

TRAINING SESSION FOR SERMON INTERACTION GROUP

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I. Discovering the big idea

When you are given the assignment to prepare a Bible message, the first challenge is to find a text. Once you have found a text, your next challenge is to discover the biblical concept contained in that portion of Scripture. What is the idea of the text? The idea of the text is what God wants to be shared with His people. Now if the idea of the text is that “masters should be kind to slaves,” I am going to have to restate that idea and talk about perhaps showing kindness to those who are under our authority, whether in the work place or our children or in a school setting. But I must understand what God is saying through the author before I have anything to say to my audience. That is not as easy as it sounds. If you have wrestled with passages before, you know that this is hard work. In order to arrive at the idea of the text, we have to consider the two components that form any idea.

A. Subject

1. We are not talking here about the grammatical subject like, “He said hello.” The grammatical subject of that sentence is *he*.
2. But we are talking in terms of preaching. What is the text talking about? If you can determine what the text is talking about, you've got the *subject*.
3. Sometimes we get into trouble because we make the subject too broad. You might say, “It is talking about God.” What is it saying about God? We are not yet at the subject. “Well,” you say, “it is talking about God's love.” Okay, what specifically about God's love? How God expresses His love for sinners: that's the *subject*. However, that doesn't yet give us the full idea of the text. We also need a *complement*.

B. Complement

1. What is the text saying about how God expresses His love for sinners? That is what we call the *complement*.
2. This is not a polite comment that you say to someone. That is spelled with an I in the middle. This is *complement*, that which completes the idea.
3. So if the subject is what the text is talking about, the complement is what the text is saying about what it is talking about. If the subject is How God expresses His love for sinners, the

complement might be this: that at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

4. In I John 1:9, it is talking about what happens when we confess our sins. It is not just talking about sins or about confessions, but what happens when we confess our sins. And what is he telling us? Complement: that God is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us. Do you see how the complement completes the idea?
5. So first we ask, “What is it talking about?” and second, “What is it saying about what it is talking about?” When we put those two components together, we have the main idea.

C. Formation of an idea

1. *SUBJECT + COMPLEMENT* ‘IDEA. So we have got the idea. You say, "Okay, I understand now what the main idea of the text is.
2. We refer to this main idea of the text as the *exegetical idea*. Once we have determined the exegetical idea, we have to decide what we are going to do with it.
3. We discover there are basically three things we can do with any idea and that is true with any speech you would make. We are talking here especially about a Bible speech that we call a sermon.

II. Developmental questions

(The three developmental questions are listed under point II).

A. What does it mean?

The first thing you could do with the idea is to ask the question, “What does it mean? “He is the propitiation for our sins”—what does that mean?

Goal: And so the goal, (you'll want to write it down), would be to *explain*. If you believe that your hearers don't really understand what that idea means, you need to explain it. Now we are probably not going to simply explain it. We might also want to apply it. But we might say the primary developmental question is AWhat does it mean?” If we are convinced that people know exactly what it means, we may want to take another developmental question.

B. Do I buy it?

The second question we might ask is “Do I buy it?” or “Do I believe it?”

Goal: The goal with this approach would be to *prove* that it is true, to prove, to convince you, that it is true for you. That is a little more challenging than it sounds because there are many people who believe something is true but it still doesn't do anything to their lives.

I want to suggest to you four reasons why people do not believe or buy what the text says.

1. They don't see the connection between what you are saying and

what the text is saying. They don't see the connection and they say, "That sounds unreal to me. I can't see how they connect, one thing to the other." That is one reason why people don't buy a certain idea.

2. Secondly, real life seems to contradict what the text is saying. Perhaps I am telling you from the Bible that God is always good and good people never suffer. First of all, the Bible never does say that, but if you found a text that you thought said that, your hearer might say, "Real life as I know it contradicts that. I have seen lots of good people suffer. I don't buy it. That contradicts what I see in life."
3. A third reason why people might not buy an idea that is being shared from a text is because something else is more important to them. You can talk to them about the importance, for example, of paying their tithe. But that 10% of their income is more important to them than what God thinks or God's place in their life. They'll say, "Some other people may buy it but I don't buy it. Something else is more important to me."
4. A fourth reason why people don't believe/buy what the text says is because it seems impossible for them and so they reject it as false. The preacher might say, "You can have victory in Jesus" and they might say, "Well, I see the connection and I've seen people in life where it happens. I can't say necessarily there is anything more important to me than victory in Jesus, but for me it seems impossible and so I am just going to say I don't believe that." Does that make sense? I don't believe it because I don't believe it will happen to me. So there may be a certain passages where we need to convince people. I would suggest to you for this first sermon on immorality from 1 Cor. 6:18-20, we are going to have to *convince* people they need to flee from all sexual immorality because there are a lot of people in our culture who are moving towards immorality rather than away from it.

