

Exposition

Two major purposes of introductions are to arouse attention and to introduce the subject. Certainly the historic purpose and the purpose most often given is that they are to arouse attention. Introductions arouse attention and introduce the subject. Those are the historic two. The other two purposes are to make the fallen condition focus (FCF) personal and to prepare for the proposition in two ways, in concept and terminology. So the four purposes of introductions are to arouse attention, introduce the subject, make personal the FCF, and then prepare for the proposition in concept and terminology. What are some major types of introductions? We listed several, so there are lots of answers that you could give here. The human interest account is the most important and most frequent. Some other types of introductions would be catalog, provocative question, simple assertion, and startling statement. The key one is human interest account.

Two commonly used but ineffective types of introductions are historical recap and literary recap. Those two are common but fairly ineffective. We will talk about how those sometimes work their way into a Scripture introduction, which is different from a sermon introduction, so we will talk about those a little bit, but not for the sermon. How should the introduction prepare for the proposition? We already said this, did we not? The introduction should prepare for the proposition in concept and terminology. Let us pray, and then we will begin.

Heavenly Father, we praise You for Your Word, not only for the truth of it, but also for the sufficiency of it. All that we need for life and godliness, You have given to us in the Word that is completing us. We ask, Father, recognizing that we come to You at different stages of life, with different weaknesses and temptations, different senses of being empty or insufficient, and therefore we thank You that You give us the Word, that because it speaks of You, it is making You our portion. We would pray again this day for that knowledge of You that gives us strength and joy that is strength because we have learned more of our Savior from what we say and what Your Word says. Teach us, we pray, to be these vessels of Your goodness so that poured out from us would be the words of life for others that are their portion, whatever state of life they are in. Grant us, we pray, even the ability this day in what we are doing to be prepared for Your work. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Our goal for today is to understand the basic nature and characteristics of sound biblical exposition, so today we will talk a lot more about just what exposition is. Your instincts already tells you a great deal, but I want to talk about why it is important to think about the specifics of what is involved in exposition.

I think you realize that, for a vast number of people in our culture—and we will look at some of the statistics in a little bit—the Bible, while it is the “good book,” is nonetheless this impenetrable maze of unfamiliar names, difficult concepts, and ancient codes. Many people believe that you have to have the right knowledge to delve into its mysteries, and because of that, people just kind of stand away. Their attitude is “I cannot deal with that. I cannot get into that. It is too difficult.” In my mind, the goal of good preaching, what exposition is about, is convincing people that the mystery of the Word is a myth. Good preachers convince people that the way in which they can find the meaning of the Word is simply along a very well worn path that anyone can follow as long as they understand how to interpret with some very basic rules. The goal of the very best preaching is to convince people that they can do it rather than that the preacher is the only one who can do it. It is, in a sense, giving away the mystique of the preacher. Good preachers say, “I am going to let you see that you can do this.” The very best preaching says, “The mystery that you think surrounds this book is a myth. You can understand it, too.”

Now how do we go about doing that? Let us review the big picture of where we have been in the course thus far. We started out talking about the context of the sermon, and we talked about what the Word itself is. We discussed its inherent power. We talked somewhat about the nature not just of the message but of the messenger—the importance of our *ethos*, our character, and our own communion with God in terms of being able to express the truth of God’s Word. Then we said that if we are going to preach from God’s Word, we have to select the text. We talked about some basic principles for selecting and interpreting the text, and we even discussed some tools for interpreting the text. All of this was getting ready for the sermon itself, but now we have begun to get a little more intensely into the message itself. We have talked about the introduction that leads to a proposition. We put a head, as it were, on the sermon, and we know that it has a throat—that is the proposition. We began to develop main points. These are, as it were, the bones, the skeleton, of the message. The message has a head and a throat and a skeleton. Today we will begin to put flesh on these bones by talking about what exposition is. We will start by talking about the nature of exposition. Then, in the coming lessons, we will begin to go into the specifics. We will answer the questions, “What are these subpoints like? What are illustrations like? What are applications like?” We will even talk about the nature of explanation and its various features and components. So the big picture is that we have a skeleton, and now we have to start putting flesh on the bones and thinking what it means for the sermon to take physical form in front of us.

I have described exposition as shedding some ordinary light on the path that leads to the truth of God’s Word. Here is a formal definition of exposition: exposition is presenting the meaning of a scriptural text so that it may be understood—and you know the key here is the conjunction “and”—*and* acted upon. One of the contributions of the last decade’s study of even the Greek meaning of the word “doctrine” is that more and more we understand that for the Greeks, “doctrine” did not just mean abstract thought. It meant thought that could be lived. It is the practice of the principles. Exposition is more than just saying, “Here is what this passage means abstractly.” Exposition is understanding it so that it can be acted on. Exposition is all of those things.

Just because I am a homiletics professor, I will do the standard thing that homileticians do, which is just remind you that the noun is “exposition,” the adjective is “expository,” and the verb is “expound.” We do not “exposit” texts. We expound them. Okay, I did my homiletics duty, and now you can say “exposit.” Homiletics teachers, historically, do not recognize the verb “exposit.” It is “expound.” We expound the text. Now what does that mean?

