



HOW TO PREPARE A SERMON WITH LIMITED STUDY TIME

BIVOCATIONAL LEADERSHIP SERIES

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Portions of the teacher training booklet, *Sunday School In Church Health & Growth*, were adapted and edited for use in this booklet by permission of the First Baptist Church of Tallassee, Alabama. These sections include *Key Connecting Words*, *Preaching the Bible*, *Preaching Bible Stories*, *Why Members Don't Bring Their Bible to Church*, *Teaching Passages Members May Find Offensive*, and the *Bible Study Tools* section — these sections are found in the bonus material.

Jack Day's Bible Storying Resources can be found at: <http://biblestorytelling.org>

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Appreciation is expressed to those bi-vocational pastors (past and present) who took the time to read this booklet and offer their feedback and suggestions. Edwin Attaway, Gary Buchanan, Luke Finkelstein, Glenn Goggans, Mason Halacher, Steve Loggins, Phillip Nelson, Greg Pate

How to Prepare a Sermon With Limited Study Time

First Edition, 2020

www.smalltownbaptist.org

SERMON PREPARATION AND THE BUSY BI-VOCATIONAL PASTOR

Nothing you do all week will bless more people in more ways than preaching the Word of God.

God's Word is powerful. It tells us the truth about God, ourselves, and the world around us. Consequently, it reprograms how we think and feel. It builds people up. It plants new desires for good and for God within us. It is alive and active. And because it is, nothing we do meets more peoples' needs in more ways. The widowed husband is comforted. The tempted teenager is challenged. The business person whose store is facing hard times finds God's guidance. Perhaps, all in the same message. However, if you are a bi-vocational pastor, it can be very difficult to find time to prepare. What follows are some thoughts on preparing sermons with limited preparation time. Following that, you will find bonus material and resources for sermon preparation.

Preview Summary: Nine keys to preparing sermons with limited time:

1. The sooner in the week you begin preparation, the better!
2. Give God time to work in your mind through the week by reading your text on Monday. This includes conscious meditation on the passage through the week and God working in your subconscious thoughts.
3. The key to knowing your text on Monday is to have a preaching plan.
4. Preach through books of the Bible
5. Divide a sermon into Parts A and B and preach it over two services.
6. Let the passage itself help you preach it! The sooner in the week you have an outline of the passage, the sooner the sermon outline will come into shape.
7. The less time you spend alliterating and rhyming, the more time you will have to study the passage and apply it to human hearts and lives.
8. Preach one sermon at a time... make one point at a time
9. Take advantage of your commute to work.

1. The sooner in the week you begin preparation, the better!

It's better to eat small meals each day instead of having a huge feast once a week. Five hours of preparation spread out across the week is far better than five hours of cramming on Thursday night or... gulp... Saturday night. And just as some foods taste better when prepared in a crockpot over time, a sermon needs to be slow-cooked. Knowing your text on Monday gives you time to think as you drive to and from work. It gives you time to look up a word meaning or to find an illustration. Knowing your text early in the week keeps you relaxed and on your game. There's no rush, pressure, or panic.

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2. Give God time to work in your sub-conscious thoughts.

If you know on Monday the passage on which are going to preach and you read the passage, then the rest of the week, God will be working in your sub-conscious thoughts to show you how to explain, illustrate and apply the passage. Ask him for his guidance. He will point out things you weren't even looking for. You will be amazed.

Simply reading your text on Monday will turbocharge your preparation!

Read your text slowly and carefully around four times. The first and last time, read it from the translation you use to preach. On the first reading, don't try to outline the passage yet; just read it. On the second and third readings, you may want to read the passage out of other translations. You may gain an insight you may have missed otherwise. Bi-vocational pastor Gary Buchanan writes, "I always tried to read the passage out loud several times. It helped me to hear my voice reading the passage instead of just reading it in my head. Doing that helped me get a 'feel' for the flow and helped to plant the passage in my mind for the subconscious meditation that you mentioned. It also helped identify words or phrases that were difficult to pronounce or might get my tongue tangled." On the final reading, look for the natural divisions in the passage. Without looking anything up, reading any commentaries, or putting anything to paper, you are already on your way!

Meditate on the passage throughout the week.

Think about the passage phrase by phrase and word by word. This allows the passage to marinate in our minds. God promises to bless our meditation. You will find practical suggestions for Bible meditation on pages 11-12, in the bonus materials.

3. The key to knowing your text on Monday is to have a preaching plan.

We've all been there—agonizing over what to preach this coming Sunday morning. "Well, I thought about this passage, but I don't know. This other passage could be the one. Help me Lord! Which one is it?" What if on Monday I am not hunting a text for Sunday, but already am preparing the message? Is a preaching plan biblical? Wouldn't it stifle the leading of the Holy Spirit? Let me explain why a preaching plan is both biblical and something a Spirit-filled pastor would do:

1. A preaching plan enables us to preach the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). It is a discipline that considers subjects and doctrines we wouldn't have thought of "on the fly." A preaching plan enables us to feed our congregation a balanced spiritual diet. Exposition through books of the Bible, doctrine, biblical solutions to life problems, biographies of biblical characters, the heart cries of the soul in the Psalms, the varying types of literature found in Scripture, and so many other things. A preaching plan forces us to think biblically and from the big picture.
2. A preaching plan gives us the opportunity to study new books, doctrines, and subjects. A preach-

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ing plan forces us to consider parts of the Bible we are not as confident in preaching. We, ourselves, get to grow in the process. Remember, *our most anointed service is on the cutting edges of our own new growth.*

3. The Holy Spirit has a track record of leading people in the planning process (Exodus 26:30; 1 Chronicles 28:11-12; Psalm 20:4; Proverbs 21:5). The Lord himself plans (Psalm 33:11) — aren't we all grateful for his *plan* of salvation? There is nothing unspiritual about planning.
4. When you have a preaching plan, you will hear sermons, notice books and resources, and pick up stories to illustrate sermons weeks ahead. Without the plan, you won't know to be alert to those opportunities.
5. A preaching plan enables the pastor to spend less time on deciding what to preach and spend more time preparing to preach.

