

Minnesota Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

2012 Camp Meeting

‘Every Believer a Preacher’

The Art of Sermon Preparation and Delivery

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Every Believer a Preacher

Pre-eminent role of the laity.

In the SDA church, the role of the laity is paramount. This is so for a number of reasons:

- We believe in the 'priesthood' of all believers (1 Peter 2.9), whether 'laity' or 'clergy'.
- We believe that every individual in the Body of Christ is gifted by the Holy Spirit in order that they may serve and benefit the body of the church and be fulfilled themselves (1 Cor. 12).
- As such, the mission of the church stands or falls on the principle of active participation by every member. There is no place for the concept that the 'clergy' do the work and the 'laity' are bystanders.
- The SDA church has more churches than salaried pastors. Many functions within local churches are fulfilled by gifted members. If every congregation insisted on having a paid pastor, the work of the church globally would grind to a halt.
- However many churches we have now, we must plant more! As SDA Christians, bearing the everlasting Gospel to a dying world, we are compelled by the love of Christ to grow and invite new believers into the Body of Christ. Real worship is to be active, not passive, corporate and not just individual. All aspects of the worship hour should draw the congregation into active involvement and participation.
- In some Christian fellowships, the clergy has been elevated, and the laity diminished. This is based on the false assumption that the clergy have authority over the laity.
- The rise of charismatic churches is partly a reaction to this false dichotomy between clergy & laity, and in the charismatic movement all members actively participate in worship.
- In the SDA church, during worship we need to pursue the active participation of all members, and we must not usurp the pastoral leadership of the parent within his / her family.

Pre-eminent role of the sermon.

In the SDA church, the sermon has the pre-eminent role within the worship hour. This means:

- The time allocated for the sermon is still a major portion of the worship hour.
- The content of the sermon should be substantial and well-prepared.
- The sermon must be relevant, coherent, practical and well-considered.
- Whoever is asked to preach should reveal the grace of God, the beauty of Christ, and the powerful hand of the Holy Spirit.
- Preaching is not about achieving public affirmation, congratulation, recognition or praise.
- Preaching is not about filling a vacant slot on a preaching schedule.
- Preaching is not about providing an opportunity to ride a favourite spiritual 'hobby horse'.
- Preaching is not about taking advantage of a captive audience to 'put a few things right'.
- Preaching is about meeting the spiritual needs of your congregation as you have identified these needs during your broader interaction with the members in the life of the church. It is about drawing men and women to humble themselves before the throne of God where they may find grace to help in time of need.

Challenges facing modern preachers.

In the 21st century, we need to recognize that the SDA preacher is up against many challenges. Some challenges are practical, others are personal, but all are to be understood as being part of the great struggle between Good and Evil.

- Lay preachers are often busy in their regular lives, and find it hard to set aside sufficient time for sermon preparation.

- 2
- Preaching resources such as concordances, dictionaries, commentaries etc., are not cheap.
 - Physical restrictions at home, e.g. a lack of a suitable, quiet and peaceful location for sermon preparation, often work against sermon preparation for lay preachers.
 - We live in a video age, where people are used to constant change, have an appetite for entertainment rather than serious thought, and prefer to be fed rather than challenged to ponder spiritual truths for themselves.
 - The 'average' congregation includes spiritual 'novices', spiritual 'old timers', those who believe and those struggling just to make it to church. Some want mere entertainment, others crave serious food.
 - Familiarity breeds contempt. Even Jesus recognized that a prophet is not acknowledged in his own town. The congregation often knows the personal life of a preacher well, and this makes it hard to preach with integrity.
 - Some pastors just assign preaching appointments, but make no effort to guide the lay preachers in their sermon preparation. This leaves the lay preacher in a 'vacuum', not knowing what to preach.
 - Preaching is often perceived as being boring, irrelevant, a waste of time, something to be endured, old-fashioned.
 - Worship facilities often are not conducive to the worship experience and the delivery of the sermon, yet.....
 - God uses preaching to change lives, to teach and feed the faithful, to comfort, encourage and strengthen His saints. Preaching deserves our very best because it bears such potential as an instrument for our Lord.
 - The message of the true preacher is from God.
 - This message comes through a man or woman who is totally committed to Him.
 - 'There is no limit to the usefulness of one who, putting self aside, makes room for the working of the Holy Spirit upon his heart, and lives a life wholly consecrated to God' (DA250).

