



EQUIPPING CHURCH LEADERS
• EAST AFRICA •

EXPOSITORY PREACHING

by

Jonathan M. Menn

B.A., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1974

J.D., Cornell Law School, 1977

M.Div., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2007

Equipping Church Leaders-East Africa

3701 N. Gillett St., Appleton, WI 54914

(920) 731-5523

jonathanmenn@yahoo.com

www.eclea.net

December 2007, revised May 2013; corrected July 2014

Expository preaching—i.e., how to expound, preach, and apply the Bible well—is described and demonstrated. The importance of the preacher's own life is explained. Each aspect of a good sermon, from the introduction, through the proposition and exposition, to the applications and conclusion, is analyzed and made clear. How to prepare and organize a good sermon is examined, different organizational models are presented, and detailed sermon outlines are included. What makes communication persuasive, and the preacher's style, are discussed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Expository Preaching—Introduction.....3
 A. *Expository preaching described*.....3
 B. *Reasons for and benefits of expository preaching*.....4
 C. *Expository versus topical preaching*.....5

II. Preaching through Biblical Books.....6
 A. *Many traditions draw their sermons from passages found in a lectionary*.....6
 B. *Expounding disconnected passages from week to week neglects the context of the passages*.....6
 C. *One expository approach is to preach through books of the Bible*.....6
 D. *There are a number of reasons for and benefits of preaching through books*.....6

III. The Life of the Preacher.....7
 A. *Those who proclaim and preach God’s Word are called to live holy lives*.....7
 B. *The Holy Spirit’s role in expository preaching requires that preachers live holy lives*.....8
 C. *A life congruent with what you preach, in right relationship with God and with others, greatly helps the persuasiveness of what you say*.....9

IV. Contextual Considerations and Audience Awareness..9
 A. *Contextual considerations*.....9
 B. *Although the form of their presentations differed based on the nature of the audience and their purpose, Jesus and the other biblical preachers and teachers consistently used a “problem (or issue)-based” method of preaching and teaching*.....10
 C. *Our preaching should follow the model of Jesus and Paul*.....10
 D. *Audience awareness and the implications of a problem (issue)-based “Rail-Fence” approach*.....13

V. Considerations Regarding the Biblical Passage You Are Expounding.....14
 A. *The purpose of the passage*.....14
 B. *Explaining and illustrating the passage*.....16

VI. Application.....16
 A. *Life change is the goal of expository preaching*.....16
 B. *Throughout the Bible doctrinal truth is combined with practical applications that demonstrate what that truth is to look like and how that truth is to be lived*.....17
 C. *Application gives the exposition its meaning*.....17
 D. *Application may be a change in attitude as well as a change in behavior*.....17
 E. *Preachers should not assume that simply by explaining, or even illustrating, what the Bible says and means, people will automatically see how to apply biblical truths to their lives*.....17
 F. *Two key questions to keep application-focused*.....18

VII. The Components and Organization of Effective Sermons.....19
 A. *To be most effective, a sermon should have a single, unifying point*.....19
 B. *Persuasive communication is enhanced by clear organization*.....21
 C. *Three aspects of the sermon are often overlooked, but are important to the effectiveness of your presentation: Introduction; Transitions; and Conclusion*.....21
 D. *General organizational considerations*.....22
 E. *Different organizational models*.....24

VIII. Persuasive Communication and the Preacher’s “Style”.....25
 A. *There is no one correct style of preaching*.....25
 B. *The manner or style of preaching will vary depending upon the substance and goal of the specific message, the circumstances in which we are preaching, and the knowledge and needs of the audience*.....26
 C. *Principles of persuasive public speaking apply to sermons as well as to other types*

<i>of public speech</i>	27
D. A preacher’s “anointing” is not related to emotionalism	28
REFERENCES CITED	29
APPENDIX A— INTERROGATIVE BIBLE STUDY FOR BIBLICAL PREACHING	30
APPENDIX B—STEPS TO THE SERMON: A MINIMAL CHECK LIST FOR PREACHERS	32
APPENDIX C—Matt 6:19-24—Didactic Model Sermon Outline	39
APPENDIX D—Eph 2:11-16—Didactic Model Sermon Outline	40
APPENDIX E—Exod 1:1-22—EPA Narrative Model Sermon Outline	42
APPENDIX F—Rev 19:11-21—EPA Narrative Model Sermon Outline	46
APPENDIX G—Ps 73:1-28—Literary Plot Model Sermon Outline	47
APPENDIX H—Rev 19:11-21—Literary Plot Model Sermon Outline	50
APPENDIX I—1 Sam 30:1-31—Me-We-God-You-We Model Sermon Outline	51
APPENDIX J—SERMONS MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED	52
APPENDIX K—ARE YOU WASTING YOUR SERMON PREP TIME?	54
APPENDIX L—NOT-SO-SIMPLE SERMON SOLUTIONS	55
THE AUTHOR	57

EXPOSITORY PREACHING

I. Expository Preaching—Introduction

A. Expository preaching described

1. Although the Bible was written thousands of years ago, the Holy Spirit addresses us through Scripture, and makes the words of Scripture alive and contemporary for us today.

- a. *Several passages use the present tense for the Scripture, which indicates that the Spirit actively speaks to us through the Bible today (Heb 3:7; 4:7; 10:15-17; 12:5-6).* Even Old Testament events occurred as examples for us, were written specifically for our instruction, and the people involved in those events still speak to us (**1 Cor 10:6, 11; Heb 11:4**). The apostles and writers of the Bible frequently use both the past and present tenses when referring to Scripture, indicating that what had been written in the past is still “a living word to living people from the living God” (Stott 1982: 100). John Stott explains the significance of this: “When once we have grasped the truth that God ‘still speaks through what he has spoken’, we shall be well protected against two opposite errors. The first is the belief that, though it was heard in ancient times, God’s voice is silent today. The second is the claim that God is indeed speaking today, but that his Word has little or nothing to do with Scripture. . . Safety and truth are found in the related convictions that God has spoken, that God speaks, and that his two messages are closely connected to one another, because it is *through* what he spoke that he speaks.” (Ibid.: 102)
- b. *Other passages indicate that when the Holy Spirit speaks through a person who is rightly preaching the Bible, it IS the Word of God (Acts 4:31; 6:4; 11:14; Rom 10:17; Phil 1:14; 1 Thess 2:13; Heb 13:7; 1 Pet 1:22-25; 4:11).* Thus, when a preacher is doing what he should be doing, the preacher, the Spirit, and the Word are all intimately united in a living, vital, supernatural enterprise.

2. Expository preaching follows from the above truths.

a. *The elements of expository preaching are:*

- (1) Expository preaching is based on and expounds a biblical text;
- (2) Expository preaching is faithful to the emphasis, doctrine, function of the passage, and intent of its author; and
- (3) Expository preaching applies the passage to the lives of the listeners.

b. *Expository preaching defined.* Expository preaching might be defined as, “opening up the inspired text with such faithfulness and sensitivity that God’s voice is heard and God’s people obey him.” Bryan Chapell adds, “In order to expound a passage a preacher must explain context, establish meaning, and demonstrate implications in a way that a specific group of listeners will find interesting, understandable, and applicable” (Chapell 1994: 127).

3. The term “expository” indicates that “exposing” what the Bible says, means, and implies is at the heart of preaching. The pattern was established by the priests in Nehemiah who “read from the book, from the law of God, translating [or “explaining”] the sense so that they understood the reading” (**Neh 8:8**). Stott describes this: “To expound Scripture is to bring out of the text what is there and expose it to view. The expositor open[s] what appears to be closed, makes plain what is obscure, unravels what is knotted and unfolds what is tightly packed. The opposite of exposition is ‘imposition’, which is to impose on the text what is not there. But the ‘text’ in question could be a verse, or a sentence, or even a single word. It could equally be a paragraph, or a chapter, or a whole book. The size of the text is immaterial so long as it is biblical. What matters is what we do with it. Whether it is long or short, our responsibility as expositors is to open it up in such a way that it speaks its message clearly, plainly, accurately, relevantly, without addition, subtraction or falsification. In expository preaching the biblical text is neither a conventional introduction to a sermon on a largely different theme, nor a convenient peg on which to hang a ragbag of miscellaneous thoughts, but a master which dictates and controls what is said.” (Stott 1982: 125-26)

4. Expository preaching deals with literary units. Pastor Mark Harris explains, “A literary unit can be understood as a line of thought, an argument, or a story. It may be a single verse, a paragraph or several chapters. In each literary unit, a single theme usually dominates, and all the surrounding material supports it. This is the ‘big idea’” (Harris 2004: 22) Chapell similarly calls the preaching portion of Scripture an “expository unit,” which he defines as “a large or small portion of Scripture from which the preacher can demonstrate a single spiritual truth with adequate supporting facts or concepts arising within the scope of the text” (Chapell 1994: 53). Looking at Scripture as literary or expository units

encourages preachers to see scriptural passages as “collections of unified thought packets rather than as arrays of disconnected verses” (Ibid.: 52).

5. Expository preaching is more than simply teaching. The preacher is charged with the task of studying, understanding, and properly interpreting the Bible. Expository preaching then takes the next step of conveying that information to people who have *not* done the study in such a way that they will understand it *as if they had done the study*. But expository preaching does something more—it conveys the truths of the Bible in such a way that the listeners will be inspired to *change their lives* as a result of what they have heard and learned from the preacher. John Piper explains this: “When Paul says to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2, ‘Preach the word,’ the term he uses for ‘preach’ is a word for ‘herald’ or ‘announce’ or ‘proclaim’ (*kēruōn*). It is not a word for ‘teach’ or ‘explain.’ . . . I call this heralding *exultation*. Preaching is a public exultation over the truth it brings. It is not disinterested or cool or neutral. It is not mere explanation. It is manifestly and contagiously passionate about what it says.

Nevertheless this heralding contains teaching. You can see that as you look back to 2 Timothy 3:16—the Scripture (which gives rise to preaching) is profitable for *teaching*. And you can see it as you look ahead to the rest of 2 Timothy 4:2, ‘Preach the word . . . reprove, rebuke and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.’ So preaching is expository. It deals with the Word of God. True preaching is not the opinions of mere man. It is the faithful exposition of God’s Word. So in a phrase, preaching is *expository exultation*.” (Piper 2004: 10-11)

6. Expository preaching must engage not only the mind but also the heart and life of the preacher. The reason is that the Holy Spirit *first* applies the passage *to the preacher* and then, through him, applies it to the people. In order to preach expositoryly the pastor is obligated to do a thorough study of the text, which feeds his own soul, strengthens him, and thereby makes him a better pastor and person. The pattern was set by Ezra who “set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel” (**Ezra 7:10**). “Study-Practice-Teach” should still be the pattern for preachers today.

7. Expository preaching likewise must engage the minds, hearts, and lives of the congregation. Piper says, “In true worship there is always *understanding* with the mind and there is always *feeling* with the heart. Understanding must always be the foundation of feeling, or all we have is baseless emotionalism. But understanding of God that doesn’t give rise to feeling for God becomes mere intellectualism and deadness” (Piper 2004: 10).

8. The purpose or goal of expository preaching is not simply to teach people what the Bible says and means, but to change lives. As Pastor Andy Stanley says, the goal is “to teach people how to live a life that reflects the values, principles, and truths of the Bible” (Stanley and Jones 2006: 95). The transformation of our *lives* (not just our thoughts or beliefs) is at the heart of what Christianity is all about (see **Rom 8:29; 12:1-2; Eph 4:17-24; 5:8**). James made this clear when he said “faith without works is useless” (**Jas 2:20**), and “prove yourselves doers of the word, not merely hearers who delude themselves” (**Jas 1:22**). Jesus gave one sign for how people would know that we are his disciples: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (**John 13:35**). Consequently, that was the goal of Paul’s instruction: “The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (**1 Tim 1:5**). Notice how the goal of love affects one’s *entire life*: the heart is purified; the conscience is made good (because there is no longer a difference between what one says and what he does); and one’s faith is sincere (belief is combined with Godly works so that faith is no longer useless).

9. Because the goal of expository preaching is the transformation of lives, application of the word—TO the lives of the hearers, and IN their lives BY the hearers—is central. God’s Word always calls for a response: “When you commit to preach for life change, your preparation is not complete until you have answered two very important questions: So what? and Now what? Our preaching won’t make much difference if our people don’t understand what difference it is supposed to make. . . . The key to this approach is refusing to stand up and speak until you know the answer to two questions: What is the one thing I want my audience to know? [and] What do I want them to do about it?” (Stanley and Jones 2006: 97, 104)

B. Reasons for and benefits of expository preaching

1. Exposition “sets limits” in that it restricts us to expounding the scriptural text. The preacher is less likely to succumb to the temptation to simply teach his own “pet ideas” and interests. He is also less likely to succumb to pressure from the congregation to only preach “what they want to hear.” The *limitation* of what to preach thereby *frees* the pastor to preach the whole counsel of God in a way that

helps to insure both *integrity* (freedom from temptation and pressure regarding the subjects to preach) and *balance* (i.e., balance between different parts of the Bible, and balance within a book itself) in one's preaching.

2. Sound exposition requires that the expositor not twist Scripture. An expository preacher must have the integrity to discern what the biblical authors meant, and say it. An expository preacher must "sit humbly under the authority of the Scriptures, instead of standing in judgment on them" (Stott 1982: 127-30). In fact, if you do *not* preach in an expository fashion you are *misrepresenting God* because, "you are saying in the name of God what God never said: you are making promises He never made; giving advice He never gave; and declaring warnings He never declared. In short, you are instructing [your audience] in a false view of God. In doing so, you become a false teacher and put yourself under the judgment of God." (Harris 2004: 26)

3. The Word gives preachers their ultimate authority. "The authority of the Word enables us to say the most challenging things to any person without apology, but that same authority lets us speak tenderly without compromising strength" (Chapell 1994: 89). Similarly, exposition gives us confidence to preach because we are not merely stating our own views or those of some fallible fellow human being. Instead, "we are expounding God's Word with integrity and honesty"; therefore, "we can be very bold" (Stott 1982: 132). In fact, a study of 263 lay people in 28 congregations (9 African-American; 16 of non-Hispanic, European origin; and 3 ethnically mixed) from 13 denominations in the American Midwest for Christian Theological Seminary [the CTS study] showed that, "by far the single most mentioned trait contributing to the authority of the sermon is the preacher's use of the Bible," particularly when the preacher has evidently studied and is not just stating his own opinions (Allen 2006: 65, 67-68). That finding was confirmed by another survey of 102 preachers and 479 listeners from throughout the United States, drawn from all age groups, denominations, locations, and ethnic groups [the GASS study], which found, "One of the most commonly identified characteristics of a good sermon, according to surveyed listeners, was that it be 'Scripture based'; a primary characteristic of a bad sermon was an unclear relationship between the Scripture passage and the key point(s) of the sermon" (Carrell 2000: 27).

4. Expository preaching presents and applies the *power* of the Word, and the *authority* of the Word, which is the work of the Holy Spirit (Isa 55:10-11; Jer 23:29; Acts 18:28; Eph 4:17; 1 Thess 2:13; Heb 4:12; Jas 1:18; 1 Pet 1:23). The pastor can confidently expect to see spiritual transformation occur in his congregation as a result of his preaching because "when we proclaim the Word we bring the work of the Holy Spirit to bear on others' lives. No truth grants greater encouragement in our preaching and gives us more cause to expect results from our efforts." (Chapell 1994: 24)

C. *Expository versus topical preaching*

1. A topical sermon is a sermon on some topic chosen by the preacher or others. Often topical sermons are not expository. Preachers choose the topics and then develop them according to their own ideas, not according to what God says in the Bible. A few "proof texts" from the Bible may be thrown in, but in such sermons the themes or main points are "organized according to the subject's nature rather than according to the text's distinctions," and "the development of [the sermon's] main ideas comes from sources outside the immediate text" (Chapell 1994:127-28).

2. Topical sermons themselves may be expository. In "topical expository" preaching "the sermon begins with a theme, doctrine, person, sin, felt need, etc., and then goes to Scripture to determine what God says about this specific topic" (Harris 2004: 30). For example, in preaching on abortion you will have to look at verses from different passages in the Bible since there is no passage that explicitly deals with that subject. One who preaches a "topical expository" sermon should still be committed to expounding what the Bible says or implies about an issue; the Bible should still be one's primary reference and authority, and the preacher will "be committed to never using a verse outside its originally intended meaning" (Ibid.). A topical expository sermon may also use one passage of Scripture as a primary "anchor" for the message, but then use other passages to elaborate a more comprehensive view of what the Bible says about a particular subject. The difference between "topical exposition" and "textual exposition" is that in textual exposition the preacher "*begins with the text and lets it determine* the 'big idea' of the message. Attention to careful exegesis and proper hermeneutics will determine the direction of the message." (Ibid., emphasis added)

3. Topical sermons certainly have their place:

- a. They help to provide breaks between (or even within) a series of sermons on one book or theme so that the people can hear other things.
- b. They deal with particular issues that arise in the lives of the congregation or in the culture

which need to be addressed at a particular time.

c. They may deal with issues that arise based on the calendar (e.g., Christmas, Easter, an important national holiday) which should be dealt with.

d. *Topical sermons may themselves result in a series of sermons based on a common biblical theme (e.g., “stewardship” or “the attributes of God”).* In such a case, the preacher might elect to expound particular passages of Scripture, each of which are relevant to the theme of the series even though they are all from different books of the Bible. Indeed, the preacher may elect to do a series based on a particular theme *within a book* (e.g., the “glory of God” from Isaiah)—in that case, the book still sets the agenda but not every passage in the book will be expounded.

II. Preaching through Biblical Books

A. *Many traditions draw their sermons from passages found in a lectionary*

The lectionary is a three-year cycle of passages consisting of passages drawn from the OT, Psalms, Gospels, and Epistles, for each week of the year. The lectionary has the advantage of having the passages pre-selected so that the pastor knows in advance what passage he will be preaching on. Further, the passages are relatively comprehensive so that over the course of twelve years much of the Bible can be expounded. In putting together the lectionary, an effort was also made to tie the weekly passages to the church calendar. Even though it is possible to preach expository sermons from passages chosen by a lectionary, week-by-week the passages are, to a large extent, disconnected from each other.

B. *Expounding disconnected passages from week to week neglects the context of the passages*

The great disadvantage of expounding disconnected verses or passages each week, even when the passages have been selected from the lectionary, is that doing so neglects the *context* within which the verse or passage arises. That prevents the congregation from seeing the connections between the passage being expounded and the passages immediately before and after, which would be expounded if the preacher were preaching through an entire book. Consequently, the congregation will not be able to grasp the overall theme of the *book* in which the verse or passage is found.

C. *One expository approach is to preach through books of the Bible*

Expository preaching typically will be a *series* of sermons on a particular book of the Bible. That is because the vast majority of biblical books are too long to be adequately expounded in only one sermon. The books need *not* be taken in order from Genesis to Revelation. Long books ordinarily should be alternated with short ones, or books by one author with books by another author, or NT books interspersed with OT books, or a book series may be interrupted or alternated with topical messages to provide variety. Even if you do not preach a series of sermons through an entire book, you might consider preaching series’ of sermons through important *parts* of books (e.g., a series on the life of Joseph [**Genesis 37, 39-50**] or a series on the Sermon on the Mount [**Matthew 5-7**]). Such series provide benefits similar to preaching through entire books (see below).

D. *There are a number of reasons for and benefits of preaching through books*

1. In giving us the Bible, God did not choose to give us his Word in the form of disconnected verses, but in the form of books. In those books the verses all work together to form coherent arguments and lines of thought. Consequently, “the whole [the book] is greater than the sum of its parts [the verses and passages].” In preaching through books of the Bible, the preacher properly places high emphasis on the Word of God, honors the nature of Scripture itself, and helps us to think in terms of the larger units of Scripture than simply the individual verses.
2. Preaching expository sermons through books of the Bible creates a broad—and deep—knowledge of the Word of God for both the preacher and the congregation. As the preacher preaches through a book, sermons expounding passages both before and after the passage in question may refer back to the passage in question, thus reinforcing the recollection by and understanding of the congregation of the passage in question.
3. Expository preaching follows the example and pattern used in the Old Testament, and by Christ and the Apostles in the New Testament. Ezra expounded the Scriptures in the Old Testament (**Neh 8:5-8**). Jesus explained what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself (**Luke 24:27, 32**). Jesus, Paul, and Apollos read, explained, and then made clear the implications or exhorted from the Scriptures (see **Luke 4:14-27; Acts 17:1-4; 18:4-5, 24-28; 1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 4:2**).
4. The congregation is more likely to understand today’s text in the context of other recent sermons.

Thus, the preacher will not have to spend as much time in introducing the context of each sermon.

5. People's understanding will easily grow. Since it tends to take more than one message for people to really “get the point,” the natural use of repetition that comes with preaching through a book helps to solidify the themes that the book is aiming at. One message will reinforce others.

6. The preacher's preparation is simplified. By committing to preaching through biblical books, the pastor will not have the anxiety of wondering (or have to waste time trying to figure out) what to preach each week.

7. The people will see how to interpret the Bible for themselves. In addition to learning the substance of the Word of God, the congregation will learn week-by-week how to interpret Scripture, in its context, for themselves.

8. Expository preaching lends itself readily to congregational involvement in the sermons. Questions can be handed out a week in advance to help get the congregation into the text and thinking about it; small group studies can be arranged for members of the congregation to discuss and study the book on their own, with the sermon providing a good resource.

9. Difficult subjects can be dealt with in a natural way. By preaching through entire books, the pastor is both *forced* and *enabled* to study and preach “the whole counsel of God.” People will see that the pastor is dealing with sensitive topics because he naturally has come to that topic in the book he is expounding. Consequently, the people will not wonder “why is the pastor dealing with this?” or “who is the pastor aiming his message at?”

10. Preaching through books of the Bible helps to insure that the basic needs of the congregation will be met. “All Scripture is redemptive revelation inspired to address humanity's fallen condition (or incompleteness)” (Chapell 1994: 270-71). Preaching through books means that the Bible will be opened up to the congregation in a comprehensive way. As the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, ch. 1, art. 6, puts it: “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.”

III. The Life of the Preacher

Anyone who is a preacher or leader in Christ's church is obligated to live a life that honors Christ (see **1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9**). That is particularly true for those who intend to expound Scripture, because God himself exalts his word (**Ps 138:2**).

A. *Those who proclaim and preach God's word are called to live holy lives*

1. God's servants are called to live lives of holiness and obedience to the Lord. **John 14:21**—“He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.” **Rom 6:19**—“present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.” **2 Cor 1:12**—“Our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.” **2 Tim 2:15**—“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.” **Heb 13:7**—“Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.” **1 Tim 4:12**—“Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself and example of those who believe.” See also **1 Tim 3:1-7** and **Titus 1:5-9** for the qualifications required to be an elder or overseer in the church.

2. Preachers in particular must live holy lives because God is their witness and they are subject to his judgment. **1 Thess 2:5, 10**—“For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is our witness . . . You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers.” **Heb 13:17**—“Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account” **Jas 3:1**—“Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.”

3. Preachers must restore and maintain right relationships with God and others.

a. *It takes a life marked by the cross to preach the cross.* Jesus stated that we *cannot* bear fruit by ourselves—we have to remain connected to the vine (**John 15:1-10**). We must remain absolutely dependent on Jesus and his word, just as Jesus was absolutely dependent on the Father and his word (see **Matt 26:39; John 4:34; 5:17-20, 30; 6:38; 8:28-29; 10:18; 12:49-50; 14:31; 17:4**).

b. *Being rightly connected to Jesus and submitting to his word mean that we must be in right relationship with other people.* One of the qualifications to be an elder in the church is to be hospitable (**1 Tim 3:2**). Being hospitable—spending time with and getting to know the people in your congregation (their hopes, fears, struggles, problems, and lives in general)—enhances your ability to relate well to people, and thereby enhances your effectiveness as a preacher. John added that, “the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” (**1 John 4:20**; see also **Jas 2:14-26**; **1 John 3:17**). Further, one who is living and speaking consistent with the Word of God, in right relationship with God and others, cannot legitimately be accused of hypocrisy but can legitimately call on others to *imitate* himself (see **1 Cor 4:16, 11:1**; **Phil 3:17, 4:9**; **1 Thess 1:6**).

4. Practical suggestions for cultivating right relationships with God and others.

- a. Strive for practical, earnest, glad-hearted holiness in every area of your life.
- b. Make your life—especially the life of your study—a life of constant communion with God in prayer.
- c. Read books that were written by men or women who bleed Bible when you prick them and who are blood-earnest about the truths they discuss.
- d. Direct your mind often to the contemplation of death.
- e. Consider the biblical teaching that as a preacher you will be judged with greater strictness.
- f. Consider the example of Jesus.
- g. Strive with all the strength you have to know God and to humble yourself under his mighty hand. (Piper 2004: 63-66)

B. *The Holy Spirit's role in expository preaching requires that preachers live holy lives*

1. In true expository preaching, it is the Holy Spirit who discloses to the preacher the truth of the passage, empowers his words, and affects the hearers to obedience (see **Acts 1:8; 4:31; 10:42-44; 11:12-21; 16:6-10, 14; 1 Cor 2:4, 12-13; 2 Pet 1:19-21**).

