

PREACHING

To Change Lives



By Rev. Jon Byler

About the author

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Introduction

Communicating God's truth is a passion of my life and it's an exciting journey of growth and development. I welcome your participation in this journey and hope that you will be challenged in this book to keep sharpening your skills as a preacher or teacher.

This book is designed for pastors or those who preach regularly and who want to improve the effectiveness of their preaching. The book is relevant for all but specifically targets those who have not had any formal training in homiletics (the art of preaching). The heart of the book gives a 9-step plan for developing any sermon. It includes some basic Bible Study skills as well as instruction in the use of several reference works, especially the concordance. It can be used as an instruction manual for groups or used for self-instruction. Action assignments for each of the chapters are designed to put the teaching into practice as you develop sermons from the book of Ephesians.

The book grew out of several classes that I taught to students striving to improve their preaching skills. I pray that it may be useful in your life to make you a more effective communicator of the eternal truth of the Word of God. Please do not photocopy these notes without permission.

I give special thanks to my wonderful wife, Loice, for her assistance and suggestions in producing this book. She has been my best critic and companion for almost 20 years and I owe a huge debt to her influence.

I also acknowledge the impact of other authors and speakers on my thinking and preaching. Specifically, I want to note the following books which have been influential for me in preaching:

How to Preach, Rev. Dewey Huston, Evangel Publishing

The Shepherd and His Work, Seth Msweli and Donald Crider, Evangel Publishing

Preach the Word, John R. Mumaw

Inductive Preaching, Ralph Lewis

Caring for the Flock, David Larson

"Communicating to Change Lives", "The 10 Commandments of a Communicator"

Injoy Life Club tapes by Rev. John Maxwell

The Seven Laws of the Learner, Dr. Bruce Wilkinson

Compendium of Pastoral Theology, *How to Preach*, Alliance Centers for Theological Study

Chapter One

THE ROLE OF PREACHING

It's Sunday morning in your church. After the offering has been collected and the choir has finished their song the preacher comes to the pulpit. What happens? Do the members lean forward attentively, eager to catch every word and ready for the highlight of the day? Or do they settle down to endure the next 45 minutes while their mind drifts to other things? It all depends on how effectively you have learned how to communicate God's truth to the audience.

The Purpose of preaching

What does preaching really do? What is its purpose? Is it just an activity to keep preachers busy 52 times a year? Should it be the highlight of our worship service or something thrown in like leftovers? There are at least four biblical and practical purposes for preaching that make it essential in the life of every believer.

Proclaiming truth

The primary role of preaching is to proclaim God's truth to the listeners. The Bible uses two Greek words that are translated "preach" in English. The first is "euangelizo" which means to declare or bring good tidings, i.e. the good news or gospel message. The second, "kerusso", speaks of a herald or one who proclaims a message. These two words indicate that preaching is proclaiming the good news of the gospel message.

The proclamation of truth should be the goal of every message. The preacher has truth that needs to be communicated with the audience. It is not just a time of sharing thoughts, but of delivering truth to the hearers.

The preachers' message is not just any message; it is a message of truth. It is not a political message or a talk about agricultural methods. If it is to be preaching it must be based on the truth of the Word of God. "Preaching" that is not based on the truth of God's Word should be called "public speaking" instead of preaching.

The message is not only based on truth but it must be proclaimed. **To proclaim means to make known publicly or clearly.** It is a much stronger word than to "tell." Preaching is done publicly. Sometimes personal witnessing is described as "preaching" to someone. Person to person evangelism is telling the good news but it is not normally done publicly and should not technically be called preaching.

In this sense preachers are mediators. They stand between God who has a message and the audience who needs to hear the message. It is the preachers' role to communicate it clearly to them in a way that they can understand.

To explain the scriptures.

Another purpose of preaching is to explain the scriptures. Preachers have the tremendous and awesome task of taking the living Word of God and making it understandable to the people. This is true no

matter what type of sermon he is preaching, whether evangelistic in focus or teaching believers.

Some things in scripture are easily understood but others require explanation in order to be understood. Thus, the role of the preacher is to study and understand the message and then give it to the audience. This in essence is the teaching function of preaching. Neh. 8:8 says of the Levites, *“They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.”* The truth of the Word of God should be explained in a way that people can understand what it means in their lives.

What then is the difference between teaching and preaching? For the purpose of this study very little distinction needs to be made. Technically, we have already seen that preaching is proclaiming. To teach, Bruce Wilkinson maintains, is to cause to learn. Preaching can be used generally for any type of proclamation and usually also implies a format in which one person delivers the message with little opportunity for interaction with the recipients. Preaching can be evangelistic in nature or focus on nurturing believers. Teaching focuses on imparting truth to believers and often is used to describe a classroom setting where some interchange is expected between the teacher and the learner.

The principles taught in this book can be used by anyone desiring to effectively communicate the truth of God’s Word!

To encourage

A third purpose for preaching is to encourage. People are hungry for encouragement. Their lives are filled with disappointments, questions, and struggles. One role of the preacher is to give them hope, to show them a way to cope with their situations. Biblical messages should build people up and leave them with a feeling that they can make it with the grace of God.

This doesn't mean that the preacher can't point out sin or weaknesses in his sermons. But overall the result of the message should be encouragement, to build and strengthen the lives of the listeners. No one thrives on a diet of criticism! Consider these biblical examples of encouragement:

“Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers.”(Acts 15:32)

“Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction.”(2 Tim. 4:2)

“He [the overseer] must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.” (Tit 1:9)

Ask yourself, “Does my proclamation of the Word of God bring encouragement to people’s lives?”

To change lives

A final purpose of preaching is to change lives. Preaching is not an academic exercise or a speech given to bring compliments to the

speaker. It is not to impress people with my knowledge or intellect, how well I have studied or prepared. Absolutely not! The goal is for the power of God to move and work in the lives of people so that they will make the desired change in their lives. We want them to be “doers of the Word and not hearers only.” (James 1:22-25) Our sermons have the power and potential to change lives! All preaching should have an aim or focus to change lives in a specific way. One homiletics teacher said, “Always preach for a verdict.” It is life change that is needed in the church and if it is not happening it is not a lack in the Word of God; but in the messenger!

Power packed preaching produces productive people!

The power in preaching

We have looked at the 4 purposes of preaching and we now turn our attention to the power in preaching.

Preaching has the power to do several things:

Bring salvation to the unsaved.

“How, then, can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” (Rom. 10:14-17) The proclamation of the message brings salvation to those that are not saved. What a joy to preach the gospel and a sinner gives his life to Christ in response and joins the family of God!

Bring growth in the life of the believer.

Preaching also has power to bring growth to the life of the believer. This may take place in the believer’s mind by affecting his way of thinking. We have power in preaching to convince people of the truth of God's Word. This changes their thinking and ultimately their actions.

It is through preaching that people grow in their understanding of what it means to follow Christ. They learn what it means to walk together as the body of Christ. They understand more about the meaning of their Christian faith. They are challenged, encouraged, rebuked, strengthened, and moved to action by the power of preaching.

Again we are talking of life change. Preaching the Word of God produces change in the life of the listener when it is combined with an obedient response. This change may not be as instantaneous as the conversion of an unbeliever, but it is significant change.

The growth of the believer should be the primary concern of the preacher. God never intended for pastors to preach nice, polite messages; he called the pastor to “to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.” (Eph. 5:12) The pastor/teacher’s job is to equip the saints for ministry. He is not to do all the work, but to prepare the saints to do the work! This preparation is done in different forums but certainly the pastor should be preaching to bring growth in the believers and sharing with them clearly what God expects them to do.

Power
packed
preaching
produces
productive
people!

Set the direction and focus of the church.

Preaching also has power to bring people together around a common goal, to move the entire group together in one direction. It is through preaching that a pastor or speaker is able to communicate his vision and goals for the church. Because preaching is done publicly and many people are listening at once, it has great power as a unifying force in the life of the church. It can stir emotion and bring people to a willingness to move in a direction together. Every pastor with a vision from God will use the pulpit to communicate that vision to the people and unite them to reach the goal.

Why is preaching so powerful? Does the secret lie in the messenger? Does it lie in the style of delivery? Does it lie in the respect people have for the preacher? NO! While the messenger is important, the power of preaching is not in the messenger, but in the message, the Word of God. There is no way we can overestimate the power of the Word of God. When we preach the Word of God we are speaking a word which is *“living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”* (Heb. 4:12)

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” (Mt. 24:25) We are preaching the eternal Word of God. *“...The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.”* (Jn. 6:43) These are words of life! These are not our words but the words of God himself! In 1 Thes. 2:13 Paul says, *“And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.”*

We must believe this, that we are speaking words that have power, words that bring life to people. We must experience it first ourselves and then transmit it to others. We cannot allow ourselves to be deceived to think that we will be effective as preachers if only we learn how to speak eloquently or how to correctly prepare a message. Paul warns against this in 1 Cor. 2:4 where he says, *“My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power...”*

Preaching has power, tremendous power, power like no other form of communication.

The priority of preaching

If we understand the purpose of preaching and recognize its power it is not difficult to see that preaching should be a priority for a pastor.

Preaching is the means God has chosen to communicate his truth.

Preaching is how God has chosen to communicate the precious truth of God's Word to a needy world. He left the message with us to communicate to others and he chose the method of preaching to accomplish that task. He could have called angels to do this work but he has commanded us to *“Go into all the world and preach the good news to*

all creation.”(Mk. 16:15) Paul tells Timothy, “Preach the Word...” (2 Tim. 4:2)

Preaching is the most important function of the pastor.

With recognition of the power inherent in preaching it follows logically that preaching should be a priority in our lives, especially if we are leading a church. It is the one thing that more people will judge a pastor by than any other activity. Larsen says, “The Pastor has no higher responsibility than the faithful and dutiful preaching and teaching of the Word of God.”

With all that we have said about preaching it should be clear that the work of preaching is something to which we should apply serious energy and effort. Paul tells Timothy in 1 Tim. 4:13, “Devote yourself...to preaching and teaching.” (KJV uses “give attendance to exhortation) The Greek word used here (prosecho) suggest “devotion of thought and effort.” To devote ourselves to something takes time and energy. It takes commitment to make that a priority in our lives. Praying for a sermon on Sunday morning is not devotion to preaching! Yet, many times pastors allow other issues to crowd out the time they should spend preparing a message. I know personally the feeling of desperation that comes on Saturday night when there is no message and the feeling of regret that comes when I preach a message that I know was less than my best. But I also know the joy that comes when I have “devoted myself” to the task and God has blessed my effort more than I could have imagined.

No other single activity of ministry has the potential to impact the lives of people as does preaching.

Faithful preaching of the Word of God is not something that will just happen. It takes time, energy, and hard work. But it is worth the result because of its tremendous power.

In this book we will emphasize the technique of preaching, but we cannot forget that preaching is primarily a spiritual exercise. You can preach a technically flawless sermon that fails to accomplish its goal. On the other hand a sermon that lacks any structure can be mightily used of God. Our goal is to combine the two in a way that God can use us more and more effectively.

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Action Assignment

- a. Name a great preacher you know about and write why you think he is a great preacher.

- b. What sermon can you remember in the last year that had a marked effect on your life?

- c. Why did it impact you more than other sermons?

Chapter Two

THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF SERMONS

Before we look at the steps of preparing sermons we should be familiar with different types of sermons. We will examine the three most common types of sermons and identify the strengths and potential weaknesses of each.

The Topical Sermon

The topical sermon is a sermon that is developed around a certain *theme* or *topic* of scripture rather than a specific text. A topic is chosen and then the scripture is searched to find out what the Bible teaches on that subject. Ideas are taken from different parts of the Bible and put together in a logical way to form a sermon. An example is a sermon on “Pride” in which the preacher uses many different scriptures to teach the listeners what the Bible says about pride.

The topical sermon has several strengths:

- It allows for the doctrines of scripture to be taught in a consistent way. It is easy to systematically teach people the great doctrines of the Bible such as sin, judgment, love, rebellion, salvation, the second coming, bitterness, grace, etc.
- It allows for more in-depth look at a scriptural idea. An expository sermon may only touch on a certain truth but the topical approach will take more time to develop the idea fully.
- It helps to keep the subject well balanced. The topical sermon uses many scriptures thereby reducing the chances of misinterpretation that can arise when only one scripture is considered.
- It develops a deeper appreciation for the unity of scripture. By focusing on the scripture as a whole an appreciation is developed for the way in which all scripture relates together.

The topical sermon also has several weaknesses:

- It is more difficult for the listeners to follow. Because the speaker uses many different scriptures the listeners often get lost trying to find all the references mentioned by the preacher.
- It is possible for the preacher to stay only on favorite topics and ignore others. He may be tempted to ignore doctrines that are unpopular or that he doesn't personally like.

The Expository Sermon

An expository sermon is a sermon that takes a passage of scripture and develops a sermon from that passage. The theme and all major ideas must come from within the passage itself. “Expository” means to expound or to explain.

The expository sermon develops a single theme and omits other ideas. In this way the expository sermon is different from a commentary or exegesis which will attempt to explain every idea in the text systematically.

The expository sermon has several strengths:

- It is easy for people to follow along in their Bibles. This also makes revision easy for them at home and enables them to remember well the main points.
- It provides a systematic way to cover a whole book of the Bible (or a shorter portion) in preaching.
- It encourages in-depth study of the scripture.
- It brings out topics from the text that need to be addressed rather than personal favorites of the preacher.
- There is no limit to the material available for the sermons.
- It develops an appreciation for the richness of God's Word.

The expository sermon also has several weaknesses:

- It takes more time and effort to prepare.
- A series of messages can become too long and tedious and discourage participation.