C. How does it relate to life? (So what?)

There is a third developmental question. We can ask, "How does it relate to life?" This is one of the areas where I think preaching has been particularly weak in the past.

Goal: You explain it. You even convince a person it is true, but they say, "How does that relate to my life?" My wife is a wonderful critic of my sermons and she will often times tell me, "Derek, don't just tell us what to do, tell us how." You'd better talk about that when you talk about sexual immorality because there are a lot of folk that would like to flee but they don't know how. What are you going to tell them? "You need to spend more time with God?" "May God help us to make an application to this message?" Your hearers

might say, "God, can you please help us because the preacher didn't give us any practical application!" How do I apply that to my life? This is where we as a group will really bring a lot of strength. Hopefully I will have brought an explanation of the text to the group. How does that apply to a mother with two children? A newly wed? How does that apply to someone who has lived in the same little rural community since 1945?

III. Outlining

You say, "Okay, we have figured out what the text is talking about. We've got the subject. We've got the complement. And then we can explain it, we can prove it or we can apply it. Where do we go from here? Well, we need to outline our message and again that is not that easy to do.

A. The passage outline (exegetical outline)

Let me give you an example here for the sermon we are going to be looking at. Here is a passage: I Cor. 6:18-20. Now those who have done more preaching will ask, "Can you defend that this is a separate thought unit?" You will discover that it is a separate exhortation which means a special appeal in the context of some more teaching about sexual immorality. Paul answers two vital questions in this exhortation to the Corinthian believers.

I. The first question in the beginning of verse 18 is *how* the Corinthians should relate to sexual immorality. That is in the first part of verse 18.

II. The second question is *why* the Corinthians should respond in this way. v. 18b-20

A. It is a sin against their own body. v. 18b

B. They should honor God in their body temple. v. 19-20

Now that is the outline of that passage in I Cor. 6. You have got an outline of the text but that can't possibly be your sermon outline. The least that you have to do is take *Corinthian* out of there and insert *you*. But you will also discover that the order also needs to be changed. We are not changing what the text is saying but the order in which it is saying it.

B. The sermon outline (preaching outline)

Look with me at the sermon outline in your handout.. What do you think is the first logical question? Jim, what do you need to know first--How to flee? or Why you should flee? I think you are right, because if I haven't convinced you *why* you should flee why would you want to listen to me about *how* to flee? So I want to talk to you about Why and then you are going to come to the place where you will say, "Man I need to flee; I need to turn away and now how do I do it?" Then we can go and answer the question How. So notice how we adjust the preaching outline.

I. Why you should turn away from sexual immorality. v. 18b-20 (We turned those two questions around and we ask first of all, notice no

Corinthians in there anymore, why *you* should turn away from sexual immorality).

- A. It damages you personally v. 18B
 - B. It dishonors God publicly v. 19-20
- II. How you should turn away v. 18a (Then we ask the question, How should you turn away from sexual immorality? and the answer is:
- A. Flee continually v. 18a
 - B. From every kind of sexual immorality v. 18a
- C. The importance of transitions
- Transitions are a very important part of preaching. We use that word when we talk about our lives: we say, "She/he is in transition." A person finishes college and gets a job. We say that was a transition, right? It is a shift and that is also true when speaking. How do we help people follow us when we speak? They can only listen. They cannot see our outline. What are some of the techniques that can be used when transitioning through the outline that will make the message easy to follow? I have heard some messages that I don't think I could follow if I had a flashlight and a map and I have heard others that were so easy I didn't need a map or a flashlight. They were just so clear. What are some of the techniques that will help make the development of the sermon clear?
1. Use of a key word.

The first is use of a key word. I would suggest to you in this outline the key word is *question*. There are two questions that are raised in this text. Now if we happen to hear a sermon from Heb. 4 about the Word of God, the preacher might highlight several distinct characteristics of the word of God. The preacher might emphasize that the Word of God is living, but then point out a second distinct characteristic that we find in the text: the Word of God is active. Even though you cannot see the preacher's outline, in your mind you're saying, "Okay, he has given me the first distinct characteristic," and now you are listening for the second distinct characteristic. You've got a key word or phrase that helps you to move through the outline. In the sermon on 1 Cor. 6:18-20, I may indicate that there are two *questions* that Paul addresses in the text: he asks how we should get away from immorality and why. I have used the key word *question*. Is that clear? You might ask, "Could you run out of key words?" No! There are numerous plural nouns that you could use. Say you were looking at jealousy: the dangers of jealousy would be one thing you could talk about. What is another word? Forgiveness: reasons for forgiveness, the benefits of forgiveness, the opportunities for forgiveness. There are all kinds of words, the barriers to forgiveness. We are going to see in this text 3 barriers, not 3 things, first thing, second thing.