2. Receipt of the Spirit's guidance in preaching is, to a large extent, dependent on the *attitude* of the preacher.

a. *Paul articulated the proper attitude of humility, even “fear and trembling,” before God.* He realized that he would be speaking *God's* word, as *God's* instrument, to *God's* people, for *God's* glory—and would be judged by God accordingly (**1 Cor 2:1-5**; see also **2 Cor 2:14-17; 4:2, 7; 5:11**).

b. *The proper attitude recognizes our dependence on the Spirit.* Piper warns us: “Phillips Brooks used to counsel young preachers with these words: ‘Never allow yourself to feel equal to your work. If you ever find that spirit growing on you, be afraid.’ And one reason to be afraid is because your Father will break you and humble you. . . . The dangers of self-reliance and self-exaltation in the ministry of preaching are so insidious that God will strike us if he must in order to break us of our self-assurance and our casual use of professional techniques.

So Paul rose to preach (he says in 1 Cor. 2:3) ‘in weakness and in fear and much trembling’—reverent before the glory of the Lord, broken in his native pride, crucified with Christ, shunning the airs of eloquence and intellect. What happened? There was a demonstration of the Spirit and power (2:4)!

Without this demonstration of Spirit and power in our preaching, nothing of any abiding value will be achieved no matter how many people may admire our cogency or enjoy our illustrations or learn from our doctrine. The goal of preaching is the glory of God in the glad submission of his people. . . . Or to put it another way, in preaching, the one who sets the agenda and gives the power gets the glory. So if the goal of preaching is to be attained, we simply must preach the Word inspired by the Spirit of God in the power given by the Spirit of God.” (Piper 2004: 42-43)

c. *To help us maintain dependence on the Spirit, Piper follows five steps “in seeking to preach not in my own strength but in the strength that God supplies.”* He summarizes these five steps with the acronym *APTAT*. When his mind is “befogged by fear or distraction,” and just before preaching, “I almost always put my heart through *APTAT* before the Lord.” *APTAT* stands for the following: **A—Admit** to the Lord that without him I can do nothing; **P—Pray** for help, begging for the insight, power, humility, love, memory, and freedom that I need to preach this message for the glory of your name and the gladness of your people and the ingathering of your elect; **T—Trust** not merely in a general way in God's goodness, but in a specific promise where

I can bank my hope for that hour; **A—Act** in the confidence that God will fulfill his Word; **T—Thank** God at the end of the message that I was sustained and that the truth of his Word and the purchase of his cross have been preached in some measure in the power of his Spirit to the glory of his name (Piper 2004: 47-49).

C. A life congruent with what you preach, in right relationship with God and with others, greatly helps the persuasiveness of what you say

1. You will be more persuasive even if you are not a good speaker. Many people considered Paul's letters as "weighty and strong" even though his personal presence was unimpressive and his manner of speaking "contemptible" (2 Cor 10:10). What gave Paul's words such power and authority in the minds and lives of people was that "we are in word by letters when absent, such persons we are also in deed when present" (2 Cor 10:11). Paul modeled the truth that, when preachers "demonstrate that the authority with which we preach inheres neither in us as individuals, nor primarily in our office as clergy or preachers, nor even in the church whose members and accredited pastors we may be, but supremely in the Word of God we expound . . . then the people should be willing to hear, particularly if we put the matter beyond doubt by showing that we desire to live under this authority ourselves" (Stott 1982: 58).
2. Paul's example is confirmed by scholars of rhetoric. The Greek philosopher Aristotle and the classical rhetoricians had discussed what makes for persuasive speech 400 years before the time of Paul. Aristotle had divided rhetoric into three types of persuasive speech: *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*. *Logos* refers to "the ideas, structure, and logic of a speech evaluated in terms of their persuasive force" (Mack 1990: 36). *Pathos* is "producing a certain attitude in the hearer" (Cooper 1932: 8); it is engaging the *emotions* and *personal interests* of the audience (Stern 1991: 89). *Ethos* is the *character of the speaker*. A speaker's *ethos* is based on his establishing practical wisdom, virtue, and good will (Jamar 2001: 73). Aristotle held that *ethos* "is the most potent of all the means to persuasion" (Cooper 1932: 9). Contemporary students of preaching, advocacy, and persuasive speech recognize the same things that Aristotle described over 2300 years ago (Adler 1983: 29-45; Chapell 1994: 25-30; Stern 1991: 13, 87; Stott 1982: 262-98). Thus, consistency between the preacher's life and speech, in addition to being important theologically and spiritually, also has profound practical consequences for the *effectiveness* of preaching.
3. Spiritual integrity—*ethos*—is absolutely necessary for exhorting and instructing the congregation about how to *apply* the text to their lives (which is the heart and goal of the sermon). Chapell makes this clear: "Application also requires personal trustworthiness. Why should people listen to a preacher tell them what they do not want to do, have not done, or will need to change? If the answer is not 'Because they know the preacher loves them and the Lord too much to withhold the truth they need,' then the application will fall on deaf ears. Even when it hurts people listen to application when they perceive spiritual integrity in the preacher. Such trust does not rise from academic exegesis or homiletical structure but results as a pastor's life reflects the indwelling Spirit." (Chapell 1994: 222)
4. Your listeners will not pay attention to your sermon if you do not practice what you preach. "While the relationship between preacher and listener is often that of 'acquaintance' rather than 'close or intimate friend,' it is, nevertheless, a relationship. The preacher is the leader of a community; . . . Regardless of the type of leadership, the preacher's life is observable. In no other public speech is the *demand for credibility* so high." (Carrell 2000: 25) In the CTS study, the researchers found that: "Many listeners say they locate authority in a sermon when they perceive that the preacher's life is consistent with the preacher's message. Conversely, they take sermons less seriously (or not at all) when the preacher's life outside the pulpit is inconsistent with the messages of the sermons. On the latter point, several say, 'I don't listen to anyone who doesn't try to practice what they preach.'" (Allen 2006: 68) The GASS study was similar: "Listeners watch the preacher's life. Listeners talk to each other if potential hypocrisy is detected. Said one staff member-listener, 'Everything he says in his sermons about building community, loving and respecting others, sounds good. But I see him weekly in staff meetings. I *know* how he treats others.' . . . 17 percent of the listeners had one message for preachers: Work on your own spiritual life." (Carrell 2000: 25-26, 98)

IV. Contextual Considerations and Audience Awareness

A. Contextual considerations

1. All of Scripture is contextualized (i.e., was written within particular cultural settings and used particular cultural forms). The Bible "was not written in a vacuum, nor created for some theoretical and

utopian society. Not only were the authors influenced by their own cultures, but the text itself was transmitted through various cultural forms, known as genres. Also, the people who first received the text read it within their assumed cultural grid.” (Webb 2001: 23)

2. In his incarnation, Jesus was fully “contextualized.” “He embraced the human context in all of its ‘scandalous particularity’—as a male Palestinian Jew, ‘born of a woman, born under the law’ (Gal 4:4)—in a specific time and place. He was thoroughly immersed in his Jewish culture; he participated in its celebrations and traditions; he spoke Aramaic with a Galilean accent; he had distinctive physical features and personality traits. As Charles Kraft reflects, ‘God in Jesus became so much a part of a specific human context that many never even recognized that he had come from somewhere else.’” (Flemming 2005: 20)

3. Jesus and the other biblical preachers and teachers were highly contextualized in their preaching and teaching. Jesus “communicated to people not in theological abstractions but through familiar, concrete forms—miracles, illustrations from common life, proverbs and stories, master-disciple dialogue and the example of his life among them. Although he offered a radically new teaching he did not coin a new language to express it. Instead, he used the earthly images of everyday rural life. Fishing and farming, weeds and wineskins, soil and salt became the ‘stuff’ of his theological activity. From the beginning the gospel was voiced in local, culturally conditioned forms.” (Flemming 2005: 21)

4. Jesus and the other biblical preachers and teachers varied their approach and the form of their preaching and teaching depending on the nature of their audience and specific purpose they were trying to achieve. Jesus could be very harsh with hypocrites and those who were misrepresenting God (**Matt 23:13-36**), but very tender to sinful people (**Mark 14:3-9; John 8:1-11**). Paul “frames the gospel differently for the Thessalonians than he does for the Corinthians even though both communities are situated in a predominantly Greco-Roman cultural setting” (Flemming 2005: 20). In his major sermons in **Acts** Paul varied his approach depending on his audience: in **Acts 13** he spoke mainly to Jews in a synagogue, concentrated on Israel’s history, and quoted the OT; in **Acts 17** he spoke to pagan philosophers in Athens, concentrated on the nature of God, and quoted pagan poets.

B. Although the form of their presentations differed based on the nature of the audience and their purpose, Jesus and the other biblical preachers and teachers consistently used a “problem (or issue)-based” method of preaching and teaching

1. About half of the teaching incidents in the Gospels were initiated by people having some personal need, problem, or issue; in the half of the Gospel teaching incidents that Jesus initiated he also “usually started on a personal level because then the pupils connected His eternal truth with their own lives” (LeBar and Plueddemann 1995: 93). “A problem-solving spirit pervades the Gospels. . . . Sometimes He Himself took their questions right out of their minds and posed such problems as, ‘Do you think that the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices were sinners above all others? Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell—do you think they were sinners above the others who dwelt in Jerusalem?’ (Luke 13:1-2)

His factual questions were for the purpose of crystallizing the need and focusing attention on it in relation to Himself. He didn’t ask people to repeat His answers back to Him. He was looking for spiritual insight and action on the basis of His teaching. He often used questions to get His listeners personally involved in the teaching situation and to lead them on into the truth.” (Ibid.: 94)

2. Paul’s epistles were all addressed to local churches or individuals in order to deal with specific needs, problems, and issues. “Most of Paul’s letters are not carefully structured essays but informal messages with very personal elements. They are usually addressed to particular churches or individuals, often in answer to letters received. Each one, except perhaps Ephesians, was written first of all to meet very real local needs as well as eventually to meet the need of the whole church age. Statements of doctrine arise from the nature of the local circumstances. . . . Even the most doctrinal sections of Romans were written to meet local needs. Sometimes Paul began with the problems in the church and related those problems to the truth of God. Other times he began with truth and later related that truth to life. But nowhere does Paul teach content that is unrelated to the needs and problems of life.” (LeBar and Plueddemann 1995: 131, 136)

C. Our preaching should follow the model of Jesus and Paul

“Jesus never taught subject matter which was divorced from life, nor did he teach solutions to practical problems without teaching the Word” (Plueddemann 1994: 46).

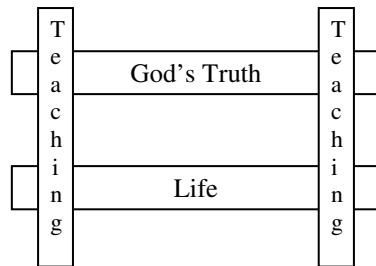
“This recognition that every Scripture is addressed to some dimension of human fallenness and designed

to lead its hearers toward the goal of perfection in Christ has far-reaching hermeneutic as well as homiletic implications. Hermeneutically, the interpretation of any text of Scripture must take into account the occasion into which it was written and the circumstances of its first readers. Identifying the *particular problem* that evoked the text in the first place, the need of the first recipients, is essential to our discovery of its *God-given purpose* in creating the holy community whose members grow toward perfection in Christ. Homiletically, recognizing how the first recipients’ spiritual problem manifests itself in our hearers’ experience—despite all the differences in time and place and culture and surface appearance—provides the surest guide to the application of the text’s message to our contemporaries. Because such application can be seen to arise directly from the text, it carries both credibility and conviction.” (Johnson 2007: 71n.5)

“With enthusiasm and conviction, the listeners in our study [the CTS study] express a need for sermons that address life’s most difficult issues. In their longing to hear about God’s way among us and their appreciation for the difficulties and risks in preaching about controversial issues, these listeners reveal a strong desire for preaching that occasions a deeper encounter with life’s questions and controversies in light of Christian faith. Just as importantly, their words reveal an abiding confidence in God’s word in scripture and they call on preachers to draw on the resources of Christian faith to address the crises of the world around them.” (Mulligan, et al. 2005: 108)

“If we want Jesus to teach in His own way through us, what will our general pattern look like? We’ll start where our pupils are, with their current needs, help them to find God’s answer in Scripture, and begin to practice that truth this week.” (LeBar and Plueddemann 1995: 99)

1. The model of Jesus’ and Paul’s teaching has been described as a “Rail-Fence model.”

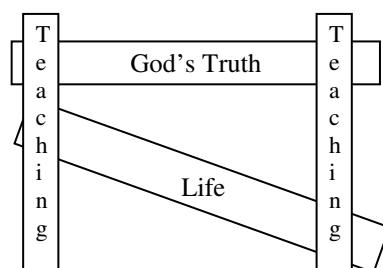


2. James Plueddemann, who developed the model, describes it: “The rail fence is made up of two rails held together by fence posts. The upper rail stands for truth. The bottom rail represents life. Anything that helps bring together truth and life is a fence post. The fence post may be an insight the learner discovers about the relationship of a Bible passage to a life need. Many teachers desire to build fence posts through their teaching methods. Critical reflection is another example of a fence post between truth and life. The teacher working with the Holy Spirit seeks to teach truth in such a way that it compels critical reflection between the life needs of the learner and the truth of the Word of God.

Truth without life leads to dead orthodoxy. Life without truth leads to heresy. Teaching one without the other is not biblical and is not the stimulus needed for spiritual growth.” (LeBar and Plueddemann 1995: 101)

3. Applying the “Rail-Fence model” in the context of preaching: When you *prepare* your sermon, you begin with the “top rail” (i.e., you properly exegete a passage of Scripture); but when you *present* your sermon begin with the “bottom rail” (i.e., the need, problem, or issue in your people’s lives).

a. *Most people’s lives are not consistent with God’s Word.* “There is usually tension between God’s standards and our lives. The tension influences the intellect, the emotions, and behavior. Where our lives fall short of the standard of Scripture there will be problems and frustrations. Emotional dissonance is the result of the tension.” (LaBar and Plueddemann 1995: 101-02) The situation for the people looks like this:



b. *Your sermon is designed to help the people understand their need, understand how God’s Word relates to that need, and bring their lives (the “bottom rail”) back into proper alignment with the truth of God’s Word (the “top rail”).* First be aware of and raise a need, problem, or issue that affects people in your congregation. By raising an issue that affects your people at the beginning of the sermon, either by asking rhetorical questions, or otherwise, you get your people’s attention, because they know you will be dealing with something that is important to their lives. After having raised the issue (the “bottom rail”), you then move to the “top rail.” You can say something like, “Let’s see what the Bible has to say about this issue.” You then show the people how applying the Bible passage helps them deal with the problem raised at the beginning. “The process of teaching, like the rail fence, has a three-step cycle. The teacher should usually begin by helping learners reflect on problems in their lives (the bottom rail) which can be tied into the Scripture to be studied. Next the teacher helps the student understand the content of Scripture (the top rail). Third, the teacher challenges, compels, and stimulates students to discover the relationship between the content of Scripture and the problems posed in life (the fence posts). Through the miracle of God’s grace people are able to grow toward maturity in Christ through the power of the Word, the Spirit, and spiritually-gifted teachers.” (LaBar and Plueddemann 1995: 102)

4. Plueddemann uses another analogy of what the preacher or teacher is trying to do. “The effective teacher is like a person who takes a strong rope, ties one end around the big ideas of Scripture, ties the other end around the major themes of life, and then through the power of the Spirit struggles to pull the two together” (Plueddemann 1994: 48).

5. The sermon should compel the people to critically reflect on the difference between their personal experience and lives, and what the Bible says. The essential question that preachers should be asking themselves as they study and prepare their sermons is: “What is God’s Word for my people, and how does it relate to their particular situation?” The pastor must recognize that life—whether at the individual, church, community, or national level—does not conform to the way Scripture says it should be. Therefore: “The Bible is taught clearly, but the teaching is not the end—it is a means. The teacher must challenge the student to explore the tension between God’s standard and life experiences, and help the student pull the two together. . . . The effective Bible teacher is a good teacher of the subject matter, but also constantly challenges students to wrestle with biblical implications for ethical dilemmas, problems in the church, and personal lifestyle. The effective teacher will constantly hold absolute Scripture in creative tension with modern world-and-life-views.” (Plueddemann 1994: 49-50)

6. This same process also has been called “critical contextualization”: “*Exegesis of the Culture:* The first step in critical contextualization is to study the local culture phenomenologically [i.e., how the people understand their own beliefs and practices]. . . . *Exegesis of the Scripture and the Hermeneutical Bridge:* In the second step, the pastor or missionary leads the church in a study of the Scriptures related to the question at hand. . . . *Critical response:* The third step is for the people corporately to evaluate critically their own past customs in the light of their new biblical understandings, and to make decisions regarding their response to their new-found truths. The gospel is not simply information to be communicated. It is a message to which people must respond.” (Hiebert 1987: 109-10)

7. Using a problem (issue)-based “Rail-Fence” approach to sermons is effective in helping people to change their way of living.

a. *The above approach has successfully been used in many different settings around the world.* This was the approach of Jesus himself. It is the approach of Christian educators like LeBar and Plueddemann. Secular educator Paulo Freire wrote extensively about a similar problem-based method (although he did not include the “top rail” of Scripture), and used it in teaching poor people in Brazil (Freire 1973). Other secular educators and psychologists have recognized the importance of such an approach (see LeBar and Plueddemann 1995: 9-13). Plueddemann himself applied this method in the Sunday School materials he wrote and leadership training seminars he designed as head of the Sudan Interior Mission’s Christian Education Department for the Evangelical Churches of West Africa (Ibid.: 13).

b. *The CTS study shows that such a method helps preaching to be effective.*

(1) The heart of the “Rail-Fence” approach is getting the people to see the disconnect between their lives and how God would have them live and how Scripture can show them a better way of living. This requires the preacher to help them think about things they hadn’t considered before or think about things in new ways. Those are the very factors that lead to change: “A persistent motif in listener remarks is that they often

make alterations in thought and behavior when their lives are in disequilibrium [i.e., out of balance]. The disequilibrium can be quite conscious and can possibly change the structure of aspects of life (individual or corporate), or it not be on the listeners' conscious screen until named in the sermon. Indeed, the sermon may create a sense of disequilibrium. Many listeners respond to such moments with openness to the possibility of different ways of thinking and acting.” (Allen 2008: 68-69)

(2) Showing the similarities between the lives of people in the Bible and the contemporary lives of the congregation makes the Bible “real” to the listeners. LeBar reminds us that, “Because human nature does not change radically through the centuries and the Bible speaks to the human situation, it deals with basic problems in spite of widely differing cultures. Bible characters must be studied in their contexts, yet their problems are ours too.” (LeBar and Plueddemann 1995: 98) The CTS study found that: “Hearing that people in the Bible struggled in ways similar to contemporary people encourages many of the interviewees. As one says, ‘I think one of the things our pastor does just so well is really describe these biblical people as real people. Sometimes the pastor will even go so far as to use something anecdotal for us to understand that they were real people.’ That is important because ‘A lot of times we have these biblical folks in these ivory towers of our minds, and the preacher relates back to us as real people. That helps me a lot.’” (Allen 2008: 66)

D. Audience awareness and the implications of a problem (issue)-based “Rail-Fence” approach

1. Since all Scripture is contextual, all preaching is contextual. “Contextual preaching is preaching in which text and context *co-determine* the message that is being conveyed. This implies that context is constitutive [i.e., essential; has power to establish] in the homiletic process. Only when the preacher proceeds from the context, can his sermon reach the present situation of his congregation in a meaningful way.” (Pieterse 1984: 5)

2. To be most effective, the preacher should have a formal process for gathering listeners’ input for upcoming sermons. The vast majority of listeners never talk with preachers about the sermons they hear. This is a tremendous waste of resources. Although preachers spend most sermon preparation time studying the biblical text, preachers actually have two texts: the Bible and their listeners. They need to study both. The author of the GASS study says: “Preachers, do you know the listeners’ ideas and feelings on your next sermon topic or text? Could you state them to the listeners’ satisfaction as you begin to prepare your sermon? Some formal mechanism for collecting listeners’ perceptions must be established. Preachers can invigorate their sermons with creativity, novelty, and relevancy, by actively pursuing the listeners’ perspectives and integrating those perspectives into each and every sermon.

Preachers, your listeners’ lives are your greatest resource. If this book leads you to make one and only one change, please, create a formal process by which to gather listeners’ input for upcoming sermons. Announce topics and texts well in advance, provide a ‘Sermon Support’ box in a conspicuous location, and invite listeners to contribute their ‘ideas, comments, and questions.’

Form a group of listeners with whom to dialogue about upcoming sermons. If a threatening climate exists, then hand-selected ‘supporters’ can comprise your first listener support group as you ease yourself into the partnership mode and as you ease listeners into the process of authentic dialogue. You may also wish to hold open-invitation breakfasts, brown-bag lunches, or evening dessert sermon chats, so you can listen to your listeners talk about approaching sermon content. . . .

Preachers, if the sermon support group becomes an integral part of your sermon preparation, not only will the transformational power of the spoken words of your sermons be enhanced, but the church community will be strengthened through the resulting relationships.” (Carrell 2000: 210, 212)

3. In order to be able to “exegete the culture [or context],” so as to be able to bring the “top rail” and “bottom rail” together, the preacher must be thoroughly involved with his people and know them well. “The preacher must grasp, must *live* the situation and context of his congregation. The preacher must be involved with the ‘grassroots’ experiences, feelings and thoughts of the members of his congregation. He must absorb their theology. If he sits with his community, suffers with them, despairs and hopes with them, rebels with them against injustice and oppression, then he can relate the message of the Bible to their lives. This is the method of contextual preaching.” (Pieterse 1984: 7-8) In the GASS study, “Seventeen percent of the listeners suggest that preachers foster relationships with listeners. The most common answer in this category is, ‘Know your listeners.’” (Carrell 2000: 97)

4. Identifying closely with the congregation can be expressed in the sermon. Identifying closely with the

congregation significantly increases a preacher's credibility and effectiveness. One American study found that even changing pronoun usage from "you" to "I" in sermons helps to unite the pastor with his people, and "maximizes contact and attention" (Theis 1981: 51). If the preacher "lives the situation and context of his congregation," his life can itself be a powerful sermon: "Hearing the preacher's own story is powerful for a significant stream of interviewees. After describing a preacher struggling with the idea of change, a hearer says, 'To listen to another person openly and honestly witness to their faith helps at times to connect and help me over a struggling point that I may have had that they may have already gone through and now help me go through.'" (Allen 2008: 66)

5. A preacher can only preach what his audience is able to understand and receive. In preparing and delivering their sermons, preachers should consider several factors with respect to their audience, including: a. educational level; b. gender distribution; c. age distribution; d. mixture of believers versus unbelievers; d. maturity level (spiritual and general); e. biblical knowledge; f. hunger for the Word; g. occupational backgrounds; h. cultural, historical, and other factors that affect and influence the audience. Factors such as these may influence many aspects of the sermon, such as: a. length of sermon; b. level of formality of your presentation; c. part of the canon from which you draw your message; d. aim of your sermon; e. structure of the sermon; f. level of detail of the sermon.

6. Preachers need to be aware of other special aspects of their congregations. "Contextual preaching" requires that the sermon matches the communicational abilities and expectations of the listeners. Further, the preacher needs to be attentive to such issues as: marital status; the ability/inability to have children (and the pain and stigma that inability to have children can cause); widowhood; orphans; HIV/AIDS status, etc. According to the GASS study, "A majority of listeners are female (61 percent) and an overwhelming majority of preachers are male (84 percent): . . . For many female listeners, this gender difference contributes to their perceptions about sermon irrelevancy and the preacher 'not really knowing them.'" (Carrell 2000: 145-46) Many male preachers use a lot of sports illustrations in their sermons without thinking that such examples may not appeal to most of the women (i.e., the majority of people) in the congregation. All people tend to think, act, and speak within their own "comfort zone." However, to be an effective preacher, a pastor has to leave his own comfort zone and truly enter into the world and context of his congregation.

7. Preachers need to be aware of their audience and the audience's reactions during the sermon. You need to maintain eye contact with different members of the congregation during the sermon. That will help you "engage" with the congregation. The listeners' facial expressions, head nodding, eyes, etc., will tell you whether or not they are understanding, are agreeing with, and are being moved by what you are saying. "Audience reaction is an essential ingredient in this whole business of speaking. What you see on the faces or in the eyes of your listeners tells you almost instantaneously whether you are getting across, and what other effects are occurring. Such feedback is indispensable to effective speaking." (Adler 1983: 78)

V. Considerations Regarding the Biblical Passage You Are Expounding

Detailed outlines for how to interrogate and study a passage of Scripture in order to preach it well are attached as **Appendix A ("Interrogative Bible Study for Biblical Preaching")**, and **Appendix B ("Steps to the Sermon: a minimal checklist for preachers")**. Particularly important considerations regarding the passage you intend to preach about are discussed below.

A. The purpose of the passage

1. God has a reason or purpose behind why he had each passage of Scripture written.

a. *All Scripture is to complete us, so that we may be thoroughly equipped for the good works which God has prepared for us—indeed, so that we will become like Christ himself (see 2 Tim 3:16-17; Rom 8:29; 15:4; Eph 2:10).* Thus, the preacher must *relate* that passage to his audience in a way consistent with the reason or purpose why God had the writer include the passage in Scripture. Chapell tells us: "We do not fully understand the subject until we have also determined its *reason or cause*. Consideration of a message's theme ultimately forces us to ask, 'Why are these concerns addressed? What caused this account, these facts, or the recording of these ideas? What was the intent of the author? For what purpose did the Holy Spirit include these words in Scripture?'" (Chapell 1994: 40)

b. *It is often helpful to outline the passage when you are studying it, in order to discern the author's train-of-thought.* Outlining helps us—indeed, *forces* us—to see the structure and logical flow of the passage, since we must put the outline on paper. Outlining also forces us to

be able to state in our own words the main points of the passage.

