THE ART OF
PREACHING
PART 3 – PART 7
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PRACTICAL MINISTRY : THE ART OF PREACHING

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Part Three
CONSTRUCTING THE MESSAGE

In the introductory section of this study guide the point was made that the Bible places the main emphasis on the preacher and the message rather than on the technical construction of the sermon. However, there is much to be said for putting together a structure for a message as long as we do not bind ourselves to it and make it rigid and inflexible.

A good rule to follow is to prepare as if there is no Holy Spirit, and then preach as if there are no notes and only the Holy Spirit!

GOOD SERMON CONSTRUCTION WILL DO THE FOLLOWING FOR US:

1. Help us to keep to the main message

Pruning away irrelevant points will prevent us rambling all over the place. Remember we are trying to get God’s message and truth across, not demonstrating to the people how much we know! Don’t try and say everything you know on a particular subject - keep it simple and to the point, you don’t need to expound on every point of the Bible in one message!

One of the problems we face, when we do research, is we get excited about all the other related things we discover and want to include them in the sermon. A common mistake made by inexperienced preachers is that they overload the message with information and Bible verses. The main message is obscured and the people get indigestion with the huge variety served up for them!

An exception to the above will be when you are teaching on a subject, preaching through a book or a passage etc.
2. Enable the message to progress logically

Logical progression is important. I.e. each point building upon and following the previous one. This makes more sense to the hearer. It is extremely difficult to follow and understand a preacher who is making a whole lot of comments and statements that do not seem to go together.

What would you make of the following?: “Jesus walked on the water ...... Elijah was a powerful prophet!”

Making unrelated comments is one of the most common weaknesses most preachers have. We often assume too much in terms of what people know and how they think. We assume they will be able to make the logical connection when they cannot.

3. Help us to keep the sermon balanced

Therefore we will avoid giving more time to the less important issues and ending up failing to give sufficient time to the main message.

4. Help us to plan to bring the sermon to a point where we can challenge people to make a decision

We obviously build up to a point of challenge with the message we preach, and want our hearers to make a decision concerning the truth they have heard. We will cover this in more detail later.
A WELL-CONSTRUCTED SERMON WILL CONTAIN THE FOLLOWING:

1. Introduction
2. Body
3. Conclusion

1. Introduction

The introduction must introduce the BODY of our message, leading up to the theme of the message. The introduction prepares the ground, explaining the relevance of the theme.

An introduction should:

- Be simple
- Be pertinent
- Be courteous
- Catch the attention of your hearers
- Unfold the context and point of your message
- Not be distracting
- Not be pure entertainment and have no relevance to your theme
- Connect with your audience personally.
- Make them want to hear your main point / theme before you actually tell it to them.
- Say the main point/theme and what specifically you are going to tell them today.¹

A good idea is to prepare the introduction last, once you know your theme, and the challenge you want to leave your hearers with.

2. Body

This constitutes the main part of your message, centering on your theme, and

¹ These last points are from the book How to Preach for a Change by Terran Williams, available at www.commonground.co.za.
containing three or four main points.

There are certain principles of arrangement:

1. Explanation and argument come before persuasion and appeal. Always base your appeal on a fact you have already explained, and, of course, it needs to be a biblical principle.

2. There should be a build-up in your message. Work from your weaker, less impactful points to your stronger, impactful points. I.e. your sermon should build up to a climax. A sermon should not becoming a muttering or rambling on.

3. The people should understand the theme or main point of the message. They should see the value of what you are saying; it should have purpose; it should have relevance; and it should have easily understood practical application. Your listeners should know what to do about what they have heard! Always build a bridge from the “known” (the readily perceived) to the unknown (the point you want them to grasp).

You may be preaching a one-point or a multi-point message. Most of the time, you will probably preach a multi-point message, which means that within your body you would have several sub-points, and each of these you can break down into smaller bits. Each sub-point should include:

1. Reference(s) to Scripture
2. An application.

3. Conclusion

For your conclusion, do the following:

- Repeat what you stated in the introduction (your build-up).
- Repeat the main theme of the message.
- Repeat the sub-points made (each application or each point within the preach – remember, this is a summary!).
- End it off with one big application and make it inspiring.

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2 See Part Five: Other Types of Sermons for more on a one-point message.
Notice the basic flow in your message:
1. You make them want to hear what you have to say before you say it.
2. You tell them what you are going to say.
3. You tell it to them (this is the bulk of the message).
4. You tell them what you just said.

Now let’s delve into more detail.

**CONSTRUCTING THE MOST COMMON SERMON: A MULTI-POINT MESSAGE**

There are six phases in the preparation of a message’s content. Here is a suggested process of preparing the message’s content:

1. **Palm**: What is your main point / theme?
2. **Fingers**: What are your subpoints?
3. **Two creases in each finger**: for each point:
   a. **First crease**: How will you show that this subpoint is from the Word?
   b. **Second crease**: How will you amplify and apply this subpoint to our lives now?
4. **Skin between fingers**: How will I transition from subpoint to subpoint without losing people?
5. **Wrist**: How will I, in the introduction, make people want to listen to me, and want to hear what I am about to tell them?
6. **Knuckle and punch**: How will I bring this all together, and give that final inspiration?

Now let’s look at how to do each of these.

**1. Phase one: Palm: What is your main point / theme?**

Every message needs one main point / theme. People need to be able to remember what you spoke on and so your message needs to have focus.

It’s so important to dig until you find this main point / theme. It gives the message its

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3 The following is taken, with some slight adjustments, from the book How to Preach for a Change by Terran Williams, available at www.commonground.co.za.
focus. Everything that is said in the entire message needs to develop and support that single point / theme.

The main point of a single-text message

Single-text messages can sometimes be difficult when it comes to having a main point, because the scriptures attend to several things at once in a passage. When this is the case you can usually choose just part of the chapter, and say, ‘You can read the rest of the chapter at home.’

If however you get to choose your own single-section of the Bible to preach from, you can then choose one that deals with just one main theme / point. The main point needs to be the most basic summary of that text.

Here are some examples of main themes / points when looking at various Bible passages:

- Luke 12:22-34: ‘Seek first God’s will, and you will experience God’s care’

(Look at the texts and see if these are appropriate main points for each text.)

The main point / theme of a multi-text, topical message

When doing a topical message you will also need a main point / theme that holds it all together. It may be a simple theme like worship, humility, serving etc.

For example you may say in your message: ‘I want to speak to you today about personal prayer / being filled with the Spirit / how to restore a broken relationship / have a good marriage etc.’
But beware of trying to cover too much ground when you choose a theme. For example, you could give one message on ‘What is prayer?’ Another on ‘Why pray?’ Another on ‘What makes it hard to pray?’ And another on ‘How to pray.’ Sometimes you can try do all in one go, but beware of information overload. A singularly focused message is more powerful.

