

vli mentoring  
**Preaching Manual**

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## PREFACE

This manual was written for the VLIAD Mentoring Pastor to use in mentoring his/her VLIAD student(s) in preaching. At VLI, Columbus, Ohio, we meet with a class of 12-14 first-year students for the purpose of mentoring in preaching. We meet eight Saturdays during an academic Quarter, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon each Saturday. The first week we have each student stand up and give an extemporaneous biography lasting 5 minutes. They address the following topics in their speech: (1) State your name and where you grew up; (2) Tell the story of your commitment to Jesus Christ; and (3) Tell us why you decided to go to VLI; and what are your future goals for putting this training to use? This exercise gets them in front of everyone talking about something they are intimately familiar with; and it bonds them with their class.

Half way through the student biographies, we explain how a typical class progresses.

1. Start at 9:00 a.m. sharp. Be on time. Attendance is taken. Tardiness is marked.
2. Three students will give a 15 minute message; each is followed by a brief evaluation. (The first session the mentor does the first several evaluations using the enclosed “Message Evaluation Form”—after page 16. After that modeling, the mentor randomly selects a student to evaluate the sermon just delivered by a fellow student.) The students all fill out the Message Evaluation Forms for each sermon. After the student evaluates his/her peer, the mentor follows up with any additional comments (to make sure the evaluation process is balanced, fair, and constructive). Following the oral evaluation, the students pass their written evaluations to the student who was just evaluated.
3. There will be a 30 minute instruction on an important aspect of the preaching task. (This manual supplies you, the mentoring pastor, with the content of these teachings.)
4. 10-15 minute break.
5. Three more students give 15 minute sermons followed by evaluations.
6. There will be a spiritual accountability exercise with questions and prayer.
7. If the student will not be able to make it to class on a certain day (only two absences are allowed per Quarter), it is the responsibility of the student to exchange his/her preaching assignment with someone else. In this case, the student must leave a voice mail for the mentor indicating the substitution; and the substitute “preacher” must tell the mentor of this arrangement at the beginning of the class.

At this point, lecture on or just read the first lecture, “SESSION 1: SELECTING A TEXT.” At VLI, Columbus, we just read through the written lecture, making comments and interacting with the students as we go through it. We also have copies of the lecture made and distributed to the students at this juncture of the class. We try to keep the lecture and discussion to 30 minutes.

After the lecture, have the other students finish up their 5 minute autobiographies. At the end of the class, do the “Spiritual Accountability Exercise.” How you do this depends on the size and makeup of your student body. If you have 1-3 students, you will usually function as one group. If you have several students, it is best to divide into more than one group. Since some of the spiritual accountability exercises in future sessions involve areas of personal and sexual accountability, you will want to break into gender-specific sub-groups, if that is possible. The mentoring pastor just needs to use wisdom with the group s/he has, the dynamics of the particular group, and the best ways to facilitate the exercises so they will be beneficial for everyone involved.

There are enough lectures written for the first 7 sessions. The last session is a good time to review, squeeze in the last sermons of the Quarter, and enjoy the completion of this mentoring module. In a class of 12-14 students, our goal is to have each student preach in class a minimum of three times during the Quarter. In much smaller classes you may use less time per mentoring session. For some smaller groups 1 ½ to 2 hours may be sufficient for a mentoring session.

This mentoring manual is a work in progress. Please send us any suggestions you have to improve it: additions, omissions, better material, etc. Our desire is that all our efforts will advance God’s Kingdom by preparing better preachers and leaders for the body of Christ.

## SESSION 1 Selecting a Text

### 1. Considerations for Selecting a Text

The first thing a preacher needs to do is select a biblical text to preach from. This is our assumption if the source of our authority for preaching is not merely speculation, our own experience, or that of others. If we believe that God speaks uniquely through the Word He has revealed to us in the Scriptures, then we must turn to the Scriptures to hear God's authoritative voice. But the question is, which text? This can be answered in various ways.

A preacher must be a constant and devoted student of the Bible. Then there will be a rich source of text in the preacher's mind ready to be called upon when the need presents itself. This suggests the first way preachers can select their texts. They can preach from a through which God has powerfully spoken to them. Sermons rooted in our own personal convictions and encounters with God have a dynamically self-authenticating quality. Moreover, the best way to speak to the heart is to speak from the heart. Although the authority of our preaching is not derived from our experience, a text whose truth we have experienced will bear more functional authority in our lives. Moreover, it will probably strike the hearts of the hearers more authoritatively, as well. Finally, a helpful discipline bringing balance to the preacher is to follow a plan of reading through the entire Bible once every year or two.

A second method of selecting a text is to discern the current pastoral need of the congregation. Good pastors are often good preachers because they know the needs, hurts, and hopes of their people. Every person has an area of pain in his or her life and everyone has a dream. Also, people not only have their own individual needs but congregations have specific

stages in their spiritual pilgrimages. When we address these concerns with the truth of God's word we will be speaking to a captive audience. On the other hand, failing to address these concerns because we would rather talk about something else may cost us the attentiveness of our congregation. The wise preacher, however, may sometimes discern and address deeper needs in his hearers than surface wounds they are preoccupied with. Spiritual growth and experience will mature preachers in their ability to recognize the most important needs.

A third consideration for selecting a text is environmental factors: events in the life of our nation or community (scandal, election, issue, public debate, death of a public figure, natural disaster, social catastrophe, etc.). Karl Barth spoke about preparing for sermons with a newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the other. Christians should not be expected to shut out the real world that everyone else is talking about to hear of loftier things in the pulpit. Believers want to know what the word of the Lord says about the pressing issues, events, tragedies, and hopes of our times. How can we think "Christianly" (biblical and critically-theologically) about these things? How do they look in the context of Christian worship and encounter with God? Only the preacher who is saturated in Scripture, the common sufferings of others, the Holy Spirit, and prayer can answer the question of our times in the right tone.

The fourth consideration for selecting a text to preach is driven by strategy and calendar. As preachers work with their people they develop a vision for where God is taking them. They have "been to the mountain." They see a little farther ahead than the rest of the crowd. This means that they not only need to set the direction; but they also need venues for communicating it. The greatest venue is the pulpit. For there to be integrity, however, the preacher must be convinced that the vision is scriptural, appropriate to this people, and from God. This being true, the preacher cannot help but the vision.

If preachers are not only going to be passionate but also prudent, however, they must form a plan for unfolding this vision within a certain timeframe. This will involve a set of messages interspersed throughout the year. The preaching calendar will become a part of the strategy for communicating the vision. Furthermore, whether the preacher is communicating a vision, speaking to personal needs of the audience, or sharing what God has done for him personally through a passage, the best way to accomplish the intended result in the congregation will often be to preach a series of messages on a given topic or set of texts. This helps an audience sustain its focus on an area in which God wants to deal with people deeply. It also makes the preachers planning easier. He does not have to figure out what to preach on next week, but rather how to pursue each facet of the topic and each he has decided to use.

Another aspect of the calendar which determines preaching is holidays and seasons: Christmas, New Years, Easter, Pentecost, graduations, summer (children out of school, families taking vacations, and life-styles and styles of relating socially often change during this season), fall (back to school, more stability of peoples schedules, new focus on sports, etc.). The preacher often has little choice but to address these. It is wise to plan ahead how to make the best use of these occasions to further worship, spirituality, evangelism, ministry training, and the vision of the church. In these instances, one could look as far as a year ahead and decide on specific texts, emphasis, and the objectives for preaching these messages.

In the process of selecting a text for a message, one needs to keep in mind the thought-flow of the context in which the text is located. The passage must make sense, logically, from what is said before and after it. In an epistle, for instance, a text will often be a paragraph. The meaning of that paragraph will be determined by the flow of the apostle's thought from the previous paragraphs and its continuation in the paragraphs that follow. Beyond this, we are concerned with the previously larger literary units (blocks of material) that make up the whole



epistle. Once we see how our passage fits in with the thought-flow of its larger literary unit (context), then we know we are following the thoughts of the inspired apostle rather than reading into the text our own speculations. As a result, we can preach with conviction, “Thus says the Lord,” rather than “I hope I can teach this from that text.”

## **2. Meditation**

Assuming we are preparing for next Sunday’s sermon, it is best if we have our text selected by Tuesday. One should read it over and over again. Preferably, the preacher may memorize the key thought, verse or in some cases even the whole paragraph. It is evident that Jesus, Paul, the other apostles, the early church fathers, and men and women of God throughout the ages were not only familiar with the Scriptures but memorized and meditated deeply on a large number of biblical passages. Within our own historical roots, we find that the Puritan pastor-theologians considered meditation the link between Bible study and prayer. The consensus of their opinions was that without meditations bible study was spiritually shallow and prayer lacked substance.

Not only does meditation empower us to grasp the biblical text at a deeper level; it also helps us break barriers of expectation that obscure the significance and erode the inroads of God’s truth into our hearts. In the 1950’s a number of researchers conducted experiments in the field of Empirical Psychology to understand how the human mind thinks. In one experiment a deck of cards was printed with some variations from a normal deck. This deck had some red clubs and spades and some black hearts and diamonds. No one caught on at first. When the subjects of the control group were asked to identify the cards as they went through the deck at a reasonable pace, they saw and reported back hearts as spades and red spades as hearts.

In spite of the fact that the subjects knew to be wary because they were in the midst of scientific testing procedures, their horizon of expectations were so locked in that they could not accurately process the data in front of their eyes! However, as the testing proceeded, the subjects became increasingly agitated. The more dogmatically minded subjects found themselves getting angry without knowing why. The less authoritarian subjects started to realize that some of the cards were not what they expected them to be, but were indeed abnormal. They began to recognize the anomalous cards.

This is another reason why we need to meditate on the Word of God. It gives God an entry point for breaking through our prejudices, vested interests, worldviews, and past programming. Growth cannot occur without change. As we become receptive to seeing new things and embrace change, God will use us as catalysts of change in the lives of others. We should behold the gem of God's Word just as a jeweler holds up a diamond to the light and turns it at different angles to show off its brilliant radiance. In the same way, we need to take portions of Scripture and turn them in our minds asking the Holy Spirit to illuminate the brilliance of Christ to our hearts.

As you do this, pray for illumination; and use it as a medium through which to pray for yourself, those closest to you, your leaders, your church, and the world beyond your church. Record significant ideas and insights in connection with the passage throughout the process. Meditation is the link between hearing, reading, and studying Scripture, on the one hand, and praying and preaching with conviction and passion, on the other. For those who like to study a lot, meditation keeps you from becoming miles wide but only an inch deep.

After the preacher selects the text and meditates on the text, it is beneficial to compare his insights with what other respected scholars have gleaned from Scripture, background information, and the history of Christian interpretation. A judicious selection of a study of

commentaries is extremely important at this juncture. The preacher should continue to meditate and pray through the text during this pursuit of understanding of the biblical passage.

