

The Application Model of Jim Shaddix in Expository Preaching

Jesse Hembree

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC

Abstract: Most homileticsians agree that application is a fundamental component of expository preaching. However, there exists a debate as to whether application in an expository sermon should be specific or general. Well respected scholars on both sides of the debate have contributed greatly to their respective convictions on the matter. Nevertheless, this essay seeks to uncover some of the potential dangers that befall overly specific and general application. Furthermore, this essay argues that the application model as proposed by Jim Shaddix serves as a *via media* between the dangers of specific and general application, thereby offering a viable approach to aid preachers in applying the biblical text without drifting into either extreme.

Key Words: application, expository, general, Holy Spirit, particular, preaching, principle, specific

John Broadus once penned the words, “The application in a sermon is not merely an appendage to the discussion or a subordinate part of it, but is the main thing to be done.”¹ Over a century later, he is joined by many who share the same conviction. Grant Osborne writes, “The static study of the original meaning of a text dare never be an end in itself but must at all times have as its goal the dynamic application of the text to one’s current needs and the sharing of that text with others via expository teaching and preaching.”² Likewise, Dennis Johnson maintains, “Exegesis itself is impoverished when specialization and professional pressures in the academy inculcate into faculty and students a model of biblical interpretation that aborts the process short of *application*, depriving it of its

¹ John Albert Broadus and Vernon L. Stanfield, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 4th ed. (Harper & Row, 1898), 165.

² Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. and exp. ed. (InterVarsity Press, 2006), 410.

sweetest fruit.”³ Others have used more vivid language, arguing that exposition without application leads to “spiritual constipation”⁴ and “abortion.”⁵ When the expository sermon lacks application, preaching is deprived of its purpose of “bringing home to God’s people God’s message from God’s Word.”⁶

At one point in time, the debate over the necessity of application was pertinent. In fact, many of the aforementioned works were written amid an age when not only expository preaching in general, but application in particular, fell on hard times.⁷ Fortunately, as evidenced above, several scholarly works have contributed to a reclaiming of application in expository preaching in recent decades.⁸ Therefore, this essay will not seek to contribute further to the necessity of application but rather to explore the extent to which a preacher should apply the biblical text. In other words, this essay is not focused on the broader question, “Should preachers apply the biblical text?” but rather, “To what degree of specificity should the text be applied?”

This question has also created a debate among likeminded expository

³ Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (P&R, 2007), 13 (emphasis original).

⁴ Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (Baker, 2001), 113.

⁵ Howard G. Hendricks and William Hendricks, *Living by the Book: The Art and Science of Reading the Bible*, rev. and updated ed. (Moody, 2007), 171. Hendricks and Hendricks articulate that Scripture is not intended to be studied merely to satisfy curiosity but to transform lives. Therefore, when a preacher neglects to apply the text to the audience, he deprives Scripture of its transformative purpose.

⁶ Jay E. Adams, *Truth Applied: Application in Preaching* (Ministry Resources Library, 1990), 32. Jay Adams explains that the nature of preaching is to herald, meaning that it involves declaring both the good and bad news of the Bible in an authoritative manner.

⁷ Hershael York and Scott Blue write, “Though some disagreement exists about the precise definition of expository preaching, no dissension stands sharper nor has greater consequences than the current discussion regarding the necessity or even the appropriateness of the role of application in an expository sermon” (Hershael York and Scott Blue, “Is Application Necessary in the Expository Sermon?” *SB/T* 3.2 [Summer 1999]: 70).

⁸ For further examples, see Scott A. Blue, “Application in the Expository Sermon: A Case for Its Necessary Inclusion” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001); and R. Scott Pace, “Hermeneutics and Homiletics: A Case for the Necessity and Nature of Contextual-Theological Application in the Expository Sermon” (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007).

homileticians in recent years. Jeramie Rinne explains that because “application deals with how God’s timeless message speaks now, and now is always changing,” the task of application remains fluid.⁹ Furthermore, this essay claims that the debate over the level of specificity has not only resulted in the task of application remaining unclear, but it has also left the guardrails against overly specific and general application unclear as well. Therefore, the question this essay seeks to answer is, “What are the potential dangers of specific and general application, and is there a model of application that currently exists that helps guard against these potential dangers?” This essay argues that the application model as outlined by Jim Shaddix warrants a viable approach to help guard against several hazards presented by specific and general applications.

Research Methodology and Defining of Key Terms

In order to validate the thesis, this essay will incorporate a qualitative content analysis.¹⁰ First, the arguments made by proponents of specific and general application will be analyzed, and some of the potential dangers that befall each respective approach will be extracted. After establishing a working knowledge of each approach and the dangers they might pose to expository preaching, this essay will then analyze Jim Shaddix’s model of application. At the end of the essay, Shaddix’s model will be evaluated as a *via media* between the potential dangers of specific and general application.

Before conducting the analysis, I will provide a working definition of specific and general application. As a functional element of expository preaching, application is helpfully understood as “the process whereby the expositor takes a biblical truth of the text and applies it to the lives of his audience, proclaiming why it is relevant for their lives, and passionately encouraging them to make necessary changes in their lives in a manner congruent with the original intent of the author.”¹¹ Expositors on both sides of the application spectrum agree with the underlying premise of this definition. The disagreement, however, lies in how one understands the term “relevant.” Those who fall into the specific application camp, such as Bryan Chapell, argue that relevancy is achieved when the focus of

⁹ Jeramie Rinne, “Learning the Art of Sermon Application,” *The Gospel Coalition* (July 2013).

¹⁰ Paul D. Leedy, Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, and Laura Ruth Johnson, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 12th ed. (Pearson, 2019), 235–37.

¹¹ York and Blue, “Is Application Necessary in the Expository Sermon?” 73–74.

the message is “on real concerns of specific people.”¹² Charles Dennison, however, argues that the Word of God is already relevant and thus does not need to be “pull[ed] into our world as if [it] were deficient in itself and in need of our applicatory skills.”¹³ John MacArthur, similarly, maintains that the preacher is tasked only with expounding on the principles of the text and entrusting the Holy Spirit to apply those principles in a relevant way to each individual.¹⁴ Therefore, one could define specific and general application in the following way:

Specific application deals with the immediate context of the sermon and intends to address specific challenges or concerns of a particular group of people at a particular time in a particular place. General application, on the other hand, focuses on the broader context and intends to address deeper and more varied principles that are derived from the biblical text, entrusting the Holy Spirit to reveal the significance of those principles directly to individual listeners.¹⁵

With a working definition now in place, one can begin to glean a proper understanding of specific and general application as well as the potential dangers each approach might present to expository preaching.

Understanding Specific Application

Specific application accentuates the particulars of a given congregation over the broader implications a biblical text might have on God’s people in all times and at all places. Chapell elevates the particulars of a congregation when he writes, “The old preaching adage rings true: if you try to speak to everyone, you really speak to no one. In preaching, *the particular is the universal*; the more we focus our messages on real concerns of specific people, the more everyone is compelled to listen.”¹⁶ Although Chapell

¹² Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 3rd ed. (Baker Academic, 2018), 32. Chapell’s understanding of relevance and specificity leads him to argue for every text having a Fallen Condition Focus (FCF), which offers the audience more incentive to listen to the message.