Choose just one main point / theme in any message. And let everything develop that point.

2. Phase two: Fingers: What are your subpoints?

Choosing subpoints for a multiple-text, topical message. If you were talking about the things that delight God, you would think of dividing it up as such:

1. We love him above all
2. We trust him most of all
3. We obey him first of all
4. We praise him always

And each of these would have a base in a verse.

Choosing subpoints for a single-text message

One way to find subpoints for a single-text message is to cut and paste the text you’re speaking on from the Internet (such as www.biblegateway.com/versions) into a document. Then on the computer screen you can separate (with a few lines of space in between) the Scripture subsections that each have a different thought. You can then give each separate section a summarising heading.

This heading is the first movement towards identifying the subpoints. You can then try to connect the summarising heading to the main point / theme.

So for example look at Galatians 1. Let’s say the topic is “Freedom”. You might battle to find an integrating main point. But you could pick out three insights into freedom
from this text and make these the subpoints:
• vs 1-5: Freedom happens when we believe the message of freedom
• vs 6-10: Freedom dwindles when we begin to doubt the message of freedom.
• vs 11-24: Freedom explodes as we encounter the Liberator himself.

(A critical comment on these subpoints: The wording of the subpoints is unusually long, but you’re holding them together around a single theme - in this case the theme of freedom. But as a general rule the wording should be as short and simple as possible.)

Make the wording of the subpoint immediately applicable to our lives, usually even putting it in the imperative tense. The temptation is to use subpoints that simply describe the text, and then try to apply it to our lives as you speak about the subpoint.

An example of simply describing the text is as follows:

The subpoints of Luke 15:3-7, if you just described the text, would be:
• vs 3-4 – The good shepherd went looking for the lost sheep
• vs 5-6 – The good shepherd celebrated the finding of the sheep
• vs 7 – Even the angels celebrated

But here is a far better way to make each point: make it immediately applicable to the lives of your hearers. Here is a better way of creating subpoints for Luke 15:3-7:
• vs 3-4 - Commit to go after the lost
• vs 5-6 – Expect to experience the ultimate joy
• vs 7 – Remember all heaven applauds your efforts

Notice that these subpoints are applicable to our lives now. Notice also that they are not descriptive in tense, but imperative - they tell us to do something. It’s true that the subpoints made in the effective example would have been applications mentioned within the subpoints of the ineffective example. But rather put the application in the subpoint itself. That way the point will have greater impact, and the application will be more memorable. Besides, people are more likely to remember headings than information under a heading.

Whenever possible make the subpoints in the form of an imperative, as opposed to a
mere description. So for example:

• ‘Confess your sins’ is better than ‘Confessing our sins is good’
• ‘Realise God will never leave you’ is better than ‘God will never leave you’
• ‘Demonstrate the shepherd’s heart’ is better than ‘We should reflect God’s shepherd heart’

Sometimes the subpoint will be something they need to do, and sometimes it will be something they need to know. When it’s the latter, start your subpoints with verbs such as “discover”, “understand”, “realise”, “get a revelation of”, “know”, and “remember”. Make sure that each subpoint is in the same tense and has a similar feel to the other subpoints.

**An example of not doing this would be: (from Matthew 5:13-16)**

- Subpoint one: We should be salty.
- Subpoint two: Be the light of the world.
- Subpoint three: Making a difference is a great privilege.

Notice that they don’t feel similar, and they are in different tenses, and therefore not so effectively stated.

A more effective wording would be:

- Subpoint one: Salt the earth.
- Subpoint two: Light the world.
- Subpoint three: Make a difference.

Notice that they are similar in length and feel. And they are all in the imperative tense.

Sometimes, but try to avoid this, topical messages can have sub-subpoints. The most common way that this happens is if you make the subpoints themselves into questions (which themselves are answered by some sub-subpoints).

For example, if you were speaking on worship your three points could be:

- What is worship?
- Why worship? (with three reasons given as sub-subpoints)
- How to worship? (with four practical tips as sub-subpoints)
Using the three questions of ‘what’, ‘why’ and ‘how’ as the three subpoints help you with the flow and arrangement of the content. These talks can really dazzle people, but the information overload can undermine the long lasting effectiveness of the message.

The goal of preaching should not be to impress people, but to impact them. So as a general rule, rather choose just one question per message. In other words, the above message could rather be done as a series of three talks, with each talk answering just one question. If you only get to speak once, choose just one question to answer.

3. Phase three: Two creases in each finger
(The two subsections of each subpoint)

For every subpoint you make you will generally have two parts to it.
1. You will show how this subpoint comes from a specific verse(s) in the Bible.
2. You will amplify the subpoint and apply it to our lives now.

First crease: How will you show that this subpoint is from the Word?

Charles Colson writes, ‘The only way you can speak for God with certainty is to speak from the Bible.’ Henry C. Fish said, ‘Preachers who saturate their messages with the Word of God never wear out.’

You have already given the point, which immediately gives it the application edge. Now you read and explain the Scripture verses themselves, and show how you got to this application.

Focus on bringing the specific verse(s) to light. Open them up. Explain the words or phrases that are hard to understand. People need to understand that you are getting this from God’s Word. This is not your opinion. Engage them with the text. Bring it to life. Let people feel the wisdom and the power and the clarity that flow from specific verses in the Bible. Bring the story to life if it is a narrative section; speak to people’s imaginations not just their minds.
**Second crease: How will you amplify and apply this subpoint to our lives now?**

Thomas Manto wrote, ‘Teaching what God’s Word says is like drawing the bow, but calling people to apply the truth to their life is like actually hitting the mark.’ It’s not enough to explain a truth from God’s Word and not encourage, equip, ask or tell people to apply it to their lives.

Once you have looked at the specific Scripture(s), you need to amplify and apply the subpoint to our lives. Here are seven possible ways that you can amplify and apply the subpoint to our lives:

- **Be perspicuous (which, ironically, means ‘be clear’)**
  You could say the subpoint again in other words. Don’t underestimate the power of repetition, especially repetition that says the same thing again and again but in different words. Another way to be clear is to say what you don’t mean by this subpoint.

- **Be persuasive**
  If you have some doubt that people will believe or accept this subpoint on the basis of God’s Word alone, persuade them that it is so. Use statistics, or personal stories, or lines of logic that remove all doubt that God’s Word is right about this.

- **Be pictorial**
  You could use a Bible story or analogy or object lesson or visual that illustrates this subpoint in picture form. Truth in picture form seems to lodge deeper in a person than truth in propositional or factual form. So give them a mental picture that illustrates the subpoint.

- **Be practical**
  You could suggest one or two very specific ways we can apply this to our lives this week.