2. Particularly when preaching the OT (but also when preaching the NT) we need to ask ourselves “Where is Christ in this?” “It is impossible from the Old Testament alone to understand the full measure of God’s acts and promises that it records” (Goldsworthy 1991: 54). The reason why the OT alone does not convey its full, underlying meaning is the doctrine of progressive revelation: i.e., the truths of the Bible were not revealed all at once, but were progressively revealed over time. Thus, the **OT** is the preparation of the gospel; the **Gospels** are the manifestation of the gospel; **Acts** is the expansion of the gospel; the **Epistles** are the explanation of the gospel; and **Revelation** is the consummation of the gospel. The full meaning of any particular passage may not be clear unless the whole Bible and the stage of redemptive history are taken into consideration. “To read the Bible contextually *as the Word of God* must include the completed canon as the ultimate context of any particular passage” (Johnson 2007: 156). Jesus and the NT authors understood this. They saw the entire OT as in some way a book about Jesus. He is its central person and integrating theme (**Luke 24:25-27, 44-45; John 5:39-40, 46; Acts 3:18, 24; 10:43; 26:22-23; 2 Cor 1:20; 1 Pet 1:10-12; Heb 1:1-3**). Because of this, “The performance of *every* covenantal mediator and participant—patriarch, prophet, priest, judge, king, husband, father, son, parents, children, servant—ultimately is to be interpreted in light of the ways it reflects (or falls short of reflecting) the perfect covenant obedience to be offered by Jesus as the Lord of his people—in sum, the consummate mediation that would be achieved by Jesus the Son of God and brother of his people. . . . Thus the mixed behavior of covenantal leaders makes each, by virtue of his office, in one way or another, typological of the Coming Deliverer, in whom the roles of prophet, priest, and king would be perfectly fulfilled.” (Ibid.: 216) Examples of this can be both positive and negative. Positive examples include Joseph who was unjustly betrayed by his own brothers, yet remained faithful despite hardship and temptation, and was highly exalted and saved many (**Gen 37: 1-36; 39:1-47:31; 50:1-26**), and Isaac (**Gen 22:1-18**) who willingly submitted to his father and offered himself as a sacrifice. Negative examples include Lamech (**Gen 4:17-24**) who disregarded God’s plan for marriage (unlike Christ—**Eph 5:25-32**), killed in violation of God’s law (see **Exod 21:23-25**), and demonstrated the spirit of revenge rather than forgiveness (unlike Christ—**Matt 18:21-22**), and “Judges’ failings and kings’ injustices [which] demonstrated to Israel the need for a coming king who would render justice with absolute equity and divine omniscience (Isa. 11:1-5)” (Ibid.). To put it another way, in order to preach an OT passage true to the full context of the complete Bible, we need to do two things: “[1] ascertain (as clearly as we can) how its first hearers should have understood it but also [2] place that meaning in the context of the divinely designed flow of redemptive history and saving revelation that was always moving believers’ hearts toward Christ.” (Ibid.: 330) Our listeners thereby will be able to see how the OT was pointing toward ultimate fulfillment in Christ.

3. When we are analyzing a passage we should answer two questions in order to determine the purpose of the passage:

a. *What does this passage tell us about God (i.e., what is the “God Factor”)?* “The Bible is not about Ruth, David, Jonah, and Peter, but about the God of Ruth, David, Jonah, and Peter” (Harris 2004: 66). God is present in different ways, and working in different ways, explicitly or implicitly, throughout the Bible. He is calling us to be in communion and relationship with him. We need to ask how he is present in the passage we are studying.

b. *What does this passage tell us about people and the human condition (i.e., what is the “Depravity Factor”)?*

(1) Because of mankind’s fallen condition, people have all sorts of needs, problems, and issues which they try (but fail) to fulfill or solve through many different (often improper) ways (which often end up causing them more trouble than they began with). Chapell calls this the *Fallen Condition Focus* (FCF) and describes it this way: “Since God designed the Bible to complete us, its contents necessarily indicate that in some sense we are incomplete. Our lack of wholeness is a consequence of the fallen condition in which we live. . . . The corrupted state of our world and our being cry for God’s aid. He responds with his Word, focusing on some facet of our need in every portion. *The FCF is the mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those to or for whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage.*” (Chapell 1994: 41-42)

(2) Since the FCF of a passage is rooted in our human condition, the FCF may vary from text to text. For example, the FCF of a passage may be non-sinful issues or specific sins. *Non-sinful issues might include:* grief; illness; longing for the Lord’s

return; the need to know how to share the gospel; how to pray effectively; the desire to be a better parent; determining God's will; maintaining integrity in the face of opposition; or understanding one's gifts. *Specific sins might include:* greed; rebellion; lust; irresponsibility; poor stewardship; pride, etc. The FCF ("Depravity Factor") is simply an aspect of the human condition that requires the instruction, admonition, exhortation, or comfort of Scripture.

B. *Explaining and illustrating the passage*

1. Explaining the passage. Explanation requires the preacher to convey the results of his exegetical study and determination, in understandable and memorable form, to the congregation. Explaining the text can be effectively done by: (a) *stating the truth of the text* (i.e., stating what the text means); (b) *placing the truth of the text* (i.e., locating where in the text you derived that idea); and (c) *proving the truth of the text* (i.e., restating, narrating, explaining, describing, defining, and arguing so that the congregation understands why the text means what you say it means—such proof may be self-evident, or not, depending on the particular text) (Chapell 1994: 116-24).
2. Illustrating the passage. Both preacher and listeners live far away, in time, place, and culture, from the context of the Bible. Illustrations are stories, examples, experiences, or other materials which elaborate, develop, explain, or otherwise allow listeners to identify with the scriptural principle or text that is being expounded. Illustrations turn abstract truths into concrete realities. As one teacher of public speaking puts it: "This is always the speaker's object: bringing his thesis home to the audience, making the abstract concrete and therefore real" (Buckley 1988: 15). Illustrations expand and deepen our understanding of the text. They can be drawn from virtually any source: a newspaper or book; a cultural custom or practice; some event, occurrence, or other things in the community that is known to the congregation; an event in the preacher's own life; phenomena of nature; politics; sports; folklore; history; television; radio; movies; an example from elsewhere in the Bible; in short, anything that the congregation can relate to which can help to make clear the truths of God's Word. The use of cultural stories and parables are particularly important in non-Western cultures where storytelling is a common, important, and even expected means of conveying truth. Jesus lived in just such a culture, and regularly used stories and parables to convey or illustrate spiritual truths.
3. Illustration and explanation go together. Good illustrations are necessary for people to grasp biblical truths but are not sufficient absent explanation: "By grounding biblical truths in situations that people recognize, illustrations unite biblical truth with experience and, in so doing, make the Word accessible, understandable, and real in ways that mere propositional statements cannot. . . . Listeners who experience concepts—even vicariously—actually learn more than those who must consider words and ideas in the abstract. What preachers have known instinctively for generations has a solid scientific foundation. Meaningful thought flourishes when tied to reality. This discovery discloses the hidden value of illustrations. Listeners simply understand more deeply and more broadly when we exhibit biblical truths in identifiable experiences. . . . [With respect to Christ's use of parables (**Mark 4:34**)] Until explanation accompanied the parable its truth remained unclear. Illustrations alone will not illuminate biblical truth. The genius of Scripture is its linkage of illustration and proposition in which both components of exposition expose and reinforce the truths of the other." (Chapell 1994: 166, 173, 175n.39)

VI. Application

A. *Life change is the goal of expository preaching*

"Scripture's own goal is not merely to share information about God but is to conform his people to the likeness of Jesus Christ" (Chapell 1994: 45). Since all Scripture is designed to equip God's people for the work he desires them to do (**2 Tim 3:16-17**), God expects us to act on the problems (i.e., the FCF) that his Spirit and Word reveal to us. Further, the congregation has the right to ask of the preacher, "*Why did you tell me all that?*" and say of the sermon, "*I understand what you think—but so what—what am I supposed to do about it?*" The author of the CTS study describes "the acid test of the sermon's authority": "It has authority if after what I've heard I find myself doing what I heard. It has no authority until that happens." Preachers, then, may be able to gauge the authority of their preaching by the degree to which, over time, congregations begin to practice the main themes of the sermons they hear from one Sunday to the next. An escalation in altered living that is in accord with the gospel can trickle down into the wider community, hopefully leading others to acknowledge the One in whose name and authority the minister is preaching." (Allen 2006: 74) In the GASS study, although most

preachers said that “change” of life was their goal in preaching, none of the listeners stated that as their reason for listening (35% listed “inspiration; 30%—life application; 21%—information; 14%—insight): “However, an assumption could be made that since 35 percent of listeners want to be inspired and another 30 percent want life application—an inspiring sermon with life application suggestions could activate a desire to change. . . . Though surveyed listeners did not identify their listening goal as ‘I want to be changed,’ when the listener survey posed the question, ‘What is your inner reaction to most sermons?’ 14 percent of listeners reported that their typical inner reaction is ‘a readiness to change.’” (Carrell 2000: 151)

B. Throughout the Bible doctrinal truth is combined with practical applications that demonstrate what that truth is to look like and how that truth is to be lived

“The Bible always connects doctrine with practice” (LeBar and Plueddemann 1995: 141). For example, the prophets in the OT combined God’s words of warning and judgment with calls for his people to repent and change their way of living. Jesus revealed the nature of God, himself, and God’s kingdom, and described how we are to live in the light of that revelation. Most of the epistles were written to deal with specific problems or issues facing local congregations. The writers of the epistles typically begin their epistles with discussions of doctrine, and then explain what such doctrine involves and requires in the lives of Christ’s followers.

C. Application gives the exposition its meaning

It is the living, doing, and applying the truths of Scripture that demonstrate whether or not a person understands and has real, saving faith (see, e.g., **Matt 7:16-21; 28:20; John 14:21, 23; 15:10; Jas 1:23-25; 2:14-26**). Thus, a sermon must unite application to exposition: “The real meaning of a text remains hidden until we discern how its truths should govern our lives. . . . Do not start writing out the message before determining what the sermon seeks to accomplish. Application must precede final decisions about structure, wording, and even tone of the message or else the preacher will be designing a highway without knowing its destination. . . . *Application gives ultimate meaning to the exposition.* . . . This means that until a preacher provides application, exposition remains incomplete.” (Chapell 1994: 78, 202-03) In fact, as Christian educator Lois LeBar concludes, “James 4:17 makes clear that knowing and doing are two distinct processes. When we teach people new truth without applying it, we are making them worse sinners than they were previously.” (LeBar and Plueddemann 1995: 99)

D. Application may be a change in attitude as well as a change in behavior

Without a change in attitude—belief, motivation, feeling—an exhortation to change behavior is simply moralistic legalism. Consequently, identifying an attitude that needs to change (pride, prejudice, selfishness), engendering a positive change of attitude (rejoicing, faith, trust in God in the face of difficult circumstances), or reinforcing a faith commitment previously made (grasping the freedom of forgiveness, taking comfort in the truths of the resurrection, renewing hope on the basis of God’s sovereignty), are legitimate and important applications in addition to calling for changed behavior. Getting people to think in new ways—e.g., “Raising the congregation’s awareness of the need for them to change,” “helping people see things that they may not have perceived,” and “helping them to see how the world appears to people who are different from those in the congregation”—are important ways in which sermons lead people to change their way of living (Allen 2008: 63, 67).

E. Preachers should not assume that simply by explaining, or even illustrating, what the Bible says and means, people will automatically see how to apply biblical truths to their lives

A primary problem with most sermon “applications” is that they are *not specific and practical enough*. In a survey of 206 pastors and 2,233 church attendees, “considerably fewer listeners than pastors said sermons were about ‘handling personal life issues’” (Reed 1999: 84). Preachers tend to “float over” real-life problems and issues without addressing them directly (Reed 1999: 84; Allen 2005: 371-72). Instead, the preacher must be clear and explicit, and *supply the application* that the people need. As Chapell says: “Application focuses the impact of the entire sermon on the transformation(s) God requires in his people. This is not the time to mince words or abandon care. Direct application *right between the eyes—with love*. From the pulpit, say exactly what you mean exactly as you would say it to a loved one. The spiritual welfare of others requires that you not obscure your meaning in abstract idealism, which disturbs no one and has no potential to get you in trouble. . . . If the church will not heal until gossip stops, say so. If political differences are dividing believers, address the problem. Speak with tact. Speak with love. But do not fail to say what the situation requires and what the Bible demands.” (Chapell 1994: 223)

F. *Two key questions to keep application focused*

1. What do the people need to do?

a. *Application should be based on principles that the text supports.* Explanation of the text should establish the validity of the principles on which the application is based. This is important because most listeners “can generally be classified as ‘apathetic’ to the preachers ‘change’ goal since they do not attend with the expectancy that they will be changed” (Carrell 2000: 151). The listeners must be able to conclude: “We must do this because it is what the Bible says.” This is particularly important because application—which, by definition, involves a change in attitude and/or behavior—is the point at which the listeners are likely to *resist* the preacher and the sermon. This also is why the exegesis and explanation of the biblical passage must be sound—when exegesis and explanation are sound, and the application truly arises from the passage (and is seen by the people to do so), then exegesis, explanation, and application will be mutually reinforcing.

b. *Application should be specific—and the preacher should give specific examples of how to do what needs to be done.* To exhort the people to “love your neighbor” is not application. Loving one’s neighbor is simply a general principle, well-known to the congregation. It begins to move from being a general principle to real application when the preacher identifies specific contemporary situations that listeners face in which they should apply the biblical principle (e.g., loving the neighbor who supports a different political party; raises hateful children; laughs at your faith; is a member of a different tribe or clan). However, even saying that is not specific enough. The preacher needs to suggest specific actions that demonstrate what such love looks like (e.g., offer to care for the problem child for awhile to give the mother a break; show some specific act of kindness to the neighbor; ask the neighbor over for dinner). The preacher should give specific examples of how *different types of people in the congregation* (young people; old people; married people; men; women) can apply the biblical principle in their lives. Further, “hearing stories of real people [including the preacher himself] who have been moved to act or think differently helps facilitate fresh avenues of thought and behavior” (Allen 2008: 66).

c. *Application should be realistic.* LeBar reminds us of an important truth: “We naturally resist change because it means a new organization of the personality structure that we have been building. It’s much easier to continue the line of least resistance than to disrupt old patterns of thinking and acting. If an individual is asked to make too many adjustments at once, he or she is overwhelmed.” (LeBar and Plueddemann 1995: 175) Consequently, be careful of asking the congregation to radically alter their lives. Try to find something that everyone can do—and make specific suggestions for groups within the audience (young, old, believers, unbelievers, etc.). Stanley suggests the following, “When I ask an audience to do something specific, I usually ask them to commit to a specific length of time. Halfway through a series on the Lord’s prayer I asked our congregation to begin the next seven days with prayer. Just seven days. Anybody could do that. And hopefully those seven days would begin a habit.” (Stanley and Jones 2006: 189) Remember, you are attempting to change people’s habits. It is like trying to get wagon wheels out of well-worn ruts—it is not easy and takes time and repetition. However, once new habits of thought and action begin, slowly-by-slowly they will deepen with time and repetition.

d. *In application we must be sure to direct our listeners to the resources they have in Christ—the humility of obedience, prayer, his Word, his example, the Spirit, trusting in his providence, acting on his truths—to enable them to make the changes they need to make in their lives.* Preachers must be careful not to give “simply human-centered exhortations to do better in the power of the flesh” (Chapell 1994: 210). It is “sub-Christian” to tell listeners simply to “be like [Moses, Gideon, David, Daniel, or Peter],” “be good,” or “be disciplined” which “imply that we are able to change our fallen condition in our own strength” (Ibid.: 267-68, 280-86). To preach what people should be and do, but not mention Christ, who enables them to be and do, warps the gospel—and at best will produce a congregation of Pharisees.

e. *Application should make use of the resources of the church.* The CTS study showed that “preachers cannot count on congregations thinking and acting differently in response to a single sermon. Preachers typically need to think of individual sermons working with other sermons and with other parts of the congregational system [to bring about life-transformation].” (Allen 2008: 74) At least two things can help:

(1) Direct your people to the resources available in the church and community. If the

church is functioning as it should, and if the preacher knows his people well (including their gifts and resources), parishioners can be directed to those in the body of Christ who can assist them as they begin to conform to the image of Christ. Even if the church does not have specific ministries or individuals who can assist the parishioners, the village or community may have such resources.

(2) Small group discussions. Many churches utilize small (cell) groups that meet during the week. Some churches even have small group discussions that deal with the issues raised in the sermon immediately after the church service is over. These groups can discuss the week's sermon, particularly with an emphasis on critical reflection and application. Small group discussions are an important and effective way of getting people involved and "engaged" with the sermon. The people in the group all have their own experiences and insights which can help the others and questions about the sermon can be answered. Mortimer Adler tells us why such discussions are so important: "Precisely because uninterrupted speech and silent listening are more difficult to do well than writing and reading, they are both rendered more effective when instructive speech is followed by two-way talk—by conversation or discussion, by questions and answers, by some kind of forum in which speaker and listener can engage in an active interchange. . . . When lecturing is not supplemented by discussion that helps the speaker make sure that the minds of the listeners have been reached and moved, and when listening is not supplemented by reading in the absence of what can be accomplished by discussion, lecturing becomes the most ineffective form of teaching." (Adler 1983: 52)

2. Why do they need to do it?

a. *We need to provide proper motivation.* Right actions done for wrong reasons may be nothing more than legalism and hypocrisy. Instead, Christianity aims at lives that are changed from the "inside-out" (see **Rom 12:1-2**). Lives that are transformed on the inside will lead to changed outward behavior. The key is to point the listeners to Christ and the love and grace of God. Ultimately, the issue all preachers must confront is: are we to be holy *in order to get* God's acceptance, or are we to be holy *because of* God's acceptance? *Guilt* drives the *unrepentant* to the cross, but for the *believer* a proper understanding of God's *grace* should change everything to a motive of *gratitude*: "When believers see that the whole of Scripture—the entire sweep of biblical revelation—is a stage for the portrayal of grace, their hearts respond in awe and humility. Such responses ground messages of worship and obedience in their proper motivations and make the application of all biblical truth the fruit of thanksgiving, praise, gratitude, and loving service. Christ-centered preaching does not abolish the normative standards of Christian conduct, but rather locates their source in the compelling power of grace. The rules of obedience do not change, the reasons do." (Chapell 1994: 302)¹

b. *We also need to provide proper inspiration for people to live the way the passage says they should.* Give examples from your own life or from the lives of others, or of churches or entire communities, where change occurred. Toward the end of his sermons Stanley tries to cast a vision or "paint a verbal picture of what could and should be. In this closing moment you call upon your audience to imagine what the church, community, families, maybe even the world would be like if Christians everywhere embraced your one idea" (Stanley and Jones 2006: 129). This inspires people to try to make the changes the Scripture and the sermon have called for.

VII. The Components and Organization of Effective Sermons

A. To be most effective, a sermon should have a single, unifying point

1. Since the goal is life-change, the most effective approach is to have a single point, not multiple points, to your sermon. The single point flows from the one, clear *destination* where you want your listeners to arrive—i.e., the specific idea you want to communicate; the specific thing you hope to accomplish; the one thing they need to know and what they need to do about it; the end-point of

¹The contrast between God/grace-based motivation and human/guilt-based motivation for obedience is stark: "When love motivates, then the Lord, his purposes, and his glory are our aim. Without this no application challenges the believer to serve any object greater than self." (Chapell 1994: 209)

application and life-change. Stanley puts it this way: “When I say *point* I am referring to one of three things: an application, an insight, or a principle. With this approach, every message should have one central idea, application, insight, or principle that serves as the glue to hold the other parts together” (Stanley and Jones 2006: 103). Once you have that clear end in mind, everything in the message should be aimed at reinforcing, illustrating, and making memorable that point. As Stanley says, in a sermon “we are taking people on a journey [to a changed life]. Once you’ve identified the destination, you owe it to your audience to make the path clear and direct. That means that you cut away the things that are not pertinent to the subject.” (Ibid.: 109-10)

2. Once you have discovered your point and built your message around it, the next step is to craft a single statement or phrase that makes it stick. What is God saying to the church through what the biblical writer wrote? When you have found this, craft it into a single, simple statement *in one sentence* of the big point of the passage—i.e., the one thing you want your people to remember and take away from the sermon. This is the *proposition* (see **Appendix B, sections IV.B-E**). Simply put, the proposition of the sermon is *a clear, forceful statement of the main thrust of the passage* as it relates to the congregation. This simple statement summarizes what you believe the Lord wants you to say to the congregation from the passage you are preaching. All the parts of the passage should build toward this truth, flow from it, or be related to it in some demonstrable way. The proposition needs to be as memorable as possible. This will help you as well as your audience. If it is short and memorable then it will be easier for you to blend it in throughout your message. If it is a well-crafted statement, it will be more obvious to your audience that this is your point. Thus, typically the proposition is stated relatively early in the sermon. An exception may be when you are preaching a narrative passage and are following the inductive and story-telling form of the text.

3. A unifying focus is necessary for at least three reasons:

a. *The text itself demands focus.* The theme and purpose of the text should be our focus as we expound that text. As Chapell says, “The meaning of the passage is the meaning of the sermon” (Chapell 1994: 23). There is a logical flow to how the biblical writers present things. The Bible itself presents one whole, consistent, story. Even when ideas in a particular book appear to be unrelated, there is a larger purpose or unity behind what is being said that a discerning reader can uncover. Consequently, our sermons should reflect the unity of the text. “Although many ideas and features compose a sermon, they should all contribute to one theme. A sermon is about one thing” (Ibid.: 38).

b. *Speakers need focus.* The Scriptures are very deep and intricate. Scores of commentaries have been written on any particular text. However, unfocused, wandering messages do not communicate well. Unity of focus may at first seem constricting but actually frees preachers from becoming trapped in the web of possibilities that different passages present: “By the time you have finished preparing your message, you pretty much know where the force of the message is; you know where the ‘a-ha’ moment is. By the time you’ve finished preparing, you know the part of your message that excites you the most. In other words, you know *how* to find the main point. You know *when* you’ve found the main point. What you need to focus on is building everything around it.” (Stanley and Jones 2006: 105)

c. *Listeners need focus.* Listening is not like reading, where a paragraph can be reread if it is not understood the first time. Listeners quickly tire in trying to discover where a speaker is going with what he is saying. However, a message built around a single idea is easier to follow. Listeners will quickly forget a list of points. It is much easier to remember one point than several points—if that point is clear, memorable, reiterated, and “brought home” to them. Listeners’ attention and understanding can be aided through the use of repetition and rhetorical questions:

(1) Repetition. “Repetitions are needed precisely because the listener cannot turn back to something said earlier and hear it all over again. The speech is continually moving forward, and the speaker must repeat something said earlier if the listener needs to have it in mind in order to understand a point being made later.” (Adler 1983: 65)

(2) Rhetorical questions. During the sermon you can maintain the listeners’ attention and focus by asking, and answering, rhetorical questions (e.g., “Why?”; “Why does it say that?”; “What is going on here?”; “What is he telling us?”; “How does this apply to our lives today?”).

4. Having a single focus to the sermon points up one difference between preaching and teaching: in teaching one can touch on a lot of different aspects of the text; the focus of preaching makes sure that

everything is directed to a single end. Unity of a sermon gives the preacher the ability to focus on a subject in depth. If there are two or more issues or points that stand out in the passage you are studying, don't use one sermon to make both points. Instead, save them for a later time, or do a short *series* of sermons on the passage, making one point in each sermon. In your preparation, your challenge probably will not be to *find* the one point you want to focus on but to *eliminate* the two or three other points you also would like to make.

B. Persuasive communication is enhanced by clear organization

1. The importance of clear organization. “The organization and order of what you say is as persuasive as what you have to say” (Stern 1991: 199, 203, 205). In the GASS study, “Twenty-eight percent of the listeners describe a good sermon as a well-organized sermon. To them, a well organized sermon includes detectable, thorough preparation by the preacher . . . clarity . . . and a well-demonstrated link between the Scripture and the key point(s) of the sermon. . . . [On the other hand] Forty-seven percent of the listeners say a bad sermon is a disorganized sermon. Their primary description of *disorganization* is the word ‘rambling,’ heard over and over and over again from the listeners. They describe lengthy sermons which continue (with repetitive explanation or seemingly unrelated tangents) long after the point has been made, or sermons with so many points that a key thought is difficult to detect. Says one listener, ‘I wonder if even he knows his main idea and could say it in a sentence.’ As a secondary note, listeners describe disorganized sermons as those without clear connections to Scripture.” (Carrell 2000: 92-94) One central theme, a stress on simplicity rather than complexity, and good organization all provide *clarity*. Clarity is crucial to persuasiveness. Without clarity listeners quickly tire of trying to follow what the speaker is saying, and will tune you out. With clarity, listeners will continue to follow the speaker, and will be much more likely to understand, remember, and apply what you are telling them. You should indicate your organization early-on in your sermon by means of an *organizational sentence*.

