern age. He is a professor of homiletics and worship at Lexington Theological Seminary. He is an ordained elder within the Methodist church.

Allen is well versed in the homiletic conversation, but might lack some practical knowledge that comes from preaching in a congregation year after year. The author contributes to a theological library because his book is a quick reference for the various types of form that are generally used in the America pulpit. He highlights the essential qualities of a sermon which are unity, movement, and climax. No matter what form is used, these elements provide the foundation for a good sermon. The author's intended purpose is to give the local preacher a quick guide to the different types of structure for sermons. The book is not an in-depth look into each form, but is merely a survey of the options available for preaching that will connect. The purpose of the book is to start the discussion into the various forms; there is still a lot of work to do to master the different types of structure. This is the starting point as the author believes that a minister to incorporate various types of structures in the pulpit. He advises against using the same structure over and over again from week to week. The author wants to expand the preacher's tool box for sermons. The author details the common elements in all good sermons to establish the foundation for the various structures used to preach to begin the work. He provides the wide-angle view than zooms in to the various formats. He uses 1 Kings 19:1-15a as the foundational text to illustrate each of the forms. He highlights the propositional sermon, the exegesis-interpretation-application sermon, the verse-by-verse sermon, the four pages sermon, the valley sermon, the new hearing sermon, and the negative to positive sermon. In a brief overview, the author shows the major characteristics of these types of structure. At the end of each section, he provides the skeleton structure that he would use for the 1 Kings 19:1-15a text. There are also charts for each type of sermon. In each chapter Allen gives the positives and negatives for each form. At the end, the author instructs the preacher that he does not have to be mastered by the form. The form is for the preacher, and in appropriate times the preacher is to exercise flexibility to communicate his points. The form is not the master, but a tool in the transformational process. Determining the Form was an excellent introduction to the various forms available in preaching. The chapters were well organized from the old methods to new methods in preaching. The only problem in this area was that the book is static in time. Form methodology continues to change, and a discussion of Andy Stanley's form of "Me, You, God, You, Us" would have been beneficial. The author seemed balanced in his approach. Sometimes authors have a particular bias for a certain form. Even though the propositional model is older, the author still praised it. He saw that the "university form" still had some merit in today's pulpit. He did not automatically go with the newer is better approach. The case study aspect of looking at 1 Kings 19:1-15a was helpful. It was a nice illustrative section to flesh out the particular structure that was being overviewed in each chapter. The examples provided a picture of what a sermon would look

like in that form. For an author that might be given to more of an abstract view of preaching, he did a good job in making each section practical with this sermon text. Allen showed that the "valley structure" seems to be the normative for the majority of narrative sermons. He correctly pointed out that too many preachers take the congregation too low into the valley but the sermon ending is too weak to carry them out. Some of the other forms, like the "negative to the positive" and the "New Hearing Sermon" can be over used as much as the "University Sermon." After a while, the listeners will tire of constant delayed gratification ploys. The members will catch on to the structure and tune the minister out until the end. The popularity of forms is constantly changing. A few years ago, all the fanfare was given to "expository sermons." This form was the top form for a lot of preachers. The key, as the author seemed to indicate is not one form above the other, but all forms have a place and time in the pulpit. The greater the flexibility of forms the higher success he seems to believe the minister will have. Though, this is probably true, one must be aware of over doing variety. Overall, the author accomplished his mission of introducing various forms so that a minister will have more to draw from for a week to week basis.

Used this book in my Seminary studies. Great resource.

O. Wesley Allen has written a remarkably clear and concise synopsis of a variety of sermon forms. The most useful aspect of his book is using the same passage (1 Kings 19: 1-15a) to illustrate all of the possible choices. Obviously, not all pericopes lend themselves to such a variety of forms and Allen makes no claim that they do. Neither does he show a bias towards any particular form, but rather discusses the strengths and weaknesses of each one. Overall, this is a very helpful book; probably much more so for the beginning preacher, but a nice review for all.

This is a great little book to help the learner preacher get from exegesis to sermon. You've done your exegesis, now what? How do you get from that point to a real sermon--one that isn't simply a teaching sermon about what the reading meant when it was written? This little book gives outlines and examples of several forms that sermons can take and helps the reader figure out which will help him or her convey to the congregation the message God wants heard. English majors may find the approach simplistic, but for this former Engineer, the diagrams and examples were just the help he needed.

