

Let me invite you to eavesdrop on an Irish-Aussie conversation about preaching. This book teems with ‘plusses’: it is *short* (as a tome that takes Eutychus as its poster boy must be); it is *stretching* (the authors force one to deal with longer texts—and leave one asking, “Why can’t I summarize extended passages like that?”); it is *specific* (they include actual sermons with critique); it is *searching* (in case you skip the first chapter, ‘pray’ occurs eight times in the conclusion); and *stirring* (you still want to preach when you’ve finished reading). If you don’t buy the book, don’t cry if Eutychus isn’t saved!

**Dale Ralph Davis**

Author and Bible expositor

Cookeville, Tennessee

This book deserves to be included in the ‘must read’ category for preachers. It is readable, which always helps! And, as we would expect, it is biblical and practical. But it is also funny and forthright in a way that made me re-evaluate my preaching and resolve with God’s help to improve. This is a different book from Lloyd-Jones’ *Preaching and Preachers* and *Between Two Worlds* by John Stott, but it may prove to be just as influential.

When my congregation asks me to explain the improvement in my preaching, I will ask, “Have you read the one by the Irishman and the Aussie?”

**Alistair Begg**

Senior Pastor

Parkside Church, Cleveland, Ohio

This book fills a gap in our concern for better preaching because it joins true piety to good theology in a way that few books do. Gary and Phil bring lots of experience, wisdom and practicality to the most privileged job in the universe—handling the word of God. It’s a short, sharp and wonderfully honest Irish/Aussie injection.

**Simon Manchester**

Senior Minister

St Thomas’ Anglican Church, North Sydney, NSW

Worried your preaching, though of course biblical, may be getting a bit jaded, even boring? This humdinger of a book is just for you: full of marvellous insights from areas as diverse as biblical theology, preaching the Old Testament, and mode of delivery; and written like the sermons it is encouraging us to preach—faithful but fresh. A must-read, a short read, a great read, for preachers at every stage, whether young colt or old nag. Buy, read, apply!

**John Samuel**

Senior Minister

Duke Street Church, Richmond, Surrey

Millar and Campbell write with much wit and wisdom for the sake of our listeners. At some point every preacher must decide whether to preach for the regard of one's peers or for the welfare of Christ's people. Millar and Campbell have obviously decided for the latter and give much sound advice for the rest of us to do the same.

**Bryan Chapell**

Chancellor

Covenant Theological Seminary, St Louis, Missouri

The late Klaas Runia entitled his Moore College lectures of 1980 *The Sermon Under Attack*. The only thing new about the current attack on expository preaching is that which it nominates to be its substitute—these days, it's narrative or storytelling. But the people of God know that the Bible preached, explained to the mind, applied to the will, is precisely the nourishment they need, and which alone promotes their maturity.

I am very pleased to recommend this book by Phil and Gary, two faithful expositors. Our old friend Chappo, to whom it is dedicated, would be pleased as well. I can hear him saying, "Get to the text brother! The authority is in the text. Tell them what the text says, and do it in 20 minutes." We are grateful for Chappo's ministry and grateful to our brothers by extending its emphasis through this book.

**David Cook**

Former Principal

Sydney Missionary and Bible College, NSW

I needed to read this book by Campbell and Millar at this point in my life. I've been preaching for over 27 years, and this book has convicted me of fundamentals that have ceased to be central in my preaching.

Every preacher needs to read this book every five years. It is both theologically driven and brimming with wise and practical insights on how to preach.

**Ray Galea**

Senior Minister

St Alban's Multicultural Bible Ministry, Sydney, NSW

# Saving Eutychus

How to preach God's word  
**and** keep people awake

Gary Millar and  
Phil Campbell

*Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight... Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story...*

Splattttt.

Acts 20:7, 9 (NIV)

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# An Aussie and an Irishman walk into a pulpit...

PREACHING IS HARD WORK. And—we're sorry to break this to you if you're just starting out—it doesn't seem to get much easier. But God in his kindness gives us people to encourage us that we're on the right track, to sharpen us and to help us to keep going. That's how an Aussie and a Northern Irishman ended up writing a book on preaching together.

We have very different backgrounds, personalities and experience. We have very different interests and passions. Our families are at very different stages. And as you will discover in this book, we express ourselves differently and approach preaching from different angles. But those differences are part of what has led to this book. From the moment we met

in 2010, we recognized that we had independently come to many of the same key convictions about teaching the Bible.

While the details of our processes will vary, we are both completely committed to teaching the Bible book by book in a way that is faithful and fresh. And we share the same concern for saving Eutychus—preaching should never bore people to death. We both look for the ‘big idea’ that unifies the passage we’re preaching on, and we both tend to preach on longer ‘chunks’ of text, as defined by the underlying movement of these big ideas. For both of us, preaching begins with God speaking, moving, thrilling, teaching, correcting and wooing us through a passage of the Bible. As God’s truth begins to sink into our own hearts and lives, God enables us to think more clearly and deeply about its application in the lives of those to whom we’re speaking. This is the process, in a nutshell, that we both follow and will be unpacking in the pages ahead: work out the big idea; apply it to ourselves; think through how to preach it.