For some biblical foundations of what exposition involves, there are key texts that we turn to like Luke 24:27. This passage describes Jesus after the resurrection, walking on the road to Emmaeus with the two disciples, and the Bible says, “And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he expounded”—now the Greek word there is *diermeneuo*. *Diermeneuo* means “to unfold the meaning of what is said, that is, to interpret.” I like the image of unfolding. So Jesus unfolded “unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” Now you must know that “all the Scriptures” does not mention Jesus by name, but He is unfolding the meaning of the Scriptures. He is saying, “Here is where it stands in relation to me. Here all the Scriptures are culminating in me; here is how they all tell you what I am and what I do.” He is explaining the meaning of the Scriptures beyond what might seem obvious at first. Here is what it means, and of course what it means is Him. Again, it is His story. Now in that same passage, after Jesus has left, they ask each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” That term “opened” is another interesting term. Here it is *dianoigo*. He opened the Scriptures to us. The meaning is “to open all the way,” as to open a door wide open, so that someone can go into it. Now again, I just like the richness of the language, do you not also? It is not only unfolding, like the unfolding of a scroll, but it is also the notion of opening the door all the way so that someone can go in there and see what is involved in that text and its meaning. These become two

very key terms for us in understanding exposition—to unfold the meaning and to open up the text so that people can go in and see what is there.

There are key examples of biblical expositions. We think through the pattern of the Scriptures. How do they teach us what preaching is? What do the Scriptures show us about this unfolding and opening up of the Word of God? The key Old Testament example is from Nehemiah. Remember that at this point the children of Israel have been in exile for 70 years. They do not remember the law of God. They do not even remember the language of the law of God, so to make known to them what must happen there are certain steps that the leaders take, and Nehemiah explains them in Nehemiah 8. He describes Ezra's actions. "Ezra opened the book"—now we get that "opening" language again—"Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them, and as he opened it, all the people stood up. Ezra praised the Lord, the great God, and all the people lifted their hands and responded, 'Amen, amen.' Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. The Levites..."—and then they are named—"...instructed the people in the law while the people were standing there." This term, "instruction," is another key term. What does that instruction involve? We are told right here. "They read from the book of the law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning, so the people could understand what was being read." Now do you see those components beginning to unfold? They read the book, and then they made clear what it said. They began to give the meaning so the people could understand. We will now look also at the Hebrew to understand more specifically how that instruction from the Word is broken down and what its pieces are.

The presentation of the Word is the first component. First, we present the Word of God to people, reading it and making it clear. The Hebrew there is *parash*, which means "to distinguish or to specify clearly," probably in this context meaning to translate. Now that is interesting, is it not? They did not just read the Word. They said, "You have to understand what these words mean." So at a bare level, it was giving definitions of the words. You have to know what these words mean. There is translation occurring, but there is more than that. Not only did they present what the word said, but they also said what it means. There is an explanation component as well as a presentation component. When it says that they gave the meaning, the Hebrew there is *sekel*, which means "to give the sense of meaning requiring perception or insight." This is not mere definition, but the idea is that you have to know implications of this word. You have to have insight into what its implications may be, and that becomes clearest in the final component, as they caused the people to understand. That is, they gave exhortation as well. If you have studied Hebrew, How did you memorize the word *ben*, "to understand"? The way I did it is that I just thought about how in my father's shop, there are various bins for nails and screws and brackets. He puts different things in different bins, so that he can find them and use them when he needs them. He has them categorized according to use. That is actually what the Hebrew word, *ben*, "to understand," means. It means "to categorize for use"—to understand something so that I can use it.

Do you see how all three components of exposition come together in this account? We see from this earliest description of a preaching moment that exposition involves presentation, explanation, and exhortation from the Word. I show you what it says, I explain what it says, and then I exhort you to act on that, to put it to use. Those three components of Old Testament practice worked their way into what the theologians call synagogue worship. These things continued to occur in the synagogue, and we even see them in New Testament practice as well.

You will remember that Jesus, when He went to the synagogue and read from the Scripture, gave the import and then applied it. Listen to this from Luke 4: "Jesus read the Scripture"—by the way, when he read from the Scripture, what was His body posture? He stood. When He explained it, what did He do? He sat down. Well, that might be interesting for today, if every time you preached you sat down, but

there was certainly an element of respect for the Word in that practice. Is that not interesting? He stood to read the Word, and then the practice was to sit down while explaining the Word. That was an expression of authority at least for the scribes, but Jesus followed that in the synagogue practice. So Jesus stood to read the Scripture. What is happening there? Again, He is presenting the Word. The first step is to say, “Here is simply what the Word says.” Then He gave the import of the Scripture. He explained it as well. In that step, He says, “What does it mean? Now that you know what it says, what does it mean?” Then Jesus applied the Scriptures. We know He applied them because the people were ready to stone Him afterward, because He said that the Scriptures that they have read apply to Him, which means they should honor Him. They understood exactly the exhortation in His words, so there was exhortation as well.

We find these three elements of exposition in Pauline practice as well. I am not going to read through all of the possible examples, but just for the moment consider 2 Timothy 4:2. Here the word for preaching is *kerusso*, the proclamation and the singing out of the Word of God. In this passage, Paul says that we are to preach the Word in season and out of season. In saying, “preach the Word,” we understand that notion of simply presenting what the Word says, but then he also says, “correct, rebuke, and encourage.” Do you hear the applications? Correct people from the Word, rebuke people from the Word—by the way, also encourage them from the Word. And then we read, “...with great patience and careful instruction.” Note that the order changed here but not the elements. We still have presentation, exhortation, and explanation. What you have in addition is a meshing of authority as well as encouragement. Do you remember early on in the course when I asked you, “When you think of preaching, what voice do you hear in your head?” It is interesting that when we see Paul describing preaching, he has many voices contributing. You are to correct people. That is one kind of voice. You are to rebuke people on the authority of the Word. That is another kind of voice. But what is the last one? You are to encourage. If we hear only one voice, we will probably be too limited in our preaching.