2. The organizational sentence helps you to organize your sermon and helps your audience to understand where you are. The organizational sentence is basically a roadmap which you use to show your audience where you will be taking them in the sermon. In other words, the organizational sentence alerts the listeners to how you plan to develop the thought of the proposition (see **Appendix B, sections IV.E-G**). In the organizational sentence you give your listeners some idea of the main areas you will be covering, and the order in which you will be covering them. As noted before: *listeners need focus*. They quickly tire of trying to discover where a speaker is going with what he is saying. The organizational sentence gives them that focus. It acts as a signal to the audience of how your explanation of the text will proceed. As you move from one part of the text to the next you can repeat language from your organizational sentence so that the audience clearly knows where you are. Thus, your proposition and organizational sentence help to provide *clarity*, without which your sermon will fail.

C. Three aspects of the sermon are often overlooked, but are important to the effectiveness of your presentation: Introduction; Transitions; and Conclusion.

1. The Introduction.

- a. *The introduction should do at least three things: (1) Grab the attention of the audience; (2) Develop a need, problem, or tension that is felt or experienced by the audience; and (3) Introduce the biblical text's answer to that need, problem, or tension.* Stanley explains why this is so important: “If we give answers to questions no one is asking or attempt to resolve a tension that no one is feeling, then our information is likely to fall on deaf ears. Information that does not address a felt need is perceived as irrelevant. It may actually be incredibly relevant, but if our audience doesn't see or feel the need for it, it is perceived as irrelevant. No one is engaged. They may sit quietly until we are finished talking. But they will not be engaged. . . . Your introduction may be the most important part of your message. It is the equivalent to a railroad conductor yelling, ‘All aboard!’ . . . Many communicators, especially preachers, are so anxious to get into the body of their message [that] they spend little time preparing their introductions. They leave the station alone.” (Stanley and Jones 2006: 153-54)
- b. *Time should be spent in making sure that the audience is engaged—that you will be dealing with a need that they feel, and will be answering a question that they themselves have been asking.* They need to know *what is at stake for them*. Stanley concludes: “In just about every message I give I will say, ‘Here's why this is important.’ . . . I usually explain *why* at the end of the introduction. Now that they know *where* we are going, they need to know *why* I am taking

[them] there. The fact that it is in the Bible is enough for some, but not enough for most. Answering *why* provides an incentive for your audience to follow you to the next part of your message.” (Ibid.: 187-88)

2. Transitions.

a. *As you transition from your introduction to the explanation of the text, and from the text to your challenge to the people or conclusion, you need to make sure that your audience knows that you are making a transition to the next phase of your message.* Listeners will lose attention unless the speaker gives them the verbal “pegs” on which they can hang their thoughts, attention, and understanding. Letting your audience know what is coming next helps them stay with you and follow your train of thought.

b. *Even within the explanation of the text, you should make it clear when you are transitioning your discussion from one part of the text to the next.* That is one reason for having an “organizational sentence.” The organizational sentence acts as a signal to the audience of how your explanation of the text will proceed. As you transition your discussion from one part of the text to the next, you can repeat language from your organizational sentence so that the audience clearly knows where you are.

c. *Repetition helps.* Try saying something like, “Now, in light of all that, what should we do? How does this principle look when we try to live it out? Here are some suggestions.” (Notice that in this example the listeners’ attention was focused by the use of a rhetorical question, and that rhetorical question was repeated twice, in slightly different ways.)

3. The Conclusion.

a. *People tend to remember what you leave them with—if it is left with them in a memorable, engaging way.* Therefore, you need to know exactly how you want your message to end and prepare your conclusion to achieve the end you want.

b. *Your conclusion should bring the “big idea,” your one point, home to your audience in a way that they will remember and want to apply in their lives.* Remember that your goal is to see the lives of your congregation change and become more and more like Jesus. Make sure that with a well-crafted conclusion your audience is brought to the destination that this message was designed to reach.

D. **General organizational considerations**

1. Every sermon should meet certain minimum requirements. Dr. Greg Scharf calls the following the “A-B-C of sermon outlines”:

A—Is it *applied*? Does the sermon bring the message home in a practical way?

B—Is it *biblical*? The text must control the message; the proposition and main points should be based on the text; the outline should show the verses on which the points are expounding to demonstrate that the message is anchored to the text.

C—Is it *clear*? The sermon must be organized. (Scharf n.d.)

2. A well-organized sermon is vital for maximum effectiveness. Persuasive communicators all recognize that “the organization and order of what you say is as persuasive as what you have to say” (Stern 1991: 203).

a. *An organizational outline of the sermon may initially seem constraining, but in fact it helps to free the preacher from causing confusion.* A well-organized sermon helps to enhance clarity of analysis and clarity of expression. It thereby: (1) enhances the listeners’ understanding of the thrust and importance of the message; and (2) increases the likelihood that the listeners will move to the all-important step of applying the message in their lives

b. *Some preachers wrongly think that, “if I organize what I intend to say in advance, then I will be quenching the Spirit,” especially since Jesus said, “do not worry beforehand about what you are to say but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit” (Mark 13:9-11; Matt 10:17-20; Luke 12:11-12).* Such thinking may sound “spiritual,” but is, in fact, unspiritual nonsense:

(1) The context of Jesus’ statement had to do with believers being arrested and persecuted when they did not have the opportunity to prepare legal defenses. Jesus’ statement had absolutely nothing to do with sermon preparation, organization, and delivery. Further, Jesus only said not to “worry” about how or what to say if you are arrested. He did not say, “do not think about, or prepare, or organize your defense if you have the chance to do so.”

(2) Everyone, in fact, prepares and organizes that which is important to him (e.g., the meal he will eat; how he will spend his day), and everyone gives *some* advance thought to what he will say in every situation when he has the opportunity to do so. To quote Jesus' statement as a reason for not preparing and organizing your sermon is just an excuse for *laziness* and *poor preparation*. In fact, by using Jesus' words as an excuse for not preparing and organizing your sermon you would be committing a great sin, because:

(A) You would be misrepresenting Jesus and his Word to the people, since you would be taking his statement out of context, and using it to support your own laziness; and

(B) You would be betraying the fact that you think earthly things (e.g., the meal you will eat or your daily activities), which you take the time to organize and prepare for, are more important than the things of God (i.e., his Word), which you do not take the time to organize and prepare for—but then have the arrogance and audacity to presume to preach to the people.

(3) To use Jesus' statement as an excuse not to prepare and organize your sermon in advance actually betrays a very low view, not a high view, of the Holy Spirit.

(A) *Anyone who is truly reading God's Word and preparing a passage to preach will (or should) be in close communion with the Holy Spirit.* To use Jesus' statement about "*not worrying about what you will say*" betrays the fact that you really haven't been in communion with the Holy Spirit at all. It is therefore presumptuous to assume that when you get up to preach the Holy Spirit will then "magically" speak through you when you haven't been speaking with Him during the week.

(B) *To use Jesus' statement as a reason not to prepare and organize your sermon beforehand is based on the haughty presumption that, if you did organize what you wanted to say in advance the Holy Spirit is so weak that he could not give you new thoughts while you are preaching your sermon to make it even more effective.* You are thereby sinning by wrongfully raising up your own importance since you are, in effect, saying, "I am so powerful that if I do any advance preparation even the Holy Spirit himself cannot override me." In fact, the Spirit is more likely to speak through you if you have been communing with him during the week and have been using your best efforts to organize and prepare a good sermon.

3. Written sermon outlines are helpful for an effective presentation. An outline helps to organize the material. It insures that all of the key components of the sermon are covered in the proper order. An outline is indispensable if a "mental block" occurs during the sermon and the preacher forgets something. The following are important considerations for the use of outlines:

a. *Tailor your outline to your own, specific needs.* Outlines can be sparse or detailed. Key words or phrases should recall to the preacher's mind entire thoughts and paragraphs. Particular sentences that are important and need to be specifically phrased can be written in their entirety. The correct way to pronounce certain words can be indicated. Phrases or other aspects of the sermon that need to be emphasized can be underlined, or put in bold, or written in capital letters. Pauses can be indicated by dashes or some other symbol.

b. *Color coding.* The use of highlighters to color code the notes is a very useful technique. Different colors can indicate Scripture passages to be read, specific lines to be emphasized, rhetorical questions, main points, transitions, etc. Color coding also helps the notes to be visible to the preacher while he is giving his sermon.

c. *We must not be tied to our notes.* It is important that the preacher not be tied to his notes but during the sermon should glance at them only for reference. The preacher needs to be so familiar with what he intends to say that he can be free to move about the stage and maintain eye contact with his audience.

4. Sermon effectiveness is enhanced by oral rehearsal. All preachers *think about* what they want to say, and most preachers prepare some form of *written notes*. However, the vast majority of preachers do not stand up and actually *orally rehearse* their sermons before they give them. That is a great mistake. The author of the GASS study points out: "An oral style requires orality in preparation. Say many surveyed preachers, 'My fear is that it won't all come together during the sermon.' That particular fear can be

eradicated with oral rehearsal as the sermon comes together before the appointed hour.

As portions of outline or manuscript are drafted, they need to be ‘tried out’ orally, tested for their spoken power. Rearranged. Regrouped. Revised. As each section of the sermon is developed, the preacher needs to converse his or her way through the logic. An oral product begs for oral preparation. Oral rehearsal allows for prediction of length; mental rehearsal does not. Of all the preparation strategies public speakers employ, my colleague Kent Menzel and I found that oral rehearsal for an audience is the preparation strategy most predictive of public speaking excellence.” (Carrell 2000: 224-25)

E. Different organizational models

A detailed method for preparing and organizing a sermon is attached as **Appendix B (“Steps to the Sermon: a minimal checklist for preachers”)**. Although there is no single “right way” to organize or preach a particular passage, the following are different organizational models. The same passage of Scripture can be preached using different models. The models have many similarities, and aspects of one model may be adapted for another. For example, the problem-based introduction that is typical of the “Me-We” model can be used in any of the other models, as can the applications and conclusions. These are not the only sermon models that exist, and these may be altered as necessary. However, use of some organizational model is recommended to make sure that the sermon meets the “A-B-Cs” of sermon organization so that the sermon can be as effective as possible with the listeners. Detailed preaching outlines of several sermons, based on each of these models, are attached as **Appendices C-I**.

1. **“Didactic” Model**—This model is particularly suited when preaching from the epistles or other didactic portions of Scripture.
 - a. *Introduction*
 - b. *Proposition*
 - c. *Organizational Sentence*
 - d. *Exposition of the passage* (including illustrations and applications [or application may be placed at the end])—follow the organization or train-of-thought of the passage as you expound it.
 - e. *Conclusion*
2. **“EPA [Explanation-Principles-Application] Narrative” Model**—This model is often useful when preaching narrative or poetic passages:
 - a. *Introduction*
 - b. *Organizational Sentence* (you still have one, but it will be along the lines of, “We are going to look at this passage three times [or ‘in three ways’]: first we will look at the details; then the principles; then the applications”).
 - c. *Retell and explain the episode* (in a narrative fashion, including historical information).
 - d. *Go back and work through the principles that are being taught*.
 - e. *Proposition* (the proposition comes here, between the principle and applications; this is an inductive approach which is often the case with how narratives themselves are structured).
 - f. *Go over the passage a third time with emphasis on the applications*.
 - g. *Conclusion*
3. **“Literary Plot” Model**—A narrative sometimes follows a literary structure involving four movements (**Luke 8:22-25** is an example); this model works well in many narratives, miracle stories, or other accounts that involve some crisis/resolution:
 - a. *Introduction*
 - b. *Organizational Sentence* (referring to “four movements” of context; crisis; resolution; and implications/applications).
 - c. *Context* (background and, in **Luke 8**, the call to go across the lake).
 - d. *Crisis* (in **Luke 8**, the storm and the cry that “we are perishing”).
 - e. *Resolution* (in **Luke 8**, Jesus as Lord of creation, “and it became calm”).
 - f. *Proposition* (as in the EPA Model, the proposition comes just before the application; this heightens the suspense of the story).
 - g. *Implications/applications* (in **Luke 8** the disciples’ question “Who is this?” is an implication and leads to our understanding who Jesus is—he is Lord—and the implications for us that we can and must trust him, even [and especially] when life appears to be at its worst for us).
 - h. *Conclusion*
4. **“Me-We-God-You-We” Model**—This model was developed by Stanley (Stanley and Jones 2006: 119-31), and may be used when preaching any genre of Scripture. Because its terminology is somewhat

different from the other models, it will be explained in some detail here. His outline is a “relational outline,” based on the relationships of “Me-We-God-You-We.”

a. *ME*—Begins with a statement or story about yourself, or a problem or question you have faced, in order to introduce yourself (especially important when addressing a new audience) and the topic to the audience. However, *ME* is not primarily about the speaker, but about finding *common ground* with the audience. Consequently, the issue that you raise is a question, or problem, or tension that other people also face in their lives.

b. *WE*—Then broaden the tension you have raised to include everybody in the audience (e.g., “Sometimes I wonder why I even bother praying [*ME*]; I bet you’ve wondered about that as well [*WE*],” or “There are some people I don’t get along with [*ME*]; can anybody here relate to that [*WE*]?”). Spend a fair amount of time doing this to make sure that the audience is *engaged with the issue*. Thus, you may raise the issue in different ways—how it relates to young people or old people, single people or married people, believers or unbelievers, etc. Stanley points out: “Don’t transition from *WE* to the next section until you feel like you have created a tension that your audience is dying for you to resolve. In other words, assume no interest. Focus on the question you are intending to answer until you are confident your audience wants it answered. Otherwise you are about to spend twenty or thirty minutes of your life answering a question nobody is asking.” (Ibid.: 125) This approach “sets you up to address the issue of application in the beginning as well as at the end. If you open the message with *your* struggle (*ME*), and relate it to *their* struggle (*WE*), you’re already in the area of applied truth” (Ibid.: 126). (Note that Stanley is using the “Rail-Fence” model and begins with the “bottom rail,” although he does not use those terms.)

c. *GOD*—Now you can transition to God’s thoughts on the matter, i.e., the biblical text. Thus, after first raising a problem in life and connecting with people, you move to the Bible and the solution to the problem. In your explanation of the text you should “engage people with the text”: have the people turn to and focus on one passage rather than skipping around in the Bible; lead them through the text (i.e., don’t read long sections without comment); highlight and explain odd words and phrases; point things out as you go like a guide; if some parts of the text frustrate you or you are unsure about, say so (if it frustrates you, it frustrates someone in the audience); have the audience read certain words out loud for emphasis; summarize the text with well-crafted statements. (You certainly should engage people with the text when you are using one of the other models of expository preaching as well.)

d. *YOU*—Here you tell the people what to do with what they have heard. Try to find one point of application you can challenge everybody to embrace. Stanley rarely asks people to make life-altering commitment to anything; he doesn’t think that is realistic. However, he often asks people to try something for a week, or even a day, or sometimes a month. Try to find something that everyone can do—and you can give examples for groups within the audience (young, old, believers, unbelievers, etc.), like you did in the introduction.

e. *WE*—Conclude by inspiring the people what the church, or community, or nation, or world, would look like if people begin doing what has just been talked about. This casts a vision of the way things could be and should be. It also reconnects you with your audience (i.e., you and your audience are all “in the same boat together”), rather than your being separate from your audience telling them what to do.

VIII. Persuasive Communication and the Preacher’s “Style”

A. There is no one correct style of preaching

1. Each individual has strengths he should draw on and weaknesses he should try to improve. You should not try to imitate someone else but should try to learn from others while remaining true to who you are. Stanley suggests: “In your quest to develop an effective style you need to constantly ask yourself two questions:

1. What works?
2. What works for me?

The first question will keep you on the lookout for new principles and methods of communication. It will drive you to wonder why certain communicators are so engaging and why others are not. It will keep you open to new ideas. It will motivate you to be a lifelong learner in the field of communication. . . . The second question will motivate you to continually evaluate and tweak your

delivery.” (Stanley and Jones 2006: 179)

2. Experience alone doesn't make you a better preacher. Instead, experience plus the evaluation of that experience will make you a better preacher. You need to evaluate your own preaching and ask for the candid evaluations of intelligent and perceptive members of your audience. Find a small, diverse group of people (different ages, sexes, and backgrounds) whom you trust and who are not afraid to be honest with you, and have them formally evaluate your sermons (both style and content) periodically. Then, you need to have the courage to *act on those evaluations* and change what needs to be changed in order to become a better, more persuasive and effective communicator of God's Word. Another feedback technique is to occasionally “provide a small sheet of paper in each bulletin, with the following instructions written on the top: *Following today's sermon, please write the key idea of the sermon in your own words. Drop this one sentence paraphrase into the 'Sermon Support' box on your way out the door. Thank you.* [If your church does not have written bulletins, ask listeners to do that on their own.] As you read the responses, your question as preacher then becomes, ‘Am I satisfied that they understand?’” (Carrell 2000: 218) The difference between 10 years' worth of evaluated sermons and not having your sermons evaluated, is the difference between 10 years of experience and 1 year of experience repeated 10 times.

B. The manner or style of preaching will vary depending upon the substance and goal of the specific message, the circumstances in which we are preaching, and the knowledge and needs of the audience

1. The Scriptures indicate that we should have a different emphasis and tone depending on the nature of the passage we are expounding. The Bible may be expounded and preached for many different reasons and on many different occasions. **2 Tim 3:16** says that Scripture may profitably be used “for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” In **2 Tim 4:2** Paul similarly says that preaching may include reproof, rebuking, exhorting, and instructing. In **1 Tim 4:11, 13, 16** and **6:2** Paul told Timothy to use the Scriptures for teaching. In addition to those uses of Scripture, Paul's own preaching also included encouraging (**Acts 16:40; Col 2:2; 1 Thess 2:11**), comforting (**2 Cor 1:4; 1 Thess 4:18**), imploring (**1 Thess 2:11**), admonishing (**Acts 20:31**), warning or threatening (**Acts 13:8-12**), reasoning, demonstrating, proving, and persuading (**Acts 18:4, 19, 28; 26:28-29**). Peter was always ready to “remind” the church of things they had heard so that his hearers could readily “call these things to mind” (**2 Pet 1:12-15**; see also **Luke 24:25-27; John 3:9-10; Acts 3:12-18; 8:30-35; 17:16-31; 26:25-28**). *An important consequence of this is that when we preach and apply Scripture, not only should the content be covered but the emphasis should be followed and the tone should be respected.*

2. To persuade people of something we must “internalize” our message.

a. *The message must become a part of us.* “The interest quotient of any speech is in direct ratio to the interest and energy put into the topic by the speaker” (Buckley 1988: 14). The preacher should first passionately engage his intellect by rigorously studying and understanding the passage to be preached (i.e., in his study, he begins with the “top rail”). That will commit him to the passage. Such a serious commitment to the passage to be preached will have at least two effects when he then preaches the passage:

(1) It will give him intellectual excitement about the passage. “Intellectual excitement on the part of the teacher . . . serves to produce like excitement on the part of the listener” (Adler 1983: 54-55). Another teacher of public speaking puts it this way: “It is the energy in the speaker's voice—the note of keen interest on his part—that ignites interest in the audience” (Buckley 1988: 15).

(2) That intellectual excitement or energy that comes from “owning” a passage will help to properly control the emotional presentation of the passage. “The thinking you have done privately and are now publicly articulating in your speech must have emotional force as well as intellectual power [to be effective and persuasive]” (Adler 1983: 59). That “emotional force” has to be “real,” not faked. If the preacher has rigorously studied his passage so that it is “real” to him—he sees the seriousness and importance of it—then he can properly convey that to his audience: “One must give of oneself. One must force oneself to feel first in the gut, then speak. . . . When the speaker incarnates in his private imagination what he is talking about, he will not be forcing his emotions. He may to the contrary have to restrain them.” (Buckley 1988: 17)

b. *A technique for helping the preacher to “own” his message.* Stanley suggests that before preaching you “should be able to sit down at a table and communicate your message to an audience of two in a way that is both conversational and authentic. The message must in some

way become a personal story you could tell as if drawing from personal experience.” (Stanley and Jones 2006: 135)

c. *An example of making the message “real” to the preacher.* Another person was going to deliver a message at Stanley’s church but obviously was so concerned with his outline, and content, and how he would perform, that he had forgotten his audience, their needs, struggles, and hopes. Before the person went up to preach, Stanley said to him: “‘How would you communicate this message if your eighteen-year-old son had made up his mind to walk away from everything you have taught him, morally, ethically, and theologically, unless he had a compelling reason not to? What would you say this morning if you knew that was at stake? Because for somebody’s son out there this may be his last chance. Now quit worrying about your outline. Go out there and plead your case like your own son’s future was at stake.’ And he did.” (Ibid.: 98-99)

C. Principles of persuasive public speaking apply to sermons as well as to other types of public speech.

1. Effective and persuasive presentation can be enhanced when the preacher combines the three types of persuasion (*logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*) with the “four laws” of persuasion:

a. *The “four laws” of persuasion are:*

Law 1: Primacy (what we hear first colors our thinking and helps to determine how we view what comes later);

Law 2: Recency (what we hear last is most memorable);

Law 3: Frequency (memorability increases with repetition); and

Law 4: Vividness (retention of information dramatically increases when both seeing and hearing are involved). (Stern 1991: ch. 5)

b. *How the three types of persuasion and the four laws of persuasion work together.* Logos is why our exegesis and explanation of the text must be sound. Pathos is why we must engage our audience personally. Ethos is why our lives must be above reproach. Primacy is why our introductions are so important. Recency is why our conclusions are so important. Frequency is why repetition of our one, clear point is so important. Vividness is why our illustrations are so important.

2. What you say and how you say it are both important, but in different ways.

a. *How you say something is more important than what you say when it comes to engaging and retaining the audience’s attention.* That indicates why your introduction is so important.

b. *On the other hand, what you say is more important to the audience than how you say it when the audience “is absolutely convinced that you are about to answer a question they’ve been asking, solve a mystery they have been unable to solve, or resolve a tension they have been unable to resolve”* (Stanley and Jones 2006: 152). This is why your exegesis, explanation, application, and conclusion are so important, *if you have first engaged the audience’s attention in your introduction.*

c. *The principles of good communication (one point; good organization; being clear and specific; repetition and illustration of the point, etc.) will triumph over a poor speaking style virtually every time.* As Stanley concludes, “*clarity trumps style.* Clarity trumps just about everything.” (Stanley and Jones 2006: 175)

3. We must pay attention to the “technical” aspects of our presentation. Our manner of presentation can either enhance or detract from the persuasiveness of what we have to say. Preachers need to consciously think about these aspects of their presentation because *how* one says something is as important as *what* one says. That is particularly important in expounding the Scriptures because your manner of presentation can truly or falsely represent the Word of God to the people.

a. *The tone, pitch, volume, and speed of the voice should be appropriate to the circumstance.*

One theologian and preacher relates this example: “I have often struggled with speed of delivery. Once after a sermon a woman asked in amazement, ‘Did you ever take a breath?’ Since that time I have worked at pauses and rate of delivery but still do poorly at pacing my sermons.” (Osborne 1991: 364) People simply cannot pay attention for long to a presentation where the preacher does not vary his speed, volume, tone, and emotional level. Two other aspects of our voice deserve mention:

(1) Vocal peculiarities and pronunciation. Some people may get a dry mouth after speaking for some time. It may be a good idea to have a bottle or glass of water available. If you have a sore or scratchy throat, taking a throat lozenge or sucking on a

piece of hard candy before you speak, or having that available, should help. Be aware of your own habits of speech. Many people have verbal “ticks”—they say meaningless words or phrases like “you know,” or “like,” or “just” as “filler words” that really mean nothing. These can be very distracting for listeners. Even such phrases as “Praise the Lord!” and “Hallelujah!” can become meaningless “filler words” when repeated endlessly and mindlessly. When you ask people to “Praise the Lord” there should be a reason based on what you are saying why they should “Praise the Lord.” Some listeners actually start counting the number of times you say such meaningless filler words! If you have difficulty pronouncing certain words (e.g., the names of some OT people), you should practice saying them in advance. Writing such words in your sermon notes with the proper pronunciation indicated may also help.

(2) Microphones and speakers (Public Address [PA] Systems). One aspect of the volume of one’s voice is the use of microphones and speakers (Public Address [PA] Systems). PA systems may cause “feedback” or static or other distortions that actually make it harder for the congregation to hear and understand the speaker. Further, many small churches use PA systems even though the rooms are small enough that such systems are unnecessary. In such cases, it may be better simply to speak naturally and not use the PA system at all.

b. *Our facial expressions and hand gestures should be purposeful but not “forced.”* Facial expressions should be appropriate to the situation yet “should be generated naturally out of the strength of emotion or intellectual heat” (Buckley 1988: 174). Thus, “one does not pound the lectern² when suggesting that maybe a compromise is the intended course of action, nor shrug one’s shoulders when one is petitioning Congress for a declaration of war” (Ibid.: 173-74).

c. *Be aware of our physical appearance, posture, and clothing.*

(1) Physical appearance: We should make sure that our hair is properly brushed or combed. If we have some new abnormality or peculiarity that our congregation hasn’t seen before (a bandage on our face, our arm is in a sling, etc.), that should probably be briefly mentioned or explained at the beginning. Any oddity in our appearance is something that the listeners will observe, and will be wondering about, and will serve to distract them from the sermon itself.