¹³ Charles G. Dennison, “Some Thoughts on Preaching,” *Kerux* 11.3 (December 1996): 8.

¹⁴ John MacArthur, *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically* (Thomas Nelson, 2005), 246.

¹⁵ The researcher was unable to find any sources that offer a precise definition for specific and general application. Therefore, the following definition belongs to the author and is based on research in the field of application in expository preaching.

¹⁶ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 32 (emphasis added).

does not align himself fully with the theology of Norman Neaves, he is sympathetic to the pastoral tone Neaves portrays when he writes,

I'm tired of sermons that do not live where people live, that don't connect with the real stories and struggles by which their lives are shaped, that never touch the earth or breathe the air that the congregation breathes. Maybe there are those who enjoy developing the universal sermon, the one that can be preached everywhere and anywhere, that has a quality of being timeless. But as far as I am concerned, everywhere and anywhere really means nowhere; and those who strive to be timeless, are usually, simply not very timely.... The particular is higher than the universal.¹⁷

Although Chapell cautions that such an elevated view of the particulars of the congregation does not permit preachers to call people out by name, he nevertheless calls for preachers to "speak with tactful specificity to the burdens and struggles our people face—just as the Scriptures do."¹⁸

Murray Capill, another proponent of specific application, adds that preachers should target their application towards the real spiritual experiences their people face.¹⁹ In order to accomplish this goal, he suggests that preachers ask themselves questions about individual people in their congregation. These questions include, "Where is *this* person at? What does *she* need? How can I get inside *him*? How can I help *her* advance spiritually?"²⁰ By asking questions about the spiritual needs of individual people, the preacher enables himself to make application that is both varied and useful to his congregation.²¹

In a similar vein, John Stott has contributed significantly to the discussion of application in expository preaching with his analogy of "bridge-

¹⁷ Norman Neaves, "Preaching in Pastoral Perspective," in *Preaching the Story*, ed. Edmund A. Steimle, Morris J. Niedenthal, and Charles Rice (Fortress, 1980), 108. Quoted in Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 205–6.

¹⁸ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 35.

¹⁹ Murray Capill, *The Heart Is the Target: Preaching Practical Application from Every Text* (P&R, 2014), 135.

²⁰ Capill, *The Heart is the Target*, 135 (emphases added).

²¹ In chapter five of his book, entitled "One Size Doesn't Fit All," Capill illustrates a fascinating analogy to support the need for specific application. He writes, "I don't want to go to a doctor who automatically prescribes penicillin for every patient. I want to go to one who diagnoses before she prescribes. Careful diagnoses will then ideally lead to a range of holistic remedies. They won't be just about what medicine to take, but about exercise, sleep, diet, mental well-being, relaxation, and so on. Preachers must do the same" (*The Heart Is the Target*, 135–36).

building."²² Although Stott may not classify himself as a proponent of specific application in the same way Chapell and Capill do,²³ he nevertheless values the task of the preacher "to ask people questions and get them talking."²⁴ He explains,

We ought to know more about the Bible than they do, but they are likely to know more about the real world than we do. So we should encourage them to tell us about their home and family life, their job, their expertise and their spare-time interests. We also need to penetrate beyond their doing to their thinking. What makes them tick? How does their Christian faith motivate them? What problems do they have which impede their believing or inhibit them from applying their faith to their life? The more diverse people's backgrounds, the more we have to learn. It is important for us to listen to representatives of different generations as well as of different cultures, especially of the younger generation.²⁵

Although Stott's questions include individual needs and concerns, they are not limited to individual people. In fact, they are designed ultimately to acquire a working knowledge of different generations and cultures, which is necessary for effectively connecting the world of the Bible to the world of contemporary people.²⁶

Some adherents of a general approach to application, such as MacArthur, rely heavily on the influence of the Holy Spirit in applying the text to the congregation. That does not imply, however, that adherents of specific application ignore the Holy Spirit's role in this task. In fact, Chapell contends, "Ultimately, the Spirit alone can apply the truths of his Word; therefore, sermon application succeeds only when preachers preach for his purposes and in dependence on his work."²⁷ Likewise, Capill argues,

²² John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Eerdmans, 1982), 99–135.

²³ For the sake of clarification, I do not claim that the names mentioned in the specific and general application approaches agree with one another in all matters involved in the discipline of preaching. Although there is certainly a connection between all of these individuals regarding their theology, this is not always indicative that there is a lack of nuance between their methodology.

²⁴ Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 146.

²⁵ Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 146.

²⁶ A critical element of bridging the cultural gap between the biblical text and contemporary audience is what Stott refers to as double listening. He defines this concept as "listening to the word of God and listening to the voices of the modern world, its cries of anger, pain, and despair" (John R. W. Stott, *The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor* [InterVarsity Press, 2007], 100).

²⁷ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 214.

“Belief in the power of God’s Word when applied to the heart directly by the Holy Spirit is absolutely right.”²⁸ However, he adds, “Settling for explanation of the Word but not application of it to life fails to do justice to the fact that the Spirit uses means, and his means include the preacher’s proclamation of the Word to his people in his day.”²⁹ Essentially, failing to apply the biblical text specifically to a particular congregation is not permitted by a high pneumatology. Such an idea, according to York and Blue, is “disingenuous” for there is no “biblical or moral principle [making] exegesis the work of the preacher and application the exclusive province of the Spirit.”³⁰ On the contrary, a high pneumatology necessitates that the preacher make specific application for, as Chapell argues, “Sound explanation requires good scholarship. Solid application requires deep spirituality.”³¹

The Dangers of Specific Application

In dealing with specific application, several potential dangers arise out of the models presented by the likes of Chapell, Capill, and Stott. First, when the preacher attempts to grasp the felt needs and concerns of the congregation, the natural temptation that follows is the potential for those needs and concerns to drive the message more than the biblical text. Granted, neither Chapell, Capill, nor Stott argues for preaching that is less Word-driven and more audience-driven.³² Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize this potential hazard that awaits expository preachers seeking to relevantly apply the biblical text. Daniel Doriani cautions against naïveté at this point, beckoning preachers to consider the questions, “What books are [the people] reading? What societal ills have they noticed? What

²⁸ Capill, *The Heart Is the Target*, 12.

²⁹ Capill, *The Heart Is the Target*, 12.

³⁰ York and Blue, “Is Application Necessary in the Expository Sermon?,” 72.

³¹ Chapell adds, “A pastor who is keenly aware of the soul’s struggles and who is intimately acquainted with scriptural remedies has what it takes to produce sound applications” (*Christ-Centered Preaching*, 207). Capill, similarly, articulates in his application model that powerful preaching and penetrating application flow through the spiritually nourished reservoir of the preacher’s own life (*The Heart Is the Target*, 81–94).

