

EXCERPT

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***Preaching in a New Key***  
*Crafting Expository Sermons in Post-Christian Communities*

March 11, 2025 | \$28, 248 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-1099-0

*“Mark Glanville offers an amazing mix of theory and practice for the art of preaching Christ in a post-Christian world. A great manual for how to craft preaching that is authentic, artful, contextual, and grounded in Scripture. A fresh approach to ministry of the Word in the twenty-first century.”*

—**Michael F. Bird**, deputy principal at Ridley College in Melbourne, Australia

## Preach the Word

Before we dive into chapter one, which explores the inner life of a preacher, it is important to take a moment to think about the nature of preaching. Jazz music is a helpful metaphor for understanding this. In my previous book, *Improvising Church: Scripture as the Source of Harmony, Rhythm, and Soul*, I explain how jazz musicians immerse themselves in the jazz tradition for literally thousands of hours. Album after album, scales upon scales, we get the rhythms of jazz into our muscles and its melodies into our ears. Then, each time we come to play, we improvise on the tradition with lyrical creativity. We play something new for the new moment. The jazz musician’s discipline of learning the tradition is very much like the church’s task of immersing ourselves in the tradition of Scripture. Together we get Scripture into our muscles. We learn its themes, we meet its characters, we know its stories. Then, when it comes to doing church together, we discern how to improvise new melodies on the biblical story in our neighborhood.

This is a helpful way to understand preaching too. Each time we preach, we improvise a new melody on the biblical tradition. Our melodies connect with the heart and shine with the beauty and harmony found in Jesus; like jazz, they also hold tensions and complexities that resonate with our world and lived experiences.

As with jazz, there is plenty of room for fresh thinking around the *form* of preaching. Yet the tradition is the tradition: Scripture is Scripture, and our understanding of the *nature* of Christian preaching is not a free-for-all, a blank space for each preacher to fill in. Christian preaching is a concept that comes to us from Scripture itself.

I have said that preaching is similar to playing jazz. Each time we preach, we improvise a new melody on the biblical tradition. Because jazz is at once deeply rooted in tradition and at the same time deeply creative, it reminds us that any divide between expository preaching and creativity is a false distinction. Preaching at its best is at the same time deeply rooted and creative. As we will see, the nature of Scripture itself demands creativity.

The first place for creativity is contextualization. Contextualization means communicating in the forms, language, and symbols of a culture, taking into consideration the ways in which people interpret the world and make meaning for themselves. The biblical writers in both the Old and New Testaments relentlessly contextualize their proclamation.

Take the Old Testament festivals as an example of contextualization. The festival texts call Israel to communal feasting before the Lord—remember Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Tabernacles (e.g., Leviticus 23; Deuteronomy 16:1-17)? Interestingly, these festival texts of the Old Testament have literary forms that were recognizable in ancient times, for the scribes reappropriated the ancient literary forms of festival calendars. Yet, these texts also changed it up: the biblical festival calendars were shaping Israel to incorporate the refugee, the fatherless, and the widow into the community through the feasts (Deuteronomy 16:11, 14). This example displays the thoughtfulness of the Old Testament scribes as communicators, expressing God’s Word with the symbols, rituals, and forms of their culture.

Reflecting the contextualizing practices of the Old Testament scribes who came before him, the apostle Paul relentlessly contextualizes the gospel. Paul writes, “To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to gain Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law . . . so that I might gain those outside the law. . . . I do it all for the sake of the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:20-23). We, too, have the task of relentless contextualization. This is an act of love for our people and for the sake of the gospel.

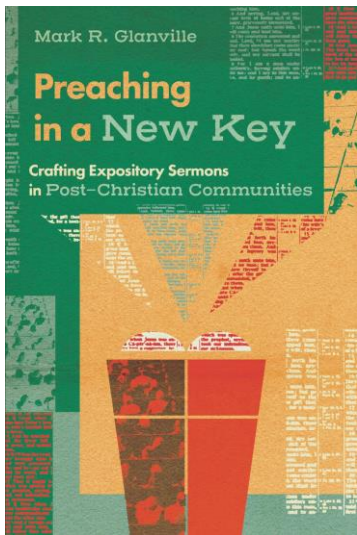


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Respected teacher of preaching Jared Alcántara defines contextualization as “the intelligible interpretation and transmission of Christian faith through concepts and means that are tailor-made and custom-fit to the needs of a particular community” (*The Practices of Christian Preaching*). Contextualization has a double benefit: each time we recontextualize, we experience something new about our faith. Because we are always recontextualizing the gospel, we must also refresh the preaching conversation. In fact, the art of preaching must constantly undergo a process of refinement and recontextualization.