I must tell you it was very hard for me to know what voice to speak in recently. I went and spoke at a funeral of a pastor who had taken his own life, and I will tell you that in my mind, there was a need to do each one of those things. There was a need to correct, to say, “Here are some ways that people are handling this that are probably wrong, and we need to correct it.” It is very hard to talk about a voice of rebuke at such a funeral, but there was a need to say that what this man, my very good friend, did, was wrong, and there are terrible consequences not only for his family but for his church. I needed to say that this was wrong, and at the same time to say, “but as evil as it was, God is that good and more so.” We must recognize that there is an appropriate voice in which to deliver each message. As we explain the Word, we want to make sure it is not our person that is controlling the Word but the Word that is controlling our person. That is part of the explanation, is it not? Part of the explanation is that what we are saying matches how we are saying it. We explain in all of these ways what God requires so that we are faithful to this exposition, this unfolding of God’s Word.

Even the Great Commission contains this pattern. Once you see it, you will see it over and over again in the Scriptures. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Is there a teaching component? Well, you surely see that there is explanation. We are to teach others to observe. What are they to observe? What Jesus has commanded. So the word that Jesus has given is what we are to be teaching. Again, there is presentation and explanation of the Word, and then is there exhortation or application of it. They are to observe. They are to do what Jesus has commanded. So even though we recognize that these components can change in order, they all keep appearing, and so we have our basic definition of exposition here. Exposition, therefore, unites the presentation of the Word with explanation (that is, information about the Word) and

exhortation, or application of the Word. I think when we approach preaching early on, we tend to equate exposition with explanation, but exposition is more than that. It is the presentation of the Word, the explanation of it, and exhortation based on that explanation.

Now how do we make sure that we accomplish all of these things in a sermon? Some of that, I think, is probably common sense to you, but you have to say, “Well, how do these things actually begin to take shape in the sermon that we are putting together?” What we will do now is talk about the three components that, historically, in formal, classical messages, go in every main point. In every main point, this meat between is composed of three components: explanation, illustration, and application. So in every one of these major categories between the main points we will find three components: explanation, illustration, and application.

Obviously, explanation answers the question, “What does this text mean?” Of course, we will cover how to do explanation a whole lot more in the course, but let us now talk about the standard tools. There are four of them. When you say, “What does explanation involve?” there are four standard tools. The first is repetition. How do we explain what a text means? The first tool is repetition. For example, “Jesus said we should always pray and not faint. What does that mean? It means you should always pray and not faint.” Repetition is the first tool. The second tool is very similar. It is restatement. It is saying the concept again but in different words. For example, “Jesus said we should pray and not faint. Now what that means is that we should pray and not give up.” Do you hear the restatement? The third tool is definition and/or description. Now, typically definition is much more important to us in didactic passages like in the epistles. For example, “What does the word ‘propitiation’ mean? How does it differ from ‘expiation’?” We might explain those two words as a substitute for wrath versus the turning away of wrath, but I may have to explain to many people what those words mean. Didactic passages will often surface words that we have to explain. By contrast, narrative passages, the stories (and by that I do not mean something fictional, but the historical or biographical accounts in Scripture) often involve description. I have to say, “What happened here? Why did it happen? Why is it important to know, in this explanation of the Lord’s Supper, that this is the third cup of the Passover that Jesus is dispensing?” I will describe what that means. So in didactic passages we are often giving definitions, while in narrative passages we are often giving descriptions. In both cases, what we are doing is basically this: we are making the unknown known. That is what definition or description tries to do: to make the unknown known. Now I think you will recognize that the fourth basic tool for explanation is argument. After repetition, restatement, and definition comes argument. This does not mean that we will sound argumentative, but we will present the supporting proofs for the truth we have stated. So we bring to bear logic, exegesis, and context. We bring the supporting proofs for the truth we have stated. In essence, we establish the point logically. Now these four things, in the history of preaching, are known as “the general processes.” They are very standard. If you said to people in many different schools, “What are the general processes?” they would recognize these four aspects of explanation—repetition, restatement, definition or description, and argument. These are the general ways that we explain what a text means.

Which are the most frequently used? The first two. Why did you go to seminary? The last two. Now it is important that we say that to one another honestly, because our tendency is to load up a sermon with definition, description, and argument, when repetition or restatement would have done the job. That is very tempting because we think, “I went to seminary! I got all that information!” Do you remember the statement from John Stott: “The great torch of every preacher is putting away 90% of what you know about a passage in order to explain it in a sermon.”? There is so much more you could say, but if I were to say to you, “Jesus says here that you should pray and not faint, and what He means is you should pray and not give up,” then I have probably said all that I need to say. I can keep talking. I can say, “Now we

recognize here that this is the iterative use of the Greek present tense.” People will say, “Huh?” There are times when I will need to explain the iterative nature of the Greek present tense, that it is something that goes on again and again and again without stopping, but it is probably sufficient in this particular case to say, “What this means is that you should not give up on what you are praying about. Just because there has not been an answer yet, do not give up.” Do you hear all the good English words? This is a little frustrating to us, but I sometimes just ask you to go listen to the sermons that you hear. What will stay in your academic brain is the one or two places in the sermon where the pastor does argument, and he is logically building a case, and it does require some Greek or some doctrinal context or some historical background. That sticks out in our brain, but if you will listen to the rest of the sermon, you will find that most often what happens is that he will say something like this: “What we understand here is that prayer is not something that we should give up on. Look at verse 1. Jesus says, ‘pray and do not give up.’” That was the end of the explanation.