As the preacher learns the historical meaning of the biblical text and prays to discern the needs of his audience, the meaning of the text *for us* here and now begins to emerge. Thus dawns the message the preacher must preach. In addition, the preacher should collect illustrations that will make the message graphic, personal, and emotionally and volitionally evocative. According to Augustine, every good sermon must inform the mind, stir the heart, and motivate the will.

### **3. Assignment and Spiritual Accountability Exercise**

The student will select a text (2-5 verses maximum) from the Bible from which to preach a fifteen-minute message next week. The mentor may narrow the source of selection to either a Gospel or New Testament Epistle. The student will preach this message in front of his or her mentor [and other student(s), if applicable]. The mentor will evaluate the student's message with an *evaluation form* included in the next session.

In the area of spiritual accountability, the mentor and student(s) may talk over whether they have spent adequate time in Bible study and prayer in recent weeks. After sharing they should pray for one another for God to increase their hunger for prayer and the Word as well as the strength and discipline to be consistent in these practices. They should be informed that this will come up again during mentoring sessions. It is important that the mentor develop an atmosphere where personal spiritual and character issues can be openly addressed with candor and appropriateness. Many of the questions in future sessions will be much more personal. So an ethos of love, acceptance, and accountability needs to be carefully nurtured.

SESSION 2:  
A Sermon has a Central Thesis

**1. The Fragmentary Nature of Today's Preaching**

For many students the model of preaching they have heard is a rambling commentary on various words and phrases from a biblical passage. Instead of listening to one message the audience has been bombarded with several sermonettes at the same time. The people may be somewhat impressed by the preacher's knowledge or sincerity, but they are confused by the lack of unity or simplicity in what is said. The average sermon is a collection of three or four points whose relationship remains a mystery to the audience.

In addition, vague exhortations are often substituted for relevant applications because no single truth has emerged for the preacher to apply. Sermons riddled with "We must . . . !" "Let us . . . !" "You ought to . . . !" "Don't . . . !" "You need to . . . !" "Stop . . . !" "Start . . . !" become exhausting to listen to and are often resentfully endured. The unfocused preacher becomes a loose canon and the audience feels it has been barraged by fire from every direction. What is needed is a carefully crafted arrow aimed at the heart of the target piercing the conscience and persuading the whole person to respond with a life-changing decision.

Haddon W. Robinson contends, "When the congregation goes back into the world, it has received no message by which to live since it has not occurred to the preacher to preach one."<sup>1</sup> One probable source of the problem is that students studying to be preachers sit through a lot of lectures by theologians in classrooms. This becomes the student's model for conveying biblical truth. However, the sermon is very different than a lecture in that its aim is to convey one message, not many. Moreover, the sermon is different than an essay in that it is intended to be delivered orally rather than read. The oral message requires a simplicity, unity, and multiple reinforcements that differ from the subtle nuances and relationships of ideas found in many written essays.

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<sup>1</sup> Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 33.

## 2. The Central Thesis of a Text and Sermon

The sermon should be a bullet, not buckshot. It can be pictured as a stake driven into a wall with rings (supporting points) tossed onto it to adorn its fixed prominence. Preachers and public speakers down through the ages have emphasized the crucial importance of a central thesis for effective communication. Spurgeon, the greatest preacher of the Victorian era, said, “Preach to one point, concentrating all your energies upon the object aimed at.”<sup>2</sup> The prophets of the Old Testament delivered messages that they often called “the burden of the Lord.” The prophetic oracle was highly focused, addressed a particular audience and required a specific response.

The sermons of Paul in the book of acts, argues Donald R. Sunukjian, are centered around on central thesis.

Each of Paul’s messages is centered around one simple idea or thought. Each address crystallizes into a single sentence which expresses the sum and substance of the whole discourse. Everything in the sermons either leads up to, develops, or follows from a single unifying theme.<sup>3</sup>

Robinson claims this for the sermons of Peter, as well. Fenelon, 17<sup>th</sup> century giant in the spiritual disciplines, said, “The discourse is the proposition unfolded, and the proposition is the discourse condensed.” Its form should be one complete declarative sentence, simple, clear, and cogent. It should contain no unnecessary or ambiguous words.<sup>4</sup> The proposition or thesis is the gist of the sermon. A reading of the best sermons reveals that often the preacher repeats more

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 345.

<sup>3</sup> Donald R. Sunukjian, “Patterns for Preaching: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Sermons of Paul in Acts 13, 17, and 20,” Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1972, 176, cited in Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 36.

<sup>4</sup> John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, rev. Jesse B. Weatherspoon (New York: Harper & Row, 1870), 55.

than once the comprehensive sentence. Every paragraph serves in some way to enforce or prove or explain or illuminate it in its deep significance.

What is it that gives unity to a biblically-based sermon? The biblically-based sermon communicates a biblical thesis. In other words, we start out by isolating the dominant concept or thesis of a biblical passage. This will bring the sermon into intimate relationship with the biblical text. Unfortunately, most sermons today bear a precarious relationship to the biblical texts they are allegedly based on. Roger Johnson, in an article entitled, “The Value of Expository Preaching and Teaching,” laments:

All too often the biblical passage read to the congregation resembles the national anthem played at the sporting events. It gets things started but it is not referred to again during the lesson. The authority behind preaching resides not in the preacher but in the biblical texts.

So the subject matter of our preaching is not only a single central concept, but it is a biblical one. Remember, the authority of our preaching does not rest in our experiences, but in the Gospel. Our experiences and insights illustrate the biblical truth, not the other way around.

The great 19<sup>th</sup> century preacher, Charles Simeon, argued for the need of finding the central thesis of a biblical passage in order to fix its truth in people’s memories.

Reduce your text to a simple proposition, and lay that down as the warp; and then make use of the text itself as the woof; illustrating the main idea by the various terms in which it is contained. Screw the word into the minds of your hearers. A screw is the strongest of all mechanical powers . . . when it has turned a few times, scarcely any power can pull it out.<sup>5</sup>

So, when we prepare our sermons we must be patient as we are diligent in pouring over our text until the dominant thought or central thesis of the text emerges in our minds. John Stott says,

We have to be ready to pray and think ourselves deep into the text . . . until we give up all pretensions of being its master or manipulator, and become instead its humble and obedient servant. Then there will be no danger of unscrupulous text-twisting. On the

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Simeon, in an article in the *Christian Observer* (Dec. 1821), cited by John R.W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 226.

contrary, the Word of God will dominate our mind, set fire to our hearts, control the development of our exposition and later leave a lasting impression on the congregation.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, the initial goal of our sermon preparation is to arrive at the one central thesis of the scriptural passage we will preach from.

A normal initial response to this is that it sounds like a lot of work. It will take more time than you have to give it. Bill Hybels said, “You don’t get a well-fed church by serving fast food.” Of course, it’s easier and quicker to throw a few verses around some of our experiences; but that’s fast food. On the other hand, some “wannabe” preachers want to be original; so they do not want to be shackled with a reading from Scripture or be bound to a text. That reminds me of Vance Havner’s comment about a guy who was going to be original or nothing; and he was both.

Let’s say it again. Every sermon should have a thesis; and that thesis should be the dominant thought of the passage of Scripture on which it is based. To understand how to identify the central thesis of a biblical text, we need to analyze the components of the central thesis statement. It has two components. First, *the subject*, which answers the question, “What am I talking about?” Second, *the complement*, which answers the question, “What am I saying about what I am talking about?” The subject without a complement hangs in the air without a sense of completion.<sup>7</sup>

For example, the subject of James 1:2-4 could be stated as “Facing trials with joy.” However, that is an incomplete statement of what is being said about the subject. We can complement the subject by this more complete thesis statement: “We can face our trials with joy when we realize they will result in an unshakable and perfect faith.” A second example can be taken from James 1:5-8. The subject may be given as “Ask God for wisdom.” A more complete

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<sup>6</sup> John Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 227.

<sup>7</sup> Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 39-41.



thesis, however, would be “God will lavish wisdom on those who ask with expectation of receiving it from Him.” Another example is 2 Cor. 3:4-6. The subject is, “Our competence is from God” (v. 5b). The thesis of the passage, however, needs to be complemented with the broader idea of its context: “The Holy Spirit enables us to preach life rather than death from Scripture.”

### **3. The Sermonic Idea as Thesis**

As we prepare to preach, we are actually doing two things with the central thesis of our sermon. First, we are trying to find the central thesis of the biblical passage we plan to preach from. Second, we are adapting this thesis to the needs of the preaching situation. That does not mean we are distorting the meaning of the text. It does mean we are applying what the text does say to the audience we need to address. Therefore, our thesis statement not only has to be an accurate expression of the dominant thought of the biblical text; it also needs to address our audience in an interesting and memorable fashion. The dominant thought of the biblical passage stated in an interesting and memorable fashion for the audience gives us the sermonic idea.

Haddon Robinson gives us some good tips on how to develop the sermonic idea. First, try to state roughly the subject of the biblical text. What is the writer talking about? Then ask, what major assertions is he making about his subject? That is the complement. Since the initial statement of the subject will often be too broad or narrow, it will often be helpful to ask six questions of the subject in light of the passage: Who? What? Why? When? Where? How? Applying these questions to your subject will help you be more exact. Robinson concludes, “When a proposed subject accurately describes what the author is talking about, it illuminates the

details of the passage; and the subject, in turn, will be illuminated by the details.”<sup>8</sup> Another way of identifying the subject of a passage is to write out the various assertions that can be made from the text and then decide which one is the most inclusive of the others. In other words, one of the ideas is the biggest and the other ideas support that one.

In stating the thesis of the sermon, we have taken the central thesis of dominant idea of the biblical text and put it in words that apply to the audience’s knowledge and experience. We must ask how this text, crystallized in its thesis statement, applies to the needs of several types of people in the audience: the single mother, the couple trying to cope with infertility, the bewildered parents of a destructively rebellious teenager, the son that is grappling with the decision of putting his mother into an old folks home, the wife who has just found out about a malignant tumor in her body, the young adult struggling with career options, the teenager trying to deal with peer pressure, etc. The audience is made up of real people with concrete struggles and specific needs.

The cornerstone of the sermon is the statement of the central thesis in a sentence that is as exact and memorable as possible (the sermonic idea). Robinson claims, “Because the homiletical idea emerges after an intensive study of a passage and extensive analysis of the audience, getting that idea and stating it creatively is the most difficult step in sermon preparation.”<sup>9</sup> The renowned scholar and preacher, J. H. Jowett, in his Yale lectures on preaching said,

I have a conviction that no sermon is ready for preaching, not ready for writing out, until we can express its theme in a short, pregnant sentence as clear as crystal. I find the getting of that sentence is the hardest, the most exacting, and the most fruitful labor in my

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 99.

study . . . . I do not think any sermon ought to be preached or even written, until that sentence has emerged, clear and lucid as a cloudless moon.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, as we evaluate messages given by students, we will look for thesis statements that are easily identifies, carefully stated, and winsomely expressed. The thesis statement must be the central thrust of the whole message; and every point made in the message must be supportive of and logically related to this central thrust.