What if something comes up; won't the preaching plan get in the way? No, you stop and preach a special message on the tragedy that has occurred or address the issue. Then, adjust your plan and resume the series. Worksheets to help in developing a sermon plan can be found on pages 23-26.

4. Preach through books of the Bible.

When you preach through books of the Bible, you will always know your sermon for the next week. No one can say you were picking on them from the pulpit; you were simply preaching the next passage. And it will force you to study passages you may have skipped over, enabling your own learning and growth. Two suggestions: first, always know which books the Sunday School curriculum covers so you don't overlap. Second, the New King James Version does a good job of putting subjects headings for each passage, helping you develop your preaching plan in advance.

5. Divide a sermon into Parts A and B and preach it over two services.

When preaching through books of the Bible, one possibility for the busy preacher is to continue his message in the next service. Many pastors still have three messages per week: Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday evening. It can be difficult to study for different messages in each of these services with the same attention given to the morning service. And, after concentrated study and meditation on a passage, there is often more truth discovered than the pastor can cover in a single sermon. On Sunday night or Wednesday, the preacher could continue the passage in the evening service, covering new material. Or cover the passage from a different angle. Or trace a theme found in the passage throughout Scripture. Or expound a doctrine which was prominent in the morning passage. Or further explore implications and application, addressing current issues in the culture. Perhaps take questions on the passage, as they did in the first century synagogues. One week of rigorous preparation can yield more than one message. And further driving the nail in will help your members!

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6. Let the passage itself help you preach it!

Bible passages have a way of outlining themselves. The outline of the passage should be the outline of your sermon. In the epistles especially (but also in the Psalms and other places), take your cues from the *key connecting words* in the passage (more on this can be found on pages 14). The sooner in the week you have an outline of the passage, the sooner the outline of your sermon will take shape. Narrative passages (stories) are a little different (see pages 14-15 in the bonus materials).

6. The less time you spend alliterating and rhyming, the more time you will have to study the passage and apply it to human hearts and lives.

When I started preaching, many pastors considered it important to alliterate their sermons or to make words in their points rhyme. It was considered a sign of good sermon craftsmanship and was supposed to help people remember the points of the message. However, it is possible to get stuck trying to think of a word that starts with the same letter for your third point. You lose valuable time that could have been spent on understanding and applying the passage. Further, in our present culture, this is more likely to be off-putting to young adults who perceive it as too slick or shallow. It can be a helpful thing to include a snappy saying in your sermon. For example, when preaching on confessing sin from First John 1:9, you could say, “Confess ‘em as you does ‘em and not bunch ‘em.” But to make every point in every sermon sound like that may come across as too gimmicky to some.

Similarly, some preacher's sermon points sounded more like subject categories than points they were trying to make (The making of the man, The message of the man, the mission of the man, The motive of the man). Now how do I go out and apply “The motive of the man”? Shouldn't the phrasing of the point state the motive? Or to talk about the importance of good motives? Rather than a category, consider, instead, phrasing that is application-oriented and immediately understood (“Strive for pure motives in your Christian service”).

Dropping the alliteration and rhyming words saves time to prepare to explain God's message in the passage and to speak to human hearts.

7. Preach one sermon at a time... Make one point at a time.

Outline with an uncluttered organization of your thoughts—with clean lines. *A sermon should have one main thrust and the points should support the big idea.* After you have identified the main thrust of the sermon, outline the points of your message around that theme. Rick Warren writes, “You can create unity in a message by using ‘category words’ to describe how your points are similar... Instead of pointing to ‘five things’ in the text, describe its five demands, five benefits, or five beliefs.”¹

It would be better to preach a sermon on prayer with nine reasons to pray (though that is still a lot of points) than to have three points (say, one on Bible study, one on prayer, and one on fellowship) with

¹ Rick Warren, *How to Structure Your Sermon for Maximum Impact*, <https://pastors.com/how-to-structure-your-sermon-for-maximum-impact/>

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three subpoints each. At least then, you have one main theme with nine points supporting that one big idea. Three points and nine subpoints make things feel cluttered. That three-point sermon with all the subpoints might make a great sermon *series*.

How does this help save time in sermon preparation? It keeps the sermon “bite-sized.” When a preacher actually preaches his text, there are several things he has to do for each point he makes. He has to explain the words and ideas of the passage in its context. He has to illustrate the passage to bring it to life in our current day. And he has to apply the principles of the passage for everyday living. (See “Preaching the Bible” on pages 12-13 in the bonus materials for more information.) Do you really want to prepare to explain, illustrate, and apply nine subpoints? Could your members really follow the logic of your message if you did? Keep it bite-sized; don’t bite off more than your hearers can chew.

Where did we get the idea that complicated outlines make for better sermons? One reason is because we often hear this approach in our preacher meetings. I would observe, however, that those preachers are speaking to pastors—pastors who have more depth and can follow a more complex outline. Contrast your hearers on Sundays—not only is your congregation not composed of preachers, they aren’t all mature Christians. Nor are they all adults. I would also point out that those “all-star preachers” aren’t bi-vocational with limited preparation time; some of them even have research assistants! So, let yourself off the hook! You are in a different situation and have a different audience.

Use Your Commuting Time To and From Work

In the United States, the average commute to work is 25 minutes. If you work five days a week, that totals up to four hours and ten minutes per week (round trip). You could put this time to good work by listening to your passage in audio as you drive to and from work. Then, you could download and listen to a couple of sermons on the passage as you drive. There are a lot of really good expositors. Some cautions: First, don’t listen to the same preacher as you prepare every sermon. Your members will tire of hearing what your favorite preacher had to say on the passage in your sermons every week. God wants to speak *through you*. So, drink from many wells.