The Textual Sermon

The textual sermon is one in which the preacher chooses a verse or two and develops his message from that verse or verses. It is closely related to the expository sermon but the text is much shorter.

The textual sermon has several strengths:

- It keeps people in one place in the scripture and helps them follow along.
- It is easier to prepare than an expository sermon.

The textual sermon also has several weaknesses:

- The text can just become a starting point for the preacher's personal opinions on a topic. Alternatively, it can develop into a topical sermon without a plan.
- It can take the verse out of context eg. ignore the surrounding verses.

Each type of sermon has its value, advantages, and disadvantages.

Each type of sermon has its value, advantages, and disadvantages. We will emphasize the expository and textual sermon primarily because the discipline mastered there will also be able to help you prepare a topical sermon. Chapter 13 will focus on developing a topical sermon.

Action Assignment

1. Write the outline of a sermon that you listened to this month. Include the introduction, conclusion, illustrations and all the main points. Indicate which of the three types of sermons (textual, topical, expository) it was.

2. Read Ephesians 1-3. Write the reference of a passage that you would like to preach from.

Why does this passage appeal to you?

3. Read Ephesians 4-6. Mark here when you have done this: _____

4. Use Eph. 1:3 to develop a textual outline. (More instructions on outlining will be given in Chapter 7; for now, try to summarize what you believe are the main ideas of this scripture.)

Title: _____

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

5. Use Eph. 2:1-6 to develop an expository outline. Write the title, the main points, and the verses connected to the main points (just put the verse number after the main point.) You don't need to develop it beyond the outline. You may have more than three points if you wish.

Title: _____

A. _____ v. _____

B. _____ v. _____

C. _____ v. _____

Chapter Three

BE THE RIGHT PERSON

Let us now turn our attention to the actual process of preparing a sermon. These 9 steps apply to any type of sermon whether topical, expository, or textual.

The first step to effective sermon preparation begins with you, the preacher! A politician can give an effective speech even if he is not a good man; a lecturer can do an acceptable job in the classroom even if he/she is a terrible spouse, but in preaching it is altogether different. In preaching there is no way to separate your life and walk with God from the message that you are sharing with people. Your character is crucial in allowing God to use you effectively in ministry.

John Maxwell, a noted preacher, says that for the first six months of your ministry your communication precedes your character. But after that, who you are, affects what people hear. In other words, once people know who you really are, they hear what you are, not what you say!

What should characterize the life of a preacher?

He should be called by God

The preacher needs to have the call of God upon his life. The call of men is not enough for the power of God to flow through you. It is good for men to recognize God's call, but it is not sufficient to be called by men.

We can refer here to two types of call. One is a **call to minister as a life work or career** and the other is a **call to minister in a specific setting or at a certain time**.

I believe that before I can be effective in either a life work of preaching or preaching at a specific place for a time, I must have the assurance that it is God's plan for me. **Prayerfully consider all requests to preach.** Resist the temptation to take any invitation that comes along. Not every open door from men is God's open door for me. My "yes" or "no" to an invitation should not come from my diary but from God.

Many times people want to know how to hear the voice of God. We don't have time to go deeply into that but a preacher should look for several things: A gifting in that area, an inner sense of direction, and confirmation from others.

Do you have a clear sense of God's call on your life to preach? If not, take some time alone with God and ask him to direct your life.

He should be a person of the WORD.

A second characteristic of a preacher's life is that his life must be fully based on the Word of God. The preacher must daily immerse himself in the scripture if he is to be effective in the pulpit. Our message is the Word and our life must be in the Word. More than any other believer the preacher is called to know the Word. Paul tells a young preacher, "*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.*" (2 Tim. 2:15) We must make a deliberate effort for our lives to be shaped by the Word of God.

I was challenged by one of the teachers in the Bible College that I attended. He seemed to know so much about scripture and I admired him for that. Then I heard someone say about him that when he was younger he would stay inside and memorize and study the Bible while his age mates were outside playing games. He was willing to pay the price to know the Word of God. Are you willing?

More than any other believer the preacher is called to know the Word.

The Word of God must shape our lives if we are to be effective. Before we can challenge, we must be challenged; before we can correct, we ourselves must be corrected; before we can preach about brokenness, we must be broken. We need to be humbled, corrected, rebuked and changed by the Word of God. Too often we are tempted to just prepare a sermon since a sermon is needed, but if it is not coming out of our walk with the Lord through his Word it will lack the power of integrity.

Being a person of the Word is much more than being able to give a testimony of how good God has been to us. It means an intimate walk with Jesus in the Word, a daily laying of oneself before the Word of God to be shaped and challenged. Going to the Word for a sermon only will never do; our sermons must grow out of our discipline with the Word. I am not saying that it is wrong to go to the scripture looking for a sermon; I am only saying that if we do that without a life based fully on the Word it will not work.

Often young people make the mistake of thinking that they can preach on any topic since they have the fire of the Holy Ghost in their bones. But their message lacks substance since their lives have not gone through the fire and their character has not been molded by the Word of God. This doesn't mean that a young person should not preach by any means! But he should be aware of the need to continue walking humbly with Christ and allowing the Word to shape his life.

If the Word is not shaping our lives we will never preach it effectively! The more our life is shaped by the Word of God, the more powerful our preaching will be.

Many believers want to be great preachers so they pray and pray. Then they stand and shout believing that God's blessing will be poured out. But prayer alone, without the discipline of the Word, will not produce strong sermons.

How is your walk with the Word? Do you have a plan for spending time daily in the Word of God? Are you going deeper and deeper into it as you grow in your Christian life?

He should be prayerful

The preacher must be a prayerful person. The message that we are communicating is a spiritual message, it has spiritual power and it needs spiritual discernment. *"This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words."* (1 Cor. 2:13) We cannot allow ourselves to approach the task of preaching as an academic exercise, that if we just put together

the right words with the right examples the right results will follow. We are engaged in a spiritual battle and we need to fight through prayer.

Paul says in 1 Thes. 1:5, "...because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction." Prayer is a requirement if we are to have this power.

The Word and prayer go together. Some pastors are faithful in the Word and spend hours in study but lack the intimacy with God that comes through prayer. We will take more time to look at the area of prayer in the next chapter. For now, ask yourself, "How is my prayer life? Is it giving me the power I need to preach effectively?"

His life should be consistent

The life of the preacher should be consistent. Not perfect, but consistent. There should be a quality about the life of a preacher that gives weight to his message. We have all heard the saying, "Practice what you preach" or "Your life speaks so loudly that I can't hear what you are saying." We cannot be effective in preaching if we are proclaiming things that have not been worked in our own hearts. We cannot preach about love until the Lord has really given us love for that sister that we can't tolerate. We can't preach about finances when our own finances are in a mess. We can't preach about hard work when we don't get up until 8:00 in the morning ourselves. We can't tell others to tithe when we aren't doing it ourselves.

We cannot be effective in preaching if we are proclaiming things that have not been worked in our own hearts.

This doesn't mean that we can never preach a message that we have not attained, but we need to be striving towards the goal we are setting for others. We are not perfect but we need to be transparent in our lives. We can't cover sin and expect that God will bless our sermon. We need to search our lives before giving the message so that we are prepared. Even if you need to preach a message that is still in progress in your own life have the integrity to admit it as you preach.

Have you lived the message? Is your life consistent?

Action Assignment

In each of the areas mentioned in this chapter rate yourself on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being perfect. Put a number beside each characteristic.

- Called of God _____
- Person of the Word _____
- Prayerful _____
- Consistent life _____

What do you need to do to strengthen yourself in each area? (Be specific and give a time when you will do it or have done it.)

Chapter Four PRAY ABOUT YOUR SERMON

Much that we have said about the personal life of the preacher applies to prayer because it is in prayer that the character of the minister is formed. We have already noted that his life should be a life of prayer. In this step we are focusing specifically on praying about the sermon. **Prayer should saturate the whole sermon preparation process.** From the selection of the text to the choosing of the closing song, prayer should permeate the process of preparation.

Pray especially in the following areas:

That God would personally apply the truths of His Word to your life. It is too easy for a preacher to study the Word for a sermon and his own life is left unchanged. We are not only to prepare sermons for others but we should allow God first to speak to us.

Pray that God would minister these truths to the lives of the listeners. Your words will not speak to people, but the Spirit of God can use your words to bring life to others. When possible pray the truths of the sermon you are preparing for those who will listen. For example, if you are preaching about giving, pray that God will open people's hearts to realize the need to give and that a generous spirit will rise up among the people.

Ask that God would keep you from pride. One of the greatest dangers preachers face is to trust in their own ability or seek glory for themselves. It is an awesome task to bring life to people through the Word of God and when God moves among people, Satan quickly comes to us to pat us on the back. "What a wonderful sermon that was; you must have really studied well."

One preacher was being congratulated outside after the message by an admiring member who said, "Pastor, I want to tell you what a wonderful sermon that was..." The pastor replied, "Thank you but Satan already told me!" He understood what one writer said, "The greatest spiritual struggle many preachers have is against the deep and subtle desire in their hearts to receive some of the glory for themselves when preaching." Does this mean

One of the greatest dangers preachers face is to trust in their own ability or seek glory for themselves.

that it's wrong for people to show appreciation for the message? No, it is good for them to do so. But we who preach have to be very cautious about how we receive it or the enemy of our souls will use it against us.

All of us who preach, I believe, are tempted with pride. In fact the more successful we become, the more we are tempted. Together with prayer, we need to read and meditate on the following verses to help us deal with this temptation.

When you feel you have such a special gift to speak to people look at Js. 1:17, "*Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights...*" and 1 Cor. 4:7, "*For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive?...*" This reminds us that even a gift to bless people through our

preaching did not come from within; it is a gift given by God to us. A verse that has been very helpful to me personally is Eph. 2:9,10, “*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*” This reminds me that when I preach with power, it is only because God has given me that work to do and all the glory should go to the one who makes it possible. At the same time I can feel good about it and say, “Today I have done the work for which God created me.” That allows me to feel the pleasure of obedience but gives the credit to God.

It is also possible after a sermon to feel like a failure. Maybe we didn't see the response we wanted; maybe the message wasn't clear as we wished; maybe we forgot some things we wanted to say. So Satan tries to discourage us. We should also be alert to this trap and unless there is a clear area in which God wants us to improve we should resist thoughts of failure. We should do our best and leave the results to God.

Pray that God would guide you in preparation and delivery. Pray that God will direct you to the right scriptures, the right illustrations and the right examples. Pray also that he will help you be effective in communicating the gospel. Pray that you will faithfully do your part in preparation and still allow the Holy Spirit to do his part.

I often pray before a sermon, “Lord, if there is anything that I have prepared to say that is not what you want me to say, block it from my mind. And if there is anything else that you want me to say help me to think of it as I bring the message to your people.”

Action Assignment

1. Take some time to reflect on your own life. Are there times that you have been tempted in the area of pride? In prayer ask God to deal with this area of your life and to set you free from the desire to be recognized by men.
2. Memorize one of the verses mentioned in this chapter that can help you deal with pride. **(Js. 1:17, 1 Cor. 4:7, or Eph. 2:9,10)**
Mark here when you have done it. _____
3. Take 10 minutes to pray about a message you are preparing. Use the points mentioned in the chapter to guide your prayer. (Pray that God would personally apply the truths of his Word to your life; Pray that God would minister these truths to the lives of the listeners. Ask that God would keep you from pride. Pray that God would guide you in preparation and delivery.)

Chapter Five

CHOOSE THE SCRIPTURE

After we are the right people and we have prayed about our message we need to choose a scripture for our sermon. How do we go about this? How do we know what God wants us to preach about? Do we pray and flop open our Bibles and place our finger on the first verse we see? If you use that method you might find yourself in the situation of one preacher who was looking for a text using the “flop” method. On his first try he opened his Bible and read that Judas went and “*hanged himself.*” (Mt. 27:5). Not liking that, he tried again and found Lk. 10:37 which said, “*Go and do likewise.*” He shut the Bible quickly and tried again, only to read, “*What you are about to do, do quickly,*”! (Lk. 13:27) Obviously, there must be a better way for God to reveal the right scripture to us! Here are three ways that God can reveal his choice to us.

Through our recognition of a need in the church.

One way that God can guide us to a particular scripture to use is when we recognize a need in the people and find a scripture to meet that need. This is the “medicine chest” approach where we look to the Word of God to meet a particular need just as a doctor diagnoses a patient and then looks for the proper drug from the cabinet.

Maybe you recognize that there is a lot of gossiping being done and you sense a need to preach on our speech. So you choose James 3:1-12, a good passage on our tongue. You may sense a need for teaching about baptism or the Holy Spirit so you do a topical sermon on that subject. You may feel a need for a close look at a book of the Bible or a Bible character that is relevant to the needs of the people.

As you walk and talk with people, be observant. Notice what is happening in their lives and what their needs are. Do they need encouragement? A rebuke? A challenge?

You may also be requested to preach on a certain topic or issue. If you are invited to preach about giving, it is because there is a need in the church that the pastor wishes you to address. So, the need may sometimes come from outside your own personal observation.

One caution in using this method: make sure that your sermon is not a selfish reaction to perceived needs. Don't use the pulpit to attack and rebuke things that should have been dealt with privately.

Through our personal walk with the Word.

A second way that we can find the right scripture comes as we read the Bible for ourselves. We may find that a particular verse or passage meets a need in our own lives and we realize that others also have the same need. Or we may be reading and see very clearly a sermon outline in the passage we are reading. This can lead us to choose that text for further study and development into a sermon. It is a good idea when reading the Bible to read with a pen and a paper so that if there is something that gives you a sermon idea you can note it and come back to it later.

