

## UNIT 2: SERMON PREPARATION

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1. There is an art to preaching. Like any artist, over time you will develop your own style and approach. In order to have the freedom to do that well, however, you must first grasp some foundational elements of sermon preparation.
2. In this session, we will explore (1) The preparation of the sermon, (2) The material for the sermon, (3) The Aim of the Sermon, and (4) The Illustration of the Sermon.

### I. The Preparation of the Sermon

We can divide the preparation process into three stages: The Planning Stage, the Research Stage, and the Reflections Stage. A pastor should plan his sermon schedule at least one year in advance. Preaching the two major cycles of the Christian Year - the Cycle of Light (Advent, Christmas, Epiphany), and the Cycle of Life (Holy Week, Easter Season, Pentecost) - and the rest of the year preaching expository sermons through books of the Bible, is the best way to plan a year of preaching. After expository series, textual series then topical series should be the second and third in frequency.

#### The Planning Stage.

Planning a sermon involves working with the biblical text, developing a theme, establishing the aim, and producing an outline.

1. **Biblical Text.** **The sermon MUST flow from the biblical text.** We must not begin with what we want to say and then try to find proof-texts to support it. The text will determine the course of the sermon. It may be a phrase, verse, or a whole section.
  - a. Context: We must interpret Scripture carefully and accurately (a process called hermeneutics). We must be careful to interpret a passage in its **context**. It is not an isolated statement but fits within a larger narrative of Scripture. Therefore, our interpretation must fit within the larger unity of the Bible.
  - b. Meaning: What is the meaning of the passage as intended by the original writer? (Timeless Principle). **Hermeneutics appropriate to the passage must be used!** Those hermeneutical principles (interpretive principles such as genre, literary conventions, etc. appropriate to the text) will guide the exegesis.
  - c. We must do careful exegesis (finding the true meaning from a Scripture passage) rather than eisegesis (reading our own meanings into the Scripture).
  - d. Application: We must then apply the timeless principle to our context today.
2. Establishing the Sermon Theme. Once you have selected a biblical text and have a clear understanding of its basic message, then summarize that message in a crisp, clear, concise, memorable statement. This is the theme.
  - a. You might make this the sermon title or use it for a subtitle.
  - b. Several themes may arise from your study of the text. Nonetheless, focus only on the one theme to which the Holy Spirit leads. *“He who chases many rabbits catches none.”*
3. The Aim of the Sermon. The aim answers the question: “What should this sermon do?”

- a. The aim must be clear and specific, stating the intent or purpose of the sermon. It should be tangible and clearly based on the text.
  - b. You must know where you're headed when you leave the gate. Do you want people to change their belief on an issue? Are you challenging them to change a behavior? Are you seeking simply to provide more biblical knowledge?
4. The Outline. Develop major points relating to the text, theme, and aim of the sermon. One simple way to approach this is to work through the 1) Original Meaning, 2) Timeless Principle, and 3) Contemporary Application. For example:
- I. Timeless Principle
    - A. Original Meaning
    - B. Contemporary Application
  - II. Timeless Principle
    - A. Original Meaning
    - B. Contemporary Application

### **The Research Stage**

1. Set a schedule for sermon prep and maintain discipline to spend sufficient time in preparation.
2. The author suggests six hours of prep for each sermon. Set a specific schedule if you preach regularly.

### **The Reflection Stage**

Take the research to prayer and spend time discerning what God is saying. This is why Saturday night specials are not effective. There is not enough time to sit with the Word.

## **II. The Material for the Sermons**

1. "Now that I know how to prepare for a sermon, where can I find a regular supply of material to use?"
2. There is a great deal of talk today about churches "being relevant." We must certainly be relevant! The only other option is being irrelevant! But we often confuse relevance with being hip or trendy. The Bible, when rightly interpreted and applied, is completely relevant! But this means we must spend some time in the text and understand the world of its day so that we can bridge the gap to what it says for OUR day.
3. Faulty Approaches:

- a. The haphazard approach
  - b. Borrowing sermons from other preachers (plagiarism)
4. Ideal solution: Our preaching should be based on our own personal study of the Scriptures. We will never run out of things to learn about God's Word. If we continue to study for ourselves, we will always have material to preach.
5. Personal Bible Study:
- a. Devotional Bible reading. Keep a journal with sermon ideas. However, don't just look for sermons. It's vitally important to study God's Word to invite Him to speak to you personally. Study as a child of God first rather than a preacher.
  - b. Read longer sections of Scripture and whole books of the Bible. Read in context. **Scripture was not originally divided into chapters and verses. It is meant to be read as a whole.** When Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthians, they read the whole letter just like we read letters today. That is how we are to read each book of Scripture.
  - c. Intensive and systematic Bible study with a referencing system.
6. Use good resources. Don't bother using popular ministers' latest books. Read material with both good scholarship and healthy application. Develop a library of good reference material. Some good examples:
- a. New American Commentary. Word Biblical Commentary.
  - b. New International Commentary, New Testament (NICNT). Also, the NICOT.
  - c. Study Bibles: NIV Study Bible, ESV Study Bible, Cultural Background Study Bible.
  - d. Bible Dictionaries and Encyclopedias.
  - e. BlueLetterBible.org.
  - f. Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Available as a 10 volume set or an abridged single volume).

