

Sermon Prep Outline

15 hour, 4-Part



Then the Lord said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.' Exodus 4:11-12

PART I, TILL: Study your Text & Structure your Sermon (5 hrs Monday 13 days out)

Study your text

Pause to pray over this sermon, then enjoy the creation process with a heart of faith. During the past weeks you've been jotting down ideas for this sermon on a prep sheet, but now is the official start of your sermon prep. Record your notes on a prep sheet. View sermon prep as a vital piece of your discipleship—Jesus has called you to preach for your own sanctification and joy. Beware of idolatry in your own heart: What's ruling you as you prepare this sermon—Jesus and his gospel, or some idol of performance?

Note the immediate context of your text. Determine your text's genre and begin pestering your text with historical and literary questions. All knowledge is covenantal, meant for obedience—what is this text meant to do? Read your text many times to determine its flow, read other translations, and examine the text in its original language. Any significant differences? Unusual or significant grammar? Word-study worthy words? Any important historical/cultural matters to explain? What stands out to you? Consider memorizing your text over the next two weeks.

Write a complete-sentence exegetical outline of your text.

Think through the *biblical theology* connections in your text. How does your

text fit in with the overall storyline of the Bible? What gaps does it fill? What hinges on this passage? Consider using a crucial cross-reference or two. Determine your text's relation to Jesus: is it predictive, preparatory, resultant, or reflective of Jesus? Identify the *gospel pointers* in your text. What does the text say about man's redemptive need/problem and God's redemptive provision? Get to the gospel/Jesus via Theme Resolution, Law Fulfillment, Story Completion, Need Met, Problem Solved, Contrast, Symbol/Type Fulfillment, etc. Think through the *systematic theology* connections in your text. How can you use this passage to make your people more theologically alert?

Write out the exegetical thesis of your text in a single sentence. Test the sentence subject to see if it's too narrow or too broad. Sentence complements could later serve as main points in your sermon.

Study about three of the best commentaries on your passage Aim for a mix of technical, preaching, and devotional commentaries. Read or listen to at least one sermon on your text. Less is more, don't take in too much input.

Determine the purpose & thesis of your sermon

Determine your purpose/application aims. Why is this text here? So what? How can you use this text to nourish your sheep?

Solve people's problems with your text/ the gospel. Climb the abstraction ladder. How has this text been addressing your life? What do you want your people to know/ feel/do from this text? Write a purpose statement for your sermon ("To persuade the congregation that...").

Write a sharp, 15 words or less, 21st century-worded sermon thesis. Try including both doctrine and application in this sentence. Say it in a sentence! What is the burden, the claim, of this text that's beginning to burn in you? This sentence doesn't always have to surface in the sermon, but most of the time it will.

Outline your sermon

Ask your text a question or questions about the thesis to help erect a focused outline. Have a clear plotline for your sermon. Think of your sermon as a story. A three-point outline often works best. Decide the approach of your outline: deductive (thesis stated up front) or inductive (question/ problem/tension/mystery presented in the beginning that moves towards the thesis/ resolution near the ending)? Vary between deductive/inductive text reading. Vary where you place prayer in the sermon. Sometimes hide your outline when you preach. Be a sticky communicator. Make your sermons Simple, Unexpected, Concrete, Credible, Emotional, Storied (SUCCESs).

Write your sermon outline using complete sentences and 21st century language for your main points/movements and your sub points/movements. Begin with an involving introduction that surfaces need, that makes the people say, “Hey, I need to hear this.” Use a provocative question, human-interest story, simple assertion, startling statement, a catalog of information, or create a conflict/problem. Depending on the approach of the outline, the introduction could set up the whole thesis, just the subject of the thesis, or just the first point. Go after people’s sweet spot with your introduction. End with a conclusion that serves as the last main point, reviews, returns full circle to the introduction, creates a climax, sounds a call to mission or new possibilities, exalts Christ, or demonstrates the sermon in action. Seek the natural stopping place.



PART II, SEED: Make a Hybrid Draft of your Sermon (4 hrs Wednesday 11 days out)

Make a hybrid draft of your sermon. This draft is more than a detailed outline and less than a manuscript rough draft—you're making a document that fills out, details, and sharpens the movement of your sermon, preparing you to write a final draft next week.

