

E. THE 9 STAGES OF BASIC SERMON PREPARATION: PART 2

Developing a sermon from the time we feel led to share a message or are called upon to preach is a **process**. There are times when we just need to “be ready” (2 Tim. 4:2), but many times people will be gracious to us and give us advanced notice and we will have some time to prepare. What follows is a **process** that I use. Each person's method of preparation is different, so please use the steps suggested below as a guideline. Then, as you build up experience, you can develop your own approach to sermon preparation.

Having said that, most preachers will follow some **process that involves many steps or stages** so that they start at one point and develop the message over a period of time. Personally I like to use a PC to type up my notes. It saves a lot of time. But if you do not have a PC, then you can use a writing pad or notebook.

The process taught here is a basic process. It will be good for those who are speaking for the first time to simply follow each of these steps, one by one, in the order that they are mentioned. This will help develop the discipline needed to prepare thoroughly. It will ensure that messages also have good content and will be delivered properly. As preachers develop experience, they will need less time to go through the 9 stages, and will find that this process saves a lot of time because it is systematic and thorough.

Later, preachers will develop their own method of preparation, and they can make adjustments to the 9 stages suggested here.

These stages are designed for taking simple passages and developing messages based on these passages. Preachers should start with simple texts such single verses or shorter passages and practice developing sermons based on those texts.

There are different types of sermons. I would suggest learning to develop simple EXPOSITORY sermons. The content of Expository sermons is based almost exclusively on the actual Biblical text. It is a sermon that finds the theme, main points, and sub-divisions of the sermon from one passage or verse. It requires in-depth exegesis so that preachers will learn to properly expound the word of God. It avoids the danger of introducing new material into a sermon that is not actually found in the text being used. Because Expository sermons find a lot of sermon material in just a verse or short passage, it is best to practice developing Expository sermons using part of a verse, a single verse, or a short passage of Scripture. Later preachers will find that they are able to manage longer passages and yet still keep to their usual length of time when speaking. Beginner-preachers will find longer passages too cumbersome and may be overwhelmed by all the content that exegesis uncovers.

Please note: Different types of Biblical genres (types of writing or literature) are more suited to certain types of sermons than others. Some types of Biblical genre are: prophecy; narrative (story); parable; apocalyptic; poetry; proverb; epistle; didactic (teaching); law; history, gospel, etc. Each type of genre also has certain rules of interpretation (hermeneutic) that needs to be applied to it. When starting out preachers can practice using simpler genres such as didactic (teaching), proverb, and certain sections of poetry.

Please Note: Stage 2 of the 9 stage process follows an analytical process. This process is very good for discovering the structure of the text and for understanding the relationships between different parts of a text. It is also helpful for developing outlines and for developing a unified theme. However, it is more suited to some genres than others. It is also suited to shorter passages. It can also feel a little bit clinical if it is the only method being used, and can be a bit time-consuming and even confusing if taken to the extreme. Sometimes

“analysis-paralysis” can set in and the preacher can feel more confused at the end of the process than enlightened. Nevertheless beginner-preachers should use it to develop a solid foundation of sermon preparation.

Allow Sermons to “Grow”

Before we go any further, understand that we must “Allow Sermons to Grow”. Therefore do not try to prepare your sermon in just one sitting! Preparing sermons can be very taxing on the mind. You may start out excited as one idea grabs your attention, but the more you read, you may find that several ideas take your focus and leave you confused. Or you may find that you have too many things to say and can't quite choose only one because they all seem so important. You may also find that the passage doesn't quite open itself up at first. You may need to walk away and just do something totally unrelated to sermon preparation. Then come back, spend time in prayer, and then try preparing again. There are clear stages in sermon preparation. Each one should be done with a small break in between. Particularly when you try to take what you have discovered and try to put it in words that other people can understand, you may need a few attempts before you get it right.

Sermons Grow! If you allow time between the different stages of preparation, you will find all the materials you need to for the sermon. All the following will become clearer: which points are the main ones, which are subordinate points - and which of your list of points can confidently be deleted; how to phrase your points; which illustrations to use; how to apply the message, etc.

It is quite clear that it is expecting too much for all of this to be developed in one sitting. Personally I try to set aside some time on Thursday afternoon or Friday morning. If I have time on both of these days, then I set aside less time each day. If I have only Friday, then obviously more time is set aside that day. Then on Saturday I will set aside another block of 2-4 hours. Finally Sunday morning I will finalise any preparation. Between these blocks of time, I will often be reading the passage over, or reading commentaries and making notes on scrap pieces of paper. Then when I go back to the PC to develop notes further, I will type up some of the handwritten notes. I may also spend time in prayer between the different writing 'blocks'.

Be careful. If you leave aside too little time, you will not develop the message to the best of your ability. On the other hand if you take too much time, you may come to rely on your own efforts and not on the Holy Spirit. Plus, if you leave too much time for sermon preparation, you will find that you need to use it all!