#### **4. The Message Evaluation**

Enclosed with this lesson is a “Message Evaluation” sheet. You can copy as many of these as you need. While listening to the student present his or her message, the mentor fills out this evaluation form. If there is more than one student in the group, distribute enough evaluation forms for everyone to evaluate every sermon. Randomly call on a given student to evaluate the sermon of the student who just preached (using the evaluation sheet). The mentoring pastor or leader, who has also filled out an evaluation sheet, should then follow up with any additional comments. This ensures that the critiques are balanced, constructive, and as complete as is appropriate for this stage of the student’s training.

The mentor can either hand all the evaluations to the student immediately following the oral evaluation, or the mentor can keep his/her evaluation for one week and make a copy of it for his/her files. In this way, the mentor can track the student’s progress over time and have the file of evaluation handy when s/he has to fill out the student’s mentoring evaluation report for the Quarter (VLIAD supplies these). This latter Quarterly Mentoring Evaluation is what gets sent back to the VLI office, Columbus, Ohio. At the next weekly mentoring session, the pastor can

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<sup>10</sup> J. H. Jowett, *The Preacher: His Life and Work*, the 1912 Yale Lectures (New York: G. H. Doran, 1912), 133.

hand the sermon evaluation to the student. Also, if a video camera is available, this will greatly reinforce the evaluation and make a more effective impact on the student's improvement.

## **5. Assignment and Spiritual Accountability Exercise**

Assign the student another 15 minute message for next week. However, this time the student needs to have a good statement of the sermonic idea based on the central thesis (dominant thought) of the biblical passage the student will preach from. Make sure the student(s) understand that the thesis statement (made interesting and memorable=sermonic idea) consists of the subject (what you are talking about) and the complement (what you are saying about what you are talking about).

The mentoring pastor can kill two birds with one stone by assigning the very text he will preach from the following Sunday (provided he know what that will be). This means he will be intimate with the passage and his mind will be stimulated with more preaching ideas after interacting with the students(s). This can also have a positive impact on the student as s/he feels appreciated for contributing worthy ideas to the pastor's preaching ministry. Motivated by humility and the desire to train others, the pastor can see this as constructive and not a threat.

In the areas of spiritual accountability, ask the following questions:

1. What temptations have you met with in the last week or two? What was the result?
2. What victories has Christ won in or through you?
3. Have any issues developed in your personal life that you need prayer and/or counsel about?

After this interaction, pray for one another, and ask for God's wisdom and counsel on where to go from here and how to lovingly apply scriptural accountability.



# Vineyard Leadership Institute

## Preaching/Teaching Evaluation Form

Speaker's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator's Name \_\_\_\_\_

### MESSAGE EVALUATION:

	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Additional Comments</u>
<u>Organization</u>				
Attention Step (Introduction)	1	2	3	
Thesis Statement	1	2	3	
Conclusion	1	2	3	
<u>Content Development Exegesis</u>				
Did Message flow from text?	1	2	3	
Did Outline flow from text?	1	2	3	
<u>Coherence of Message</u>				
Did Sub-points flow from thesis?	1	2	3	
Did Illustrations serve thesis?	1	2	3	
Applications fitting & enough?	1	2	3	
<u>Style</u>				
Word Choice (vivid, graphic & appropriate)	1	2	3	
<u>Delivery</u>				
Vocal variety, body language, conversational	1	2	3	
<u>Authenticity</u> (overall believability)				
Humor, Natural Style	1	2	3	

### Summary Questions:

1. Did this message connect with you?
2. Did the speaker connect with you?
3. Further comments and encouragements:

## SESSION 3: The Objective of Preaching

### 1. **Why Preach?**

We have learned that a sermon must have a central thesis. That answers the question of what we shall preach. However, there is one more basic question we should ask. Why should we preach? The difference between the central thesis and the objective is the difference between a bullet and a target. The former states the truth; the latter defines what the truth needs to accomplish. What will be the purpose of us standing up in front of people and saying anything at all? Is it to inform? Entertain? Will we preach from Acts 3 because last week we spoke from Acts 2? Do we preach because people expect the pastor or speaker to preach at this time every week? Some preachers substitute purpose with vague notions: “My job is to preach the Gospel”; “I teach the truth of God’s Word”; “I am going to challenge the people.” This is to preach without a specific objective.

To have no objective is to have no idea of why you are speaking from the pulpit. It is like confusing going for a drive with traveling to a specific destination. Or it is like confusing shooting guns for practice with hunting big game. The difference between preaching with an objective and preaching without one is like a caricature of the difference between the way women and men shop. Women often enjoy browsing around in the store as a diversion or form of entertainment. Men hunt down what they want and bring it home as quickly as possible. The point of preaching is to change lives. It is to encounter people with the truth so that it results in effecting repentance, faith, conversion, empowering with the Holy Spirit, commitment to

discipleship, obedience, healing, consecration to service, equipping for ministry, etc. As we stand up to preach, the point and purpose of our message must be clear.<sup>11</sup>

Aiming for specific results in our preaching is risky business; and it requires faith. It increases the preacher's dependence on God. When the preacher asks God's help to discern the specific and measurable results of his sermon, then it forces him to reflect on particular behaviors and attitudes that need to be changed in the people. Moreover, this leads to more concreteness in making applications and choosing illustrations. A preacher needs to state what he expects to happen in the hearer as a result of hearing his sermon. As in all planning, the preacher must start with the end in view.

In one of his addresses to pastors, C. H. Spurgeon spoke of preaching for conversions:

So pray and so preach that, if there are no conversions, you will be astonished, amazed, and broken-hearted. Look for the salvation of your hearers as much as the angel who will sound the last trump will look for the waking of the dead! Believe your own doctrine! Believe your own Saviour! Believe in the Holy Ghost who dwells in you! For thus shall you see your heart's desire, and God shall be glorified.<sup>12</sup>

In another place, Spurgeon says, "True preaching is an act of faith, and is owned by the Holy Spirit as the means of working spiritual miracles.... [you must] labor to remove prejudices, to resolve doubts, to conquer objections, and to drive the sinner out of his hiding-places as once."<sup>13</sup>

Charles Finney agrees, "The minister should hunt after sinners and Christians, wherever they may have entrenched themselves in inaction. It is not the design of preaching to make men easy and quiet, but to make them ACT." Finally, Stott adds, "If there are no summons, there is no sermon."<sup>14</sup> We need to know what it is we are summoning the people to do.

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<sup>11</sup> Don Williams, "Preaching with a Point: Persuasion and Apologetics" (Sept. 23, 1994), and unpublished paper submitted to the AVC USA Educational Task Force.

<sup>12</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry*, a collection of address to ministers and students, 1900 (Banner of Truth, 1960), 187, cited by Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 108.

<sup>13</sup> Spurgeon, "Lectures to My Students," cited by Don Williams, "Preaching with a Point," 1.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Finney, *Revivals in Religion*, 223; John Stott citing Broadus in Stott's *I Believe in Preaching*, 225, 246. Both of these citations are taken from Don Williams, "Preaching with a Point," 1.





Jerry Vines contends, “Persuasion is what preaching is all about. The whole existence and purpose of the sermon is to persuade. It moves the souls of men.”<sup>15</sup> According to Don Williams, not only are all sermons persuasive, they are combative, convicting, and compelling. They are combative because they war against the world, the flesh, and the devil. They engage in spiritual warfare—exposing lies, sin, secular worldviews, worldly values, and false assumptions. In addition, sermons offer reasons to believe, that is, apologetics. Furthermore, sermons are convicting, appealing to head and heart, reason and emotion, to the conscience, and most importantly, to the will. Finally, all sermons are compelling: “They hook imagination. They break down barriers. They drive to decision. They explode in ministry . . . . They create action on the part of the hearers.”<sup>16</sup>

## **2. Aiming at the Whole Person to Change Lives**

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<sup>15</sup> Jerry Vines, *A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 97-98.

<sup>16</sup> Don Williams, “Preaching with a Point,” 7.

For our preaching to change lives we must aim at the whole person, not just their minds or their emotions. This is where sermons differ from lectures, on the one hand, and entertainment, on the other. Rich Nathan says, “Our teaching should go to the heart and will of an individual. At the end of a successful sermon, we ought to have a person making a decision or life change . . . concerning what we have taught . . . . We are aiming at some kind of behavioral change . . . . It is the will and heart of the listener that should be, primarily, in view.”<sup>17</sup> We must not only inform the mind but grip the heart and motivate the will to action. A.

W. Tozer claims:

Truth divorced from life is not truth in its Biblical sense, but something else and something less . . . . No man is better for knowing that God in the beginning created the heaven and the earth. The devil knows that, and so did Ahab and Judas Iscariot. No man is better for knowing that God so loved the world of men that He gave his only begotten Son to die for their redemption. In hell there are millions who know that. Theological truth is useless until it is obeyed. The purpose behind all doctrine is to secure moral action.<sup>15</sup>

The preacher, with the help of the Holy Spirit, must reach the whole person to change lives.

### **3. Preaching Sustains and Nourishes the Church**

The health and welfare of the people of God has always depended upon the mutual relationship between the Word of God proclaimed and the obedient response of God’s people. Not only was the universe created by the Word of God, but the church, His new creation, was both created and is sustained by His Word of power. Stott faithfully represents the Reformed view when he says of God and the church:

Not only has he brought it into being by his word, but he maintains and sustains it, directs and sanctifies it, reforms and renews it through the same Word. The Word of God is the scepter by which Christ rules the Church and the food with which he nourishes it.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Rich Nathan, “Message Development” (1994), an unpublished paper submitted to the AVC USA Educational Task Force, 4.

<sup>15</sup> A. W. Tozer, *Of God and Men* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian, 1960), 26-27, cited by Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 108.

<sup>16</sup> Stott, *Between Two Words*, 109.