³² For example, Stott clarifies, “We listen to the Word with humble reverence, anxious to understand it, and resolved to believe and obey what we come to understand. We listen to the world with critical alertness, anxious to understand it too, and resolve not necessarily to believe and obey it, but to sympathize with it and to seek grace to discover how the gospel relates to it” (John R. W. Stott, *The Contemporary Christian: Applying God’s Word to Today’s World* [InterVarsity Press, 1992], 28).

troubled persons have stepped into their offices? What songs have they been singing? And what if these recent experiences have little to do with the text?”³³ Doriani even cautions against the corrupted heart of the preacher himself:

Further, we dare not neglect the role of the corrupted human heart in the process of application. What are the teacher’s frustrated desires and dreams? Who has offended him and in what way? What would he like his hearers to do for him? Some leaders can find, in many a text, evidence that their goals and their programs are precisely God’s will for themselves or their church. In short, free meditation has few safeguards against the infections of a deceitful heart.³⁴

Essentially, when felt needs and concerns become too suggestive for the sermon, the preacher might find himself making application that has little to no grounding in the Scriptures. Hence, Haddon Robinson claims, “More heresy is preached in application than in Bible exegesis.”³⁵

The second potential danger that befalls specific application is what Doriani refers to as the “personal spirituality view.”³⁶ There is no way to know for sure if Doriani has Chapell in mind when he states, “Solid application requires deep spirituality,”³⁷ but it stands to reason that Doriani may be questioning the logic that Chapell uses.³⁸ Doriani elaborates, “Taken to its extreme conclusion, the ‘personal spirituality’ view regards theoretical reflection on application as superfluous. If the speaker faithfully hears the text, he will know what to say.... On this view, application is better caught than taught.”³⁹ If powerful application is determined less by methods and more by one’s spirituality, then it raises the question, “How well can a model of specific application be taught and replicated at all?” In essence, the potential problem with claiming that application is contingent upon the preacher’s spirituality is that it may insinuate that

³³ Daniel M. Doriani, *Getting the Message: A Plan for Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (P&R, 1996), 125.

³⁴ Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 125.

³⁵ Haddon Robinson, “The Heresy of Application,” in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today’s Communicators*, ed. Haddon W. Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Zondervan, 2005), 306.

³⁶ Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 124.

³⁷ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 207.

³⁸ Chapell’s *Christ-Centered Preaching* was originally published in 1994, whereas Doriani’s book was published in 1996. So, although Doriani may not have Chapell in mind at the point of writing his book, Chapell’s work was circulating at that time.

³⁹ Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 124.

specific application is only possible when the preacher is filled with the Spirit, regardless of how well he understands the particular needs and concerns of his congregation.

The third and final potential danger of specific application is the issue of over-individualization. Rinne helpfully calls attention to this likelihood in expository preaching, writing, “We suffer from an individualistic, self-focused orientation (at least here in the United States). As a result, we instinctively think of relevance in personal terms. We ask, ‘What does this text mean for *me*?’ but fail to ponder what it means for *us*. And yet so much of the Bible is written to God’s gathered people, whether Israel or local churches.”⁴⁰ In other words, when application is tied too closely to individual people and their felt needs, what is lost is the potential for the Scriptures to address and form the body and bride of Christ as a whole.

Understanding General Application

As mentioned above, the general application approach views the Bible as a naturally relevant book that does not require the preacher to display its relevance through multiple, specific points of application. On the contrary, rather than focusing on the particulars of the congregation, proponents of general application focus on the broader principles of the biblical text. MacArthur helpfully explains this point, writing, “If a listener cannot grasp the principles taught by the text of the sermon, he will fail to understand their application to his own life. If he does understand them, he will be unable to escape their specific application made by the Spirit to his own life.”⁴¹ According to MacArthur, if the congregation cannot understand the basic underlying principles of the biblical text first, it is unthinkable to presume that they will rightly understand the implications the text has for their lives.

Although York and Blue claim that MacArthur “downplays the need for sermon application,”⁴² it appears that his convictions on the matter are a bit more nuanced than they suggest. MacArthur is clear that preachers should seek to apply the biblical text in some measure. He writes,

True expository preaching is actually the most effective kind of applicational preaching. When Scripture is accurately interpreted and powerfully preached, the Spirit takes the message and applies it to the peculiar needs of each listener. Apart from explicit general application in principizing the main parts of the exposition, the

⁴⁰ Rinne, “Learning the Art of Sermon Application” (emphases original).

⁴¹ John MacArthur, *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Word, 1992), 356.

⁴² York and Blue, “Is Application Necessary in the Expository Sermon?” 71.

expositor is not compelled to give a set number of points of specific application before a sermon can have an applicational impact. *That’s not to say he should not make some illustrative applications*, but if the text is allowed to speak fully, applications will multiply far beyond what he can anticipate as the Spirit of God takes His Word and applies it to each listener.⁴³

As is evidenced by the italicized sentence above, MacArthur believes preachers should strive to apply the biblical text. His only caveat is that the sermon’s impact is not contingent upon the number of applications offered by the preacher. Rather, MacArthur argues, it is the task of the preacher to explain and apply the general principles of the text and trust that the Spirit will further apply those principles in specific ways to individual people. By doing so, “This grants the Holy Spirit, who is most capable in applying the Word to every heart, His rightful place in speaking to individual lives.”⁴⁴

Although application is the process of connecting scriptural truth to the contemporary world, a general approach to application recognizes the lack of a one-to-one relationship between these two factors. Walter Kaiser writes, “[The Bible’s] words are most frequently ... directed to a *specific* people in a *specific* situation in a *specific* time and in a *specific* culture.”⁴⁵ Therefore, Robinson concludes, “The Bible is specific, but my audience is general.”⁴⁶ He explains, “For example, a man listening to a sermon can identify with David committing adultery with Bathsheba, but he’s not a king, and he doesn’t command armies. We have to take this text that is historically specific and determine how the living God speaks from it today.”⁴⁷ In the example that Robinson provides, a general approach to application will focus only on the principles that contemporary people share with David, which, in this case, is the principle of committing adultery. By doing so, the preacher is safeguarded from “saying what God doesn’t say.”⁴⁸

⁴³ MacArthur, *Preaching*, 246 (emphases added).

⁴⁴ MacArthur, *Preaching*, 246.

⁴⁵ Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Baker, 1998), 37 (emphases original).

⁴⁶ Robinson, “The Heresy of Application,” 307.

⁴⁷ Robinson, “The Heresy of Application,” 307.

⁴⁸ Robinson, “The Heresy of Application,” 307. Robinson uses very vivid language to describe the act of applying the text in ways that the biblical writer would not permit. He considers it “a rape of the Bible” (p. 306).