It’s interesting and stimulating, though, to think about the differences in our preaching as we work together. I (Gary) think Phil’s style is crisper and shorter, and he’s brilliant at reducing an argument to the bare minimum. I tend to take a little longer to get there, and (I think) I spend more time trying to work the text under our skin. These differences reflect, in part, who we are (an Aussie and an Irishman), our theological influences, our personalities (for Phil the glass is usually half-empty, and for me it’s at least three-quarters full) and our personal convictions. But as flawed people and preachers, we are trying to do exactly the same thing. And what we want to do in the pages that follow is to encourage you to work harder on the biblical text, on the content of your sermon and on your delivery, so that you continue to grow as

the preacher that only you can be. Our prayer is that this book will equip and encourage you to preach the word of God in a way that fits your own personality and is faithful and fresh in your own context.

There are key elements of sermon preparation and delivery that all of us need to learn and practise. There are other aspects that are a matter of personal preference and style. We're aware that some of the things we're suggesting here reflect who we are and where we've been. We both have unfortunate quirks that we couldn't unlearn even if we wanted to, as well as many things we're still learning to improve. We're far from being 'perfect preachers'—yet along the way we have grown and changed. We hope that hearing our two voices and learning from our experiences will help you gain confidence in your own 'voice' and see some fresh ways in which you can continue to develop as a preacher too.

In the chapters that follow we are both very open about the way God has worked in us over the years. You will have multiple glimpses into our lives and families, so it may help you to know a little bit about us up front.

I was born in Northern Ireland, am married to Fiona (a Scot born in Peru), and have three daughters—Lucy (11), Sophie (10) and Rebekah (6). We moved to Australia at the start of 2011, where I am the Principal of Queensland Theological College (QTC) in Brisbane. Before that, I was minister of Howth and Malahide Presbyterian Church in Dublin in the Republic of Ireland for 12 years (and was on the staff of a large church in Northern Ireland before that). I studied chemistry in Belfast, and then theology in Aberdeen, before completing a DPhil at Oxford (on Deuteronomy).

Phil and Louise are the parents of four adult children—Nathan, Jo, Maddie and Susie—and they are now learning the

art of grandparenting (even though they insist they're much too young). Nathan's popular blog [www.st-eutychus.com](http://www.st-eutychus.com) inspired the title of this book.

Phil leads the ministry team at Mitchelton Presbyterian Church on Brisbane's north side and, as past chair of QTC, he helped persuade Gary to move his family halfway around the world. For over a decade, Phil has also loved teaching the introductory preaching course at QTC, and much of the material in this book has been road tested there.

One thing we do have in common is that our respective wives, Fiona and Louise, have taught us more about preaching and been a greater help to us than anyone else. Not only is this book written *for* them, it would probably also have been much better if it had been written *by* them.

A host of people along the way have also helped us a great deal. In addition to those who have graciously listened to us teach the Bible in our churches over the years, various mentors and friends have journeyed with us, sharpening and encouraging us along the way. For me, these people include Bob Lockhart, William Still, Warner Hardie, Dave Mansfield, John Chapman, colleagues at the Irish Preachers Conference and the Dublin Gospel Partnership, Nigel McCullough and, above all, my closest friends Andrew Smith (whose wife Tara has worked miracles in making a book out of our material) and David 'Monty' Montgomery. For Phil, these people include Donald Campbell, Phillip Jensen, David Cook, John Chapman, Bryson Smith (who models all the ideas in this book brilliantly) and the members of the Pearl Beach Preaching Group.

If you read through that list of names, you'll have noticed that we have one influence in common—Canon John Chapman. Until Chappo went to his reward a few weeks ago, he encouraged us and countless others like us to “know and