Jesus corroborates this view when he says that “Man cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4; cf. Deut. 8:3). “God’s people live and flourish only by believing and obeying his Word.”<sup>17</sup> Conversely, it would not be unreasonable to conclude that the quality of the church’s spiritual life in any era is due to the quality of Christian preaching.<sup>18</sup>

#### **4. Preaching as Powerful Action**

Another way to depict the change that preaching can make in the lives of men and women is to recognize the biblical theme of preaching empowered by the Holy Spirit as an act of power. A sermon can become an act of God as God chooses to take it up and use it as His instrument. It is the Spirit-wielded word through the preacher. Humans are defeated, conquered, and in bondage to sin, guilt, sickness and death. Preaching breaks open the prison in which people are held. It assaults the bastion of death and sets the captives free. As preachers with the Word of Power in our mouths, we expect results of liberation, healing, and transformation. The God who spoke the healing word recorded in Scripture will speak it again.<sup>19</sup> Jesus would not separate his proclamation from his demonstration; and neither would we. Thus, a crucial part of our sermon preparation is to craft our conclusion as a funnel to the ministry time in which people are powerfully encountered by God further.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 113-115.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 107-109.

## 5. Preaching as Equipping

An important question for a Vineyard preacher to ask is how the sermon equips the believers for the work of the ministry. Preachers are used to telling their audience what to do but now how to do it! It is not enough to say what or why. We need to show the people how. 2 Tim. 3:16-17 says,

<sup>16</sup>All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

This means, respectively, that the Bible is not only profitable for teaching truth and correcting error, but also for reforming conduct, and training in Christian practices. It not only transforms our thinking but changes our behavior and equips us for action. In addition, Eph. 4:11-12 says that Christ gifts the church with people with training gifts, including “pastors and teachers” in order “to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” So, one important reason for preaching a sermon is to equip the believers to live and minister effectively.<sup>20</sup>

One of our tasks as preachers is to teach our listeners how to think in a Christian manner. Teaching the Scriptures with clarity and conviction helps people develop a Christian mind. In an era when propaganda passes for education, psychological deception shapes advertising, and political correctness substitutes for thinking through issues, it is essential that the Christian preacher stands apart as one, who with integrity of scholarship and openness of motives, plainly

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<sup>20</sup> C. H. Dodd, British scholar who greatly impacted the previous generation of New Testament scholarship, argued that preaching (*kerygma*) differed from teaching (*didache*). Preaching proclaimed the cross and Christ’s death for our salvation and teaching the resulting lifestyle of Christian ethics. However, current scholarship recognizes overlap and is reticent of drawing a sharp line of demarcation between the two. We in the Vineyard can appreciate the fluidity between proclaiming deliverance, experiencing power ministry, and equipping believers to minister with healing prayer (often when we are in process of being delivered ourselves).

reasons from scripture (2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2). We need to openly lay out the alternatives, plead with people to follow the Scriptural path, but leave the decisions up to them. We can use the Bible and our teaching abilities to serve people or manipulate them. God, in his love for people, pleads his case through the apostles and prophets and asks for their thoughtful, free, and loving response. This is our model as well.<sup>21</sup>

In the New Testament, Christians are urged to exercise discernment: “Test the spirits to see whether they are from God ... ” (1 Jn. 4:1); “Test everything ... hold fast to what is good .... Abstain from every evil kind” [of prophecy] (1 Thess. 5:19-22). That is, believers are not asked to receive messages uncritically – even those claiming to be inspired! Christians are expected to grow in discernment through practice (Phil. 1:9; Heb. 5:14). As Christian preachers we should invite our hearers to test and evaluate our teaching. The Bereans are commended for combining open receptivity with critical listening (Acts 17:11). The Christian preacher needs to interpret Scripture soundly, reason plainly, appeal to the hearers sincerely, and try to persuade them with a combination of conviction and humility. During the whole process, however, the preacher must respect the listeners’ freedom to think for themselves and to respond in an uncoerced manner.<sup>22</sup>

## **6. Preaching with a Purpose**

The more you learn the purposes of various biblical books and passages the more tools you will have in your preaching toolbox for addressing the needs of other believers. One major question involved in responsibly interpreting Scripture is, “Why did the author write this?” In what way did he expect to change the thinking and actions of his hearers? Biblical writers did

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<sup>21</sup> Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 173-176.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 176-177.

not just randomly pick up a pen to jot down a few religious thoughts. They passionately set out to accomplish a purpose. Their business was to obey God and change lives. So the preacher needs to discover why a given passage was included in Scripture and come to a decision about what God wants to accomplish through his message to affect the lives of his audience.<sup>23</sup>

Keeping this last point in mind, it would be worth your while to write a purpose statement for your message at the beginning of your sermon preparation. If you do not know where you are going, you will not know the best route to take you there. That's why some preachers avoid this discipline; so they will not have to worry about the destination. If you do not know where you are going any way will get you there! However, if we aim to be used of God to change lives, we best know what God wants to accomplish through us and what it looks like when it impacts our hearers. Robinson says, "A purpose statement not only describes our destination and the route we will follow to get there, but if possible tells how we can know if we have arrived."<sup>24</sup>

## **7. Assignment and Spiritual Accountability**

The student should select a text (2-5 verses) from which to preach another message for next week. Not only must the student have a clear thesis statement based on the central thesis of the passage, but s/he needs to start out with a purpose statement (stated objective) of why s/he should preach this message. It should describe what results s/he thinks God want to accomplish in the lives of the audience through this message.

In the area of spiritual accountability, thoughtfully and prayerfully answer the question: Have you left unresolved any issue between you and any other person? Interact and pray about

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<sup>23</sup> Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 109.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

this. The mentoring pastor may need to give wise counsel to act on this matter in a redemptive manner. Also, beware of issues allegedly too small to do anything about, but too big to forget (even after a significant amount of time has passed). That is a red flag that things are not as resolved or insignificant to one's spiritual life as s/he thinks.



SESSION 4:  
Exercises for Stating the Central Thesis and Finding  
the Dominant Thought of a Passage

1. **Stating the Central Thesis**

Reviewing from lesson 2, “Every sermon should have a thesis; and that thesis should be the dominant thought of the passage of Scripture on which it is based.” The two components of the central thesis statement are the *subject* and the *complement*. The *subject* answers the question, “What am I talking about?” The *complement* answers the question, “What am I saying about what I am talking about?” Both components are needed for the thesis statement to be complete.

Below are some exercises to practice identifying and stating the thesis of a passage.<sup>25</sup> As you read the exercise passage cover the answer below it while you guess at the answer. Your guesses will improve with practice. State the subject and complement in the following passages.

1. A good sermon leaves you wondering how the preacher knew all about you.

**Subject:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Complement:** \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: Subject: The test of a good sermon.  
Complement: It reveals what you are.

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<sup>25</sup> Taken from Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 46-48, 211-213.

2. Today's pulpit has lost its authority because it has largely ignored the Bible as the source of its message.

**Subject:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Complement:** \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: Subject: Why today's pulpit is weak.  
Complement: It has ignored the Bible.

3. G. K. Chesterton once said that it is often supposed that when people stop believing in God, they believe in nothing. Alas, it is worse than that. When they stop believing in God, they believe in anything. *Malcom Muggeridge*

**Subject:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Complement:** \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: Subject: The consequence of not believing in God.  
Complement: We will believe anything.

4. A good name is more desirable than great wealth; the respect of others is better than silver or gold. *Proverbs 22:1*

**Subject:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Complement:** \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: Subject: The value of a good reputation.  
Complement: It is worth more than material things.

5. Praise the Lord, all nations;  
Extol him, all you people!  
For his love is strong,  
His faithfulness eternal.  
*Psalm 117*

**Subject:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Complement:** \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: Subject: Why everyone should praise God.

Complement: We should praise Him for His strong love and eternal faithfulness.

6. Do not speak harshly to a man older than yourself, but advise him as you would your own father; treat the younger men as brothers and older women as you would your mother. Always treat younger women with propriety, as if they were your sisters. *1 Timothy 5:1-2*

**Subject:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Complement:** \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: Subject: How we should deal with others.

Complement: We should treat them with the respect one gives to members of one's family.

7. Walking is the exercise that needs no gym. It is the prescription without medicine, the weight control without diet, the cosmetic found in no drugstore. It is the tranquilizer without a pill, the therapy without a psychoanalyst, the fountain of youth that is no legend. A walk is the vacation that does not cost a cent.

**Subject:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Complement:** \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: Subject: The benefits of walking.

Complement: It benefits us physically and psychologically.

8. A Chinese boy who wanted to learn about jade went to study with a talented old teacher. This gentleman put a piece of the stone into the youth's hand and told him to hold it tight. Then he began to talk of philosophy, men, women, the sun and almost everything under it. After an hour he took back the stone and sent the boy home. The procedure was repeated for weeks. The boy became frustrated—when would he be told about jade?—but he was too

polite to interrupt his venerable teacher. Then one day when the old man put a stone into his hands, the boy cried out instantly, "That's not jade!"

**Subject:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Complement:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Answer: Subject: How do we learn to discern the real from the counterfeit?<sup>26</sup>  
Complement: We learn through repeated, even peripherally conscious, exposure.

9. Rudolph Fellner reminds his classes at Carnegie-Mellon University that "melody exists only in your memory, for at any given moment you are hearing only one note of the tune." Music is a cumulative art. It is a change of sounds through time, each sound taking its meaning from those that have gone before. It is not the art for amnesiacs.

**Subject:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Complement:** \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: Subject: The importance of memory in music.  
Complement: Without memory we would have no melody.

10. Work today has lost many traditional characteristics; so has play. Play has increasingly been transformed into organized sports, and sports in turn increasingly resemble work in the arduous practice and preparation, in the intense involvement of coaches and athletes (in the spirit of work), and in actual economic productivity. In a final paradox only those sports which began as work—that is, hunting and fishing—are now dominated by the spirit of play.

*Sport and Society*

**Subject:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Complement:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Answer: Subject: The reversal of traditional distinctions of play and work.

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<sup>26</sup> Our answer here is different from the one Robinson suggests.

Complement: What was play has been made into work, and what was work is now recreation.

## 2. Finding the Dominant Thought

Now let's practice identifying the dominant thought of some Scriptural passages. One way of recognizing the subject of a passage is to write out the various assertions that can be made from the text and then decide which one is the most inclusive of the others. That is, one idea is the biggest and the other ideas support that one. Also, the initial reading of the passage will often yield a broad notion of the subject. But this is too general; and it needs to be narrowed down.

Another method for narrowing down the subject is to assume that the biblical author is addressing a question about this broad subject. What is the question? Identifying this question will give the narrower subject. This question can be turned into an incomplete subject phrase to which you can add the answer (the complement). The answer to the question, or the completing of the subject phrase, becomes the complement, thus forming the thesis.<sup>27</sup>

Sometimes the passage will address more than one underlying question. These multiple questions reveal the several different assertions about the thesis that probably will be developed as outline points during the message. Usually one of these questions is clearly the larger, more climactic, more inclusive question. It either contains or dominates the other questions. It, therefore, becomes the subject and its answer becomes the complement. Let's practice now on some Scriptural passages.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Don Sunukjian, "Biblical Preaching," an outline and presentation given to the Association of Vineyard Churches leadership, Nov. 5-7, 1997, 13-15.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 16.