The Dangers of General Application

There are a couple of different dangers that arise out of a general approach to application. First, although MacArthur's theology of preaching is thoroughly conservative, his reliance on the Holy Spirit to make specific application can lead preachers into the tragic waters of liberal ideology. Jay Adams argues, "Abhorrence of direct application leads ... into common ground with many liberals who believe that the use of the indicative alone, to the exclusion of the imperative, is adequate. At best, such preaching is applied (if at all) by implication; at worst, only by inference. Application becomes the task of the listener rather than the preacher."⁴⁹ Daniel Akin asserts that this "weakness is one of the deadliest ones of the so-called 'New Homiletic.'"⁵⁰ Indeed, one can trace the similarities between what MacArthur believes about application and what New Homiletic practitioner, Fred Craddock, believes as well. In defense of his inductive preaching method, Craddock writes, "If it is done well, one often need not make the applications of the conclusion to the lives of the hearers. If *they* have made the trip, it is *their* conclusion, and the implication for their own situations is not only clear but personally inescapable."⁵¹ The main issue with this potential danger is not the language connection between MacArthur and Craddock, but rather the presumption that the specific applications drawn by the congregation are rightly understood. Akin precisely points out that because we cannot "assume that [our people] will understand on their own ... [w]e cannot hope our people will 'fill in the blanks' of sermon application."⁵² In essence, reliance on the Holy Spirit to apply the message directly to individuals does not always result in rightly understood conclusions from the audience.

The second potential danger of general application is that it might lead preachers to become complacent.⁵³ Even if the preacher views the Bible as an intrinsically relevant book, the problem remains that the common perception of the Bible in modern times is that it is irrelevant.⁵⁴ Doriani

⁴⁹ Adams, *Truth Applied*, 21.

⁵⁰ Daniel L. Akin, Bill Curtis, and Stephen Nelson Rummage, *Engaging Exposition* (B&H Academic, 2011), 178.

⁵¹ Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, rev. and with new sermons (Chalice, 2001), 48–49. Compare this statement with MacArthur's: "If he does understand them, he will be *unable to escape* their specific application made by the Spirit to his own life" (*Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 356, emphases added).

⁵² Akin, Curtis, and Rummage, *Engaging Exposition*, 178.

⁵³ Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 127.

⁵⁴ Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 127. Stott shares a conversation he once had

states, "Even Christians fail to see what the Bible has to do with their financial struggles and emotional decay at home, or with the temptations and the pressures to compromise at work. It stands mute, it seems, before the issues of the day—questions raised by constant change, the global economy, medical technology, and chronic poverty."⁵⁵ When preachers fail to recognize this sad reality of the day, and continue to "urge people to pray, trust God, observe the law, read the Bible, evangelize, and 'show their commitment by getting involved,'" the temptation is to stick with the same clichés and ignore real struggles and questions their congregation face day to day.⁵⁶

Understanding Jim Shaddix's View and Model of Application

Having explored some of the potential dangers of specific and general application that faces expository preaching, the question that arises is, "Is there a model of application that currently exists that helps guard against these potential dangers?" In the affirmative, this essay claims that Jim Shaddix's model of application warrants a viable approach to help guard against the potential dangers of specific and general applications. Before analyzing Shaddix's model, it is important to first understand his convictions on the matter.

Shaddix defines application as simply "relating the sermon to your audience, involving them in its subject, and calling them to act on its challenge."⁵⁷ He recognizes that expository preaching has received a bad reputation in the past, often "characterized by an overload of exegetical details with no connection to the real world."⁵⁸ Such a status, according to Shaddix, is not indicative of true expository preaching but "poor expository preaching."⁵⁹ He explains, "The goal of true expository preaching must be to secure some moral action, not simply to communicate doctrine."⁶⁰ In recent years, Shaddix argues that the pendulum has swung too far to the other side of the spectrum. No longer are preachers weighing down their congregations with exegetical facts; now they "are preaching more application at the expense of needed exegetical details of the

with brothers who denounced Christianity because they wanted to know "not whether Christianity is *true*, but whether it's *relevant*" (*Between Two Worlds*, 102, emphasis original).

⁵⁵ Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 127.

⁵⁶ Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 127.

⁵⁷ Jim Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching* (Rainer, 2019), 87.

⁵⁸ Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching*, 87.

⁵⁹ Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching*, 88.

⁶⁰ Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching*, 88.

text.”⁶¹ Such a shift in focus also misses the mark of true expository preaching “because it undermines and nullifies the possibility of real life change.”⁶² Taken together, Shaddix views exposition and application not in terms of a “greater-lesser” relationship, but as complementary partners in the shared goal of transforming lives.⁶³

Shaddix not only considers exposition and application partners in the preaching task, but he also contends for a symbiotic relationship between the preacher and the Holy Spirit in applying the biblical text. He and Jerry Vines write, “The expository preacher has a powerful ally as he seeks creatively to communicate God’s Word to contemporary listeners. He’s been promised divine assistance in connecting the ancient text to life today.”⁶⁴ According to Shaddix, the Spirit “provides guidance regarding the infinite number of specific situations and problems people face.”⁶⁵ Consequently, while the preacher is commissioned to apply the biblical text to his people, the Spirit’s assistance relieves him of needing expertise in everything under the sun.⁶⁶

Although the Spirit guides the preacher in making application, according to Shaddix, such an asset does not permit the preacher to neglect his responsibility to apply the text rightly. In fact, he and Scott Pace write that one of “the most compelling [reasons] for including application in the sermon is our opportunity to *cooperate with the Holy Spirit*.”⁶⁷ They recognize that the Spirit and the Scriptures alone contain sufficient power to change hearts, but they also acknowledge that preachers are the Spirit’s “delegated spokesmen” who are “charged to communicate on his behalf.”⁶⁸ Contrary to proponents of general application, Shaddix is hesitant to hastily distinguish between the preacher’s and the Spirit’s responsibility in applying the text.

Although Shaddix does not entirely accord with those on the general application side of the debate, he is concerned with the extent to which

⁶¹ Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching*, 88.

⁶² Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching*, 88.

⁶³ Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching*, 90. This is a slightly different perspective than Chapell who contends that application justifies and provides a target towards which exposition aims (*Christ-Centered Preaching*, 189–92).

⁶⁴ Jerry Vines and Jim L. Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons*, rev. ed. (Moody, 2017), 75. See also where Pace and Shaddix state that preachers exercise spiritual leadership through application “in partnership with the Spirit” (R. Scott Pace and Jim Shaddix, *Expositional Leadership: Shepherding God’s People from the Pulpit* [Crossway, 2024], 51).

⁶⁵ Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching*, 52.

⁶⁶ Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching*, 52, 90.

⁶⁷ Pace and Shaddix, *Expositional Leadership*, 52 (emphasis added).

