

Application (continued)

There were a few questions that came at the end of class last time that I thought were very apt questions. Let me review. An application-consistent outline is where you have the anchor clause as the application. “We should praise God because He is sovereign.” “We should praise God because He knows all things.” “We should praise God because He controls all things.” The “we should praise God” part stays the same, so you may think your application is very redundant in the main points. But your anchor clause will stay the same, and in the application you will develop the reason for that particular application. “We should praise God because He knows tomorrow.” When you develop the explanation of that particular main point, the magnet clause “He knows tomorrow” is not only what the explanation is about, but it is also the reason for that particular main point’s application. The part that changes is situational specificity. You will say, “Here is another reason that we should praise God: He knows all things.” Then you will say what situations in life that applies to. It may be about the college student who does not know where he is going next year. The situation will deal with the reason for the application. There will be a different reason on the next main point. “We should praise God because He controls all things.” We could say, “Even when the medical exam does not give the results that I wanted, still God knows and controls what is going on. I will still praise Him because I know that He is still in control.” The praise concept stays the same, but the reason for that application changes. You apply it differently to new situations. I have a new reason, and therefore there is another situation in which to consider this central application.

In an application-consistent outline, the part that really changes is not the core application but the reasons for it. You begin to see the impact of that when you say what situation the new reason applies to. How does it make a difference in other situations? Even if I still praise God, what is another reason to do it in this new situation? Here is where instructional specificity, the exposition of the subpoints, might seem very similar: we should praise God. The part that changes hugely is the situational specificity. You will give another situation that is affected by the new reason that I told you about. That is a very astute question. It means application-consistent outlines are typically about “whys.” Reason and motivation is typically what application-consistent outlines are about. Principle-consistent outlines are typically other things to do. They give more instruction instead of more reasons by their nature. The application changes in principle-consistent outlines, and the principle stays the same.

I was reminded of something that I did not say last time because we were moving quickly. Instructional specificity comes from the text exposition. If I say, “Here is the instruction,” and it is in the terms of my subpoints, I will end up applying what I explain. The instructions come out of the subpoints. That language and terminology comes down. That means that instructional specificity is supplied by the text. I say what the text means, the instructions come out of the text, and I use the words and the concepts of the text. Instructional specificity comes out of the text. Situational specificity comes from our experience. It might reflect something in the text, though. The people of Israel might have gone through something similar to the situations we face. The people of Israel certainly wondered what tomorrow would hold. The situational specificity could come out of the text, too, but it might be that now that I know the instruction, I need to exegete the text and the congregation. My experience with the congregation may often supply the situational specificity. Now that you know this truth, where in your life does it apply? You go in through the “who” door to find situational specificity. Now that I know this truth and I know my congregation, who needs to hear this? It is the standard pattern of the pastor who, actually or in his mind while preparing the sermon, sits at the table with the people in the congregation and says, “If I talked to you about this, what difference would it make in your life?” It moves it from the academic lecture to a sermon. That is situational specificity, because you describe the situations of the

people not the people themselves. What situations are they facing? I get to that place by asking, “Who needs to hear this?” It is the difference between the preacher who says abstract interesting things and the one who has the people at the end of the sermon asking, “How did you know what I was going through? Did you read my mail? How could you be speaking to me so clearly?” It is because it is not just preaching; it is pastoring at the same moment.

How can I help with what you are facing? My key thought, which I will repeat over and over again, is the most apt application comes when you take truth to struggle. Our tendency when we start preaching is to identify truths in the text and then start creating lists of behaviors. “You should do this. You should not do this. Go buy this book. Witness to your neighbor.” We create this list of things to do, which before you preached the sermon you had not even thought of. We create a list because we feel like we have to do application. Instead we should go in through the “who” door and ask what people are struggling with. How can I help them today? How can I be a shepherd to God’s people? What are they struggling with? I take the truth to the struggle. It will create a passion in you for preaching.

I remember when I was a senior in college and I told my best friend, who was a Jewish man, that I was going to go to seminary. He said, “Why would you do that? You do not like telling people what to do.” In his mind a preacher was someone who told other people things to do. In my mind preaching was about helping people. I do not want you to lose that ethic. That is probably why most of you are taking this course. You have a sense that you can help people. The Word of God has something to help them. Application can be about saying, “I have truth now. Where are people struggling that I can help them and not just put more burdens of behavior on them?” Instead of saying, “Here is something else for you to do,” we need to ask, “What are you struggling with, and what does the Word of God say will actually help?” Taking truth to struggle turns you from a lecturer to a pastor. It gives you a passion for your preaching and a joy in it. You will probably say that you love doing it because you can see how it helps people. It does not just burden them.

Let us pray together.