### III. The Aim of the Sermon

There are four basic types of sermons: Evangelistic, Doctrinal, Ethical, and Apologetic. So, how do we decide which to use? It depends on several factors: What is the objective of the sermon? Who is the audience? What should the sermon accomplish?

1. Evangelistic Preaching: This is directed toward the uncommitted. It should engage their intellect, emotions, and conscience. Calls for decision.
2. Doctrinal Preaching: One of the main responsibilities of a pastor/overseer is found in **Titus 1:9 ESV. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.**

The congregation must be taught how to rightly interpret Scripture and what we believe.

This includes TEACHING.

- a. **Didactic**—Didactic instruction is the basic form of the doctrinal sermon. It is instructional teaching.
  - b. **Demonstrative**—The demonstrative mode of instruction is showing what you mean. It may be mental (logical argumentation), verbal (illustrative stories), or visible (object lessons, pictures, and diagrams).
  - c. **Interrogative**—The interrogative mode is the use of pointed questions to challenge the listener’s thinking. Answers may be given verbally or mentally, depending on the situation. Ask leading questions. Jesus did this a lot. Watch how often He answered a question with a question.
  - d. **Contributive**—The contributive mode uses audience feedback or participation as part of the teaching process. Allowing spontaneous comments, incorporating material drawn from the hearers in advance of the sermon, or featuring a prearranged testimony are ways the contributive method may be used. I find this to be particularly effective with younger people.
3. Ethical Preaching. Ethics deals with how we live out our salvation. It answers two questions: What should we do? How should we do it?
  4. Apologetic Preaching. Apologetics is the process of defending the faith. It addresses the question, “Why should we believe or do this?” In apologetic sermons, we must do the following:
    - a. Refute the arguments of opponents of the gospel.
    - b. Reason so clearly that we convince honest inquirers of the credibility of the gospel.
    - c. Reassure believers by such a clear statement of the evidence for Christianity that their faith will be confirmed, and they will be strengthened against false teaching.

***Special Note regarding apologetic preaching:***

1. Carefully investigate every aspect of the topic you are considering. Use good sources and verify the validity of what you share! Much of the material that circulates on YouTube and other social media is unreliable at best, heretical at worst.
2. For example, when addressing scientific matters, avoid pseudo-science groups. Many well-meaning groups mishandle science (and Scripture!) in an attempt to make it fit their worldview. For example, some young earth creationism sites use faulty science and circular reasoning to fit their interpretation of Scripture. We must handle both Scripture and science with integrity.

3. One excellent way to find good resources is to look at the bibliographies of good preaching textbooks and other materials provided by our Assemblies of God schools.

#### IV. The Illustration of the Sermon

1. The human mind is designed to think in pictures. The most effective preachers, like Jesus, have been masters of verbal illustration. Sermon illustrations show us what the unseen things of God are like by using examples from the visual world around us. It helps the listeners to “See” the truth we are preaching.
2. Purposes of Illustrations:
  - a. **Illumination.** Sermon illustrations serve the text and bring life to biblical truth. They are not an end in themselves.
  - b. **Interest.** Illustrations get people’s attention. Jesus used effective illustrations, and He was never boring.
  - c. **Impressiveness.** This refers to the fresh impression that is made through the use of new illustrations. They can bring fresh life to familiar truths.
  - d. **Recollection.** We remember good illustrations much better than bare statements of truth. If we want a sermon to be remembered, we can go a long way toward achieving that by using good illustrations.
  - e. **Persuasion.** Since persuasion is the goal of all sermons in one respect or another, effective illustrations should serve to add persuasive punch to the message.
3. Verbal Illustrations:
  - a. **Figures of speech.**
    - i. Metaphors: Direct comparisons. “Blind guides! You snakes!”
    - ii. Similes: Use “like” or “as” to make comparisons. Example: **Matthew 24:27 ESV. For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.**
  - b. **Quotations**
  - c. **Stories**
    - Anecdotes: Incidents drawn from our lives or that of others.
    - Analogies: Drawing parallels between natural things and the things of God (Example: Luke 11:5-10).
    - Parables: Everyday events demonstrating spiritual truths (Example: Matthew 13:3-52).

- Fables: imaginary situations highlighting human characteristics (Example: Tress that have human characteristics in Judges 9:8-20).

4. Visual Illustrations:

a. The Preacher. Physical movements, emotions expressed

b. Visual Aids: *Use these sparingly! Depend on the spoken word!*

- PowerPoint presentations: Use lightly. Less is more. Watch an Apple keynote presentation when they are launching a new product. That is the gold standard.
- Video clips. A testimony, report, music video, etc.
- Physical objects.
- Enacted parables. Live or recorded dramatic presentation. Tommy Barnett is famous for this.
- Diagrams and charts. These can provide an overview of a topic. Again, use sparingly.
- Maps, chalkboard or whiteboard, artistic representations.
- **Handouts**. Good as a take-home illustrations. Can include Bible references and primary points to remember.

5. Good sources of illustrations are Scripture, of course, current news and stories, books, and carefully researched items online (please verify their accuracy!). Also, personal experience is very valuable. It is good to let people see into your life. It makes you approachable.

6. **Use illustrations sparingly, and make sure they are accurate and appropriate.**

7. As you develop your preaching ministry, you will come across many stories and useful information. Don't trust yourself to remember it all. Develop a system for recording illustrations, whether it is simply to write it in a notebook or file it in a computer.