- **Be provocative**
  You could ask them questions like: Do you get this? Do you realise how important it is that we actually do this, and not just hear about it? Does this apply to you? What stops you from believing this? Doing this?
• Be personal
You could tell a personal story of how you have either battled to believe or do this personally, or of how you got it right and how positive the experience was. Interestingly, nothing seems to empower people to do what you’re saying, quite like you vulnerably admitting that you have at times failed in doing this.

• Be prophetic
You could try and capture the prophetic urgency of this, saying something like, ‘Please hear me. I believe with all my heart that this is what God is saying to you and me. You are not here today by accident. God is speaking to us now through his Word. You and I must make the adjustments in our lives. His grace is here to help us.’

Do not rush through your subpoint. You need to give each one sufficient time for the Holy Spirit to really massage it into the minds and hearts of the people.

That is why, as a general rule, it is not good to have more than three of four subpoints.

4. Phase four: Skin between fingers: How to transition from subpoint to subpoint without losing people

One of the most common mistakes in preaching is to change from one subpoint to another, but to do it too quickly, or without sufficient clarity so that some people do not understand that the previous subpoint has ended, and the next has started. This can be a frustrating experience for hearers since they have lost track of where you are.

The best way to avoid this is to be very clear that one subpoint is ending, and the next is starting. So at the end of every subpoint, slow down, take a breath and say something to the effect of, ‘So that brings us to the next thought.’

To come back to the analogy of the fingers on the hand: the way to get from one finger to the next is to come back to the palm (the main point of the whole message) and to the skin that joins one finger to the next. That means that you must be sure to repeat the main point or theme of the message again. And perhaps repeat the subpoints already stated. Here is an example:
‘So the first way to protect our church is to ‘focus on what we have in common’. And the thought we’ve just looked at is ‘1) Be realistic in your expectations’. That brings us to the second way that we can protect our church: ‘2) Choose to encourage rather than criticise.’”

That may sound like a lot of words, but they are vital. Remember that we are trying to make a singular point (in this case protect our church) and we are trying to help people follow very clearly our flow of thought and especially to remember the subpoints that develop the main point. They also give a person time to change mental gear (which takes a good ten seconds) from one subpoint to the next. Besides, repetition is very effective to really impress a message upon your hearers.

5. Phase five: Wrist: How to, in the introduction, make people want to listen to you and want to hear what you are about to tell them

You’ll notice this is last because, as above, it’s recommended you prepare your introduction last. Figure out what you want to say and then, at this point, you can figure out how you want them to hear it.

6. Phase six: Knuckle and punch: How will I bring this all together, and give that final inspiration?

This is the conclusion. This should bring the message to an end, and NOT be another message in itself! We must not “waffle” on ad infinitum, because many a good message can easily lose impact with the hearers at this point.

It has four parts, the first three being really brief.

1. Briefly repeat your build-up in your introduction.

2. Then repeat your main point / theme.

3. Then repeat your subpoints. (Don’t introduce any new points! You will lose people.) For example: you could say ‘Let me wrap up. We all put something first in our lives, but only Jesus is worthy of being first. He is the only one who won’t ultimately disappoint
us. That’s why God has spoken to us today in his Word and has said, ‘Put Jesus first.’
And the way we put him first is to 1) Love him more than family, 2) Love him more than
our independence and 3) Love him more than comfort.’

This is a ‘punchy’ moment because you pull your whole message together. It enables
people to feel much like they’ve been watching an artist sketch something line by
line, and then once the artist is finished, they step back and get to look at the whole
picture with one view.

4. Land with something inspiring.
Sometimes you don’t need to land with more inspiration, because the message and its
punch is already so powerful. But if you have an inspiring way of landing that captures
the main point / theme it will add even more. But make sure that it’s the best story
that comes out in the message. Save the best for last.

Here are two things that you could do:
1. Tell an inspiring true story of someone that somehow relates to this theme.
2. Cast vision for the church saying, ‘Can you imagine what kind of church we will
   be if we take God seriously, and actually do what he is saying. Families will be
   stronger. So will marriages. Our city will feel the benefits of. God himself will be
   deeply enthralled. And we will find real joy.’

5. Your final application / appeal
Think of what kind of application you want. For example, salvation, healing? Make
your application appropriate – you may want to move into a time of ministry and
prayer here, or make an appeal that people put their faith in Jesus for the first time.

TIPS, TRICKS & TECHNIQUES

Brainstorming

You will eventually develop your own way of preparing and constructing a sermon,
but the following method may be helpful:

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4 This section is mostly inspired by Leon van Daele’s original notes on preaching.
When you feel you have God’s message or subject, take a sheet of paper and write down everything that comes to mind (even if the thoughts and points are not in progressive order) before you do any research on the matter. You will often find that that will contain the main message! This is referred to in some circles as “brainstorming”.

The next step is to write out in one simple sentence the main theme or message you believe God wants you to share with the people. Keep it before you as you prepare. It will help you to prune your material and keep your sermon as simple and as focused as possible.

Look at your brainstorm sheet, and see if you can work out an outline from what you have. You may have to give this some thought and add headings and points. You now have a framework for your message. Keep it next to you while you do some research adding the material you select under the relevant headings. If you can’t fit it in, ask yourself if it is really necessary, no matter how wonderful and exciting it seems!

**Using illustrations**

It’s worth talking about how to use illustrations properly as this can often be done in an unhelpful way.

An illustration is a story, an analogy from nature, something humorous, (e.g. an anecdote), a testimony, quotation, poem or song which illustrates a point in a sermon.

Illustrations need to bring illumination and refreshment to your message, as windows bring light and fresh air to a stuffy room.

Jesus is the master at the use of illustrations. Some examples are: -

Matthew 5:1-12, “You are the salt of the earth, and the light of the world”
Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus using the analogy of building using good foundations.

Right throughout His ministry Jesus used illustrations to teach His message, many in the form of parables. This corresponds with human psychology, for we think in images, and they assist in stressing, explaining and making a point stick.
Because illustrations have been called the windows of a sermon, an appropriate illustration will often throw light on a difficult point. The audience may find a point difficult to comprehend or apply, until the preacher illustrates his reasoning with a simple story.

The use of illustrations is therefore invaluable when preaching. Illustrations stimulate the imagination of the listener and impress the sermon on their mind. It’s true to say that an illustration is often remembered long after the actual sermon is forgotten.

The danger of using illustrations is that they might take up too much of the sermon itself. Also some illustrations are “old favourites” (be they your own or well-known illustrations) and you must avoid inserting them everywhere, for they will lose their impact and become meaningless.