Growing a spiritual garden.

Sermon preparation is like growing a spiritual garden. Like a gardener, a preacher must prepare the 'soil' of the mind and spirit. A gardener with a garden will plant a variety of plants, engage in constant care and nurture of the garden, and this constant care and nurture will result in a harvest in due season. When preparing to preach, we need to remember a few points:

- Use the talent of time – we all have time, and we choose how to use this time. Sermon preparation involves the conscious setting aside of time.
- Study the Bible. We are talking here of a general, continuous study, not study specifically directed towards a sermon or Bible study. The preacher should find fulfilment in reading and studying the Word, should read often and for pleasure. He or she should read whole books or chapters at a time to imbibe the flow, the message and the context. He or she should read often and at length.
- Bible reading and study can be by topic, by book / chapter, by story or incident, or by biography. This reading should be drenched in prayer, seeking the guidance and illumination of the Holy Spirit.
- We are not looking for a quick cash crop from our Bible study. We are seeking a deep pool from which our own souls are refreshed before we begin to preach. We preach from conviction, not from necessity.
- Read also from a wide variety of books: biographies; commentaries; devotionals; practical ministry magazines; general history; Bible histories; periodicals; and EGW.
- Avoid books of 'canned' stories or sermons.

Study resources.

A lay preacher often does not have financial resources to develop a well-rounded theological library. Many commentaries are hard to find, electronic resources are expensive, and there is such an abundance of study materials available that the lay preacher can often be confused as to where to start. What are key resources for a lay preacher?

- An active prayer life and meaningful devotional life. Without this, sermon preparation is like seeking to grow a rose garden in an arid desert.

- The Bible. When a preacher enters the pulpit, the Bible they carry conveys a message. It should be large enough to be seen, to show that the Bible is indeed important to the preacher, show signs of being well cared-for, and not falling apart – this would be a distraction.
- Formal equivalent translations are essential for systematic Bible study. Good examples are the KJV; NIV; NRSV; ASB; NASB; RSV; NKJV.
- Bible concordances. This helps you to locate a particular verse from any given word. This is helpful when you remember the verse, but not its location. The best option is Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, and Young's and Cruden's are also good.
- Bible dictionaries. These are invaluable tools for learning the culture, topography, climate, geography, social customs etc. of a passage being studied.
- Bible commentaries. You can find commentaries which cover every Bible book in a single volume, a commentary per Bible book, or single books of the Bible involving multiple commentaries. A commentary provides key information for each book such as authorship, date, location, purpose, main themes, structure and main message. A commentary should also discuss, verse by verse, an objective analysis of the matters arising from any given verse, whether it be meaning, translation, application or nuances. Any set of commentaries has a number of 'strong' and a number of 'weak' volumes. Choose your volumes carefully.
- Bible introductions. These are used as occasional references works, not primarily for daily use.
- Theological study and popular Bible study books.
- EGW books. These may be divided into Bible devotional books (Conflict of the Ages series, Steps to Christ, Thoughts from the Mt. of Blessing, Christ's Object Lessons and Sketches from the Life of Paul); and counsels and testimonies (the 9 volumes of Testimonies, and the various counsels).
- Electronic Bible study aids. These can be very expensive, and make extensive use of Greek and Hebrew. Unless one is acquainted with Greek & Hebrew, these can be difficult to use.

Factors to consider when preparing your sermon.

The time has come to prepare the sermon. The lay preacher is looking at a blank screen or sheet of paper. What do you need to consider as you begin writing?

Audience

1. Who are the audience?
2. What background does the audience have (educational, socio-economic, cultural, linguistic etc.)?
3. How many are in the audience (small, intimate group with opportunity for discussion, or large audience in formal setting)?
4. Is the audience comprised of well-established members, new members, seekers, or the disenchanted and sceptical?
5. How many children / nursing mothers are there in the audience?
6. Linguistic factors – do we have people for whom English / Spanish is not their mother tongue? Do I speak in a way that is hard to understand for non-native speakers, e.g. with idioms / slang / too fast / with word plays / with complicated sentence structures etc?
7. Cultural factors - will the audience expect an antiphonal approach or not? Will the audience be expecting you to finish sharply by noon or not? etc.
8. Where is the audience spiritually – as individuals and as a group? What spiritual message does the audience need to hear?