I keep a devotional journal and record which chapters of the Bible I read that day and a short thought. If I find a passage that speaks to me and I feel it also has potential for a sermon, I put a star beside it.

In this kind of sermon we will be able to say, "This week as I was reading...the Lord impressed this upon my heart...."

Through special revelation.

Special revelation is a final way that God may guide us to choose the text for our message. In prayer or in another way God may just impress

Whichever method we use, we need the confident assurance that God wants us to speak from a particular text.

a scripture on your heart. You may not see the need of it and you have not been thinking about it but suddenly it is there on your heart. You may think of the verse or you may even have an impression in your heart to look up a reference that you know nothing about.

This method seems more *spiritual* than the others but I believe that God can use any of them at any time in our lives. The important thing is to

recognize that God needs to guide us to the right text for that particular time.

Whichever method we use, we need the confident assurance that God wants us to speak from a particular text. This assurance adds power to the message itself and helps us share it boldly.

Many times I have experienced doubts about the choice of the scripture as I am preparing. At first I was convinced that God wanted me to speak from a passage, but then I begin to doubt half way through the process. I have found that unless I really sense God leading me away from that scripture I should persevere and usually the confidence returns, sometimes after I see the results!

When you preach are you confident that the text or topic you have chosen is the right one? Of the three ways to choose a text mentioned here, which way do you find yourself using most of the time?

Action Assignment

1. Read through the book of Ephesians with special attention given to the following passages: 1:3-14; 2:1-6; 4:7-16; 4:20-32; 5:21-33; 6:10-18.

Choose one of the above passages to study further (you will later develop this into a sermon). Spend at least 30 minutes studying the passage and writing down your thoughts on a separate paper. Don't worry about organizing them; just write them down as they come. Meditate slowly and carefully on the verses. Think about the flow of the passage and how the different ideas are connected. Does one thing cause another? Is there a sequence of events? Underline what you feel are the main points in the passage. Continue digging until you discover at least two new insights that you have never had before. Do not use any other books; just meditate on the passage. When you have finished, answer the following questions on your paper:

Write the passage you selected.

Write below what you feel are the main points of the passage.

Write two insights from this passage that are new to you.

Write any other thoughts that you wrote on your paper that you feel are significant.

Chapter Six STUDY THE SCRIPTURE

We now come to the most crucial part of sermon preparation, the actual study of the scripture. It is on this point that we need to be prepared to spend much time and energy. In studying we search for what the scripture says, not what we desire it to say.

We should have two goals in mind as we prepare our sermon. We want to **explain** the passage to the listeners and **apply** the message. This requires digging into the scripture.

Dig for explanation.

Ask key questions. Read the passage you have chosen slowly and carefully several times asking yourself these key questions:

1) “What does this verse/passage say?”

This may seem like an obvious question but it is important that we actually understand what the passage is saying. Many times we are quick to assume something because of what we want it to say or because of what we have been told it says, that we really don't get what it is saying. Sometimes it will help to read it out loud or to use different translations to get a new meaning.

2) “What does this verse/passage mean?”

Meaning goes beyond simply understanding what the content says, but asks what the meaning is.

3) “What kind of language is used?”

Often the kind of language will help us understand a scripture or help apply it to our lives. Is the text a suggestion or a command? Is it an encouragement or a rebuke? Is it to be taken literally or figuratively? For example, when Rom. 12:1 says, “*Be transformed*” it is a command. It is not a prayer request; it is a command to be obeyed!

4) “What is the progression of thought here?”

In other words, are there steps involved, does one thing relate to another, does one thing cause another to happen, or does it state purpose e.g. why we should do a certain thing? (This will apply especially to a passage, but can also apply to a verse.) Look carefully at the small words for insight. For example, “so that” or “in order that” or just “so” indicate purpose or results. “After”, “Before” or “then” relate to time and may indicate steps of action or results.

For example, **Rom. 12:1-3**, “*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and*

perfect will.” There is progression of thought here (offering our bodies, not conforming, being transformed) that leads to knowing the will of God. The word “then” is the key that unlocks the passage.

5) “Is this all it means?”

Don't stop with the first insight! Scripture is so rich that it will continue to yield insight as long as you keep looking. Sometimes a key thought will come from a small word. For example, **Eph. 1:3**, says God “*has*” blessed us. This is finished, done, a completed action. It is a fact, not a question. It is not a wish. So many insights can come out of close examination of the scripture.

This is essentially meditation, thinking deeply about the meaning of a passage, uncovering the hidden truths in it. It is difficult to discipline our mind to keep looking intently at the scripture but when it begins to unfold before our eyes it is worth the effort!

Read the context.

The context is simply the verses before and after the text. The surrounding verses help us understand the meaning of the text we are studying.

This point is especially necessary if we are developing a topical or textual sermon. In an expository sermon we are dealing with a longer passage and it won't be so difficult to understand the context. But in all cases we need to take into consideration what the author is writing. Look at the previous verses or chapter. What is the point the author is making? Where is he going? To whom is he writing? What is he trying to prove or disprove?

Many insights
can come out of
close
examination of
the scripture.

Reading the context will help us to avoid doctrinal errors that can come from picking a verse or verses out of context and misinterpreting them.

Follow difficult words and related ideas.

Look up meanings of words that are not known to you in the dictionary or a Bible dictionary. (We will look later at using more reference books, for now focus on the scripture you are studying.)

It is also helpful to read the passage in different translations for a clearer meaning of the word. If the translation you are using is not in your mother tongue, read it in that language.

If you can think of related scriptures you can also look them up and see what light they can shed on the passage you are studying.

There are things that will need explanation in a sermon like meanings of difficult words, circumstances from Bible times, any customs helpful to understand. You will be able to get some of

this from reference books, but at least you can look up words that you don't understand.

These steps are primarily for **understanding** so that you can **explain** the meaning of the text to your audience after first understanding it yourself. The next part of Bible study is to focus on **application**. In actual practice the two parts may not follow neatly, the applications may come as you are digging for understanding.

Dig for application

Understanding the scripture is helpful but without application it cannot change our lives. In our preaching we must be able to apply what we have learned from scripture to our everyday life if the message is to have meaning. Bruce Wilkinson suggests that at least ½ of our message should be devoted to applying the message.

One of the things I look for in a sermon is a clear and appropriate application. I have listened to many sermons and at the end I felt like saying, "So what?" "What difference does it make in my life?" "What am I supposed to do or change?" There is no way to preach for life change if we don't apply the Word to the lives of people.

EXPLANATION WITHOUT APPLICATION CANNOT LEAD TO TRANSFORMATION!

Excitement and transformation are two completely different things; our goal is not feelings but changed lives! Feelings can help people to change but don't guarantee that they will change.

Find personal applications.

In studying the scripture we should first find how the passage speaks to us. "Now that I have understood what it says, what does it mean for me in my everyday life?" Again, the scripture must first shape our lives before it can impact our audience.

Find applications for your audience.

The applications for your audience may be the same as for you personally. But depending on your audience, the applications may be slightly or even greatly different. Think about the needs of the people you will speak to. What struggles are they going through, what temptations face them daily? How should this passage apply to them?

Guidelines for applications

Here are four guidelines that will help you make good applications from your text.

1) They should be clear.

Be clear and specific. Know the change that you desire in your audience. Tell them, "Each of us needs to set a goal of spending 20 minutes in prayer." If you say, "We should do better in prayer" or "We need to love more" it is not really clear what you expect them to do.

For the application to be clear it must be verbalized. Don't expect the audience to "read between the lines." Wilkinson says that it's wrong to give content and then pray, "Lord, apply this message to our lives." That's

the work of the preacher! The audience may not respond positively to the message but they should clearly understand what you are asking them to do.

2) They should be relevant.

Your application should be relevant to your audience. Each group of people is different and although the truth of the scripture doesn't change; the applications will change to meet the needs of the audience. Once I was called to preach at a High School and I thought I would be speaking to the Christian Union students. But when I got there I found out that I was speaking to the whole student body. In a few minutes before I stood to speak I had to change many of my applications to fit the context since the applications I had prepared for Christians would not be relevant to the majority in attendance.

3) They should be positive.

As much as possible we need to seek to have our applications positive. Encourage people to do what is right rather than condemning what is wrong. Of course there will be times that we must point out sin, but make sure that you also point them to the positive action that you want them to take. For example after you have preached about hard work you may say, "Stop sleeping so late in the morning and tell God you want to get up and work early."

Some applications are negative and provide no hope to the listener. For example, a preacher can say, "It seems like all of us are just failing in prayer and soon our church will be full of demons!" Instead say, "Brethren, we have been weak in prayer but today we are going to see how to have a victorious prayer life and overcome our enemy."

4) They should be consistent.

Make sure that you don't try to put two different ideas together in one application. Don't mix oranges and bananas! Make your application consistent with itself. For example, you might say, "This passage teaches us that we need to show practical love to one another and we need to fast a lot." The two ideas are not related to each other.

Or you may say, "I think we need to learn from this passage to give more, but don't give until God speaks to you." When you use "but" in an application (or anywhere else for that matter) you negate what has come before and sends a contradictory message.

Throughout this process you need to be taking notes on what you are doing. In our next step we will learn about organizing our notes.

This is Bible study! It is not easy work but it is one of the most exciting things that you can do. I hope that you will get a taste of the joy of sitting down with a scripture and seeing things pop out in a new way and know that it was not taught to you by man but revealed by the Holy Spirit as you studied the Word. Later in the course we will add to this when we learn about using reference books in our study. But this is always the first part, to dig into the Word for ourselves and find what it means and how it applies to our life.

Bible study is a lot of work! It is like cooking the food in the kitchen. Much time is needed in the kitchen before the meal is ready to be served. The cook spends hours preparing what the guests will eat in minutes.

Action Assignment

1. Continue studying the passage you started in the last chapter.
 - A. Using the 5 questions from the chapter on “digging for explanation” to look more carefully at the passage. Answer the questions below.
 1. **“What does this verse/passage say?”** (Give a brief summary of what the passage says.)

 2. **“What does this verse/passage mean?”**

 3. **“What kind of language is used?”** (Is it a suggestion or a command? A promise or a prayer? Instruction? Teaching or rebuking?)

 4. **“What is the progression of thought here?”** (Are there things in the passage that cause others to happen? Results of an action?)

 5. **“Is this all it means?”** Read it again! Read it in another language. Keep thinking about your passage until you have at least one new insight that you didn’t get last month and write it here.
 - B. Look now at the “context” of your passage. Read the whole chapter that it is in. What insight did this add to your study? (Hint: What is Paul saying to the Ephesians, where is he going with his thoughts, what follows your passage? Answering these questions can give you some new ideas about the meaning of your passage.)
 - C. Are there any words you don’t understand in your passage? _____ If so, look them up in a dictionary and write the meaning on the back of this paper.
 - D. Dig for applications
What are the applications from this passage? (This should be real life change that the passage will produce.) Look at the 4 guidelines for applications in this chapter and then write two applications below by completing the statement: If people correctly understand this passage they will...
 - 1.
 - 2.

Chapter 7 ORGANIZE THE MATERIAL

Can you remember the sermon you heard last Sunday? Can you even remember the sermon you *preached* last Sunday? Recently I asked a class of students how many of them could remember at least two points the preacher made on Sunday. In the class of twenty only two persons raised their hands! Something is wrong. Lives won't change if they don't even remember what was preached!

This chapter will help you understand why you can always remember some sermons and others are forgotten within 10 minutes of the service. One of the secrets of a successful sermon lies in how it is organized.

Why is it important to organize the material?

- **It helps keep thoughts joined together.** Organizing forces you to connect your thoughts in an orderly fashion as you prepare the message. That planning helps the sermon to flow well and makes it easier for people to understand your thoughts.
- **It makes the message easier to remember.** A sermon that clearly has several points that the preacher emphasizes will be much more easily remembered than the sermon in which the preacher stands and shares many good but unrelated thoughts.
- **It helps to keep the message focused on the aim.** A well-organized sermon will not wander aimlessly through the scriptures. It will stay focused on accomplishing one goal.
- **It helps the message to be a thrown spear instead of stones.** A loose collection of thoughts with no organization is like a handful of stones thrown at a crowd. There will be an impact, but a well-planned sermon is like a spear thrown directly at the target. Which one is more likely to change lives?

Think of this book on preaching to change lives. How would you be able to learn if I continually threw out ideas that were not related in an orderly fashion? If in one chapter you read a couple of paragraphs about being the right person; then a few sentences about illustrations, then a page on the power of preaching, a line about the importance of the title, and then an exhortation to pray, how would you react? You would be confused! You would likely throw the book down in disgust! Unfortunately, some people preach like that! As they give the altar call they mention a need to pray, call for people to give, tell a story of what happened to them last week in the market, rebuke laziness, and challenge people to preach the gospel!

One of the secrets of a successful sermon lies in how it is organized.

It is the work of the preacher to organize the material in a way that will be helpful to the listener. We will spend a full chapter on this subject because I believe it is one of the most neglected areas in preaching, one which can make a significant difference in your sermons' effectiveness

immediately, and it also is a skill that is rarely taught. Let's look at three practical steps you can take to organize your sermon.

Choose title

The title you choose should relate to the overall purpose and direction of your sermon. It can be a simple statement, such as "Three ways to please God." It may also be in the form of a question such as, "How can we please God?" The title should capture the essence of all that you will preach about.

The title may or may not be mentioned in the delivery of the message but the discipline of writing it will help to strengthen your sermon even if you don't tell the people what it is. If it is a title that will help people want to hear what you are saying it is good to mention it. Mentioning the title also encourages people who are taking notes to be able to write your title in their notes.

The title may be chosen at any time in the process of preparing the sermon. Although we have mentioned it first it is not necessarily the first thing you need to do.