Heavenly Father, we ask for Your blessing on this day. Even as we have talked here a little bit, we are your undershepherds. We ask that we would be made more effective pastors for Your people even by the way that we are taught to preach. We think about how we sit in the pews so longing for the preacher to say something that will enable us to better face the struggles, hurts, and difficulties that we deal with in our lives. We want to do it ourselves in accordance with the Word of God. Father, if we are able to help people face their struggles to be helped and healed by Your Word, then that is the great privilege and pleasure of our lives. Give us just a taste of it even as we talk about some of these technical aspects of application. Help us to sense what a difference Your Word can make and how we can help others through it. We ask Your aid and blessing in Jesus’ name. Amen.

As we think about the importance of application, we are at the point of talking about what makes application difficult. One way to think about this is one of the more revealing surveys that was done about a decade ago. It was known as the Murdock Report, which was a very refined survey of Christian leaders in the Pacific Northwest in the United States. These were 800 leaders who were teachers or supporters of major evangelical colleges and seminaries in the Pacific Northwest. Obviously these were very informed people, because they either work in or support major evangelical institutions. It was interesting when the businessmen were surveyed and they were asked the question, “Do you know how the Bible applies to your ordinary business life?” Ninety percent said they did not know. Ninety percent of these very informed, highly involved Christian leaders said they did not know how the Bible applied to their ordinary business life. I want you to think of your position as a preacher talking to such people.

You want to say, “I want you this week to go and change your business practice in such a way that no longer are people taken advantage of. In fact, you should be willing to sacrifice profit, the bottom line, for the good of the people who work for you and the good of the people to whom you sell your product. I want you to go and change what you are doing, and I want you to do it all this week.” If you say that, you will run into anger! I did not say anything unbiblical: you should put people ahead of profit, and you should operate with integrity. But I will run into anger because the idea is to make money. People will say, “You do not understand what I have to accomplish. In fact, if I do not make money, I cannot employ the rest of the people. You do not understand what I am going through. I am angry at you now, and the credibility of your message is irrelevant. You are uninformed, arrogant, inexperienced, naïve, and do not understand my world.” All you thought you did was tell them what the Bible said.

We recognize that concrete applications have huge dangers in them. We talked before about what people remember out of sermons. We said they remember illustrations and then applications, but they typically remember most the applications that they most strongly disagree with. There are other problems that come up when I begin to come into their lives and tell them they have to change on my authority, which supposedly comes out of the Bible, though it does not seem like I know their world. The man may know he needs to be more Christian, but the instruction the pastor gave might have been a bad example that did not take into account the factors the business man must deal with. This brings us back to the Murdock Report, which says that 90% of the businessmen did not know how what the preacher says week-to-week applies to their situation. Sometimes we will get people to see the importance of application by asking them how they would want to be treated before we turn it to tell them how to treat others. That was Jesus’ strategy when He said to treat others as you want to be treated. There may be all kinds of false assumptions on the part of the preacher that he may suggest without even recognizing it. That could be a problem as well.

We have begun to recognize that application is full of landmines. We can see why preachers would just as soon not go there. It is very dangerous. Let us talk about what makes application difficult. First, it is difficult because of the thought required to be specific. We have already said that explanation is provided to you by the text. Application comes out of the preacher’s experience with the people. The Westminster Divines say, “One applies out of his residence and conversation with the people.” Living among them and conversing with them is the source of application. That does not mean it is the source of the instruction. What makes it real to people is that you really know them. People really appreciate it if you visit them in their workplaces. Young pastors sometimes do not recognize this. They are amazed that you care enough to come into their world and find out what they do and where they are. You might think you will bother them and you are out of place. And that can be true at times. But you need to pick your moments, and people love to see that their pastor is trying to find out what they deal with. We recognize the difficulty and the thought required to be specific.

The other reason that application is difficult is because of the courage required to be specific. We know that if we get it wrong, rejection is a very real and present danger. So the tendency is just to stay in abstraction. If you just give principles, it is not dangerous. J. Daniel Bowman, in his book on preaching, gives a solution to this, which I hope you will disagree with. He says, “What is it that causes sermons to be ineffective? One result of recent studies was that sermons that contained applications to the daily lives of the congregation were the sermons that were unanimously rejected by the congregation.” It said that application to daily lives results in widespread rejection. “The frequency of rejection and the intensity of rejection exactly paralleled the amount of daily application. I would suggest that individuals are becoming more and more reluctant to accept application, religious or otherwise. That kind of prescription implies that one is in a position to tell others what they should do.” Therefore Bowman advises not to do application. As though we are in a position to tell other people what to do! But we do

speak with the authority of the Word of God. So now we have to ask if we proved that the principles and instructions we gave are in the text.

