

How to Prepare & Present a Sermon

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I. Intro

- A. Tonight we're going to talk about how to prepare and present a sermon.
1. We are blessed here to have so many men who have abilities and experience presenting sermons. It's a great blessing to the congregation to have so many men are willing to do that. As all of those men know who've been up here, there's a lot that goes into sermon preparation. It takes a lot time and thought, but you learn so much every time you do it.
 - a. Tonight we're going to build on that and hone those skill even more as we talk about the actual nuts and bolts of sermon preparation.
 - b. I recognize there are a lot of people in this room who have never presented a sermon. I recognize there are a lot of women here who don't present public sermons. But we felt that this lesson would be helpful for everyone here. Because most of us teach in some kind of capacity. The women lead ladies Bible classes and studies. We teach individuals as well.
 - c. The things that I'm going to talk about will help you organize your thoughts and will help with any kind of teaching.
 2. What I'm doing tonight is not going to be a sermon. It's really more of a "How To" class. I am going to be presenting steps that I find helpful. I realize there are a lot of different ways to prepare and present a sermon, so if I give some suggestions and they don't work for you, feel free to discard them.
- B. First I want to lay some scriptural groundwork.

4 I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom:²preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching

- C. In this verse Paul lays down the basics of preaching.
1. Preach the word. It starts with the word. I need to take God's word.
 2. Then I need to help other people apply it to their lives. That's where the rebuke, reprove, and exhort comes in. Exhort means to strongly urge someone. By preaching

the word I need to help them identify their sins and help them chart a new course for their life. Basically, it needs to bring about a change.

- D. Most of the sermons in the Bible fit this format. The sermons in the book of Acts definitely fit this.
- E. Now I can mess this up in 1 of 2 ways.
 - 1. First I could fail to have enough of God's word in my sermon. If the sermon was mostly about my own opinions and my experiences, then that wouldn't follow what Paul's saying. This is immediately after the great verse about God inspiring the word. God breathed this word, it's really important that I preach it.
 - a. Now that involves me understanding the text. What we're talking about tonight is going to build on all of the techniques that we've discussed for studying the Bible. I need to be a good Bible student. Have you ever sat through a sermon and thought, "I don't think this guy really understands what these verses are saying."? That's a really dangerous thing.
 - 2. Or I can fail to apply it (reprove, rebuke, exhort). I could read to you a lot of scripture, but if I don't help you make the application then I wouldn't be preaching like Paul describes preaching. But someone says, "Isn't God's word supposed to do the rebuking?" Yes, but I have to point out that rebuke to people. People don't always naturally see it.
 - a. In Acts 2, Peter could have just gotten up and read some scriptures, but some of the people there might not have understood what he was trying to say. So he had to explain those scriptures. He had to end his sermon by saying, "Therefore God has made him Lord and Christ, this Jesus who you crucified." Now Peter wasn't really saying anything that those scriptures hadn't already said, but he had to help the people make the personal application or else they might have never gotten it.
- F. So tonight I am going to share some techniques for writing and presenting a sermon that will accomplish what this verse describes.

II. Step 1: Come up with an idea

- A. It may be a scripture that I'm interested in or it may be a concept. At this point it can be vague. I might say, "I want to preach something about overcoming temptation."
- B. Before I start researching it, I should ask myself a few questions to make sure this idea is going to work:
 - 1. Will this be helpful for people? In one sense, if it's God's word, it's always good for us, but at the same time there are some topics that are more needed than others. If

you were preaching to a bunch of people who didn't have kids you wouldn't preach about how to raise kids. Think about how this topic could help people.

2. Am I the right person to present this sermon?
 - a. There are a few times where it might be a great topic, but I'm not going to be able to adequately present it.
 - b. Sometimes that's because I'm really struggling with it. If I have a real anger problem, then I probably shouldn't get up and present a sermon on anger. I could go home and study it and even prepare a sermon on anger. That would help me. But maybe that would be good for me to present a year from now when I've learned how to overcome my anger problems and it's not so much of a daily struggle anymore.
 - c. Would people listen to me? Sometimes because of my age, my reputation, or my stage in life there are certain people who won't listen to what I have to say. The church still needs to hear that preached, but maybe it's not a good time for me to do that preaching.
 - d. Would I be able to research it? Sometimes it's a great topic, but it's just over my head. I don't have the experience to do that kind of in-depth research to adequately deal with this issue.
 - e. Am I excited about it? It's much better to preach about something that you're passionate about.
- C. Finally, pray about it.

III. Step #2: Do the research

- A. Don't shortchange yourself on this step. Really spend some time on it. One of the blessings of presenting a sermon is how much it helps the teacher grow. Don't just say something you already know. Spend the time to really learn something here. That will help you and it will help your hearers.
- B. There are two general ways to prepare sermons:
 1. Textual – You just take a single text and preach from that. That could be a single verse. It could be a chapter. Or it could be a few chapters.
 2. Topical – This is where you take lots of verses and put them all together to make your sermon.