Choose goal

A second step in the process of organizing your material should be to choose a goal (theme, aim). The goal is a **written statement of what you hope to accomplish in your sermon**. It is the direction you want to go and the desired change you hope to make in the lives of the listeners.

Wilkinson says, "When we teach, a change should take place in the life of the learner in one of two directions: Either internally he becomes more Christ like and godly in his character, or externally he becomes more skilled in his conduct so that his life and works are more effective for God."

Therefore, every time you get up to preach or teach you should have one of those two goals in mind: "I am going to challenge and teach and encourage you to become more like Christ," or "I'm going to give you a tool or sharpen one of your skills so that when you do something for Christ, you accomplish more." That's why a good, Biblical preacher always causes you to wrestle with change--to become more like Christ or develop more fruit for Christ."

There are two factors that should shape the goal that you choose:

It should be practical.

The goal should state what you hope to accomplish in a practical way. It should focus on the change that you desire to accomplish in the listeners. A goal that only desires a change in thinking such as "To help the listeners understand the grace of God" is weak in that it has no practical area of change desired. It would be stronger to say, "To help the listeners understand the grace of God in such a way that they will worship him more."

In a sermon that is more focused on change by its nature it is easier to choose a goal. For example, a sermon on speech could have the goal, "To help the listeners stop gossiping." That is practical and simple. It

is also measurable; there is a way to tell whether or not you have reached your goal if you examine the change in lives after the sermon.

Don't give a general or vague goal such as, "To encourage the listeners" or "To help people understand more about God." *A good goal must have a practical life change clearly stated!*

It should be single

Don't try to accomplish too much in one sermon. Someone told me once that I should only hope to produce one change in the lives of listeners. If I can do that I have done well! It was somewhat hard for my youthful pride but I found that it was good advice. You can't get people to give finances, fast more, pray faithfully and stop gossiping all in one sermon! People just don't change in six areas at one time. Narrow your focus to one change that you want to happen in the lives of people. This may mean that you have more material than can be shared in one sermon and you will need to eliminate some things to focus effectively on one. *One sharp spear is much more effective than scattered stones and one definite change is far better than ten good intentions.*

One sharp spear is much more effective than scattered stones and one definite change is far better than ten good intentions.

Like the title, your goal may not always be shared with the listeners, but the value of it is that it will shape your sermon and keep you on the right track. This discipline will force you to stick to your topic and to eliminate extra ideas that may be good but don't help to accomplish your goal. **Every main point, every illustration, every application should help you to reach your goal.** If it doesn't help your goal, it is a waste of time! If your sermon is well done the listeners will know what your goal is without you reading it to them.

Develop the outline

What is the outline? It is simply *an orderly arrangement of the major points of your sermon*. A good outline provides the framework for all the main points of the message. Outlining is a skill that is worth your time and effort and will bring improvement to your preaching immediately. For those who are not familiar with how to outline I have included some tips in Appendix 1 to teach the basics of outlining. Here, I will focus on *four steps for preachers to prepare powerful outlines*.

Step One: Choose main points

We get the main points as we study the scripture and dig for understanding and application. Writing down thoughts randomly as we study gives us the raw materials for choosing the main points. Look back through the thoughts you wrote down as you studied the scripture and decide which ones are most important. Find 3 or 4 major points that seem to be the most important to you and the audience to which you will be preaching.

Three things to remember as you choose the main points:

The points should come from the text.

In a truly biblically based sermon each of the points should come out of the scripture. This is especially true in an expository sermon but I feel strongly that it should be true in nearly every case. Our sermon should keep people coming back to the Word of God. If the point is not coming from the text it must be coming from your mind. *We have not come to hear your mind, we have come to hear the mind of God!*

Discipline yourself to stick to the Word for sermons that will change people's lives. With each point you should be able to refer to the verse or the word that supports the point. If you can't do that, it should not be a main point. Don't be a preacher that reads a scripture at the beginning of the message and never returns to it again. Keep coming back to the Word!

The points should all focus on the goal.

All the main points should help to accomplish your goal. They should either be directly related to the goal or a step towards accomplishing the goal. If a point does not relate to the goal it should not be used, or the goal should be changed!

The points should not be too many.

How many main points should there be? There is no set rule for this but here are some guidelines. **Avoid having too many** main points which become difficult to remember. How would you feel when the preacher stands and says, "My sermon this morning is on the 15 keys to a successful devotional life"? Three points has become the generally accepted target but it is not a requirement. I would suggest a general rule of no less than two and not more than 5.

Let's look at a practical example that will help us to understand outlining. Recently I preached a message from Habakkuk 3:17-19, which says, "Though the fig-tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights."

As I looked at this passage I was thinking, "This passage tells us that we can rejoice no matter what is happening in life. It is our response that matters." That was, perhaps, my major idea and in my mind the goal of the sermon was to help people understand and apply that truth. "Response" was a key word.

On the paper I was using, I wrote the following thoughts that were to become my main points:

Response is not based on circumstances. The circumstances were bad but it didn't affect his response.

Response is personal. He says, "I" will. That means it is my choice, not someone else's.

Response produces good results. The last verse talks of good things that happen when our response is right.

Keep this example in mind as we go to the next step in outlining.

Step two: Organize the main points

After you have chosen what will be the main points or ideas of your sermon begin the work of organizing them in a way that will produce the results that you desire by uniting the points and placing them in a good order.

Unite the points with each other

There should be a connection between one point and the other points. All the major points should relate to one another. Decide on the major points first and then come to the sub points.

The test of unity is if you are able to say, “Three things that we learn about our response (or the word/topic you are preaching about) from this passage....” This is a crucial test and you would do well to learn it thoroughly! Keep working on your outline until you can make a similar statement. If you can’t make the statement it is a clear sign that the points are not united.

The easiest way to unite your points is to force yourself to use a *common word* in each major point. If your sermon is on the tongue, make each point use the word tongue. You might have “Sins of the tongue, Proper use of the tongue, and Changing the tongue.” You can now say, “Today we will see three things that God wants us to know about our tongue.” This is not the only way to unite the main points, but it is guaranteed to work!

When you have learned to do that well you can do more creative things with your outline that will increase its effectiveness.

- **Make each point of similar grammatical construction.** For example if you use, “The tongue can be used to sin” and “Changing the tongue” as main points, they are united in that they are both speaking of the tongue. But in one, the “tongue” comes at the beginning and in the other it comes at the end. Changing the second one to “The tongue can be changed” will strengthen the outline.

- **Use words that all start with the same letter or end with the same sound.** With the above example, “The Sin of the tongue” and “The solution for the tongue” brings more strength because you have used a common word, plus used a common letter for the other word, “s” for sin and solution.

Realize that what we are doing here is not changing the meaning of the main points or scripture, simply trying to put it together in a way that will make it easier for the listener to connect the points and remember the teaching. It takes effort to stop and think, to examine each word and find creative ways of putting them together, but the results will be worth the effort.

The easiest way to unite your points is to force yourself to use a common word in each major point.

Let’s go back to the sermon from Habbakuk.

As I looked at my main points I decided that my key idea is not “response” but “rejoicing”. (Yes, you can change as you continue studying!) So I changed my points to use rejoice as follows:

Rejoicing is not based on circumstances

Rejoicing is personal

Rejoicing produces good results

Now I had my main points and could check with the text, “Today we will see three things this passage teaches us about rejoicing.”

I then looked at it some more to see if I could make it stronger by using the suggestions above. I noticed that the grammatical construction was different in the third point and I tried to make all the ideas start with the letter “p”. Here’s the result....

Rejoicing is possible

Rejoicing is personal

Rejoicing is powerful

Notice that I am not changing the meaning of what I will preach, I am only looking for the best way to wrap the message so that it will be easily understood and remembered.

Order the points

The points should not only be related to one another; they should flow from one to the other. They might flow in **sequence**, e.g. from one thing happening to the next. For example: The definition of sin, The origin of sin, The solution to sin. This order makes sense. There is a logical progression of thought.

Perhaps they will flow in terms of **questions and answers**: What? Why? How? What then?

They may also flow simply from **the order that they are found in the text**.

Think about the order that your major points are in. Is there a good flow from start to finish? Maybe you need to rearrange one or two of them for a better flow.

Generally, it is a good idea to save your strongest point for the end of the sermon so that you finish on a strong note. This may not always be possible but consider it.

In our example from Habakkuk I choose to go with the order of the text: possible, personal, and then powerful. That also allowed me to have what I felt was my weakest point (personal) sandwiched in the middle and to close with a very positive note on the power of rejoicing.

Step Three: Add sub points

Sub points are points that support the major point. After you have chosen the major points you are ready to add sub points. All the sub points should support the major point. If they don't support the major point, perhaps they don't need to be included, or you need to create another major point.

When I worked on subpoints for the message from Habakkuk I looked at the main point, “Rejoicing is possible.” I found two subpoints that I wanted to make:

A. Rejoicing is possible because of a decision. (“I will” is a conscious decision.)

B. Rejoicing is possible because of focus. (“in the Lord”. He was able to rejoice because he was focusing on the Lord, not the circumstances.)

After knowing what my sub points were I again went through the process of strengthening them. I worked on the “d” and “f” words to make them similar. “Focus” became “direction”

A final example from the last main point, “rejoicing is powerful.” I found three sub points and worked on the last words as you can see in the brackets until they were all “p”:

a. We are strengthened. [Empowered, powered] (from “The Lord is my strength”)

b. We are guided. [Led piloted] (from “feet of a deer”. The deer’s feet are able to guide him through rough places)

c. We are lifted. (Promoted) (from “he enables me to go on the heights”)

There can be many other ways to do this work of outlining. I am not so concerned that you learn to do it the way I do it but it is important that you undergo the discipline of doing it. The discipline of making an outline forces you to organize your thoughts; keeps your sermon united; keeps your delivery on target and helps you to accomplish your goal. I am convinced that the time we spend struggling to get our thoughts in an organized manner will be well worth it in the final result. The checklist in the action assignment for this chapter will help you to evaluate your own outline.

Step Four: Add the Flesh

Up to this point we have only been organizing the framework of the message, now it’s time to add the flesh. The framework holds it all together and helps to unite it but the real meat is in the explanations and applications.

Write the explanations

Under every point and sub point you will now begin to write in the insights you gained from your study. Pick out the ideas you wrote as you studied and decide which point they support. You may find that for some points you don’t have many thoughts and you will need to dig a bit deeper in the scripture. Your objective here is to adequately explain what the scripture is saying to the audience.

Write the applications

As you add the explanations you also need to write the applications. We have already looked at the way we dig for applications as we study. Discipline yourself to have an application at least for every main point in the sermon. Use what I call the “*So What Factor*.” The “So What Factor” simply asks, “so what?” after each point. If I have made the point that rejoicing is possible from the life of Habakkuk, then I ask myself, “So, what difference does it make for my listeners?” The answer to that question

becomes an application. “No matter what you are going through in life, you can rejoice.” That is my application. I might add some examples of difficulties that people are going through or an example from my own life to make it clearer but I must apply the scripture.

There are two approaches to applications. Normally, you will make an application *as you explain the point* of the passage. At other times, however, you may wish to *complete the sermon before making the application*. This is often true when the passage is a story that takes some time to tell. As the preacher you will need to decide which approach will be most effective. Waiting for the applications can heighten the anticipation of the listeners who are waiting to hear what you really want to say to them through the rest of the sermon. On the other hand after waiting for some time they may lose interest or forget the point that you are trying to apply.

Use the “*So What Factor*” for effective applications.

Action Assignment

1. Go to the sermon that you have been preparing. Look carefully at the notes you have been making of your study. Choose the main points from your notes and work on making them into an outline. Include sub-points. Use the instruction given in this chapter to guide you. Be prepared for some mental sweating! (If you need help with the basic concept of outlining use the guide in appendix 2) When you are satisfied, look at it and go over the organizing checklist below and mentally answer all of the questions. Make any needed changes. Then write a goal and title for your sermon. Make sure the goal clearly states one change that you hope to accomplish in the lives of the listeners. Write your results in the following format:

Title:

Text:

Goal:

Outline:

2. Continue practice your outlining skill by choosing **two** of the following passages: Eph. 1:3-14; 2:1-6; 4:7-16; 4:20-32; 5:21-33; 6:10-18. (Do not use the one you have been working on before.)

For each of them choose a title, and a goal. Then construct an outline of the passage giving at least three main points that are united to the title you have given. You don't need to go beyond the main points. Write the outlines on another paper.

Organizing checklist:

Do all my points and sub-points come from the scripture text?

Do all my main points use a common word? (This is not a requirement but will help ensure that your sermon is focused on one idea.)

Do my main points use similar construction grammatically?

Do I use any words that begin with the same letter or end with the same sound?

Do my main points follow a logical sequence or order?

Do my main points support the goal?

Am I able to say, “Today we will see several things about...”

Do my sub points all relate to the main point they are under?

Chapter 8 CHOOSE ILLUSTRATIONS.

How would you like a wonderful meal of roasted meat that didn't have salt? A sermon without illustrations is like meat without salt. It may have a lot of protein but it is boring to eat! Illustrations add salt to our sermons when we choose them carefully. Jesus used wonderful illustrations. In fact, his sermons are often simply stories of real life that illustrated spiritual truth. We would do well to remember this as we try to make our sermons so homiletically correct!

The purpose of illustrations

Why do we use illustrations? Two major reasons:

Illustrations are to interest. Illustrations serve to interest people in what we are saying and capture their attention. When Jesus wanted to teach us that we need to forgive others he could have just told us, "Forgive others"! But he gave an illustration of the unmerciful servant that makes the truth much more interesting and easier to remember. I just used an illustration to make you interested in the point I was making!