Attach supporting material to your outline and plug in material from the prep sheet that serves the thesis of the sermon. Less is more: disregard notes that don't serve where God is leading you with this particular sermon. Don't contribute to information overload.

Use complete sentences throughout most of the draft. Determine whether you need to explain, illustrate, or apply your points. Also, utilize humor.

EXPLAIN: Preach to Christians and non-Christians every week. Explain and prove your points by flushing out unspoken premises. Give as much biblical info as the people need to understand the passage, and no more, then move on to illustration or application. Explain to believers and unbelievers. Anticipate listener's questions (use questions to transition and set up points). Consider addressing a defeater belief. Expose and challenge people's idols: personal, cultural, religious. Show how true resolution, perhaps a 3rd way, is found only in your text. Unless a quote is excellent, put it in your own words. As you explain, make it your greater focus to proclaim.

ILLUSTRATE: Plug in illustrations that tap the five senses. Make biblical principles immediately tangible. Freshly incarnate biblical truth each week. Aim to illustrate each main point. Preach images. Entice with your illustrations. Restore wonder in your people. Live life on the look out for sermon illustrations; turn life into a workshop for preaching.

APPLY: Plug in application under each main point or near the sermon's close. Make biblical principles immediately practical. Personally counsel the people with your text. Motivate by grace—feed people's faith, show them that God is for them. Write out applications that are concrete and specific. Is there a command to obey? Promise to claim? Sin to avoid? Warning to heed? Fact to believe? Truth to ponder? What does this text say to the Christian, non-Christian, and immature Christian in your church? Consider setting up an application trajectory in your introduction. Reveal your own life and how it intersects with this text.

Look at the world through the lens of your sermon. Believe the truth and practice the behavior you will preach. Talk to other people about your message; give mini-sermons that test out your message. Let these conversations edit your sermon. Transform procrastination into rehearsal.

Get away from your sermon. Do other things and more sermon clarity will come. Add good ideas to your hybrid draft.



PART III, GERMINATE:

Write a Final Draft of your Sermon
(6 hrs Thursday 3 days out)

Rewrite your whole sermon in one sitting using a printout of your hybrid draft. Writing in one sitting will ingrain in you the flow of your sermon. Write like it's an emergency. Make believe you have to preach it once 6 hours is up. Keep moving. Kill perfectionism. Trust your instincts. Write like you talk; talk your message out loud as you write. Don't manuscript everything, keep many portions of the draft in bullet point form (when you know it, bullet point it; when the idea is fuzzy, write it out—you can reduce later if needed). Repeat key words; employ repetition. Be clear. Be simple. Be colorful and memorable. Underline one key phrase/sentence per paragraph as a visual cue. Pray as you write. Enjoy the process.

Know the ideal length of your draft for comfortable pace and timing. For me: 9 pages, 1.5 spacing, Times font size 14, 2,350 words (biblical text included) = 35 to 40 minute sermon.

Keep looking at life via your sermon, preaching your sermon to yourself, and talking your sermon out with others, but stay away from your manuscript until Saturday night. Internalize your sermon. Visualize your sermon.

Read over your sermon Saturday night before bed and Sunday morning



PART IV, REAP: Preach your Sermon

immediately after waking up. Read it repeatedly and rapidly—read to get the flow and main movements, not the sentences. Make any last minute adjustments. Consider doing a rough, fast forward run through of your sermon in the pulpit on Sunday morning to get a sense of pace, gesturing, movement. Don't spend much time on any of this. Give your sermon to God. Trust God and his Word.

Preach it! Have fun and have faith. Be yourself. Preaching ought to feel and sound like “Explore and Tell”—tell the people what you've discovered this week from exegeting Scripture and life. Preach to the heart with confidence, joy, and expectant faith. Worship as you preach. Emote what the text says. Know your opening—use the first 45 seconds of your sermon to show people that you're going to have fun together and that you're serious—you're standing to speak with authority and confidence as God's ambassador.

Learn from your preaching. For every sermon you preach, detect and ponder one take-away lesson that will help you improve next time. Let both compliments and criticisms drive you back to the doctrine of justification by faith (not justification by preaching!) and grow you as a preacher.