So repetition and restatement are the tools we use 85% to 90% of the time. We use them most of the time. Now why am I taking care to say this? Remember that earlier I was saying that the goal of the best exposition is to convince people that they can read the text. So I say, “Here is the principle. Look at your text. What does it say?” And when I simply locate in the text that key phrase or key sentence that exactly deals with what I am saying, people say, “Oh, that is what it means. I can read that. I can understand that.” So the preacher who is helping people find their way through the text occasionally has to explain the road signs. Occasionally he has to translate something from a different language, but most of the time he simply has to say, “Look at the sign; that will get you through.” So repetition and restatement are the tools that we most often use.

That brings me to an important point that we have alluded to before: you owe nothing more to explanation than what is necessary to make the point clear but also nothing less than what is necessary to prove the point. So as a good expositor, you take the shortest course that you can. You ask, “What is the best way, the simplest way, the plainest way that I can make it clear?” You owe nothing more than what is necessary to make the point clear but nothing less than what is necessary to prove the point. So, granted, if repetition is not enough to prove the point, then you need to move on to definition or argument. You keep going if repetition is not enough, but if it is enough, you can stop there and move on to the more difficult things or what is later in the passage. I hope you hear me saying that I am not trying to diminish in any way the wonder and the goodness of the tools that you are getting in seminary. To be able to exegete a text in its original language is a wonderful thing. You rightly say, “Wow, I can do this. This is great!” But the great goal of preaching is not to show people the sweat of your labor but rather to show them the fruit of your labor. Good expositors say, “You can understand. Let me show you that you can do this” and only occasionally bring out the heavyweight tools when they are necessary.

I want to move on to the standard questions of explanation that help us think through the process. If I were listening to you preach and I had questions about the text, what would they be? They would be the five “W’s” and an “H.” What are they? “Who, what, when, where, why, and how.” So we look at a text, and we just ask these basic questions. We have begun to see the biblical pattern that happens over and over again dealing with these aspects. We have already looked at Luke 24, where Jesus explained what all the Scriptures said about Himself. Jesus sat down, in Luke 4, and explained the Scriptures. Paul reasoned in the synagogue. If you look at these passages, you will see the general processes. These are just standard things that occur in terms of how passages are explained, but now we see this important note. What we are now calling explanation is what traditionally is considered to be all that exposition includes. People’s instinct is that exposition is explaining the text, giving those definitions, descriptions, and arguments. Exposition is often considered to be concluded when the explanation is finished, but explanation is not finished when I have said to you, “This is the definition of the words. This is what this

text means.” Why is explanation not done at that point? If I give you all the Greek words for prayer and I give you all the Hebrew words for prayer, and I tell you the places in Scripture where prayer occurs, and I tell you that disciples pray, do you now know what prayer is? What is lacking for you to know the meaning of prayer is actually doing it. You still lack application. You can get the information, but until you are able to apply it to your life as a believer, as a disciple, you really do not know what prayer is. I can talk to you all day long, but until you and I get on our knees, you will not know what prayer is. Preaching is moving people to that action basis for understanding the Word. It is the difference between abstraction and praxis. Praxis is doing what the doctrine says, which is what we are equipping people to do in preaching—not just giving them information about the text. I occasionally have heard preachers say, “Now there is really no application of this text; I just need you to know this,” and I think, “Wait! That is not why the Holy Spirit put it here. He said He had a purpose for it.” That is why, until we have moved into the purpose, we have not really explained the text. Until I know the purpose, I do not know what the text means to me. So we need to keep moving and think about the other elements of exposition.

Exposition must include three elements. What are the essential elements of, we might say, full exposition? They are explanation, illustration, and application. Explanation establishes the truth. Illustration demonstrates the truth—“Let me show you in real life where this makes a difference. Let me demonstrate this truth as well.” Application applies the truth.

Just to be very straightforward with you, you must know that in the history of preaching, each one of these elements has historically been questioned as to whether it is necessary for preaching. The *solus verbi* folk, “the Word alone,” have questioned the use of explanation. The *solus verbi* people were the Huguenots, the French Reformers. They felt that it was not the role of preachers to explain the Word, because that was presuming that the preacher could do more than the Spirit Himself had done. They believed that the goal was simply to read the Word to God’s people, and the Huguenot services were often just readings. Now, were people saved and converted and wonderfully helped by those sermons? Surely much good did come from them, but I am guessing that you think that we need more than to read the text to people. I am guessing you believe that there is some reason for explanation in this day and age, where people need to know what those words mean even if they are in English. However, it is important that you know that in the history of preaching, some have questioned whether there should be any explanation at all.

Have there been times when people have questioned illustration? Surely there have. Many of us are in Reformed circles where people just do not like the idea of introducing illustrations into a sermon because it is perceived as catering to an entertainment culture. The idea is that by using illustrations, we have capitulated. We are telling “little tales for little minds” to all those television-addicted people. We are in a television age, but now here we go just surrendering to the age by using illustrations in our sermons. Can you think of anyone in the Bible who used illustrations when he preached? Well, there was one person. Let me see if I can think who that was. It was Jesus, of course! The Scriptures say that “without a parable He did not say anything to them.” So it was certainly integral to the Scriptures to have illustration.

Has there been any period in history in which people have questioned the necessity of application in preaching? Yes, it has a name, *solus Spiritus*, “the Spirit alone.” This view holds that it is not the responsibility of the preacher to apply the Word but the responsibility of the Holy Spirit, and if the preacher tries, he will get in the way. Some of you may know that the historic Dutch Reformed Church has had grave concerns about the application of the Word. However, what I need you to hear about these specific periods in which there were questions about these elements is if you look across all periods of preaching, there has never been any great preaching that has not involved all three elements. If you go

back to the earliest times that we have history of preaching sermons as we know them, all the way into the present time, you will see that great preaching has always included these three elements. Now, it has included different proportions of those elements, granted, but it has included all of the elements, and that is what we will do in *Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*. We have said that it is a classical model. We will learn to use all three elements, and we will recognize that later on you will make choices—given the nature of your people, the nature of your context, even the nature of your subject—about the proportion of the elements that you will use in different sermons. However, what we will not do is say, “You know what, I just do not like illustration, so I am not going to do that.” Even if you do not like it, there are people in your congregation who need it, so we are going to learn to serve our people by making sure that we learn all three elements, and then we will make prudential choices later on about proportions.