Illustrations are to clarify. Illustrations help to make clear the meaning of what we are saying. They clarify a truth. We may want to illustrate the danger of hidden sin. We can give the illustration of a small bug that gets inside the cob of maize (corn) and eats away the inside of the ear while the outside looks normal. Finally the maize is destroyed.

When we use an illustration to clarify a teaching it is like cleaning the glass on window.

When we use an illustration to clarify a teaching it is like cleaning the glass on a window. When the window is dirty the things on the other side cannot be clearly seen. After a proper cleaning the glass is clear and things on the other side can be easily seen. The illustration should make the teaching clearer in the minds of the listeners; therefore, it causes the truth to remain fixed in the mind of the listener.

Kinds of illustrations

There are several different kinds of illustrations that we can use in sermons.

Comparative. A comparative illustration compares one thing with another and uses the common link to make a point. In Mt. 13:31 Jesus said, "*The Kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed...*" What is the point? The mustard seed starts small but becomes big, just like the Kingdom. In James 5:7-8 we are told, "*Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.*" Our waiting for the Lord is compared to a farmer waiting for the crop.

Specific cases. A specific case illustration gives an example from scripture or personal knowledge of a case that illustrates the point being made. When James says, "*The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and*

effective. Elijah was a man just like us..." (Js. 5:16) he is giving the specific case of Elijah as an illustration.

You might say, "We need to persevere in prayer. I prayed for my brother to be saved for three years. I was tempted to give up but the Lord encouraged me to continue and at last I saw the answer to my prayer."

Personal illustrations are generally stronger than someone else's. They make it clear that the message being preached has already been lived.

Other scriptures. You may use another scripture verse to illustrate or clarify the truth you are teaching. Be careful that the scripture is relevant and adds something strong to your point or it may end up weakening rather than strengthening. Use other scriptures to support your text but don't lose your sense of direction.

Visual Aids. Visual aids can make powerful illustrations. You can dress like the character you are talking about. You can take the role of one of the characters and speak from his perspective. You can use a drawing or picture as an illustration. I heard a very powerful sermon on forgiveness in which the preacher tied a bundle on her back and left it there for the duration of the message to illustrate the unnecessary burdens we carry when we don't forgive people. At the end of the message she untied the load and opened it for everyone to see. It was full of garbage! The possibilities with visual aids are unlimited. Be careful that you have carefully thought through how you will use it so that the impact is positive.

The dangers of illustrations

There are several things we need to avoid as we use illustrations in our message.

Using too many. Too many illustrations can cause the listeners to forget the point of your message. A general rule is to have one good illustration for each major point in your sermon.

Using one that is too long. A long story can make people forget the truth that you are teaching. Many times the details of the story don't add much to the teaching. If you use a longer story it should have a more powerful message than a shorter one. Think carefully about your illustration and what parts are really essential to the story.

Using one that is not related to the sermon. It is easy to use a story or an illustration that is interesting but not really connected to the main point that you are making. This will bring confusion to the listeners. Make sure you have thought about how it illustrates or clarifies the point you are making. The relationship should be clear enough that it brings no confusion to the listeners. If you are in doubt, choose another one. It may always be good to ask yourself, "Is this the best illustration that I can use for this point?"

The Sources of illustrations

The sources for sermon illustrations are virtually unlimited. The best source is your own keen mind. Be keen to look for things that can illustrate your sermons. Notice the way people interact. Reflect on the things that you see. Observe things that other people just pass by. Jesus was a tremendous example of one who noticed his environment and was able to weave so many illustrations from everyday life into his sermons.

Some suggested sources are: The Bible, a newspaper, radio/TV, your imagination, books, life experiences, observation, and traditional proverbs.

There are so many sources of illustrations that we can use that we need to use care in selecting the best ones. Ask yourself, “Which is the one that will best illustrate my point?” “Which one can my listeners most identify with?” Think through the illustration to see which parts are relevant to your point and whether or not there are parts that might lead the listeners to the wrong conclusion.

Beware of using illustrations on the spur of the moment as you preach. Sometimes this can be good, but I have also experienced that it can lead me to trouble. There may be an aspect that I haven't thought through and it ends up not quite fitting the point I want to make.

Ask yourself, “Have I chosen good illustrations for my message?” “Will my audience understand them?” “Are there better ones I could use?” “Have I thought of a visual aid?”

Action Assignment

1. Look around you in the room you are now sitting. What do you see in the way of objects? List 10 of them.
2. Tell specifically how one of these objects could be used to throw light on some spiritual truth. Name an object and tell how you could use it to illustrate the truth.
3. Choose illustrations for the sermon you are developing, referring to this chapter as needed. Find and write one illustration that you will use to illustrate each of your main points.

Chapter 9 WRITE THE INTRODUCTION AND CONCLUSION

Have you ever gone to church and the preacher stood up and talked for 20 minutes and you were still asking yourself, “Where are we going?” or “What is he preaching about?” In this chapter we’re going to learn how *NOT* to do that to your audience as we examine the introduction and conclusion!

Once you have the outline in good condition and have put your applications, you can concentrate on the seventh step in sermon preparation: the introduction and conclusion. In flying, the most critical times for the safety of the passengers are takeoff and landing. If those are handled well, the flight will normally go well. In preaching it is also true that the most crucial times are the beginning and the end. If we crash at these critical moments all our effort may have been in vain. Often preachers make the mistake of planning what they will say but not how to start or finish. Maxwell says, “The secret of a powerful presentation is to create a dynamic opening, a great conclusion and then bring them as close together as possible!” Let's look first at the introduction.

The Introduction

The introduction sets the tone for the whole message and needs to be carefully planned. Roger Ails says, “You have the first seven seconds to make a good first impression.” If you start with confidence, enthusiasm, and a good introduction it will help people to listen to what you have to say.

The introduction should arouse interest. The introduction is a “hook” to catch the minds of people. We need to say something that will cause them to desire to hear what we are going to say. You have been thinking, studying and preparing the sermon but your audience usually has no idea what you will be preaching about. Their minds are on many other things and it is your job to captivate their minds and stir their interest. We must capture their attention and also establish in their minds a need to hear what we are going to say.

The introduction should be short. The introduction should be as short as possible, yet be effective. Usually, 3-5 minutes is adequate. Especially if your time is limited, keep the introduction brief. In the book *How to Preach* the story is told of the woman who complained about her pastor that he takes so much time setting the table that she has lost her appetite when the food comes! Keep it short! The introduction may summarize what you are going to say but it is not the time to preach the message.

We must capture their attention and also establish in their minds a need to hear what we are going to say.

The introduction should be relevant. There should be a clear relationship between the introduction and the sermon. If a preacher stands and tells about his trip to the coast last week and then goes straight to the text and there is no connection the audience is confused. “Why did he talk

about his trip?” This is not an introduction; this may be a part of your pre-sermon testimony! In rare cases the connection may deliberately be hidden until later in the sermon but this should be planned for a specific purpose, not by accident.

The introduction should prepare them for what is coming. You may say, “This morning we are going to see three things that God wants us to know about prayer....”

One note of caution: *Don't promise more than you can fulfill!* Don't say you will speak “briefly” if you know you will take 45 minutes. Don't promise that everyone in the church is going to be transformed into super Christians before the morning is over. It is good to create expectation and faith but promise only what you can actually deliver.

The introduction can use different methods. There are several ways that you can introduce a sermon.

- **Questions.** Questions can be a very effective way of introducing a sermon. Ask a question that is of interest to your audience and which will be answered in the sermon.

“Have you ever wondered ...”

“Do you sometimes struggle with....”

“When you look at the situation in our world do you understand what is going on?”

- **Tell a story.** This can be a story from real life, an imaginary story, or a story that comes from a current event. People love stories and this is one of the best ways to capture their imagination. However, be careful that your story relates to the sermon and isn't too long.

“The other day as I was walking along...”

“This week I read in the newspaper that...”

“When I was a young boy, I remember a time I was in school...”

“Imagine what would happen today if....”

- **Present a problem.** Give a problem that is common with the audience and explain that we will see the solution to the problem.

“Many times Christians have trouble witnessing. Today we are going to learn 3 secrets of effective evangelism from the story of...”

“One of the most difficult areas of our life to control is our tongue. Today....”

- **Make a contrast with public opinion.** Compare what most people think and what the Word of God says.

“If you took a survey in our community today and asked people what the most their most pressing need is, most would respond.... But let us see what the Bible says about...”

“Many people in the world believe that happiness lies in getting things. But Jesus teaches us a different way....”

All of these are ways that you can think about when writing an introduction. Ask God to show you something that will really help people to pay attention and get the most out of your message. Remember, pray about everything in your message, even which story to tell!

The Conclusion

The conclusion is probably the most overlooked part of sermon preparation. Many well prepared and delivered sermons are seriously weakened because the speaker doesn't know how to stop. He goes on and on like a plane lost in the fog at the airport! One homiletics teacher said, "Stand up, speak up, shut up!" In other words say what you need to say and then stop. You need to give some thought and planning to how you will end your sermon.

The conclusion should help to tie together everything that you have said. It is not the time to introduce new ideas but it is a good time to summarize what you have said. Repeating the main points will help people to remember them better.

Just as there are many methods that can be used in the introduction the conclusion also can be done in different ways. The conclusion may be an **illustration** that helps to apply the main points of the message. It may include a **summary or revision** of what you have shared. You may **ask questions** for people to search their hearts and lives.

In the conclusion **focus strongly on the application**. Now is the time to really drive home the change that you want people to make. Are you calling for a new commitment to Christ, a change of attitude, or repentance? Make it very clear what you want the listeners to do. *Don't be afraid to ask for a commitment; you are preaching for life change!* God wants to produce a specific change in people's lives. Let people decide whether or not to do it, but don't let them go without knowing what you are calling them to do. Ask for a specific commitment. "Today I am asking you to make a commitment to God that you will stop gossiping..." (or start tithing, or witness to one person in the coming week, or stop complaining and start rejoicing, etc.) It is helpful if you challenge people to do something specific with a date. You may ask them to share with someone their commitment before the end of the day. Any step of action that you call them to should be clearly understood and measurable. *Don't weaken a strong sermon by failing to call for a commitment!*

Often it is appropriate to ask people to respond visibly by lifting up their hands or coming forward to the front. Don't embarrass people but encourage them to take a specific step. If other needs will be met with a visible call to come forward, make sure you clarify what the invitation is from the message and what other needs you are prepared to meet.

Along with your conclusion you may think of a **song** that will set a good atmosphere. It is difficult to do this as you are standing and preaching and too often we come to the end of the message and realize that we haven't thought of a song that is appropriate so we call on a brother to lead us in a "chorus" and hope that he has at least been listening to the message! It is far better for us to think ahead of time of a song that fits the sermon and will lead to an appropriate conclusion.

Don't be
afraid to ask
for a
commitment;
you are
preaching for
life change!

Avoid repeating several times, “In conclusion...” When you are ready to conclude, do so! But don't keep promising that you will soon be finished!

Above all the conclusion should be the final step to help you accomplish your goal. Ask yourself, “Does my conclusion help me reach my goal?” If not, the conclusion needs to be revised.

I have presented these steps more in the order that they will be done than in the order that they will be delivered. Obviously, the introduction will come before the outline and the conclusion will be last. There may be times that the order may vary in preparation but this is a good guideline to follow. The goal, title and the outline will naturally flow together and may be developed simultaneously at times. Or you may need to go back and change the goal if you find different material than you expected in your study of the scripture. As you work on your outline you may find that the title needs to be changed.

Action Assignment

1. Think of an introduction to the sermon and the conclusion. Write at least a summary of what you will say in these parts:

INTRODUCTION: I will say....

CONCLUSION: (Make sure it includes a clear call to a commitment) I will say.....

2. Now ask yourself, “Is this the best introduction? Will it create interest in what I will preach about? Is it related to the sermon? Does my conclusion clearly call people to take a specific step?”

Chapter 10 PUT THE SERMON ON PAPER

After all that work you are ready to put your sermon on paper in its final form! Blessed is the preacher who when he stands up is able to easily read his notes but is not glued to them!

Why do we write our sermon on paper?

- It helps us to remember the important information that we want to share with our audience.
- It also helps to keep us from getting sidetracked on things that we don't need to say.

What kind of paper should you use?

This will vary depending on your personal preference and what is available to you. Loose papers are often used and work well if you have a good filing system for them. If you prepare your message with a computer, you will need to print the message on loose paper. Make sure you have numbered the pages so that if they get out

Blessed is the
preacher is able
to easily read his
notes but is not
glued to them!

of order during delivery you can quickly rearrange them again. Another option is to have a special notebook that is used only for sermons. This will help you keep your sermons after preaching. Alternatively, you may fold a paper sidewise, then fold it in half and use it with four pages. This makes a convenient size to fit inside your Bible. I recommend that if you are serious about preaching don't ever throw away a sermon. It represents a lot of time and effort and you may want to refer to it again or even preach it again if the Lord leads in that direction. At least you will have a record of what you preached in a particular location.

What do you write on the paper? At the top of the first page write:

Title:

Text:

Goal:

Date/Location:

Follow this with the **Introduction** and then the **main points** of the outline and finally the **conclusion**.

With each major point in your outline make sure that you have explained, illustrated and applied the point unless you are doing all the application at the end.

Tips for writing your sermon

Write enough but not too much. Make sure it is enough to help you remember all that you want to say, but don't write whole paragraphs. If you write out whole paragraphs you will get lost when preaching. If there is a particularly strong statement or application that you want to make it will be helpful to write it so that it comes with greater force.

Certainly all your main points and the scriptures you will refer too should be easily visible. You may want to write out scriptures that you don't plan to turn to. This will save you time as well as the possible embarrassment of not being able to quickly find the verse. It is not easy to

preach and look for a verse at the same time. Often, it seems like the book for which you are looking has just disappeared from your Bible!

