

FURTHER TRAINING

You may decide to run another program for those with preaching gifts, because they need more training.

Here are some suggestions of areas in which they may need more training, and some suggestions for basic level resources, which you could use for a training program:

- The inspiration and authority of the Bible. J I Packer, *God has Spoken*, Hodder.
- Biblical Theology. Vaughan Roberts, *God's big picture: tracing the story line of the Bible*, IVP.
- Systematic Theology. Graham Cole, *Faithful Theology: An Introduction*, Crossway; or Robert Letham, *Systematic Theology*, Crossway.
- Key Bible words. J I Packer, *God's Words*, Baker.
- Understanding the literature of the Bible. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, Zondervan, and Leland Ryken, *How to read the Bible as literature, and get more out of it*, Zondervan.
- The process of exegesis. Nigel Beynon and Andrew Sach, *Dig Deeper*, IVP.
- An introduction to each book of the Bible. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*, Zondervan.
- Finding the central ministry purpose of the book of the Bible. e.g., <https://stjudes.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Finding-the-ministry-purpose-of-a-book-of-the-Bible-Peter-Adam.pdf>
- A practical theology of preaching. Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Words*, IVP.
- Cross-cultural awareness. Evelyn and Richard Hibbert, *Walking Together on the Jesus Road: Discipling in Intercultural Contexts*, William Carey Library.

Or you could work through a practical book on preaching, such as Bryan Chappell, *Christ-Centred Preaching*, Baker; Denis Lane, *Preach the Word*, Evangelical Press; Samuel T. Logan, Jr., [ed.], *The Preacher and Preaching*, Presbyterian and Reformed; and Haddon Robinson, *Expository Preaching*, InterVarsity Press.

The books recommended above are just suggestions. You may well find resources which are more useful to you.

TOPICAL SERMONS: A WARNING!

I recommend that you do not ask new preachers who do not have a theology degree to preach topical sermons. If you do, they will need lots of help! A topical sermon requires a comprehensive understanding of relevant Biblical material and more theological ability than just linking together relevant words.

For example, for a topical sermon on 'War', there is ample Biblical material, but its relevance to contemporary warfare between competing nations is limited, because we do not engage in OT 'holy wars'. Or a sermon on gender identity is difficult because there is little if any Bible teaching which is directly relevant to the current debate. We have to work from implications of Bible teaching, which requires considerable Biblical theological and pastoral wisdom. I advise young preachers to do regular preaching for ten years before they tackle a topical sermon!

THE CONTENT OF THE PROGRAM

I would spend the first six weeks in teaching people how to preach, and the second six weeks in hearing their sermons and giving feedback. They need to stand up and give their sermons, preaching to the group.

The First Session

Introduction, outline of the program, explanation of the purpose of the program, and explanation of the sermons to be preached by students. This includes the passages and dates, the reason for the 10-minute rule, and the expectation that students will benefit from the sermons preached by others, and from the feedback received by others.

Include focus on the book from which the sermons will be taken. Introduce the book, its main message, its particular features, and general issues of interpretation and application. Perhaps you could recommend a good commentary [and have copies available].

People will have lots of questions, so allow plenty of time.

You could also introduce students to these useful aids for the preacher:

- A Bible Atlas.
- A Bible Dictionary.
- Bible commentaries.
- A One Volume Bible Commentary. [These are useful because they do not include any unnecessary information, are usefully brief, and give basic information on every book in the Bible.]

Make sure that the people meet each other, and develop a supportive fellowship for the training program. Perhaps form small prayer groups of 2 or 3, and get them to pray together each week.

Make sure that you include time for prayers in each session: for without God making and sustaining preachers nothing will happen! Take time to pray for the church, for the ministry of the word in the church, for those who preach, and for those in the training program.

SOME USEFUL MATERIAL

i. Text and application.

A common pattern is to preach the sermon, then add the application.

Text	Today
1	Application
2	
3	
→	

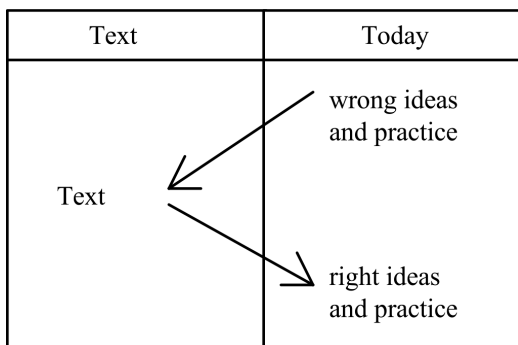
This is not a bad approach, but it has some drawbacks. If used every week, it will become boring; it encourages people to slumber for most of the sermon, and wake up for the last five minutes; and if the preacher runs out of time, then the application is rushed or left out.

Another way to preach is to apply the points of the sermon on the way through.