Some Ways NOT to Save Time

1. Plagiarizing the sermons of others. How could we think God could anoint a sermon we stole lock, stock, and barrel?
2. Just opening the Bible up and going from the overflow. To go from the overflow, one first has to have a whole lot flowing in. And to be honest, most preachers who try this end up preaching the same basic sermons over and over.
3. Constantly re-using old sermons. It’s one thing when you’ve had one of those weeks, with three funerals, to pop an old sermon in the microwave. It’s another thing to do it week after week.

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Assorted Suggestions from Fellow Bi-Vocational Pastors

Insights from those who are or who have served as bi-vocational pastors

- ◇ **Don't Let a Good Lunch Go to Waste:** *One thing I also use to my advantage is my lunch time at work. I know everyone's lunch time is different, but I have found it to be a time of refreshing for the day and also a time I can spend working on my sermon for Sunday and/or Wednesday night Bible study. — Phillip Nelson*
- ◇ **Keep a Pad by the Bed:** *Sometimes at work or when I wake up or even in middle of the night I will write down a thought that hits me. If in the night I will sometimes look at them the next day and some are good but others do not seem that good in the light of day.—Glenn Goggans*
- ◇ **From the Deer Stand to the Pulpit:** *When I was serving bi-vocationally, I utilized part of my outdoor recreation time for sermon preparation. I would study my Bible and meditate on my scripture as I fished and hunted by myself. A tree stand or the bank of a farm pond are great places to commune with the Lord and get inspiration. Commute time during those events also were fruitful. Another time I focused on my sermon was during my morning rituals of showering and shaving. I used to get some of my best ideas while in the shower. — Steve Loggins*
- ◇ **Be Alert at Work:** *I found I understood what questions people were talking about because of my job. I would listen to people at lunch or on the job and began to learn what was in the mind of the people in the pews. Their fears and worries and also cultural connections. It might point me to a news story I wouldn't have known about or a song I hadn't heard. That was always helpful for me in sermon prep. It might helpful with an introduction or an illustration. — Edwin Attaway*
- ◇ **The Most Helpful Thing:** *The biggest single thing that helped me was preaching through books of the Bible... I typically alternated between the Old and New Testaments. Either way, I knew what book was coming next and could be reading through that book ahead of time. I'd just read the Scripture without doing any commentary work or additional preparation. — Gary Buchanan*
- ◇ **A Text Out of Context is a Pretext:** *There is a place for topical sermons, I believe, but we feed and are fed by the entirety of the scriptures. I like chocolate cake, but I live on meat and potatoes. I also think it leaves less room for misrepresenting the scriptures for lack of context. — Greg Pate*
- ◇ **A Great Prayer to Pray:** *The one thing that helps me more than anything is simply praying this prayer: 'God, tell me what you want to say to your people this week.' I say that over and over during the week. I pray it regardless if I have a sermon series planned or not. I pray it with as much openness to the Spirit's leadership that I can muster... I suppose it is leaving room for the Holy Spirit to work—mostly on me, so that He can speak clearly to whomever. That prayer is important for me to pray! — Mason Halacker*

A Simple Plan for Sermon Preparation

Adjust as needed for your life circumstances

Sunday Night: Download the passage and a couple of sermons to listen to during the week. I know you are tired on Sunday night, but this won't take long and will help you all week. You have a teenager in your church to get this ready for you. See list of sermon sites on page 22.

Monday: Read the passage four times. On the first and last readings, read from the translation you will preach from. On the second and third reading, use different translations. On your final reading, begin to mark the key connecting words and the transitions that form the natural divisions of the passage — as it outlines itself. Ask God to guide you this week. That's enough for Monday.

Commute Time: Listen to the passage on the way to and from work (see page 21 for resources). Pray for God's guidance.

Tuesday: Outline the passage. As you do, think in terms of the truths from the passage that will matter in the lives of your congregation. Make a list of things you might need to look up in your Bible dictionary or in a commentary. This might be things that are hard to understand, word meanings, places, etc.

Commute Time: Listen to a sermon on the passage.

Wednesday: Prayer Meeting Night

Commute Time: Give thought and prayer to your midweek service or prayer meeting.

Thursday: Look up the things on your “look-up list.” Use Bible apps on your phone, Bible software, or Bible Study web sites to speed up the process (see page 21 in the bonus material). Outline your sermon based on your outline of the passage. Ask yourself: How can I phrase each point with a verb in it? (believe, trust, obey, seek, remember, love, forgive, etc.)

Commute Time: Listen to another sermon on the passage by a different preacher.

Friday: Family Time

Commute Time: Listen to the passage again on the way to and from work. Pray over what you have so far. Ask God to put his final edit on your message. Ask him to empower you as you deliver it.

Saturday: Final Touches. Are you ready to explain the passage, illustrate the principle, and apply it to life for each point? Maybe not every point needs a story, but you will want to ask yourself if it does.

BONUS MATERIAL

Bonus Material: On Sermon Preparation

Bible Meditation

Several passages in the Bible affirm the value of Scripture meditation (Genesis 24:63; Philippians 4:8; Psalm 1:2; 19:14; 119:15, 97-99). One of the most beloved of these verses is Joshua 1:8.

Joshua 1:8 (KJV)

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

Joshua 1:8 (CSB)

This book of instruction must not depart from your mouth; you are to meditate on it day and night so that you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do.

Notice the commands: First, we are to talk about the Scriptures all the time. It is to be a constant subject of conversation.

The second command is to meditate on the Scriptures day and night. The word for meditate means to mutter. A good word picture would be a dad following the instructions for assembling a Christmas toy, as he mutters to himself, "Insert Tab A into Slot C." He is not talking to his wife. He just knows that saying it helps him focus on the current step. He is thinking about what he is doing. Meditation is thinking about God's instructions.