(2) Posture: Our posture communicates a great deal of information to the audience. If we are too stiff, the audience becomes tense. If we are draped over the lectern, or slouch when we stand, the audience will assume that the substance of what we have to say is not important.

(3) Clothing: Make sure that our tie is on straight, shirt is tucked in, shoes are tied, and the pocket flaps on our jacket are properly out. People focus on these things and thereby are easily distracted from paying attention to our message. Also, if you have keys or coins in your pocket, make sure you do not put your hand in your pocket and jangle them while you are speaking. Many people do this without being aware of what they are doing, and it is very distracting for the listeners.

D. A preacher’s “anointing” is not related to emotionalism

1. Some people speak of a preacher’s having “the anointing” as if yelling, gesticulating, or great emotionalism were signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit, or as if anointing by the Spirit was indicative of the greatness of the preacher himself. Such ideas are fundamentally (and dangerously) wrong. Emotionalism *per se* has *absolutely nothing to do* with whether or not a preacher is being used by the Holy Spirit. We know this for at least six reasons:

a. Nowhere do the Scriptures state or imply that emotionalism in preaching is a sign of special “anointing” by the Spirit.

b. Many of the different forms or manners of preaching which Scripture tells us to do (such as teaching, encouraging, comforting, reasoning, demonstrating, proving, and persuading) are contrary to or would be rendered less effective by the use of high emotionalism.

c. Yelling, gesticulating, and high emotionalism themselves may be cultural artifacts.

d. Yelling, gesticulating, and high emotionalism have been employed by evil people who

² “The *podium* is the elevated platform of stage on which a speaker performs; the *lectern* is the stand on the podium that one speaks at” (Buckley 1988: 163).

manifestly have not been filled by the Spirit (e.g., Adolf Hitler).

e. If employed by a preacher to demonstrate his “anointing,” emotionalism can be easily “faked.”

f. God’s Spirit manifestly “anoints” and uses preachers who do *not* demonstrate any of the indicia of what some people call “the anointing.” Jonathan Edwards best exemplifies this: his preaching, probably more than anyone’s, was responsible for the outpouring of the Spirit known as the “Great Awakening” in America during the 1730s-1740s. Nevertheless, “in the days of the awakening he still wrote his sermons out in full and read them, by and large, without gesture” (Piper 2004: 53).

2. None of the above is meant to suggest that the emotions (or “affections” as Edwards called them) are unimportant or are *not* part of the Spirit’s working in either the preacher’s or his listeners’ lives; they are (see Piper 2004: 84-86). What is at issue are the particular, external manifestations which some people falsely equate with an “anointing” by the Holy Spirit.

REFERENCES CITED

- Adler, Mortimer. 1983. *How to Speak How to Listen*. New York: Collier.
- Allen, Ronald. 2005. “What do Lay People Think God is Doing in the Sermon?” *Encounter* 66: 365-75.
- _____. 2006. “Assessing the Authority of a Sermon.” *Encounter* 67: 63-74.
- _____. 2008. “How do Sermons Help People Change?” *Encounter* 69: 61-75.
- Buckley, Reid. 1988. *Speaking in Public*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Carrell, Lori. 2000. *The Great American Sermon Survey*. Wheaton, IL: Mainstay Church Resources.
- Chapell, Bryan. 1994. *Christ-Centered Preaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Cooper, Lane. 1932. *The Rhetoric of Aristotle*. New York: D. Appleton-Century.
- Flemming, Dean. 2005. *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.
- Freire, Paulo. 1973. *Education for Critical Consciousness*. New York: Continuum.
- Goldsworthy, Graeme. 1991. *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.
- Harris, R. Mark. 2004. *Thus Saith the Youth Pastor*. Unpublished manual.
- Hiebert, Paul. 1987. “Critical Contextualization.” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11: 104-12.
- Jamar, Steven. 2001. “Aristotle Teaches Persuasion: The Psychic Connection.” *The Scribes Journal of Legal Writing* 8: 61-102.
- Johnson, Dennis. 2007. *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R.
- LeBar, Lois, and James Plueddemann. 1995. *Education that is Christian*. Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor.
- Mack, Burton. 1990. *Rhetoric and the New Testament*. Minneapolis: Fortress.
- Mulligan, Mary Alice, Diane Turner-Sharazz, Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm, and Ronald Allen. 2005. *Believing in Preaching: What Listeners Hear in Sermons*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice.
- Osborne, Grant. 1991. *The Hermeneutical Spiral*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.
- Pieterse, H. J. C. 1984. “Contextual Preaching: To Gerhard Ebeling on his seventieth birthday.” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 46: 4-10.
- Piper, John. 2004. *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

Plueddemann, James. 1994. "Do We Teach the Bible or do We Teach Students?" *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 13: 44-53.

Reed, Eric. 1999. "The Preaching Report Card: Today's listeners grade pastors on what they hear from the pulpit." *Leadership* (Summer): 82-87. Online: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/1999/summer/913082.html>.

Scharf, Greg. n.d. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, H561—course lecture.

Stanley, Andy, and Lane Jones. 2006. *Communicating for a Change*. Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah.

Stern, Herbert. 1991. *Trying Cases to Win*. Eau Claire, WI: PESI.

Stott, John. 1982. *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Theis, John. 1981. "Pronouns and Interpersonal Contact: Assessing the Impact of the Sermon." *Journal of Pastoral Counseling* 16 (Spring-Summer): 47-52.

Webb, William. 2001. *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.

Westminster Confession of Faith. 1646. Online: http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/index.html.

APPENDIX A

<https://portal.tiu.edu/files/uportal/teds/ptdept/Schar.InterrogativeBibleStudy.pdf>

INTERROGATIVE BIBLE STUDY FOR BIBLICAL PREACHING

Greg Scharf, Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology,
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School³

"Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no truths."

Assumptions:

- Careful study of the text is an essential prerequisite to faithful preaching. How we study will shape how we preach.
- Accurate observation can be facilitated by incisive questions of the text. Many questions will aid our understanding of a text; some will be especially helpful in preparing to preach a text.
- We cannot faithfully preach a text until we know more than what it is saying. We must try to discover what it is attempting to achieve and how it is to achieve it.

Suggested questions (including two pivotal ones Haddon Robinson asks) to supplement those you may already be asking:

1. *What have we here? (What is this text functionally?)*

- command
- report of an event, conversation, prayer
- recitation of God's deliverance
- warning
- oracle, "Thus saith the Lord"
- divine explanation
- example
- testimony
- confession
- plea
- interlude
- a link in the history of redemption
- a lament
- an encouragement or exhortation

³ Dr. Scharf is Chair of the Department of Pastoral Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL. He is the author of *Prepared to Preach* (Christian Focus, 2005). This material and Appendix B are used with Dr. Scharf's permission. Minor changes have been made by Jonathan Menn with Dr. Scharf's permission.

- a genealogy
- a greeting or benediction
- a hymn

2. What is this passage about?⁴ (What is the dominant subject of this text?)

For instance, this passage is primarily about:

- prayer
- faith
- obedience
- doctrine
- rebellion
- idolatry
- fear
- joy
- government
- God's ways
- or a host of other subjects

3. What is the author saying about this subject?

In answer to this question we will:

- Observe what else (in addition to what we consider the subject) is mentioned in the text.
- Summarize the context of the passage as it relates to the subject of the passage.
- Discern how other matters mentioned in the text are related to what you consider the subject.

4. What responses might the Holy Spirit want from believing readers of the text? (Why did the Holy Spirit see fit to include this text in the canon?)

For instance, the Holy Spirit might want to elicit:

- repentance
- trust in God
- confession of sin; confession of Christ
- any number of specific forms of obedience.

5. How does this passage move the reader to make the intended response?

This question focuses our attention on the way the text before us seems to be designed to achieve its purpose.

Armed with that insight we craft our message to make use of the elements the passage itself uses to achieve the purpose for which it was written. For instance, we may notice:

- rhetorical devices
- argumentation
- examples, both positive and negative
- godly fear of unhappy consequences mentioned
- display of benefits of faith that leads to obedience
- editorial comments, e.g., **1 Kings 12:15**
- direct appeal
- use of some feature of a specific genre. So for instance, poetry may use an image or memorable phrase to move the consciousness of the listener, e.g., **Ps 84:3**, which speaks of the sparrow nesting near the altar of God.

6. How does this passage contribute to the larger picture of redemption?

- How does it point to Christ?
- Where is it in the Biblical story line?
- How did it impact original hearers/readers?

⁴Haddon Robinson in *Biblical Preaching: The Development*.

APPENDIX B

<https://portal.tiu.edu/files/uportal/teds/ptdept/Scharf.ChecklistforBeginners.pdf>

STEPS TO THE SERMON: A MINIMAL CHECK LIST FOR PREACHERS

Gleaned and compiled from various sources by Dr. Greg Scharf

Revised February 15, 2002; August 8, 2007

I. Pray throughout the process.

Ask God for concentration, wisdom, insight, sensitivity, discernment, love for Himself, His word and His people.
It doesn't hurt to study on your knees.

II. Select the text (also called the preaching portion or passage).

A. If this is part of a series of sermons the selection process begins well before the preaching event.

Months before the series begins you select a book of the Bible or a topical theme that:

1. Addresses needs you perceive in the congregation or that your hearers feel in themselves (or both).
2. Reflects how God has spoken to you or a hunger you have that you reckon may be God given.
3. Balances the spiritual diet. If you have been feeding in the Old Testament, consider a series from the New; if in narrative you consider didactic; if microscopic, consider painting with broader strokes, etc. If you have been emphasizing doctrine, you may select a book that includes more reproof, correction, or training in righteousness, although most books and passages will have a combination of these.
4. Clarifies abiding theological emphases that need to be reaffirmed.
5. Reinforces some truth or theme of Scripture that God seems to be underscoring in the church locally or more widely.
6. Takes into account the maturity level and receptiveness of the church.
7. Reckons on the length of time on the calendar and clock for this series.
8. Fits the season of the year.

B. If you are preaching a series of consecutive expositions and have selected a book of the Bible based on the above and other criteria:

1. Read and re-read the whole book until dominant themes emerge and the shape of the author's argument becomes clear.
2. Consult authorities, friends, reviews, to see which commentaries to borrow or buy. Read the introductions of these to review or learn the background, theology, occasion, authorship and other critical or textual issues.
3. Explore several possible ways you could preach this book including consecutive detailed exposition of every paragraph, thematic treatment or topical preaching from the book. Draft a series plan with dates and provisional worship themes on a work sheet allowing for holidays, special occasions, etc.

C. If you are preaching a topical series from non-contiguous passages, or an individual message or sermon:

1. Beware of having an idea in search of a text. This is a recipe for eisegesis when we want—and people need—exegesis. Once you have settled on a text, follow it wherever it leads even if it goes somewhere you hadn't anticipated. It is better to violate your sermon series plan than to twist the passage to fit your preconceptions.
2. As above, select as a text, a passage of appropriate content and length that is a complete unit of thought.
3. Allow more time to place the passage in its contexts of paragraph, chapter, section, book, corpus, testament and canon than you need if you are consecutively expounding the book.

D. In all cases:

1. Select passages of appropriate content and length. Text selection is both objective and subjective. As you read through the Bible for your own spiritual enrichment, certain passages will jump off the page to you, speak to you, convict you. As you look at these more closely be careful not to take too short a section, nor to try to expound too much. *Each preaching portion must be a complete unit of thought and preferably not too many thoughts.*
 - a. You may preach expositively from a single sentence if that sentence develops the idea sufficiently to make a sermon.
 - b. More often you will preach from a paragraph.
 - c. Sometimes—perhaps most of the time—you will preach from more than one paragraph.
 - d. Sometimes you will preach from a chapter or several chapters.
2. What matters is that the preaching portion demonstrably conveys a single thought which it develops. That is, there should be a *single dominant idea* that the biblical author develops in the passage.
3. Start a file on each passage for cross references, word pictures, illustrations, questions, insights, newspaper or magazine articles or whatever else may come to mind as you work through the book in detail.
4. Continue to read and re-read the whole book as often as its length and your schedule allow looking for connections, repetitions, trademark words and phrases. If it is your custom, mark your Bible to help keep these in mind.

5. Read theologies and popular books that parallel the biblical book you intend to expound.
6. At least three months in advance, commit to discreet passages and specific dates and communicate these to worship planners and other church leaders.

Now that you have planned a series and selected a text or preaching portion, the next task is to:

III. Study the preaching portion.

The following steps are not exhaustive. Many of them overlap. Sometimes God-given insights will come quickly and subsequent study will simply confirm what you saw with relatively little effort. More frequently, especially as a beginning preacher, you will need to discipline yourself to take most if not all of these steps, trusting God to speak to you as you “labor in the word and teaching” (1 Tim 5:17). The point is neither to despise the means God has given us nor to rely on them to the exclusion of humbly seeking the face of God and inviting Him to speak to you through His word. It will help if you try to be simultaneously microscopic and macroscopic. Look meticulously for details, but don't get lost in them. Remember all you know about theology and hermeneutics. Bring what you already know to bear on what you see. Then use what you see in this text to add to what you know. The following are the steps in studying the text:

A. Pray, before, during and after the study process, as already discussed.

B. Study in a place and at a time where you may reasonably expect to minimize interruptions; concentrate and think.

Ideally you will be alone, without a telephone you are obliged to answer and with someone to intercept visitors. Your desk will be clear enough so that other matters do not beckon you and your tools will be close at hand. If you use a computer in this process, you must discipline yourself not to play with it.

C. Discipline yourself not to think too much about the audience and their needs or yourself and your needs for a sermon as you look at the text.

Both of these concerns can keep you from seeing what the passage is really getting at. That is, it can lead to eisegesis instead of exegesis.

D. Read or attempt to read the text in the original language at least once, if you can.

Notice the words used. Use lexical and other tools to discover their meanings.

1. Pay attention to grammar and syntax. For instance, if the verbs are indicatives, don't make the passage into a command as if they were imperatives unless there is good warrant contextually for doing so.
2. If the passage is a lengthy narrative or historical portion and your grasp of the languages is rudimentary, do your best given the time you have. Your goal in studying narrative is not microscopic lexical, grammatical analysis but rather observation of scene, setting, plot, point of view, characterization, dialogue and other rhetorical and stylistic elements that help the author make his point. For instance, you may observe repetition, omissions, inclusion, chiasm, irony, etc.
3. Ask the Lord to help you develop the skill of reading below the surface and between the lines. Err on the side of digging into the text early, allowing plenty of time to digest and meditate.

E. Make your own translation, writing it out in a form that suggests its structure.

An outline does this well. If you struggle with the original language, don't despair. Slowing down at this stage is good. You will be more likely to notice details like repetitions, contrasts, connectives, word order, purpose clauses, etc.

F. Read and re-read the text in the Bible from which you intend to preach, making notes of whatever strikes you.

This is a good time to observe:

1. connecting words, purpose clauses, conjunctions, adversatives and other elements of grammar and syntax. Remember that words take on meaning based on function in sentences as well as etymology which is really a history of their meanings.
2. images, other figures of speech, and illustrations.
3. repetitions which are verbal underlining.
4. key theological words: grace, love, fear, truth, joy, etc.
5. characters.
6. plot.
7. figurative language.
8. hyperbole.
9. metaphors.
10. simile.
11. Hebraisms.
12. unusual word order.
13. stylized speech or archaisms.
14. questions the text seems to address, whether stated or not.
15. problems the text raises in your mind or might be expected to raise in the minds of your listeners.

16. the tone or mood of the text.

G. Pay careful attention to the context.

Almost every text has a significant context. This includes cultural and theological contexts as well as the literary context of the passage in its book, corpus and testament.

H. Read the passage in other translations looking for nuances you may have missed earlier.

The goal to this point is to gain a basic familiarity with the *content* of the text. This is the step in Bible study some refer to as *observation*.

I. Interrogate the text.

This is the heart of Bible study. Start with the basic interrogatives (Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How) to get below the surface of the passage. Essential questions include:

1. What is this text? I.e., from its form and wording determine its function in the present context. For instance, Is it a warning, a prayer, a report, a description, an explanation, a parable, a diatribe, an argument, an encouragement, a teaching, an example, something else, or some combination of these or other things? This is usually obvious, but very often overlooked. This has direct bearing on what your sermon will be. For instance, if the passage you are expounding is a warning concerning the consequences of disobedience, your sermon should be a warning concerning the consequences of disobedience.
2. What is the author writing about? I.e., what is the subject of this passage? The section will mention or refer to various things. You need to discern which of these is the main thing.
3. What is the author saying about his subject? I.e., how does the rest of the section relate to the subject?
4. What response does the Holy Spirit want from those who hear or read this passage?
5. How does this passage move the reader to make the intended response? I.e., notice and learn from the way the inspired author develops the idea of the text. For instance if the text does this by argumentation instead of by example, you will want your sermon to develop the thrust of the passage by similar means.
6. How does this passage contribute to the larger picture of redemption? You must not only decide what the passage is, but also decide how it fits in the big picture of Scripture. To do this, notice how the text functions in the book and the canon. Why did the Holy Spirit include this passage in the Bible? What does this portion contribute to the larger message of the Bible? This will, of course, include how it points to Christ. What is the *intent* of this passage? This will point toward how it should function in the church.

J. Let the genre of the passage alert you to special features.

See, in particular, sections V. “Special considerations when preaching narrative,” and VI. “Special considerations when preaching poetry and prophecy,” below.

K. Keep asking questions until you have a good grasp of the meaning of the text.

This is *interpretation*. The goal is to discover *what* the passage means (its content) and *why* it is in the Bible (its intent). Although we approach observation with as few presuppositions as possible, interpretation requires that you bring to the text sufficient biblical and theological knowledge to ask the questions that help you discover the purpose of God in including it in the canon. To him who has will more be given. You see what you know.

L. Come to some basic conclusions about the passage you are studying.

Having asked good questions about the text, you must now come to some conclusions.

1. Isolate or synthesize a single, simple statement of the thrust of the passage. What is God saying to the church through what the biblical writer wrote? When you have found this, all the parts of the passage should build toward this truth, flow from it or be related to it in some demonstrable way. If they do not, you may not have discovered the actual epicenter of the passage. Your observations of connectives, purpose clauses, etc. will help you see the structure of the passage. Persist in your study until the dominant thought emerges and is clear. Write this down.
2. Check your conclusions and adjust them by consulting various authorities such as commentaries, theologies and other tools. It often pays to begin with the most technical commentaries and work toward more popular ones. Some may use the more technical commentaries as part of the translation and outlining step described above. If you elect to do this, beware of letting someone else do your thinking for you.

M. Let the passage speak to you.

You must allow time for this. Submit to the truth you have seen; ask for more light; humble yourself before God; meditate on the dominant truth.

1. Until you know what the passage is saying and why and until it speaks to you, don't try to preach it. Your authority as a preacher comes from preaching what the text actually teaches, albeit to a different audience than the original readers.
2. If the passage does not speak to you, look for spiritual or relational hindrances that might be blinding you to its message. Then ask God if you have missed the point of the passage or there is some other reason why His word is not getting through to you. This may happen when you are assuming that this is a message merely for others and

putting yourself above the text. At a certain point in the week you need to proceed by faith and affirm that if God can speak through Balaam's donkey he can speak through you even if the impact of the text on you is less than you want.

Having discerned to the best of your ability the dominant thrust of the passage, you must now:

IV. Shape what the passage is saying into a sermon (i.e., an exposition of the text that will preach).

This involves, at minimum, the following steps.

A. Think of the needs of the congregation as they relate to the dominant thrust of the passage.

Ask the Lord what he wants to say from the text before you to the people He knows will be in worship on the day for which you are preparing to preach.

B. Write out a provisional proposition.

Simply put, the proposition of the sermon is a clear, forceful statement of the main thrust of the passage *as it relates to the congregation*. This simple statement summarizes what you believe the Lord wants you to say to the congregation from the passage you are preaching. The proposition will be characterized by faithfulness, unity, completeness, and clarity.

For example, if preaching **Heb 12:1-11** your proposition might be, *“Keep your commitment to Christ!”*

C. Test your proposition.

Ask such things as:

1. Is the proposition stated relatively early in the sermon?
2. Have I stated the proposition repeatedly? (How long would it take a latecomer to know what I am talking about?)
3. Have I prepared my listeners for the proposition?
4. Is the proposition clear and singular as opposed to lumping together unrelated ideas?
5. Is the proposition concise or does it contain unnecessary words or ideas?
6. Is the proposition contemporary as opposed to describing an event in "Bible times"?
7. Is the proposition personal, simple, direct?
8. Is the proposition memorable?
9. Would an intelligent listener, filled with the Spirit, studying the passage carefully, agree that this statement accurately reflects the (or a) dominant truth of the passage?

D. Revise your proposition as necessary.

E. Review how the passage you are expounding makes the case for the proposition you are preaching.

1. Use this information to form an outline consisting of main points that not only develop the thought of the proposition, but also are related to each other in some way that is easy to grasp and remember. Ideally that relationship will be suggested by the structure of the passage. At a minimum, it should not be contrary to the development of the passage.
2. This relationship is encapsulated in an organizational sentence. This sentence does not state content of the passage or the sermon but alerts the listeners to how you plan to develop the thought of the proposition.

F. Write an organizational sentence.

1. This may take more than one form, but perhaps the simplest consists of a key word that is a noun in the plural modified by a number corresponding to the number of main points in the outline together with sufficient verbiage to express the connection between the proposition and the main points. For example, in a sermon on **Heb 12:1-11**, if the proposition is *“Keep your commitment to Christ,”* the organizational sentence might be, *“This passage gives us three reasons to keep our commitment to Christ, even when it doesn’t seem worth it: (1) Christ has guaranteed the result; (2) You have been changed; (3) God is in charge.”* “Reasons” is the key word. The key word is not the subject of the passage or the sermon. It defines the relationship between the main points, each of which is a reason in this case. Other key words might be: “ideas,” “truths,” “keys,” “angles,” “steps,” etc.
2. Avoid using as key words “things” or “points” in your organizational sentence because they are too general and therefore fail in their essential purpose of clarifying the relationship between the main points.

G. Write the main points of the outline.

1. In the example from Heb 12:1-11, above, the main points might be:
 - a. *Christ has guaranteed the result (vv. 1-4);*
 - b. *You have been changed (vv. 5-8);* and
 - c. *God is in charge (vv. 9-11).*
2. Note that in the example from Heb 12:1-11 the main points were initially stated in the organizational sentence, and then repeated as the main points in the body of the sermon; that does not always have to be the case. The main

points should clearly relate to the organizational sentence, but do not have to repeat what the organizational sentence said word-for-word. For example, in preaching on **Eph 2:11-16**, the proposition might be, “*Our life is new in Christ.*” The organizational sentence might be, “*Today we will be looking at our new life in Christ from two angles: who we really are in Christ, and what we must do about it.*” The main points might be:

a. *Christ has made us “one new man” (vv. 11-16).*

b. *Since we are “one new man,” we must act as one toward each other (vv. 14-16).*

3. If you have difficulty articulating true main points and anchoring them to the text, you may need to revise your proposition to state what the text actually is teaching.

H. Develop each main point.

The means of developing the main points include:

1. Citing and reading the text from which it is drawn. I call this “anchoring.”

2. Validating the point. This is essential when the main point is not self-evident from the text cited.

3. Explaining, amplifying, clarifying, qualifying it. This may involve adding some color to the narrative. Six useful ways to do this are by: description; example; definition; comparison and contrast; causal analysis; and division.

4. Illustrating it. Illustration serves to bridge from the biblical world to the present. Note, however, that illustrations can overpower a message.

5. Applying it. This involves inviting the listeners to submit to the teaching in appropriate ways. It may be repentance, obedience, faith, worship or any combination of these or other responses. Our task is to call for the response that the text calls for.

I. Write the conclusion to your sermon.

This will always involve revisiting and applying the proposition. It may also recapitulate the mains. This is where you drive the message home.

J. Write the introduction to your sermon.

This should in some way raise the issue or question that the text being expounded answers.

K. Write out the sermon in full.

Pay special attention to selecting the best word at each point and clear transitions which repeatedly link all the parts of the sermon to the proposition.

L. Reduce the manuscript to manageable notes.

M. Rehearse the sermon aloud.

Ideally try to rehearse in the actual place you will preach it, until you are relatively free from your notes.

N. Preach the sermon in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Prayerfully trust God to speak through you.

O. Water the seed of the word with prayer.

V. Special considerations when preaching narrative (i.e., stories; historical accounts).

A. Special aspects of narrative (as opposed to didactic epistles).

1. Narrative teaches implicitly. Ask the Lord to help you develop the skill of reading below the surface and between the lines.

2. The punch line of the story may not be contained within the text itself but before or after it.

3. When preaching narrative, it helps to ask, *with whom do you want your listeners to identify in the story?* Your proposition may focus on the theology of the passage or positive or negative lessons learned, depending upon with whom you want the congregation to identify.

4. Telling a story within a story can confuse hearers.

5. It is easy to overlook narrative in the prophets.

B. Regarding the preaching portion:

1. As stated above, select as a preaching text a passage of appropriate content and length that is a complete unit of thought. What matters is that the preaching portion demonstrably conveys a single thought which it develops by means of the story or narrative of the text. That is, there should be a dominant idea that the biblical author develops in the passage. If in a narrative section of scripture you skip passages because they do not teach truths you feel the congregation needs to hear, at a minimum show how these passages you have skipped contribute to the over all message and prepare for the passage you are expounding.