C. Textual

1. Choose a section of scripture that represents your topic well and then study it to death. Use all of the techniques that we talked about in the last couple weeks.
2. Your goal is to understand what the author is trying to teach us. You may go in thinking that Paul is saying one thing, but after you study it a lot you may find out that's not quite exactly what he's emphasizing.
3. Preaching on a single chapter works well. It typically gives you enough material to write a sermon while keeping your research from being too overwhelming.
4. Study the context. If you're going to preach on a chapter study the previous chapter and the next chapter to understand the flow of thought.
5. Write down the points that the author is making in that chapter. Don't just look for what helps you with this sermon, but understand the whole message that this particular chapter teaches. That's going to add a richness to your sermon.
6. Basically, learn what God has to say.

D. Topical

1. Both of those can make very good sermons, but I would actually say that the textual style can be an easier route to a better sermon.
 - a. That's because there are lot more pitfalls with a topical sermon. It's easy for a topical sermon to have a lot of scriptures and yet come from my head instead of from God's word.
 - b. Here's how that happens. I say, "I'm going to preach a sermon about money." Let's see, what are the points I could make about money?
 - i. How about, "Money causes greed," "Money is useful," and "Money causes arguments." I could probably find you scriptures to support each of those points, but am I really presenting the Holy Spirit's message when I do that? No, it was all born out of my own thinking and then I just put some scriptures on it as a stamp of God's approval.
 - ii. The other challenge of topical sermons is that it's really easy to pull a verse out of context. If I'm looking for a verse that says, "Money causes arguments," I might find it, but if I looked at the wider context it might actually be saying something else.
2. In order to do a topical sermon well, I need to find all the scriptures that apply to that topic, see what they all mean in their context and then present them in a way that accurately represents God's message. I need to emphasize the things that God emphasizes.

- a. Now with most topics that would just take too long. If I search for the word “faith” in the Bible that would be way to large of a study, but if I wanted to preach about “atonement” that might be more manageable.
- b. I could make my life easier by limiting my scope. I could preach a sermon on what Jesus teaches about money in the book of Luke. That’s a limited scope, but it’s still being honest with the Bible. I’m letting the Holy Spirit’s inspiration of the book of Luke guide me in what to say and not say rather than my own biases guide me into what to say and not say.
- c. By putting those verses together I’m learning something. I’m discovering what God’s word says. I came into this thinking that everything God said about money was negative, now I see that he has positive things to say about money, but they’re not the things I would have expected. Now this sermon is really helping me and therefore it’s also really going to help my hearers.

IV. Step #3: Write an outline

- A. At this point, you have a lot of notes about what the Bible teaches. Now you need to figure out how to present that to your audience. If you did your research well, you may have too much information. So you’re really going to have to narrow it down.
- B. Start by thinking of the thesis. What do I really want people to go away thinking?
 - 1. For example I might preach a sermon on Joshua 1 called, “Be Strong and Courageous.” The main point that I want to get across could be, “We can be strong when God is with us.” That’s the thing I want people to go away remembering. They need to be able to say, “The preacher said I can be strong when God is with me.”
 - 2. It makes it easier if my thesis is the main point of the text that I’m presenting. But sometimes the sermon will just focus on a particular aspect of the text and so my main point will be more of a sub point in the text.
- C. Then start building your main points. The sub points should again come from the text or texts that you studied. They don’t have to be in the same order, but they should all be things that the Bible teaches.
 - 1. The sub points need to lead the audience towards your main point.
 - 2. So in Joshua 1 maybe my sub points could be:
 - “I can gain strength from God’s promises”
 - “I can gain strength from God’s word”

“I can gain strength from God’s people”

3. Then in my conclusion I could show how all of that is because God is with us.

D. Now I might also create some sub points. Under the “promises” point I could put:

Promise to Moses

Promise to Abraham

Promise that God will be with Joshua

Application: Promises that God has given to us today

1. I probably wouldn’t show all those sub points to people on my PowerPoint. That might make my sermon feel too complicated, but writing down those sub points will help me write this sermon. Now these are sub points, so I’m not going to be able to spend much time on each of them when I present my sermon.

E. I could also make this sermon more complex or interesting by dividing it into two halves:

The need for strength

Moses is dead

Things from the rest of Joshua: Battles, temptations, etc.

The reason for strength

God’s promises

God’s word

God’s people

1. It’s nice when you can create a need before you give people the answer. Also, sometimes sermons that are divided in half create a more engaging presentation.

2. Be creative with the outline. You don’t have to do just 3 or 4 simple points. Sometimes a different style of outline can create a very interesting sermon.

V. Step #4: Review the outline

A. This is your chance to spot all the problems in your sermon before you start writing it. If this sermon isn’t going to work well, then you need to figure that out now.

B. You can start with your initial questions like, “Is this still going to be helpful for the church?” “Am I still excited about it?”

