

Listening to Buechner

By [David Heim](#)

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Algebraic preaching—that's Frederick Buechner's term for preaching that may make sense on some abstract level but that depends on terms like "salvation," "atonement," "savior" and "died for your sins" that are likely to skim over people's heads. Until the preacher connects such words to human experiences, to the "wretched and liberating moments" of life," wrote Buechner, the preacher might as well be saying " $X + Y = Z$."

His own essays and sermons are anything but algebraic. They are winding, elegant excursions into scripture by a man who has listened closely to the gospel and to the mysteries and sorrows of his own life.

[Barbara Brown Taylor recalls](#) being overwhelmed the first time she heard Buechner speak by his willingness to name realities usually avoided in church. "Were we really going to tell the truth?" she wondered. Were we really going to trust that "our nicked and ragged selves will somehow serve to bring God's truth to life"?

For those interested in Buechner's sermons, essays and novels, there's now a [website devoted to all things Buechner](#). It offers an introduction to his works (with comments by Taylor and others) plus an archive of video and audio material, a searchable index of Buechner's writings and selections from his works keyed to themes of the lectionary texts.