2. The key is to look for the point the author is trying to make by means of the story. Why did the Holy Spirit include this passage in this part of the canon? It may relate more to the fallen condition of the characters in the

story or to God's character as revealed in the story, but both will be there. Which you emphasize in your sermon will depend upon your perception of the needs of the congregation.

C. Observing a narrative text.

The following are important observations to make with respect to narrative texts:

1. the setting (time, place).
2. point of view of narrator.
3. characters and how they are described.
4. dialogue and where it is introduced.
5. plot—how the story moves from start to finish.
6. words, especially theological words and descriptive words.

D. Interrogating a narrative text.

The following are essential questions to ask in interrogating a narrative text:

1. What is the context of this narrative? What is the circumstance or situation that sets the stage for this story? Notice especially any element of tension that cries out to be resolved.
2. Who is telling the story? (This helps to establish perspective.)
3. Who are the main characters of the story? What can you discover about them from the text itself? From other sources?
4. What is the place of dialogue in the story?
5. Are there monologues as part of the story?
6. Are there editorial comments? Notice these especially because they may contain the inspired key to the narrative.
7. Are there stories within the story?
8. What is the basic plot in simplest possible terms? (normalization)
9. What are the parts of this story? Think of episodes or scenes in a drama or chapters in a book.
10. Is a scene described that contributes to the impression left by the narrative?
11. If the story has a subject, what is it?
12. What words contribute most to the thought of the narrative?
13. How does this story contribute to the larger theme of the book? How does it function—i.e., is it a warning, an encouragement, teaching, example, etc.?
14. What is the emotional tone of the story?
15. Where else in the Bible are these characters or this event mentioned and what can we learn from those cross-references?

E. Regarding the proposition:

1. Ask how the narrative passage you are expounding makes the case for the proposition you are preaching. In general a story or narrative will make its case either by means of constituent parts that add up to the main point (the so-called cyclical model), or as a whole unit (the so-called narration-implication model).⁵
2. To determine which way it makes its point, review the scenes or episodes or chapters of the story asking if the author is using them to make a point, teach a lesson, etc., or, on the other hand, if they are merely building blocks toward a larger conclusion. If the former is the case, each part is applicable; if the latter, only the big idea conveyed by all the parts together is applicable. This will influence how you re-tell the story and how you apply it.
3. Depending upon the length of the text, you may elect to read and/or retell the story piecemeal, relating its parts by analogy to contemporary life and inviting application of each scene of the play. If those parts do not stand alone, you will want to read or retell the story in its entirety and contemporize and apply the whole at the end.

F. Regarding the organizational sentence:

An organizational sentence for your sermon is beneficial even in the case of a narrative when you might otherwise have elected not to articulate it because the retelling of the story clearly reveals the progression of the passage and holds its elements together. That is, you may still find it useful to break the story into “scenes,” or to note, for instance, three “conversations,” or to observe four “mistakes” the main character made.

VI. Special considerations when preaching poetry and prophecy.

A. Regarding the preaching portion:

As stated above, select as a preaching text a passage of appropriate content and length that is a complete unit of thought. Usually this will mean a complete psalm, an entire oracle, the whole lament, etc. Just as we wouldn't explain a single stanza of a song or poem but try to grasp the whole, so it is not best to seek to expound only part of a poem.

⁵These terms come from Dr. Harry Shields' 1996 Trinity Evangelical Divinity School D. Min. Thesis, *From His Story to Our Story: A Skills Development Manual for Old Testament Narrative Exposition*.

B. Observing a poetic or prophetic text.

1. Look for parallelism, assonance, rhythm, chiasm, ellipsis, repetition of words, strophe divisions, stanzas, and other features that are more difficult to see in the English. Try to divide the poem into stanzas or strophes.
2. In read and re-reading the text in the Bible from which you intend to preach, making notes of whatever strikes you. Be sure to observe:
 - a. figurative language
 - b. hyperbole
 - c. metaphors
 - d. simile
 - e. Hebraisms
 - f. unusual word order
 - g. stylized speech or archaisms
 - h. other features of poetic and prophetic literature

C. Interrogating a poetic or prophetic text.

This is the heart of Bible study. Start with the basic interrogatives (Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How) to get below the surface of the passage. In poetry and prophecy these questions might include:

1. Who is speaking?
2. To whom or for whom is this poem, oracle or description written?
3. About whom is this passage written?
4. What time frame is implied by the writing?
5. What place or places are mentioned?
6. What feeling or impression does this poetic passage create?
7. What images contribute to this impression?
8. What recitation of Israel's history are included? What mention of God's people, God's enemies, the nations do you find?
9. What stylized expressions, common phrases are used?
10. To what conclusion do the elements of this passage seem to build?

D. Basic conclusions regarding a poetic or prophetic text.

You need to come to at least *four basic conclusions about the passage* you are studying:

1. What is it? (Is it a rebuke? A lament? A hymn of praise? Something else?)
2. What is it talking about? (i.e. what is its subject?—God, His people, human need, sanctification, or any number of more specific subjects?)
3. What is it saying about its subject? (For instance that prayer is essential, that faith is rewarded, etc.)
4. How does it function in its book, testament, and the canon? (To underscore the fallen condition? To point more directly to Christ? To remind readers of God's faithfulness?)

E. Regarding the proposition:

Ask how the poetic or prophetic passage you are expounding makes its case for the proposition you are preaching. Look for feeling, impression, images, intensification produced by parallelism or other means that all point toward the thrust of the passage in its context. If you cannot isolate and articulate such elements, you may need to revise the proposition until you are satisfied that all the parts build toward the thrust you have identified.

VII. Four cautions to bear in mind.

A. Don't read back into the text what is not there, or introduce ideas that are foreign to the original intent of the author.

B. When one neglects Old Testament images that the New Testament picks up and reinforces, one misses an opportunity to affirm gospel truth—e.g. circumcision, priesthood, shepherding, Israel as the counterpart of the Jesus and of the church.

C. Reliance on technical knowledge of the culture, history or language can virtually close the Bible to lay listeners by implying that they cannot profit from it without knowing what we insiders know.

D. Following the above steps does not guarantee success.

We must always seek the Lord's face and ask for his help as we prepare and speak. However, the above steps are designed to help us avoid some basic errors and to increase the likelihood that our messages will be faithful and clear.

APPENDIX C

Matt 6:19-24—Didactic Model Sermon Outline⁶

Introduction: Money. We all want it. We all need it. Money can do a lot of good. It is better to have it than not to have it.

Did you realize that Jesus talked more about money than just about any other subject? We know that Christ's great enemy is Satan. You would think that Jesus would have said: "You can't serve God and Satan." But no—"You can't serve God and money/wealth/Mammon (i.e., money and things)." **WHY?**

Think about it: When we're young we are satisfied when we get a few coins. Then we grow up—the coins no longer satisfy us. We get a job—but the entry level job doesn't satisfy us for long. We see all the things we want to do with the money—so we want more. When we're young we want a bicycle. We get one. Does that satisfy us? When we're older we want a motorcycle. We get one. Does that satisfy us? Then we want a car. We get one. Does that satisfy us? Then we want a bigger car, or two of them. We get them, but are we ever satisfied?

Why did Jesus say, "You can't serve God and money?" Because He realized that probably the biggest thing that will lead us away from God is money and material possessions. The reason is:

Proposition: MONEY IS SPIRITUAL. It is just as spiritual as the cross—indeed, money may be *more spiritual* than a cross. **WHY?** Both are external things. They can be used for good or bad. Lots of people wear crosses (earrings, necklaces, carry in pocket)—but money *reveals what's inside of us*: our attitude toward it and what we do with it demonstrate better than almost anything else, where our heart, mind, soul, and priorities really are.

Anglican Book of Common Prayer: Sacraments = "outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace." That principle applies to all of life. What we do with our money demonstrates what we *really* think of Jesus Christ—like a "*spiritual barometer*."

Organizational sentence: I want to do three things: (1) Look at the spiritual nature of money; (2) Consider the early church which understand this, and how that radically affected what they did with their money; (3) Make some specific applications to us.

I. Spiritual Nature of Money

Matt 6:19-20—"Don't store up treasure..." "Store up" in the Greek is the verbal form of the word "treasure"—i.e., "Don't treasure the treasures on earth, but treasure the treasures in heaven..."

- **v. 21**—Does NOT say "where your heart is, there your treasure will be..." (although that is true)—but "*Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*" **WHY?**
- We treasure what is very valuable to us: I treasure my wife. She is the most important person in my life. So I will do whatever I can to strengthen our relationship ... (not perfectly—as she could tell you—but); it's the *way I treat her* that demonstrates what I really think of her (which now makes me think ...)
- So Jesus has given us a very practical, outward and visible sign—what we do with our \$—that demonstrates what we really treasure: this world and the things of this world, or God and the KOG. It shows *where our heart is*.

A. What we do with our money is a form of worship: **Matt 2:11** (wise men); **Mark 14:3-9** (woman with vial of costly perfume). They gave something directly to Jesus:

1. But Jesus isn't fooled and can't be bribed: **Matt 15:5-9 [READ]**. Worship ≠ singing & coming to church.
2. 2 Greatest Commands: "Love God & love your neighbor"—2nd Command (how you treat neighbor) is really the outward, visible sign of whether you are really meeting the 1st command; it is the *spiritual barometer*—MONEY IS SPIRITUAL.

B. What we do with our money is a manifestation of true faith: **Jas 2:14-18** ("Go in peace"); **1 John 3:16-17 [READ]**. MONEY IS SPIRITUAL

C. What we do with our money is a form of ministry: **Phil 4:18** (OT sacrifice language); **Jas 1:27** ("Religion" = "the external ceremonial service of worship"—that takes money). MONEY IS SPIRITUAL

II. Early Church understood this

A. Early church characterized by ASTOUNDING GENEROSITY—which *everybody could see*.

B. WHY?—Two Reasons:

1. Jesus had truly changed them from the INSIDE-OUT (easy to say "Jesus is Lord" or "I've been born again"—but they *proved* that it was true).
2. They understood the implications of the Gospel:
 - If Christ forgave us, how can we be unforgiving people?

⁶ To a large extent this is a *topical* sermon concerning the nature of money, although it is *anchored* in a particular text.

- If Christ gave everything he had for us, how can we just clutch onto our money & possessions?
- If Christ had no place to lay his head, how can we not open our homes to the homeless or other needy people?

C. Examples:

1. **Luke 19:1-10**—Zaccheus;
2. **Acts 2; Acts 4**—Church in Jerusalem;
3. **Acts 11:27-30**—Antioch.
4. **2 Cor 8:1-5**—Macedonia (20 years later ≈AD56—Background: famine in Jerusalem—**1 Cor 16:1-4**)
 - *WHY were the Macedonians so generous? Answer: v. 5*—Their lives changed from INSIDE-OUT; they had a *new set of eyes*—a new set of values (i.e., love of God; love of neighbors).
 - **2 Cor 8-9**—Paul's longest dx. of giving money, but never uses the word "money"—calls it: "grace;" "this gracious work;" "koinonia" (Lord's Supper); "leiturgia" (liturgy); "service; ministry"—i.e., all spiritual terms—**WHY? Answer:** because MONEY IS SPIRITUAL
5. Church up through the mid-300s [**Read quotes from the early church and their use of money**]:
 - They changed the Roman Empire. They lived a life that was so good, so DIFFERENT from the way most people lived their lives. People wanted it. The power that comes from the freedom from enslavement to money and things. Their lives had been changed from the inside-out—and they demonstrated it through lives of astounding generosity.
 - **IS THAT WHAT PEOPLE SEE IN US? If not, why not?**

III. Applications

A. Not trying to lay guilt on anyone: **2 Cor 8:8, 13; 9:7** all say Paul is NOT commanding people to give—and we should NOT give grudgingly or if we feel under compulsion.

1. **WHY?** God doesn't need your money; giving only because you feel pressured doesn't honor him; and he can't be bribed or placated anyway.
2. So if you feel that way: DON'T GIVE.

B. We all know that we should be constantly assessing our lives & our walk with the Lord:

1. Our attitude toward money and what we do with it is the *most practical, spiritual self-assessment tool* there is.
2. It is a **NECESSARY self-assessment tool: WHY?**
 - **Matt 6:22-23**—"Eye is dark"—**Materialism** (an "*inordinate desire for or dependence on money and material possessions*").
 - **Materialism/Greed blinds us to our own materialism/greed**—just need to know one person who is more extravagant in his conspicuous consumption than you are... i.e., *Macedonians had a "new set of eyes."*
 - Average "Christian" gives under 3% of income—if everyone in U.S. who calls himself a "Christian" gave just 10%, there would be **>\$150 Billion** available for missions, the church, the poor & needy.
 - Africa (Muslims pouring MILLIONS into sub-Saharan Africa)—Obama trying to socialize U.S. economy—largely because the church is not acting like the church did during the first 300 years of its existence.
3. God is so gracious: He changes us from the inside-out—that alone should cause us to want to be extravagant givers to help the poor and build the Kingdom—but he also gives us a *MOTIVE TO DO SO*:
 - **Matt 6:20** told us to "*store up treasure in heaven.*" **1 Tim 6:17-19** tells us *how* we store up treasure in heaven: generous giving to help the poor & needy, and build the KOG.
 - This requires: **BUDGETING – PLANNING – TALKING – (EXPLAIN)** But *you can't lose!*

Conclusion. MONEY IS SPIRITUAL. It goes to the heart of our faith because it reveals what is really in our heart. What we do with our money demonstrates what we really think of Jesus. Let us live like we truly love Jesus.

APPENDIX D

Eph 2:11-16—Didactic Model Sermon Outline

Introduction: We all like to be with people who are like us. Many reasons—some legitimate/some not. Martin Luther King, Jr.—"It is appalling that the most segregated hour of Christian America is 11:00 on Sunday morning." (Statistics re. ethnic homogeneity in the churches—90%) Same is true elsewhere: tribalism (Africa; India). Potential results: Rwanda: genocide (Hutu vs. Tutsi); Kenya: post-election violence (Luo vs. Kikuyu)—most called themselves "Christian." *But even if no violence*, such divisions in the church are *wrong*:

- How we "do church" speaks volumes about what we really believe.
- Jesus' last prayer: **John 17:18-21**—unity "*so that the world may believe that you sent me.*"
- Q. we must ask ourselves: "Is this theologically justifiable?" (esp. in a country with many ethnic/tribal groups).
- Neither Christ nor Bible recognizes ethnicity, tribe, or cultural backgrounds as a proper basis for dividing the

church.

Proposition: Eph 2:11-16—OUR LIFE IS NEW IN CHRIST.

- Put another way: according to Bible, all believers not only *united* in Christ, but have been created *a new kind of person* in Christ—therefore, we are called to act toward each other as we would toward Christ himself.

Organizational Sentence: Today we will be looking at our new life in Christ from two angles: (1) Who we really *are* in Christ; and (2) what we must *do* about it.

I. Christ has made us “One New Man.” (vv. 11-16)

A. Israel and the Gentiles (vv. 11-12): v. 11—“you, the Gentiles”: Who are the Gentiles?

1. Before Christ = 2 groups: Israel (Israelites/Jews) and the Gentiles. (v.11)
 - Race/ethnicity/tribe/clan—divisions with *no theological significance whatsoever* since all were equally Gentiles.
2. Spiritual condition of Gentiles = totally lost and without hope. (v.12)—that is the condition of everyone without Christ.
3. God called Israel and blessed them (Deut 7:6-8; Rom 9:4) to be God’s *means* of revealing himself to the world. (Deut 10; 1 Kgs 8; Is 42)—but Israel *failed* in its responsibility.

B. What Christ has done (vv. 13-16)

1. He brought the Gentiles to God himself—by his blood. (v.13)
 - We didn’t bring ourselves because we couldn’t
 - No black, white, Hutu, Tutsi, Luo, Kikuyu, etc. blood—because *all blood is red & is interchangeable*—the *blood of Christ* is the only important blood & it *unites us* (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11).
2. He eliminated the very distinction between Jew and Gentile. (vv. 14-18)
3. More than that: He created a whole new race—“one new man.” (v.15)
 - “Create”—vv. 10 & 15
 - “One”—vv. 14, 15, 16
 - “New”—v. 15 + 4:24 (“new nature” = “likeness of God”)
4. He eliminated enmity: *horizontally* (v.15) and *vertically* (v.16)

C. What this means: Christ has eliminated the significance of all racial/ethnic/tribal/economic/social distinctions between people who are in him [READ Col 3:10-11]

1. How can we possibly divide ourselves along such lines in the *church* even though such distinctions have been explicitly eliminated in *Christ*?
2. This is sin of high magnitude because it goes to the *heart* of what Christ did in vv. 14-16.
3. Klyne Snodgrass: “To maintain divisions is to deny what Christ has accomplished.”

So what should we do?

II. Since we are One New Man, we must act as one toward each other. (vv. 14-16)

Application requires a *change of mind*.

A. Things we should do:

1. Put on “the mind of Christ” (Eph 4:24; 1 Cor 2:14-16; Rom 12:1-2)—look with eyes of Christ.
 - Think of others—and ourselves—as our true reality is in Christ.
 - Believers = closer than family members who are not believers: Jesus on cross—Mary/John (John 19:25-27).
 - To say “they’re not our kind” or “I’m more comfortable worshipping with _____”—betrays the body of Christ—because your real self, true self, is no longer defined by race or culture, but is a new man in Christ.
2. Reach out: *specific examples* = partnerships; pulpit-sharing, joint projects, etc.

B. Things we should not do:

Ethnic/tribal problem = separatism (Gal 2:11-14, 18)—Ethnic theologies (“German Christians” in Nazi Germany; “black” theology/“feminist” theology because of concerns over oppression); churches founded on ethnic/tribal lines.

1. The Christian church—the “*one new man*”—is *unique*
2. Church is a family (Rom 8:15-16; 1 Tim 3:15; 5:1-2)—Like a large *extended family*—family helps & loves each other despite of (or because of) their differences (Rev 5:9).
3. To subordinate theology or church organization to any racial/ethnic/tribal concerns—however legitimate—is *inherently wrong* because doing so elevates to primary importance something that, in Christ, has been *completely done away with*.
4. Also inherently wrong because it elevates something less than Christ himself to be the focus or place of primary importance in the church—how can that be right?
5. Separatism rebuilds the wall of division that Christ broke down—only now it is rebuilt *between different groups*

of Gentiles (where the OT recognized *no distinctions* at all).

C. What of culture?

1. **Acts 2:5-11**—The multiple cultural backgrounds of the people who constituted the early church.
 - Nevertheless, **Acts 2:44**—“*And all these who had believed were together, and had all things in common.*”
2. **Cultural problem = Favoritism (Acts 6:1)**, similar to sin of *separatism*: Primarily a cultural problem, not an ethnic problem (all Jews, but some “Hellenistic Jews” had adopted more of Greek culture than the others).
 - **Church dealt with it—Acts 6:3, 5, 7**—and people remained together.
“Cultural preferences must take a backseat to unity in Christ. The most important issue is always *identity*. What is the strongest defining reality for us—Christ or culture? Culture is important—indeed, a necessary part of the fabric of our lives—but Christ, not culture, gives the primary definition to life.” (Klyne Snodgrass, *NIV Application Commentary, Ephesians*)
3. **Culture should not define or limit Christ**—but obedience to Christ and his view of people (the “One New Man”) can *transform culture*.
 - *Negative*—National/cultural/ethnically-based church: Doesn’t that say to *me*, who’s not a member of the “in” group: “You’re not one of us”; “You’re not welcome here.”
 - *Positive*—By being together in church, just as we are in fact one new man, we demonstrate the truth of Scripture, the priority of Christ, and show that Christ IS the answer to our society’s ethnic, tribal, and cultural divisions and strife.

D. Great importance of this: Malcolm X’s “Letter from Mecca” [READ].

The issue is more important today for us than when it was written >40 years ago.

1. Rampant and aggressive Islam.
2. To extent Islam is seen as the way to eliminate racial/ethnic/cultural differences among people—and the church and Christianity is not—is to the *great shame of the church*.

Conclusion:

- In all that we do pertaining to the church we must ask: “Can I justify this theologically?”—because how we “do church” demonstrates how we *define ourselves*, and *what is most important to us*.
- **Ephesians 2** tells us what true reality is—we must *rethink* what we are doing and *act* to bring our practice in line with true reality.
- Christ broke down the wall dividing Jew from Gentile and created “*one new man*” in its place; he thereby abolished the significance of racial, ethnic, and cultural distinctions in himself and in the church—we must not build that dividing wall and those distinctions back up between ourselves.
- What Christ has joined together, let not man put asunder!

APPENDIX E

Exod 1:1-22—EPA Narrative Model Sermon Outline⁷

Introduction: *Have things ever gone from going well to bad to worse in your life?*

ME—Sick + angered daughter [or other example]

WE—Things can happen in your life, or in the lives of the people who are close to you, the lives of the people in the churches you will serve that are unexpected and shattering:

- Job: doing well; moving up—new boss—all of a sudden can’t do anything right.
- Doctor says “sit down”—Nancy F: 40s—cancer—looked 80 when she died.
- Boyfriend/girlfriend dumps you.
- Christians in Nigeria—Sharia Law—persecution—churches burned—murder.

In such circumstances we cry out “it’s not right—it’s not fair”—and we can’t see God at all in our distress.

Organizational Sentence: The story of what happened to people living in ancient Egypt >3000 years ago in **Exodus 1** talks about this very problem. So, let’s look at this passage in 3 ways: (1) see what happened. (2) look at two important truths contained in this story; and (3) see how it applies to us when we go through hard times.

I. Exposition:

A. **Exod 1:1-7: Links** with what came before in Genesis. We all know story: Joseph sold into slavery by his brothers—rises to #2 man in Egypt and saves Egypt from famine—**Gen 46** Joseph’s father and his whole family move to Egypt and settle there.

1. **Gen 47:6**—[READ]: That’s where **Exodus 1** picks up.
2. *God was blessing them—they were increasing—life was good. BUT: Something happened.*

⁷ Note that even though this sermon is based on the EPA model, the introduction follows a “Me-We” model format.

B. Exod 1:8—[READ]: Probably a new dynasty. Change can come into our lives in a moment. We're not expecting it—we haven't planned for it—but it happens anyway:

1. You get a new boss—your boyfriend or husband gets a new girlfriend.
2. Your church splits—you get fired.
3. The doctor says “sit down.”

The consequences can be shattering.

C. Exod 1:9-11—[READ]:

v.10—“wisely”=skillfully, smartly, shrewdly.

1. Hebrews were not being accused of doing anything wrong—other than *existing*.

- Not accused of encroaching on Egyptians.
- Not accused of taking the best land for themselves.

2. Pharaoh's complaints were *merely hypothetical*:

- Hebrews had been loyal and valuable in the past.
- They could have been a valuable *resource* in time of war.

3. Pharaoh's opposition was ultimately *irrational*:

- He didn't like them—he opposed their increasing—yet his biggest concern is that they might *leave* Egypt.

v.11—“*labor*”=burdens, compulsory labor.

But things went from bad to worse.

D. Exod 1:12-14—[READ]: These verses tell us 2 new things that the Egyptians did:

1. **v.12**—The Egyptians' attitude toward the Hebrews changed:

“*Dread*”=also “disgust, repugnance, loathing”—fear and loathing often go together regarding people one hates—and that happened here.

- That attitude was new, and it precipitated a new stage of oppressive labor:

2. **vv.13-14**—labor “*rigorously*”=“with violence, slavery.” This was no longer merely compulsory labor—it was transformed into violently enforced slavery in all areas of life.

But Pharaoh had a more diabolical plan to deal with the Hebrews—and this new plan unfolded in 2 stages:

E. Exod 1:15-22—[READ]

1. **vv.15-16**—Pharaoh first talked to the midwives—this suggests a plan to kill the Hebrew baby boys *secretly*.

One commentator puts it like this: “Since [the king] saw that it was not possible to weaken the Israelites by indirect methods, he decided to put an end to their power by direct action. But he did not as yet dare to issue a decree to this effect openly, and endeavoured to achieve his object covertly. He ordered the midwives to slay the male children of the Israelites. They were to kill them, of course, secretly, in such a way that the parents and relatives would be unaware of the crime, and would think that the infant had died of natural causes either before or during birth.” (Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. by Israel Abrahams [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967; Central Press, 1974], 12)

2. **BUT: vv.17-19**—When the midwives didn't do that, and were called before the king, they defended themselves by saying “*We're not guilty—the Hebrew ♀ are not like Egyptian ♀—they are so full of vitality that they deliver even before the midwife gets there*”

- What they're implying is, “*Your Excellency, once the infant son is born, and his father and mother and relatives have seen him, it is impossible to kill him secretly.*”

3. **SO: v.22**—Pharaoh abandons all subterfuge:

- No longer does he “*speak*” as in **v.15**—now he *commands*.
- No longer is his order just to the midwives—now it is to the *nation*.
- No longer is his edict private or secret—now it is *public*.
- No longer will death be veiled or hidden—now it is to be the outright, wholesale murder of the Hebrew children: publicly, visibly, and without exception.

And that's where the story ends—The Hebrew MSS show a pause between **v. 22** and **2:1** to indicate that here the story ends. **OR DOES IT?**—Let's take a look behind the scenes and see—And what do we see?

