

Collecting Material for the Sermon

Usually, a sermon starts with a “seed-thought” from a text or as a result of the needs in your audience. That “seed” however must be nurtured into a full sermon by the collecting of material either from the text itself or from other Scriptures.

To do this, you must develop over time a homiletical mind. Such a mind enables you to see potential sermons as you read the Scripture or meditate on it. That kind of mind will identify potential preaching passages, recognizing logical unity in a passage of several key thoughts.

Remember, true content in itself does not necessarily make for a profitable preaching possibility. It must be truth with some personal application to the listener. A sermon involves exposition plus application.

I. Survey the Context of the Preaching Portion

A. What group of Bible books are you in?

If you are in Ephesians, you may want to study the background of the four books that make up the prison Epistles.

B. What is the background of the particular book you are in?

1. Read and re-read the Book until the main theme of this book is crystallized in your mind.
2. Learn all you can about the human author of the Book.
3. Find out where the Book was written.
4. When was it written?
5. To whom was it written?
6. What prompted the writing of this Book?
7. List any peculiar or important repeated terms.
8. What is the general tone of the Book? Argumentative, exhortation, instruction?
9. Formulate a basic outline of the Book. Think particularly of the application of the truth.

In his book *Expository Preaching without Notes*, Dr. Charles Koller lists seven items which he terms as factual data necessary for the preparation of the sermon:

1. Determine the speaker or the writer.
2. Determine the addressee.

3. Establish an approximate time for the incident or for the presentation of the original message.
4. Locate the place where the incident took place.
5. Clarify the occasion that prompted the contents.
6. Determine the aim or purpose behind the passage.
7. Formulate the main theme of the passage.

II. Analyze the Content of the Preaching Text

A. What to look for as you read and re-read the text:

1. What is the dominant impression?
2. Who are the major and minor people in the text?
3. Are there repeated words or phrases?
4. Does a distinctive name or title fit this passage as a means of identification?

B. Is there an obvious outline in the passage?

1. Are there significant breaks in the passage between thoughts?
2. Are there several key ideas or points?

C. Are there any parallel passages of Scripture?

1. The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible.
2. Is there additional information in these passages?

D. What is the grammatical style?

1. Punctuation will give clues to declarations, exclamations, questions, etc.
2. The meaning and background of words will give color and illustration to the passage.
3. Verb tenses are important in the biblical languages.
4. Word order in sentences is also important in the Greek. The most important words always came first.
5. The Bible is filled with figures of speech. Note these for clarification and illustration.
6. Repeated, peculiar, or distinctive terms may provide the basis for your sermon points.

III. Search the Text for Preaching Ideas

- A. Is there an interrogative adverb in the passage?

Who, What, When, Where, or How

- B. Is there a personal, community, or national _____ problem _____ cited directly or indirectly?

Is the answer, cure, or solution included?

- C. Are there key _____ words _____ in the passage?

The word because may indicate some reasons why there is a certain problem.

- D. Does the text divide itself into paragraphs?

Is there a key point in each paragraph?

- E. If the passage deals with an incident in a Bible character's life, what are the keys to unfolding it?

- F. Are there any _____ familiar _____ verses in the text?

- G. Are there "cause and effect" relationships in the text?

- H. Is there any specific _____ doctrine _____ in the passage?

- I. Is there a specific _____ activity _____ mentioned that should be practiced or avoided?

- J. How does the passage affect lives today practically?

Conclusion:

Don't try to be too homiletical in this early stage of collecting the facts. Just put down ideas on some scratch paper. Write down every thought, Scripture, illustration, quotation, etc. that comes to your mind. Don't worry about where it might fit or if it will at all. You are just gathering ideas.

The more sermons you prepare, the more this process of thinking homiletically will come naturally. You won't be able to write fast enough!