Begin now to feel the weight of terminological and conceptual consistency. Have I said this is what the Bible says and begun to do application using the terms that I proved were in the text? If they are not there, my authority base is a long way away. One of the reasons that I will do that summarizing and consistency is just to make sure that people are able to overcome “the breaking point.” The breaking point is this: in exposition I go through the explanation of the sermon and say, “This is what the Bible says...” Everyone can nod and say, “That is very interesting.” Then I can go on and tell an interesting illustration. Everyone nods again. Now I say, “As a consequence of that, you must change. In fact, this was the goal of the sermon, not just to inform you but to transform you. You must change.” It is that typical transition in a classical traditional sermon from illustration to application that is the breaking point. It is where people, in silly terms, say, “He has stopped preaching and gone to meddling.” In real terms this is the place of rejection. It was easy to say and to hear everything to this point. But now you begin to say, “With the authority of the Word of God, I must call you to repentance, correction, reproof, or encouragement. Ultimately you need to change.” This is the place where it gets dangerous, and we know that there is very real possibility of rejection.

Let us talk about how to overcome the breaking point. I have already given you my best advice: take truth to struggle. If that is your overall goal, then it is even your good intent that means so much to people. If you seek to help, it will override some of the errors that you may have in application. If it is truth to struggle, it will avoid both lists and legalisms, and it will truly make you a pastor. As we take truth to struggle, first, we need to offer a conclusive argument. The reason that you must do this is because I have shown conclusively that it is what the Bible says. “I can show you conclusively in the Scripture that it is not okay to cheat people in order to make a profit. If that is what you are doing, I can show you the absolute argument that what you are doing is wrong.” You can often do this. The Bible says, “Thou shalt not steal,” so if you operate without integrity in order to make money, I will say, “You cannot do that. The Bible says you shall not steal.”

Now we have a problem, though. The old rubric is a man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still. Someone may say, “You convinced me that what I am doing is wrong.” But I still have a problem. Those of you in pastoral training basically know what is right and wrong to do, but you still sin. The knowledge of what is wrong is not the final word in terms of being able to see transformation in people’s lives. While we say it is our pastoral and exegetical obligation to say, “This is what the text says, and it has implication on your practice,” it is not the last thing to do. We offer a conclusive argument, but that is not the end.

Another thing that we might do to overcome the breaking point is use illustration to disarm hostility. In the Bible, Jesus and others would speak on a difficult subject but tell a story about it first. Nathan told a story about a man who had a very sweet sheep that he loved. Someone else who was richer and more powerful took it away. David wanted judgment on that person, but Nathan says, “You are the man. This is what you have done in taking another man’s wife.” It was a way to get people to agree to the principles through a story before applying the story.

I was with a group of pastors last night who have done some surveys in Christian colleges, though they did not talk to only Christian kids. A recent survey asked young Christian people how many of the friends that they have of college age sleep with people who are not their spouses. The answer was 90%. Even if people did not feel that they were involved in promiscuity, their impression of their friends was that 90% were sleeping around. If you are a pastor to young people in a church today, and the first words

out of your mouth are, “You should not sleep around,” 90% of the people listening just tuned you out. Instead, you could deal with it by telling what will happen statistically to young people who sleep around in terms of their future marriages. “We know the incidence of divorce among those who live together prior to marriage is roughly triple that of those who do not live together. The saying is ‘We will just try it out for a while, and then we will get married.’ It sounds reasonable. But is it not strange today that what sounds reasonable does not seem to work out? Those people who experiment with marriage before they get married actually end up getting divorced at three times the rate of those who do not live together before marriage. Did you know that the Bible addresses this and has some instruction for us that might be helpful? If you are struggling with what is right for you, let us see what the Bible says, because it tries to help us with what we recognize about relationships coming undone.” Tell me the difference in tonality. One takes a statistical viewpoint and says, “Something is wrong here. We all recognize it,” and goes through the account of what is happening in society today. The other preacher first gives the principle and says, “This is wrong; just do not do it.” The one who tells a story is actually trying to help. I am not saying that is the only way to go about it, but it is a strategy. It is a strategy that uses a statistic, an illustration, or something else that presents the principle first. That way people agree to the principle before proving it is in the Bible.

Another thing that helps overcome the breaking point is to make sensible proposals. There are typically three categories of things that are not sensible. One category is “pie in the sky” principles, which are almost silly abstractions. “Because God calls you to love your neighbor, I want you to go to your neighbor this week and smile at him for at least five minutes. I want him to see the love of Jesus in you. Just go and smile in front of him.” Get real! This pie in the sky notion of smiling more every day and loving you neighbor like you never did before does not work. You could actually say there is biblical principle behind some of that, but there is really a certain naïveté that will not help.