II. Principles

Remember the “2 truths” I mentioned earlier: Here is the 1st important truth we must remember when things go from bad to worse:

A. When things go from bad to worse, God may be unseen—but he is still present and at work.

We may not hear his voice, but as Francis Schaeffer says, “*he is there and he is not silent.*”

- The evil things that are happening may appear random and out of control to us—but they are, in fact, part of a greater, connected plan or design over which God is sovereign and is orchestrating.

- In fact, God uses evil often in *ironic* ways—ways that we think are *just the opposite* of what we expect—which may be one reason why it is so hard for us to see what he is doing.

Let's see how that truth is demonstrated in our text.

1. What happened was part of God's design and plan.

- **v.7**—suggests that God had not forgotten his promises in Genesis to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to make Israel a great nation, and to multiply them like the stars of heaven and the sand of the seashore—Indeed, God was fulfilling those very promises, even though Israel was in a foreign land.
- **v.9**—Israel is called a “*people*” for the first time—they have gone from being a family to a people—they may not have recognized that fact—but God did—and so did Pharaoh.
- Even the *change of circumstances* was not random but was part of an overall design God had told Abram about 100s of years before—**Gen 15:13**—**[READ]**
- Genesis had not yet been written—the people didn't know—they couldn't see—but God could, and he was being faithful to his plan.

2. Evidence of design in the text.

- Interplay between the Hebrews' multiplication and the evil that befell them—3X Israel is said to have multiplied—each is followed by an ↑ in tension and increasingly severe acts of oppression:
- **v.7** = compulsory labor of **v.11**.
- **v.12** = violent slavery of **vv.13-14**, and the plan to use the midwives to secretly kill the baby boys of **v.16**.
- **v.20** = open command to all the people to cast the Hebrew boys into the Nile of **v.22**.

3. Design in the wording shows the connection was not random:

- Lest we think that the oppression of the Hebrews was caused by their multiplication, God had ordained just the opposite. In **v.10** the King of Egypt said that they had to deal wisely with the Hebrews “*lest they multiply*”—In **v.12**, although translated in the past tense in our Bibles (“*so they multiplied*”), the actual Hebrew is in the same imperfect tense as in **v.10**, not the past tense—“*the more they will afflict them, in the same way the more they will multiply.*”
- The King of the Universe was ruling over the King of Egypt.

B. The irony of how God was working

We know the end of the story—the Exodus—but that doesn't come until at least *80 years later* in **ch. 12** (*Moses isn't even born yet* in **ch. 1**)—but knowing what comes later helps us to see how *ironically* God works.

1. **v.10**—Pharaoh's greatest fear was that the Hebrews would leave Egypt—yet that's what happened.

2. **v.11**—The Hebrews were forced to build storage cities for the Egyptians—yet when the exodus came, the Hebrews plundered the Egyptians of their goods (**Exod 12:35-36**).

3. **v.22**—The final decree to cast the Hebrew boys into the Nile:

- *Because of that very decree*, Moses' mother placed Moses in the Nile.
- To further the irony, Moses was saved from death *by Pharaoh's own daughter*.
- Thus, *the decree itself was used by God as the instrument of Israel's final deliverance*.
- In yet another ironic twist, although the Hebrew boys had been sentenced to death by drowning, when the exodus finally came *it was the Egyptian army which drowned*.

4. The people couldn't see it at the time, but God was using each of the events in this drama—often in ironic ways—to work his good purposes and plan.

- We may not see in our own lives anything but evil and very adverse circumstances—but the Lord is the same, yesterday, today, and forever (**Heb 13:8**).

This leads to the 2nd important truth which applies to us in times of great, unremitting stress—and that is how God works—namely:

C. God works through his people.

- God works through the faithful acts of those who are his.
- He works through those who place obedience to him over their own comfort and success.
- Indeed, he works through those who place faithfulness to him over real risks of harm to themselves.
- *In Exodus 1 the heroes of the story are the **MIDWIVES***. God was faithful to his promises to Israel—even though they may not have known it—and that the structure of the text shows that. God worked by design and he worked ironically—and God worked the same way through the midwives.

1. The text shows that the midwives were integral to God's design.

- In **vv.15-21**—the key word is “*midwife*.”
- In its plural and singular forms the word “*midwife*”, occurs **7X**. God is *emphasizing* the importance of his *people* to how he carries out his *plan*.
- The people who fear God are integral to God's design and God's work.

2. Note also the irony of the midwives.

- In **v.10** at the beginning of his program of oppression, the Pharaoh said that they had to deal “*wisely*” or “*shrewdly*” with the Hebrews—yet it was *the midwives themselves who showed the greatest wisdom and*

- shrewdness in their dealing with Pharaoh* in **vv.18-19** when they were called to account for their actions.
- They manifested what Jesus later said—in **Matt 10:16**—we should be: “*wise as serpents and harmless as doves.*”
3. Look at the ironic result—not only did God bless them (**v.21**), but—for all his worldly power, position, and prestige—the Pharaoh remains *unnamed*. Yet those midwives have been remembered down through the centuries *by name*—Shiphrah and Puah—and they will continue to be known by name throughout all of eternity.
- God knows you by name—*What kind of a name do you want to have in God’s eyes?*
 - Remember—the most noteworthy people are not the mighty and the famous—but those who suffer and do God’s will out of love and reverence for him.

Proposition: So what is this telling us? It is telling us: *We may not see it; it may be hard to understand; but everything that is happening to us—including the bad—is all part of God’s plan.*

III. Applications: *So how does this apply in our lives?*

A. The midwives were nobodies—Pharaoh had supreme power—he was calling them to account for their apparent disobedience to his order—and he could have squashed them like that [SNAP].

1. They disobeyed the leader of the nation at the risk of their own lives because they had their priorities straight—they knew the one to whom they ultimately would have to give an account of their lives—so like the widow offering up her 2 mites (**Luke 21:1-4**), those midwives offered up all that they had.
2. They were physically fearless because they were morally God-fearing.
3. When we are faced with a matter of principle, do we compromise with what we know to be right—with what we know God wants—because we are afraid of losing something less than the midwives had to lose—something like our money—our position—or a friendship?

B. We all face these choices when fidelity to Christ and to his Word matters:

1. You find a wallet with money in it, but you also see the name and address of the person who dropped it. Will you give it back or not?
2. You buy something at a shop and the clerk gives you too much change. Will you keep it?
3. You’re a young woman; you’re with your boyfriend; he wants to fornicate. What will you do?
4. On your job your boss tells you to do something you know is wrong. If you don’t do it, you risk losing your job. What will you do?

C. God sees these little things—but they really are not “little” things at all. These are the things that demonstrate who we really are—they show our character and show whether or not our faith is real.

Conclusion: We don’t know how long the dreadful period of violent slavery in Exodus lasted—but it surely lasted a long time—enough for several generations to be born and die without ever seeing an end to their misery—without ever hearing of Moses—without ever knowing of God’s promises or plan.

- *Something like that may be true for us or for those we know. You’re in a place of hardship—you don’t know the reason, and you can’t see the end of it.*
 1. That’s why we need the church—that’s why we need each other!
 - *Remember the midwives*—They were not alone. Shiphrah and Puah, they were in it together.
 - They couldn’t see how things would work out—but they feared God and did the right thing even at the risk of their own lives.
 - And they could strengthen each other—and encourage each other—and lean on each other—and cry with each other.
 2. What would it be like if we did that? We know people who are hurting: maybe someone lost his job—or has a child very sick with malaria—or needs money for school fees.
 - If we made a meal for the sick or needy person—or even could pay some of their school fees—what effect would that have in their lives?
 - Think about who you know: If we did just *one act of encouragement this week*, we might start something and who knows where it will end.
 - Anyone can do one act of encouragement in a week.
 - That’s the church being the church—that’s acting like Christ himself.
 3. Let’s try to be like the midwives. Remember: God now calls them by name—when we stand before him to account for our lives, if we have been faithful, he will call us by our names, too.

APPENDIX F

Rev 19:11-21—EPA Narrative Model Sermon Outline

Introduction: *Personal example:* Trial of case—waiting for verdict—Have I done well?—“The jury has reached its verdict”—nothing more you can do—then judgment comes. *Other examples:* election; marriage proposal; student’s examination, etc.

Rev 19:11-21 tells us about a verdict and judgment, with stakes infinitely higher than any lawsuit, election, marriage, examination; it is Jesus’ verdict on the world & the judgment he is going to render.

Organizational Sentence: Today we are going to look at this passage in 3 ways: first, to examine the details and symbols; second, to observe the principles that are being taught; third, to emphasize the applications for our lives.

I. Retelling the Passage:

A. Context of Revelation:

1. **Genre:** letter; prophecy; apocalyptic = understandable to audience.
2. **Historical context:** Roman Empire (AD 90-95). Like Uganda (Kenya, etc.):
 - *Organization*—large capital; mainly rural/agricultural; roads.
 - *Language*—one major language (Greek = English/Swahili, etc.) + other languages.
 - *Social*—multiple tribes/peoples; multiple religions (some persecution).
3. **Purposes:** encouragement + warning.

B. 19:11-21—Explanation of the major symbols:

1. **v. 11**—*White horse* = conquering hero—like victorious Roman general parading in Rome.
2. **v. 12**—*Eyes are flames of fire* = all-seeing; fire-judgment (**Rev 1:14; 2:18, 23**).
3. **v. 12**—*Many diadems* = crowns/royalty; “many” = more than any earthly king (**v. 16**).
4. **v. 13**—*Named WOG* = Jesus (**John 1:1**).
5. **v. 14**—*Armies wearing fine linen, white & clean* = Christians/the church (**Rev 19:7-8**).
6. **v. 15**—*Sharp sword* = WOG (**Rev 1:16; Heb 4:12**)—Just as he created in the beginning of history by the word, so he will judge and destroy at the end by the word.
7. **v. 15**—*Rod of iron* = Jesus has complete authority & power; all enemies will be totally destroyed (**Rev 2:27; Ps 2:9**).
8. **v. 17**—*Great supper of God* = counterpart to **Rev 19:9** (marriage supper of the Lamb)—the counterpart of *salvation is judgment*.

II. Principles:

A. There will be a day of final reckoning; it will affect the entire world and every person in it. (vv. 11-21)

B. Jesus is coming back to this earth; he will not come as the “meek and mild,” but as “King of Kings, and Lord of Lords” to “judge and wage war.” (v. 11-12, 16)

C. His judgment will be absolutely accurate, faithful, true and righteous. (v.11)

1. It will be all-searching, thorough and go to the absolute root of matters. (**v.12**)
2. It will be final. (**vv.11, 20-21**)
3. The standard for judgment is the Word of God. (**vv.13, 15**)

D. For those who are not his, it will be fearful beyond belief. (vv.13, 15, 17-21)

1. He not only judges but wages war. (**v.11**)
2. Doom will be final and horrible—there will be no “2nd Chance.” (**vv.15, 17-21**)

E. For those who are his, it will be triumphant. (v.14)

Faith, trust and commitment to him will be fully vindicated. (**vv.11, 14**)

Proposition: Be committed to Jesus now so you don’t fall under his judgment later.

III. Applications

A. If Jesus is not the Lord of your life, repent and turn to him.

1. **If you are doing well:** You know what is inside of you; you cannot change yourself from the inside-out.
2. **If you are poor and not doing well:** The God of the universe knows you have great value—because he came to earth in the person of Jesus, lived as a poor man, and died for you to give you new life.
3. **Explain the Gospel & works vs. grace:** Man’s religion = what we do for ourselves; the Gospel = what Christ has done for us.
 - The Resurrection demonstrates *who* he is and that he is alive today.

- He said that he would be coming back to the earth. (**Matt 24; Mark 13**).
- This passage tells us what will happen when he does return.

B. If Jesus is the Lord of your life, stay faithful to him.

How are we faithful?—LOVE: **Matt 22:36-40; John 13:34-35; 1 Cor 13; 1 Tim 1:5.**

1. Specific examples:

- “Cup of cold water” (**Matt 10:42**)
- “Generous & ready to share” (**1 Tim 6:18**)
- Helping the poor & needy and building the KOG (**Acts 4:32-35; 2 Cor 8:1-5; Gal 6:10; Jas 1:27**).
- Such acts of love = sewing together our “white robes” (**Rev 19:8**).

2. Remember:

- Our problems are nothing compared to what will happen to those who are not his.
- Our problems are nothing compared to the great good that will be ours.
- His eyes are a flame of fire—do what the Word of God says in all aspects of your life so that his return will be a time of triumph for you—this should *encourage* those who are living faithfully.

Conclusion: “Verdict” is from 2 Latin words which mean “to speak the truth.” Jesus will both speak the truth and execute judgment based on the truth. Make sure you are ready.

APPENDIX G

Ps 73:1-28—Literary Plot Model Sermon Outline

Introduction:

Don’t all of us wrestle with the problem of suffering from time-to-time? We lack money; yet ungodly people prosper. We suffer great illness; yet we see others in good health. We have tried to do the right thing, but do not seem to be achieving the things we have hoped and dreamed for; yet we see others flagrantly disregarding how the Bible says we should live, and seem to be happy and successful. In such times we feel much like Job, and ask the same questions that he asked:

- “Where are you, God?” and
- “What kind of God is this that allows evil and the ungodly to prosper, but the pure and godly—his own people—to suffer?” and
- “Is there no justice?”

Organizational sentence: Today we are going to step into the shoes of a man named Asaph who faced great unfairness and wrote **Psalm 73** to tell us about it. Let us walk through four movements of this psalm—its context, the crisis Asaph faced, the resolution of that crisis, and the implications and applications of this to our lives today—to see the insight God gives us when we see the wicked prospering.

I. Context

A. One of most important psalms

1. Begins Book III of the Psalter—middle.
2. Deals with an important problem that we all have to deal with.

B. Who is Asaph?

1. Levite: chief of sacred music, appointed by David to minister before the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle (**1 Chron 6:31-32, 39; 16:1-5**)
 2. Seer/prophet (**1 Chron 25:2; 2 Chron 29:30**)
- 12 psalms attributed to Asaph—more than any except those attributed to David.
- He was at the heart of Israel’s system of worship.
 - He knew what he was talking about.

II. Crisis (vv. 1-14)

v.1—“Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.” But is that true? What did he see?

A. What Asaph saw (vv. 2-14)

1. vv. 2-7—Not rich on outside but miserable on the inside, but rich/worldly/powerful on the outside and healthy/happy on the inside, with a trophy wife or husband to boot.
2. v. 6—What are they clothed with? Anything they want!
3. vv. 4, 7—“Fatness” = Success/health/wealth/happiness
4. vv. 8-9—Look at the self-satisfaction and arrogance:
 - “Set their mouth” “in,” “among,” or “against” (“butting up against” or “in opposition to”).
 - Tower of Babel is true after all—and God couldn’t stop it.

- “*Tongue parades*”—lapping up whatever they want.
- 5. **vv. 10-11**—Hebrew (v. 10) is difficult:
 - May refer to the worldly unbelievers or God’s people.
 - Perowne: “Broad and deep are the waters of sinful pleasures which they, in their infatuation, drink.” (J. J. Stewart Perowne, *The Book of Psalms, vol. 2 (Psalms 73-150)*, [London: George Bell and Sons, 1878; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1966], 11)
- 6. **v. 12**—Summary
- 7. **vv. 13-14**—Contrasts his own situation.
 - Muslim wealth and oppression of Christians—“Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart”

B. vv. 13-14:

1. We ended reading at v.14, but let’s retrace our steps a moment:
 - **v.1**—Asaph began with his fundamental proposition: “Surely God is good…” Begins almost the way **Ps 1** began: “*Blessed.*”
 - **vv. 2-3**—why he slipped a little: Because of what he saw—he had *looked outward* to *other people*.
 - **vv. 4-12**—What he saw: the arrogant/wicked/those far from God—how they prosper.
2. Then, beginning with v.13, Asaph looks inward, at himself:
 - **NOTICE: v.13**—“Surely” (Heb., *akh*), same word he began the psalm with in **v.1** = *A movement of the psalm*; but a movement *inward to despair*:
 - **v.3**—“Envious”= *self-centered, self-interest* at heart, vs. **v.13**—“Surely in vain”= *self-pity*
 - **v. 5**—“They’re not *plagued* like mankind,” vs. **v.14**—“I have been *stricken* (“afflicted, tormented, struck”) all day long” = *same word* (Heb., *negah*).
3. Self-centeredness will lead you to self-pity every time—if you don’t get what you want, and if your frame of reference is *horizontal*, i.e., *other people*, and:
 - They’re prospering, and you’re not.
 - they have big churches/ministries, and you don’t.
 - they have jobs, and you don’t.
 - they have *all the things you want* (money, success, respect, fame, influence, books, fill-in-the-blank), AND YOU DON’T.
4. He looks outward—he sees *success* of the ungodly; that’s not the way it’s supposed to be.
He looks inward—he sees *futility* and a *waste of life*; that’s not the way it’s supposed to be.

III. Resolution (vv. 15-28) *Let’s take a closer look at what Asaph is saying:*

A. vv. 15-17—turnaround/hinge is v. 17, but that turnaround began with a check/a resistance in v. 15.

1. **v. 15**—He faced a choice—but Asaph remembered his basic responsibilities and loyalties.
 - Doing the right thing—even when faced with grave doubts (Hemingway: Guts = “grace under pressure”).
 - Doubts and questions ≠ enemies of faith—the ungodly don’t ask such questions; they take the good for granted and whine or act dysfunctionally when things are bad.
 - Here: Doubts were because he took God seriously; they can be a catalyst of mature faith.
2. **v. 16**—Deep wrestling thought; no resolution, but:
3. **v. 17**—“Sanctuary”: Literal vs. figurative (probably both).
 - Asaph’s obedience despite his questions and doubts—his wrestling with the tough issue of how to reconcile the prosperity of the wicked and the apparent triumph of evil, with his own suffering, in light of God’s own goodness—paved the way for his great breakthrough that God gave him

What did God show him?

B. vv. 18-20—The true state of the ungodly from God’s perspective.

1. **v. 18**—“Surely”: Same Heb. word *akh* as in **vv. 1, 13**. *Another movement*—but now a movement *upward to God*.
2. Counterpart of vv. 4-12—That is how things *appeared* to Asaph; this is how they *are*.
 - *Devil and Daniel Webster*—souls of the ungodly depicted as moths; but not even that here—the ungodly are just like a DREAM.
3. The Great REVERSAL—IRONY:
 - **v.9**—“*They set*” up in heaven vs. **v.18**—“*You set*” in *slippery places* + “cast down.”
 - Only truly safe & secure with God; the only ones who slip are those away from God.
 - If you think your money, success, authority, looks, health, life itself will last—YOU’RE DREAMING
4. There IS justice! God’s stage is *larger*—his time-frame *longer*: BUT prosperity of worldly is *fleeting*. Their end will UNMAKE everything they’ve lived for; the ungodly/those not pure in heart, are living in a dream world; they will be suddenly swept away. That is their end.

C. vv. 21-26: The true state of the godly from God's perspective.

1. **vv.21-26**—Asaph receives a true picture of the godly.
 - A 2-part insight answer, and understanding from God regarding why “*Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart*”:
2. 1st part—**vv.21-22** = counterpart to **vv.13-14**.
 - Justice/judgment: *Negative* answer that deals with the *ungodly*.
3. **vv.23-26** = 2nd part of the insight/answer:
 - *Positive* answer that deals with the *godly*: *God himself is with them and he is their satisfaction both NOW and FOREVER*. This is true picture of the godly.
4. VERY PERSONAL.
5. SUFFICIENT—**vv.23-24** = Three Acts of God: (1) “*Hold*”; (2) “*Guide*”; (3) “*Receive*.”
6. Great IRONIC CONTRASTS with the words he uses; seen in the Hebrew:
 - **v.17**—“*their end*” vs. **v.24**—“*afterward*” = same root: (Heb., *ahar*).
 - **v.18**—“*slippery places*” vs. **v.26**—“*my portion*” (“*my allotment*”) = same root (Heb., *halaq*).
 - **v.12**—“*always*” vs. **v.26**—“*forever*” = same word (Heb., *olam*).

D. He brings this all to a conclusion in the last 2 verses:

1. Just as he began the Psalm similarly to **Psalm 1**, so Asaph ends much like **Psalm 1 (1:6)**.
2. **vv. 27-28**—See how far he's come and how far things have reversed:
 - He has found that the answer is not in the externals, not in one's circumstances, but in *God Himself*.
 - It's the difference between being *far from God* (v. 27), and *near to God* (v. 28).
3. See, again, how he brings this home with his use of IRONY AND CONTRAST—he uses the *same words and phrases* he used before, only now with his new understanding:
 - **v.12**—“*Behold, these are the wicked, always at ease*” vs. **v.27**—“*Behold, those who are far from you will perish*”
 - **v.2**—“*But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling*” vs. **v.28**—“*But as for me, the nearness of God is my good*”
4. **v. 28**—“*I have made the Lord God my refuge*”
 - “*Lord God*” ≠ *Adonai Elohim*, but *Adonai Yahweh* = God's *personal name* (**Exod 3:13-14**), which appears in this psalm for the 1st time right here: he can now call God by name.
5. Thus, Asaph concludes with personal counterpart to how he began:
 - **v.1**—“*Surely God is good to Israel*” vs. **v.28**—“*The nearness of God is my good.*”

Proposition: Despite outward appearances, God is our only true security and hope.

Implications/Conclusion:

A. Not surprising that Ps 73 is the beginning of Book III, the middle book, of the Psalms:

1. Looks back and echoes **Ps 1**.
2. It picks up from **Ps 72** which looked forward to the righteous king, to let us know that God himself is the righteous king who is ruling now and is our portion and refuge now.
3. It provides in advance the answer to the very next psalm, **Ps 74** which is a cry in anguish when the temple sanctuary had been destroyed.
4. Looks forward and anticipates the Psalms of Praise which end the Psalms.

B. We of the New Covenant can have even a greater experience of the truth of Ps 73 than Asaph had:

1. Asaph had to enter the sanctuary before he received his great insight.
2. We are the temple; we are the sanctuary (**1 Cor 6:19**).
 - In the Holy Spirit who indwells us (**John 14:16-17; 16:7**).
3. We have Him.
 - He said he would never leave us (**Heb 13:5; Matt 28:20**).
 - Nothing can pluck us out of his hand (**Rom 8:35-39**).
4. We have his body, the church (**1 Cor 12:12-27**).
 - He has adopted us into his own family (**Rom 8:15-16; 1 Tim 3:15; 5:1-2**).

C. Therefore, rejoice dear Christian, regardless of your circumstances:

1. God is not just near to you; he is in you—so stop comparing yourself to others.
 - God has chosen *you*—so what difference does it make if other people have certain material things that you do not have?
 - We will be living forever and have all things.
2. Keep an eternal perspective on things like Asaph saw in v. 17.
 - Most of the time our frame of reference is too short.
 - This world is temporary, but we tend to forget that what we do here will have consequences that will last forever (**Matt 10:24; 1 Tim 6:19**).

- Therefore, use the time to do good to others because you love Jesus (**Gal 6:10**).
- 3. Remain faithful—let him be your sufficiency, your portion, forever.
 - Doing what he knew to be right, even when he didn't see an immediate pay-off, is what kept Asaph from falling over the edge.
 - Doing what we know to be right, even though we do not see an immediate pay-off, will help us stay close to him, and—like Asaph—will help us to draw on his help when we face doubts, fears, and troubles.
 - Like Asaph, as we let Him *hold* us and *guide* us (Spirit; Word—**John 16:13**) he will *receive* us in glory (**John 14:3**).
- 4. Because he has adopted us into his family—the church, draw on the family for help, and help your family members.
 - Family takes care of its own.
 - Start “looking” at and treating other believers as your “real” mother, father, brother, sister (**1 Tim 5:1-2**).
 - Develop 1 or 2 Christian friends with whom you can be as close as earthly brothers or sisters.
 - Do something this week—e.g., invite that person to lunch; take him/her a gift—begin to forge a new, deeper relationship.
 - God knows we need deep relationships with people, just as we need a deep relationship with him, in order to cope with the troubles we have and injustices we see in this world—therefore, he has given us his family, the church, to help us: let us start making use of the family he has so abundantly given us.

APPENDIX H

Rev 19:11-21—Literary Plot Model Sermon Outline⁸

Introduction: Adventure stories/movies/books/stories from the past told by elderly family members.

Organizational Sentence: We are going to walk step-by-step through this passage and see how its truths apply to our lives.

I. Context (vv. 11-16)

- A. Christ is returning to earth.
- B. This has been foretold from the beginning of Revelation.
- C. All of history has been awaiting this moment.
- D. Names of the rider on the white horse (i.e., **vv. 11, 13, 16**).
- E. Pictures (description/characteristics) of the rider on the white horse (i.e., explain the symbols).

II. Crisis (vv. 17-19)

- A. Armies of the beast are drawn up against Christ.
- B. Symbolizes all who are not his but rebel against him.
- C. Beast and kings and all their armies assembled against one man—who is stronger?

III. Resolution (vv. 20-21)

- A. Although battle lines are drawn, no battle takes place.
- B. No one can stand against the returning Christ.
- C. Beast and false prophet captured; everyone else killed: destruction and shame.
- D. Nature of the great judgment.
- E. Jesus is the ultimate, final victor of all history!

Proposition: We must live in hopeful certainty of the victorious return of Christ.

Implications:

A. For the saved:

- 1. We can live in confidence
- 2. This confidence should encourage us to persevere in our faith, especially when our circumstances are very difficult.