So here is the idea: all three will be included. We will not be so concerned about the order. The standard order is explanation first, then illustration, then application, but we recognize that the idea is for all three to be included, not necessarily in a particular order. We will know over time that they can switch order, but we need all three to be present for the exposition to be complete. As we think about illustrative material and what illustration involves, there are four types of illustrative material. (Again, we will develop these later but mention them now just to get them in front of you.)

The first type of illustrative material is factual information outside of the text. This would include, for example, statistics. I may be preaching on a passage that deals with sexual unfaithfulness, and I may simply quote statistics of either sexually transmitted diseases or the incidence of abortion or the incidence of illegitimate birth. I may just use statistics. They are not out of the text, but they are illustrative of what the text is talking about as the consequences of sin. So this type of illustrative material could be statistics, expert analysis, citations of events or examples from other sources, or other factual information outside of the text.

Another standard form of illustration is quotations from outside of the text. These could be poems, hymns, or striking statements from others like other preachers or perhaps commentators. Now, I want to talk for a moment about the appropriate way to deliver quotations, because even though you write it down and you really like going to other people, what do we have to be very aware of in this age? How much and how long can you use poetry in a text today? Not much. Today, we cannot use numerous and lengthy quotations. Now I think you have to recognize that you look at a lot of great sermons in the past and in different ages, where people were much more accustomed to listening to literary material, you will find lengthy quotations from poems or other authors. Today, it is very difficult even to read from a commentator beyond a sentence or two. People just kind of tune out. Two things are happening. The first is that you are using words other than your own, so the cadence sounds unfamiliar. It often sounds academic or literary in ways that signal to people that they cannot understand because you are not talking normally anymore. The other thing that happens is that when you start reading, you start looking down. You break eye contact, and you immediately turn people away. It signals that this is something that is not as important as what you are saying when you are looking at your listeners. Now you do not mean that. Usually you are citing that quotation because you think it is more important. You think that you have someone who says something better than you can say it, in a particularly moving or credible way. You want that source. Now that is very important to do, but because we recognize all the difficulties of people holding on to quotations when we use them, there are just some standard things that we do when we use quotations.

First, we should be very brief when using quotations. Second, before we read the quotation, we say why we are using it. We say something like, “Here is what I want you to listen for” or “Listen to how so-and-so says this so beautifully,” and you define what you mean by “this.” So you tell them what you want

them to listen to in the quotation. Third, we cite essential sources only. A sermon is not an essay. It is not a research paper, so we do not say, “Charles Swindoll, in his book, *Improving Your Sermon*, Multnomah Press, 1989, page 43....” We do not say that. What do we say? “Charles Swindoll says...” Maybe I need to say the title of the book, but somehow I will take the briefest time I can to make it clear. “Elizabeth Barrett Browning says this in beautiful terms.” I do not say the title of the poem and when it was written and the location of her house and her address. What is the quickest way? It is not a research paper; it is a sermon, so I am getting what I can in front of people as quickly as possible. The final rule is that I look at people and read as little as possible. It is the process that preachers call “ladling.” This is an image of a ladle, like when your mom ladled soup out of a big pot. She reached down in, dipped down, and then poured it out into the bowl. What we are doing when we are reading quotations is we read down, capture the words, and then we look up at people. I keep “ladling” with my eyes. I keep trying to pull you in, rather than create a shell like a turtle where my head goes down and my eyes go down and I cut you out. So I am ladling out to you as a means of keeping people with quotations.

Another form of illustration is imagistic language—metaphors, similes, and word pictures. It is very necessary in our culture today to preach with lots of word pictures. Here is an example: “We have to understand that the internet is really that. It is a net for many people. It captures them and holds them, and they drown in that net.” Do you hear how I use that “net” language? So imagistic language is very important in today’s culture, but obviously the big thing that I have not yet said in this list of illustrative material is true illustrations.

True illustrations for preachers are not just illustrative material. Your instincts already tell you what they are. They are small stories, usually a paragraph or two long. You will get an idea if you go to the library and you begin to look up those books that have illustrations for preachers, like White’s *10,000 Illustrations for Preaching*. Now, some of those are really terrible, but some of them are good, and at times you will need things like that to be catalysts for your own thought in those kinds of illustrations. Those books will give you an idea of what the standard length is. Looking at those will show you what the ears of Western people in Western culture are accustomed to hearing in terms of type and length of illustration. So an illustration is a small story. You are not just citing a statistic. We are doing human interest accounts—people in interaction with people, an event of some sort that is described, people in a conversation, people in interaction, a human interest account. So it is not just a statistic cited or an allusion to something that happened in the Bible. It is the retelling of a small story, usually a paragraph to two paragraphs long. So a true illustration is a short narrative.

Where do we get illustrations? What are our sources? There are three. The first is contemporary accounts, either gleaned from others or personally experienced. Illustrations gleaned from others are when you read something or you hear something. There is absolutely nothing wrong with taking stories from other preachers, so long as you give them credit. And we will learn ways of doing that. By the way, do I have to say, “I heard Tim Keller preach this in New York City”? Do I have to say that? I do not have to say that. My credibility and my integrity are intact as long as I say, “You know, I have heard someone say” or “Preachers talk about” or “I once heard” or “I read that....” As long as you give the credit away, you can use it.