Make sure you are writing clearly in large print so that you can easily read your writing. Don't use very small writing and don't try to squeeze so much into one place. You need to be able to glance down at your paper and easily understand what is there. If you are able to type your sermon it will help make everything readable.

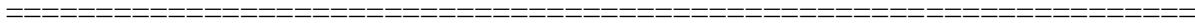
Use various techniques to make key things visible. Think of the things that you want to be able to see most easily when you look down at your paper and then use the following techniques to aid you.

- Use different **colored pens** for different points. You may have your main points in red and other points in black or blue.
- Use **underlining**. You can underline the main points or items that you want to stand out. Underline any Bible passages you want to refer to so that it stands out clearly. When you look down you will quickly see the reference of the verse. You may underline a strong point that you want to say exactly as you wrote it. A highlighting pen can also help greatly for this work.
- **Capital letters**. Put your major points in all capital letters. It helps to create a contrast with the rest of the text.
- **Good indentation**. This helps to make your outline easy to follow.

Don't mark everything of course, or you soon won't have anything standing out!

Your end result should be something that can easily be followed and which will enable you to accomplish the goal for which you planned. See Appendix 3 for an example of a written sermon.

So far in your sermon preparation you are still in the kitchen, preparing the food! In the next step we will bring the food to the table as we look at the delivery of the sermon.



Action Assignment

1. You are now ready to put your sermon down on paper. Follow the instructions given in this chapter and write it out carefully and neatly on a separate paper. Use the different techniques mentioned in this chapter and refer to the sample outline in Appendix 3 as a guide. (Note that it does not use different colors as yours will.)

Chapter 11 DELIVER THE SERMON

After eight steps of preparation you are now ready for the delivery of the message! The message is ready to come from the paper and to the people through your delivery of the message. We will look at how you should behave when preaching and some techniques that will help your delivery to be more effective.

First, how should you behave when preaching?

Naturally. Be yourself; don't try to copy someone else! God created you as a unique individual and doesn't want you to become anyone else. It is good to observe others and learn what makes them more effective but *never* try to be another person. Don't exaggerate your expressions and try to overwhelm people. The power is in the message, not in how loudly you speak it! Be natural.

Confidently. Preach with confidence. You have prayed, studied and prepared. Now take courage from Paul's instruction, "*Preach the word!*" (2 Tim. 4:2) We will deal later with nervousness but for now realize that you need to have confidence in yourself. Don't allow Satan to play games with your mind. You can do "*all things through Christ*" who strengthens you! Pray that God will grant you confidence. Even Paul, the great apostle requested prayer that he would "*fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel...*" (Eph. 6:19)

Earnestly. Preaching should be taken with all earnestness or seriousness. Seriousness doesn't mean you can't use humor, but it means that you are fully involved in what you are doing. Put your whole heart into the sermon you are preaching. Your facial expression, movements, etc. should all convey to the audience that *what you are saying is very important*. We are bringing the Word of God to the hearts of men. It deserves our total concentration and effort.

Your facial expression, movements, etc. should all convey to the audience that <i>what you are saying is very important</i> .

Use humor but do it sparingly, make sure that it is not offensive, helps you keep to the objective, and honors God.

What are some techniques of presenting a sermon? As you speak in public delivering your sermon there are several things to consider about how you communicate.

Speed of speaking. Your speed is important in speaking. If you speak too fast your words will run together and you will not be understood. You should speak slow enough to pronounce words clearly and for people to understand. If you are relaxed this will not be a problem.

Tone. Your tone refers to the quality of the voice and manner of expression. There should be some variety in your tone. When there is no variety we say that the speaker is using a **monotone** which is dull and

boring to listen to. Our tone should change according to the emotion of the topic. There are times when it is good to use a happy voice while at other times a sad voice is appropriate. At times our tone will be high and at other times low. We should avoid harsh and condemning tones. Usually, if we are natural and relaxed this will happen automatically.

Volume. Volume refers to the loudness of your voice. Some preachers assume that the louder they speak the more people will listen. A loud voice will help attract attention immediately but when it continues at the same volume it doesn't help in holding attention. To be effective, we need variety in volume. Use soft quiet words at times, especially if the audience is small. At times an abrupt change in volume will bring a dramatic effect.

Gestures/movements. The body language of the speaker should emphasize the message but not detract from it. This includes hand movements, posture, and even moving around. The key word with gestures is **moderation**. Don't be too dramatic or unnatural. On the other hand use enough motion to emphasize your points. Don't be frozen to the pulpit. Some movement helps to hold the attention of the audience.

Avoid unconscious distractions. You need someone to love you enough to tell you if you are doing something distracting. Distractions may involve your hands, your eyes, or even your appearance. Some people unconsciously tug on their ear; others, continually adjust their spectacles; others keep straightening their tie. All of these things can be completely unconscious and will require someone else to tell us what we are doing. If you are married your wife can help you a lot in this area! Unmarried preachers can look for a good friend to help you in this area.

Keep your *eyes* on the audience but don't stare at one person. It may help to pick out a few individuals who are "with you" and focus on them more than the others. They will encourage you to keep preaching! If you find that it is difficult for you to look directly at people's eyes look just slightly above them. It will still appear that you are making eye contact. Avoid looking out the window or up at the ceiling, you are preaching to people!

Appearance. Your appearance should be *neat but not flashy*. Torn or sloppy dress can really distract the listeners from the message you are preaching. You may not be able to afford a new suit but make your old one look its best. Clean your shoes, tie your tie neatly. Make sure that your colors match and that your shirt is properly tucked in. If you use a handkerchief when preaching make sure that it is clean and that you put it completely back in your pocket after use so that it doesn't hang out! The preacher should avoid wearing flashy clothes or jewelry that draws attention to him rather than the message. Do you want people to leave talking about how you *looked* or what you *said*?

Stand **confidently** and with **good posture**. Don't rest on the pulpit. You may place your hands on the podium but don't put your weight on it.

As a general rule when people watch you preach they should not really notice your gestures, movements, or appearance. They should not be obvious, which means that they are supporting rather than detracting from your message.

Deal with nervousness

All public speakers experience some degree of nervousness and it is to be expected, especially for those who have not spoken in public often. In fact, some nervousness is good since it makes the heart beat faster, the adrenaline flows and you do your very best. However, too much nervousness is not good. The best prevention for nervousness is preparedness.

Prepare your mind by studying. The more you have studied and even practiced your sermon the more confident you will be that you can do it. Knowing what you are going to say, what illustrations you are going to use, etc. helps to ease nervousness.

Prepare your soul by praying. We have already looked at this area but I will again emphasize the importance of prayer throughout the whole process of sermon preparation. Don't stop now! Pray for confidence and boldness to preach the Word. Quote verses that will give you courage, *"God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and self-discipline."* (2 Tim. 1:7)

Prepare your body by deep breathing. Just before standing to speak take some good deep breaths! It will help your body prepare for the sermon and slow the racing of your heart.

There are several other important issues that relate to sermon delivery:

- **Scripture reading.** Make sure people are with you before reading the scripture. Wait for the ruffling of most pages to stop before beginning. At the same time don't embarrass people by saying, "I see that some have not found the scripture yet and I'm waiting on them." If they need directions to find a book, give them some guidance.
- Avoid **difficult words** that are not understood by your audience as well as slang or offensive words. Keep the message simple.
- Also **avoid repeated or distracting words.** Many times we use words to fill space that we don't really mean and they can become a distraction. "Uum...", "All right", "Praise the Lord" "Hallelujah" are common ones that are misused. Make sure that when you say, "Praise the Lord" you mean it!
- **Involve the audience** as much as possible in your delivery through questions, asking for an "amen" or by having them say something to themselves or one another. This helps to keep them alert and involved in the message.
- **Watch your time!** What a shame it is when a preacher has a very good message but because of carelessness with time loses his audience. Different audiences have a different tolerance but each one has a limit. After that, you won't reach them. Often we think that since our message is so important and our delivery is so good that people won't mind a few more minutes! In fact, it is better to release them while they are still slightly hungry than to wait until they are annoyed at you.

Think before you preach about the part in your sermon where you want to spend the most time. Make sure that you have your watch with you and glance at it frequently. I advise placing it near your notes when possible so that you don't need to be seen looking at it on your arm. (Don't keep picking it up and staring at it intently!)

How much time is enough time? It may vary depending on your situation, but generally I feel that 30-45 minutes is long enough. In a well-prepared sermon you can say a lot in that amount of time.

These are the nine steps of preparing a sermon. Follow them until they become automatic. They are like the fundamentals of kicking a soccer ball, until you master them you will not be the best player you can be. They may feel awkward at first like any new skill, but if you will work at them diligently they will soon become very natural to you.

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Action Assignment

1. Practice the delivery of your sermon. Find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed and preach it just as you would in front of an audience.

Chapter 12 PREACHING FOR SPECIAL EVENTS

There are several special events to which you might be called to preach that require some special preparation different from preaching in a local church setting.

Crusades/evangelistic preaching

Several things should be noted for crusade preaching.

- **Be thoroughly prepared.** Almost anything can happen at a crusade and you are on the front lines of the battleground. More than in the church you are required to be spiritually alert. In outside environments drunkards, dogs or stray animals may interrupt the meeting without notice!
- **Keep your sermon short.** For a crusade make every effort to keep the sermon short. Remember that your audience is not as committed as the believers are on Sunday and if you don't hold their attention they will simply walk away! Get to the point, make your point and give the invitation!
- **Use many illustrations** or stories to retain the interest of people. Illustrations in the crusade ground are perhaps even more important than in the church. Choose them well. Consider visual aids or drama as a means of communicating the truth to the audience.
- **Base your sermon on the Word.** Although you may not follow written notes as closely as you do in a church setting, you should still study and prepare ahead of time. Think about the audience and what applications you will make. Make sure you present the gospel in a clear manner and give people an opportunity to respond. Make the gospel attractive to people; don't beat them with the Word but use it to draw them to Christ.
- **Think seriously about your conclusion.** How will you call people to respond? Will you sing a song or chorus as an invitation? What should be done? You may need to communicate with ushers or singers before the message to avoid confusion. Decide your plan ahead of time and then allow the Holy Spirit to work.

Schools/youth meetings

When you are called upon to preach in schools or to youth there are several things you should consider.

- **Think more about your applications and illustrations.** Think about the student's situation in life and ask yourself, "What challenges do they face on a daily basis? Try to remember what it was like when you were in school and the issues you faced. Talk with teens and learn what they are going through, you might be surprised how much has changed since you were in school. Tailor your applications and illustrations to the needs of the audience.

- **Also consider the age of the students.** If you are speaking to school children in their first five years of school they are obviously at a different stage of life than high school students. Again, adjust the message and applications to the age. You may want to change your style of communicating for younger children. Come down to their level and try to connect with them. Ask more questions and involve them in the message.
- **Watch your time.** Schools have timetables and you must fit into them! Find out ahead of time how much time you have and adjust your message accordingly.

Funerals

Funerals are special occasions when you have a wonderful opportunity to share the Word of God with people who are tender, having been faced with the reality of death. Seize the opportunity and keep the following issues in mind.

- **Comfort the family and relatives.** You are there to offer hope and comfort to a grieving family. Always show your concern and identify with their emotions. Allow appropriate expressions of emotion, even Jesus wept at a funeral.
- **Avoid empty words.** Often at times of grief well meaning believers say things like, “It was the will of God” or “Thankfully, no one else was killed” or “Don’t cry, be strong”. These things generally don’t help and the preacher should avoid such sayings. If possible obtain a good book on helping people through grief and it will give you wisdom on counseling in such situations.
- **Choose a relevant scripture.** Funerals are appropriate times to remind people of the certainty of death. They are more open at such a time to see their own humanness. At the same time, give the hope that we have in the gospel message.
- **Don’t preach to the dead.** Preach to those who are alive. When appropriate you may refer to the person who has passed away particularly if there are positive things to speak about the person. But remember that the dead person is in the hands of God and nothing you say will change his/her eternal destiny. Preach to the living and prepare them for death.
- **Keep it short!** A funeral is an emotionally draining time especially for the family. Have mercy on them and don’t preach all afternoon! A short message that is to the point is sufficient and will be more appreciated by all.

Action Assignment

1. Prepare a message for one of the special events listed in this chapter.

Chapter 13 DEVELOPING A TOPICAL SERMON

In many respects the process of creating a topical sermon is the same as an expository or textual sermon: making a goal, introduction, conclusion, applications, etc. However there are several differences that you must consider.

Choosing the topic. Instead of choosing the text as you would for a textual or expository sermon you will choose a *topic* that you wish to study from the scripture. The Holy Spirit may lead you to this topic in a similar manner: through a sensed need among the people, through personal study or through special revelation. In any case, you choose a topic rather than a text.

Studying the topic. To study for a topical sermon you will need to follow the procedure for a concordance study. (See chapter 15 and 16 for details.) This will take you to many different passages in the scripture. Take notes on any interesting ideas suggested in the scripture. Your goal is to get a good overview of what scripture has to say concerning the topic you have chosen.

In your study you will want to follow the dictionary meaning of some words and when you are able even Greek or Hebrew language helps.

Organizing the material. For the topical sermon you will need to take all the scriptures you have studied and arrange the ones that are useful to your goal into a logical outline. Make sure your outline follows some kind of logical sequence. Where possible try to have at least two verses to support a major point. This will safeguard you against the error of basing a teaching on a small foundation. Leave aside the verses that don't help your outline, but take care that you aren't contradicting the teachings contained in them.