Consider the goal of meditation: "That you may be carefully observe everything written in it." The objective is life change, not mere head knowledge.

Just look at the promise! "Then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do." God blesses the life of the person who is constantly thinking about how to align his life with God's Word. Certainly, when a pastor meditates on a Bible passage day and night for a week, with the goal of life change, God is going to bless that faithful pastor's preaching! As we meditate, we are preparing not only the message, but also ourselves.

Some practical suggestions for Bible meditation:

Read the passage multiple times. Some people write the passage on an index card they can put in their shirt pocket or place on a sun visor in their cars. Memorize it — or come close to memorizing it.

Review the passage *phrase by phrase*. See if each phrase answers one of the questions: Who?, What?, When?, Where?, How?, or Why? Who? "Your mouth" What? "This book of the law" when? "Day and night" Where? There's no where mentioned in this verse. How? Meditate (murmur and review) Why? "Then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do."

Review the passage *word by word*, putting emphasis on a different word each time you read or recite it. Do you need to look up a word to check its exact meaning?

Bonus Material: On Sermon Preparation

As you review the parts of the passage, are you finding:

- ◇ A command to obey?
- ◇ An attitude to change?
- ◇ A sin to confess?
- ◇ A promise to claim?
- ◇ A condition of a promise?
- ◇ An example to follow?
- ◇ A great truth about God to believe?
- ◇ Bible meditation enhances sermon preparation and, in addition, you get blessed absolutely free!

To Preach the Word, You Have to Preach Your Text

See yourself like an attorney and the text you are preaching on as your client. Represent your client! Too many preachers read their text and then, as if the text were a launching pad, travel into space.

Preaching the Bible

There are three things we need to do when preaching the Bible: *Explain the passage, Illustrate the passage, and Apply the passage.*

1. Explain the Passage.

Here are some ways you can explain the passage:

- Explain the context: When the book was written, to whom it was written, why it was written, the culture and events taking place at the time it was written.
- Outline the passage—that is, simply list the things the passage talks about.
- Explain word meanings.
- Explain customs of the day which are mentioned in the passage.

2. Illustrate the Passage

- Sometimes, we illustrate the passage itself. We explain a custom of the day or we give historical background, perhaps with a story from history.
- Sometimes, we illustrate the application of the passage. For example, by telling a story of someone who applied the principle of the passage in his life.
- Good places to find illustrations:
 - ◆ Personal experiences.
 - ◆ Books on the topic you are preaching on.
 - ◆ Christian biographies
 - ◆ Our Daily Bread Devotional Booklets: Searchable by topic.

Link: <https://ourdailybread.org/author/our-daily-bread/>

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- ◆ Sermon Illustration Database (a free download): www.holwick.com/database.html
- ◆ Illustration books: One word... these collections often contain stories from the 1800's with the associated flowery language, so you will want to be selective.

3. Apply the Passage

We are not preaching merely to inform, but to inspire a closer connection to the Lord. We seek to persuade people to trust God where they had been in unbelief. The Bible calls us to

Faith	Competence	Encourager	Forgiving
Virtue	Responsibility	Gentleness	Selflessness
Understanding	Initiative	Gratitude	Good listener
Self-control	Kindness	Joy	Thought life
Endurance	Generosity	Hope	Respectfulness
Godliness	Courage & Valor	Patience	Humility
Brotherly affection	Security	Reasonableness	Confidence
Love	Contentment	Authenticity	Wise in speech

spiritual growth and life change. Some character qualities to which Scripture calls us include: Group Bible Study books have discussion questions which can be helpful for considering how to apply the passage, as do “Application Commentaries” and teacher resources such as *LessonMaker*.

This isn't a sacred formula you must slavishly follow: Explanation, illustration, and application don't always have to take place in that exact order. Sometimes, it is best to make application and then illustrate what that would look like. Because the text is so straightforward, it may not require a great deal of explanation. You don't always have to have a story to illustrate every point (especially in narrative passages, which *are* the illustration). Sometimes our passage tells about something God has done; we can't apply the finished work of Christ, we can only trust and rejoice in it. However, these are the components you need to *consider* for each point.

To Preach the Word, You Have to Read the Words

Don't rush too quickly to the “general idea” of the passage. Sure, you don't want to miss the forest for the trees. But, on the other hand, the forest is made up of trees. God is a good communicator and uses words to convey ideas. God inspired the words, so we want to read them. Before going to “What does it mean?,” first deal with “What does it say?” Read. the. words... and define the words. (There is information about word study tools on pages 18-19) And, then, we want to *feel* the words. Read Romans 8:1: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus,..” Forgiven sinners don't just read those words; we *feel* them!

Bonus Material: On Sermon Preparation

Key Connecting Words

One way to follow the outline of a passage, especially in the New Testament epistles, is to find the *key connecting words*. These are often simple prepositions and conjunctions, but they are the arrows that point us to the divisions in the passage. Examples of key connecting words include:

- ◇ **Therefore, Wherefore:** Tells you how what the biblical writer is about to say is connected to what he just wrote. Whenever you see the word therefore, you need to ask yourself, “What is that ‘therefore’ there for?” Romans 12:1 “I beseech you **therefore**, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice...”
- ◇ **If:** Emphasizes a condition. 1 John 1:9 “**If** we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
- ◇ **As:** Emphasizes an pre-existing reality which is the basis for a command or promise. Colossians 2:6 “**As** ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him”
- ◇ **For:** Emphasizes a reason. John 3:17 “**For** God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”
- ◇ **But:** Emphasizes a contrasting truth. Ephesians 2:4 “**But** God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,”
- ◇ Other key connecting words include: And, Nor, Or, Yet, So, Because, Since.