1. Read Mark 4:35-41.

**Subject:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Complement:** \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: Subject: Jesus intentionally leads his disciples into a threatening situation.

Complement: This is to show them how powerful he really is.

Thesis: Jesus intentionally leads us into threatening situations to show us how powerful he really is.

2. Read 1 Corinthians 1:4-9.

**Subject:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Complement:** \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: Subject: Be thankful for speech gifts.

Complement: They confirm the witness to Christ in our midst till Jesus returns.

Thesis: Thank God for speech gifts because they confirm our witness to Jesus until he returns.

3. Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5.

**Subject:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Complement:** \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: Subject: The foolishness of preaching is the wisdom of God.

Complement: This is demonstrated in the Corinthians' calling and in Paul's ministry.

Thesis: Your calling and Paul's ministry demonstrate the wisdom of God through the foolishness of preaching.

4. Read 1 Corinthians 2:6-16.

**Subject:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Complement:** \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: Subject: The message of the Gospel is a mystery to unbelievers.

Complement: Because only by the Spirit of God can it be understood.

Thesis: The message of the Gospel can only be comprehended with the help of the Spirit of God.

5. Read Ephesians 1:3-14

**Subject:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Complement:** \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: Subject: Every spiritual benefit has been given to believers in Christ.

Complement: This is for the praise of God's glory (see vv. 6 and 12).

Thesis: Believers are given every spiritual benefit for the praise of God's glory.

6. Read Ephesians 1:15-23

**Subject:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Complement:** \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: Subject: God has made available to believers revelation and power.

Complement: This is for the exaltation of Christ and the extension of his Body.

Thesis: God has made available to us revelation and power for the exaltation of Christ and the extension of his Body.

7. Read Ephesians 2:1-10.

**Subject:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Complement:** \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: Subject: God has raised us to life and enthroned us with Christ.

Complement: This is because of the Great love with which he has loved us.

Thesis: Because of God's great love towards us He has raised us to life and enthroned us with Christ.

### 3. **Crafting the Sermonic Idea**

Finally, we want our thesis statement to be not only an accurate expression of the dominant thought of the biblical text; it also needs to address our audience in an interesting and memorable fashion. This is the sermonic idea. Look back over the thesis statements of the above seven biblical passages and state the sermonic idea with your audience in mind.

1. **Sermonic Idea of Mark 1:35-41:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Suggestion: God pushes us out of our comfort zone to show us His power.

2. **Sermonic Idea of 1 Cor. 1:4-9:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Suggestion: Experiencing spiritual gifts is a confirming witness to Christ in our lives.

3. **Sermonic Idea of 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Suggestion: What is foolish to the world is God's wisdom that saves us.

4. **Sermonic Idea of 1 Cor. 2:6-16:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Suggestion: The people of God have the wisdom of God because they have the Spirit of God.



5. **Sermonic Idea of Eph. 1:3-14:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Suggestion: Believers have the total benefit package so God's glory will be praised.

6. **Sermonic Idea of Eph. 1:15-23:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Suggestion: God's revelation and power for you to exalt Christ and extend his church.

7. **Sermonic Idea of Eph. 2:1-10:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Suggestion: God has made us alive, enthroned us with Christ, and prepared works of eternal significance for us because of His love for us.

#### 4. **Assignment and Spiritual Accountability**

Have the student(s) select a text to preach from for the next session. A higher standard of expectation should be communicated regarding the clarity and crafting of the thesis statement as it appears in the sermon (the sermonic idea).

Concerning spiritual accountability, ask the married student(s) the following questions:

1. Would your wife/husband acknowledge that you have loved, honored, and affirmed her/him and have otherwise fulfilled your responsibility as her husband/his wife?
2. Have you regularly prayed for and with your mate?
3. Have you given priority time to your mate and children?

Ask the unmarried student(s) the following questions:

1. Since you have been a Christian adult, have you conducted yourself in a godly and righteous manner towards the opposite sex? Is this characteristic of all your dating and socializing?
2. Do you understand that your faithfulness to your future mate (if God's will is for you to be married) starts now? Explain how this will affect the way you socialize with the opposite sex and the way you will think about members of the opposite sex.

## SESSION 5: Structuring Your Sermon

### 1. Expanding the Sermonic Idea

After you have discovered the central thesis of your text, decided the objective (purpose) of preaching this sermon for this particular audience, and composed the sermonic idea, *you now need to determine how you will present the ideas of your sermon to best accomplish your purpose.* You must structure your sermon for orderly arrangement to best reach your objective. When one states a thesis, four things can be done to develop it.<sup>29</sup>

1.1 *Restatement*: a speaker merely states an idea in other words to clarify it or to impress it on the hearer. This is a more creative exercise than mere repetition; although a skillful use of repetition can be creative, as well. We have an abundance of examples of restatement in the parallelism of Hebrew poetry. Look at Psalm 34:1, 3

I will bless the Lord at all times;  
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.

O magnify the Lord with me,  
And let us exalt his name together!

You will notice that the first two lines say the same thing in different words; and the last two lines do the same. You can find this feature throughout the Psalms, Proverbs, many oracles of

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<sup>29</sup> Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 138-141, 116-121.

the prophets, and a number of the sayings of Jesus, as well. Much black preaching is replete with the creative use of restatement and repetition.

1.2 *Explanation*: centers on the question, What does it mean? Does this concept, or parts of it, need explanation? Are there items in the text taken for granted by the ancient writer and audience that my audience needs explained to them? For example, “meat offered to idols” in 1 Corinthians 8-10; the structure and meaning of “covenant” in the Bible (e.g.g., Matt. 26:28; Gen. 15:18; Ex. 24:7; Ps. 89:3-4 and 2 Sam. 7); what it means “to prophesy” in 1 Cor. 12-14 and the rest of the New Testament. One of the major battles of preaching is to attain intelligibility. Speakers must anticipate what their hearers do not know and explain it to them.

1.3 *Validity*: deals with the question, Is it true? Can I really believe it? What proof do you offer? Psychological acceptance seldom comes from citing Scripture alone. It must be gained through reasoning, proofs, and illustrations. Paul not only cites the Hebrew Bible, he also argues his points and draws heavily on human experience and illustrations. In both their writing and preaching the apostles adapted themselves to their readers and listeners to establish the validity of their ideas.

When Paul reasoned with the Corinthians about the right of a minister to receive financial support, he appeals to the logic of experience. If soldiers, grape growers, shepherds, and farmers receive wages for their work, why not an apostle or teacher? Then, Paul reasoned from the law—against muzzling the ox that treads out the grain (1 Cor. 9:6-12). When Paul addressed the intellectuals at Mars Hill in Athens, in Acts 17, he discussed natural theology—the fact of creation and its necessary implications; and although he set forth biblical concepts, the apostle never quoted from the Old Testament since it would have meant nothing to the audience.

A preacher, therefore, does well to adopt the attitude that a statement is not true because it is in the Bible; it is in the Bible because it is true. The Bible states reality as it exists in the

universe as God has made it and as He governs it. We would expect, therefore, the affirmations of what Scripture teaches to be reflected in the world around us. While sociology, psychology, archaeology, astronomy, and the other sciences do not establish biblical truth, the valid data from these sciences often confirm the truth taught in Scripture.

Developing skills in accessing studies from various fields by means of the internet or the library will build a bridge between what your audience considers authoritative and the authority of Scripture. A recent survey, for instance, on how cohabitation before marriage lowers the chances of those marriages lasting corroborates the wisdom of the Bible against popular opinion. Merely ask, “Is that true? Do I and my hearers believe that?” Deal honestly with the question, “Would my audience accept that statement as true without challenge? If not, why not?” Write down specific questions that come and, if possible, the direction of some of the answers.

1.4 *Application*: answers the question, “What difference does it make? So what?” Perceptive application must follow accurate exegesis. For making applications, it is very helpful to think of groups of concrete individuals to whom you will be preaching. How does the thesis and its supportive exegetical insights in the text speak to the single mother in her late twenties, couples in their fifties feeling unprepared to approach retirement, the male college student losing the battle for pure thoughts and habits, the mid-thirties couple preoccupied with improving their home and multiplying their possessions, teenagers who may have to stand alone at school or in the neighborhood against peer pressure, those who recently lost their spouse or child or a close relationship, etc.? Preach to real people in concrete situations. Challenge people to apply the scriptural message and make a biblical response to their situation in life.

Run the message of the thesis through a mental grid of the various groups and life-circumstances of your audience. Men are fathers, husbands, sons, employees, employers, tax payers, citizens, renters, homeowners, divorced fathers, step-fathers, fathers of children in

specific age-stages or empty nest. Break the audience down. Think through the women's roles in parallel. In regards to work, think of the people who own their business and are concerned with profit, reputation, employees, government regulations, etc. Or, on the other hand, people who work for others and dislike their jobs are thinking about hours, wages, distance of travel, a dead-end career track, and a supervisor who is either incompetent, unrighteous, dishonest, critical, demoralizing, etc. (or all of the above).

People face failures: broken marriages, relationships, business failures, wayward kids, bitter disappointments, etc. Believers are persecuted for righteousness sake: a mother of young children challenges a school's alternative lifestyle series; she does not want her children involved in the Halloween event; or a mother does not want her children spending time with her husband's parents because of the trash they watch on T.V. and she receives verbal abuse because of her stand.

## **2. The Logical Forms of a Sermon**

2.1 Deductive form. Two major logical forms that sermons can take are *deductive* and *inductive*. In sermons developed according to a *deductive* form of reasoning, the *central thesis* is stated in full in the introduction; and the body of the sermon explains, proves, or applies the central thesis. The points of the sermon must show that both Scripture and the facts of human experience demonstrate the truth of the central thesis. For example, the structure of a deductive sermon may look like this:

- I. Introduction
  - A.
  - B.
  - C. Central Thesis
- II. Main point
- III. Main point
  
- IV. Main point

## V. Conclusion

Specifically, one may want to preach a sermon on “The Purposes of a Church” from Acts 2:42 (or 2:41-27).<sup>30</sup> One could outline the sermon deductively as follows:

- I. Introduction
  - A. In order to be the church God wants us to be, we need to know the goals or purposes of a church.
  - B. Acts 2 reveals what God intends a church to do.
  - C. ***The purposes of a church are to worship, instruct, fellowship, and evangelize*** (central thesis).
- II. Worship
- III. Instruct
- IV. Fellowship
- V. Evangelize
- VI. Conclusion (summary, applications, actions steps, and challenge to decision).