Where people get into trouble is that they do not use those words, and therefore they are saying implicitly, “I came up with this.” That is where preachers lose their jobs. They do, and it is epidemic right now in this culture. There are two main factors in this: it is the availability of sermon tapes and illustrations and sermons on the web. We have so much availability to well known preachers or obscure preachers that it is so easy to pick things up and think, “No one will ever know that I got this from

someone else.” The trouble is that everyone else is out there looking for those sermons and seeing those things. Some of the former pastors of some of the largest churches in the country right now are out of jobs because they simply used sermons and illustrations and did not give the credit, and it would have been so easy to just say, “I have read that” or “I heard that” or “someone says that...” As long as you give the credit away, you are fine. Now, sometimes you want more source information, right? You actually want to say, “Sinclair Ferguson, in his book on the Holy Spirit,” and the reason you want to say his name is that you know you are about to say something controversial, and you want his credentials. Sometimes you want to do it that way. But if it is just something that you know will grip people, not because you need the credentials, just say something like, “You know, preachers tell the account that,” and then go right ahead, and you can use it.

Contemporary accounts are one source of illustration. A second source is historical accounts—something that you have read or known about from history. Of course, we use these over and over again. We will talk about how to contemporize them, though. To listen to an historical account in archaic language is very difficult for people today, so we will learn how to contemporize historical accounts and make them livable again.

There is another source of illustration. We have contemporary accounts, historical accounts, and biblical accounts. The Bible has many places you can go to say, “Here is an example. Here is where we see somebody trusting in God or failing to trust God.” The Bible itself has the great wisdom of not only giving propositional truth, but also linking it to historical narratives and parables, because the Bible knows that when people cannot only hear doctrinal truth but see it lived out in people’s lives, it has great power. In fact, if the Bible were only propositions, stated in Hebrew terms long ago, without the narratives of people living it out, we would not know what the Bible means anymore. The way in which we lock down meaning scripturally is, for example, we have the Ten Commandments, and then we see people in Scripture living them out both positively and negatively. That is how we know what those commandments mean. If it had just been the commandments by themselves, we would not have the full meaning that we have from the historical narratives going along with them. So illustrations do all of these things, and we function very well when we say, “You know what? The Bible is explaining what that means illustratively, and maybe that is the best illustration in this particular account.”

The two main dangers of illustration are that they can be overused or underused. When illustrations are overused, preaching deteriorates into mere entertainment. When illustrations are underused, preaching arrogates into mere abstraction. The traditional purpose, that is, the primary purpose traditionally, of illustrations, is to make the abstract familiar and the principle particular. That is what everyone would say historically. We use illustrations to make the abstract familiar and the principle particular. And the reason is that we know this: real meaning is not known if truth is not related to concrete life so that it can be applied. Steve Brown is a good friend of mine, and he likes to say things very baldly, but he says it this way: “If you cannot illustrate it, it is not true.” You might think that is too strong a way to put it, but what is he trying to say? He is saying that if you, the preacher, cannot figure out where this has meaning in real life, how are the people going to figure it out? If the preacher cannot figure out how this would have some concrete, lived-out example in life, then how in the world do you expect the people to whom you are preaching to be able to put it together? So he says, “If you cannot illustrate it, it is not true,” and by that he means that it does not have meaning to people.

But that begins to say something else, and that is this: for this reason, because we want to concretize truth in such a way that it can be lived out, the supreme purpose of illustration is not to clarify but to motivate. Motivation, not clarification, is the supreme purpose of illustration. Do you remember what we are trying to do? You now know the abstract truth, and I want you to live it out. Now what we will

typically do in an academic environment is that I will say to myself, “You know what illustration is about? It is about making the abstract familiar. So if what I have said is very clear, then I do not need an illustration.” Exactly the opposite is true. We are not primarily using illustrations to make a point clear. In fact, if it is not clear before you illustrate, the illustration will probably not help. What we are doing with illustration is trying to make you feel and live out the truth that you now clearly know. The primary purpose of illustration is not to clarify. Now it does have that purpose, and it can help in many ways, but the primary reason for illustration is to motivate people to do what they now know to do. If you do not realize that, what you will say is, “I have made this very clear, so I do not need to illustrate,” and despite your best intentions, what you just did was create abstraction. You have said that this does not connect to the real world; it may be clear, but it does not connect. So the reason that we illustrate is to make the connection to the real world so that people can live it out. Often, in illustrations, I am reaching for the heart. The explanation often reaches for the mind so that people will understand. In illustration, I am often trying to involve people’s sense of wonder or grief or mercy, to make it touch them as well as to have them understand. So illustrations are part of exposition in that they move beyond the mere mental understanding and into trying to make people apply through making things concrete.

Scripture gives us confirmation of the importance of these concrete particulars. We already looked at Mark 4:34, which says, “Without a parable he did not say anything to the people.” Did the apostle Paul, who could be very abstract, ever use illustrations? Well, of course he did. He would use them over and over and over again. Prophets used illustrations. Examples would include lying on one side for six months or talking about a ripe fruit basket. What were they doing? They were saying, “Here is the truth in a way that you can understand it.” Of course, Jesus Himself is the great user of illustrations.