In your final draft you may want to write out some of the scriptures on your sermon notes to avoid turning to every reference. Decide which ones are the most important and need to be read. Usually, you should read at least *one scripture to support every major point* you are making and more if it is controversial or new to many people.

If possible you may have a **key verse** that supports most of your major points. If so, you can stay with that verse throughout the sermon and only refer to others as needed. This will help keep people focused on one passage and avoid much moving around in their Bibles.

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Action Assignment

See Assignment for chapter 16.

Chapter 14 DEVELOPING BIBLE STUDY SKILLS

We touched briefly on study skills as one of the nine steps in sermon preparation. However, since it is such a major part of sermon preparation this chapter will go into more details than earlier.

Bible study is such a vast subject that we could spend many days learning more about how to do it. Bible study takes a lot of time and energy but the rewards are great. Js. 1:25 says, *“The man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does.”* Notice that we are to look *“intently”* into the law or the Word of God. Intently means that we do it diligently and with purpose. We need to focus intentionally on finding truth in the scripture. This is hard work but we are promised a blessing.

Constant study and special study are both needed. Mt. 10:19-20 is sometimes used in defense of not preparing, *“But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”* This verse is not talking about a Sunday sermon; it is talking about a time when you are arrested. It applies only to emergency situations!

Our God is a God of order and planning. Even a casual study of the scripture reveals the tremendous mind of God planning our salvation even before the world began. It was his plan to provide all the types and pictures of Christ in the Old Testament. His universe is a universe of order and the scripture themselves reveal tremendous order to the careful observer. Let's commit ourselves to the study of the scripture both as a lifestyle and for special occasions such as a sermon.

Let's commit ourselves to the study of the scripture both as a lifestyle and for special occasions such as a sermon.

Four rules of Biblical interpretation.

As we come to scripture it is vitally important that we learn how to correctly interpret what we read. We are to *“Rightly divide the Word of Truth.”* Four rules will guide us.

Rule One: Find what kind of speech is used, factual or figurative

Factual speech is a simple statement of truth about an object or event. When the scripture says, *“He left Jerusalem for Galilee.”* this is factual speech. When Paul says, *“Husbands love your wives”* he is using factual speech. Interpreting this type of speech is not so complicated. We only need to ask, *“What does the verse say?”* We don't need to seek for hidden or complicated interpretations. We may still need to dig deeply to find *all* the meaning in the passage but this is simply a part of study.

Figurative speech is speech that uses imagery or comparisons. It is symbolic language and often uses words like *“as”* or *“like”*. For example

when Jesus says, “The Kingdom of heaven is like...” He is using figurative speech. “I am the door” is also figurative speech. When the Bible says, “He is our Rock” it is figurative. He is not a literal rock but his character and the character of a rock have something in common.

Figurative speech is more difficult to correctly understand. When the Bible uses this kind of speech we need to be very careful in how we interpret the meaning of the verse or passage. Here we should ask ourselves, “What does this figure of speech symbolize?” The books of prophecy use a lot of figurative language and hence produce a wide variety of interpretations.

It is possible that a passage can have double meaning and can be interpreted both literally and figuratively. For example many Old Testament passages are literal history of God's people but in the New Testament we find that they also have a symbolic meaning. The Passover lamb, for example, was a real historical event in the lives of God's people but it also represents Jesus Christ, the “lamb of God.”

Rule Two: Determine the original circumstances.

It is also helpful in Bible study to determine the original circumstances. This means the situation in which the scripture was written, who was involved, what was happening, etc.

For example, to understand why Jesus used such harsh words against the Pharisees we need to know who the Pharisees were and the way they lived. Or to understand the significance of Jesus' talk with the Samaritan woman we need to know a little bit about the relationship between Jews and Samaritans.

It is helpful to know to whom the passage was written and what had happened before that time. Who was the writer, the audience, and what was the purpose of the book? The more we know about the original circumstances the safer we will be in interpretation.

To understand the passage in Eph. 2:1-18 about the unity of the Jews and Gentiles in Christ, we need to understand the historical differences between the two.

We can learn about the original circumstances through reference books such as Bible dictionaries or Bible Handbooks.

Rule Three: Determine the context of the passage.

The context is *the verses before and after the text*. We have already mentioned this but we will note it again here as a rule for interpreting scripture. We must consider the context of the passage when interpreting a verse or passage. We should ask, “Is my interpretation consistent with the verses that have come before and after?”

For example, we all know the saying of Jesus, “*Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.*” But what is the context? The verse before says, “*If you hold to my teachings you are really my disciples.*” (Jn. 8:31,32) The context teaches that obedience to Jesus' teaching is required for us to “know the truth.” We cannot expect to walk in disobedience to truth that we know and expect God to reveal more truth to us.

1 Jn. 2:27 says, "...you do not need anyone to teach you." Many people have taken this to mean that we don't need to go to school or study. We need to look at the context to understand what this passage is teaching. John says that he is writing to warn them about "those who are trying to lead you astray." (v. 26). He is warning against false teachers, not categorically rejecting teaching. In fact, that interpretation is ridiculous since John himself was teaching the people with his letter!

So before concluding that we understand what the text is saying it is very important that we consider the context. Read the preceding verses and those that follow. Consider the theme of the entire book.

Rule Four: Consider the rest of the Bible.

We must also consider the rest of the Bible. The Bible will not contradict itself. If you read James alone you may conclude that we are saved by works. You may read other passages and conclude that we are saved only by faith and it doesn't matter what we do. When we consider both of them we come to a more balanced view of scripture. Before formulating a doctrine we should study other passages of scripture that teach on the same subject. The scripture cannot contradict itself but it may take some effort on our part to understand the right teaching.

3 errors to avoid in interpretation

Basing an important conclusion on a small foundation.

Don't base an important conclusion on a small part of scripture. For example, the Mormons baptize for the dead based on an unclear verse in 1 Cor. 15:29. Before making your conclusion make sure that it agrees with other scriptures. Ask, "Is this consistent with what other scriptures teach?" "Is it a major teaching or a minor one?" Trust God that when he feels something is very important he will make it very clear and probably even repeat it in several different places.

Making the details of comparison mean what you want them to mean.

This is important when we are interpreting parables or passages that are figurative, comparing one thing with another. Comparisons should have one point in common, be careful about going beyond that.

For example, when the scripture says that God is a rock, does it mean that he is smooth, hard, cold and gray? No, it means only that he is stable and unchanging!

When you interpret the parables look for *one major point*. Don't try to find meaning in all the details of the story. In parables Jesus was teaching one important truth. If you are studying the parable of the good Samaritan look for the main point. It is not helpful to try to figure out what was represented by the donkey, oil, Jericho, the money, etc. The point Jesus was making is that we need to love our neighbor!

When you interpret the parables look for one major point.

Rejecting the opinions of other believers.

When we come to the scripture we need to come with a great deal of humility. For literally thousands of years people have committed their lives to studying this same book. We should be very cautious about rejecting the beliefs of those who have gone before us. This is not to say that they are always right, but we should at least seriously consider what they have to say. They might come from a different theological background or another denomination but they may still have an insight into God's Word that you don't have. So don't throw all the commentaries and reference books away just yet! Those people have something to teach us. You will find when you read what other people have written on the scripture they are many disagreements over some issues. There are many different traditions. This should not cause us throw up our hands in disgust and despair, but it should make us cautious about forming our own "new" opinion and ignoring all that has been written in the past.

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Action Assignment

1. Evaluate your sermon based on this chapter. Have you followed the rules of Biblical interpretation? Make any changes that are needed.

Chapter 15

USING DIFFERENT REFERENCE MATERIALS

Reference materials and books can be of great help to us in Bible study although their size and complexity many times discourages the Bible student. We will consider the most common helps found in many Bibles and the most common reference books found in libraries.

A Bible Cross Reference system.

Many Bibles contain an excellent resource that is often overlooked, the cross-reference system. This is normally found in a centre column between the Biblical texts. A cross-reference in a Bible gives other verses that relate to the one you are reading and that can shed more light on the subject. Usually there will be a small letter just above a word in your Bible. Look at the cross reference (usually in the center column) for the verse number that you were reading and the small letter that you found. Next to that letter in the cross-reference will be one or more scriptures that relate in some way to that verse. You can spend a good amount of time following verses in this way and it will help you in finding other related verses that may shed much light on the one you are studying.

Maps

Most Bibles have at least a few maps that can aid in understanding the land of the Bible times. The map can show the locations of towns, villages, or nations that are referred to in the scripture. Maps help the reader to understand distances between different locations and to picture the geography mentioned in the scriptures. An *atlas* is a special book filled with maps with much greater detail.

A Concordance

One of the most useful tools in Bible study is a concordance. A concordance is a book that lists the different places in the Bible that a particular word is used. It is very useful to help you find where a verse is located or to find out what the Bible teaches about a particular subject. Some Bibles have small concordances near the back. These concordances do not list every work or every occurrence of words but they can be very helpful. An “exhaustive” concordance such as *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance* lists every word in the Bible and every occurrence of that word.

A concordance is a book that lists the different places in the Bible that a particular word is used.

For more details on using a concordance see the next chapter.

A Bible dictionary.

A Bible dictionary is a useful tool for looking up information about names, places, and customs mentioned in the Bible. It can give you more information about a specific person such as “David” or a place like “Galilee”. It also contains information about customs of Bible times such

as “circumcision” or the “Passover meal”. All these things are listed in alphabetical order just as in a normal dictionary.

A Bible Handbook.

A Bible Handbook is similar to a Bible dictionary. The main difference is that in a Bible handbook the topics are listed as they appear in scripture instead of in alphabetical order. The Bible Handbook will also give introductions to the different books of the Bible and helpful information about the author, date of writing, the setting, etc. A lot of historical and cultural information will be included and many pictures will illustrate the topics.

Commentary

A commentary is an author's explanation of the scripture text. There is a wide variety in commentaries since each one reflects the author's opinions and interests. Some will focus on scholarly insights and information; some are more devotional in their emphasis; while others place much emphasis on the original languages of the scripture. Some writers are very evangelical in their doctrine but others will question some of the historical events of scripture. It is good to read the ideas of several authors to understand where they agree and where they disagree.

Commentaries are very useful to obtain insights from others about the text. When using them however, remember that these are the comments of someone about scripture, but not the scripture itself. The writers can be wrong on how they understand the scripture!

Some commentaries deal with only a particular book of the Bible. Others cover several books such as the Pastoral Epistles, and others cover the whole New or Old Testament in a single volume.

Greek/Hebrew Language Helps

Often we cannot find the full meaning of the scripture since some meaning is lost when it is translated from the original languages to our language. The Old Testament was primarily written in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek. Language helps can give us insight into the meaning of the original word even if we have not studied Greek or Hebrew.

A good place to start with the Greek language is the *Strong's Concordance*. After each reference in the concordance there is a number that refers you to the Hebrew or Greek dictionary in the back of the book. (If the verse is in the Old Testament it will be found in the Hebrew section; if from the New Testament it will be in the Greek part.) By looking at the number you can easily see if the same original word is used in the different verses or if different words are used. If the number is the same it means that the original word is the same.

To find the meaning of the word you need to look up the number in the dictionary at the back of the concordance. Let's look at an example using pride. The concordance lists two occurrences like this:

1 Ti 3:6 being lifted up with p. he fall into 5187

1 Jo 2:16 lust of the eyes, and the p. of life, 212

The numbers 5187 and 512 indicate that two different words are used for the English word pride. If you go to the back of the book and look

up number 5187 you will find that the Greek word is “tuphoo” which means to “envelop with smoke.” Figuratively this means “to inflate with conceit: to be lifted up with pride...”

When you look up number 212, you find the word “alazoneia” which means “self confidence, boasting,...” You also can find that it comes from the root word number 213, which refers to a boaster.

Although this can be a tedious process, it will often uncover a helpful insight into the meaning of the scripture.

Another book that will help you with language is an *expository dictionary* such as Vine's. This will list the English word alphabetically and then give the different Greek words that are used. It will explain more about the different meanings with different words.

Action Assignment

1. Visit a good library that contains the reference books mentioned in this chapter. Find each of them and browse through them to become familiar with them. Ask the librarian for assistance if needed.
2. Spend 30 minutes using reference books from a library to study the sermon you prepared. You can look at several commentaries on the book of Ephesians with particular emphasis on your passage. You may also want to look at a Bible handbook for more information about Ephesians, the city of Ephesus, or the people to whom Paul was writing. Write any insights you gained from your study.

Chapter 16 **USING A CONCORDANCE**

The concordance is one of the most useful tools for Bible Study. These instructions will help you to use a concordance in sermon preparation. Here are the steps you would follow for any topical study using the word “pride” as our example.

Step 1 Look up the word “Pride”.

You will find a list of references in the order that they occur in the Bible. It will look something like this:

Le. 26:19 I will break the p. of your power
1 Sam. 17:28 I know thy p. and the
Pr. 16:18 p. goeth before destruction, and
Pr. 29:23 man's p. shall bring him low
Da 4:37 those that walk in p. he is able

The first part of each entry is the reference where it can be found in the Bible. Then a short sentence is given from that particular verse. The word that you looked up will not be written out; only the first letter will be given. In this example the “p.” stands for pride.

Step 2. Look up the references in your Bible.

On a separate paper write down all the references that you think will be helpful in your study. Look them up in your Bible to see the entire verse. If you find that a particular verse is not helpful for you, strike it from your list. Be careful that you don't strike it out because you don't agree with it! When you find something that is interesting or informative, write it on your paper. For example beside the reference to Da. 4:37 you might write: “God is able to humble the proud.”

Step 3. Organize the material.