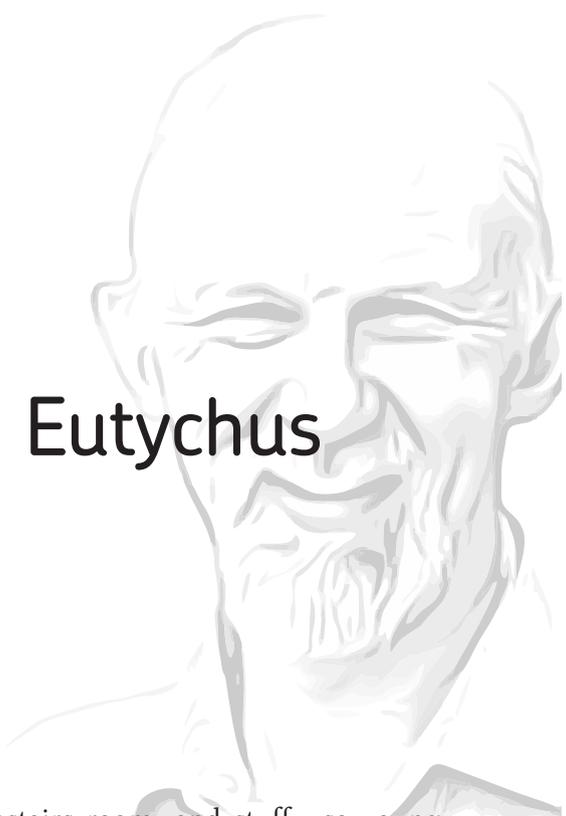
tell the gospel” with the constant reminder that “the first 50 years are the hardest”. Neither of us has been at it for 50 years yet, but Chappo’s example keeps us going. Our hope is that this book is a fitting thank you to God for his life and ministry.



*Gary Millar*



*Phil Campbell*



# Saving Eutychus

IT'S CROWDED IN THE upstairs room, and stuffy, so young Eutychus wedges himself onto a windowsill and sucks in the cool outside air. But fresh air isn't enough. The visiting preacher talks on and on. By midnight, Eutychus is asleep on his perch. His weight shifts, he tumbles... and moments later his body lies broken on the pavement three stories below (see Acts 20:7, 9).

The rest, as they say, is history—though happily, thanks to some apostolic first aid, the young man's 'terminal velocity' wasn't as *terminal* as it could have been.

Now, before we unjustly judge the preacher here, let's consider the extenuating circumstances. Paul had arrived in Troas on his whistlestop tour of the Aegean to proclaim the kingdom of God, and time was short. The night Eutychus struggled to stay awake was Paul's last among them, and there was a lot he wanted to teach them. Paul couldn't catch

a later flight and prolong his stay; he had to keep talking. But the humbling point we want to make is that what took Paul many hours of speaking to achieve—near-fatal napping—takes most of us only a few minutes speaking to a well-rested and caffeinated crowd on a Sunday.

So why does Luke include this story in Acts 20? Is it proof that some people would rather die than listen to an overlong sermon? Or maybe it's a warning to preachers—if you lack Paul's apostolic healing gifts, keep people awake at all costs.

How are you doing with that? I try hard to avoid being dull, yet most weeks I find myself losing one or two over the edge. When I met the doctor who was about to sedate me for an endoscopy, I couldn't help joking, "Hi Doc, I see we're both in the business of putting people to sleep! Call me next time you've got a tough case." But it's not all that funny. And the difference between us (apart from a lower hourly rate) is that I *don't want* to be in the business of putting people to sleep.

Gary and I are not approaching this book as experts on preaching that keeps people awake. But we are convinced that when attention wanders and eyes droop, it's more often our fault than our listeners'. It's our job to keep people awake, and we'll take the blame if they fall out the window. But if you've just resolved to learn a new stand-up routine for Sunday, hold on. Our challenge is not just to avoid being deadly dull. Our challenge is also to be faithful, accurate and clear as we cut to the heart of the biblical text and apply what God is *really saying* in a way that cuts to the hearts of people who are *really listening*.

When Bill Hybels visited Sydney in the early 1990s, Australian evangelist John Chapman ('Chappo') was in the audience. Most of us found Bill's talk on Matthew the tax collector riveting, and as best as I can remember it included plenty of practical

party tips, given the fact that the tax collector threw a massive Jesus-party and invited all his friends.

When Bill invited questions, Chappo raised his hand. “Dear brother”, said Chappo, “I’m not meaning to be rude, but I wonder if you could tell us how people are to know when they are hearing God speak through his word, and when they are just hearing good advice from Bill? Because as far as I could tell, I couldn’t spot the difference. As you spoke to us, it all seemed to come with the same authority.”

Chappo had a point. Hybels had sanctified a bunch of commonsense suggestions by mixing them with the text of Luke 5 and delivering them with all the authority of Scripture. None of it was wrong. It was just that none of his points were the points Luke was actually making. Sure, Luke *mentioned* the party—but he wasn’t telling us to have one. It wasn’t God speaking. It was Bill.

Saving Eutychus doesn’t just mean keeping him awake. It also means doing our best to keep him fresh and alert so he can hear the truth of the gospel and be saved. If we have done our job, we will stand up on Sunday ready to deliver a sermon on a Bible passage that we have wrestled with and that the Holy Spirit has begun to apply to our own hearts and lives. We will know exactly what we want to say and how we’re going to say it in a fresh and engaging way. We will have prayed for God to reach the hearts of our listeners with his word. When that’s happening, snoring is not an option. None of this, however, can happen without prayer.