

## A Non-Comprehensive Step-by-Step

# GUIDE TO SERMON PREPARATION

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### A. INFORMATION - IMMERSE IN SCRIPTURE & SPIRIT

1. **Pray before, during and after your sermon preparation.**
2. Get out a lot of **paper**, your own **Bible**, and **one other translation** (if you usually read a Bible like “The Message” then choose a translation like the NASB, NIV or ESV). It is not required, but you may like to use your concordance, a Topical Bible, a study Bible, and a good commentary (I recommend *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, edited by Frank Gaberlien, Zondervan).<sup>1</sup>
3. **It is best if your sermon comes from meditating on Scripture for your own growth.**

Studying only to prepare a sermon is not nearly as life giving for you or others. If your sermon is starting from an idea or teaching (not the best way, but it happens), very briefly write down your thoughts.

  - a. What is going through your spirit? Why are you thinking about preaching this?
  - b. Are these ideas based on faith or fear? If it is fear or doubt find the heartbeat of faith.
  - c. Ask, “God, what do you think about this sermon?”
4. **Focus in on the passage that will be the anchor for your sermon and decide where you think the “big idea” begins and ends.** This becomes the passage you will focus on. In a 45-minute sermon you could have 2 or 4 passages, but usually only one of them is central to the sermon.
5. Read the passage **aloud** 3 to 4 times from several different versions of the Bible. It is key to know what the passage is saying. Use what you have learned from doing an inductive Bible study, moving from “their town” to ours. Develop a standard study/meditation set of skills, perhaps like the following.

#### **98 MINUTES OF MEDITATION (7 Minutes Per Step):**

1. What is the context of the passage? (Briefly examine what is going on in the sections and paragraphs ahead and behind.)
2. Ask and answer the basic “who, what, where, when, why & how” questions. Note the idea “connectors” like: but, if, for, because, therefore, in order that, etc.
3. What are the key words? Move to key concepts, to get the “big idea.”
4. What’s the “big idea” of this passage and how does it relate to the other supporting ideas in the passage?

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5. Do the Newbie Bible Study. (*Note: This was not taught in any of the Biblical Studies lessons included in the DVD curriculum. The instructions about how to do this study are listed below.*)
  - a. Keep in mind that this particular method of study is a limited tool, as it does little historical-grammatical study.
  - b. Make observations about:
    1. GOD – What can we learn about God in this passage?
    2. ME – What can we learn about ourselves or humanity in general from this passage?
    3. DO – What should we do in response?
6. In his book, *Christ Centered Preaching*, Chapell recommends that you also discern the “fallen condition focus”.<sup>2</sup> Answer the following: What do we share in common with a) those the text was written to or about, and/or b) what do we have in common with the person who wrote the text?
7. See the sights, smell the smells, hear the sounds, feel the sensations, taste the tastes. Immerse yourself in the story, drama and picture.
8. What are the emotions in this passage? What is the atmosphere of the passage? What emotions are created in you as you read? (Are these the same as each other?)
9. What is implied by the passage but not explicitly stated? For example, Paul wants to go to the Roman church to impart a gift that they may be established. The implied idea is that they are not quite established until Paul gives them something; or that God’s leaders carry “something impartible” for churches that establishes them.
10. Note any theologically complicated words and look them up in a theological wordbook like G.W. Bromiley’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament One Volume Abridged*, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of the Old and New Testament*, or go to the website [www.blueletterbible.com](http://www.blueletterbible.com).<sup>3,4,5</sup>
11. What is the meaning and/or implication and/or significance of this passage?
12. How does this idea/passage fit into Israel’s history, church history and cosmic history?
13. What connections exist in your mind and spirit between this passage and other passages? Is this story/idea mentioned elsewhere in the Bible? Are these ideas explained more clearly or illustrated elsewhere?

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14. Now experience this passage from God's point of view. (As best you can!) What does He receive or give because of the truth of this text? How is He the hero?

6. At this point, you may want a concordance and topical Bible for related passages (the Holy Spirit will often make interesting connections if you will listen) and write down the reference and a brief description of the verse. These may become part of your sermon. As you grow in your experience and more of the Word is in you, these connections and listening to the Spirit will come more naturally to you.

7. After you have done your own "immersion", look up the passage you have chosen in a quality commentary and/or study Bible. Write down any helpful concepts or observations you find and correct any poor thinking they uncover in your preparation. Some of you will prefer to do this step before the meditation portion above.