Location

1. Where is the sermon to be presented?
2. How large / small is the location?
3. Will there be PA systems available?
4. Is there a vestry for personal preparation and prayer before the sermon is delivered?
5. Will the location present any particular difficulties for voice projection?

- (4)
6. Will the location provide a focussed audience or a constantly moving / interrupted audience?
 7. Will there be a pulpit / lectern to preach from or not?
 8. Will there be anywhere to keep my notes whilst I preach?
 9. Will there be audio-visual projection facilities available (overhead projector / LCD projector)?

Time

1. How much time is available for the sermon?
2. Does the sermon come at the end of a long meeting when people are tired, hungry and sleepy?
3. Are there any absolute cut-off points, e.g. the need to leave a building at a particular time?
4. Will the sermon be delivered in a single 'block' of time, or will it need to be cut into two or three small parts?

Topic

1. What are the spiritual needs / priorities of the expected audience?
2. Is there already a passage / topic which is to be preached upon, e.g. as part of an annual liturgical calendar or a quarterly preaching plan?
3. What do I feel impressed by the Holy Spirit to preach upon?
4. What single point do I want my audience to take away with them if they take nothing else away from the sermon?

When preparing the sermon, the following cautions should be taken into account:

- Avoid obscure texts. These may be fascinating, but they can be a snare for unprepared preachers.
- Avoid peculiar interpretations of explanations of Scripture. There is wisdom in many counsellors, and whilst a particular interpretation may be novel and exciting, it may not be Scripturally based.
- Avoid hobby horses. Do not get stuck into a groove. If you are not growing a spiritual garden, you will inevitably fall into this trap.
- Avoid taking a text out of context.
- Avoid preaching personal opinions. Do not preach opinions – preach convictions.
- Be a preacher, not a lecturer. We do not wish to merely discuss interesting ideas or issues, but we want to convince, to stimulate, to challenge, to persuade and to involve the listener. We are seeking a change in behaviour, in heart, in the minds and thoughts of the audience. If we preach for instance on prayer, we are not hoping that our audience will go home and philosophize about prayer, but that they will go home and actually pray.

Types of Sermon

Sermons can be used for a number of purposes, depending on the needs of the occasion. They may have the following functions:

- Expository, expounding a given portion of Scripture.
- Didactic, preaching a systematic presentation of principles and Biblical ideas.
- Devotional, preaching intended to draw individuals closer to God in adoration and homage.
- Evangelistic, preaching intended to enable the Holy Spirit to bring the listeners to conversion.
- Prophetic, which for evangelicals means preaching to the times, e.g. gay marriage, abortion etc.
- Apologetic, preaching to make a careful defence of the Christian position on a given issue or to make a case for believing this as opposed to believing that.

The actual main types of sermon that are normally delivered may be classified as follows:

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Topical

1. A topical sermon addresses a single issue in the Bible, and asks the question, what does the Bible have to say on this topic?
2. A typical topical sermon will cover issues such as faith, forgiveness, hope, love, charity, what happens when people die.
3. A topical sermon may take a key text on an issue, and shed light on the key text through the use of other texts that address the same topic.
4. A form of topical sermon is a sermon that focuses on a particular doctrine. This is a systematic presentation of the Bible's teaching on an issue of central importance for the Christian faith, e.g. righteousness by faith, the 2nd Coming, the nature of man, law and grace, the Church as 'Body of Christ', and the final judgement.
5. Topical sermons often take the form of a 'triple decker', in which there is an introduction which asks a question of relevance to the audience, e.g. what happened to those who died in the tsunami, followed by a discussion around three major texts / Biblical themes relating to the original question, and then a conclusion, relating the texts and Biblical principles covered back to the original question.
6. Sermons often have three main points as this is the easiest way for the audience to remember the points raised – people seldom remember a sermon with four main points, and a sermon with only two main points is viewed as being 'light' or 'sermon lite' and not worth the effort to remember.
7. A preacher may engage in 'faceting', which is gradually disclosing the 'faces' of a doctrine or text to reveal the gleaming wonder of the Word of God. These sermons are normally 'how to' sermons, e.g. 'How to pray 1....2....3', and so need to be progressive, clearly laid out, with a clear pattern, without subdivisions as these merely confuse, and leading to a clear conclusion.
8. Sermons with three main points allow the preacher the time and space to develop an idea or theme, starting with a basic point, then adding some complicating factors, leading to a more rounded and comprehensive final presentation of the Biblical position on a given issue.