Someone might ask for an example of an illustration that is not merely clarifying but is seeking to motivate people with the truth that they now know. You must know that just because of the circumstances of my own life, what is most in my brain is the sermon that I preached yesterday. My text was simply, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God,” so I was saying that being poor in spirit does not disqualify from the kingdom of God, and the fact that my friend rejected the hand of God does not mean that God’s hand rejected him. Now that is a very simple truth, but the account I told was an account of my son at a time when he was being treated for a disease, and the drugs powerfully affected his emotions. I just remembered a time in which I reached out to my son, and my son, in a very uncharacteristic way, struck my hands away. He did not want me to touch him, and I said that not only did it startle me, but it sent him deeper into depression because he never knew that he could do such a thing. What I needed him to know, so that he would keep taking the medicine, was that even though he had struck my hands away, my hands would never stop reaching for him. Now I knew something of what had gone on in that church, and I knew that many people in that church had reached out to the pastor, but he had struck away their hands. And so I wanted not just to say, “I want you to know this abstract truth, that God continues to care for those who reject Him, but I want you to feel deeply in your heart this profound truth, that even when you have brushed away the hands of God and others, God’s hands do not stop reaching out for you.” Now I will grant you that I think they well understood the abstract truth the first time I said it. However, I am not after just their heads, but I am after their hearts. I want them to feel deeply what I am saying beyond a level of mere cognition. I want them to feel the emotional, spiritual weight of this notion, of a father not ever willing to take his hands away from a son he loves. I wanted them to feel that in that moment for this pastor whom they were not just sad about but also angry with. This man had taken his own life. They were angry with him, and I wanted them to feel the weight of all those aspects of, “I know you reached out to him, and I know he brushed your hands away, but what is God’s attitude toward him? That has to be our attitude toward him.” I think what we are saying is that, in illustrations, a preacher is not only trying to teach his people

but also to pastor them, to make them feel the weight of a truth in their experience as well as in their cognition.

There are two standard ways of using illustrations relative to truth. One is deductive, in which we state the truth and then we move to the particular. That is a deductive method, but of course that is only one of the two major forms of cognition. The other is inductive, in which we give the particular, the illustration, and then we indicate what truth comes out of it, so in very formal terms, an introduction is typically inductive. We give the illustration and then we move to the principle, which is the proposition, whereas main points are typically deductive. We give the truth and then move to the particulars. We recognize, as I said before, that these pieces can be flipped. There is no standard order, because things are legitimately inductive or deductive. We can turn the order either way, but the point is that they are connected. One leads to the other before the exposition is complete. To dispense with one is what makes it incomplete.

The last major category, we know, is application. We have discussed explanation and illustration, and then application is the final major part of exposition. Application is answering the question, “What does this text mean to me?” Dr. Rayburn’s basic question is, “So what?” So application answer that “so what?” The importance of application, as I have already said to you, has sometimes been debated in the history of preaching, but John Broadus, the father of expository preaching, said that application is the main thing to be done. In saying that, he is saying that we are not ministers of information, but we are ministers of transformation. So my goal even in making a truth known and giving information about it is to bring transforming truth into people’s lives. It is the truth that transforms. If we do not remember the end goal, the purpose, we may begin to preach so that people will pass information tests, but the goal of preaching is to have a change of the will, to bring not only behavior change but also change of mind and heart as well. Application is part of that.

There are four components of application. The first we call instructional specificity. It answers the question, “What should I do?” Many people think that is all application is, but it is not. It is just the first component. The first component is answering the question, “What should I do? What does this text require me to do or believe or accept or change?” A second component is situational specificity, that is, not only what should I do, but where should I do this? Where in life should I do this? Now we teased about this a little bit before, but remember how you find situational specificity. You go in through the “who-door.” You ask the question, “Who in my congregation needs to hear this? I just said that God knows tomorrow. Who in my congregation needs to hear that?” Now, do I name them in the sermon? No, but I describe their situation. I do not identify their person; I identify their situation. “There are people here today who are struggling with...” or “There are people here who are wondering about...” In yesterday’s sermon, I simply said, “Is there anyone here who is poor in spirit? This text is talking about you.” So I am trying to say that this applies to your life, and the way we do that is that we make sure that we are not only saying, “Here is the behavioral implication,” but also saying, “Here in your life is where it applies.”

Now here is where the *solus Spiritus* people get quite concerned, because they say, “Now this is just the problem I was concerned about. When you start talking about individual situations, you have now limited the work of the Holy Spirit. You have said that this great biblical truth only applies to this situation, and there are people in lots of different situations.” Now we have to say there is a lot of good sound logic and theology in that objection, so we meet it in two ways. The first is just by understanding this: in preaching, the particular is the universal. This is just a principle, that the particular is the universal. You know this old maxim of preaching: if you try to speak to everyone, you speak to no one, but if you speak to someone, everyone listens. So we will say that just by being particular, we are saying

that this abstraction has some meaning in real life for someone, and then we identify the situation. Then we will do one more step, which we will talk a lot about when we get to application. We will say, “By the way, I am not going to limit it to this one situation. I will develop the light of God’s Word in this situation so you will see it has real life significance, and then having developed that light, I will say that this truth applies to someone in this other situation and this other situation as well.” Now I will not discover those other situations with as great an intensity or as much discussion, but I will develop the light in one context and then I will say, “Now that you know how that light is developed, you need to consider it in this context and this context, too.” Where do I get those contexts? I am not just exegeting the text, but I am also exegeting the people. I am a pastor. I know them. I love them. I live in their lives. I know what they must hear. Sometimes the issues are too sensitive, and I cannot describe in detail what I know to be the most sensitive situation. I have to develop the principles in a less-sensitive situation, but then I say, “But now that you know the principles, what about this situation that is more sensitive?” So we use our tools prudentially and pastorally, but we are still saying, “I have to show you that this has meaning in real life by knowing the situations that you face and saying not only what to do but where to do it.”