The advantage of a deductive sermon is clarity. The audience knows what the sermon is about from the beginning. The central thesis emerges in the introduction. However, what the deductive sermon gains in clarity it may lose in suspense or lessened climax. The conclusion is predictable so the preacher has to hold the audience’s attention with explanations, demonstrations, and applications that are not already anticipated by his listeners.

2.2 Inductive form. In sermons developed from an *inductive* form of reasoning, the subject of the sermon occurs in the introduction by means of a statement or question, but not in the form of a complete thesis statement. The completion or complement of the thesis emerges gradually through the main points of the sermon. Induction is a form of reasoning whereby we make a generalization from a sufficient number of particular cases. Discovering something to be true of certain objects in a class, we infer that to be true of all objects of that class.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the structure of an inductive sermon may look like this:

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<sup>30</sup> This example is taken from Don Sunukjian, “Biblical Preaching,” an outline and presentation given to the Association of Vineyard Churches leadership, Nov. 5-7, 1997, 21.

<sup>31</sup> John Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, ed. J. B. Weatherspoon (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1945) [1870], 175.

- I. Introduction
  - A.
  - B.
  - D. Subject/Question
- II. Main point
- III. Main point
- IV. Main point
- V. Conclusion—Complement/Answer (as well as applications, action steps, and challenges to decision).

Specifically, a sermon on Isaiah 9:6-7, “Unto Us a Son is Given,” could be outlined

inductively as follows:

- I. Introduction
  - A. More than 700 years before Jesus of Nazareth walked the face of the earth, the prophet Isaiah, a champion of monotheism amidst an apostate people, predicted the answer to our human plight coming in the form of a child to be born.
  - B. This son, amazingly, would have both divine and human characteristics. Human in that he would be born as a child like all other humans; divine in who he would be and what he would do. The meaning of “name” in the Ancient Near East is . . .
  - C. The essential nature of this “child” and “son” is revealed in his name. He is also the same person being spoken of in Isa. 7:14 (cf. Matt. 1:23) and Isa. 11:1-10. Isa. chs. 7-12 is a major literary unit concerning “Immanuel.”
- II. Wonderful Counselor: The term “wonderful,” here, speaks of the supernatural and of divine intervention. He brings the wisdom of God to us (cf. Isa. 11:1-4a).
- III. Mighty God: the same as the Lord God Almighty of Israel (cf. Isa. 10:21; Deut. 10:17; Jer. 32:18). God wants to show his power on our behalf (2 Chron. 16:9).
- IV. Everlasting Father: this means he unceasingly generates life. Note how Isa. 9:6 both differentiates and identifies God the Father and this son. He is, at the same time, a child to be born and the Everlasting Father. Reference John 14:1-10.
- V. Prince of Peace: This son will bring peace between God and man,<sup>32</sup> between man man, and between man and nature. See Isa. 11:4b-10. The Hebrew meaning of *shalom* is . . . . In other words, he is our abundance.
- VI. Conclusion
  - A. In all the history of Israel, what child to be born could possibly fit Isaiah’s prediction?
  - B. Isaiah said that this child is born and this son is given *unto us!* He was brought into this world *for our benefit.*
  - C. ***God brought Jesus into this world***, born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14), ***to be our wisdom*** (James 1:5; direction), ***our power*** (to save and to heal), ***our source of life*** (1 Jn. 5:12), ***and our abundance*** (Phil. 4:19). [central thesis] Give illustrations from experience, applications (individuals in the audience who

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<sup>32</sup> I am using “man” here in the generic sense not in the sense of gender. Other ways of phrasing this seemed awkward and inefficient.



right now need God's wisdom about a decision they must make, God's power to intervene, the life of God to renew them or save them, and God's abundance to meet their needs), and challenge the people to respond by receiving ministry.

The advantage of an inductive sermon is the sense of leading people to discover something for themselves. The argument of the sermon builds with each point. The idea of the thesis statement is completed only at the end. However, what the inductive sermon gains in sustained suspense or building to a climax it may lose in lack of clarity. The preacher must give clear oral directions as to where he or she is going so that the listener does not lose track of the sermon's progression towards its central truth.

An inductive structure is probably best when the argument is cumulative, or the main points are a list, or the points of the message progressively emerge within a narrative (biblical story). Moreover, this structure can be used when there is no need to state the complete thesis at the beginning of the sermon; or it may be employed when the audience may be resistant or hostile to the thesis and you need time to develop your argument to win them over. On the other hand, a deductive structure serves best when clarity from the beginning is paramount; and when what you need to accomplish is primarily explanation and application.

2.3 Other forms. These are not the only forms a sermon can take. Haddon Robinson suggests two questions to ask of a sermon before choosing what form it should take: (1) Does this development communicate what the passage teaches? (2) Will it accomplish my purpose with this audience?<sup>33</sup> Many sermons can be put in a "problem-solution" format. In the introduction the preacher identifies a personal or ethical problem, its background, and perhaps discusses inadequate solutions being offered today. The first main point puts forth a biblical principle or approach to the problem. The next two or three points explain, defend, and apply the

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<sup>33</sup> Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 127.

biblical solution. The conclusion clenches the argument, illustrates the blessings of God in following this course (and perhaps the consequences of doing otherwise), and calls the audience to a decision to make concrete actions steps to implement the solution.

Other forms sermons can take are: What? Why? How? or Explore, Explain, Apply; or What it is not, What it is; or a more nuanced outline might be: Not this, nor this, nor this, nor this, but this. Some have taken the six questions approach (Who? What? When? Why? Where? And How?) and occasionally used it to structure their sermons. This can give a sermon a fresh daily news feel. Again, remember the rules are to match the structure to be both faithful to the text and relevant to the audience.

2.4 Arranging arguments. John Broadus offers some valuable advice on how to arrange the arguments of a sermon.<sup>34</sup>

1. Arrange a series of arguments so that the strongest comes last (climax).
2. Begin arguments with something your listeners will fully acknowledge.
3. Avoid formality—"have the reality of argument, but as little as possible of its merely technical forms and phrases."
4. Aim for clarity, precision, and force.
5. In general, depend principally on arguments from Scripture.

### 3. Assignment and Spiritual Accountability

The student(s) should select a text from which to preach another fifteen minute sermon for the next session. You will pay special attention to the logical structure of that sermon. Let the student(s) know this. Interact with any question the student(s) have about this.

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<sup>34</sup> John Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 190-195; summarized by Nancey Murphy, *Reasoning and Rhetoric in Religion* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), 90. Remember that the use of "argument" here has nothing to do with being "argumentative." An argument is the sequence of points you make to persuade your listeners to respond in a certain manner, i.e., to embrace God's offer to change their lives. A sermon or a series of sermons should be looked at as a sustained argument to persuade people to follow God's Will in a given area of their lives.

Here are some questions for spiritual accountability.

1. Have you been with a woman/man in circumstances that might be seen as inappropriate?
2. Have you allowed yourself to be exposed to any sexually explicit material?
3. Are you having devotions (Scripture reading, prayer, and possibly making journal entries of what strikes you during devotions) at least 3-5 times a week?

## SESSION 6: Introductions and Conclusions

There are at least two ways of serving a meal. I could come to a table that is beautifully spread, with Texas-size T-bone steaks, mashed potatoes, parsley peas, iced tea with a slice of lemon, molded jello salad garnished with cheddar cheese, and cherry pie piled high with whipped cream. That is I could if I were not watching my diet.

A second kind of meal can consist of one huge bowl of food served on a bare table. Suppose I ask my wife, “What in the world is this?” She says, “I’m sorry honey, I just didn’t have time to prepare the meal in the usual way; so I took the steak, the peas, the mashed potatoes, the salad, and the cherry pie, and I put them all together with the iced tea. It’s the best I could do. The meals are equally nourishing but not equally appetizing. Our preaching is like those two meals in some ways.

Similarly, two preachers can preach a text with the same knowledge base. They may use the same commentaries and they may have had equivalent experience or academic training. However, one takes the time to present it well and the other does not. Their audiences, therefore, experience something totally different when the sermons are delivered. Three places where the preparation of a sermon’s presentation really pays off are in the introduction, conclusion, and the illustrations. In this session we will deal with the introduction and conclusion of the sermon. In the next and final session we will discuss illustrations.

## 1. The Introduction

Every sermon should have a well thought-out introduction. Introductions serve the following purposes. First, they *grab the attention of the audience*. If you do not engage the audience with a reason to listen to you in the first few sentences of your sermon, it will be very hard to get them back. Although the audience is not yet ready for something too loud or emotional, they do need something that will arrest their attention. An interesting story, humor, a personal incident, a thoughtful and entertaining spin on a current event, misunderstandings of your subject or text told in an amusing way, the pertinence of the subject to our times, the disadvantages of not grasping the importance of the subject, the advantages that come with knowing the subject, and the utility of the subject are all good sources for an effective introduction. We need to arouse the curiosity of our listeners and give them a good reason to anticipate that we will say something that will meet a need.

Introductions, secondly, serve to *build rapport between the speaker and the audience*. They need a chance to warm up to you as well as to your subject. It is crucial to leave a good first impression. Your audience wants to know that you are nice, funny—or at least engaging, and competent. We need to give them a good preliminary answer to their first question: “Why should I listen to you?” Thirdly, *introductions help your listeners to “unpack their bags.”* If you are talking about a controversial subject people come with anxieties, frustrations, or strong opinions about it. You can use the introduction to clear away this underbrush so you can plant some good seed from the Scriptures and Christian reflection on them.

The fourth purpose of an introduction is to *build a bridge*. There is often a deep chasm between the culture and mindset of those who penned the ancient Scriptures and today’s postmodern mind. We have to build a bridge over this two to three thousand year divide to

enable God's revealed truth to flow out of the Scriptures and into the hearts of our listeners. We need to exegete not only the Scriptures but also the language, culture, needs, and aspirations of the world around us. A good bridge will be solidly anchored in the world of our people as well as the world of the Bible.

Finally, an introduction *introduces the message of the sermon*. The introduction raises the question or issues—important to the listener—that the sermon will answer. It moves from evoking the audience's interest in the subject in general to specifically focusing them on your central thesis with a brief description of how you are going to develop it. Moreover, the introduction should have four characteristics: (1) It should have a vital relation to the thesis; (2) It should contain but one theme; (3) There should be a natural transition from the introduction to the body of the sermon (the transition should not be forced, abrupt, or strained); (4) It should be prepared carefully.

On this last point, the introduction should not be left to the spur of the moment or to the inspiration of the occasion. Therefore, it should be written out in full—more than one time. The first time you write it out it will be preliminary because you are still working out the content of your message. After your sermon has been completely prepared, you write it again. Because you now know exactly what you are going to say, you are in a position to decide precisely how to lead into your message.