The opposite category is what I call high hurdles. You tell people to do something, though you do not realize what their lives are really like. “If you really want to study the Bible with me in these next few sermons that I go through, I want you to show up on Tuesday nights. We will have a Greek class together, and that way you will really understand the passage.” It might be a good idea, but how many are going to show up for the Greek class? ‘

The third category of things that are not sensible is naïve expectations. The classic example of this is the pastor who stands in the pulpit and says, “Go buy this book. It was really helpful to me, so I think you should go buy this book.” Probably only a minor percentage of the people will remember the name of the book by the end of the sermon. Of those who remember the name of the book, even fewer will get into the car during the week, go down to the local Christian bookstore, put their money on the counter, and take the book home and read it. If you really want people to read the book, you better provide free samples or excerpts of it in the foyer as people leave.

You have to deal with where people really are. You might tell the businessman, “Change your business practice,” but what does that mean? How could you actually begin to help someone who you think may be using business practices that are unethical or unbiblical? His whole business, his livelihood, his family’s livelihood, the livelihood of the people who work for him, his pension, and his kids’ college education all depend on his business practice. If you are going to have someone change, you had better say more than just that they should change. In the course of your sermon you might want to say, “People who are really struggling with this, I recognize that I might not have faced all the things that you are facing. Would you come and talk to me? Let us talk it through and think about what you have to think through. I may not have faced all the issues that you have.” I even confess my naïveté. “Is there someone here who can help you? Let me put you in contact with some businessmen who face similar

things.” Rather than failing to help people, we want to give them the help that they need. This takes serious thinking as a pastor. I can try to live in your life and think about where I would need help if I were in your position. I give you principles, but I do application that takes into account what you must deal with.

The next way to overcome the breaking point is to fit the tone to the task. An old preacher-ism says, “Accusations harden the will. Questions prick the conscience.” We must not just stand in the pulpit and rant at people for not being as good as they ought to be. We might pick on young people for promiscuity, businesspeople for lack of compassion, and wives for not properly caring for their children. If all we do weekly is rant, you can just watch people’s demeanor fade. I preach in a lot of different churches. Sadly, I can even tell when I get up in the pulpit if people are accustomed to being beaten with the Word or helped by it. People accustomed to being beaten with the Word almost immediately glaze over and drop their heads when I start talking. They are accustomed to being hurt by the preaching. People who are accustomed to being helped by the preaching look up expectantly. They think, “I need this.” It does not mean that they are unwilling to be pricked in the conscience.

One of the mistakes that young preachers make is to think that people do not want to be challenged. Those in whom the Spirit is alive do want to be challenged. They actually want to know how to change. They know it is hard and it is a struggle, but those in whom the Spirit is working want to love Jesus. They want their lives to glorify Him, and they actually want to be challenged. They want it to be credible and compassionate, they want it to be with the authority of Scripture, and they want solid things that they can actually do that are realistic. But the people of God really want to be challenged. I can say the hardest things to people if they believe that I am concerned about their good. Watch pastors when they really love their congregations. They can say, “I know this will hurt, but you have to change.” Watch the smile as they say the hardest things while saying, “I love you still, but this will hurt you and hurt us if change does not occur.”

On the other hand, a preacher could rant and just go after people with the authority of the Word of God. That ultimately destroys ministries rather than helps them. Think of some of these possibilities: “Now you know the Word of God says he is already with the Lord, therefore I do not want you to grieve without hope.” Is that going to help? The words are true, but the tone does not fit the task. To help people who grieve, the Bible commands us to bring comfort. It is not just comfort with the truth of the Word; it is giving the Word correctly even in our tone. Our tone needs to fit our task. A preacher might gruffly say, “What this congregation needs is more love for one another.” But his tone does not match the task, so it is not received well.

The opposite might happen, too. A preacher could timidly say, “Listen, I know what you need to do, and I will speak to you with the authority of the Word of God. You really should change...” But you do not need to back up or apologize up front for what you say. There are times to say, “The gossip in this church is tearing us apart, and if it does not stop, the session is going to act on it or we will die. It has got to stop.” With courage, force, and the authority of the Word of God, you can say what has to be said. It may be loving, and it is for love’s purposes, but sometimes it has to be forceful.

Let us talk about how we know when we are too rough or too timid. There are some verses that deal with the gentleness of pastoral conversation. Second Timothy 2:24-26 says, “The man of God must not quarrel. He must gently instruct those who oppose him.” We as seminarians just love to debate about very minor things at times and get very mad at one another for not holding to our particular position. Second Timothy 4:2 says, “Correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and careful instruction.” I know what it means to encourage with great patience and careful instruction, but I do not know what it

means to rebuke in the same manner. I typically think that to rebuke is the old “one-two punch.” Some sin can be changed in a conversation, and some sin changes over a generation. That is a very tough thing.