⁶⁸ Pace and Shaddix, *Expositional Leadership*, 52.

specific application has progressed. Regarding the individualistic tendencies of specific application, Shaddix laments that preachers “get so consumed with making specific application to individuals that they never consider the degree to which their preaching relates to the larger congregation.”⁶⁹ Furthermore, and most importantly for Shaddix, “The more individualized and specific the preacher becomes, ... the less relevant his preaching becomes with regard to the purpose of preaching and the agenda of the Almighty. Additionally, ... he likely will find himself making God say some things He never said!”⁷⁰ When the preacher is more focused on making specific application to individual felt needs, he may effectually give them a lot of *good stuff*, but the tragedy “is not what people are *getting* but what they are *not getting*”—namely, *God’s stuff*.⁷¹ Essentially, Shaddix is concerned about application that places undue confidence in human resources rather than directing attention to divine agency.⁷²

Based upon the brief research above, Shaddix advocates for a *via media* between specific and general approaches to application. Nevertheless, in order to fully substantiate this claim, Shaddix’s own model of application must be considered and evaluated. Therefore, the questions raised now are, “What is Jim Shaddix’s proposed model of application, and how well

⁶⁹ Jim Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon: Changing the Way Pastors Preach and Congregations Listen* (B&H, 2003), 111. Shaddix is not against the idea that preachers should be concerned about individual listeners, as will be analyzed in his application model below; he simply argues that individual application must proceed only *after* considering the broader implications the text has on the congregational body. He writes, “None of this is to say that the preacher should not be concerned with specific application to the lives of his individual listeners. Certainly, every preacher must give serious attention to whom he will be speaking and how he might establish relevancy in each heart and mind. John the Baptist, Jesus, Paul, and the other apostles were concerned that the people acted rightly based on specific application of truth (e.g., Matt 7:21–27; Luke 3:10–14; Eph 4:25–32; Jas 2:14–26). But they provided such application only after allowing it to flow naturally from a consideration of broader theological ideas” (*The Passion Driven Sermon*, 111).

⁷⁰ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 111. Shaddix argues that the agenda of the Bible is to set people “on a course to be shaped into the image of [God’s] Son, Jesus Christ” (Jim Shaddix, “Hearing God’s Voice: A Practical Theology for Expository Preaching,” *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 13.2 [Fall 2016]: 10). Shaddix agrees with Robinson on the issue of making God say things He never said (Robinson, “The Heresy of Application,” 306).

⁷¹ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 66. Shaddix defines *God’s stuff* as the very essence of the Bible, whereas *good stuff* is helpful advice in life that is easily gleaned from simple observation and research.

⁷² Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 66.

does it help guard against the potential dangers that specific and general application present to expository preaching?" These important questions are addressed by considering Shaddix's "application funnel" and his implementation in two selected sermons.⁷³

Application Funnel

Shaddix views relevancy in preaching as "that which connects the truth of God's Word with the greatest needs of the most number of people."⁷⁴ When the preacher strives to apply God's truth as revealed in Scripture to the greatest needs of his congregation, he is on course to preach a message that is both meaningful to his people and glorifying to God.⁷⁵ Therefore, in order to make application with integrity, Shaddix proposes a series of six considerations for preachers that collectively form what he refers to as the "application funnel."⁷⁶ Just as a "V" shape funnel is intended to direct a downward flow into a specific location, the six considerations of Shaddix's application model are positioned in decreasing order of priority, beginning with the theological application of the text and ending with its application to individual people.⁷⁷

Theological Application

When the preacher sets out to apply the Scriptures to his audience, the first area of significance he should establish is its theological implications. This part of the application funnel helps answer the broader question, "What does this given biblical text teach us about God and his relationship with people?"⁷⁸ By answering this question first, the preacher is able to determine why God put that particular text in the Bible in the first place.⁷⁹ Vines and Shaddix offer a couple of guiding sub-questions to help the preacher in this task: First, "What biblical doctrines and theological

⁷³ The two sermons selected for examination are "Pursuing Christ's Presence" on Haggai 1 and "The Mystery of Marriage" on Eph 5:31–33. See Jim Shaddix, "Pursuing Christ's Presence," *The Website of Jim Shaddix (TWJS)*; Jim Shaddix, "The Mystery of Marriage," *TWJS*.

⁷⁴ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 108.

⁷⁵ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 108.

⁷⁶ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 109.

⁷⁷ When the application funnel is used appropriately, Shaddix claims that "the preacher can establish a logical, significant relationship between biblical truth and the largest number of his listeners without losing substance along the way" (*The Passion Driven Sermon*, 109).

⁷⁸ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 109.

⁷⁹ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 175.

tenets are informed by this text?"⁸⁰ Second, "Where does this text stand in relation to Christ and the gospel?"⁸¹ In establishing the theological implications of the text, the preacher constructs a strong foundation upon which he can connect "that part of mankind which relates to the Creator."⁸²

Shaddix identifies the theological implications of both Haggai 1 and Eph 5:31–33 by locating the significance of the respective subject matter in relation to Christ and the gospel. In his sermon on Haggai 1, Shaddix relates the Jewish temple to the presence of Christ. He says, "God did not establish that physical building as end game. He established it as a representation of that which is to come, which you and I are the beneficiaries of, and that is the presence of Jesus Christ in our lives."⁸³ Likewise, in dealing with Paul's explication of marriage in Ephesians 5, Shaddix equates the concept of marriage with the portrayal of the gospel. He says, "I think [Paul] shows us ... in this passage of Scripture ... that through the marriage relationship, God has been streaming the gospel ever since he instituted marriage at the beginning of the history of mankind."⁸⁴ In effect, by equating the temple to the presence of Christ and marriage to the demonstration of the gospel, Shaddix forms the theological foundation upon which the remaining applications build.

Universal Application

After establishing the theological implications of a given biblical text, the preacher can then move to establish its universal application. In other words, "This is the timeless truth in any given passage that is applicable

⁸⁰ "Look to see what the text teaches us about foundational doctrinal issues like the character of God, the nature of salvation, and the depravity of man, that element of humanity that rebels against the glimpse of God. Be sure to look for some glimpse of God in every Bible passage, such as Creator or Sustainer" (Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 175).

⁸¹ "As noted earlier, every text stands in relation to Christ in some way. It either points forward to Christ, speaks directly of Christ, or reflects back on Christ. Determine how your passage relates to God's larger story of redemption through the gospel. The expositor can't afford to neglect to determine where his passage intersects with Christ and the gospel. Whatever you do, don't leave the study of your text and move on to sermon preparation without identifying the Christocentric and gospel-driven nature of your passage" (Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 175).

⁸² Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 109.

⁸³ Shaddix, "Pursuing Christ's Presence," 6:58.

⁸⁴ Shaddix, "The Mystery of Marriage," 6:44.

to all people of all time.”⁸⁵ Examples of universal, timeless truths include “human identity, the reason for existence, the future, guilt, love, significance, death, eternity, and more.”⁸⁶ These issues were just as relatable to the people in the Bible as much as they are today. Therefore, at this stage of the application funnel, the preacher seeks to locate these timeless truths and state them as principles that apply to all people across multiple generations.⁸⁷

In his sermon on Haggai 1, Shaddix moves from the theological implication that the temple represents Jesus’s presence to the universal significance of that truth for all people. After tracing the language of “temple” throughout the New Testament, Shaddix says, “Jesus is the temple. Jesus gets in you, you’re the temple. You come together as the body of Christ, we’re the temple together. But we are looking for, waiting for, moving toward that time when we will experience the presence of God in Christ Jesus for all eternity.”⁸⁸ Essentially, Shaddix indicates that the lasting significance of the temple as a symbol of Christ’s presence is that when people are indwelt with Christ’s Spirit, they too become the temple. Similarly, Shaddix establishes the universal significance of marriage in his sermon on Ephesians 5. He says, “As the people of God, the Church of Jesus Christ, we’re the bride, he’s the bridegroom. This is God’s purpose in all of eternity.”⁸⁹ In effect, because marriage is a depiction of the gospel, Shaddix asserts that the Church’s relationship with Christ should vividly reflect the gospel in every way.