Introductions have a significance disproportionate to their length. In a forty to forty-five minute message, introductions may last 5-10 minutes. Haddon Robinson advises:

Keep the introduction short . . . . An introduction needs to be long enough to capture attention, raise needs, and orient the audience to the subject, the idea, or the first point. Until that is done, the introduction is incomplete; after that the introduction is too long.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 165.

If you leave your guests on the porch too long they will not feel invited into the house. And if you spend an inordinate amount of time setting and spreading the table they will lose their appetite for the meal. Also, be careful not to promise more in the introduction than you deliver in the body of the sermon. This leaves people feeling cheated. In addition, rehearse your introduction enough so that you can look at the people rather than your notes or your Bible. Either near or at the end of your introduction is a good time to read the biblical text from which you are preaching.

## **2. The Conclusion**

The great orators of Greece and Rome called the conclusion, “The final struggle which decides the conflict.”<sup>36</sup> This last three to five minutes of the sermon is the most important part of the preaching event. It is here that the objective of preaching is either met or missed. The eternal issues raised by the sermon are decided at this time if at all. What a mistake it would be to neglect proper preparation of a compelling conclusion and fail to accomplish the mission of the sermon’s purpose. We must be like the lawyer pleading our case before the judge and jury confidently expecting a favorable verdict.

Just as the final draft of the introduction should be the last thing written, the first draft of the conclusion should be one of the first things written. Start with the end in view. You should have a clear objective as to why you are preaching and a text selected that accomplishes this purpose with God’s authority. Now write out how you will drive home the point to pierce the hearts and consciences of your listeners—motivating their will to take action. It is not enough for people to enjoy or even to remember your teaching. They must do something about it. “If

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<sup>36</sup> William Evans, *How to Prepare Sermons and Gospel Addresses* (Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.), 107; Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 122.

there is no summons, there is no sermon.”<sup>37</sup> “We are out to storm the citadel of the will, and capture it for Jesus Christ . . . Whether evangelizing or teaching does not matter. The appeal is the final thing.”<sup>38</sup> For important cases before courts and congresses lawyers and politicians have rewritten the conclusions of their speeches from fifteen to thirty times! It is not too much to expect that we would write ours out—at least two or three times.

What should characterize a good conclusion? Concentration, vitality, brevity, and closure. The FAA (Federal Aviation Agency) does not allow commercial pilots to do or talk to their crew about anything other than that which pertains directly to landing the aircraft when approaching a landing. Experienced pilots know that landing an airplane takes complete concentration. Gymnasts know exactly how and where they will land at the end of their routine. In the same way, preachers should have no uncertainty about where and how their sermons will land. Concentration and clarity are crucial elements of a good conclusion.

Secondly, it is important that preachers have strong conviction about what they are saying and that this passion communicates to the congregation. There is a saying about how classic black preaching should proceed: “Start low, go slow; rise higher, catch fire!” This is good wisdom for almost any style. We want to be genuine and natural, to be sure. But we cannot afford to make our final appeal in weakness of manner, words, or thought. And it is a fault of some energetic speakers to top out in vocal pitch or run out of energy before they reach their conclusion. Preachers must conclude strongly and energetically (not necessarily in volume but in intensity) to secure the vital effect of their sermons.

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<sup>37</sup> Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 210.

<sup>38</sup> Stott, *Between Two World*, 248, citing, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 289.



Thirdly, conclusions should be concise. Do not give verbal markers like “finally,” “in conclusion,” “I want to close with this thought,” etc., and continue on past a concise thought. It is usually best not to announce the nearness of the end of the message. Just conclude skillfully before people have much time to long for it. Moreover, this is no time to introduce new material or lead your listeners into new avenues of thought. Briefly drive home what has been said in a fresh way to lead to your appeal for decision, action, and application. This brings us to our last characteristic of a good conclusion, i.e., closure. The work of the sermon is wasted if the preacher falls short of “closing the deal” with the listener. It’s like a safari without game, a lawyer without a verdict, or a salesman without a sale. Preachers should work hard in preparing their sermons; and they should expect fruit for their labor.

What elements constitute an effective conclusion? Summary, logical appropriateness, direct personal appeal, illustration, quotation, application, specific direction, and divine equipping may mark an effective conclusion. *Summary* is a way to tie up the threads of the sub-themes of the message; but it is not an opportunity to repeat the sermon. Rather, the preacher briefly gathers up the main points of the message to “concentrate their force upon one final effort of conviction and persuasion.”<sup>39</sup> Moreover, there should be a *logical appropriateness* to the fit between the body of the sermon and its conclusion. The audience should see the conclusion as a natural if not compelling end to all the arguments, facts, appeals, and cumulative force of the discussion.

Next, sermons in general and their conclusions in particular need to have *direct personal appeal*. The best way to reach the heart is to talk from the heart. The conclusion of the sermon is very personal in its aim. The preacher must know where the hearers are spiritually, morally, and personally; and as God’s spokesperson and the people’s shepherd s/he must urge, guide,

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<sup>39</sup> Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 127.

persuade, counsel, and challenge them. Also, an *illustration* or anecdote that illuminates the central idea of the message and engages the affections adds quite an impact to the conclusion. Just make sure it is so transparent that little or no explanation is needed for the hearers to grasp its relevance to what you expect them to do.

In addition, a *quotation* may state the sermonic idea in better words than the preacher can come up with. For example, a key verse from the text expounded, which sums up or applies the entire passage, can drive home what the thesis requires of the audience with focussed power. Also, *application* should be made at each major point in the sermon; however, in the conclusion the application is concentrated. It is here that the truth of the message is brought down full force on the particular relationships, obligations, opportunities, and challenges of the hearers. Furthermore, *specific direction* comes from the preacher offering practical guidance on how to translate the truth of the message into experience. What can people do on Monday differently as a result of what they have been taught on Sunday?

Finally, we in the Vineyard have a wonderful heritage of experiencing the *equipping* of the Holy Spirit through ministry time at the end of the sermon. This is the time to use those we have trained in the healing ministry and evangelism to minister to those who respond to the message. Moreover, ministry time is also a good way to have those on the ministry team model the ministry for trainees who seek to learn how to minister in the power of the Spirit. In this way, many experience a divine encounter or spiritual empowerment as they are prayed for at the end of the service.

### 3. Assignment and Spiritual Accountability

Have the student(s) select another text to preach from for the next session. Let each student know you will be paying special attention to the introduction and conclusion of the sermon. You will see if the introduction grabs everyone's attention and if it leads naturally and effectively into the body of the sermon. Does the conclusion tie together the argument developed throughout the sermon and does it intensify the applications? Does it call for a decision or action steps that are logically required by (implicit in) the body of the sermon?

For spiritual accountability ask these questions:

1. Have any of your financial dealings lacked integrity or wisdom?
2. Is your attitude about money consistent with Scripture? Do you tithe to your church and do you give to the poor and to missions?
3. Do you understand the difference between being an owner and being a steward? Do you have plans to increase your generosity to God's work as a sign of your growth in Christ?

## SESSION 7: ILLUSTRATIONS

What is the purpose of illustrations and where do we find them? To “illustrate” means to throw light on a subject, to illuminate, or to give luster to. A sermon without illustrations is like a house without windows: it is more of a prison than a home. If Scripture is the foundation of our house of preaching and reason the pillars, then it is the windows of illustration that let in the light. People struggle to follow abstractions, but delight in the images that light up their imaginations.

One expert speaker said that “the human mind is not, as the philosophers would have you think, a debating hall, but a picture gallery.”<sup>40</sup> And it doesn’t matter if you are a university professor, a tribal native, or a child; everyone loves a good story which paints vivid pictures on the canvas of the human imagination. An Arab proverb declares, “He is the best speaker who can turn the ear into an eye.”

### **1. Purposes**

Illustrations have several purposes: to arouse attention, to explain, to prove, to stir the affections, to ornament, to convict, and to assist the memory. An excellent use of illustration in the introduction is to *arouse the audience’s attention* from the beginning. Moreover, after the

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<sup>40</sup> Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 239.

discourse has labored for awhile in argument or description it is important to secure the listeners' attention again by employing effective illustrations. In the introduction to a sermon on having an undivided heart ("Pure in Heart"), it was told:

A fellow was found with a rope around his wrist, strung from a light fixture. His buddy cut him down and said, "What in the world are you doing?" "Committing suicide!" the fellow said. "Well, you should have put it around your neck if you really wanted to commit suicide." The fellow answered, "I tried it around my neck but it was choking me!"

The introduction continued to show that too many Christians are double minded, failing to aim at seeking God's Kingdom first.

Another major use of illustration is *to explain* by setting forth something similar or analogous to the case in hand. Stott adds, "Illustrations transform the abstract into the concrete, the ancient into the modern, the unfamiliar into the familiar, the general into the particular, the vague into the precise, the unreal into the real, and the invisible into the visible."<sup>41</sup> Many of Jesus' parables (usually fictitious stories) performed this function: the seed growing in secret, the Good Samaritan, the Unmerciful Servant, the Prodigal Son, the Two Debtors, etc.

Illustrations may be employed for the purpose of *proof*, especially as an argument from analogy or by presenting an example that warrants an induction. Paul piles up illustrations from everyday life as well as the Mosaic Law to prove that he has the right to expect remuneration for his ministry (although he chooses to forgo this right for the sake of the Corinthians):

<sup>7</sup>Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? <sup>8</sup>Do I say this on human authority? Does not the law say the same? <sup>9</sup>For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain?" (1 Cor. 9:7-9)

Notice the argument from analogies which also accumulate towards the effect of an inductive argument. The climax, which Paul regarded as the strongest argument, showed how the Law

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

confirms this (Deut. 25:4). Then Paul adds two more everyday analogies before he presses his conclusion: <sup>10</sup>“The plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of a share in the crop. <sup>11</sup>If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits?”

Say you are preaching on general revelation or on the fairness of God who judges everyone based on what they have done with Jesus—even those who have never heard. I have found that citing stories like those in Don Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts* (Glendale: Regal, 1981), in addition to biblical references, is the most effective argument. Richardson gives over twenty examples of how tribal peoples all over the earth experienced the following: (1) a tribesman became disenchanted with his tribe’s worship of false gods; (2) he cried out for the true God to reveal himself; (3) he had visions or dreams revealed to him about white missionaries coming to his tribe with the truth; (4) his tribe was even given some of the content of the message of truth; (5) then the missionaries came and preached the Gospel; (6) and finally, astonished by the correlation, many tribesmen are converted. The cumulative impact of the stories amounts to an argument from induction. Dudley Woodberry of Fuller School of World Missions has collected hundreds of stories of Muslims given dreams about who Jesus is. These have figured prominently in the recent evangelization of Muslims.