I worked in a pastoral situation in which a large segment of the community and some of the leaders of my church were employed in publishing. That particular publisher produced a large amount of pornography. This had gone on for a generation and a half. I will tell you it was the hardest period of my pastoral life to know how to deal with men who were leaders in my church who stood on the line when pornography is produced. Their lives, their pensions, and their families were at stake. They quickly said that it was not what they worked on most of the time. It just came through on occasion. But I had to think about what the Word of God said and how it applied to this situation. How can I lead God’s people if this is what I put my hand to? Am I going to be fired when I talk about this? I actually had my wife call my in-laws and say, “We may have to come live with you,” because we thought we might lose our job when we found out what was going on. We had been lied to going into the situation. We had been told it was not happening. We had only been there about six weeks when we found out this was still going on. What would you do? The Bible talks about the good shepherd versus the hireling. When the wolf comes, the hireling runs away. He did not need to deal with it; they were not his sheep. But the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. How gently, compassionately, and patiently do I have to deal with this if I really care about you?

The last verse is 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12, “We could have been a burden to you but we were gentle among you as a mother nursing her baby.” There are also verses about when we should be more forceful. Titus 1:10-13 says, “Talkers and deceivers rebuke sharply.” Titus 2:15 says, “Encourage and rebuke with all authority.” We have just said on one side is gentleness and patience and on the other side is to rebuke and show the wrath of God against all ungodliness. Both are the right things to do. And you know what to do when based on pastoral prudence. The goal is to preach and live in the community with the authority of the Word of God so as to see the transformation of the Word of God. Calvin, in Book II, chapter 12 of the *Institutes*, talks about what he faced in French Switzerland, which was large-scale drunkenness. He actually advised people not to undergo church discipline. He said, “We must pastorally deal with this, because if we disciplined everyone, the churches would empty.” He had a right to discipline, but it was a longer-term problem that caused them to deal with the heart over time. He did not want to drive the people of God away from where there could be help. We are the help; we have to consider what needs to be done so the congregation can continue to receive it. Fitting the tone to the task is an important guideline that has many dimensions of pastoral understanding.

An even harder guideline in overcoming the breaking point is to provide sufficient guidance for adults to make their own decisions. Nothing creates spiritual babies as much as pastors who will make all the decisions for the people. There are not only pastors or churches, but sometimes there are entire movements in which the goal is to tell everyone what to think and do every moment of the day. You create automatons who, apart from that instruction, do not have the ability to stand. We see this most in our lives today when young people go to college. People have been raised in Christian homes, they have been under Christian preaching and teaching, and they go to college where it is no holds barred for them. Often that is because we have taught Christian young people everything they ought to do and put such controls on them that they have never made their own decisions. As a parent of teens, it is extremely hard to know what to do. When do I encourage you to gain the strength to stand and step back so that you will stand on your own feet?

We see this in the Bible, too. In the book of Philemon, the apostle Paul says, “I could command you to take Onesimus back but instead I appeal to you on the basis of love.” Receive him. He is a slave, which

was a big deal in that society. Paul could have commanded Philemon, but he had to figure it out on his own. “I entreat you, I urge you, but you deal with it.” More telling are the letters between 1 and 2 Corinthians. By 2 Corinthians 2, Paul said, “I would have come to you earlier...” In 1 Corinthians, a man lives with his father’s wife. Paul writes and tells them to take care of it and deal with it. By the second letter he says, “I would have come to you earlier, but if I had come to you earlier I would have had to be harsh. So I put it off so you would take care of it.” He basically said, “You have to grow up and deal with some of the difficult sins.” He gave them the tools to handle the problem and told them what was right and wrong. He gave them the principles to handle the situation and even told them where the principles apply. There was a man living with his father’s wife, such evil was not even done among the pagans. Now they knew the principles and the situations to which it applied, but he left it to them to apply it. Sometimes we have to say, “Here is the application.” Sometimes you say, “Here are the principles, and here is the situation. You are a businessperson, and I do not know how to apply this. You will have to apply it.”

When I pastored one church, we had a lot of educators, both the administration and the teachers of the local school district, in our church. We had the supervisor of the school, the principal of two of the local schools, and many teachers in our church. About every three years there was a teachers’ strike. What if the pastor came in and tried to say, “Here is what you should do...”? I did not have the expertise. I did not know how they should vote on paragraph 2, section 3, sub-item A in the union contract. But I could tell them, “Those of you who are on the picket line, there will be some people who will say some pretty ugly things to people who come and go. I cannot tell you whether it is right or wrong for you to go on strike. But I can tell you how you have to address Christian brothers and sisters. You are not allowed to speak with hatred toward those who are your brothers and sisters in Christ. You can differ with them, and there may be things you have to work through, but there are certain principles here that you must still follow. Those of you who are in administration, are you being fair? Are you being just? I can call you to those principles, but you must apply them.” Sometimes I have to say, “Here are the principles, but you must apply them. I actually do not know how to apply them, because it is beyond my expertise.”