Before moving forward with the next consideration of the application funnel, Shaddix and Vines address an important issue. They write,

Sometimes the best application of a text will be limited to its theological implications and timeless truths. The preacher will be able to say no more with regard to relevance without stretching the text. Certain truths issuing from the theological implications will serve as the primary application of the passage. And you should never feel guilty about that. *Theological implications and timeless truths are application, even though they may not have immediate and practical expression*

⁸⁵ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 110.

⁸⁶ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 110; Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 176.

⁸⁷ Vines and Shaddix refer to Kaiser’s process of “principlization,” which involves “[stating] the author’s propositions, arguments, narrations, and illustrations in timeless abiding truths with special focus on the application of those truths to the current needs of the Church” (*Power in the Pulpit*, 176). See also Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 152.

⁸⁸ Shaddix, “Pursuing Christ’s Presence,” 9:05.

⁸⁹ Shaddix, “The Mystery of Marriage,” 24:46.

*in people’s lives.*⁹⁰

This wise caution deals with the tension many preachers face in trying to make practical application to their audience. There are some biblical passages that are not easily applicable beyond its timeless truths. When the preacher both recognizes and accepts this reality, he guards himself from stretching the text to make it say something it was never intended to say. In essence, this is the very point in the application funnel where, depending on how far one goes, application can either remain biblical or outright heretical.⁹¹ Nevertheless, Shaddix recognizes that in many cases, the preacher “will be able to apply the truth rightly in practical ways.”⁹² Therefore, he encourages preachers to review the gathered material at this point and begin to consider how the text might apply to a particular audience in specific ways.⁹³

Generational Application

Once the preacher understands the text’s theological and universal application, he moves to its generational application. In other words, at this point in the application funnel the preacher “addresses that which is constant for all people living on planet earth at the time the message is preached.”⁹⁴ By using the term “generational,” Shaddix insists that preachers should recognize the different qualities that characterize every *living* generation, and seek to connect the theological, timeless truths of Scripture to each one represented in his respective congregation.⁹⁵ When the preacher strives to apply biblical truth to the generational characteristics of his time, he is more likely to achieve an element of relevance with most of the people.

Shaddix displays generational application most clearly in his sermon on Ephesians 5. Interestingly, Shaddix indicates the relevance of the subject matter to each representative generation during the introduction of his sermon. He says, “So, regardless of how long you’ve been married, if you’ve been married; regardless of if you were married once and are no longer married; regardless [of] if you’re a young person, a student maybe

⁹⁰ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 224 (emphasis original).

⁹¹ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 225.

⁹² Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 224.

⁹³ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 224.

⁹⁴ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 110.

⁹⁵ Shaddix offers clarification on this point: “By *generation* I mean the group of individuals born and living contemporaneously” (*The Passion Driven Sermon*, 110, emphasis original).

anticipating marriage somewhere down the line; and every other manifestation [of] relationship, those of us who are part of the Church of Jesus Christ, marriage is crucial for who we are and what we do.”⁹⁶ Essentially, Shaddix presents the concept of marriage as a relevant subject for each generation represented in the congregation, regardless of their marital status.

Cultural Application

The next consideration for the preacher is the cultural dynamics of his current setting. This step in the application funnel is focused on “[connecting] eternal truth with the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterize the culture or cultures of [the preacher’s] immediate context.”⁹⁷ Relevant application at this stage presents a challenge for preachers, especially in North America due to the growing plethora of cultural beliefs, traditions, social forms, and material traits from various countries, ethnicities, and people groups.⁹⁸ Consequently, when the preacher considers the shared factors within the culture or cultures represented in his immediate context, he has more potential to establish relevant application with the majority.

In his sermon on Haggai 1, Shaddix briefly makes cultural application by drawing a connection between the realities of the biblical text and the current American climate. After stating that the people of Israel neglected to build the temple because they were distracted by excess, Shaddix says, “Listen to me, American Christians, Western Christians, this is a word for us. We get distracted by our excess, don’t we?”⁹⁹ Although Shaddix’s application is subtle, he essentially asserts that the temptation to quit pursuing Christ’s presence because of various distractions is a pertinent struggle for American Christians living within a culture of abundance. Likewise, Shaddix speaks to the relevance of marriage in Ephesians 5 by drawing a contrast with the current American culture. He says, “Some have come to this passage of Scripture and said that [this] stuff is irrelevant. You know that whole ‘wives submitting to husband’s’ thing ... [saying] it really

⁹⁶ Shaddix, “The Mystery of Marriage,” 1:15.

⁹⁷ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 110.

⁹⁸ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 110. Matthew D. Kim describes this growing reality in the North American Church when he writes, “Most congregations in North America are not as completely homogenous as they once were with respect to denominational traditions, ethnicity, gender, location, socioeconomics, musical preferences, education, ministry, philosophy, theology, ecclesiology, and so on” (*Preaching with Cultural Intelligence: Understanding the People Who Hear Our Sermons* [Baker Academic, 2017], xii).

⁹⁹ Shaddix, “Pursuing Christ’s Presence,” 20:00.

doesn’t have any bearing on the free culture, the free society, and free love context in which we live today. Well, that’s completely false.”¹⁰⁰ By distinguishing between how the Bible portrays marriage and how American culture views it, Shaddix essentially argues that the theological and timeless truths of marriage are cross-cultural.

Communal Application

The fifth consideration for the preacher to make is that of a particular community. Shaddix explains this step as “the connection of biblical truth with those persons whose lives are bonded together by some type of common relationship. This may be manifested in families, close-knit communities, same occupations, shared life situations, similar struggles, or some other characteristic which groups of individuals have in common.”¹⁰¹ He also considers this step in the process “even more difficult than the previous one ... because not everyone who comes to church will have a common tie to any of the numerous other groups within the congregation.”¹⁰² Consequently, the preacher must acknowledge that at the point of trying to apply the text to a particular community of faith, whether that be a local church or elsewhere, he will find it more difficult to connect biblical truth to the greatest number of people.

In Haggai 1, Shaddix makes communal application several times throughout his sermon. Having preached this sermon in chapel at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, several of Shaddix’s applications are oriented toward students who are currently in or preparing for ministry. Subsequently, after explaining that another reason the people of Israel forsook building the temple was due to their comparison of it to the previous one, Shaddix says,

One of the reasons some of us throw down our tools and quit when it comes to actively pursuing the effects and influences of the Holy Spirit is because we look at our ministries and we look at the size of our ministries and we say it’s not worth it; it’s not as big as the next guy’s; it’s not as big as it used to be; I haven’t had the impact that I would like to have; why keep going? And if you’ve never been there, I promise you, you will be there at some point in your ministry.¹⁰³

In effect, Shaddix takes the issue that arises in the text and draws a connection to the concerns that a community of ministerial students may

¹⁰⁰ Shaddix, “The Mystery of Marriage,” 9:51.

¹⁰¹ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 110–11.

¹⁰² Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 111.

¹⁰³ Shaddix, “Pursuing Christ’s Presence,” 18:27.

have in common.

Individual Application

Finally, after considering the previous five steps of applying the text to the greatest number of people, the preacher can address the needs of individuals or selected groups.¹⁰⁴ While this final consideration receives most of the attention today, according to Shaddix, it is “inevitably the most limited in the larger scope of things.”¹⁰⁵ In other words, when the preacher reaches this point in the process, it is almost a guarantee that the proceeding application will not pertain to most of the gathered people. Therefore, while this is the final step in Shaddix’s application funnel process, he maintains, “Both preachers and listeners must acknowledge the myth that suggests that preaching is irrelevant if it fails to make specific application to each individual listener. Why? Because a whole lot of application is germane to each individual listener as part of creation and humanity, as well as part of a particular generation, culture, and community.”¹⁰⁶ Essentially, applications that are generationally, culturally, or communally bound are just as relevant as individual application.

Although individual application does not take up a substantial part of Shaddix’s sermons on either Haggai 1 or Ephesians 5, he calls attention to how husbands and wives are to live in relation to what Paul writes about marriage. He says concerning husbands, “Brothers, men of God, what does that say? It says this, listen to me very carefully: God has been streaming the story of the gospel ever since he instituted the marriage relationship. And guess what? Your role is to play Christ. Your role, my role, as men of God ... is to treat our wives in such a way, [to] relate to our wives in such a way that when people look at us, it makes them think of Jesus.”¹⁰⁷ As for wives, Shaddix says later, “When people look at the way you relate to your husband, when they look at the way that you treat him, the way that you respond to him, they think of the bride of Christ in relation to the bridegroom. You get to play the Church.”¹⁰⁸ Here, Shaddix applies the text to individual groups of people. Yet, he gives only brief attention to this point.

The End Goal of the Application Funnel: Incarnation

As the preacher progresses through the application funnel, he holds a more noble task than merely imparting biblical truth. Shaddix explains,

¹⁰⁴ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 111.

¹⁰⁵ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 111.

¹⁰⁶ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 111.

¹⁰⁷ Shaddix, “The Mystery of Marriage,” 34:10.

¹⁰⁸ Shaddix, “The Mystery of Marriage,” 37:43.

“As the Word of God is applied to the lives of believers through the application funnel, they essentially are being conformed to Christ’s image (see Rom. 8:29; Phil. 3:10, 21). To say it another way, He is *formed* inside them.”¹⁰⁹ Therefore, as the preacher works through the application funnel, he must recognize that “[life] change doesn’t take place from the outside-in, but from the inside-out.”¹¹⁰ As such, the applications that are produced as a result of the application funnel process must aim “to foster Christlike character in our people.”¹¹¹ This kind of preaching, according to Shaddix, is what he refers to as “incarnational preaching.”¹¹²

Shaddix views incarnational preaching, that which forms believers into the image of Christ, through the lens of four concentric circles. The inner circle, which is the initial target for the preacher, is the character of Christ within the listener.¹¹³ Before sermon application delves into pragmatic behavioral modification, Shaddix argues that the preacher’s main priority is to nurture the character of Christ within listeners, which “is the primary influence on how the believer thinks, feels, and desires.”¹¹⁴

This initial priority of Shaddix’s incarnational preaching naturally leads to the preacher’s second concern, which “is still not to alter his listener’s conduct but to alter their consciences.”¹¹⁵ As the influence of Christ’s character grows within a person, it will inform Christ’s conscience within them as well. Only then, when “people begin to think Christianly, they will begin to decide for Christ in every aspect of life, for faith is always expressed in the willful obedience to God’s Word.”¹¹⁶ Although the preacher might not sufficiently “scratch the surface of the infinite amount of variables in the application of God’s truth,” Shaddix contends that the Holy Spirit’s help is an essential “resource for acting in keeping with

¹⁰⁹ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 112 (emphasis original).

¹¹⁰ Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching*, 89.

¹¹¹ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 75.

¹¹² Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 112; Jerry Vines and Jim L. Shaddix, *Progress in the Pulpit: How to Grow in Your Preaching* (Moody, 2017), 76. This is not to be confused with Stephen and David Olford’s “incarnational preaching,” which pertains more to the issue of the Holy Spirit’s anointing (Stephen F. Olford and David Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* [B&H, 1998], 214). Although Shaddix refers to the anointing elsewhere as “humanity clothed in deity,” the context in which he uses the term “incarnation” here is specific to the area of application (*The Passion Driven Sermon*, 41).

¹¹³ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 112.

¹¹⁴ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 113.

¹¹⁵ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 115.

¹¹⁶ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 116.

[Christ's] character and will."¹¹⁷

Shaddix's concentric circles of incarnational preaching do not end with conduct, for once more he maintains that "contemporary preaching desperately needs a larger purpose than mere individual assent and personal application."¹¹⁸ Ultimately, he writes,

Preaching helps in forming the community of faith—not just individual believers—into Christlikeness. Most of the time when we're talking about the journey of transformation into Christlikeness, we're thinking about individual believers. Paul, however, often addresses the corporate community in his writings when referring to their spiritual growth. He intentionally wanted to build a mature community, not just mature individuals. When you stop and think about it, there are lots of things in the Christian life that can only be realized and manifested in community. Love, unity, spiritual giftedness, peace, and patience are just a few of the qualities of the Christian life that imply the experience of body life. They take more than one person to happen!¹¹⁹

In order to foster Christlikeness within a corporate body, Shaddix offers two practical suggestions for preachers to incorporate in their application.

First, preachers should frequently address the identity and mission of God's people.¹²⁰ In conjunction with the Bible's agenda to "save a people from their sins and set them on a course to be shaped into the image of [God's] Son,"¹²¹ Shaddix advises preachers to lead their people "to ask 'What should *we* do?' instead of 'What should *I* do?'"¹²² Second, Shaddix encourages preachers to use theological terminology.¹²³ He writes, "It is highly unlikely that corporate identity will ever be developed without nurturing the community's own distinctive vocabulary."¹²⁴ In other words, preachers should not hesitate to explain *and* apply theological terms such

¹¹⁷ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 117.

¹¹⁸ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 118.

¹¹⁹ Vines and Shaddix, *Progress in the Pulpit*, 76. For sake of clarification, Shaddix writes elsewhere, "Oh. I'm not speaking of the Christian communism which some have mistakenly drawn from the Acts 2:42–47 passage. Such was not the order of the day, even for the early church. What I am championing for, however, is at least some semblance of accepted community standards among God's people and preaching that seeks to establish them" (*The Passion Driven Sermon*, 119).

¹²⁰ Vines and Shaddix, *Progress in the Pulpit*, 78.

¹²¹ Shaddix, "Hearing God's Voice," 10.

¹²² Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 119–20 (emphasis original).

¹²³ Vines and Shaddix, *Progress in the Pulpit*, 78.

