

The heft of a pulpit Bible

As I pressed my sermon's pages across the book's valley, I couldn't keep them from sliding into the groove.

by [Isaac S. Villegas](#) in the [December 2025](#) issue

Published on November 24, 2025

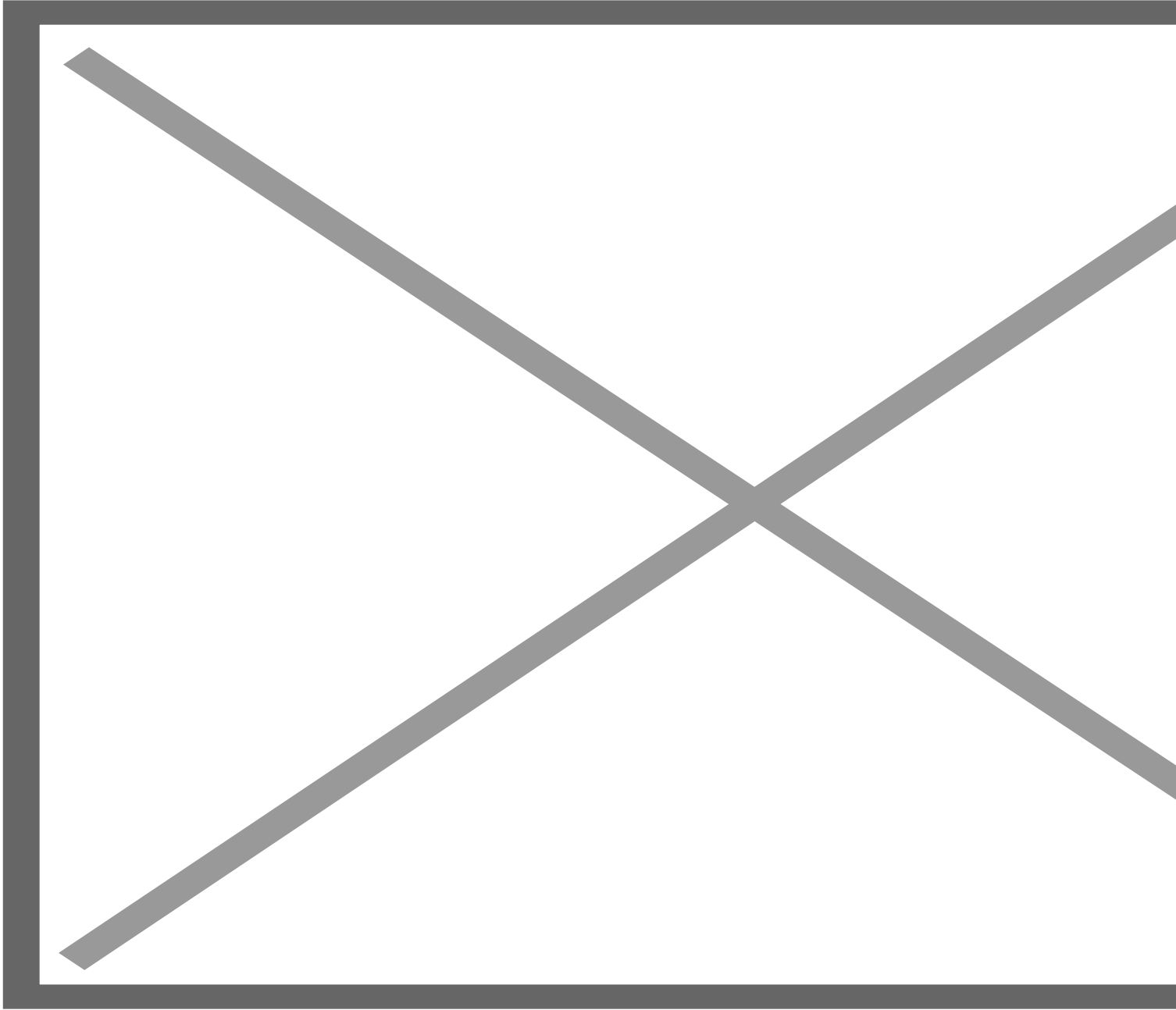


Photo by Birzio / E+ / Getty

At the Mennonite congregation I served as pastor for 16 years, I would perch my sermon manuscript on the face of the pulpit, sliding the pages across the smooth surface as I preached. I'm no longer a full-time pastor, so I've been preaching at other churches, at the invitation of pastor friends. Recently, when placing my sermon manuscripts on the pulpits of Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopal churches, I've had to negotiate a bulky object: the Holy Scriptures. This has been my introduction to the tradition of the pulpit Bible.

At St. Joseph's Episcopal, as I scouted out the pulpit before the service, Vicar Lauren showed me how to rest the lectionary book against the bottom lip of the lectern, orienting the spine toward the top, making a little shelf for my sermon. The scriptures buttressed my words as I preached.

At Trinity Avenue Presbyterian, a large Bible took up most of the pulpit. The tome lay open to the middle pages: the Psalms, the prayers at the heart of our scriptures. Before worship, while walking me through the logistics of the service, Pastor Katie shared tips on how to arrange my sermon across the book's valley, to keep my manuscript as flat as possible. I tried my hand at adjusting the pages but couldn't keep them from sliding into the groove.

How fitting, I thought, for my sermon to fall into the Psalms, the prayerbook of the Bible. I remembered a line from Karl Barth's *Homiletics*: "Preaching, then, must become prayer." Sermons, at their best, open our lives to God. To preach is to lead the church into prayer, to invite a people into a posture to receive grace. It is to welcome the Holy Spirit.

At Duke Memorial United Methodist, as Pastor Heather walked me through the order of worship, I saw on the lectern the congregation's pulpit Bible, also open to the Psalms, and this time I noticed which psalms: 112 through 118, in the King James Version. After the service I read through the verses, jotting down sentences and phrases—notes for understanding the task of preaching, a homiletical theology in situ. "Praise ye the Lord." "O give thanks unto the Lord." "His mercy endureth for ever." "Thou art my God, I will exalt you."

Those two pages of psalms indulge in the goodness of God. The verses celebrate God's kindness and care, the dependability of God's provision and love. They are a summons to share in God's delight in creation, to delight in God's delight. "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." God made us and the life all around us, thus the call to joyful gladness, to gratitude. Praise is an ethic, a style of living in response to grace. That's why God's people "delighteth greatly in his commandments." The Torah, the law, is the gift of a way of life that leads to God. To proclaim the gospel is to ready ourselves, as a community, for life with God.

The pulpit Bible reminds us that we are people of the book. We derive our existence in communion with the Holy Spirit, who incorporates us into Christ's life, a people throughout the ages who've opened the scriptures and joined the conversation with God. The church entrusts those who step into the pulpit with leading congregants farther into that conversation, deeper into God's word—to guide a community into life with God.

The heft of the pulpit Bible is a statement. Worship leaders and preachers can't ignore it. Our people in the pews notice as we shuffle our papers around it. The scriptures' imposing presence makes an appeal for everyone's acknowledgment: It asks us to remember who we are and to recenter our lives on the God of our psalmist's faith. "The Lord is my strength and my song."

The pulpit Bible is there to remind us that worship is about drawing people into divine grace. The goal is for our lives to become prayer: for us to say, in the words of Psalm 118, "Thou art my God, I will exalt you."

This is Isaac Villegas's last article as a regular century columnist. We are grateful for his many contributions.
—Eds.