When you have looked at all the verses and made some notes for yourself you are ready to begin organizing your ideas. You should choose some major points that you will have discovered. For example you might have as a major point “The source of pride” or “The results of pride” or “God's attitude towards pride” or others. It will help you to write these points down with some space in between. Now take the verses that you have looked up and put them under the major points to which they relate. There may be some that don't fit under any main point, just omit them. Do the same with sub points.

Step 4. Complete the sermon

You now have a basic outline for a talk or a sermon on the topic you have chosen, pride. You will be able to say with confidence what the Bible says about pride and support what you say with scripture references. To develop this into a topical sermon you can add more ideas, decide which scriptures to use to support your main points and think of examples and applications to use in your sermon. Add a title, goal, introduction and conclusion just as you did with an expository sermon.

This format can be used on any topic found in scripture. Often it can be helpful to also look up related words, for example “humility”, “humble” and “haughty” are all related to pride. A *topical Bible* can help find related scriptures.

CONCLUSION

Preparing and delivering sermons is hard work. It is a discipline that requires our full attention and commitment. At first many of these steps will seem awkward to you but with practice they will become very natural. It is like learning to drive a vehicle. At first you have to focus on each step. But when you master the skill you can do it without thinking.

Remember that what we are sharing with people is the Word of life, the Word that will not “*return void.*” (Is. 55:10,11) It is an awesome task but in Jn. 16:13-15 we are promised the assistance of the Holy Spirit himself to guide us into all truth!

Do your best to preach the Word. Don't wait until Saturday night to start preparing. Start early in the week and God will be able to deepen the message in your heart. Put these principles into practice and see lives changed through the power of the Holy Spirit!

Action Assignment

1. Look at the topics from the book of Ephesians that are listed below. Choose one that you would like to preach about:

- Wisdom
- grace
- speech (tongue, talk, etc.)
- thanksgiving (thanks, thank, thankful, etc.)
- sin (you will need to narrow your topic perhaps to a particular book or the gospels since there are so many references to sin)
- prayer (pray, praying)
- humility (see humble, pride)
- patience
- unity (see one, together, etc.)
- bitterness (bitter).
- spiritual warfare (This will require a topical reference book)

2. Now do a concordance study of the topic you have chosen. This will take several hours, so be prepared! Follow the instructions given in this chapter as you go through the steps below.

- a. Use a concordance to look up at least 15 references to that word (or the related words listed above). The references will come from different places in the Bible
- b. Write the references you looked up on another paper and put any comment or insight you get from the verse.
- c. Develop headings for your main points and put it in an outline form. At this point you only need a good outline of the topic. This involves grouping the ideas from scripture into related ideas.
- d. Thinking and meditate more on your main points for additional insights. Go to the scriptures again and look at the context for more insight. You may find an additional truth, you may see how one verse supports another verse, you may think of another verse that is similar and look at it. In this process of study you may choose to eliminate some verses that don't strengthen your main ideas or add others. Your outline may even change completely to support new ideas. During this study you may need to look up words in a dictionary for more meaning or read a commentary on a particular passage. Remember to pray for God's insight as you study and prepare the message.
- e. Write a title and an aim for the sermon. Think of an introduction for the sermon and an illustration for each main point on the outline.
- f. Think more about your illustrations. Perhaps there is a Bible character that will illustrate the truth of your teaching, maybe someone you met this week, a newspaper headline, a story you heard, etc. Evaluate your illustrations based on what you learned in chapter nine.
- g. Think about applications for your points. How can you apply the truths that you are preaching to real life?
- h. When you are satisfied with your study you are ready to put it in its final form on paper. Remember to write enough so that you can remember well, but not so much that you will be confused. Underlining or using different colors will help you.

Appendix 1 Developing Outlining Skills

I. DEFINITION OF AN OUTLINE

What is an outline? An outline is simply the framework or skeleton upon which the topic hangs. It organizes thoughts and material into related ideas for clearer understanding.

II. PARTS OF AN OUTLINE

A. Main Points.

These are the major points or ideas and can be stated as a short sentence or simply points. All thoughts and ideas under the main point should relate to the main point.

B. Sub Points.

These are points that support or expand the main point. They are indented from the main points to show their relationship. In this outline “A” and “B” are the sub points of II. They must both be “parts” of an outline.

III. MAKING AN OUTLINE

An outline can be made before the material is added; or can be extracted from existing material if it is well written. For example, read the following paragraph carefully and compare it with the accompanying outline:

Outline:

Title: The country of Secam

I. THE PEOPLE OF SECAM

A. The Scems

B. The Scums

II. THE ECONOMY OF SECAM

A. Fishing

1. Perch

2. Tilapia

B. Agriculture

1. Mangoes

2. Bananas

III. THE GEOGRAPHY OF SECAM.

A. The Interior is mountainous

1. Evergreen trees

2. Wild animals

B. The coast is flat

1. Sandy beaches

2. Coral reefs

Secam

The country of Secam is a beautiful country located in the South Pacific. It is composed of 50 islands. The people of Secam originally came from Australia in the late 1600's. They have divided into two main clans, the Scems and the Scums. The Scems are primarily peasant farmers while the Scums are fishermen.

The economy of Secam consists primarily of fishing industry and agricultural exports. The most common fish are perch and tilapia while the main exports are mangoes and bananas.

The land of Secam is rugged and mountainous in the interior while the coastal regions are flat and barren. Tourists love the beauty of the mountains that are covered with evergreen trees and populated with tigers. The coastal areas make favourite resort areas where people come from all over the world to see the sandy beaches and the beautiful coral reefs.

Notes:

Notice how each major point summarizes one thought or idea of the paragraphs. The title summarizes the topic of the entire work. By looking at the outline you can quickly tell the direction of the thoughts of the writer. Each sub point relates to the main point. Some of the sub points also have sub points that are further indented.

Here you can easily see that the outline is just the skeleton of the lesson; the written version gives more details and presents it in a more interesting format.

Appendix 2

SERMON CHECKLIST

30 Questions to ask yourself before preaching

Use this checklist to evaluate your sermon and to make sure that you have properly organized and prepared.

I. OUTLINE

1. Do my major points all relate to each other? Can you say, "Today we will look at two/three things about.....?" If you cannot make such a statement your points are not related.
2. Do my sub points all relate to the main point they are under?
3. Is there a logical sequence to my main points? (This may come from the text or it may be steps in a process, etc.)
4. Do my main points all use a common word?
5. Do my main points use similar construction grammatically?
6. Do I use any words that begin with the same letter or end with the same sound?
7. Do my major points relate to my goal?
8. Do each of my major points and sub points come from the text?
9. Have I written the verse next to the point?

II. INTRODUCTION

1. Is my introduction clearly related to my sermon?
2. Will it grab the audience's attention and interest?
3. Is it short and to the point?

III. CONCLUSION

1. Have I added any new ideas in my conclusion? (You should not.)
2. Does my conclusion clearly challenge the audience to take the practical step that I have as a goal?
3. Have I thought about a song, prayer or invitation as a means of response from the audience?

IV. GOAL

1. Is my goal practical?
2. Is my goal focused on only one change that I hope to accomplish?
3. Is my goal accomplished by my main points and conclusion?

V. ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Do I have at least one illustration for each main point?
2. Have I thought carefully about how well it relates to my point?
3. Are my illustrations too long?
4. Have I eliminated unnecessary details?

VI. APPLICATIONS

1. Have I made applications for each major point, either as I make the point or in the conclusion?
2. Is my application a specific action that I expect people to take as a result of the point I am making? In other words, will they know exactly what I am challenging them to do?
3. Does my application relate to my goal?

VII. WRITTEN PAPER

1. Is my paper neat and clearly written?
2. Are my major points well organized and numbered in a consistent way?
3. Have I underlined key thoughts or used different colored pens for writing?
4. Have I written enough ideas so that I cannot forget what I will say?
5. Have I included all the illustrations and applications that I plan to use?

Appendix 3 A Sample Written Sermon

Title: Rejoicing in Difficult Times

Text: Hab. 3:17-19

Date/Location:

Introduction:

Things are tough in our country today. The economy is down, many have lost jobs, unemployment is rising, insecurity is a real threat, violence is around the corner. What do we do in hard times? What is the Christian response to the news? An Old Testament prophet gives us the answer....

Read Hab. 3:17-19

Habakkuk's situation: The crops have all failed. Not one but all of them. Wealth (animals) was also finished. There was nothing to sell, nothing to eat, nowhere to get crops for planting again. The situation was bleak, it was desperate. It could lead someone to commit suicide. It could lead to worry and ulcers. But our text tells us that we can have a different attitude. We can rejoice! Habakkuk teaches us three things about rejoicing.

I. REJOICING IS POSSIBLE.

A. Rejoicing is possible because of a decision. "Yet I will rejoice"

Rejoicing is not automatic, esp. in difficult times. In difficult times we must make a conscious decision to rejoice. Habakkuk simply says, "I will". He made a choice and we can also make a decision to rejoice.

John Maxwell says, "If you have a bad attitude it's your problem. You can fix it." The attitude you have is the one you choose to have! No one gives you your attitude. Don't blame your parents; don't blame your environment. Your attitude is your choice. The good news is that you can change it!

Don't let your environment dictate your response to life. Don't say, "How can I rejoice when...." Make a decision that you will rejoice in whatever situation you are in.

We are responsible for our attitude. It doesn't matter what is going on around us, God is looking for our response. That's why the Bible commands us to rejoice...

Php 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! If God commands us to rejoice it must be something within our power to do. It is, it's a decision that we need to make.

B. Rejoicing is possible because of direction. "in the Lord...in God my savior."

What was it that made it possible for Habakkuk to rejoice? It was not the difficulties he faced but the way he faced his difficulties! It was the direction that he looked or focused. He choose not to look around but to look up! The focus in on rejoicing in the "LORD". Not in the circumstances.

- The secret is not focusing on the Situation but on the Saviour.
- The secret is not focusing on the Lacks/limitations in our lives but on the Lord of our lives.
- The secret is not focusing on the trials but on the triumphant one!
- The secret is not focusing on our present but on our future.
- The secret is not focusing on our inability but on his ability!

When we change our direction we can begin rejoicing. Rejoicing is not ignoring the situation but looking to a higher reality.

Some people look only at the dark side of life. In every possibility they see a problem. They can't see anything good in politics, weather or life.

ILLUSTRATE: Paul learned to rejoice. Read Php 4:12 So he could also command us, "**Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!**" (Php 4:4) Well, you might say, "Paul could rejoice of course! Look at what God did with him." My friend, Paul wrote those words not from the crusade ground but from prison!

Peter also knew about rejoicing. (1Pe 1:6)

Jesus learned the secret of focusing on the eternal. (Heb 12:2) He fixed his eyes not on the beating and shame, but on the future. The direction of your eyes will determine the direction of your attitude!

Apply: Can we rejoice? YES! YES! A THOUSAND TIMES, YES. Look adversity straight in the eye; then look up and rejoice! It is possible.

II. REJOICING IS PERSONAL

The second thing Habakkuk teaches us about rejoicing is that it is personal. He says, "I" will rejoice.

This teaches us that the attitude we have and the joy we experience is a personal issue. I can rejoice, but I can't rejoice for you! I can only rejoice for myself. My rejoicing can help to encourage you to rejoice, but it can't make you rejoice.

Sometimes rejoicing is a lonely position because others won't choose to rejoice. They'd rather **reject** than **rejoice**. They would rather find **fault** than find **faith**. They would rather **complain** than **confess**!

ILLUSTRATE: **Job** experienced this when even his wife encouraged him to curse God and die. He had all the encouragement to stop rejoicing but he said, "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will defend my ways to his face. (Job 13:15) Even his wife encouraged him to give up his faith, but he made a personal decision to rejoice.

APPLY: Will you make a personal decision today to rejoice? Don't worry about your wife, your boss or your workmate, let them despair, but make a choice to rejoice.

III. REJOICING IS POWERFUL.

What happens when we rejoice? The results are powerful. Habbakuk gives 3 of them.

a. **We are powered** (strengthened) "The Sovereign LORD is my strength"

There is power in rejoicing. It allows the power of Christ to flow into our lives. It can transform us from dull, lifeless people to people that are full of life and energy.

Illustrate: Remember the time that Paul and Barnabas were in prison? They could have complained but they sang instead...and God opened the doors of the prison. Rejoicing is powerful! (Story in Acts 16:16-40)

b. **We are piloted** guided. "he makes my feet like the feet of a deer"

The deer is an animal that is very sure-footed. We might be more familiar with goats that have similar feet. I recently watched some goats that were walking confidently on a very steep mountainside. With those feet they can climb on dangerous paths and somehow find their way. The picture here is that as we rejoice we will receive direction or be piloted by God. Many times we miss the power of God to guide, direct and provide for us because we are so focused on our problems and we have forgotten to rejoice. Rejoicing is a sign of our faith and "without faith it is impossible to please God."

c. **We are promoted.** "he enables me to go on the heights."

We begin to live on an entirely new level when we learn to rejoice in hard times. We begin to soar above the crowd. We begin to experience more of the life of Christ.

You will never soar above the crowd with a bad attitude. You will never reach the heights that God has made for you until you learn to rejoice in difficult times. It's impossible to soar like an eagle if you think like a chicken!

Apply: You can release the power of God in your life by rejoicing. He can guide you and promote you as you choose to rejoice.

CONCLUSION

Rejoicing is possible, it is personal and it is powerful. Today I invite you to begin living at a higher level to begin soaring with the eagles above, to rise above the difficulties of life and learn to rejoice in Christ.

If you are facing a difficult experience in life, learn from Habbakuk and right now make a decision to rejoice. Don't worry about what others are doing; this is your decision to rejoice. This week when the enemy brings a discouraging experience your way, remember what we have shared and keep on rejoicing!

Notes:

