

Homiletics Workshop

Part 1: PREPARING TEACHINGS FROM A BIBLICAL TEXT

Introduction

“Homiletics” means “preaching”—explaining and applying God’s Word to our world generally and to our listeners specifically. New Testament prophecy includes (and perhaps focuses on) preaching (see Acts 15:32; 1 Cor. 14:3,31).

The two goals of this class are to help you make progress in your home group teachings, *and* to help you become more effective in creating a culture of constructive feedback among your fellow teachers.

The first two weeks (lecture) provide you with tools and advice for creating and delivering effective teachings.

The last three weeks (workshop) provide you with practice. You will each give two 15-minute teachings in weeks 3-5, and receive immediate feedback both from others students and an experienced teacher. You will also view your recorded teachings and assess them.

There is more content here than you can digest. Use the notes to refer back to in the future, but *identify one or two areas and focus on improving them over the next year.*

Using the “Homiletic Work Sheet”

This is a practical framework that supplies you with the important ingredients and order for creating passage-based teachings. Practice this consciously, and over time it may become more intuitive. This worksheet works best with epistles, but it is also effective with other biblical genre. The upper third of page one is primarily analysis and interpretation that draws upon your inductive study of the passage. The lower two-thirds of page one is four questions that help you assemble the main parts of your teaching. Page two is a shell for creating your actual teaching outline.

STEP #1: "GENERAL CONTEXT"

This refers to the immediate and book context in mind to ensure proper interpretation.

This also often helps you to see the relevance of your passage to your audience.

Draw upon your inductive study overview for this.

STEP #2: "PASSAGE STRUCTURE"

This refers to a bare bones outline of the thought-development of your passage. This keeps us in the text and under the text’s authority.

Identify and record in your own words the main thought in your passage (often answers “What?”). Look for a summary sentence, or repetition of words or concept in the passage. Look for clues from the wider context.

Identify and record in your own words the supporting points of your passage (often answers “Why?” &/or “How?”). This is how the rest of the content of the passage relates to the main thought.

NOTE: Consider hand-writing the passage (double-spaced). This roots you in the text and slows you down to notice things you might otherwise miss. Write whatever comes to mind (passage structure; spiritual insights; parallel passages; illustrations; examples; etc.) in the blank spaces.

STEP #3: Answer these 4 key questions. Your answers will form the heart of your teaching, so carefully think and pray your way through these questions.

1. What is the *main truth* on which you are focusing?

Your answer to the “What?” question above should give you this. There may be more than one main truth. Don’t get paralyzed by “Have I found it?” Concisely state this truth as a thesis/assertion, and record where you see this in the passage and/or context.

Stay focused on the main truth! Look for answers to other interpretive questions, etc.—but only as they relate to the main truth. And ruthlessly edit everything from your teaching unless it illuminates, reinforces, and applies the main truth!

2. Why is the main truth so *important*?

Think especially of contemporary antitheses—they are the current lies (philosophical; cultural; religious; etc.) that this truth exposes and replaces (2 Cor. 10:3-5). Think of songs, slogans, movies, TV shows, ads, etc. that communicate these antitheses. Think also of religious antitheses, including the church (and including your own church where relevant).

Prayerfully reflect on how learning and obeying this truth has saved/enriched your own life, and reflect on how ignorance of and/or disobedience to this truth has injured your life. Prayerfully reflect on other people (in your past & especially in your present) in the same way.

This creates a “burden”—a sense of passion and urgency about what you are teaching. Teachings that do not address contemporary antitheses and/or are without “burden” lack relevance and a prophetic “edge.”

3. How can we put the main truth into *practice*?

Biblical learning is more than “hearing” (learning information)—it is heart and lifestyle-change through “doing” the truth (Jas. 1:22-25). Information without application is a miscarriage of the truth. Biblical application includes the ethical, but is at its heart “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6; 1 Tim. 1:5).

Sometimes the passage contains some answers to this question. Look for what answers the “How?” question. But often it does not—so you will have to come up with answers or discussion questions to address this.

Application should describe “scary steps of faith”—attitudinal repentance (from unbelief, selfishness, self-sufficiency, etc.) and practical action steps that require trusting God’s provision (see below). Think both of your own life (past & present applications) and of those in your audience. As you envision trusting and obeying God in this way, it will increase your “burden.”

4. How does the main truth relate to *God’s grace*?

By “God’s grace,” we mean not just the message of salvation for non-Christians, but also all of the provisions of God’s grace for Christians (e.g., Eph. 1:3-14).

For non-Christians, how can you briefly explain the message of salvation in a way that is connected to the passage? (NOTE: This may emerge more naturally as part of your answer to questions #2 and/or #3.) Avoid explaining the gospel in a way that is unconnected to the passage and/or that disrupts the thought-development of the teaching.

Christians must continue to increase in their understanding, appreciation, and application of God’s grace! How does the grace of God *motivate* us to respond to this main truth? What resources does God provide to *help* us in this area? Sometimes the passage clearly answers this question. Look for how it answers the “Why?” question and/or the indicatives in the passage. But often it does not—so you will need to bring this into your teaching from other passages (immediate context; wider letter context; other passages outside this letter).