Also, some preachers fall into the snare of telling incidents which they have supposedly experienced themselves, when in fact they are simply exercising a vivid imagination. A congregation will never trust the word of a man who is known to exaggerate.

It is perfectly correct though to tell a story which is imaginary, if the audience knows that it is not a true story. You could begin such a story with the words, “suppose...”, or “let us imagine...”. There is no end to such illustrations.

The sources from which sermon illustrations may be drawn are much the same as for the introduction and conclusion. History will often provide interesting stories to throw light on a message. Life itself is rich with illustration material. Other sources are the Bible itself, literature, the daily newspaper, magazines, tracts, good poetry, hymns, and the saying of famous men.

Good ground rules for an illustration are:
• An illustration should always be connected to the sermon.
• The illustration should always explain the point you are making.
• An illustration should present the Truth in a life situation.

Different kinds of illustrations:

Story
An example of this is found in Luke 15, the story of the Good Samaritan.
Analogy
When Jesus said, “I am the door”, it throws light on what He is teaching.

Testimony
A true life account in an individual’s life. Paul the apostle constantly used his testimony in one form or the other to bring home truth. We need to be prepared to use ours too. But beware of the big “I” - this isn’t about you!

Humorous anecdote
This can be valuable, but must not be forced into the sermon. Humour puts people at ease, helps them to relax and apply the truth of your message. Humour must operate under the law of love. Never use humour to be disrespectful to others or to be coarse. It is helpful if your humour points at yourself first. The use of puns is also good.

Poetry, songs and prose
These help us to be contemporary but must not be overdone.

Quotations
These are valuable if they are appropriate, and if they illustrate the theme. Do not use quotations just to show off how well read you are! Always give credit to the one you have quoted.

Scripture
Every main doctrine in the Bible can be an illustration. There are many wonderful stories we can quote from the Old Testament.

Beware of the following when you use illustrations:

Length
If your illustration is too long it can detract from your main message.

Forcing
Forced illustrations are not effective.

Coarse, cheap or misleading
We represent God in the pulpit.
Lying
Even the slightest bit of exaggeration is a lie! Check your facts and represent the truth well!

Every preacher must develop their own style and technique. Never try to copy and be someone else! That is not God’s way. We must become the unique workmanship of His hands.

On the other hand, take note of the suggestions made by others as you read, avoid the pitfalls and apply the good ones. Watch how other preachers preach, and learn from them. Observe the many varied techniques they use. Provide a background from which the Holy Spirit can draw to shape and mould your own ministry.
2 Timothy 4:1 – 5

1 I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. 3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. 5 As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

There is a necessity for us to preach the Word of God, and in doing this we must be masters of our craft. Not only in delivery, but in preparation too. Expository preaching is the challenge for all preachers to discipline themselves and preach precisely what the Word of God says.

There is a lack in the Church of truly great preaching. There are very few preachers today who are expository preachers, yet it is so vitally important. The preacher must become the mouthpiece of his text, opening it up and applying it as the infallible Word of God, nothing less and nothing more. The text needs to speak to people.

Most of our preaching should be expository preaching, where we are expounding a book, a chapter or passage. When we stick to this discipline we will invariably cover the whole counsel of God and not just our favourite subjects. This is a spiritually healthy approach and presents the authority of God’s Word foremost.

Why expository preaching?

1. Christ is the incarnation of truth (John 1:14), and our job as preachers is to present Christ.
2. Truth sets free. (John 8:32).
3. Our authority is not in what we say, but in what Scripture says.
4. We refute error by preaching truth.
6. God confirms the preaching of His word with signs following, and not our ideas or thoughts (Mark 16:20).
8. When we preach the revelation of God’s word, we prepare the Bride of Christ for the Bridegroom who is coming, (Ephesians 5:26). Therefore, we are preparing for eternity.
9. We are servants of God’s purpose as contained in His word.

Expository preaching in Scripture:

Nehemiah 8 : 1 - 8

1And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel. 2So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. 3And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. 4And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. 5And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. 6And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

7Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabah, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. 8They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.
Let’s go through this passage verse by verse:

**v2** Our objective in expository preaching is understanding.

**v3** Reading the word is an absolute priority. (1 Timothy 4:13)
   The people were attentative, and it is our job as expositors of God’s Word to keep their attention!

**v4-5** There was respect for the Word of God.

**v4** God’s Word was elevated.

**v6** The people praised and thanked God for the word (and not for a good sermon or performance).

**v7** The leaders helped the people understand the word.

**v8** The leaders read the Word clearly and gave the sense or meaning, so that the people understood the word.


**v27** interpreted (ESV)
   explained (NIV)
   expounded (KJV)

Greek, ‘diërmeneuo’ meaning, to unfold the meaning of what is said, to translate into one’s native language, and to do it thoroughly!

**v32** opened the scriptures

**v45** Greek, ‘dianoigo’ meaning, Plato – ‘to open by dividing or drawing asunder, to open thoroughly what has been closed’, a male (first born) opening the womb, to restore or give hearing, to open the sense of the scriptures explaining them, to open the mind of one causing him to understand a thing, to open one’s soul, i.e. to rouse in one the faculty of understanding or the desire of learning, to open up completely and thoroughly.

**2 Timothy 2 : 15**

*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.*

**v15** The word “handling” above in Greek is ‘orthotomos’ meaning “cutting straight” – to cut straight or proceed by straight paths, to hold a straight course. The equivalent of doing right. To handle aright. To teach the truth correctly and directly. To cut new veins in mining. To make something new, introduce new things, make innovations or changes.
2 Timothy 4:1-5

1 I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. 3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. 5 As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

The use of God's Word in expository preaching.

- Preach the word
- Be prepared in season and out of season
- Correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction
- Sound doctrine
- Keep your head in all situations
- Endure hardship
- Do the work of an evangelist
- Discharge all the duties of your ministry

2 Timothy 3:16 - 17

16 All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Our authority is that when Scripture speaks, God speaks. As preachers, we are to allow the Scriptures to speak, and rely on the authority God has given us.

How do we prepare for expository preaching?

The discipline of expository preaching is the correct hermeneutical study (interpretation) of Scripture.

The Holy Spirit is the interpreter

The Holy Spirit is introduced to us by Jesus as the Spirit of truth, who will illuminate truth. (John 14, 16.)
Read the text/passage/chapter/book

• Read the scripture over many times. F.F Bruce, a renowned Bible commentator, stated that before he dared write a commentary on any portion of Scripture he read it over a hundred times!
• Use a few different translations, and compare them to each other.
• Make notes asking yourself what the scripture is saying.
• Read the context of the passage of scripture you are studying.