C. Then start analyzing how this sermon is going to present to the audience.

1. Do each of the points lead the audience towards your main point?
2. Will it hold people's attention? Are the points so similar that people are going to fall asleep by the time I get to the third point? Do the points seem so predictable that the audience already knows what's coming up?
 - a. Sometimes you can make your sermons more interesting by adding some suspense. If you start with a question and then don't answer it until the end, sometimes that keep people paying attention. That can be difficult to do and it only work with certain sermons.
 - b. Sometimes you can write your outline where it leads people on a journey. Each point smoothly leads to the next point and takes people one step further. When this is done well it feels as though they are discovering the topic with you.

VI. Step #5:

- A. At this point you flesh out your outline so that it become a preachable document.
 1. Different people like to include different levels of detail. Some people write out everything they're going to say word for word. Others like to keep it real brief in just an outline kind of format.
 2. For me, I like to write out everything word for word, but format it as an outline and then go back and highlight key words so I can easily find my place. I find that the act of writing out every word really helps me put the information in my head and provides a smoother delivery. But it's different for every person.
- B. At this point you may want to add some illustrations and stories to help emphasize your points. These are very helpful for making the points understandable and memorable. Make sure they don't distract people from your message.

VII. Step #6: Review and practice the sermon

- A. For me, this is a really important step. The more time I spend reviewing the sermon, the smoother will be my delivery. Preach through the sermon either out loud or in your mind.
- B. Try to put it into your mind as much as possible. It's nice when you can have it in your mind like a story, where you mentally know how point A leads to point B, etc.
- C. Then pray about it. You've probably been praying through this whole process but especially now pray that God's word will penetrate people's hearts.

VIII. Step #7: Present the sermon with confidence

- A. If you've prepared your sermon in this kind of way then you are confident that you are presenting God's word. It's not about you. It's all about God's message. God's word is powerful and it will accomplish God's purposes.
- B. Know that what you are saying is very important and that it can help people. Present it boldly and lovingly.

IX. How to present a short talk

- A. Many times we also present short talks like invitations on Wednesday evenings or the thoughts before the Lord's Supper. Those are different from sermons and so they have to be prepared and presented slightly differently.
- B. The setting determines a lot about a sermon or talk. On a Wednesday evening you have a lot of factors working against you. People have just sat through a 45 minute class. It's also the middle of the work week and people are really tired. The kids just came in from classes and they're wound up and they need to go to bed soon. Because of that, people typically don't pay as much attention. Now people want to learn, but it's just not a good setting.
 - 1. On the positive side, the invitation gives you an opportunity to leave the congregation with a spiritual thought that they can take through the rest of the week. That concluding spot in the service is very powerful.
 - 2. With those two things in mind, the invitation is very important, yet it's very different from a sermon. You're going to have to keep it very short, simple, and to the point. An invitation should be 5 to 10 minutes. If it's shorter than 5, but it communicates its purpose then that's fine.
 - 3. Jesus taught differently on different occasions. There were times when he taught people all day long. There were also shorter teaching sessions like when he was in Nazareth. He got up in the Synagogue, read a verse from Isaiah, sat down, and said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Then they started asking him questions and he expanded on it more. But it seems to have been a much shorter teaching session due to the circumstances.
- C. So your goal in an invitation is to give people something memorable without them getting lost along the way.
 - 1. One way to achieve that is to just have one point. Keep everything in the invitation focused in that direction. If you have a few supporting sub points, keep them short, simple, and directed towards your main point.
 - 2. Start with a point that you feel is really important. It's best if you can study and find something that is really useful to you. Maybe it's a point about how short life is. Maybe it's a point about the depth of God's love. Maybe it's a point about the need

for obedience. It just needs to be something that you feel is very important and helpful.

3. Have 1 to 4 scriptures. That seems to work well.
 4. One simple format is to spend a couple minutes describing the need and then a couple minutes describing the solution. That kind of format keeps people listening and engaged. You give them some salt before you lead them to water.
 5. Have some kind of a lead in. If you tell a story, make sure it doesn't detract from the scriptures. Don't make it like a commercial where everyone remembers the funny joke, but no one remembers what it was advertising.
- D. Finally, think about how it's going to come across to people in the pews. Is it going to help anyone?
- E. Call the audience to action. Make sure that you clearly invite them to do something.

X. Conclusion

- A. Teaching God's word is a huge blessing, but it's also an enormous responsibility. When Paul wrote to the Colossians he talked about being a steward with the job of making the word fully known.

Colossians 1:25-26

²⁵of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.

- B. As a steward, God had entrusted him with a task. That's a serious responsibility. And his task was to make God's word fully known. The incredible message that came directly from the mouth of God, that's what Paul needed to proclaim. Let's take the task very seriously. Let's proclaim God's word.
- C. If you haven't yet obeyed the gospel of Christ then we invite you do that this evening.