STAGE 1: DECIDE ON THE TEXT BASED ON THE OCCASION

1. Finding A Text

One of the challenges that speakers face regularly is where to find something to speak about or in deciding what to say. Below are areas where preachers can find texts to preach on, and where they can get ideas for messages from:

a. From Personal Devotional Times

- ❑ "For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks." (Luke 6:45)
- ❑ "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly (Colossians 3:16)

- ❑ “The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught” (Isaiah 50:4)

The person who stores up the Word in his/her heart will always have something to share. George Muller once stated, "The Lord always helps me when I preach, provided I have earnestly sought Him in private." As you read God's word in your devotional times, make notes which can become the basis of a message later.

Therefore preachers should have structured quiet times in the sense that they read the bible systematically; study it, highlight verses and also make notes in a journal.

As you spend time in prayer, God will also “quicken” a message to your heart. I.e. he will impress a verse or a thought on your heart. He may even give you some of the points. Messages given by God in prayer should be written down as soon as possible. Then continue in prayer and ask God to confirm the message. God may not reveal too much else. In this case you will need to take a leap of faith. It in our personal quiet times that God often gives us our best messages.

b. From Collecting Message “Seeds”.

Pastors are required to speak every Sunday and even several times each week. It is not productive to try to develop a message as each occasion arises. Instead, they can develop ideas, or “seeds” for messages ahead of time. These “seeds” can be stored in a notebook or a computer and then developed as the occasion arises.

c. From Sermon Series

Sometimes preachers will develop a series of sermons around specific book of the Bible or a particular topic. Then each week there won't be any need to find a message to preach. They will simply prepare the next sermon in the series.

d. Ideas From Other Christian Leaders

Sometimes preachers come across messages or teachings from other preachers that they know would benefit their people too. They can then share the same message, providing they acknowledge where the teaching is from.

e. Briefs & Preaching assignments

Sometimes when preachers are requested to preach they will also be given the theme of the occasion and also the topic – and sometimes even the Scripture text. Invitations to speak at functions outside of the church (e.g. at schools; breakfasts, etc.). On these occasions do some research and make sure that you understand what's expected of you. Preachers may even find that church members will request teaching on a certain topic. People will ask things like, “What does the Bible say about?”

f. From a Developed Teaching/Preaching Schedule.

In prayer, preachers may ask God to show them what He wants them to share over a protracted period of time. It is not only preachers who need to decide on this. Sometimes a group of leaders can help develop the preaching schedule. In this way you may know what you will preach on, but will still need to prepare from week to week. If you're preaching through a long passage or a certain book of the Bible, choosing the passage to

Speak about becomes easier. Some denominations have a lectionary that is handed out to leaders. The lectionary either contains a fully developed message for each week or a complete outline which needs to be developed further.

g. Special Occasions:

Certain occasions determine a message's theme or the topic:

- Special church occasions. These may be regular church events such as baptisms, dedication of children, communion, offerings. They may be special ministry times such as funerals, weddings, birth of children, 21st-birthday functions; or other special events such as anniversaries, graduations; blessing a home, car, etc. The church may also have special days set aside, and it makes sense to share message related to the occasion: e.g. weeks of prayer and fasting; missions months; beginning/ending the year functions; volunteer-recruitment, etc.
- Special Focusses: Often churches reinforce specific focusses that they may have with Sunday messages. For example, these may be launching a theme for the year; an outreach event; a believer's conference.
- Special Christian Calendar events: There are special days/times on the Christian calendar which should guide one in selecting what to speak about: e.g. Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost, etc.

h. Speaking to address a special need.

Many times messages may need to be prepared to address issues as they arise. These may be societal issues: legalising of gay/lesbian marriage, xenophobia, etc; church issues: divisive people or gossip; discipline of certain sins, etc.

i. Pastoral Ministry:

As preachers visit with people, they will soon discover what it is that people may be experiencing. As preachers spend time with people, God will show them how His word relates to their particular situations. In this way preachers will always be able to preach messages that are relevant, and people who have been cared for will also receive the message more readily.

j. When God is "silent"!

Sometimes God seems to be silent. This does not mean that God does not have something that you should say. Rather it may mean that He will only show you what to share closer to the service, or even that he does not want you to share a message, but rather that He wants other ministry to take place. God may also "change" your message at the last minute. It's His church and He can do whatever He wants to. Always prepare well, but regularly each week enquire of God if there is anything he would rather want you to say or want done.

- Once you know what occasion you will share your message at, decide on your text. All messages should be Bible-based. We are called by God to "Preach the Word" (2 Tim. 4:2), not our ideas or human wisdom.
- Select the passage and / or verse that will be the basis of your message – one that is appropriate for the occasion. If you do not have one, pray for God to lead you. Decide where the passage, verse or phrase will start and end.
- Then start to pray for God to guide you in your preparations, from beginning to end.