How to Preach Bible Stories

Around 70% of the Bible consists of narrative passages—that is, stories. Some stories are historical record. We can relate to the struggles, disappointments, and sins of real-life people. Some stories are parables—earthly stories with heavenly meanings. Jesus told lots of parables. Because the Bible uses stories, telling Bible stories, and telling them well, is important.

Most folks today don’t know their Bible Stories; so, tell Bible stories as stories. Some will be hearing them for the first time. Bible stories engage one's imagination and emotions in ways outlines, snappy points, and lists of principles do not.

Bible stories are relatable, connecting our personal experiences to the big truths of life. They give us a mental picture of how biblical principles play out in real life. These passages have built-in illustrations. For these reasons and more, missionaries often use "storying" to reach people in non-literate cultures. They are better able to teach those who are not naturally linear thinkers, but rather are "oral learners." In fact, many members of our church members don’t read and actually have an oral learning style.

Here are some principles, gleaned mostly from Jack Day¹, for telling Bible stories most effectively:

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1. Simply tell the story as a story. Avoid inter-lacing principles and applications as you tell the story. Sometimes, people tell only part of the story, apply it, and then tell more of the story and apply that. At first, just tell the story all the way through. That's how God inspired it.
2. Stick as close as possible to the biblical text.
3. Don't add additional stories or sayings to the Bible story.
4. Avoid unduly modernizing the story. However, you can use modern terminology. For example, it would be OK to refer to Joseph as the Prime Minister of Egypt.
5. As you prepare, review the story until you see it like a video in your mind. Then, tell the story as you see it.
6. After you have finished telling the story, *then* preach on the principles learned from the events, persons, motives, and outcomes in the story.¹

Preaching Topical Sermons

By a topical sermon, we are not referring to the preacher reading a text and then giving his own thoughts on a subject, with his own practical suggestions and personal opinions. We are not discussing a “sermon” on a subject which is not drawn from Scripture. We refer, instead, to a message with multiple texts which address a subject. The preacher draws his points from the text and makes application.

For example, in the book of Acts, the Apostle Peter preached sermons on the topic, “Jesus is the Promised Messiah” (Acts 2:14-41; 3:12-26) and Stephen preached on “Israel’s Pattern of Rejecting the Lord to this Day” (Acts 7) — both using multiple texts to develop the theme. The book of Hebrews is believed to be a sermon on the topic, “Jesus is Better.” Multiple Old Testament passages are used throughout the book as he traces this theme and develops each point.

Even for the most committed expositor, whose first choice is to preach one passage at a time through a book of the Bible, topical sermons are sometimes necessary. It would be very difficult to preach on the biblical doctrines without using multiple passages. After all, Scripture interprets Scripture. Tracing a theme through the Bible is, by definition, topical. “What does the Bible say about...?” sermons are topical. And, when addressing some aspects of Christian living, multiple texts are helpful.

A third reason for including topical sermons in your preaching toolbox is the variety it provides to your congregation. Think about it: we study a passage in Sunday School, the pastor preaches on a passage in the morning worship service and a passage in the evening worship service and, again, on Wednesday night... and we read a chapter or so in our personal devotions — can we not see how one topical study in the mix might be a refreshing break?

Many preachers personally enjoy studying the Bible by topic. Many feel sermon preparation is easier with this approach. To those pastors who preach exclusively topical sermons, we suggest preaching in

¹ “Tips on Bible Storytelling” in Short Bible Storying Track © Jackson Day, <http://biblestorytelling.org/adults/Tips%20for%20Telling%20a%20Bible%20Story.pdf>
Day’s Bible Storying Resources can be found at: <http://biblestorytelling.org>

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greater variety — in the other direction — by including expository sermons through books of the Bible in your weekly schedule.

Observations and Suggestions for Topical Preaching:

- ◇ Be certain you are drawing your observations and applications *from the passages* instead of “reading them *into* the passages” from a self-help book or something. Double-check.
- ◇ Using multiple texts in our preaching means studying multiple passages in our preparation. You will want to avoid using more passages than you have time to prepare since you will want to study and meditate on each passages you use.
- ◇ Similarly, you don’t want to overload your hearers with more verses than *they* can absorb.
- ◇ Remember, in most congregations, there are those in attendance who don’t know their books of the Bible. Consider using a handout with the Scriptures listed for the congregation to take notes.

Topical Preaching and Questions

On Wednesday nights, Edwin Attaway often takes questions from his members on the previous Sunday morning message. Gary Buchanan would occasionally have people submit questions, selecting a question from the submissions at the end of the service. Thus, everyone knew the topic for the next week. He would study what the Bible had to say about that topic during the week and address it the next Sunday night or Wednesday. In a small church this is easier to do than in a larger church, though Steve Scoggins used to have occasional similar series at First Baptist, Opelika, which he called *You Asked for It*.

Why Don't My Members Bring Their Bibles to Church?

A pastor could be excused for marveling his members do not bring their Bibles to church. We are a people of the Book. Church members need to hold the Bible in their hands. They need to mark passages in their own copy of God's Word. They need to interact with the text.

Why don’t people bring their Bibles to church? Sometimes it is because the member doesn’t own a good Bible. Sometimes, they don’t know their books of the Bible. (Help those who don’t know their books of the Bible by providing pew Bibles. Announcing the page numbers can help them save face.) And, sometimes, it is because the pastor fails to *encourage* his members to bring their Bibles to church and then to *preach from it*. Use the Bible to preach the Bible.