Use good hermeneutics

Follow the basics of hermeneutics (interpretation) when trying to find out the meaning of a passage of scripture:

• Structures and idioms of the Biblical language
• Context
• Word origins
• Culture
• Historical setting
• Geographical conditions
• Compare texts, using texts to interpret texts
• The type of literature, e.g. literal, symbolic, poetic, historic narrative, Gospels, epistles etc.

The purpose is to clearly be able to define the application of the text today. I.e. what it was meant to say to us here and now?

Make proper use of good reference books

These should assist us in our study of the text and not skew our study or persuade us in an interpretation, especially when it comes to Biblical commentaries.

Some of the study aids necessary are:

• A concordance
• Commentaries – choose commentaries wisely; check the author’s background and reason for writing the commentary. Some commentaries are very verbose and technical, complicating our understanding of Scripture. Use commentaries as a supplementary help. Remember the commentary is an educated opinion, and we want to base our interpretation more on the source than on the opinion. Never use a commentary to prove a point.
• Greek and Hebrew lexicons
• Bible dictionaries
• Word study dictionaries
• If possible – Bible study software like e-Sword, Logos, Accordance, OliveTree
• There are also online Bible study environments (bible.org; biblegateway.com; biblehub.com)

The subject of the text
The key issue is to extract the subject or subjects out of the text, inspired by the Holy Spirit. Then, out of the subject or subjects will come your message you will expound/preach. I.e. the message we believe God is saying to the congregation through that scripture.

Follow a good homiletic flow
In constructing the sermon, follow good homiletic principles, building up to the challenge of that passage of scripture. Include illustrations and real life examples that will help the message, and not distract. Each message we prepare and preach is an incarnation of Jesus Christ. The Gospel message needs to come through strongly, for no message can be preached without reference to the centrality of Christ. He is our authority.

Pray
We need to spend an equal amount of time praying over our message as we do preparing our message.

Michael Eaton on expository preaching

This is Michael Eaton’s commentary on Peter’s sermon in Acts 2:14-41.

Note: The result of Peter’s sermon was three thousand salvations!

“This is a special kind of preaching. It is very direct. Peter addresses them very personally. This is not ‘teaching’ which is very entertaining intellectually but has no impact upon anyone’s life. This preaching relates to an actual situation that is upon them. Peter has to give a few words of explanation (2:14-15) before he starts. The best preaching has an introduction in it which gets people thinking about the actual situation they are in. Verses 14-15 are Peter’s way of being sure he not giving some kind of detached unrelated lecture. He is speaking about the acts of God
that are taking place right where they are.

This preaching is not exclusively ‘bible-exposition’. I do not believe in ‘pure’ bible exposition; I only believe in applied bible exposition. Acts chapter 2 is the greatest example of what I mean by ‘applied’ bible-exposition. We talk about ‘expository preaching’, but the word ‘preaching’ is more important than the word ‘expository’. The ‘thunder and the lightening’ of preaching is more important than what can be put into print! Peter gives an exposition of Joel 2:1 (Acts 2:16-21 quotes Joel 2:28-32, and we may take it that Peter spent some time on what it meant; Luke is only summarising).

Notice what is not in the sermon. It is not about religion in general or politics. It is not even about the wind or the fire of the gift of tongues. As soon as he possibly can Peter gets to speaking about Jesus and appealing for living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. His words pierce the peoples’ heart. This is what the church is: a community of saved people among whom God acts in power.”

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5 Quoted from Michael Eaton’s commentary series on ‘Preaching Through the Bible: The Book of Acts’. 
In the previous section we covered expository preaching in detail since this is usually the most common kind of message we should deliver. We will now cover other kinds of sermons which are good to keep in our arsenal.

A preacher should know what he wants to say, how he should say it, and why he should say it. He should then be able to preach his sermon in a way which leaves his hearers in no doubt as to what his message was about.

Young Christians sometimes want to preach, but do not know how to go about preparing a suitable message. Their thinking is often muddled and this is reflected in the ideas they gather together for a sermon. When they have delivered their message the audience is left wondering what the fuss was all about, and what message, if any, the speaker wished to convey to them.

For you to approach the subject of homiletics clearly you need to understand the different types of sermons there are, for this will better enable you to know how to prepare accordingly. Sermons, especially those of maturer speakers, may not fit exactly into any one of these categories. They will nevertheless be seen to follow a similar pattern to what is suggested here.

All sermons may be classified under the following categories, with exception to the expository sermon which we have already covered. Each of these is prepared in a different way from the others. We will consider these types of sermons and the method of preparation in each case.
THE ONE-POINT SERMON

In Part Three we covered the structure of a typical sermon which we called the “multi-point” sermon. It’s worth now discussing the “one-point” sermon.

The idea of a one-point sermon is, as its name suggests, to make only one point. Everything in the message must support that one point. You may make use of illustrations, stories, analogies and Bible verses to make the one point, but the point is not to have any sub-points (if you do, they must only serve the one point, and would typically be about applying that one point).

The advantages of the one-point message are:

• People are more likely to be impacted by a message they remember. And they’re more likely to remember a message where less is said, a message that is built around just one point.
  • If people forget what you say within hours or days, do you really think you preached a life-changing message?
  • Many multi-point messages are forgotten within hours, sometimes minutes. Ecclesiastes 12:10,11 speaks of a teacher whose teachings are like nails. Think of a point as a nail. When you preach many points, each nail of truth is just shallowly hammered in. But if you preach one point, that nail has enough time and focus to get hammered deep into a person’s memory and life.
• If, in a message, you preach a great point and then a second great point, the two points work against each other’s impact.
  • When painting, a good practice is to paint one layer at a time. Let it dry before painting over it. In the same way, if we preach two points back to back, it is like painting a new layer before the other dries.
  • Jesus taught his disciples over a period of three years. He took it slowly, teaching one layer of truth at a time. And letting it dry before another layer of teaching was applied.
  • We only have heart-space for one noble thought at a time. If you preach two or more points there could be a real sense of overload.
  • Just because a person is taking notes does not mean that the truth has time

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6 The One Point Sermon section is taken, with some adjustments, from the book How to Preach for a Change by Terran Williams, available at www.commonground.co.za.
to sink in. And how many people read the notes later and then give each point time to sink in? Not many. It is the living message, not the notes of the message, that changes people.

- There are other Sundays or times to preach.
  - When you are preparing and you just have so much amazing stuff to say, remember that there are other Sundays coming. Fifty-two in a year in fact. That means that over ten years people will hear up to 500 messages. Take your time.
  - If you only get to preach once and not again, resist the temptation to shove a series of teachings into one message. After all, do you want a message with high impact or low impact? If you want to impact people deeply, don’t hammer too many nails in. They will all fall out. Choose one nail and hammer it in deeply instead, so that it doesn’t fall out.

**Building a one-point message:**

If you take the multi-point structure we outlined in Part Three, you can alter the structure for your one-point message.