Certainly not here is the first way, and here is the second opportunity and there is the third barrier! That is too difficult to follow. But if I have got three ways or three gifts in a committed relationship, I think I could follow that.

2. Use of review and preview

What that means is this: you get to a certain place and you say, “That is where we went and here is where we are going.” So when I come to the end of the first sub-point A, I say “In answering the question why we should turn away from sexual immorality we found that our first reason is that it damages us personally. But a second reason why we should turn away from sexual immorality is that it dishonors God publicly.” I told you where we came from and where we are heading. So to review means to tell where we have been; to preview means to tell where we are going and that helps people to follow. Now good communicators do this all of the time. That is how you communicate well.

3. Use of questions

A third technique to help the transition be clear is the use of a question. For example, if we are talking of the benefits of forgiveness, you might say “I understand one of the benefits of forgiveness is peace of mind but are there any other benefits?” By asking another question, people understand that I am moving on. So the use of the question is helpful. People understand that we are transitioning to another point. People can't see your outline. They can only hear what you say and so the more that you help them to follow you, the easier it is going to be.

IV. Crafting the preaching idea

Once you have decided how you are going to approach the text and you have made your sermon outline, you need to craft the preaching idea. How are you going to craft this preaching idea in such a way that it really sticks with people?

A. A contemporary statement of the exegetical idea

1. The first thing we know is that it will be based on the idea of the text. The exegetical idea is the idea of the text. If you are going to preach a biblical sermon, you cannot come up with an idea for your sermon that is not based on the idea of the text. The preaching idea must be based on the exegetical idea.
2. But here is a key point I want you to write down under point IV.A: it is going to be a *contemporary expression* of that Biblical idea.
3. Now if that idea is a universal principle, “it is more blessed to give than to receive,” the exegetical idea and the preaching idea may be identical.
4. But if the exegetical idea is limited and says “we should not condemn people who eat meat offered to idols, but should rather be

sensitive to them,” I am going to have to make that contemporary in some way because there are not many people in the United States who eat meat offered to idols. Now there might be some people in Thailand who deal directly with that issue of eating meat offered to idols, and I might have to bring the same message right across to them. But for us there is a principle that in regard to issues that are not morally right or wrong, we have to show a certain acceptance of differences of opinion.

5. So I want to make it contemporary. That is a first point. It is going to be the same idea but brought to a contemporary setting.

B. Made concise and memorable

1. Secondly, I am going to shrink it down as much as I can in order to make it memorable.
2. I preached a sermon some years ago on the parable of the Rich Fool. It was called “The Big Fool with the Small Barns,” and in that sermon I was talking about the foolishness of just living for riches because you can't take them with you. Well I had written this sermon and I had this preaching idea that sounded good to me, but it was too long. I said, “The only treasures worth striving for in this life are those that death cannot take away.” I thought that was pretty good so I asked my son Christopher what he thought and he said, “It's too long! No one will remember it.” So I thought, how can I condense that?
3. Wherever possible, make it positive rather than negative, because a positive idea is something you can live by and not simply avoid. So I thought, What is the positive? I decided the positive is “Seek heavenly treasure, not earthly treasure” and so we condensed that preaching idea to “Seek heavenly riches.” Now you might say, “That wasn't the best. It could be improved.” Maybe so. But Nike did an awful lot of work and ended up with three words, “Just do it!” “It's the real thing” has been around for a while too. Just 4 words. So we need to be concise because the more concise the preaching idea is, the more easily people will remember it. So that is a challenge. We don't want to change the idea. We want to make it contemporary and make it as concise and memorable as possible.

V. Introductions

I want to share with you that the introduction is one of the most vital parts of the sermon. Why? If you don't get their attention at the beginning, you are unlikely to get it later.

A. Vital importance

There are three types of sermons that are preached.

1. Some you can't listen to. Have you ever heard a sermon like that? You just can't listen to it. If you are polite, you don't put your hand over your ears but you just can't listen.
2. The second type is one you can listen to. You say, "Sure I'll listen to it. I don't think it is that great but I'll listen."
3. Then the third you *have* to listen to. That is the kind of sermon we want to preach. You have worked on the sermon, start preaching and someone turns to his neighbor and says "Hey, what are you doing?" He responds, "Sshh, I'm listening to the sermon." That is the kind of sermon we want to preach. We have to make that connection in the introduction. They need to say, "Wow, this is one to listen to!" And let me tell you, that is not easy to accomplish.