Persuasion in Preaching

Persuasion is biblical: “Therefore, since we know the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade people” (2 Corinthians 5:11, CSB). Persuasion gives people good reasons to make the right choice. It takes care that all reasonable questions have been answered. The persuader cares about the choice his hearers make and urges them to make the right one. Persuasion differs from manipulation in that it doesn’t

Bonus Material: On Sermon Preparation

deceive, pressure, or appeal to the wrong motives (all your friends are all doing it, God will make you wealthy and healthy, etc.). Persuasion, unlike manipulation, respects the right of others to make the wrong choice. Persuasion gives the Holy Spirit room to work; manipulation attempts to do the Spirit's work for him. The Christian persuader isn't threatened by others' rejection of the message, but instead, maintains his composure. He knows there are seasons in the harvest and differences in the soils. He is patient and willing to give God time.

How to Preach on Passages Which Might Offend Some Members

As we teach the Bible, we will occasionally come across an ethical issue that might be offensive to some members of our members. It is no secret that one or more class members (or someone they love) is living in open violation of a principle taught in the passage. What do we do?

Two Things Not to Do:

1. **Preach around it and skip that part.**
2. **Discuss whether the passage is really teaching that principle.** As Jack Taylor once said with tongue planted firmly in cheek, "If you can't find a way to explain it away, the Bible might just mean what it says!"

Seven Things That Help:

1. **Set the right tone.** Humility, not self-righteousness. Gentle, not harsh. Calm, not defensive.
2. **Set the right pace.** As you are going through a passage, don't focus on one command out of five, for example. Cover all five evenly.
3. **Use plural language** ("Jesus teaches us..."), instead of singular language ("You need to...").
4. **Testimony:** If you have one, and if appropriate, tell your own testimony about adjusting your life to the biblical principle. Or, from your reading, tell someone else's story of doing so.
5. **Humor can be defusing** (as long as it doesn't belittle people, but gives insight into the human condition).
6. **Be prepared** for someone to object and say you are taking the command out of context. "That's a good question; let's look at the context..."
7. **Say Often:** "We don't interpret Scripture in light of our own life experiences or personal preferences; we do it the other way around. We get our values from Scripture. The Bible is the objective standard of truth." Then, when you come to a controversial issue, the stage is set.

Introductions and Conclusions

Your "passengers" will want you, as their pilot, to have a plan for take-off and then to land the plane. Introductions "set the table" for what's coming and arouse interest in the topic. Avoid promising more than you can deliver by opening with an dynamic illustration, then following it with a less dynamic

Bonus Material: Tools & Resources

Bible Study Tools

The Number One Most Helpful Bible Study Tool is a Good Bible Dictionary

There are a lot of really helpful Bible study tools. Preachers need commentaries, an atlas, topical study tools, and word study tools. But the “Swiss Army Knife” for sermon preparation is a Bible Dictionary. It can help in more different ways than any other tool. Here are some ways how:

- To read introductory material about a book of the Bible.
- To look up information about a city or nation
- To learn more about a Bible character
- For information about historic people & events that are in the background of a passage.
- Maps
- To read up on a doctrine or belief.
- Timelines and charts
- Pictures of items mentioned in the Bible-tools of the day, for example.
- Renderings of the Tabernacle, Temple, etc. and their furnishings.

Because it is all arranged in alphabetical order, it is an easy tool to use. So, be sure to keep a good Bible dictionary handy where you prepare to preach!

Word Study Tools

Compare Several Good Translations (not paraphrases).

Solid, accurate, modern translations include: CSB, NASB, ESV, NIV, KJV, NKJV

You can purchase New Testaments with four translations side by side. However, the print is usually too small to be practical in the full Bible. This is more helpful for New Testament study.

The NASB is the most literal word for word translation. The NIV is more phrase by phrase. The CSB & ESV are in between those two translations, and are very accurate.

The *Amplified Bible* uses brackets and parentheses within the text to define words and explain meanings in a way that is very helpful.

Looking Up the Meaning of Individual Words:

The first study tool for word studies may surprise you: an English Dictionary. The translators choose the words in English that most nearly communicate the meaning of the words in the original Hebrew or Greek. Sometimes, these are not commonly used words, so we will receive by looking them up in English.

Having seen the words in translation, we can begin to look them up in the original languages. There are several language tools which are user-friendly.

Bonus Material: Tools & Resources

Word Study Tools Include:

Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words

You look up the word in English and it lists the different words in Hebrew & Greek and explains their meanings.

Spiros Zodhiates has a set of book resources that are similar, called *Key Word Study*. These works are also available on Bible software.

The *Strong's Concordance* has an index with word definitions in the back, each assigned a number. However, it is much easier to use digital tools to take advantage of this resource. These include:

Bible Software is very helpful for this.

Software for Smart Phones & Other Devices: *Olive Tree*, www.olivetree.com

Purchase a translation with Strong's numbers. Then just click on/press the word for which you want a definition.

Bible Study Web Site: Blue Letter Bible (free), www.blueletterbible.org

1. Choose your translation
2. Click on the TOOLS button, then on the Strong's number by the word for the definition.

Bible Commentaries

Sometimes, you are reading a passage of Scripture and you run across a phrase and you wonder, "What does that mean?" How do you find out? First, compare several translations. Then, if the meaning is still unclear, consult a commentary.

Commentaries are books that help us understand a passage of Scripture in light of word meanings, historical setting, and its point for application. The most basic commentary is a Bible Handbook. Commentaries come in one-volume commentaries for the whole Bible, individual volumes on single books of the Bible, and in sets.

Commentaries represent a Bible student's best understanding of what a passage means. Sometimes, they disagree on a point of meaning. So, avoid following one particular commentator and simply parroting what he says. One old saint was given a Bible commentary as a gift. Later, her pastor asked her what she thought of it. She replied that she was enjoying it and added "You know pastor, the Bible sure sheds a lot of light on that book!" The Bible is infallible; they are not. Compare multiple resources.

Topical Study

Thompson Chain Reference Bible

Cross references are helpful. However, there isn't room in the margins of your Bible to list more than two or three other verses. A Concordance lists every time each word in the Bible appears. But what if

Bonus Material: Tools & Resources

a similar idea is expressed with a different word? So you need a topical study tool. And the best one is the Thompson Chain Reference Bible.