Exegetical

1. Fewer sermons are exegetical than topical.
2. Preaching from the Bible in an exegetical approach has the following advantages: it gives authority to the spoken word; it provides endless material for the preacher; it guards against personal bias on the part of the preacher; it encourages the hearer into his or her own Bible reading; and it enables the preacher to address difficult issues and hard sayings.
3. An exegetical sermon takes a given passage of Scripture, and asks the following questions: 1) Who was the author; 2) Who were the original audience; 3) What was the original situation being addressed by the author; 4) how would the original audience have understood the author; and 5) how may we therefore understand what God is saying to us today through this same passage?
4. An exegetical sermon focuses on a particular passage of Scripture, and uses other Scripture to interpret the focus passage if the meaning of the focus passage is not immediately apparent.
5. When studying for an exegetical sermon, take care to identify whether the text in question is purely descriptive (and therefore not providing guidance for how we are to live today), purely focussed on a particular set of circumstances (and therefore not applying for us today unless we are also in such specific circumstances, or normative (meaning that the text provide clear guidance for how we are to live today, e.g. the Sermon on the Mount of Matthew 5-7).
6. Do not preach doubts – preach the certainty of God's Word.
7. Do not preach buckshot – preach bullets. The congregation needs to depart with a clear message in their hearts and minds.

Narrative

1. In a narrative sermon, the preacher looks at a particular Biblical story through the eyes of one of the characters.

2. The preacher studies the story from the perspective of a character in the story, and tries to gain an understanding for the character's background, role in the narrative, physical and spiritual journey as the narrative unfolds, and the spiritual lessons that can be gained from understanding the character's role in the narrative.
3. The sermon is not primarily asking what the passage as a whole has to say to us today, but is asking what we can learn from one of the characters involved in the story?
4. The preacher tries to get the audience to empathise with the character involved, to understand the character's role in the story, to see the story through the character's eyes, to appreciate the spiritual struggle going on within the character as the story progresses, and to understand how the spiritual struggle and lessons for the character apply to the audience themselves.
5. This type of sermon can be highly imaginative, but the imagination must remain at all times subject to the leading of the Holy Spirit and subject to the bounds provided by the narrative itself, e.g. it is fair to ask what Joseph was feeling as he was carried south to slavery in Egypt having been sold by his brothers, but it is not fair to state categorically that as Joseph was carried south he was filled with a spirit of forgiveness to his brothers.
6. Absolute statements of what happened when the text does not allow for this are not to be made, e.g. the fact that Noah's conversations with his wife are not recorded does not allow the inference that Noah and his wife did not get on well with each other.
7. In narrative sermons, avoid the temptation to go off at tangents to discuss related doctrinal issues contained within the narrative being studied.
8. In narrative sermons, avoid the temptation to state categorically what happened when the text does not refer to the issue being discussed.
9. In narrative sermons, the preacher is trying to lead the audience down a spiritual journey, allowing them at each stage of the journey to reflect on the lessons gained so far, but asking questions at each stage which drive the narrative forward, e.g. now we have seen Joseph carried south to slavery in Egypt, and we see his continued determination to serve God during the episode with Potiphar's wife, we now explore the effect his unfair incarceration had on Joseph – will he remain faithful despite this latest injustice?

Sermon structure.

A good sermon has a compelling introduction, a solid body that is connected and coherent, and a definite conclusion that invites the audience to make a constructive response. Serious preaching is not merely saying something, it is having something to say.....a message from God.

The introduction is crucial. The attention of the audience must be grabbed. It needs to be brief but not abrupt, relaxed, wait until there is silence in the audience, and vary the style of your introduction. Introductions may consist of the following:

- A striking quotation.
- A compelling story.
- A dramatic description.
- A current news item.
- A true life experience.
- The statement of a problem.
- The use of a provocative question.
- The direct reading of your text.

Some hazards with introductions:

- Do not apologize, even if less than prepared.
- Beware of length, particularly when narrating a life experience.

- (7)
- Do not wander aimlessly around.
 - Do not state a problem unless your sermon intends to answer it.
 - Do not leave unanswered questions or greater doubt.