Two more questions need to be answered for application. Enablement means not only what to do and where to do it, but how do I do it? The fourth is proper motivation. Why should I do it? You can give all kinds of wonderful good instruction on why you should have a devotional life and why you should read the Bible and then end up by saying, “because you know, if you do not, God will get you.” Now everything that I may have just said may be proper and good about how you can do devotions and good ways to do them and situations in which you should do them, but if I end with that motivation—“You should do it, because if you do not, God will get you.”—then even though everything I said was right, the motivation makes it wrong. Right things for the wrong reasons are still wrong, so I have to make sure the motivation is also in place. The first two questions, what to do and where to do it, we will include in every main point. The second two questions, why and how, have to be included somewhere in the sermon, because sometimes the whole sermon is developing the answers to the questions of why to do it and how to do it. So we will say what and where in every main point, but why and how must be addressed somewhere in the sermon to properly drive those applications.

You have to recognize this: the chief constraint of the preacher is faithfulness to the Word of God. The chief duty of the preacher is application of the Word of God. Do you hear the difference? The chief constraint is faithfulness to the Word; the chief duty is application of the Word. If we think of all these things, how they come together, there is kind of a standard way that we think of giving life to these bones of preaching. And we think of what goes into this explanation component, and it can be described in this kind of standard double helix, which I hope reminds you of a DNA chain of some sort. The standard order will typically be explanation—“what does the Word mean?”—illustration—“show me what it means; demonstrate that truth”—and then the last one will be application—“apply the meaning of the Word to my life.” So the generic shape, if you made these three components equal, with each taking up 1/3 of each main point, would be explanation, illustration, and application, in standard proportions. But we recognize there can be kind of a standard academic seminarian error. That is not to have equal proportions, but rather to have $\frac{3}{4}$ explanation, $\frac{1}{4}$ illustration, and one sentence of application.

“Therefore go thou and do likewise” is a stereotypical seminarian’s application. If you are answering the four questions of application—what to do, where to do it, how to do it, and why to do it—you cannot do it in one sentence. It must come out of even the way that you are forming your explanation. That means that you begin to recognize, I hope, that though we separate out this taxonomy out into three major components (explanation, illustration, application), the more you preach, the more you recognize that these categories implode. They roll in on one another. Did Jesus explain as He gave a parable? Of course

He did. So while we have a kind of way of thinking about the message's components, we recognize that they interact and interrelate. So if this is kind of the standard seminary error, we would recognize that there is another error—the popular error. This error is $\frac{1}{4}$ explanation, $\frac{3}{4}$ illustration, and one sentence of application. This error very much pushes on the illustration component.

What I hope you recognize is that none of these is right in and of itself or necessarily even wrong in and of itself. Where we will ultimately determine these proportions is not only by the nature of the text but also by the nature of those to whom we are reaching. If you are preaching to a high school group, which many of you are doing even now while you are in seminary, which of these components typically gets larger in proportion in the message, if you are speaking to high schoolers? Illustration will probably grow, because you are not just exegeting the text, but you are exegeting your listeners. The Westminster Confession says, "...speaking to the necessities and the capacities of the hearers." Are you just thinking about what your capacities are, or are you thinking about what your hearers' capacities are?

Now this will be different if you are speaking to a professional group, and there are whole churches like this. I can think of one in Augusta, Georgia, that is basically made up of young professionals, people who are in legal and medical training. Which of these components will probably grow the largest when you are speaking to young professionals? Explanation will probably grow the largest. You may feel much more comfortable with this group than with the high school group. These young professionals are people whom you will strongly identify with in academic training.

Things will also be different if you are dealing with, let us say, a blue-collar crowd. The churches that I ministered to were primarily made up of manufacturers and farmers. Which of these components will become the largest with that group? Probably application. These people will say, "Tell me what I should do in life." So people who are in positions of supervision and management, professional people, may say, "Give me explanation and let me figure it out," but people who are in a very different place in life may say, "I need the instruction so that I know what to be doing in life," and then you want to increase the application component.

My main concern in showing you this is that you recognize that the evangelical instinct is for a kind of balance. All of us tire of sermons that are mere abstraction, and all of us become angered by sermons that are mere illustration. We have this instinct of wanting the preacher to tell us what it means, to show us what it means, and to apply it and help me to apply it. When those instincts are being met, we very much feel that we have been pastored as well as preached to. That is the goal of our sermons, to make sure that we are exegeting the text and the congregation, so that those things are coming together. The place where we go wrong is thinking that everyone to whom we are speaking is like us. I think that one of the great gifts of your generation is that, so much more than when I was in school, you have been taught that there are different kinds of learners as well as different kinds of people. In this you recognize that there are those who are very strongly visually oriented. There are those who are very linear and logically oriented, and you have learned to value them all. And when preaching recognizes each of these components and the value of each, then it says, "I am going to pastor all these different kinds of people by not just throwing away any of these components because of my preference. I am going to minister to all, because that is what I am called to do here." Each of these components gives me the ability to do that. The way Dr. Rayburn used to do it when he went through this lecture is that he would say, "Here is what I want you to recognize. I do not want you to picture yourself in a church. I want you to picture yourself 20 years from now in a dark alley. It has no opening beyond the one you must come back out through, and I am standing there. I have a frown on my face, and I have a question for you: what are the three components of every main point in an expository sermon? What are they?" The three components of every main point are explanation, illustration, and application.

And so upon some midnight dreary, when you are writing, tired and weary, remember this word of exhortation, the rule of all homiletic creation, for every single main point's exposition, include explanation, illustration, application. That is what we will be doing.

Next time we will be working on introductions, but also we will move briefly back into lesson 7.