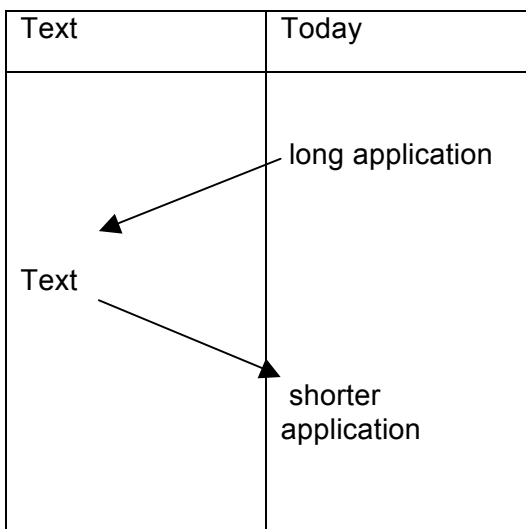
Text	Today
1 →	application
2 →	application
3 →	application
summary →	summary

This encourages people to listen, and each relevant application prompts close attention to the next point from the text.

Another way of preaching is to begin with the confusion and misunderstanding that surround us today on the subject of the text, go to the text for the truth, and then apply the truth to the congregation.



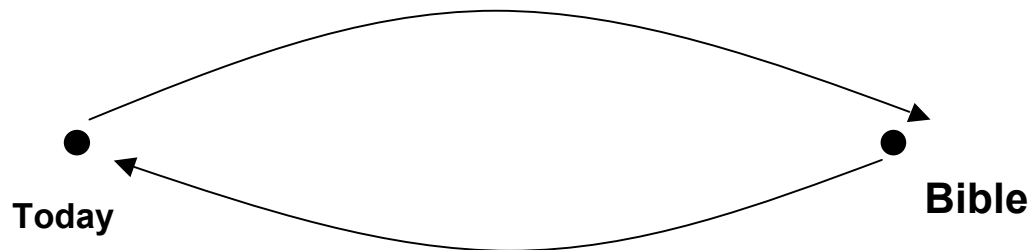
Another way to preach is to put the Application at the start of the sermon, then explain the text that supports the Application, and then repeat the Application briefly at the end.



Remember – don't use the same pattern again and again!

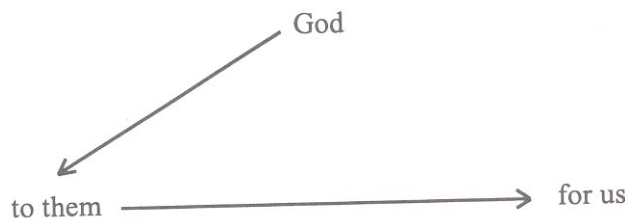
ii. 'To them', 'for us'

Read 1 Corinthians 10: 1-13. Notice the theme of 'to them...for us.'
 This is a good way of thinking about the Bible. For every time we read and preach the Bible we have to travel back to the text, and then back to our world and ourselves.



So preachers need to know the world of the Bible and the world of their hearers so well, that they can help their hearers move to the world of the Bible, and then return from the Bible-world to their own world again.

This is because the Bible was written 'to them, for us.' It is not directly addressed to us. Though God intended us to hear it, he caused it to be written to another people at another time, and then preserved it for us.



So at some stage in the sermon, we will need to help our hearers make a journey, to Galilee, Corinth, Colossae, or Patmos in the 1st Century AD, or to Sinai, Moab, Samaria, Jerusalem, Babylon or Egypt in the centuries before Christ. This is a journey to a different time, a different place, a different context, a different culture, a different place in Salvation History, and a different place in the unfolding Biblical Theology of the Scriptures. When we have heard the message of the Bible to those people of that time and place, then we are ready to return to our own world, and apply what we have learnt, while remaining aware of the significance of the journey.

God communicates to us in the Bible, but as the secondary receivers of his words. The primary receivers were the people to whom and for whom the original words were spoken or written down. All subsequent readers and hearers have had to realize that they are the secondary receivers, and so they need to understand what was intended for the primary receivers, and then transpose that meaning to themselves.

This was an issue for the first readers of the Bible. The church at Rome was the primary receiver of Paul's letter to the Romans, but the secondary received of his letter to Galatians. And when the church at Corinth received Paul's first letter, they were the primary receivers. But by the time they received Paul's second letter, they were the secondary receivers of the first letter, because the situation had changed: they had to imagine themselves back into their previous situation to understand who to apply the first letter again in different circumstances!

We often use a short-cut, when we say that the Bible is God's word to us. It is, but only as we read it as firstly God's words to others. This is doubly important when reading the Old Testament; but still important when reading the New. For even Christians in New Testament times had to understand that the Old Testament was firstly addressed to God's people in old covenant times, and not take it as direct instructions for themselves. But when they read New Testament books that were not directly and immediately addressed to them, they still had to engage in the same exercise.

This sounds complicated, but even children learn this skill when they read stories of different places, different people, and different times.

We can economise our effort by failing to take our hearers to the world of the Bible, and preaching our own best ideas. Or we can economise by taking them to the world of Bible, and leaving them there. This is false economy, because our message is then either trivial, or irrelevant. Every Biblical sermon involves these two journeys, to hear what God said 'to them,' and then to hear how what it means 'for us.'

