WRITING AND DELIVERING A BIBLE TALK

What makes a good sermon to listen to?

(1) THE PROCESS OF PREPARING A SERMON

- **FLESH OF THE TEXT:** Study the words of passage to discover its meaning and applications (both transferable and non-transferable to us)
- **BONES OF THE TEXT**: Discover the structure of the passage, outlining its big and small bones (main points and sub-points)
- **HEART OF THE TEXT:** Synthesise the big idea and big question of the text into two short simple sentences (theme and aim sentences)
    - **Theme sentence states what it means (What is it talking about?)**: summarises WHAT the big idea of the passage is: *"sums up the big idea of the passage; it is what you must teach from this passage. If you have not got a clear theme sentence in your mind you will probably have several sermons shaken up together in a bag" (Philip);*
    - **Aim sentence states why it matters (So what am I saying about what it's talking about?)**: summarises the SO WHAT application(s) that you want people today to discover: *"this is what you are praying the Holy Spirit will be pleased to do as a result of this sermon" (Philip).*
- **BRAIN OF THE SERMON:** You want build a creative bridge to connect the message of the Bible passage with the lives of real people today. Consider: What spiritual concerns does the passage (in context) deal with, and how do we share in common those same concerns today (e.g. struggles, sins, weaknesses, concerns, worries, desires)?
- **HEART OF THE SERMON:** Write the theme and aim sentences of the sermon
- **BONES OF THE SERMON:** A good sermon has a clear structure based on the passage's outline. The points you make are proving/expanding on/defending/exploring the big idea of the text/sermon.
- **FLESH OF THE SERMON:** Write out in full the Introduction, Main Points (each with explanation, illustration, and application), and Conclusion

(2) WRITING THE SERMON

Stephen McQuoid compares preparing a sermon to building a house:

> *"In the same way as a house has a foundation, superstructure, front door, windows, and a roof, so a sermon should contain all of these features. The foundation of a house is essential… the foundation of any sermon is the Word of God.* ***Without the Word being applied, the sermon is of no value to the hearer.*** *The superstructure of the house is the exposition of the sermon, or the content. This is the major part of the sermon – the central feature to which all other parts point. The front door of the house is the sermon introduction, it gives access to the house.* ***Every house has windows and these are the illustrations that illuminate the points being made in the sermon****. A house must also have a roof in order to make it complete. The roof is the conclusion to the sermon. It rounds off everything that has been said so that the package is neat and complete."*

(1) INTRODUCTION: (the last thing you write)

- This will often be the last thing you write, once you know how the sermon finishes.
- Grab attention and arouse interest – this is a journey worth taking
- Start in our world today with the concerns and interests of people today (people haven't spent 15-20 hours working on this so need to warmed up), which correlate to the main issue in the text.
- Build a bridge from our world (now and us) to the Bible world (then and them)
- State the big question of the sermon which is answered by the big idea
- David Murray suggests 12 ways to introduce the big idea of the sermon: The "Pay Attention" Introduction; The Contextual Introduction; The Background Introduction; The Example Introduction; A Contrast Introduction; A Topical Introduction; An Advantages Introduction; A Seasonal Introduction; A Question Introduction; A Quotation Introduction; A Statistical Introduction; A "What would you do?" Introduction

(2) MAIN POINTS:

(Write memorable headings. Aim for application rather than textual headings, prescriptive rather than descriptive if possible. Don't force alliteration. Don't let them be too similar or repetitive. You'll probably rewrite your headings many times, that's ok!

(a) Explain it

- Show people the point from the passage, giving only the detail and background necessary to make the point and justify major interpretative decisions you've taken in the study
- Be clear and concise
- Avoid sub-points which over-complicate the main-point
- Sometimes show what it cannot mean, in order to reinforce the true point

(b) Illustrate it

- Engages interest and hearts – we like stories of people
- We're not only intellectual beings but also emotional
- Often the passage's figures of speech and word studies can reveal useful ways to illustrate the meaning when translated from their culture into ours
- Clarifies the difficult by shedding light on things
- Brings to life the obvious
- Gives time for people to process and catch-up

(c) Apply it

- How does the truth challenge, encourage, inform…
    - different aspects of our lives: our thinking/ behaviour/ attitudes/ ambitions/ priorities/ family life/ work life/ evangelism/ prayer life/ Godliness?
    - panel of people in front of you: Men/women/retired people/young people/single people/married people/parents/unemployed?
    - people at different stages in their spiritual journey: The backslider/The non-Christian/The new Christian/The suffering or discouraged Christian/The keen Christian?

(3) CONCLUSION:

- In closing restate the big idea of the sermon and return us to our world today ensuring you hit your big question for people to walk away with an answer to
- Think about how your closing prayer completes the sermon by asking God's Spirit to continue working through the Word delivered.

(3) DELIVERING THE SERMON

All that was just to get the sermon prepared, but now God's Word must be heard by His people. We should strive to be the best communicators of God's Word that we can be.

- Be yourself, because preaching is "the communication of truth through personality" (Philip Brooks)
- Avoid information overload – don't say everything you've learned from the passage. Only show enough of your working to help people see you're faithfully expounding the text. A good tip from John Stott is: "cut out anything clever".
- Vary your voice in delivery at appropriate points: think of the vocal sphere (pitch, volume, speed). Use a tone of voice appropriate to the tone of the text
- Consider not only the pace of words but pace of ideas (let people process what you're saying and keep up by using illustrations and examples)
- Think about visual learners
- Use repetition
- Ask rhetorical questions
- Appropriately use humour
- Use inclusive language: "we" (although there are times to use "you")
- Write in short, simple sentences
- Use simple but varied vocabulary
- Write your sermon out in full and preach from a full manuscript in the early days – although don't just read from it or be a slave to it if the Spirit brings helpful things to mind in the moment.

Ask for constructive feedback afterwards about the content and communication. Feedback is hard because our sermons are precious to us given the labour involved in preparing them, but what matters most is God's Word being heard and not our feelings.