¹²⁴ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 119.

as "election," "sanctification," "propitiation," and "redemption."¹²⁵ Doing so not only helps form a communal body around scriptural language but challenges the high biblical illiteracy in the current culture as well.¹²⁶ All taken together, when the preacher engages people with the character of Christ in his application, a Christian conscience, conduct, and community, is more likely to result.¹²⁷

Evaluation of Jim Shaddix's Application Model

Having established several potential dangers that await overly specific and general application and analyzed Jim Shaddix's application model, one is now able to evaluate how well his model guards against these dangers. I do not presume that all potential dangers of specific and general approaches to application are reflected in this essay, nor that Shaddix's application model perfectly shields the preacher from error. Nevertheless, the aforementioned perils of overly specific and general application are derived from research that suggests that such potential dangers are worthy of one's consideration. Therefore, the following evaluation of Shaddix's application model is delimited by the potential dangers as outlined above.

Concerning Specific Application

The first major concern that an overly specific application poses to expository preaching is the temptation to allow the needs and concerns of the people to dictate the message more than the biblical text. Shaddix's application funnel presents an approach that avoids this inclination as its design encourages preachers to prioritize the theological implications and timeless truths over immediate practical application. Although Shaddix acknowledges that in many cases, preachers "will be able to apply the truth rightly in practical ways," he insists that the only way to get there with integrity is by considering the theological and universal truths of the text

¹²⁵ Vines and Shaddix, *Progress in the Pulpit*, 78.

¹²⁶ Shaddix claims that the growing biblical illiteracy has wrongly "convinced us that we must translate all of our terminology for the benefit of those who do not know our theological lingo" (*The Passion Driven Sermon*, 118–19).

¹²⁷ In a later article, Shaddix adds one more circle beyond the four concentric circles of Christ in character, conscience, conduct, and community. He states, "We can easily add one more circle beyond these four—culture. When enough communities are true reflections of the body of Christ, then culture is going to be affected positively" (Jim Shaddix, "Preaching as Cultural Engagement," *The Website of Jim Shaddix* [June 2020]).

first.¹²⁸ By doing so, the preacher sets himself upon a firm biblical foundation as he seeks to address the needs of his church in an applicable way.¹²⁹

The second issue with an overly specific approach to application is what Doriani refers to as an overemphasis of “personal spirituality.”¹³⁰ In other words, the “personal spirituality” view suggests that a healthy, vibrant spiritual and private life of the preacher is prerequisite for powerful application. Doriani’s issue with this concept is that application remains superfluous and “is better caught than taught.”¹³¹ In contrast, the simplicity of Shaddix’s application funnel appears replicable, and he never suggests that it is dependent upon the preacher’s spirituality.

Last, the final problem with an overemphasis on specific application is the issue of over-individualization. Essentially, the desire to make practical application to individual people has resulted in a decline in preaching that addresses and informs the gathered church. Shaddix averts this issue with his application funnel as it intends to connect “the truth of God’s Word [to] the greatest needs of the most number of people.”¹³² By working through the application funnel stage-by-stage, the preacher is compelled to consider how the truth of the text relates to generations, cultures, and communities, all of which consist of multiple people. Furthermore, as is clear by the concentric circles of incarnational preaching, Shaddix insists that the purpose of preaching is larger than individual application—it is ultimately to form Christlikeness into a community of faith.¹³³ Shaddix is worth quoting at this point:

The teaching shepherd must preach on a larger plane than merely meeting individual needs and answering individual questions. While there will always be a plethora of topics from which to choose in this realm, that pastor has a loftier goal in his preaching—his congregation’s ultimate welfare at Christ’s coming. Christ’s community must continually be looking for His return.¹³⁴

In essence, while the last consideration of the application funnel is the individual application of the text, the process does not force individual

¹²⁸ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 224.

¹²⁹ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 224.

¹³⁰ Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 124.

¹³¹ Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 124.

¹³² Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 108.

¹³³ Vines and Shaddix, *Progress in the Pulpit*, 76; Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 118.

¹³⁴ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 120.

application at all points of the sermon.¹³⁵ Rather, it simply guides the preacher in considering the extent to which the text applies to the majority of his listeners, effectually forming them into the image of Christ.

Concerning General Application

When application remains too generic, a couple of issues may surface. First, Adams helpfully points out that an over-dependence upon the Holy Spirit to apply the text specifically to individuals can lead into liberal philosophy, which suggests that application is ultimately “the task of the listener rather than the preacher.”¹³⁶ Although Shaddix recognizes that the “Spirit is faithful to make specific application to the listeners at just the right time and just the right way,”¹³⁷ he also acknowledges that “this doesn’t negate the preacher’s responsibility to make good and right application in his sermons.”¹³⁸ Furthermore, given that four of the six considerations of Shaddix’s application funnel are focused on generational, cultural, communal, and individual application, there is no inherent suggestion that implies these are limited to the Spirit’s sphere of responsibility alone.

The second potential danger of overly generic application is the temptation for the preacher to remain complacent and ignore the very real concerns that his people might have, essentially contributing to the all-too-common perception that the Bible is irrelevant. Due to the intentional step-by-step process of Shaddix’s application funnel, there is no inclination that it leaves room for complacency on the part of the preacher. On the contrary, Shaddix writes that “the preacher must *intentionally* pour—or apply—God’s Word into the areas that connect with the most number of people.”¹³⁹ When the preacher is intentional about applying the text rightly to the greatest needs of his people, he will not easily become complacent in this task. Furthermore, although Shaddix warns that relevancy in preaching is not determined by felt needs of people, the ultimate task of the preacher is to show what “God has determined to be relevant in the Word of God.”¹⁴⁰ If the Bible was inspired by God for the purpose of saving “a people from their sins and set them on a course to be shaped into the image of [Christ],”¹⁴¹ as Shaddix believes, the preacher should not

¹³⁵ Shaddix and Vines write, “Like the other functional elements, not every part of your text will need to be applied. Be intentional about picking your spots for practical application” (*Power in the Pulpit*, 223).

¹³⁶ Adams, *Truth Applied*, 21.

¹³⁷ Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching*, 52.

¹³⁸ Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching*, 52.

¹³⁹ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 109 (emphasis added).

¹⁴⁰ Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching*, 52.

¹⁴¹ Shaddix, “Hearing God’s Voice,” 10.

“enter the pulpit until [he] can talk about the gospel in a way that portrays it as nothing less than the most incredible news in the universe.”¹⁴²

Conclusion

This essay has attempted to situate Jim Shaddix within the current debate surrounding specific and general application in expository preaching. More precisely, this essay demonstrates that Shaddix advocates for a *via media* between specific and general application, warranting his application model as a viable approach to help guard against potential dangers that both approaches present to expository preaching. The essay does not argue that Shaddix’s model is the best or only viable approach to sermon application. Therefore, a comparative analysis between Shaddix’s application model with those of the names mentioned throughout this essay, such as Chapell, Capill, and MacArthur, is a suggestion for further research.

¹⁴² Vines and Shaddix, *Progress in the Pulpit*, 124. Later in the book, Shaddix writes an entire chapter entitled “Rising Above Foyer Feedback: The Art of Objective Sermon Evaluation” offering practical ways to help the preacher grow in his preaching (*Progress in the Pulpit*, 167–83).