

How to Prepare and Preach a Sermon

I. Prayerfully read the scripture text(s) selected for the day. Take notes as thoughts arise in your mind. Write down new understandings. Offer these things up to God as prayer. Look up words you aren't sure of. Look at Bible dictionaries and commentaries to understand the context in which the passage(s) was written. Go through the passage(s) line by line and summarize each main point. You will often find your sermon writes itself, simply by paying careful attention to the text. Arrive at what you consider to be the central idea of the passage and make that the central idea of your sermon.

II. Consider the setting, time of year, special events taking place in the world, community, congregation itself. While it may not be necessary to address such events directly, it is good to know what the concerns of the people are to whom you are speaking.

III. When outlining the message itself, I normally use five elements.

A. **Tell a Story:** I look for a story, either from my experience, from literature, from others' experiences, from the news, etc, that prepares the ground for the central idea of the biblical text. For instance, on October 24th, I preached on Mark 2:1-12. In that text, four friends bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus, despite the obstacles. I used two stories in my introduction of people being brought to Christ: my own, which was actually quite easy; and that of Tokiyuki Nobuhara, a Japanese Christian who did not even know the name of the Savior he had put his faith in until World War II ended. Your introduction touches the hearers' experiences, hopefully, and helps them connect the biblical truth to their own lives.

B. **Talk about Context:** I lay out the context of the text. As a seminary professor once said, "A text without a context is a proof-text for a pretext." Answer, briefly, the great journalistic questions as they pertain to the text(s) you are using:

Who (is the author, main character, etc)

What (type of literature is it: narrative, letter, law, poetry. What type of literature has impact on what type of truth it is.)

When (was it written, under what circumstances.)

Where (was it written, does the action take place, etc.)

Why (the immediate situation that called forth this writing; the issue the narrative intends to address.)

C. **Open the Text:** Spell out in detail what the text itself says. Interpret for the hearers difficult passages. Make sure to clarify issues that aren't so clear on just a superficial hearing. All of this helps you bring out the central idea of the sermon, which comes from the text itself.

D. **Apply the Message:** Apply the central idea of the text to the hearers' own situation. Be aware of the different groups of people who are in your audience. Try to anticipate what their situations are, how God's Word might speak to them in particular through this text. This allows them to measure their lives by the Word.

E. **Issue an Invitation:** Invite all present to act in accordance with the Word, as God has spoken it. If hearing the Gospel does not lead us to action, we obviously have not understood it.

IV. Write out your sermon. It should be no longer than four pages, double-spaced. Read it out loud to make sure it is good spoken English. Commit its outline to memory. Preach it like souls depended on it! They very well might

Remember and respect time limits!

Stay focused on one clear idea!

Go no longer than 15-18 minutes!

by John Cunyus