It’s helpful to compare doing a One-Point Message to being a mountain guide taking people up and down a mountain. This picture best describes the energy-flow of the message.

**Phase One: Begin your message with connection and curiosity**
This is like the mountain guide trying to recruit some climbers to come up the mountain with him. They won’t do so until they feel safe with the guide and they feel drawn to the mountain with a curiosity and hunger.

**Phase Two: Scripture build-up to the One Point**
This is like the slow but steady meander up the mountain. For every step taken there is a growing anticipation of the summit. And all steps lead to the summit that they have yet to discover.

**Phase Three: Say and repeat the One Point**
This is the summit moment. Everyone arrives at the mountain top. And what a joy it is.
And what a “aha!” moment it is. The movement stops for a while as everyone pauses to ponder the beauty of it all, and just take it all in.

**Phase Four: Amplify the One Point**
The guide spends some time on the mountain peak showing people the different views from it. People become more familiar with it, and begin to see things from its perspective.

**Phase Five: Apply the One Point**
The team of climbers descend. While the journey up was loaded with curiosity, the journey down is more focused and has the momentum of descent. It energises people to move. The guide does not need to lure them down, just guide them down.

**Phase Six: Land with an inspiring story or an inspiring vision for our community related to the One Point.**
The team and the guide finish the trip. On the one hand there is a sense of gratifying after-glow and on the other hand there is an anticipation of how things will be different now that life has been seen in a fresh way from the mountain top.

**THE BIOGRAPHICAL SERMON**

This type of sermon deals with the life story of some Bible character e.g. of Moses. The preparation of such a sermon involves firstly reading what the Bible says about the man.

A good concordance will prove most helpful here. An Old Testament character is often mentioned at various stages of God’s revelation to man. The New Testament will sometimes throw light upon the men of the Old Testament era. For example, see what the writer to the Hebrews says of Moses. (Hebrews 3:2; 2:23-29.)

You should ask yourself the following questions while reading the relevant portions of scripture:

1. What kind of man was he?

7 The next sections are adapted from Leon van Daele’s original notes on preaching.
2. What mistakes did he make?
3. What dealings did he have with God?
4. What does God say of him?
5. What virtues did he have?
6. What effect did his life have on others; on his friends etc.
7. What important lessons can we learn from his life? Positive and negative.
8. How can we apply these lessons to people in our modern world?
9. **Most importantly:** What did God do here, what was God’s response, and what can we learn about Jesus from this passage?

There might also be other questions which suggest themselves to your mind. In a message such as this you should not only know enough about the man to be able to relate the story of his life, you should evaluate the man’s character in the light of God’s revelation. It is necessary to look beyond what is obvious, and find what the implications were, if any, of his words, actions, and thoughts in the context of his life as a man. This kind of thinking will help you understand the motives, or driving forces, which made him do the things he did. It will help you understand yourself and others.

It’s worth noting, however, that this requires careful thought and prayer. Narratives can be tricky and you must bring it back to the Gospel of Jesus, grace and faith. Look at how God acts and reacts more than the person so that you can exemplify God’s grace and goodness more than the cleverness, goodness or nastiness of the Bible character (that has the danger of making your preach a works-centred Gospel).

**THE TOPICAL SERMON**

This is also referred to as thematic preaching. A topical sermon deals with a subject such as the second coming of Christ, redemption, faith, or Christian discipleship; or topics such as addiction, violence or money. The most effective way of preparing such a sermon is to ask yourself questions about the subject you wish to discuss, and to find the answers to these questions in the Bible.

It’s important that your topic is not too broad otherwise you are not going to make an impact – there will be just too much information.
It is again important to use a good concordance for the purpose of quickly ascertaining what the Word of God teaches about the relevant topic.

Here are the questions you should ask:
Try to use only one or two key texts as a reference point. While you can obviously refer or quote other Scriptures as part of your message, you don’t need people to necessarily turn there. However, just rattling off a list of scriptures at the end of each of your points for people to read at home isn’t helpful – most people won’t read them at home and you haven’t really equipped them to read the Bible for themselves very well.

THE HISTORICAL-INCIDENT SERMON

Some incident recorded in the Word of God is closely analysed to determine what spiritual lessons are to be learned from it. These lessons are then brought to the attention of the listener.

Examples of this kind of sermon would be the spies going into the promised land (Numbers 13: 1 - 14) or the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1 - 15).

The value of such a sermon is that people love a story. The Bible is full of stories which are rich with spiritual instruction. Paul wrote that the incidents recorded in the Old Testament were “written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.” (1 Corinthians 10:11; Romans 15:4).

If you decide to prepare such a sermon you should be careful to faithfully present the facts of the incident. You should avoid spiritualising any details where there is no warrant for doing such a thing. This is particularly true when discussing the parables which Jesus told. The theme of an Historical-Incident sermon is the story itself.
A personal experience with God is an undeniable fact. The recounting of such an experience is often the means of winning the unsaved to Christ.

There is an old English proverb which says, “An ounce of experience is worth a ton of theory.” Paul sometimes gave his personal testimony when presented with an opportunity of preaching the gospel. (Acts 22, Acts 26; see also Galatians 1 and Acts 9:27.)

However, it’s worth noting that the recounting of an experience with God may become tiresome and ineffectual if the audience has heard it many times before. Furthermore, although it is wonderful to tell of what God did for you or someone else ten years ago, it is more wonderful to be able to tell of what God is doing today. There is a danger that the personal testimony might take the place of the preaching of the Word of God.

You should always be careful of unwittingly creating an impression in the minds of people that God only works in certain ways. God is a God of infinite variety. The experience of one Christian might differ considerably from that of another. Many Christians have spent agonising hours before God trying to get an experience similar to one of which they have heard. They have felt disappointed and disillusioned because they cannot enjoy the same feelings or have the same experience which they hear others have experienced. Your testimony can never be made a mould for everyone else.

You should be careful when giving a testimony not to exaggerate. Stick to the facts and be specific in recounting the details of your experience. Always remember to keep Christ pre-eminent. There is nothing more distressing than the testimony which focuses attention on the speaker rather than on Christ.

Be careful not to dwell on past sins, sordid, or unpleasant experiences you might have had before salvation. The personal testimony is of value only if it glorifies God, and if it can assist other Christians, or unsaved people, to a better understanding of God’s ways, and His will for their lives.

Though it is not always necessary, or advisable to spend time in deciding what to say in a personal testimony, it may happen that you will be called upon to speak before a
congregation of people and give an account of your experiences with God. It would then be wise to stress, always bearing in mind the purpose for which you are giving the testimony, either to bring unsaved men and women to salvation, or to encourage those who have already believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

For a personal testimony to be effective it should be fresh and spontaneous. It never really helps to read it from a piece of paper.