Another way to overcome the breaking point is called “the big other.” This is how to do application and help them without making them switch off. The biggest one is to remember the difference between a good idea and a scriptural mandate. The church typically goes to war when the preacher has a good idea and says it is a biblical mandate. It may be a very good idea, but if you say it is now a command, you have become the law of God and transgressed Scripture. Beyond that there is typically great trouble in the church.

Let me give you some examples. “You must regularly feed on the Word of God so that it becomes a part of your life and existence.” That is a command. “You must have a 20-minute devotional every day. You must have a quiet time.” That is merely a good idea, though you may have people in your life who taught it as a mandate. When you did not obey their mandate, you may have felt you had failed God. Then later in life when you begin to practice the good idea as a mandate, you are actually bribing God with your prayer so He will not get mad at you. Instead of feeding on the Word, you feed God with your good behavior so that He will honor you. When you take good ideas and make them mandates, you do not just create legalism, but you make God and Satan exchange places. That is one of the reasons the church goes to war. It fights on foreign ground when we begin to turn good ideas into scriptural mandates.

Here is another example, “Do not mention past sexual sin in a sermon.” That is a good idea, but some have made it a mandate. I cannot point you to a Scripture that says that, though there are Scriptures that point to leaders of God’s people who deal with sexual sin. It deals with our culture, and I may have all

kinds of cautions and warnings. But I cannot make it a scriptural command. It is a good idea to weigh, but ultimately you must weigh it. Think about this, “You must consider the effects of your words and examples on the culture to which you speak.” That is a mandate; you are required by the Word of God to consider those more highly than yourselves to whom you minister. You are required to consider the culture in which you exist and not just do what pleases or does not please you. This next example is even harder, “You should raise your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” That is a command. “You should send your children to Christian schools.” That is a good idea, though even here at seminary we are divided on it.

Most of my pastoral experience was through the 1980s. There were different movements that came along during that time. When I first began to minister, the Christian schooling movement came on board strongly in the part of the country that I was in. We had people who meant well but, sadly, would stand up in the church and say, “If you leave your children in the public schools, you are giving them to the devil. You are simply cooperating with Satan if you do not put your children in Christian schools.” That was a great way to have congregational meetings! It was not calm waters. After that, people were not prepared for the next movement that came along toward the end of the 1980s, which was not Christian schooling but home schooling. We had the very people who thought they had the holy high ground, which was Christian schooling, who now were told, “You mean you would put your children with other children to socialize? Do you not know that the Christian family is the place that education is to occur? Do you not remember that it is the fathers and the mothers who were given the charge to teach their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?” Suddenly those who thought they were on the high ground found that there was higher ground. Then through the mid 1990s, another movement came along for schooling. After the home school movement, the classical school movement came. “You mean you are willing to use a curriculum that was produced by Bob Jones University or other people who are unreformed and follow the enlightenment categories and do not really recognize that the Trivium is the basis of all education? It even has its roots in Scripture. Do you not recognize that we have to socialize our children together according to a classical model that God Himself has endorsed? Even Paul knew the Trivium, and you will not follow it?” The movement goes on. It is a command that you must raise your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, but there may be various ways to apply that.

When we begin to exegete the culture as parents and pastors, we may say there are enough huge problems in the public school systems that we have to find alternatives. But to make an alternative a command, we go too far. Instead we can woo someone to the goodness and wisdom of what we advocate. We can tell someone why in our culture it would be good for them and their kids to follow an alternative. It is very different than saying, “With the authority of the Word of God, I can tell you that you must...” When you move it to command status, the church will go to war and divide. It is right for it to divide, because we have created a new law and made man the lawgiver.

The last example is “You must never go to an R-rated movie.” This is only a good idea. “You may not partake of anything that causes lust in your heart.” That is a command, though many in our culture do not recognize it. As a preacher it is very hard to preach it. In Calvin’s time the problem was a culture that was caught up in alcohol addiction. We now have a culture that is caught up in sexual addiction at various levels. Even we find it hard to remove ourselves from the addictions or to confront other people with it. We have to be very careful. We can struggle with the addiction so much ourselves that we begin to speak in terms where we move good idea to command. At that point we destroy our credibility and become new lawgivers. On the other hand, we can be so concerned about legalism that we then do not say what the Word of God says for fear of offending people and having to change ourselves. That becomes the great misery and joy of preaching.