Key Page Numbers in the Thompson Chain Reference Bible:

How to Use the Thompson Chain Reference Bible - page xvi (toward the front)

Understanding the Margins, Indexes, and the Other Bible Helps - page xiii, (toward the front)

Alphabetical Index - page 1,323

(if you know a topic you want to study, start here, with the Alphabetical Index)

Numerical Index of Chain Topics - starts on page 1,423

(The numbers correspond to those in the margins of the Bible text and address specific topics)

Manners and Customs of the Bible

These books tell about tools, agriculture practices, manners of the culture, and stage of life customs, as practiced in Bible times. For example, the wedding customs of Jesus' day help us better understand his teachings about his second coming and the situation of Joseph in Matthew 1. They are illustrated and often have a topical index and a Scripture index in the back.

To use this tool, you have to take the initiative to think as you study a passage, "Is there a custom here that could shed some light on this passage?" Then, you will have to hunt it in the book, using the table of contents and the index in the back. However, the effort will often pay off. These are like commentaries in the sense that you will want to own more than one and compare what they say. Examples:

- *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times*, James Gower
- *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, James Freeman

Bible Atlas

Ways a Good Bible Atlas Can Help You Study & Teach the Bible:

Sometimes, we think that all a Bible Atlas can do is show us that one dot, representing a city, is a little higher on the page and slightly to the right of another dot, which represents another city. But a Bible Atlas offers more than that.

- Great color maps - More than maps in the back of your Bible and larger.
- Color photographs of Bible places
- Insights into various periods of Bible History, which you can find in the Table of Contents.
- Information about the other nations & empires that come into biblical history.
- Archeological discoveries

Usually, there is a Scripture index and a topic index in the back, sometimes, a Map Citation Index.

So, you don't have to remember which period of Bible history it was in. Just use the index in the back!

Bonus Material: Tools & Resources

Bible Software

The big advantages of Bible software include:

- All the Bible study tools mentioned here are available for Bible software.
- Instead of having a stack of books, you can easily click through tabs for various translations, commentaries, and resources. It's faster... lots faster... to get from one resource to the other. No having to find the right book and then find the bookmark and then find it on the page.
- Copy & Paste: Easily include quotes, maps, & charts into your notes.

Bible Software Can Be Like Buying Cable: They offer bundles with a lot of books in the public domain, like channels you will never watch. One solution is to buy the basic package and purchase the Bible study resources you will really use.

Brands of Bible Software:

LOGOS: www.logos.com — The most resources by far (vast!), but prepare for sticker shock when looking at the starter packages. The industry standard for seminary students and graduates.

Olive Tree: www.olivetree.com — A smooth working app for your phone or tablet. Good prices. There is also a desktop edition, so you can use it on all your devices. They have offerings which would be helpful to Sunday School Teachers and busy bi-vocational pastors.

Online Bible (onlinebible.net) and eSword (www.e-sword.net, iPhone app for fee) are free downloads and have some nice resources, though most are older and in the public domain or are “user-made.”

Bible Study Portals:

Here are a couple of links to online Bible portals. They offer multiple translations to compare, definitions of words in the original language, some commentary help, and other tools, such as Bible dictionaries. They don't offer as much as Bible software, but they have some good helps and are free!

- *Blue Letter Bible:* www.blueletterbible.org
- *Bible Gateway:* www.biblegateway.com
- *Precept Austin:* www.preceptaustin.org

Places to Listen to the Scriptures With Phone Apps or Online:

You Version: www.youversion.com/the-bible-app

Logos Faithlife Account (free): <https://app.logos.com/signin>

Bible Gateway: www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/

You can go to the App Store or Google Play and search for “Bible in Audio”

Audio Books

Audiobooks are another good way to utilize time that wouldn't normally be “study” time. You can listen not only while commuting, but also when working around the house.

Bonus Material

Audio Sermons

These are not podcasts that will automatically download, but these downloads are be found on web sites. All are searchable by Bible passage. Those sites with only the most recent sermons from a preacher are not listed, nor do we list commercial sites which sell the downloads. There is a wide spectrum of sites listed below to get you started. Please note that links may become dead after time, as page addresses may change when web sites are redesigned.

Collection from Multiple Preachers

Sermon Audio: www.sermonaudio.com (wide array of sources, perspectives, and quality)

In Logos Bible Software: Layouts > Passage Study > on bottom of Passage Guide pane.

Southern Baptist Sources

W. A. Criswell: <https://wacriswell.com/>

David Dykes, Green Acres Baptist Church: <https://gabc-archive.org/>

Al Jackson, Lakeview Baptist Church, Auburn: <http://sermons.lakeviewbaptist.org/sermons/>

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary: Chapel Archives: <http://media.swbts.edu/category/1/chapel>

Jay Wolf, retired, First Baptist Church, Montgomery: <https://montgomeryfbc.org/sermons/>

Other Sources:

Ligon Duncan, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Mississippi:

<https://ligonduncan.com/scripture-reference-menu/>

Kent Hughes, College Church, Wheaton, Illinois: www.preachingtheword.com

Ray Stedman: www.raystedman.org/

Wayne Grudem, Professor of Theology & Biblical Studies at Phoenix Seminary

www.waynegrudem.com/audio (Lectures on Bible doctrine and ethics)

Web Site Resource (non-audio):

Preaching Point, from the State Board of Missions: <https://preachingpoint.org>

Bonus Material

Sermon Planning Worksheets:

The following three pages contain worksheets for sermon planning. How do you use these? Well first, you use them; you don't let them use you. They are provided to help you think through your preaching plan, not to burden you with filling it out in exacting detail. They exist to give you ideas; they are not a goal in and of themselves. Don't allow them to become a burden.