**DOCTRINAL PREACHING**

All preaching should be doctrinal to an extent. In doctrinal preaching, areas of doctrinal ignorance or haziness are cleared up with your hearers. Doctrinal preaching produces and builds up faith, and lays good foundations for life.

The dangers with this type of preaching is that you can become abstract and dry, and it can be unrelated to life and just plain boring. You need to create interest by relating your doctrinal message to lives personally, with good practical application to life.

A general rule is that if you can’t relate it to life, then don’t preach it!
Part Six
PREACHING THE MESSAGE

DEALING WITH TWO OBSTACLES

Generally, at the beginning of your sermon, two obstacles exist in the minds of the hearers:

1. The obstacle of trust

Many people in the audience probably don’t know you and, especially in a culture where people intuitively distrust authority, are wondering, “Who is this person? Why should I trust or listen to him?”

This is a real obstacle because people are more likely to really listen to someone they trust.

2. The obstacle of hunger

Most people have heard hundreds of different messages of all kinds in a week from all sorts of sources (TV, Internet, the newspaper, people at work, a book they’re reading etc.) and despite the fact that most know the Bible is God’s Word, they are not as eager to hear what you want to say as you are to share it. This is a real obstacle because people are more likely to really listen to a message that they want to hear.

To deal with obstacle one, try to be real or vulnerable in some way right up front. Try to say something that helps people connect with our humanity. Or just share very briefly something humorous that happened that week (but then try to connect it to the message).

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8 This section is inspired and adapted from the book How to Preach for a Change by Terran Williams, available at www.commonground.co.za.
But the best way is to deal with obstacle one is to do it at the same time as dealing with obstacle two. To deal with obstacle two, try make them want to hear what you have to say by appealing to something in their experience of life or the culture that shows that that they really do need what you are about to say. Try to include non-Christian people in this part too.

Here is an example. If you were about to introduce the main point “Live to impact people, not impress them” (from 1 Samuel 12) start off speaking about our deep desire to impress people. Share one or two of your personal stories of this – preferably funny ones. Then speak of another desire in most of us: the desire to make a difference. And maybe share a personal story about this.

Then ask them if they can relate to what you’re saying about these two desires. You can then say, “Today I believe God has given me a message which says, ‘You can’t fulfil both desires. These desires are in conflict. Choose today: ‘Will you live to impact people? Or will you live to impress people?’ That is what we will look at today. Turn with me to a wonderful section of the Bible that so clearly speaks about this…”.

Another example: If you were to speak on “put Jesus first” (from Luke 14:25-35) you could first speak about the way we as humans tend to put something first in our lives. A story or two would help – preferably personal and humorous ones – of different things people tend to put first. You can then ask people about the different things that they have put first. And then speak of how so many things we put first ultimately disappoint us, and are not really worthy of our deepest devotion. And then you can say, “I believe God wants us to explore carefully what we put first in our lives, and to hear his gracious invitation: ‘Those other things are not worthy of you. They’ll let you down. I made you for more. Put Jesus first. Turn with me to a wonderful section of Scripture that so powerfully helps us to put Jesus first…”

**USING MEDIA**

In today’s media-mad culture, it is very powerful to use a media clip that humorously or provocatively introduces your talk. (You might also use it at the end, but it does have more impact in the beginning.) It could be a movie excerpt, or a song video, or a home-spun powerpoint, or something you’ve found on YouTube. You might also have
Here are a few important pointers to remember when using media:

• Don’t rely on media! You can’t be put in a spin if some technical issues arise.
• Make sure the video clip is no longer than a minute or two, unless it is some sort of talk you want to refer to or there is good reason to have it go for longer.
• Discuss your media requirements and wishes with the media team well in advance. “Well in advance” is not just 30 minutes beforehand, but actually a few days in advance, as much as you can. There may be technical requirements you are not aware of – you can’t make assumptions here.
• Be careful with copyrights. It’s often not technically legal to play a given movie clip to a large audience without a license to do so. Discuss this with the elders and media team and make sure you honour the creative work of others.

MINISTRY APPEALS

At any point of a meeting you can make a call for people to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour, but generally at the end of a message people are often asked to make some kind of response to this call or to respond to the message in some way. When you’ve decided that there needs to be some kind of active, visible response, here are some tips.

1. Keep it short – this isn’t the time for another “mini sermon”. If it’s too long it’s usually not helpful.

2. Have a good idea on how you want to do this – until you are experienced, you may struggle to do this easily. Learn from how others do this.

3. Include the fact that people need to repent of their sins and come to Jesus – we don’t soften the Gospel!

4. It’s good to have several scriptures that you can regularly and easily rely on, especially if you’re called to do this without expecting it.

5. You need to discern how people should respond – should they come forward for
prayer? Should they stay where they are? Remember, you need to consider things such as time and how many people are able to help if a large amount of people come forward.

Here’s an interesting quote from Charles Spurgeon:

“If we want men to be truly converted, we must set before them the plan of salvation very clearly and distinctly. I meet with hundreds of persons who have had some kind of work upon their hearts; but they tell me that they walk in a mist. They have not quite understood it. They felt that they were on a rock, but they were not quite sure what the rock really was. It is a good thing that our zeal for God should be according to knowledge, that we know what we believe, and why we believe it, and know that we are saved and how we are saved and why we are saved; for if there be a mistake here, it may be fatal.”

A note on music:

Many preachers like to get the music team up to play when they make a Gospel or ministry appeal. This is well and good, but often they do it more for their own sake, as it makes them feel comfortable, than for the sake of everyone else! It can be both helpful and disruptive and so this calls for discretion.

The point is, don’t rely on music to make an appeal - it’s the Holy Spirit who moves people and convicts, exhorts and encourages. While music may help, it sometimes may not. We want people to respond with their mind and their emotions, and if we overdos the music we may end up just having people respond by emotion alone, which isn’t helpful. This isn’t a hard and fast rule - it’s just worth remembering who does the saving!

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GET PEOPLE TO WANT TO COME BACK

Don’t only aim at getting unsaved people saved in the meeting, but aim also at getting them to come back again the following week.

It is wonderful when people get saved. But we must remember that most people in our culture will not get saved the first time they come. They are just too far away from crossing the line of faith to cover that much ground.

There are many people who are instantly converted to Christ, but most people who come to faith seem to make many mini-decisions over a period of time, so that, over time and accumulatively, a major decision toward Christ has been made. This insight calls churches to patience in their longing to see the lost saved.

So the goal should not be to preach in such a way that all the unsaved get saved now, but that unsaved people say to themselves, “Wow. I’m not sure I buy all this stuff, but that message really spoke to me and got me freshly curious. Maybe these people have something I want. I’ll come back next week.”