B. For the unsaved:

- 1. Great judgment is coming, such as the world has never before seen.
- 2. If you do not know Christ, repent and surrender to him now.

⁸ This brief Literary Plot outline shows how the same passage of Scripture may be preached using different organizational formats (compare this with the EPA outline of the same passage [Appendix F]).

APPENDIX I

1 Sam 30:1-31—Me-We-God-You-We Model Sermon Outline

I. Introduction (Me/We)

A. *My situation—taking care of/cleaning the house.*

1. “Has it come to this?”—no longer making money, etc.
2. What Jesus accomplished in 3 years vs. me.
3. Feelings of worthlessness/meaninglessness.

B. *Such feelings probably not limited to me.*

1. Stay-at-home moms/homemakers—feel trapped: “I have no life.”
2. Man (or woman) in a job you can’t stand.
3. Students: “Why am I taking chemistry? I’ll never use it.”
4. Retirees: “Life has passed me by—never see the children anymore.”
5. Christians: “Where is God? I don’t see him.”

Interesting passage of Scripture that might help us when we are prone to think this way—1 Samuel 30

Proposition: What this passage is telling us is that: “*God rewards faithfulness.*”

- Even the little things are *not forgotten* and can be *very important*.

Organizational Sentence: Let us walk through this passage section-by-section and see how God rewards faithfulness.

II. Biblical Exposition (God)

A. *Background (vv. 1-6) [READ]*

1. Ziklag (1 Samuel 27)—David flees Saul; lives with Philistines >1 yr.; given Ziklag (east of Gaza).
2. Philistines going to battle against Saul & Israel (1 Sam 29:1).
 - David in a very tough situation.
 - Even when he lived with Philistines, David had not attacked Israel (1 Sam 27:8-12).
 - What we do in times of stress is a very good indication of what we really believe, & whether we are truly faithful or not.
3. God rewards David’s faithfulness.
 - The Philistine commanders mistrusted David (1 Sam 29:2-3).
 - God rewarded David’s faithfulness to Israel—even though David was estranged from Israel, God provided a way out from attacking his own people.
4. 1 Sam 30:2-6—Ziklag sacked; wives taken; David’s men so distressed they want to stone David.
 - How often we give into despair and fail to see God’s provision for us.
 - David didn’t lash back, but accepted responsibility & found strength in the Lord.
 - African proverb: “In weeping a leader must still open his eyes to see the road.”
 - As salt and light all Christians are leaders: to lead people to Christ; to show them the right way to live—by word and example. God honors that faithfulness.
5. vv. 7-10 [READ]
 - *Ephod* = kilt; high priest had urim & thummim to discern God’s will.
 - **vv. 9-10**—the 200 who remained—Exhausted, but played a vital function, as we will see later.

B. *vv. 11-20—The Battle [READ]*

1. vv. 11-15—the Egyptian: “God rewards faithfulness” (both ways).
 - *The Egyptian* got his life by giving information.
 - *David/Israel* got vital information they needed—David could have killed him (he was foreigner & member of an enemy raiding party); he showed compassion instead (see **Matt 10:42**).
 - Don’t be so focused on the “big things” in this life, or what we want to do for God, that we neglect the seemingly small things and “unimportant people.”
 - God has a plan for them (us) and the “big things” may *hinge on their contribution* (“For want of a nail”)—here, David’s victory hinged on this seemingly unimportant, sick Egyptian.
 - Compare the difference between David’s compassion to an enemy & the *lack of compassion* shown by the Egyptian’s Amalekite master to his own slave—that lack of compassion came back to slaughter the Amalekites—truly, “God rewards faithfulness.”

C. *vv. 21-25—The Immediate Aftermath [READ]*

1. David recognized that “God rewards faithfulness” (v. 23—“*the Lord has given us*” the victory).
2. The 200 vs. the 400:
 - *The 200 were exhausted but were faithful in what they had*—they guarded the equip. (v. 24).
 - *They also acted as a rear guard*—Ziklag had been taken because David had *not* stationed any fighting

- men to guard the city.
 - In the battle for souls, some go out (missions); others are needed to stay and provide the funding; others are needed to stay and take care of the home.
 - *The 400 who fought were selfish*—as long as they thought they would get it, the spoils were “*David’s spoil*” (v. 20)—they demonstrate that *our money revels what we are really like*.
 - *The 400 were also shortsighted*—in future battles the 200 would be needed (and some of the 400 might be the guards)—but they were willing to have 1/3 of David’s army leave.
3. “God rewards faithfulness,” *but he uses his people to do so.*
- Here God used David both to *articulate a policy* and to *carry it out*.
 - David had credibility because he didn’t hoard his plunder—*he led by example*.

D. vv. 26-31—The Long-term results [READ]

1. David also shared the spoil with the elders of Judah.
2. He also shared spoil with his friends in “*all the places where David himself and his men were accustomed to go*” (v. 31).
 - When David was on the run from Saul, these people had shown him friendship & hospitality.
 - They had been faithful to him, possibly at the risk of their lives.
 - They had probably not expected any reward, and may have even forgotten about the kind acts they had done.

III. Applications and Vision/Conclusion (You/We)

A. Applications (You)

1. All situations—even the seemingly insignificant ones, like the 200 exhausted men & the sick Egyptian—are important.
 - If you are faithful in the little things, God does not forget or overlook that (**Luke 16:10**).
2. What appears to us to be unimportant may be a necessary link in a chain leading to a very large & important outcome (“For want of a nail”).
3. This perspective should show us that our seemingly meaningless lives at home or school or work are not meaningless at all—but are invested with meaning.
 - We may not see the fruit/reward for a long time (like those in Bethel, Ramoth, and Jattir), but we do not lose heart.
4. Because God uses his people to reward faithfulness, we can look for acts of faithfulness of others (like David did), and *encourage, recognize, and reward them*.
5. Let’s try this week to recognize and acknowledge—even reward—just *one act of faithfulness* by someone else—*Who knows where this may lead?*

B. Vision/Conclusion (We)

What if we all started thinking and acting this way?

1. A lot less whining and “poor me.”
2. Co-workers, fellow students, friends may notice that I don’t give in to despair or bitterness like so many others—and that may give me a natural way to talk to them about Jesus.
3. Think of how strengthening and encouraging it would be if we recognized the faithfulness of others:
 - The world doesn’t do that.
 - That is where the church can be so different from the world.
4. “God rewards faithfulness”—He hasn’t forgotten or overlooked us. He wants to use us as his instruments to honor the faithfulness of others.

APPENDIX J

http://cecl.glcc.org/PDF/Lori_Carrell/sermons%20likley%20to%20succeed.pdf

SERMONS MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED

By LORI CARRELL

Do sermons actually change beliefs and behavior? An ongoing study reveals hard facts.

New research is discovering the characteristics of sermons that create lasting impact. The investigation began with surveys and interviews contrasting listener and pastor perspectives in 102 churches across the country. Currently the project, supported by a Lilly grant in conjunction with the Center for Excellence in Congregational Leadership at the Green Lake Conference Center, has deepened as 52 Protestant pastors and their 5,000-plus listeners participate in an extensive process of sermon communication analysis. A central finding of the research to date is that listeners value preaching, asserting that the sermon is the component of the church service most likely to impact their spiritual growth. In fact, listeners love their preachers and declare statistically what one respondent articulated in her written comment, “Pastor ain’t broke—don’t fix him!” At the same time, listeners’ responses also reveal that it’s the rare sermon that creates lasting change. Pastors and listeners agree that such change is the desired result of sermon communication, and yet it’s unusual. An analysis of these

rare sermons that are “most likely to succeed” in the challenging task of spiritual transformation reveals the following characteristics.

Successful Sermons Ask for Change

Successful sermons are built around a clearly stated change based goal that emanates from Scripture; for example, “Listeners will pray for their enemies” (Matthew 5:46-48). In less transformative sermons, a desired response may be implied or informative (“understand grace”), but listeners can’t discern a clear call to change. Interestingly, the research demonstrates that listeners are still satisfied with sermons that don’t ask them to change, but they acknowledge that the result is reinforcement, not growth. In lower-impact sermons, a majority of preaching time is spent on explanation, creating sermons that are more informative than transformative. In addition the listeners’ responses indicate that what’s being explained is already known to them. If listeners already agree with sermon content, how can they be expected to change? Successful sermons move believers to action. Rather than merely motivating a desire to be different (for example, “Yes, I’d like to be more forgiving”), sermons with lasting impact develop practical implementation ideas, proclaiming the power and grace of God to enable that spiritual growth. Whether the action plan is illustrated through stories or specific steps, a call to change is most likely to be successful when “how to” ideas are included.

Successful Sermons Are Organized for Listening

Successful sermons are sermons listeners can remember. Organization of ideas is key to this memory process. According to listeners, well-organized sermons that aid recall are rare. For many preachers, the passage itself provides structure, verse two comes after verse one, so they “preach through the passage,” expounding on ideas they encounter. Such an approach can be experienced as a conceptual hodgepodge that listeners call rambling. If content seems disjointed, listening energy, retention, and activation possibilities decrease. When asked what makes a sermon difficult to process and remember, the #1 answer from listeners was “disorganization.”

Following exegesis, preachers who preach sermons with lasting impact spend preparation time *organizing the ideas in ways that listeners can process*. Such sermons are structured for oral-aural communication; that is, the preacher talks and the listeners hear. Choosing a listener-oriented structure for the sermon is a critical leadership task for pastors as they seek to guide listeners toward spiritual growth. Basic components of sermons organized for listeners include:

- **an attention-getting opening to focus listeners’ thinking on a clearly articulated subject;**
- **a specific, spiritual-growth goal delineated in the introduction;**
- **two or three connected, memorably worded main points;**
- **conceptual links between the main points that move listeners from one idea to the next;**
- **a concise review that doesn’t include extraneous information; and**
- **a compelling final statement connected to the spiritual-growth goal.**

Listener-oriented sermons *stay focused, providing depth*. Organizing information for auditory processing also includes discipline in content selection so that sermons are deep rather than wide. Wide sermons are characterized by too many points, shallow topic treatment, over-explaining, familiar ideas presented as novel, repetitive subject matter, tangents, or unnecessary length. With wide sermons, listening energy is diminished, as is the potential for lasting impact. Deep sermons are rich with focused content that:

- **stays clearly linked to the Scripture;**
- **obviously connects to the delineated change goal;**
- **provides insight;**
- **balances intellect and emotion;**
- **delineates implementation ideas; and**
- **declares the grace and power of God to enable change.**

Successful Sermons Are Well-Delivered

Sermons most likely to succeed may be preached by preachers with vastly different delivery styles, from a soft spoken, compassionate pastor to a proclaimer who sets the back pew aflame with zeal. The commonality is a delivery that authentically communicates relationship and emotion.

Less than 2 percent of the pastors surveyed rehearse sermons orally. When weighing demands on their time, pastors reveal that sermon delivery is not a priority. Listeners have a different perspective, reporting that delivery does matter. In particular, some delivery behaviors (such as reading or predictable expression) make it seem to listeners that the pastor “just doesn’t care.” How we say what we say communicates relational and emotional meanings, intentional or not.

The way a pastor speaks the sermon’s words communicates the very heart of God for God’s people. Delivery also communicates the pastor’s emotion related to listeners, the topic, and the act of preaching.

Sometimes pastors who are working hard to preach (or teach) sermons in which they “explain things in a clear, casual, and accessible way” unintentionally weaken word power. In the part of this research designed to identify the “unique excellence” of preachers, “powerful and compelling language usage” was the rarest strength. Word selection impacts listeners’ memory and motivation. Listeners crave “inspiration” as a part of what helps them grow spiritually; listeners also identify sermons with powerful word usage as more inspirational than those that are comprised primarily of explanatory language. Artfulness with words that create vivid visual images; thought provocation with words that construct metaphors for complex spiritual processes; soul-stirring with compelling words that evoke emotion through alliteration, parallelism, and onomatopoeia—all can be found not just in sermons with lasting impact, but also in the public

communication of Jesus.

Successful Sermons Integrate Listeners' Perspectives

Sermons that honor and integrate listeners' lives are most likely to be successful in their ultimate aim. While pastors express concern that the loud call of listeners for "relevancy" could be a call away from Scripture, listeners describe their desire for connection much differently. Because 78 percent of the listeners have never talked with their pastors about a sermon, it's no wonder that perspectives on this matter differ dramatically. Most of the pastors and parishioners don't talk before or after sermons about those sermons, and yet all are expecting life-change outcomes. As a result many pastors prepare sermons based on general assumptions about listeners (for example, an estimated percentage of "seekers") but proceed with no specific understanding of listeners' perspectives on the selected topic or passage.

How can preachers move beyond assumption when connecting content to listeners? A process associated with successful sermons is a pre-sermon dialogue group in which the pastor "listens to listeners." During such dialogues the pastor's preparation is enhanced by listeners' discussions of how the upcoming sermon passage or topic intersects with their spiritual journeys. This research is demonstrating that such listening sessions can increase the transformative quality of sermon communication by...

- **generating fresh sermon ideas (a top need according to pastors);**
- **increasing sermon relevancy (a top need according to listeners);**
- **increasing energy given to listening during sermon communication;**
- **increasing specificity and depth of informal feedback received by pastors after the sermon; and**
- **energizing pastors personally and professionally with listener support and prayer during sermon preparation.**

Yes, sermons can change beliefs and behavior, yet there's much to learn from the listeners and preachers participating in this study of transformative sermon communication. May this first wave of findings illuminating characteristics of sermons that are "most likely to succeed" provoke your thinking, intensify your praying, and enhance your lasting impact.

LORI CARRELL, Ph.D., (*Professor of Communication Education at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh*) is author of *The Great American Sermon Survey (1999)* and is currently conducting research on "Transformative Sermon Communication" among participants in the Center for Excellence in Congregational Leadership with the support of a Lilly Endowment, the Green Lake Conference Center, and the UW system.

APPENDIX K

http://cecl.glcc.org/PDF/Lori_Carrell/wasting%20time.pdf

ARE YOU WASTING YOUR SERMON PREP TIME?

By LORI CARRELL

Kneading a stress ball in one hand and nervously tapping a foot, my pastor friend gave a quick response when I asked about his sermon preparation: "I can't find more time, so there's no reason to talk about it!" For all who preach, sermon prep pressure is a relentless reality. A recent Google search for "saving sermon preparation time" resulted in more than 50,000 responses. But our research reveals that instead of trying to prepare a sermon in less time, it's more important to ask, "How can I best use whatever preparation time I have?" A group of preachers enrolled in the Lilly-endowed Center for Excellence in Congregational Leadership at the Green Lake Conference Center and their thousands of listeners are graciously allowing us an unprecedented opportunity to learn from their experiences. We believe with them that sermon communication should regularly result in visible and lasting changes in peoples' lives. So we're trying to determine what works, using listeners' feedback as a measure of impact. In this part of the study, pastors carefully documented their sermon preparation time and activities as they worked to maximize the transformative power of their preaching. What we discovered is that *how* preachers use their preparation time matters more than *how much* time they use.

Common Practices

You may be just a little curious about how your sermon prep compares to the common practices of other preachers. The first thing you should know is that pastors who select topics months in advance and those who wait for Saturday night inspiration are unanimous about one thing: There is *never* enough prep time.

How long does it take most preachers to prepare their sermons?

While the times range from five to 20 hours, the average prep time is consistently between 12 and 13 hours a week. But many preachers described "living with" a text all week—while taking a shower, steering a stubborn committee, or squeezing that stress ball.

What do preachers do during those hours of sermon prep time?

Nearly all spent the majority of their preparation time alone, studying Scripture and writing an outline or manuscript. Activities in the "studying Scripture" category include exegesis, examining various versions of a passage, cross-referencing, commentary reading, and word studies. Other common practices include revising (57 percent), internal rehearsing (47 percent), reading related books (47 percent), and creating visuals (36 percent).

Uncommon Solutions

As this research study progressed, pastors implemented new sermon preparation practices to make their preaching more transformative. While the amount of time they spent stayed the same, they did change the way they used their time. Pastors decreased the amount of time spent reading related books, viewing related media, and revising. What did they do instead? Here are the four prep practices that helped them create sermons listeners experienced as more transformative.

1) Discernment of a clear sermon goal

“My primary challenge was to be more intentional and focused on what the sermon is asking of the people.”

Can you name the response goals of your last three sermons? Could your listeners? Many pastors are only able to name sermon topics, Scripture passages, or ideas that listeners should now *understand*. Pastors in the study reported that having a clear goal shapes their thinking throughout the prep process. First, as you study Scripture, work toward a clear, compelling, text-connected subject. Once this subject is formulated, allow a specific, high-expectation response goal to emerge. Prep time spent formulating a spiritual growth goal reduces revision time and results in more focused content. Prep time used in this way pays off in listener-perceived impact.

2) Personal spiritual growth activities

“I needed to leave room for the Holy Spirit to work.”

Several pastors recognized that they had been neglecting their own spiritual journeys. Those who made changes in this area of sermon preparation spoke of experiencing an increased sense of integrity, inspiration, and invigoration. The specific discernible changes in preaching that accompanied this uncommon prep practice varied: For some, self-disclosure increased because transparency had been lacking, while for others, self-disclosure decreased as ego diminished. Regardless of the specific alterations, as preachers spend more time in meditation, journaling, or personal devotions, listeners report a stronger impact of the sermon on *their* spiritual lives.

3) Oral rehearsal

“As the years roll by, I’m distracted from sermon prep by exhausting engagements—and by pride. Thinking I know what I’m doing, I spend less and less time preparing. I didn’t think I needed oral rehearsal. I was good enough.”

Most pastors resist spending precious prep time polishing delivery. While it’s true that oral rehearsal enhances language usage and fluency, that’s not the key significant finding. Changing from *internal* rehearsal (“going over it in my head”) to *oral* rehearsal affects organization. Speaking out loud helps preachers clarify main ideas, maintain focus, avoid tangents, construct transitions, make introductions and conclusions more concise and compelling, and make better use of their sermon prep time. What do listeners say? Better organized sermons are more transformative sermons.

4) Dialogue with others

“I spend too much time dealing with self-doubt as I wonder about the value of what I’m doing. I need fresh ideas. I wait for inspiration but then have to push to get it done. It’s a lonely process.”

For the small sample of pastors who talk about upcoming sermon content with their spouses, listeners, or other pastors, impact is increased. Because so few pastors make time for this activity, this revelation is the most tentative. But take note: As listeners beg for relevancy and preachers long to freshen the familiar, engaging in pre-sermon dialogues with parishioners can invigorate sermon preparation and impact. Intentional conversations with spouses and peers (even via email) also appear to make a difference. Sermon communication is *public* discourse; a solitary prep experience may not be adequate.

Do you want your sermons to have greater impact? You may not have more time to spend in sermon preparation, but you can spend that time differently. Such changes are hard work. One pastor says, “We ask people to change every week, but changing my preaching habits was more difficult than I ever imagined.” As you work to manage the pressure and maximize the power, consider these uncommon prep practices, and pray for uncommon results.

LORI CARRELL is professor of communication at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. She continues her research with CECL pastors (cecl.glcc.org). Check out “Dr. Lori’s Blog” at askgodtv.com

APPENDIX L

http://cecl.glcc.org/PDF/Lori_Carrell/not%20so%20simple%20sermon%20solutions.pdf

NOT-SO-SIMPLE SERMON SOLUTIONS

By **LORI CARRELL**

Looking for quick tips to revolutionize the power of your preaching? Look no further—because they don’t exist. As our sermon communication research continues, one thing becomes clear: There are no simple solutions. Instead think disciplined, long-term commitment, not tweaking. Do you believe that preaching should regularly result in the transformation of lives, churches, communities, and culture? *Your* preaching, not just preaching in general? Are you ready to take up the challenge of enhancing the transformative power of your preaching? If so, here are the not-so-simple steps—most of which require the participation of a trusted friend.

Perceive Preaching as a Priority

Any change requires motivation. For example, if you're satisfied with five extra pounds, they'll never come off. A pastor recently admitted that his expectations had lowered over the years, so that now his sermons seemed like "maintenance work." Listeners across the country would be disappointed to hear this. They expect preaching to be their pastors' most important leadership task. What are your expectations? You're asked to stand in for Jesus and speak the very word of God. Are you sobered or satisfied? The catalyst for change is often crisis, but a deep conviction about your call can also be motivating. Did God call you to preach? Revisit that experience.

Get Real About Results

If you want to make changes in your preaching, begin by enlisting the help of a friend and designating a period of time to gather information and feedback. It's important to do the following activities for a number of Sundays if you want to effectively analyze your sermon preparation and its results.

Evaluate your sermon-prep process.

Just as a dieter keeps track of food and exercise, you need to log your prep time and processes. What are you doing during preparation time? How long are you doing it? Do you ruminate when driving? Are you fueled when listening to music? How does prayer intersect with the process? To discern what's working for you, discuss your prep patterns with the friend who's agreed to partner with you.

Videotape and view your sermons.

Even if you need to borrow or buy equipment and train someone to videotape your sermons, get it done. Keep in mind that a poor quality tape won't be of much use (imagine yourself as a small blur behind the pulpit). Now here's the tough part: Get a bowl of popcorn and that faithful friend and watch your sermons. Work to experience the tapes as a listener, not an evaluator. Ask, "How did God speak through this preacher?" Journal your reflections and then discuss them.

Request and review listeners' responses.

Include a short survey in the bulletin, asking listeners to give you feedback on their responses to your sermons (this isn't meant to be a critique of your preaching). Pose an open-ended query such as "What's your response to this sermon?" or list a few questions to which listeners can agree or disagree. For example, "I was reminded of something I already believed; I plan to take action as a result of this sermon; or I have made a decision to change my beliefs." Let listeners remain anonymous, and solicit someone to compile the responses. Review the compilation with your committed companion, looking for themes.

Create a Strength-Based Action Plan

With faith that God has called you to preach, review your results to discern your preaching strengths. In our research study's consulting process, we work to determine a "unique excellence" for each preacher, such as any of the following: authenticity, clarity, compassion, courage, creativity, implementation practicality, insightfulness, inspirational delivery, intellectual acuity, interactive style, language usage, sincerity of belief, storytelling, thought-provocation, vision, or wisdom. Even though you don't have a consulting team, your trusted friend can be of great help in clarifying your primary strengths. While you may be inclined to focus your action plan on your weaknesses, our successful system asks you to start with strengths as you prayerfully delineate a change goal for your preaching. Here are several samples from the pastors in our study:

- *Building on my unique excellence in storytelling, I will work to more frequently incorporate narrative as a centerpiece of my sermons or as supporting material.*
- *Building on my unique excellence to provide insight and provoke thought, I will work to apply those skills not only to exegesis but also to implementation suggestions that my growth-hungry listeners desire.*
- *Building on my unique excellence in linear reasoning, I'll continue to provide a linear summary to maintain the clarity that so many appreciate—but I will also work to include a variety of organizational patterns for the content of my sermons. This will increase the energy and attention of listeners who think and learn differently than I do.*

Commit to Supportive Accountability

Back to that diet analogy again. If someone checks the scale with you once a week, you're more likely to attain your goal. Personal trainers and Weight Watchers "buddies" improve results. Finding preaching buddies may seem like too much trouble for isolation-prone pastors, but this step is crucial. Those pastors in our study whose preaching has become more transformative have been accountable to a team or a partner, supporting each other through the process of change.

So find another preacher to be your accountability partner. Schedule preaching chats, even if you have to connect through email, and commit to praying for each other's preaching impact. Also seek a group of pastors with whom to meet for dialogue about preaching. Theological minutia or turf issues in the way? Says a newly collaborative pastor, "Get over it. You can't be the only pastor in your community following Christ...this is kingdom work. Are you in?"

You may still be asking, "Are you *sure* there isn't something simpler? After all, I'm trusting the Holy Spirit to do God's work with whatever I offer from the pulpit." But before you decide you're satisfied with this approach, ask yourself, "Have I done all I can possibly do with the gifts and skills God has provided?" After four months of action plan implementation,

one participant emailed this note: “I’ve been preaching this way a long time. Changing has been a real struggle, but then it hit me—I ask people to change every week.”

LORI CARRELL is professor of communication at the University of Wisconsin. She’s beginning a new phase of sermon research that includes preacher and listener communication training. This article is seventh in a series on results from the Lily-Endowed Center for Excellence in Congregational Leadership study. Rev! subscribers can access the previous articles in the back-issue library at Rev.org.

THE AUTHOR



Jonathan Menn lives in Appleton, WI, USA. He received a B.A. in political science from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, with honors, in 1974, and was inducted into the Phi Beta Kappa honor society. He then earned a J.D. from Cornell Law School, magna cum laude, in 1977, and was inducted into the Order of the Coif legal honor society. He spent the next 28 years practicing law, as a civil trial attorney, in Chicago and then as a partner at the Menn Law Firm in Appleton, WI. He became a believer and follower of Jesus Christ in 1982. An increasing love for theology and ministry led to his pursuing a Master of Divinity at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, IL. He received his M.Div. from TEDS, summa cum laude, in May 2007. Between 2007-2013 he was the East Africa Director of Equipping Pastors International. Now Jonathan is the Director of Equipping Church leaders-East Africa (www.ecler.net). His extensive written teaching materials on biblical subjects are available at www.ecler.net. Jonathan may be contacted at: jonathanmenn@yahoo.com.