The main body of the text is also important. Regardless of the style or approach we are using, the body should have the following characteristics:

- **Unity.** Keep to your theme, avoid digression. Discipline yourself not to wander off course.
- **Order.** There should be an orderly sequence, progression of truths. Point B should follow point A, and so forth.
- **Symmetry.** The sermon should be balanced, each point being of similar proportion to the others. If point A outweighs B, C and D combined, your sermon has no symmetry, and is harder for the audience to appreciate.
- **Progress.** There must be movement in your sermon body so that the mind of listeners will move also. If they sense movement and life, they will be less distracted by things around them. Concentration is aided by movement. Distraction is aided by stagnation.

The conclusion is also important. It should have the following characteristics:

- It should be definite. Avoid false conclusions (and in conclusion.....and then launch into a new mini-sermon). Have a worded conclusion written out to avoid a stuttering end. Use a text, a poem, a brief quotation for the end. Be prepared, vivid and vital. Preach for a specific response from the congregation.
- It should be definitive. It should summarize clearly, succinctly and briefly the main thought the sermon. 'Tell them what you are going to tell them, then tell them, and then tell them what you told them'. Reinforce the main thoughts.

Sermon preparation.

There comes a time when after all your prayer, reading, thinking and reflection, you face a blank sheet of paper or a blank computer screen. What do you write? Here are a few tips:

1. Write down your chosen theme as the heading.
2. Write down all your preliminary thoughts and ideas. What does this theme say to you? What must you say about it?
3. Write down the Bible passages involved. Read these passages prayerfully. Read the context of the passages. Read from a number of versions. Review step 2 above and write down further insights and ideas.
4. Research your commentaries / concordance / dictionaries. Avoid reading others' sermons. Make notes from your research.
5. Think and pray over what you have discovered so far. Ask the basic questions: Who? What? Where? Why? How? When? Give the questions time to mature in your mind.
6. As your ideas form, let them tumble out onto the paper. Write down every idea, in any order. Keep writing until the flow has stopped.
7. Ask yourself some key questions: Can I yet say clearly what I want? What one thing do I intend to convey? What can I begin to leave aside as superfluous? How can I relate this material to my church?
8. Make a draft outline. List your text, theme, key message. Ask yourself critically – will it work? Where are the strengths? Where are the weaknesses? Does it have a natural flow? Does it progress? Are the transitions natural? Does it grip the attention? Does it relate to the news / current events / members' lives? How can I conclude the sermon?
9. Prepare your outline: Text; theme; opening; headings 1-2-3; conclusions. Identify suitable illustration – where, when and what?

10. Take time to pray in quiet before you write your final full draft. Leave the text for a day, and spend time in prayer and Bible reading to allow a fresh perspective when you return to the draft.
11. Write out your final full draft. Read through it until you are comfortable with the sermon, the text, and can give the basic sermon from memory. Highlight with a marker pen key texts / points.
12. Leave the text, and spend time with God, in nature, in private devotions. Rest in God's presence, sense His love and faithfulness, remind yourself of all that God has done for you and is doing for you....be filled with the assurance of God's care and do not worry about final sermon delivery or the innumerable 'what ifs?' that may intrude on your thoughts.

Preparation for an exegetical sermon would include the following analysis of the passage in Scripture which is being expounded:

1. Contextual analysis. Before working with the given text, acquaint yourself with the context, the body of text surrounding a passage that sheds light on its meaning. You do this by locating the text in the larger stream of revelation that flows progressively from the OT to the NT, and then tracing the general flow of the author's thought and fixing where and how your text fits into his book.
2. Structural analysis. Every writer has a means of developing ideas. To capture the author's overall pattern, look at the literary style being used. What genre is the author using? Identify the type of literature, and look for characteristic features. Mark the starting points and ending points of the topics and themes that you find in the text throughout the book in question.
3. Verbal analysis. Focus on individual words and details to uncover what the author was trying to say. Acquaint yourself with unfamiliar words, figures of speech, idioms, symbolism.
4. Cultural analysis. Investigate the cultural-historical background of the text in question. Enrich your understanding of the history, culture, geography, environment, anthropology. Seek the original setting for the author's words. Obscure terms will clarify themselves, seemingly insignificant details in the narrative will take on greater significance, and your sermon will begin to have the ring of authenticity.
5. Theological analysis. Relate your text to the rest of Scripture. Does your text address a theme that runs throughout Scripture, and if so, how does it relate to the overall message of Scripture? Trace the OT roots of the theological motifs / ideas in your text, and seek how these OT roots are further developed in the NT.
6. Homiletical analysis. The exegetical process is incomplete until it brings out the author's meaning for your audience. Help your audience make sense of the text, and come to a decision concerning its central message. The Word of God calls for personal transformation. We are not to preach vanilla, but the Word of God, regardless of how much change it calls for in the hearts of the listeners. We are to preach with authority, for we are preaching the Word of God, which will pierce the hearts of the listeners and bring about a personal transformation. Do not preach doubts, but preach certainty and faith.