Covered the pros and cons of established preaching forms and taught me some new ones as well.

Great blend for a seminary student like myself looking righted my sermon preparation process.

An excellent resource for teaching

This was an assigned textbook for my Homiletics III course at Oklahoma Christian University, alongside the seminal text by Thomas G. Long, "The Witness of Preaching." Having taken two previous homiletics courses, and being an upperclassman with not a little bit of previous study already under my belt, I had heard of many of the big names in the homiletical world, including Long, Fred Craddock, David Buttrick, Eugene Lowry, etc. However, I had never heard of O. Wesley Allen, Jr., nor this "Elements of Preaching" series that he edited. Considering that, along with the fact that "Determining the Form" was a mere 96 pages - closer to a large pamphlet than a book proper - I was originally skeptical. After all, how often is it that your professors assign textbooks that you actually enjoy? However, regardless of my trepidation, it WAS an assigned text. Therefore, being a good student (or at least, not a bad one), I read it. What I found thrilled and excited me to my core. As a preaching nerd, I was ecstatic. In less than 100 pages, the good Dr. Allen had managed to synthesize, describe, and illustrate the essential aspects of no fewer than eight classic sermonic forms (the University or "Three Point Sermon" form, the Exegesis-Interpretation-Application form, the Verse-By-Verse form, the "Four Pages" form described and popularized by Paul Scott Wilson, the Valley Form, the "Lowry Loop" form originally described by Eugene Lowry, the Classic African American form, the New Hearing form, and the Negative to Positive form). What is just as exciting as what Allen writes, though, is how he writes it. Rather than simply describing the above forms in a written fashion, Allen diagrammed out each form, both as a general template of the form, divorced from any specific text or or topic, and then inputting into each form a sermon from an example text - 1 Kings 19:1-15a, where we see Elijah flee to Mt. Horeb in fear, and there experience a theophany, not in the preceding wind, earthquake, or fire, but in the voice of YHWH, amidst total silence. From this pericope, Allen crafts example sermons for each group of forms (since some forms, such as the Valley form, the "Lowry Loop" form, and the Classic African American form, for example, are so similar in their structure and function, Allen inputs only one sermon diagram for this group; however, the diagram can easily be lifted from the Valley template he selected, and attached to the other two forms with relative ease). These sermons diagrammed out by Allen allow readers to see what each form would look like when connected to an actual sermon, easing the mental translation from abstract theory to concrete practice. With each diagrammed sermon, Allen uses a distinct sermon, rather than trying to

shoehorn the same message into several different forms. In addition to these described forms and accompanying diagrams, Allen also includes two very short chapters at the book's opening, entitled "Why Form Matters" and "Unity, Movement, and Climax: Essential Qualities of All Sermonic Forms", respectively. In the first chapter, he essentially argues that sermonic forms are never neutral, and that selecting a form that will complement, not hinder, the assigned text is a crucial aspect of good preaching. The second chapter's title is fairly self-explanatory - he argues that regardless of the selected form, a good sermon is unified in its content and delivery, ever-progressing and never stagnant in its movement, and ultimately reaching a climax that will "itch" the "scratch" (his language) that the movement has built up. There is also a brief afterword that describes how Allen hopes readers will use this book, and an annotated "For Further Reading" bibliography, which credits the source material used in compiling his book. In conclusion, this is a book that every woman or man who aspires to preach - whether they be a 16-year-old whose small congregation has tapped to do a bit of preaching in response to some detected talent or giftedness, a 26-year-old fresh out of seminary, or a 50+ year-old veteran that is seeking to refresh their preaching and refill their homiletical tool box - should own. While I highly recommend that those who have the means read the primary source material as well, and bask at length in the writings of the great homiletics, this is an indispensable tool for someone who has all of those tomes on their library shelf, but doesn't have time between Monday or Tuesday and the impending "Zero Hour" of Sunday morning to re-read them all. Perhaps you don't have time to skip 2,000+ pages of material, but you can certainly flip through 96 pages and reacquaint yourself with options. In that vein, this is an excellent, practical, extraordinarily welcomed contribution to the world of preaching and homiletics. With this volume (and indeed, with Allen's entire "Elements of Preaching" series, which I am in the process of collecting), good things do indeed come in small packages!

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