Application is about saying to myself as well as to others how the Word of God applies. Ultimately what keeps us from being willing to apply the Word to others is the fear of applying it to ourselves. What does the Word of God require of me? I have looked at it, studied it, and read it. The thing that can keep me safe from having to change is to keep it up in the principle world. Instead we need to say how the principle applies in my life. Once I begin to have the courage to apply it to my life, I begin to understand more and more how I have to speak to others for their good as well as the means by which I can do that. As a result, we pray a lot for spiritual guidance and pastoral prudence. I know of no preacher who says it like the Westminster Divines talked about application. They said, "The preacher must not rest in general doctrine but, how much it may pain him, must move to application." It is interesting that they recognize that application can be such a pain. It is not enough for the preacher to rest in general doctrine. He must move to the pain of application, because his goal is transformation. How can I help you? How can we deal with this hurt in your life with what the Word of God says?

Whenever you use cultural statistics, it is important to say where they came from. If you say something like I said about divorce in a church setting, everyone would nod and agree. But when you are in a secular setting, you really need a foundation for those statistics. If I used those kinds of statistics in a secular setting, I would probably cite the source particularly. It goes back to what we mentioned earlier. When we use illustrations, we typically do not cite source citation in a sermon unless we need it for the authority of it. It is not a research paper. I would think in a secular situation you would definitely need the authority of the source of your statistics.

We have recognized that the ways we overcome the breaking point are important for doing application. Let me make some final major cautions for applications. The main caution is that applications without authority are very dangerous and damaging to the sermon and the pastor. When we say they have to have authority, we need to be able to show where it is in the text. This is where that application is in the text. The principle is here. We are doing classical expository sermons in this course, and your main points and subpoints need to be from the text. Now you begin seeing that the technical aspect is not the real issue. You need to have the authority for the application you make. That becomes the essential issue. You need to have authority for what you say, and you need to show that you can say it with authority.

There are tools to make sure the listeners see that there is authority for what you say. That is expositional rain, which uses the concepts and terms that you develop in the explanation. You said what the text says and means. You use concepts and terms in the explanation. They need to reappear in the application. That is the way that you maintain authority and show that it is not just you but the text that says it. It will quickly raise flags in your own mind when you begin to transgress the line from a biblical mandate and a good suggestion. If you cannot point out where it says something, it might be just a good idea.

It is not wrong to give suggestions for a mandate in a sermon. It can be a very good idea. "One way that you can regularly feed on the Word of God is the daily discipline of a devotional. Christians have done that throughout the centuries. They recognize the power of a disciplined devotional period in their daily lives." I can very much encourage you to feed on the Word of God (the command) by a good suggestion. I just need to make sure that you know the difference between the suggestion and the command. "Here is a suggestion on how you might carry this out." When I say the suggestion is the command, then it becomes a problem. Preachers actually help at times by saying, "Knowing what you struggle with and deal with, let me give you some suggestions."

The suggestion may not come with the same authority as the command. It may come out of the

preacher's experience. Some of us know that you can feed on the Word of God by having regular devotionals. We may even point out people in the Bible who seem to have regular time with God, like Daniel. "Here is regular time with God being practiced by an Old Testament man of God. Here we see Jesus frequently retreating to a quiet place to commune with God." We see people following a suggestion even though it is not a command for daily use.

Another caution that we have mentioned already is not to make applications beyond the minister's expertise. Should you vote for the union contract or not? The preacher may not have the expertise to answer that, so it might be necessary instead to talk about principles. The final caution is not to make applications unrelated to the fallen condition focus (FCF). An application may be true, good, and even a good idea, but is it what the sermon is about? Does this still deal with the burden of the message? There needs to be a tie back when you look at your application and see if it deals with what you said is the burden of the message. You might be on another topic. "As I was preparing this message, I thought of something wonderful that you should do." Does it deal with the FCF? Sermons will come together, and you will go deeper and deeper into people's lives if you have a focus that you come back to. The application needs to be related to the FCF.

Let me go over some proper attitudes for application. Application needs to be right between the eyes with love. In preaching I often say, "You said that we should honor one another in our marriages. What did you mean by that?" You meant that we should not talk about each other behind our back to people who are neighbors, but you did not say it. Instead you said something general that was safe, did not get you in trouble, and did not offend anyone. Say what you thought, even if it offends someone. It is your job to offend them with the Word of God if you do it out of love. The very reason you stood up and addressed people from the Word was because you wanted to bring the transformation of the Word of God into their lives. If you back away from it now, you will not do what needs to be done. Say exactly what you should say, and do it out of a heart of love now that you have examined the Word in light of the people who are here.