Pulpit decorum.

You are an 'ambassador for Christ'. You are bringing the Good News into lives that are blighted by hopelessness, despair, pain, uncertainty and a sense of alienation. Body language, grooming, appearance and delivery all impact how your message is perceived.

- Appearance. You do not want to distract from your message, and your appearance can communicate several negative things about you before you begin to speak. Clothes need to be in good taste, inoffensive, clean, well presented. Ties should be discreet, not loud, avoid checked jackets or suits, and do not wear any shoes or socks that attract attention away from your face. If it is very hot, politely ask the congregation before removing your jacket. Women speakers have additional reasons to dress judiciously and cautiously. Be careful of skirt length in anticipation of kneeling for prayer before the congregation.
- Grooming. You should be making a positive impression, both from a distance and from close-up. Hair should be clean, tidy, clean and combed. If you decide to grow a beard, the pulpit is not the place for designer stubble, so grow your beard after the preaching appointment. Teeth should be cleaned and the breath fresh. Nails should be clean and cared for. Avoid garlic 24 hours before an appointment. Shoes

9
should be polished, trouser creases smart, cuffs clean. Bad breath, tooth decay, body odour, smelly clothes, greasy hair, dirty collars, dirty fingernails – all can be a stumbling block for the congregation and distract from the message. Avoid jewellery or excessive display.

- Integrity. A sermon is a reflection of our life. Our lives should be genuine. In our private life we are to maintain the same dignity, patience, generosity of spirit and long-suffering nature that we proclaim from the pulpit. Our lives are to be authentically Christian, as our actions often speak louder than our words.
- Deportment. Stand tall by the pulpit. Lift your head and look at the congregation. Do not mutter into the woodwork. Deliver your voice as if there were no microphone and so that the rearmost pew can hear you. Do not fumble about adjusting the microphone – all adjustments should be made before you preach. Look at your congregation, not at the bricks in the opposite wall. Seek for eye-contact. Do not focus on a few members, but speak with them all. Ask a good friend about your mannerisms – everyone has them! Be careful about quirks which may irritate, e.g. pushing your glasses higher, scratching your nose, cleaning your glasses. Practise your Scripture passages before you present them so you are familiar with the flow and rhythm of the words.
- Style. Use simple words to express profound truths. Avoid unnecessary clichés, extraneous thoughts, pious platitudes. Avoid heavy theological terms. 90% of your congregation are sheep, 10% are theological giraffes. If you seek to feed the giraffes only, your sheep will die of starvation as they cannot stomach the theological food you are serving.

There are some common mistakes to be avoided:

- Don't apologize. You need the congregation's anticipation, not disappointment, as you begin.
- Don't steal a sermon / illustration from elsewhere. Preach as the Holy Spirit leads you.
- Don't repeat sermons unless absolutely necessary. You may know the words better the 2nd time around, but the 'fire in your belly' may not be there any longer.
- Don't imitate others. We do not need to envy or imitate others – God has gifted all His saints, and the essence of your message is not your style but the meat of the message.

Principles of Christian communication.

There are some principles of Christian communication the preacher ought to remember as he / she preaches:

- All men are not equal. This means that only the Holy Spirit can make the secular mind spiritual. There is a wide gulf between degenerate human thinking and God's thinking. Some are open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, and so can understand spiritual matters, and others are closed to the leading of the Holy Spirit. You may preach, but the eyes of those with carnal minds will simply glaze over.
- Presence in church does not mean the audience is Christian. Just because someone is in the pews doesn't mean that they are ready to hear your sermon. Their minds may be clouded by doubt, despair, disillusionment, divorce or drugs....their hearts may be carnal....your voice is just one amongst many that are bombarding them day and night. No preacher can bridge this gap alone – it can only be bridged as the preacher seeks the Holy Spirit's intervention in the hearts and minds of the congregation.
- Seek common ground. The preacher needs to engage the listeners on common ground, at least as the starting point for the sermon. If we cannot find common ground, we need to find common terms or ideas or concepts as our beginning point.
- Use triple think. Preachers should think about what they say, what people think about what they say, and how to answer them in the sermon whenever possible. A useful technique is to engage in rhetorical Q&A after a main point to ensure the congregation understands your point. The listeners needs to understand you in the way that you intend they understand you.
- Use illustrations carefully. Illustrations have the habit of becoming larger and larger until sermons are little more than a series of anecdotes strung together by some theological cement. Illustrations should be short, to

the point, aid memory, capture and hold attention, restate the key point you are making, and fix the idea in the listener's mind.

General Principles

1. Pray, pray and pray.
2. Understand clearly for yourself the key message you want to convey to your audience and you wish them to remember for the next week.
3. Be prepared to struggle with a Biblical issue yourself, and only preach when you are convicted in your heart by the Holy Spirit that your understanding is Biblical and of God. A sermon that stretches you personally and spiritually during the preparation will be delivered with a freshness and joy of discovery that will be infectious for the congregation.
4. You are proclaiming the Word of God to dying souls. There may be a visitor in the audience who has never heard the Gospel before, and maybe never will again....so assume you have only one chance to reach that person with the love of God. All sermons, regardless of their topic, should contain in one way or the other the heart of the Christian Gospel.
5. Understand clearly for yourself on what spiritual journey you want the audience to move along.
6. Adjust your language and style to suit your audience.
7. Write (type if possible) out your sermon and practice it before you deliver it. Iron out the mistakes, and work on your physical delivery.
8. Ensure there are clear linking statements that clearly lead the audience from Point A to Point B and then to Point C in an understandable manner.
9. Ask yourself: do I wish to preach a deductive or an inductive sermon? A deductive sermon starts with a proposition, lays out the Scriptural evidence systematically, and then concludes. An inductive sermon starts with a question, and then gradually works through Scripture verse by verse to a conclusion. In an inductive sermon, the conclusion is not known at the beginning of the sermon.
10. Be thinking about your sermon for days (or weeks if possible) in advance. Sermons prepared late Friday night are often very obvious to the audience.
11. The sermon is the weekly bread of life for the audience and the highlight of the worship service – do not short-change them or cheat them with a half-baked or incoherent sermon.
12. Type out on cards / separate sheets of paper for each major section / point of the sermon.
13. Highlight the key points with a marker pen to remind you during delivery of where the emphasis is.
14. Try and mentally and physically relax in a vestry (if possible) before delivering a sermon. Take a few quiet moments to pray, reflect, and empty your mind of all thoughts other than those of the sermon.
15. Single narrow dominant thought – what one thought do you want your audience to take home with them?

Some things to think about!

11

HOMILETICS I

SERMON ASSESSMENT SHEET: TOPICAL SERMON

Student preacher _____

For the benefit of preachers, please give a reason for your responses.

CONTENT

- a) What was the single, narrow, dominant thought?

- b) Was the topic legitimately derived from the Bible?

- c) Did you learn anything about the biblical teaching regarding this topic? If so, what *specifically* was it?

- d) Was the topic related concretely to 2010? If so, give a *concrete* example.

- e) Did the illustrations truly illustrate?

STRUCTURE

- f) Introduction:
 - i) Did it grab your attention? _____
 - ii) Did it truly introduce the sermon? _____
- g) Conclusion
 - i) What form did the conclusion take? _____
 - ii) Was it effective? _____

- h) Were you able to sense that the sermon had a forward momentum, journeying coherently and interestingly from introduction to conclusion?

- i) How would you analyse the form of the sermon (i.e. inductive; deductive, etc.)? Do you think this complemented the passage on which the sermon was based?

DELIVERY

- i) Did the preacher communicate effectively through:

Eye contact? _____

Gestures? _____

Choice of words? _____

Voice? _____

SUBJECTIVE RESPONSE

- j) Did this sermon touch your:

i) heart? ii) head? iii) both? iv) neither?

- k) Did the sermon touch your needs?

- l) Will you remember this sermon tomorrow?

GENERAL COMMENTS

GRADE _____% (Using the assessment criteria on pp. 16-19)