B. Function

What's the function of the introduction?

1. Gain Attention of Listener. Do you know how much time you have to gain their attention? Researchers say you have about 30 seconds. If you can't do it in 30 seconds, you are probably not going to connect.
2. Surface need. After catching their attention, your hearers will ask, "Does this relate to me?" or "Do I need to listen to this?" Does the introduction address a need in my life? Now that is going to be a challenge when we talk about sexual immorality because we need to be able to relate that to the 14 year old and the 84 year old. We need to be able to have something that is helpful for the single, married, young, old, educated, less educated, rich, or poor. What is the need? What is the challenge for a 70 year old as compared to a 50 or 20 year old? When you surface a felt need, people will say "Wow, this is not only interesting but I need to listen to this sermon. I am so glad I came to church today."
3. Introduce the body of the sermon. The third function of the introduction is to introduce. Doesn't that make sense? What does it need to introduce?
 - a. Big Idea-Deductive. If it is what we call a deductive sermon, we need to introduce the main idea, the big idea of the sermon, in the introduction. Deductive means you bring the main idea up front and then you expound upon it in the sermon.
 - b. Subject-Inductive. Conversely, an inductive sermon simply introduces the subject, but not the main idea, in the introduction. The sermon I am going to share on immorality is going to be inductive. It is not going to give the final answer until we get down toward the end. It is going to bring these two questions together in a single

memorable idea that will make sense to us by the time we get to the end. The least we will introduce in the introduction is the subject (inductive). In a deductive sermon, we will introduce the preaching idea.

VI. Conclusions

A. Vital importance

The conclusion may be brief compared to the full sermon but it is also very important. What are some of the things a conclusion should accomplish?

B. Function

1. Summarize . First of all, it should summarize. There is a famous ditty in preaching: “First you tell them what you are going to tell them (that’s the introduction), then you tell them (the body of the sermon), then you tell them what you told them (conclusion). You are summarizing in the conclusion. In this sermon we’ll look at those two questions and what we have learned about them.
2. Apply. I am not suggesting to you that we are going to wait until the end to offer any application. In fact, I believe that application needs to be woven into the whole sermon. However, application is especially important as we come down to the conclusion. Have any of you ever worked in sales? The close is vital. In the same way, applying the sermon is very important and while you may do that throughout the sermon, it is especially important in the conclusion. Your listeners need to ask, “How do I apply this to my life? How do I apply this when I am walking through the airport and there is the magazine or newspaper rack? How do I apply this principle when I am sitting up late at night and a certain movie comes on and my wife and children have gone to bed? How do I apply this principle at work when someone comes up to me and I am single and I know he is a married man? How do I handle these things? How do I apply them? What does it mean for my life?”
3. Bring meaningful closure. Then thirdly, the conclusion is to bring meaningful closure. As you summarize and as you apply, you are bringing it all together. You are not just stopping. You are concluding.

VII. Illustrations

A. Vital importance

One of the aspects of a sermon that makes it interesting is illustrations. Illustrations are extremely helpful.

B. Function

The word *illustrate* means to shed light on, like a window through which you gain a new perspective. With that in mind, if the function is to illustrate, there is no such thing as a good illustration. There is only a good illustration of something. You may have heard a story; people maybe even laugh and say, “That is a great story!” But, if it doesn't relate, it is not an illustration. It is a distraction. An effective illustration conveys the truth of the message.

C. Sources of illustration

Where are you going to find illustrations? I am convinced that the worst place to find illustrations is in a book of illustrations. All too often, they sound canned. The best source of illustrations is from your own life, as close to where we live as possible. Look at it this way: you may want to draw this diagram (two circles which overlap in the center--one circle represents the speaker and the other the listener). Where do you think the best place to find the illustration would be? Where my life and your life have common ground. Now I've never flown an airplane but I have been in a small aircraft and if Dwight was talking to me about that, I think I could connect with him but if he talked too much about instruments etc., I would be lost. If he talked about some of those feelings with the wind I could relate to that. Now has anyone here ever been scuba diving? I have never been scuba diving so if you shared that illustration it would be difficult for me. Now where would be the second best place to find a source of illustrations? Very good! I am going to find something that the listener understands. The third best place to find illustrations? Something that is familiar to the speaker. Obviously the worst place to find illustrations would be out here, something that is unfamiliar to both speaker and listener. Most of the books of illustrations are out here, by the way. It is not really in your world or my world or where our worlds intersect but out there somewhere. It is amazing how you can take a simple thing that people understand, a little child jumping off the wall into his mother's arms and people get it just like that because it is so simple. It is so close to life. Shutting your finger in the car door and, ouch, people understand. They know what that is all about. The bottle of soda that someone shook up and you didn't know and took the lid off and it went fsssss. If it hasn't happened to you, you have seen it. I don't know what that would illustrate. Don't ask me that! There must be something it would illustrate! But it's something we can all relate to.

