

Expositional Preaching

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How Do I Prepare an Expositional Sermon?

Planning and Preparation

Planning the Menu - Dietary Balance

- The best sermon preparation doesn't wait until the week (or day) before you preach. It starts months ahead by taking time to think through what you'll be preaching over the next, say, four months.
- So think big picture at the outset. What Scriptural food group has been lacking lately in your congregation's diet? What part of God's Word might go neglected if you're not intentional about planning to preach it?
- Think also about varying the type of expositions you do over this four-month period. For example, follow up a ten-week in depth study of Ephesians with a three-week overview series in the Minor Prophets.
- Again, think in terms of providing your hearers with an objectively balanced diet of Scripture, not just in terms of what you think they need to hear based on their subjective circumstances, or of what your favorite books or passages are.
- If you're young or in a new pastorate, think about weighting the schedule with overviews so that you can provide a framework for later detailed expositions. But be warned: overview sermons are a LOT of work, so don't overdo the overview.

Setting the Table – The Art of Outlining

- Especially for overview sermons, once you have scheduled things out, outline the book.
- To do this, read and re-read the passage, noting major shifts in content, tone, voice, subject. You'll use these shifts to discern and mark outline divisions.
- If you have training in Hebrew and/or Greek, it is realistic and helpful to read shorter passages all the way through at least once in the original language. For longer passages like whole chapters or books, it is all the more useful, but also all the more difficult and time consuming.
- Get the basic message of the book, and try to title the series or message.
- Titling series and messages beforehand, even if the titles are just provisional, enables you to print up a sermon schedule for the planned period and give it to

members, who can then invite unbelieving friends interested in a particular topic or dealing with a particular problem.

Cooking the Food - Exegetical Simmering

- Exegesis is simply drawing meaning out of a text. The three steps are observed, interpret, and apply. These steps will often overlap. But try to do one at a time.
- Observing the text is simply asking "What does the text say?" So here you're looking for repeated words or ideas, conjunctions, subject and object of actions, comparisons, contrasts, transitions, literary structure, verb tenses.
- In observing the text, it helps to type the passage out, print it, and then mark up the printout using different colors to highlight the different lexical, grammatical, and syntactical features of the text.
- Interpreting the text is simply asking "What does the text mean?" So here you're synthesizing your observations, discovering principles, drawing conclusions, and seeking to discover what claim the text lays on your life.
- Applying the text is simply asking "What does the text mean for me?" So here you're looking for concrete ways to obey the claim of the text on your life, or to put the principle into practice.

The Main Course - Getting the Point

- As you do your exegesis, the controlling question needs to be "What is the point of this passage?" Don't stop studying until you know the point of the passage.
- Getting the point will greatly contribute to the unity, simplicity, understandability, and therefore the effectiveness of your sermon.
- If you quit studying before you get the point of the text, then your listeners will be at a disadvantage in trying to get the point of the text out of your sermon.
- Once you have the point, boil it down into one sentence of fewer than 15 words. This sentence will be the stated point of the sermon, and will serve as a mental hook on which listeners can hang your main points. It is called the proposition.

Serving it Up - Exegetical and Homiletical Outlines

- As you read and re-read the passage, an exegetical outline should begin to appear. This is simply the outline of the text in your own words.
- The homiletical (preaching) outline should closely follow the divisions expressed in the exegetical outline. But the wording should be less descriptive, more principle, and definitely simple - the exegetical body dressed homiletically.
- The homiletical outline should also be an outworking of the point of the text as you have boiled it down in one sentence of your own words.

- Sermonic unity will be achieved best when each main point is demonstrably linked back to your proposition statement.

Course Work

Good sermons are like a three course meal - an introduction for the appetizer, a body for the main meal, and a conclusion for dessert. Let's look at each part separately.

The Appetizer

- **Goal** - The goal of a good intro is to show the unbeliever that we understand how they might perceive what we're saying, and to show the believer why it is important for them to pay attention to this passage and this sermon.
- **When** - It's best to wait the writing of the introduction until the end of your preparation. That way you know exactly what you're trying to introduce.
- **How** - Use a story, quote, experience, or thought that front loads the sermon's application for the believer and identifies with the unbelievers skepticism.

The Main Meal

- **Goal** - To give the weight and balance of the passage, letting it speak, and being sensitive to when things in the text happen relative to salvation history.
- **When** - Write the body of the sermon first. Introductions and conclusions are easier to write if you first know what you are trying to introduce and conclude.
- **How** - State your proposition clearly. Then formulate main points that demonstrably relate to that proposition and expound the textual referent of each main point.

The Dessert

- **Goal** - The goal of a good conclusion is to make the whole weight of the text's point come down on the listeners' hearts in one concise statement or question.
- **When** - Conclusions are best written late, perhaps just before writing the introduction. Again, figure out what you're trying to conclude first.
- **How** - Repeat your proposition, summarize your main points, and give a concise quote, hymn verse, or a well-phrased sentence that presses the weight of the text on the hearts of the listeners. Winsome second person speech ("you") can be useful here.

Applicative Gridlock

We've all struggled with it - "What do I tell my people to do with *this* text?" This is usually because we're only thinking on the one applicational plane we see instead of the five or six that we often overlook.

Widening the applicational road

We need to add a few lanes to our applicational highway. Six lanes should get traffic moving again for any main point.

This is not to say that every main point will evidence every type of application. It is merely to note that we can ask more applicational questions than the standard "How will this apply to the individual Christian this week?"

- **Lane 1: Unique salvation-historical** - does the main point address a text that thrusts forward the unfolding plot of redemption in history?
- **Lane 2: Individual Non-Christian** - does the main point have implications for the unbeliever's thinking, behavior, or motivations?
- **Lane 3: Public** - does the main point have implications for how we conduct ourselves in the public squares of commerce, politics, justice, etc...?
- **Lane 4: Christological** - does the main point have implications for how we think about Christ Himself?
- **Lane 5: Individual Christian** - does the main point have implications for my own persona discipleship to Christ?
- **Lane 6: Local church** - does the main point have implications for how we conduct ourselves as an assembled congregation or in our corporate life together?