8. By this point you should have a pretty good idea of what the author's original intent was, as well as what the Holy Spirit is up to in this passage. (Note: At this point, Professor Pitt-Watson writes a simple 50 word paraphrase of the text in his own words that identifies what the passage is about. Then he distills a single sentence from that paraphrase that contains the essence, theme or big idea of what he is going to preach).<sup>6</sup>

## B. COMMUNICATION - INTERPRET FOR TODAY

1. **BRAINSTORM – A LOT – ON A PIECE OF PAPER.** Brainstorm with the scripture you have chosen and all your meditation. Remember a small percentage of our communication is content, the rest is body language, facial expression and tone – all of which is not very obvious in the written word so bring it to life! Written text is one-dimensional, but preaching is multidimensional. Put yourself in the story. Become ALL THE DIFFERENT CHARACTERS: Jesus, God, Disciples, Pharisees, etc. For example: pretend you are an ordinary person from Egypt and 10 respected leaders strongly recommend not going into the promised land and only two do. How would you respond, think and feel? What would you do? What would be some strong temptations? What is God's perspective or attitude? Reading your own ideas into the text becomes less likely now because you have already done your study.

2. **BRAINSTORM WITH THE "TEXT OF LIFE".** God has embedded the same revelations about Himself and His Kingdom in life as well as the Scriptures. That is why Paul can talk

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about the *body* and *armor* and being a *bondservant* and Jesus can teach on farmers. “What does this feel like? When did I last experience this?” Spend 30 minutes on this exercise. This is when you begin to interpret and apply the passage in an interesting way. TELL US WHAT THE BIG IDEA OF THE TEXT OR A PARTICULAR POINT IS LIKE. IF YOU CANNOT DO THIS, YOU REALLY DO NOT UNDERSTAND IT YET.

For example: Try to picture a way to describe Israel’s experience of the promised land. You could describe it that it is like being given a great house but being told you must evict the violent couple that lives in the master bedroom. Where does that picture take your mind? Is this a true comparison?

3. **APPLY THIS CONCEPT TO YOUR OWN LIFE.** The sermon “is truth poured through personality.”<sup>7</sup>

4. **NOW WRITE A POSSIBLE THEME, TITLE, PURPOSE & RESPONSE** (these may keep evolving as you prepare your message.)

**THEME:** A sermon should ultimately be about ONE thing—lots of supporting ideas, but one thing. The theme is the unifying idea in the form of a declarative sentence, not in the form of a question. It is the answer to this question: What is the big idea of the sermon?

**TITLE:** This sparks creativity, helps you narrow down your point and begins to move your mind from “INFORMATION” to “COMMUNICATION”. In other words, it is the very beginning of combining “what I will say with how I will say it”. It will most likely change as you prepare.

**PURPOSE:** Why are you preaching it? The purpose does not need to be identical to the purpose of the particular scripture, but it should be consistent with it.

**RESPONSE:** What do I expect the sermon to achieve? How do you want the congregation to respond?

Isaiah 52:7 “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation who say to Zion. ‘Your God Reigns!’”

- i. **THEME:** Run, Believer, run and proclaim God’s victory.
- ii. **TITLE:** Pretty Feet
- iii. **PURPOSE:** To comfort and encourage the people to be bringers of the news that God reigns and if they are in a tough time to look for hope in the form of a runner until there is break-through.

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- iv. RESPONSE: To watch for the “runners” and celebrate their message of hope & become runners who “talk up” the victory of God.

## 5. DESIGN THE SERMON FORM

Now, knowing your theme, title, purpose and response and some ideas about how to illustrate it, write a ½ to ¾ page summary of your sermon including a mention of your illustrations. As you write this, you are beginning to develop the “organism” (the living nature of your sermon) as opposed to just “organizing” your ideas. Look for the conceptual structure, the bones that are naturally developing, the emotional heart that drives the sermon and the muscles that will move people to action and change.

There is much that can be said about structure, but let me just give you a few ideas. Think about how you would receive this information for maximum impact. In other words, **think like a listener**. Secondly, the Scriptures themselves will often give you the structure of your sermon as you walk us through the passage or passages. Start listening for how preachers you admire organize their sermon information. Do they start with a story or a felt need? Do they start with the Bible then relate that to human experience?

The **typical informative/persuasive speech style** is a decent structure as many have learned to hear and think in this way, but it is not very organic. By that I mean you are essentially plugging information into a structure rather than allowing it to grow from the passage. It is as follows:

### I. General Goals of Introduction

Developing rapport, capturing attention, previewing importance & content of sermon, setting the mood & tone, STATING THE THEME, and presenting the scripture passage.