The fact that an illustration may offer proof while it also explains, stirs the affections, ornaments, etc. is of special importance. It causes us to pause and look at the illustrations we intended to use for these other purposes and ask ourselves if our illustrations also contain an effective argument. Also, as long as we are using an illustration that *stirs the affections* to illuminate the truth rather than aimlessly awaken the emotions (and the emotions we display are genuine and not manipulative), then we may effectively use this kind of illustration with

integrity. Indeed, Jonathon Edwards said that unless the preacher stirs the affections of the congregation, the audience is unlikely to be motivated to act on biblical truth.

The conclusion of the sermon is where you want people to be motivated to make a decision or take action steps to apply the Word. At the end of a message on the atonement, entitled, “Why Christ Had to Die?” this illustration was used with great effect:

One author wrote: When I was five years old, before factory-installed seat belts and automobile air bags, my family was driving home at night on a two-lane country road. I was sitting on my mother’s lap when another car, driven by a drunk driver, swerved into our lane and hit us head-on. I don’t have any memory of the collision. I do recall the fear and confusion I felt as I saw myself literally covered with blood from head to toe.

Then I learned that the blood wasn’t mine at all, but my mother’s. In that split second when the two headlights glared into her eyes, she instinctively pulled me closer to her chest and curled her body around mine. It was her body that slammed against the dashboard, her head that shattered the windshield. She took the impact of the collision so that I wouldn’t have to.

Jesus Christ took the impact for our sin, and his blood now permanently covers our lives.

Illustrations, in addition, are valuable as *ornaments* that make the truth more attractive and pleasing. However, we must avoid upstaging the truth of our thesis by causing too much fascination with the ornaments. Illustrations should be spotlights for the truth not floodlights which efface the central figure from the stage. For this kind of illustrating to be effective the preacher must use disciplined self-restraint and good taste. An illustration may also prick the conscience and clinch the truth. *Conviction* was the effect of Nathan’s story about the rich man with great flocks and herds who by force took the poor man’s only lamb to feed the rich man’s visitor (2 Sam. 12). Not knowing that the story was a fictitious parable rather than a reported incident David rendered a harsh judgment in his indignation. Then Nathan turned on David and said, “You are the man!” (12:7) When conviction of sin is needed, that’s the effect our preaching should have. A well-chosen illustration can accomplish this.

Who would not be convicted of their inane excuses for not being able to read the Bible regularly after hearing this illustration:

A man in Kansas City was severely injured in an explosion. The victim's face was badly disfigured, and he lost his eyesight as well as both hands. He was just a new Christian; and one of his greatest disappointments was that he could no longer read the Bible.

Then he heard about a lady in England who read Braille with her lips. Hoping to do the same, he sent for some books of the Bible in Braille. Much to his dismay, however, he discovered that the nerve endings in his lips had been destroyed by the explosion.

One day, as he brought one of the Braille pages to his lips, his tongue happened to touch a few of the raised characters and he could feel them. Like a flash he thought, "I can read the Bible using my tongue!" At the time Robert Summer wrote his book, *The wonder of the Word*, in which he tells this story, the man had "read" through the entire Bible four times.

Finally, illustrations are a great *aid to the memory*. How many times can a listener not remember anything about last Sunday's sermon except for an impressive illustration. Upon reflection, the person could reconstruct the truth of the sermon or one of its main points by recalling the graphic images projected upon his or her imagination through this illustration. It is often the best way to communicate spiritual truth, as the abundant illustrations in Jesus' preaching show.

## **2. Sources**

Illustrations, in general, are drawn from a variety of sources: the News, history, biography, observation of life and nature, the sciences, poetry, literature, art, aphorisms and proverbs, imagination, our experiences, and Scripture. Setting the news in the context of biblical truth is something preachers should practice until they are proficient at it. There are even Christian publications that do this. However, there is no replacement for learning how to make skillful analyses yourself, since it is often best to respond quickly to current events—before the Christian synopsis is available and people are thinking about something else. Karl Barth, the



greatest theologian of the twentieth century, said that he prepared sermons with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.

Anecdotes from history have always been a favorite with preachers down through the ages. And this is especially true of biography. Great ancient sources are Herodotus, Plutarch, and Josephus. If you have ever heard an arresting illustration from the life of Alexander the Great, the chances are that it was taken from Plutarch's *Lives*. Brief biographical sketches rich in illustrative material are: *The Scots Worthies*, a compendium of the exploits of the great Scottish divines, by John Howie of Lochgoin, revised by reverends Carlaw and Kerr (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson, & Ferrier) printed at the beginning of the twentieth century; J. Gilchrist Lawson, *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians: Gleaned from their Biographies, Autobiographies, and Writings* (Anderson, IN: The Warner Press, 1911); *America's Great Revivals* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., n.d.); and other accounts of the great evangelical revivals in the history of America and Britain.

The apostle Paul was an observer of life around him. Teachers often speak of the "5 A's" of Paul's illustrations. He drew his illustrations from the realms of agriculture, anatomy, architecture, army, and athletics. As he walked with God he saw analogies from each of these fields of observation. Chained to Roman guards in prison while writing Ephesians, Paul expounds on the Christian's full armor as he observes the attire of his captor.

A number of Jesus' illustrations are drawn from his observations of life and nature: sowing wheat, harvesting, winnowing, vineyards, the lily, the mustard seed, the birds, building houses, leavening bread, patching clothes, lighting lamps, finding hidden treasure, buying costly pearls, intrusting money to servants, creditors, debtors, debtors prison, etc. In nearly every case these were matters known to all. We can keep our eyes and ears open asking all the while, what is this like? What will this illustrate?

Some scientific discoveries appeal to common interest and imagination. If the information needed to understand the illustration can be given briefly and without ostentatious display of knowledge, then it could be useful for illuminating a scriptural teaching. In addition, whenever references to literature and art will really help to render the discourse interesting and useful, rather than bog it down, then they can be used beneficially. Aesop's fables, foreign proverbs, and striking sayings can all add flare to the points we are trying to make. These often have the ability to summarize an incredible breadth of human experience into a concise, pithy saying or story.

Poetry, if used sparingly and judiciously, can drive home impressive sentiments. Moreover, the preacher's own imagination can be used to invent stories or scenarios that aid the audience's ability to see pictures—as long as the speaker indicates its fictitious origin. This can be done by introducing the fictitious story with “It is as if,” or “Suppose a case,” or “Let us imagine,” etc. Also, our own experiences are fruitful sources of impressive illustration. If God has really impacted you and convicted you of something, you will be able to convey it powerfully to others. It is good to remember, however, that these stories must be proportioned in balance with some of the other sources we have been discussing.

One of the greatest sources for illustrating our sermons is the Bible itself. The Bible contains almost every one of the above-mentioned sources, especially, history and biography, poetry and proverbs, and all kinds of pointed sayings. However, in an age of biblical illiteracy, we must not assume our audience is familiar with biblical narratives, prose, and poetry. Therefore, we will need to briefly explain the background, context, and flow of the passage we are using as an illustration in a way that does not bog down the discourse or upstage the point we are trying to make.

A couple of newer sources for illustrations are: Parsons Technology, Church Software Division, “Bible Illustrator” programs (use discretion) at [www.mattel.com/catalog](http://www.mattel.com/catalog); and Craig Brian Larson, ed., *Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching: From Leadership Journal* (Grand Rapids: co-published by Baker Book House and Christianity Today, 1993). Other than these, books on sermon illustrations are largely a waste. They tend to be outdated and irrelevant. Finally, a handful of pointers from John Broadus on the use of illustrations would be beneficial.<sup>42</sup>

1. Use discipline in employing illustrations. Do not use everything that comes to mind; and be convinced that the illustrations actually enhance the biblical truth you are trying to get across.
2. Seek variety in the kinds of illustrations you employ. Too many from one or two sources become monotonous rather than evocative.
3. Be careful not to blind the audience to the subject with the brilliance of the illustrations you employ. They must serve the truth you are declaring, not vice versa. In a culture that demands to be entertained the preacher will have to use particular discretion and skill here.
4. It is usually better to go right into an illustration without announcing it beforehand. Thus, omit introducing the illustration with phrases like, “to illustrate this point,” “let me tell you a story,” etc.
5. Every preacher should be constantly accumulating and building a file of illustrations for future use. Label the illustration with the names of the biblical topics it illustrates; make a copy for each topic listed; and then file it under those topics.

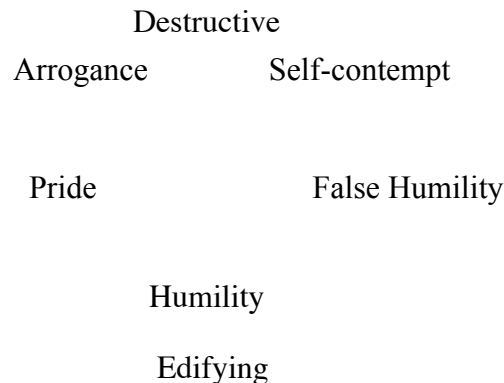
### 3. Assignment and Spiritual Accountability

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<sup>42</sup> John Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, rev. and ed., J. B. Weatherspoon (New York: Harper & Row, 1944) [1870], 208-209.

Have the student(s) select a text from which to preach from for their final session of this preaching mentoring Quarter. Encourage each student to apply everything they have learned throughout the Quarter in creating an effective sermon. Also, ask the student(s) to be mindful of using more than one or two kinds (sources) of illustrations for the next sermon.

With reference to spiritual accountability, have the student(s) locate themselves on the humility wheel below.



Rom. 12:3, 6a is a great passage for bringing out the balance between thinking too much of oneself, on the one hand, and thinking not enough of the way God uses you, on the other. For someone to sing a beautiful song before the church and respond to a compliment by saying, “Oh! It wasn’t me up there singing, it was Jesus,” is false rather than true humility. It lacks reality. Everyone present could recognize whose voice it was that sung. To simply say, “Thank you,” or “That’s a real encouragement to me,” shows true humility. Thinking more of oneself than one ought—e.g., not acknowledging the help you received, or overestimating the grace God has given you for a specific area of gifting or talent—is pride.

People who run themselves down or are over self-deprecating are operating out of self-contempt; and those who are cocky, self-inflated, or boastful are arrogant. It is not unusual for

some people to vacillate between arrogance and self-contempt. Both are destructive and are probably related to each other. That is why the diagram is a circle rather than a horizontal line indicating a linear continuum with opposite poles.

After each person shares where they are at, let the other(s) present give their feedback in a sensitive manner. Talk about the crucial importance of humility for be a leader in ministry and for a preacher. Pray together about what God is showing each of you. Other Scriptures you may want to refer to are: Num. 12:3; 2 Cor. 10:1; 1 Cor. 10:12; Matt. 5:3-5; Mk. 10:45; Phil. 2:3-11, 19-22; 1 Pet. 5:5-6; cf. Jas. 4:6, 10.