Writing a Sermon

This guide offers succinct suggestions for the preparation of an exegetical sermon. Sermon preparation follows from and is dependent upon the exegesis of the biblical passage. The exegetical work is always the first step as you prepare to preach from Scripture. Consult Exegeting a Gospel for guidance in this.

The goal of the sermon is to speak faithfully the Word of God to those who have come to hear God's revelation proclaimed. It presumes that the preacher has invested the time both to hear the Word of God and to understand the application of it to the speaker's and the hearer's lives.

Suggested Guide for Preparing the Sermon

1. **Prayer**
   Begin your sermon preparation with prayer. The sermon is an act of faith in and obedience to the Living God who continues to reveal Himself through the written Word proclaimed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

2. **Ascertain the main thought of the passage.**
   Based upon your exegetical analysis, specify the content, intent, and argument of a passage. Further, how does this passage's message relate to the immediate context as well as to the rest of Scripture? The goal is to discern clearly what the passage is saying. This is necessary if you are to preach from the passage (i.e. follow the path which is already present in Scripture) instead of simply presenting your own concerns.

3. **Identify those to whom you will be preaching.**
   It is important to identify and understand those who will hear the sermon. Anytime you seek to communicate effectively, it is necessary to identify the group to which you will speak and tailor your sermon accordingly (e.g., illustrations, vocabulary, etc.).

4. **Begin to apply the text to the life of the your hearers today.**
   The sermon seeks to illuminate how the revelation of God in a particular historical context applies to the church's life in Christ today. Having endeavored to understand what the text is saying and why, now try to see how this meaning bears upon the your life and those who will hear your sermon. Haddon Robinson [Biblical Preaching (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980)] suggests three developmental questions which will assist in this process:
   1. What does this mean? How is the author developing the thought of this passage? Are there elements in the passage that must be explained to the audience if they are to understand the text? These questions help to ensure intelligibility.
   2. Is it true? Can we believe it? How does the biblical writer substantiate what is said? What experiences in our lives make problematic the claims we are making?
   3. What difference does it make? We read the Bible to hear God speak, so to ask how what the passage says is applicable in our situation is only natural.

5. **Decide the purpose of the sermon.**
   From your understanding of how a passage applies to your life and those who will hear the sermon, try to state your purpose in the sermon. Are you trying to have the hearers apply a particular principle or action in their lives? Are you seeking to explicate a crucial aspect of the Christian faith (e.g. the resurrection, who Jesus Christ is)?
6. **Select a sermon form that facilitates the achieving of the purpose and create a sermon outline.**

   Sermons come in differing forms: either/or, applying a principle, explaining a key idea, narrative, etc. Try to let the passage itself help set the form that you will employ. Once the form is selected, create an outline that incorporates the message of the passage in the selected form. Try to communicate the message of the passage, not just outline it.

7. **Fill in the outline of the sermon.**

   Add the supporting material to the sermon. This includes illustrations, quotations, factual data, etc. that support, illuminate, or apply the sermon's points, as well as motivate the listener to action. Good illustrations are a craft that clearly elucidate a text's meaning rather than simply entertain the audience.

8. **Construct the introduction and conclusion.**

   A well-planned introduction and conclusion are essential to a well-crafted sermon, and they possess a significance that outweighs their relative length. The introduction should introduce the purpose and help to capture the hearer's attention. Some may choose to construct the conclusion first, as it is the place toward which the sermon has been moving. The conclusion should bring home the sermon's message.

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**Preaching: Basic Texts**

There are many, many introductory texts on preaching available. Here are some of the more popular ones and those of recent appearance:


Refocuses the preaching task around the decentering, destabilizing, always risky word that confronts us in Scripture. These essays, previously available only in journals, are here combined with a newly composed preface and introduction.


Addresses approaches to the teller, the listener, the method, the story, Kierkegaard, and includes two sample sermons on Matthew 28:1-10, and Matthew 7:21-29.


Draws helpful insights from the fields of cultural and communication research, as well as theology and biblical teaching. Included are contributions from: Lavinia Byrne, Donald Coggan, and Lesslie Newbigin.

Addresses age, gender, race, personality type, ethnicity, education, and social and economic background as ways in which sermons are received and how the preacher can optimize the opportunity for each to hear and understand the gospel and one another.


An immensely practical book, in which Long walks the reader through the various stages of sermon writing.


Takes readers beyond the initial steps of theological analysis, contextual explorations, and biblical exegesis to help the preacher discover the core of the message to be preached - the sermonic "claim." The book is keyed to online sermon samples and other Web-based features such as sermon illustrations and art.


A classic.


Tools and insights necessary to move from ineffective habits into dramatic sermon delivery. Shows how to preach by retelling a scriptural account from the vantage point of a biblical character-combining the power of drama with God's Word.


Not a how-to book. Instead, Taylor reflects on some of the general qualities required for good preaching.


A Grove pamphlet that offers a simple framework together with reflections on the many different facets of preaching. Will be of use to beginners as well as those with experience.


From the vantage point of the dynamic of divine grace and human action, addresses the biblical and theological content of the sermon from different vantage points.
Preaching Aids: Exegesis

Biblical Commentaries:
For a list of suggested commentaries, please consult the lists available in the Graham Library.

Preaching Commentaries and Sample Sermons (Lectionary)

Cycle C (3 volumes).


This series includes commentaries for years A, B, and C, by liturgical season.

For Years A, B and C.


*The Proclamation Series: Aids for Interpreting the lessons of the Church Year.*
These aids are published by liturgical season (example Pentecost 1,2,3) and church year (series A,B,C). The titles of the books usually go by season.

Years A, B and C.

For Cycles A, B, and C.


Looks at the benefits of preaching though the lectionary, its importance for previous generations of preachers, and how we might go about it by using material already available, or by creatively adapting the lectionary ourselves.
**Texts for Preaching**


**Sermon Illustrations**


**Sermon Collections**

To improve your preaching skills, listen to, watch, or read the sermons of the preaching greats. Many of the TST libraries have tapes of sermons by visiting and local preachers; Emmanuel College has perhaps the best collection of tapes and videos of well-known preachers. The following is a sampling of books, tapes and videos that can help you hone your preaching skills.


This series (available in the Graham Library) includes sermons by preachers like Barbara Brown Taylor, Billy Graham, Tom Long, Fred Craddock, and Haddon Robinson


If you are only going to buy one collection of sermons, make sure it is this one. In this book, you will find modeled every possible type of sermon. The editors have written brief, helpful comments on each sermon. Most of the sermons are "Anglican" in length.


New Pulpit Digest. Louisville, KY: Pulpit Digest Inc.
This bi-monthly journal publishes sermons which treat texts following the lectionary readings.


Includes sermons, commentaries and interviews with preachers.


**Sermons for Special Occasions**


**Children's Sermons**


**Preaching: Special Topics**