Instead of only asking, “Did my unsaved friend get saved today?’ we should also ask, “Does my unsaved friend want to come back?” It is not hard to figure out that if they just keep coming, then it is likely that over time they will respond to the Gospel.

TIPS FOR PUBLIC SPEAKING

Time
Remember, people generally can’t concentrate for more than 20 to 40 minutes in one sitting. It’s actually better to run under time than over time. But don’t be pre-occupied with the clock, constantly talking about how much time you have left. If you have run out of time and feel that God is not finished yet, i.e. You feel an anointing, then don’t apologise, preach on!

However, if you always go over time, that might not be the anointing, that is probably...
just bad technique and preparation. Respect your audience. Watch them. Some preachers are like Tennyson’s brook that murmured, “Men may come, and men may go, but I go on forever”. If you do not “strike oil” (impact people) in 30 minutes, you need to change your approach.

Pause
Don’t talk too quickly! Ask questions and pause for responses. Talk slowly and clearly.

Reference correctly
Clearly give the book, chapter and verse you are going to read from. Pause to give people time to find it. Finding it yourself in your own Bible may help you in the beginning to give them enough time. Repeat the reference again to fill the gap and to help those who missed it or part of it at first. And clearly name anyone who’s quote you use.

Using notes
If you like to write your whole sermon down, don’t take this to preach from. Make sure you are thoroughly familiar with it beforehand and then take a clearly printed or written outline with you. Learn to be sensitive to and to trust the Holy Spirit to adjust, change and guide you as you preach.

Be careful not to be preoccupied with your notes. Rather try to have the “picture” in your mind of what you want to communicate. Focus on that and use every reasonable means to get it across to the congregation.

Object lessons
Don’t forget the use of object lessons to make a point. The prophets of old used this many times. Many Bible scholars believe there actually could have been a farmer sowing his seed on the mountainside where Jesus may have pointed when he told the parable of the Sower to His hearers.

Body language
Some training in drama can help us illustrate with body language and gestures which can go a long way to get the message across. But be careful of excessive or inappropriate gestures.
Use simple language
When people come to church they like to bring their Bibles, not the dictionary.

Using slang and grammar
Excessive use of slang offends. Also try to be grammatically correct in your speech. Do not make a mistake like the one made by a preacher who when describing the fiery furnace said, “They hotted that furnace seven times hotter than it used to was.”

Be careful with cliché
Your favourite saying might be the least favourite of another. Try and avoid using cliché’s where you can as you do risk irritating some people as a result. Be careful with over-used acronyms too.

Avoid jargon
Use simple words where you can for Bible terms (many people don’t even understand what ‘faith’ and ‘salvation’ mean!) Also, terms such as “Life Group” and others that refer to ministries within your local church or things a particular local church does may need to be explained. You can’t assume everyone knows what a Life Group / Cell Group / Community Group is!

Speak naturally
Avoid using a “pulpit tone” or a “televangelist tone” – switching to King James English or shouting. Volume does not equal authority!

Avoid “Christianese’
Adding “Christianese” to spiritualise or pep up your message should be avoided. E.g. The inappropriate use of “Hallelujah!” or “Amen!” or “Glory!” etc. Remember, people don’t speak like that normally, so why do it from the pulpit?

Eye contact
Look around the crowd and make eye contact. Don’t stay glued to one person all the time (that will unnerve them) but don’t look at the roof, floor or your notes all the time. Speak to the people!

Write it out
In the beginning stages of your ministry, write out your whole message, complete with illustrations. It is a lot of work, but it will develop your ability to express yourself,
choose the best words and expressions to communicate what you have to, and help you determine how long your sermon is. (But don’t just read your sermon when you deliver it – this is just to help you start and refine your preaching gift.)

**How you feel after you preach**

Thomas Brooks wrote, “Preaching is a spending, painful work.” Joseph Parker said, “True preaching is the sweating of blood.” It’s hard work but this is what we’re called to!

Most preachers find they experience some depression, which is usually just emotional fatigue, afterwards or the day after. It’s good to reflect on your message but don’t dwell on it. This is all about practice and requires a lifetime commitment.
“Criticism” isn’t a negative word, although we tend to see it that way. It’s all about the heart. Therefore, sermon criticism must not be seen in a negative light, for the motive is to build up and to improve ourselves. We need to know about any problem or shortfall with any issue that relates to every aspect of our preaching.

With this in mind here are a few types of constructive criticism we should invite and expect:

- Preaching practise criticism
- Asking someone, a friend or our spouse, to crit us, looking out for ways in which we could improve.
- Judge the response, or lack of it, of the audience we speak to. Remember always that with praise or criticism, treat it like chewing gum. I.e. Chew on it for a while and then spit it out.

Learn never to own the glory of a job well done, when people thank or praise you.

When you are criticised, prayerfully consider the content of the criticism before God, making the changes that are necessary, and ignoring those aspects that are untrue.

Note that we will always have opposition when we preach as ambassadors of the Kingdom – Jesus did! (See Luke 9:51-56; 10:3; Acts 4:18-20.)

- Listen to the recording of the message you have preached.
- If those of your team or leaders who have authority speak over your life with respect to your preaching and/or its content, listen to them because they are there for you (see Hebrews 13:17).

Therefore, having the correct heart attitude to all forms of criticism is important, because we are being changed from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:17-18), and our passionate desire should be of becoming vessels of gold fit for the Master’s best
service, (2 Timothy 2:20-21).

On the following pages is a sermon criticism sheet that you can use to analyse your sermons and see how you can improve.

Sermon “crit” sheet

As preachers, we need to be able to evaluate our own preaching and grow in the gift God has for us. This isn’t about performance but we do need to grow so we can be more effective in what it is we do. Fortunately, these days we can listen to the recording of our message and evaluate rather objectively.

These three simple questions will help in evaluating your message appropriately.

1. How was the content?
   Was it Scripturally based? Were the use of illustrations helpful? Did you reference properly to authors and preachers? Did you use accessible language?

2. How was it delivered?
   Did you speak too fast or too slow? Was it too long? Was it boring? Was it interesting? Was it too intellectual? Was it funny? Was it too funny? Also, you should ask others for advice on body language and eye contact.

3. How was the anointing?
   This may be difficult to assess, but others can also provide helpful input. The bottom line is – was it effective for the Kingdom? Did it glorify Jesus? If it was effective for building your own platform and success, consider it a failure.

Evaluating others
We learn from others as well and so we will find that we begin to evaluate the way others preach. PJ Smythe has a nice rule – try and mention three good good things for every one thing you feel they can improve on.

And when you are being evaluated, make sure you don’t get defensive or depressed! Otherwise, how will you grow?