Sometimes we try to collapse the gap between 'them' and 'us', by imagining ourselves into the Bible text. The difficulty with this is that we tend to import our own presuppositions, fears, hopes, feelings and experiences into the text, and so obscure what is in the text. Of course, we should make the best sense we can of what is in the text in the light of our own experience, but we still need to be aware of the essential gap between ourselves and the text. We exercise the same self-discipline and awareness of that gap when we talk with other people today. We use our experience to help us understand them, but we must not read our experience into them, or we never really meet them, and they feel rightly misunderstood.

Because we are not the original first receivers of the Bible, we need to exercise pastoral intelligence in know which messages of the Bible are presently and immediately relevant to us and which are not.

Here are some exercises on how going back to the original context will help us get more from the text. Get groups to study John 15: 1-11, Luke 15, Revelation 3:14-22, to see how the original context is the key to its meaning.

iii. Applying the Bible to the church.

Much evangelical preaching is addressed to individuals. However, the Bible is addressed to the people of God, and preaching is a ministry which is addressed to the people of God. So both the message and medium should focus on the church, the congregation.

Good home group and bible study leaders are well experienced in assessing the pastoral needs of individuals: their strengths, weaknesses, sins, gifts, relationships, ministry opportunities and spiritual potential. Preachers have to learn to apply the same skills to the congregation. This needs to be done for the sake of the congregation. It also needs to be done for the sake of the individual members of the congregation.

Evangelicalism and contemporary society are so irredeemably individualistic that it is very difficult for preachers to allow corporate sin or corporate repentance in their world-view, and therefore difficult for them to apply their sermon to the congregation as a whole.

Part of the problem is that when we read the Bible it is not always obvious when 'you' means an individual, and when 'you' means a group. The context will answer this question.

Corporate strengths and gifts.

Churches can have shared strengths. These might include generosity, patience, welcoming newcomers, evangelism, love for Christ, desire to learn from the Bible, mutual encouragement.

Many blessings will flow from these strengths:

- Those who have these strengths in these areas will be greatly encouraged.
- Anyone who visits the church will be encouraged by the shared strength, and it will be obvious to them.
- New Christians and new members of the church will naturally adopt these strengths.
- Those who have particular gifts will be encouraged to use them.
- The church will encourage itself to grow in this strength as it sees God's blessing in its present life.
- Other churches will be challenged to grow in the same strength.
- Those who leave the church to go to other churches will take the strength with them, and may be able to encourage the church they join to grow in the same strength.

Read 1 Thessalonians and Revelation 2. What are the strengths of these churches, and what is God's response to these strengths?

Corporate sins or ‘body sins’ of a congregation

[here ‘corporate’ means of the body of Christ, not ‘corporate’ as in big business].

This includes sins that are shared by the congregation, and that they will not allow to be challenged. It includes sins of individuals that the congregation does not rebuke or correct. Body sins are the most serious sins, because they are sins which are most universal, and sins which affect all individuals, either because they allow individuals to commit these sins, or because they discourage individuals who do not commit these sins.

These sins might be gossip, failure to evangelise, failure to welcome newcomers, selfishness, prayerlessness, or indifference to the honour of Christ or the teaching of the Bible.

Let’s think what happens if any of these are prevalent in a congregation:

- The leaders must be colluding in the sin, failing to challenge, failing to provide leadership. So the leaders are leading the congregation to commit the sin.
- The mood of the congregation is that those who commit this sin are not corrected either corporately or privately. It is a publicly acceptable sin.
- Most of the congregation will be committing the sin in the shared activities of the church.
- Most of the congregation will also be committing the sin in their individual lives.
- Those who do not commit the sin will be increasingly discouraged, as they see that the majority commit the sin, get away with it, are not challenged, and do not repent.
- New converts will automatically adopt the sin for themselves as part of the normal Christian life, or they will react against it and leave the church or give up Christianity.
- Those who have a special gift that is negated by the sin will be discouraged. For example, gifted evangelists will be discouraged if the church is not committed to evangelism, gifted encouragers will be discouraged if there is lots of gossip, gifted pray-ers will be discouraged in a prayerless church.

In general, churches don’t mind preachers rebuking individual sins: they tend to object to preachers who rebuke corporate or body sins.

There are books of the Bible that are addressed to individuals. But in the case of Luke and Acts, this is a literary device designed to gain a wider readership. In the case of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, the main

recipients are the named leaders: however each letter ends with a greeting of grace to the church. Even Philemon is addressed to the church, see 1:2.

Here are some exercises to help potential preachers to begin to think this way. You could get three small groups to work in two of these, and then report back to the others.

- a. Read Daniel 9:1-19. What were the sins that Daniel confessed, and who committed them? Read 2 John. What were the strengths of the church, and what were its sins?
- b. Read Haggai 1:1-2:9. What were the sins of the people, and how should they repent? Read Revelation 3. What were the strengths of the three churches, and what were their sins?
- c. Read 1 Peter 1:1-2:10. What was Peter's message for the churches? Read 1 Corinthians 1. What was the sin which Paul rebukes, and how did he show that it was wrong?

It would be appropriate for the minister to talk about the current body sins of the church, and how they are being tackled in the sermons. The members of the preaching program might have some ideas as well! This session should end with prayers for the church.