VIII. Delivery

After all that we've said, we must recognize that the sermon process is not complete until the sermon has been delivered. A written manuscript is not a sermon. A sermon is something that happens when we gather for worship and hear the Word of God. How do we deliver the message effectively?

A. Use of notes

1. Advantages. What are the advantages of using a manuscript when preaching the sermon?
 - a. One advantage of using a manuscript is *clarity*. By the way, that is only true if the manuscript is clear to start with! The manuscript will not become clear just because you are reading it. But if the manuscript is clear, that clarity can be preserved by utilizing notes. There have been great preachers who basically stood up and read their sermons and the material was so powerful that the people just sat there enthralled.
 - b. A second advantage of notes is that it *reduces nervousness*. You carry your notes like your friend in your Bible. There is a certain sense of assurance that comes from having notes with you, even if you don't want to look at them too much. You know that they are there if you need them.
2. Disadvantages. I believe that every effective preacher should write a manuscript. There is no shortcut to excellence. However, should the preacher take notes into the pulpit? What are the disadvantages of notes in delivering a sermon?
 - a. Obstacle to effective delivery. If I stand up here with a manuscript, especially if I haven't really worked with it, I'm likely to look like this. It's called the chicken peck. Some people are able to utilize notes without any hindrance but for many they are an obstacle to effective delivery.
 - b. Restricts flexibility. A second disadvantage is that the use of notes restricts flexibility. If, as I am preaching, I realize the point is not coming across, I can modify my presentation. I am not restricted to a written document. What is the goal of preaching? It is to communicate the word of God in a life-changing way, and if I need to restate my point in order to increase clarity, I can do so.

B. Use of Voice

When discussing the use of the voice, a key issue is *variety*. There are four factors to consider in vocal delivery.

1. Pitch. What I mean by pitch is the note I select for a particular word sound. When I am talking about death I am not going to say death (in a high pitch), but rather "in the valley of the shadow of death" (low pitch). Death is a low word; that is where it belongs in the tune. Now you can get too extreme. You don't want an up and down pitch for every other word. But if you notice that you seem to be floating between a few notes, try to expand your pitch. It will make your voice more interesting to listen to. We refer to lack of

- variety in pitch as monotone.
2. Punch. By that I mean the variety of volume. There is value in saying "Now is the time!" (loud). But if all of my volume is like that, after a while I would begin to shake, and so would you. Sometimes you can get as much impact by saying "Now is the time" (lower level of volume), but the issue is variety.
 3. Pace. That means the variety of speed. There are some people who talk very quickly and there are some that talk so slowly that you have a difficult time staying awake. A variety of pace adds a certain interest that is important.
 4. Pause. What do I mean by that? I mean a "thoughtful silence." Some of the most powerful concepts are conveyed when no words are being said. Remember when you were dating your fiancée. Out on a date, no words were said. Sometimes you have got to know when to be quiet. So the use of pause, a thoughtful pause, not an awkward pause, can be very effective.

C. Non-verbal communication

What do you think is the most important aspect of non-verbal communication when you are preaching?

1. Eyes, eye contact. Have you ever had a person say, "Look at me?" Have you noticed how powerful that is, especially if it is someone special and they connect with you, eye to eye? Something happens when you look at a person. Effective eye contact is very important for good delivery of a sermon.
2. Gestures. There is a basic principle that governs all gestures: *movement should be informed by content*. Now that is so simple but it's vitally important. It means I am moving based upon what I am saying. It is also important to remember the following points regarding gestures:
 - a. They should be spontaneous -- now that doesn't mean that you can't practice them, but it means that there is an appearance of being natural.
 - b. They should be clear -- What does unity look like, for example? Maybe unity looks like this. (Illustrate with hands). The gesture should be clear.
 - c. They should be varied -- Even a good gesture loses its effectiveness if it is used continually. Variety is crucial.
 - d. They should be properly timed -- This one can be almost hilarious. If I say to you "we need to reach out to Jesus before it is too late" (delayed gesture), or "we need to turn to God today" (delayed gesture), it just makes you laugh. Timing is so important. Even if it is spontaneous, clear and well timed.