Teachings that answer this question give people hope that God can deeply transform them. Teachings that don’t answer this question tend to be unintentionally moralistic, either reinforcing people’s self-righteousness or discouraging people that acknowledge their sin-problems.

STEP #4: Concisely state the goal of your teaching in the form of a prayer request. How do you want God to use this teaching to transform your hearers? Pray big as the child of a powerful God who is committed to advance his kingdom (Eph. 3:20,21)! Assuming there are non-Christians present, you will have an evangelistic goal for them and another goal for the Christians.

STEP #5: Begin to develop the main body of your teaching outline. Plan on fiddling with this a lot. You will need to address the following issues as you work on this:

1. Decide in what *order* you will answer the above 4 questions.

The above order is a good standard framework, or you may decide to juggle the order. For example, you could reverse #1 & #2, or #3 & #4.

2. Decide how much *time* you need to spend on each of the above 4 questions.

The main truth is usually evident in the text. When it is not, you need to spend enough time to make it evident so that your hearers see it in the text. Then move on immediately to the other three questions.

Sometimes people readily see why the main truth is important. But often the contemporary antitheses are so pervasive and blinding that you must spend a good amount of your time arguing your case for this.

Usually you can/should spend much of your time on application with discussion questions, practical steps, examples, etc. But if you have to spend lots of time on the first two questions, you may have to limit your application section to one good challenging step/example.

Don't skimp on God's grace ! You should explain the plan of salvation to non-Christians, but you should also teach Christians how God's grace applies to this area of life. This is what makes your teaching distinctively Christian—that through faith in Christ, God provides the resources to live a radically transformed life!

3. Work hard on clear *thought-development*.

Readers can “re-read,” but listeners can't “re-listen.” Therefore, you have to provide verbal “road maps” to keep them tracking with you. These “road maps” are called *connectives*—words or phrases that join one thought to another and indicate the relationship between them. There are three general kinds of connectives:

Previews – These give your listeners an overall map in the beginning of your teaching. This helps them organize the material as they listen.

EXAMPLE: “In this passage, Jesus helps us to understand the new birth by answering four important questions about it . . .”

Transitions – These move the listeners from one point to another, whether from one main section to the next, or one sub-point to the next.

EXAMPLE: “OK, so the new birth is like the wind in certain ways. But how does God make this new birth available? That's what Jesus answers next . . .”

Signposts – These let your audience know exactly where you are in your teaching and/or what you want to emphasize. EXAMPLE: “I told you that Jesus answers four questions about the new birth in this passage. The fourth and most important question is ‘How do you get it?’”

Two ways to get good thought-development:

Write out your teaching in a detailed outline with complete sentences—*not* to use during your teaching (more on this later), but to get your thought-development clear.

Rehearse your teaching (alone or with another worker)—*not* to memorize every word, but to get your thought-development down cold.

4. Develop good *discussion questions*.

Good discussion questions keep listeners engaged, thinking critically and personally interacting with God's Word. The best home group teachings are not a long teaching ending with “Who has something to share?”—but an ongoing rhythm of teaching, question, and discussion. Only gifted teachers can hold a group's attention for an hour, but most of us can mix teaching and discussion effectively for an hour. We want to avoid putting someone on the spot by telling them their answer was wrong, so try to ask questions that have more than one “right answer.”

Text observation questions ask the listeners to look for important information in the text, so that they don't just passively listen to your explanation. In other words, they keep the locus of authority on the text, not on the

teacher, the audience's feelings, etc. EXAMPLES: "What words or phrases recur in this passage?" "What promises does God make in this passage?" "What does this passage tell us about who Jesus is?"

Content processing questions ask people to think about how the theological content in the passage contrasts to our own thinking and our culture's worldview. In other words, they unearth contemporary antitheses. EXAMPLES: "How does Jesus' view of money (Matt. 6) in this passage contrast to our TV advertising?" "How is this passage (Rom. 14) about letting each person have their own conviction different from moral relativism?" "How would your friends at school/work respond to Jesus' claim, 'I am the way, the truth and the life?' Why would they respond this way?"

Application questions ask people to think about how they can apply this passage's truth to their practical, everyday lives. EXAMPLES: "What would it look to apply Paul's command to be submissive to your supervisor?" "How has your emotional life changed as you have begun to set your mind on the 'things of the Spirit?'" "What are the attitudinal obstacles to asking someone to forgive you?" "How has it been worth it to become deeply involved in Christian community?"

It is ideal to have all 3 kinds of questions, and to pose them early, in the middle, and at the end of your teaching.

Be sure to keep your teaching content short enough to allow for adequate discussion and still be done in one hour maximum!

STEP #6: Create a *brief introduction* that concisely states the main truth and/or arouses interest in the importance of it. Avoid long introductions—get into the Word!

STEP #7: Create a *conclusion* to avoid trailing off. Conclusions may summarize the main point of the teaching, drive your final point, etc. But challenge people to respond to God right now: "What did God speak to you about? What does He want you to do about what He says?"

STEP #8: Ask yourself *again* "What good points do I need to *leave out* for maximum focus on and impact of the main truth?" One of the best indicators of an effective teaching (for me at least) is how much good material I left on the "cutting floor."