### II. Body

- a. 1<sup>st</sup> supporting idea or passage or principle about the theme.
- b. Develop the idea by explaining it, illustrating it and/or applying it.
- c. Reconnect the idea to the theme, and then transition to the next point.

Do this 2 to 5 times.

### III. Conclusion

Summarize the whole thing, and tell a great story or example to finish it all off and move them to action!

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Michael J. Quicke quotes these **other possible structures** from Thomas Long and Paul Wilson in *360 Degree Preaching*.<sup>8</sup>

Thomas Long:

1. If this... then this... then this – the logical building of steps suited to teachers.
2. This is true in this way... in this way... and also in this way... and in this other way – when the central claim needs to be heard in different ways.
3. This is the problem, this is the response of the gospel, and these are the implications – the classic pastor preacher’s structure sometimes called the problem-solution form.
4. This is the promise of the gospel, and here is how we may live out that promise – begins with the claims of the text and suits herald preachers.
5. This is the historical situation in the text, and these are the meanings for us now – a dialogue between the Bible world and the contemporary world.
6. Here is a prevailing view, but here is the claim of the gospel – this has similarities with the Lowry loop in which hearers’ equilibrium is upset.
7. Here is a story—which offers a variety of narrative forms.

Paul Wilson:

1. Explain the biblical text and then apply it to our situation.
2. Biblical text – our situation – biblical text – our situation.
3. Biblical text – our situation – biblical text.
4. Our situation – biblical text – our situation.
5. Frequently oscillating between biblical text & our situation.

As you are structuring the message, **make sure you connect the points!** Spend time **thinking/crafting the transitions between ideas, points and illustrations.** This is one of the most important lessons I have for you. It is extremely helpful to the listener when you “connect the dots” and transition from one idea to the next. Also, it helps to explain your illustrations and stories because not everyone thinks just like you do. What may be totally obvious to you is not always to someone else, so “unpack” the illustrations.

## C. TRANSFORMATION

Talk to the Holy Spirit before, during and after about how and if you should have a response time and what it should look like, but always craft your sermon knowing what you want people to do

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with what you are teaching them. Knowing this while you prepare will absolutely help you craft a more powerful message.

### D. PRESENTATION - DELIVERING THE SERMON

You can learn a lot from reading one of the preaching books I recommend below, but let me mention a couple of ideas:

First, do not be afraid of silence. Say something and let it sit, but do not overuse it.

Second, thoughtfully choose the phrase you use, if any, to get the people to respond to you. Kris uses, “Are you with me? Did you get that? How many of you know...?” Bobby Conners says, “Isn’t that neat?” Randall Worley says, “I can really preach if you’ll help me.” Try to avoid a phrase/tono that shames the people into responding unless they already know you. Many years ago a famous preacher with really good content, absolutely turned off the entire Sunday evening crowd with the tone (perceived arrogance) of his phrases. He had favor with his home church and his “circle” of influence but he was a newcomer to us and his choice of phrases shut us down. He said things like, “I don’t care if you didn’t like that it was good. Well, at least I’m having a good time up here, even if you’re not”. This was pre-renewal and we were more arrogant and religious ourselves, and we didn’t listen to new preachers with much grace. We have grown as a congregation but the whole mess was unnecessary if he would have waited until he had favor or been wiser in how he was trying to motivate us.

Third, have some movement, but make sure you stop every so often. Otherwise, watching you preach will be like watching a tennis match from the front row.

Fourth, talk more slowly than you usually do. You almost always talk faster than you think you will because of nerves.

Occasionally, repeat your key ideas, images and transitions. For example, “So, we saw such and such in verse 4 and that is connected to this such and such, so how does that work? It works like this...and we see this illustrated...” Kris Vallotton will often say, “Did you get that?” and then repeat the concept. It is a verbal device that allows him to repeat the idea. Ask for feedback from a trusted listener because repetition can be overused and could become annoying, but the right mix of it is essential for LISTENERS to become REMEMBERS and then DOERS.

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Finally, one minister summed it up like this, “I read myself full, think myself clear, pray myself hot and let myself go.”<sup>2</sup>

“How then can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news’” Romans 10:15

Dann Farrelly

1. Frank E. Gaebelin and D. A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).
2. Bryan Chapell, *Christ Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 101.
3. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985).
4. W.E. Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of the Old and New Testament* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1996).
5. *The Blue Letter Bible*, <http://www.blueletterbible.org/> (accessed September 26, 2012).
6. Ian Pitt-Watson, *Primer for Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986).
7. Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).
8. Michael J. Quicke, *360 Degree Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

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