That requires a second attitude, which is strong, steady, and forgiving. It is almost a cliché that older preachers move to abstraction and younger preachers move to anger. The older preacher who has preached and not seen people change or seen fruit may feel like every time he does application, it gets him in trouble. He can typically move to abstraction and safety. The counter of that is young men in the pulpit who are almost the stereotypical angry young man. "You did not do it. I told you to do it, but you did not do it. So you need to do it!" We get angrier and angrier over time because people do not do what we tell them to do. You will not be able to preach long term if you cannot get up in the pulpit, speak strong to the people the Word of God, watch them not obey, forgive them, and speak again. If you really cannot forgive them when they fail to honor you, you will burn out. Those who study pastoral burnout tell us that it is not primarily a feature of fatigue or too much work. It is a lot of work, but you will find out that the pastorate can be a place for lazy people to hide. You can just go to your study and find all kinds of reasons not to do things. But if you are a conscientious preacher, the work is never done. You are the 24/7 guy. You are always on call, work never done, people to see, sermons to write, and counseling to be done. It is more than any person could do. Fatigue typically is not the cause of burnout. It is fatigue combined with anger. "They are so unfair to me. They do not honor me. They do not do what I say." Anger ultimately becomes the corrosion in your own heart that drives you from the pulpit. Strong, steady, and forgiving all must be there for there to be pastoral consistency.

The last thing under proper attitudes is to motivate with love for Christ. This means that we typically try to motivate people *from* acceptance, not *for* acceptance. Some of you have had this and have been in those churches where there is actually a form of pastoral abuse. It says, "I will love you, and you will

have my approval if you do all the things that I say.” The pastor who stands in as ambassador for Christ seems to be saying that Christ loves you because of what you do. The truth is that Christ loves you because of what He did. Our great motivation in application is to motivate people from acceptance, not for it. “God has done this for you, in Christ. You are clothed in His righteousness. He has made a way and intercedes. In your weakness He is strong. Despite your sin, He is the One Who provided His blood.” People need to be motivated out of love for Christ from acceptance rather than told, “Straighten up, and then you will be okay with God.” If people are told, “Straighten up, and then you will be okay with God,” they will never be okay with God. They will never straighten up enough because of “the great disproportion between our best works and God’s true holiness,” as the Westminster Divines say. Not only do our good works not earn God’s affection, but they actually deserve His reproof. If I tell people, “Just do more good works; give God some more filthy rags, and He will be happy with you,” I create a God who can never be satisfied. I weaken the hearts of God’s people and ultimately drive them to despair. Motivate out of love for God. His acceptance is what drives their motivation for holiness rather than saying, “Become holy, and then God will love you.” They will never be that holy.

Let me go over some key hints for preparing application. First, plan for specific people; pick on no one. Specificity basically comes because we talk about their situations. It is why you cannot be a great preacher if you just sit in your study. In the Westminster Divines’ language, you need to be “in residence and conversation with your people.” Are you among them so that you are now able to plan with specificity in your sermon? Do not name people, but deal with where their lives are. This means that we exegete the people as well as the text. It is also important to remember all four questions of application. Two questions have to be in every main point: what do I do, and where do I do it? The “what” comes out of the explanation, and the “where” comes from knowing people and what they deal with. Within the body of the sermon before the people walk out the door, we want to know why and how. That will be in the text or its context. You need to address the “why” and “how” in addition to the “what” and “where.”

Let me make some final words on application. You want to develop an early burden for a lasting passion. We have dealt with the nuts and bolts of preaching and putting together sermons of a traditional message. We said that the FCF should be in your introduction. We began to look at sermons and underlined the key points so that we know they are there. We have done all these technical things, and we do expositional rain, using the key terms in our illustrations and applications. Ultimately I do not care! I want to know if you care about God’s people. Have you even in the introduction said, “Here is something you are struggling with. I know it. God knows it, and He is here to help you. He provided His Word for that.” If, from the very beginning, you preach with a burden for God’s people, you will love to preach. You will love it. You will say, “I have something to say that will really help people here today.” If you develop that early burden, this moves away from an academic exercise, just checking off the boxes of a traditional sermon, and you will actually begin to feel that you are doing something as the Good Shepherd would have you do. You are helping people! That is the joy of preaching. That is the profound joy of preaching, when you say, “Here is a burden that I can help with.” When you preach that way, now application is not just a scary minefield. It is actually the great joy. I can talk about where people hurt, and I can help them. That is the lasting passion of preaching, when you have a burden and the Holy Spirit gave you something to say. You can help. When you preach that way, it will be your lasting passion, and you will be a great help to God’s people.