Yet, we should not think of contextualization as occurring only across time, for on any given Sunday there are diverse cultures present within our churches. While in this book we may speak of post-Christian *culture* (singular), it is more accurate to speak of *cultures* (plural). The cultural differences in your church likely run along the lines of ethnic groups, education, wealth, ideology, life experience, and more.

Let us look back over what we have said in this prologue. We preach the Word (an act of proclamation, witness, and teaching) to form a community that displays the grace of God in Christ, within our particular context. We can now state what we mean by expository preaching. With the word *preaching*, we refer to our proclamation, witness, and teaching of Scripture, with Christ as its climactic focal point. This is contextualized to our community, with the goal of nourishing our shared life of witness in our particular place. With the word *expository*, we refer to preaching that directly and demonstrably explains and applies Scripture.

The metaphor of jazz helps us to understand why expository preaching (that is, preaching that emerges directly and demonstrably from Scripture) is so important, especially in post-Christian societies. If the music in a jazz club is not rooted in the tradition, jazz lovers will simply walk out. The same applies with church. Attractional preaching may keep people for a while; it might even give them an experience of reconnection to the Christian faith. But in the end, if people do not encounter Christ in the Word on Sunday, after a short while of attending church they will opt for brunch instead. (The opposite is not true: when someone leaves your church, it does not mean you are not preaching Christ!)

A jazz band is also a helpful metaphor for understanding a church’s shared life. Jazz musicians are not merely a collection of individuals but a group of people who are committed to playing the music together, in conversation with one another and in mutual submission to one another. Throughout this book I will use the metaphor of jazz music to explore the nature and practice of preaching.

—Adapted from the prologue, “Preach the Word”



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BIO



## **Preaching in a New Key** *Crafting Expository Sermons in Post-Christian Communities*

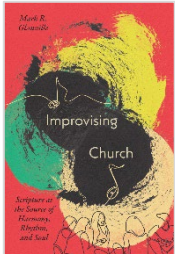
March 11, 2025 | \$28, 248 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-1099-0

As perceptions about pastors change and doubt increases, post-Christian generations find themselves looking less for a charismatic authority figure and more for healthy leaders. Scholar and pastor Mark Glanville provides a fresh look into the art of crafting sermons for both new and experienced pastors seeking to preach in sustainable and resonant ways.

## New from the Author of *Improvising Church*

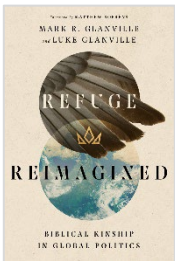
Dr. Mark Glanville works as the Director of the Centre for Missional Leadership at St. Andrews Hall, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. He is an Old Testament scholar, and has written five books, including *Improvising Church: Scripture as the Source of Harmony, Rhythm, and Soul*, and *Preaching in a New Key: Crafting Expository Sermons in Post-Christian Communities*. Mark's vocational goal is to research, teach, write, speak, and play music to nourish Christian leaders to creatively reimagine what the church can be and do in post-Christian societies, with the Bible in our hands. Mark is also a professional jazz pianist, active on the Vancouver jazz scene. Mark's podcast is *Blue Note Theology*, which he hosts from the grand piano. His personal website is <https://www.markglanville.org>.

Also by Mark R. Glanville:



**Improvising Church: Scripture as the Source of Harmony, Rhythm, and Soul** by Mark R. Glanville  
February 13, 2024 | \$28, 224 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0745-7

Though the post-Christian cultural turn can be disconcerting, it is also a uniquely exciting time to reimagine churches. Building on the dynamic traditions of jazz music and Christian community, biblical scholar and jazz musician Mark Glanville unfolds a biblical, practical, and inventive vision for building the churches we long for.



**Refuge Reimagined: Biblical Kinship in Global Politics** by Mark R. Glanville and Luke Glanville  
February 16, 2021 | \$28.99, 272 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5381-6

Mark R. Glanville and Luke Glanville offer a new approach to compassion for displaced people: a biblical ethic of kinship. Challenging the fear-based ethic that often motivates Christian approaches, they demonstrate how this ethic is consistently conveyed throughout the Bible and can be practically embodied today.



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