The first worksheet helps you think through the year. What did you preach on last year? What calendar events do you need to think about this year?

The second worksheet helps you think of the types of sermons in relation to their objectives and possible topics for sermons; just read through it. It exists only to provoke thought. What haven't you preached on lately that your congregation might need to hear?

The third worksheet is a place to list sermons for one quarter.

Permission is granted to print out as many copies as you need.

Prayer Worksheet For **Planning My Preaching for the Next Year**

Number of Sundays in Each Month:											
January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December

Holy Days, Holidays, Vacation Days, Important Days on the Church Calendar:

My Vacation Days _____ Daylight Savings Time: _____ School Starts: _____
 _____ Mother's Day: Sunday, May _____ Fall Time Change: Sunday, Nov. __
 January Bible Study _____ Memorial Day: Monday, May _____ Thanksgiving: Thursday, Nov. ____
 Book: _____ School's Out: _____ Christmas: _____, Dec. 25
 Valentine's Day: _____, Feb. 14 Father's Day: Sunday, June _____ New Year's Day: _____, Jan. 1
 Spring Revival: _____ Vacation Bible School: _____ Other: _____
 Spring Break: _____ Independence Day: _____, July 4 Other: _____
 Easter: Sunday, _____ Labor Day: Monday, September ____ Other: _____

Growth Points for Us as a Church:	
Common Problems Being Faced by Our Members:	
Books & Series I Preached on Last Year:	
Some Ways to Provide a Balanced Diet to Our Members This Year:	

Five Snapshots for Sermon Planning

Below are five ways at looking at a balanced diet for preaching throughout the year.
Don't get bogged down in the details; just look for ideas that stand out as the Lord leads you.

Things The Bible Gives Us	<p>Doctrines for Believing Principles for Living Stories for Illustrating (character studies, history)</p> <p>Seed for Regenerating Mirror for Revealing Sword for Penetrating Lamp for Guiding</p> <p>Food for the Soul Milk for Babies Honey for Delighting Meat for the Mature</p> <p>Correcting & Restoring Training & Equipping Encourage & Console Hope</p> <p>Edification Worship: Encountering & Connecting with God</p>
Disciple's Cross (Nav Wheel)	<p style="text-align: center;">Christ (the Hub: The Lordship of Christ, Spirit-filled life, Delighting in God, Worship & Praise)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Bible Study (downward spoke) Prayer (upward spoke)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Fellowship (side spoke) Witnessing (side spoke)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Obedience (where the wheel meets the road)</p>
Biblical Periods	<p>1. Beginnings (Genesis, Job) 2. Deliverance and Spiritual Formation (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) 3. Into the Promised Land (Joshua) 4. Drift into Pluralism (Judges, Ruth)</p> <p>5. United Kingdom —Kings Established: First king, Saul; greatest king, David; wisest King, Solomon (I & II Samuel, I & Kings 1-11, I & II Chronicles, most Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs); 6. Divided Kingdom and Decay (I Kings 12ff, II Kings, I Chronicles, II Chronicles, Prophets: Jonah, Hosea, Amos, Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Obadiah, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Joel) 7. Judgment and Exile (Ezekiel, Esther, Daniel) 8. Return and Rebuilding (Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)</p> <p>9. Messiah's Arrival, Ministry, and Redemptive Work (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts 1)</p> <p>10. The Church (Acts, All epistles Romans through Jude, Revelation 1-3) Coming Soon: Christ's Return and Eternal Reign (Matthew 24-25, I Thessalonians 4-5, II Thessalonians 2, Revelation, and more)</p>
Biblical Doctrines	<p>The Word of God (inspiration, authority, the canon, clarity, sufficiency); God (His existence, triune nature, attributes & character, names, knowability); God the Father; God the Son—the Person of Christ (full deity of Christ, full humanity of Christ, preexistence, incarnation, unity of two natures, sinlessness, atonement, resurrection, did He descend to hell?, ascension, offices of prophet, priest & king, His exalted state); God the Holy Spirit (who He is, His indwelling, His filling, His empowering, His gifts); Angels; Satan and Demons; Man (created in God's image, male & female, spirit, soul, & body or soul/spirit & body?, the institution of the family, how we inherit sin); The Fall and Sin (original sin—sin imputed to us from Adam & a sinful nature inherited from Adam, the nature of sin, personal sin, the seriousness of sin); Providence; Prayer; Miracles; Salvation (meaning of election & predestination, calling, regeneration, conversion, repentance, faith, justification, adoption, baptism of the Spirit, union with Christ, sanctification, perseverance of the saints, glorification); The Church (its Master, mission, government, offices, the Lord's Day, church discipline, worship, spiritual gifts); The Ordinances of the church (baptism and the Lord's supper); Evangelism & Missions (the mandate for world evangelization, the meaning of missions, stewardship, cooperation); The Christian in the World (Christian citizenship, religious liberty, war & peace); The Second Coming of Christ and the eternal state (when & how, at any time?, rapture, tribulation period?, millennium?, resurrection(s), the intermediate state—what happens between death and resurrection, judgment(s), heaven, hell).</p>
Sermon Types	<p style="text-align: center;">Evangelistic Call to Consecration & Spiritual Growth Doctrinal</p> <p style="text-align: center;">To Inspire Adoration & Worship Biblical Morality and Character</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Biblical Solutions to Life Problems Encouragement & Comfort</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Vision for Ministry of the Church</p>

Worksheet: Quarterly Preaching Plan

From:

To:

Year:

Sunday Date:	Morning Service	Evening Service	Wed. Date:	Wednesday Night:

message. (One fix is to use the dynamic illustration in the conclusion.) If you're preaching on an event, just tell the story. Sometimes, the invitation and the conclusion are the same thing; sometimes, not. But the conclusion does call for action, answering the question: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"