

Sure Foundation Baptist Church Seattle

Sermon Writing Guide

Tips and guidelines for brothers learning to preach

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A sermon is never entertainment, but something to be taken extremely seriously as a holy steward of the Holy Scriptures before both God and men. (1 Peter 1:12-16)

Purpose and Scope

This document provides a basic procedure and outline for the creation of a draft sermon lasting around 10 minutes in presentation duration, and is meant for a brother who needs assistance with their first time preaching.

The Structure of a Sermon

A sermon is much like any other presentation of information. You attempt to clearly convey an idea for the purposes of education, to convince the audience of something, a call to action, or a combination thereof. It is a chronological progression, with clearly marked verbal boundaries so your audience can keep track of where you are in your presentation.

Introduction -> Body -> Conclusion

The Introduction

The introduction should clearly define why you are speaking, taking the time of your listener. A quality introduction will immediately give the framework for your points, and permit you to directly relate the points you will make within your body. The less that the audience is kept guessing of the actual purpose of your presentation, the more they will be able to focus on your actual points.

Any presentation starts with an introduction that contains a few critical elements, usually in this order:

1. Opening
2. Declaration of Purpose
3. Emphasis of Importance
4. Transition

The Opening

An opening should tell the listeners who you are and a greeting. It may include a statement that the audience is agreeable to according to your foreknowledge, but is not required.

The Declaration of Purpose

A Declaration of Purpose, more commonly known as a “purpose statement” is the critical statement that briefly and clearly states the reason why you are speaking. It is the statement that you center all of your arguments around, and how you test which arguments to keep and which ones to reject. It generally should be narrow in subject. You may have both an internal and external purpose statement, meaning one that is for the mind of the listener and one for the mind of the author. The reason for doing that would be if you had a general topic, but wanted to speak about specific subtopics that might be more obscure or sound unimportant on their face.

Example purpose statements do not have to be explicit “In this sermon I plan to convince women to dress like ladies,” they may be implicit, usually simply as a title given to a sermon, such as “The differences between Tithes and Offerings” or “Adulterers deserve death.” If they are a call to action for the individual, they can also be phrased as a question. – “Are you doing enough for the brethren?”

Introductory purpose statements are also used to keep you on track, and you should reference this purpose several times during your presentation in order to keep the topic framed properly in your mind, and the minds of your audience. Calls to action should always be personable, meaning addressed to the

individual. The reason for this is to prevent the internal mental offloading of responsibility which would negate the purpose of your presentation.

You are speaking to a group, but the message should be heard as individuals.

The Emphasis of Importance

The Emphasis of Importance is a brief statement of why the listener should pay extra close attention, and should justify a real-world reason that they should prioritize the information you have to share over anything else they might have going on in their life at the moment. It should give justification for complete attention.

An example might be “You or someone you know might think there’s no big deal with ladies wearing pants, but if you have seen any of the vile displays going on recently, I hope you or your friends are open to changing your minds.” – the point is to convey the seriousness of the lesson.

The Transition

The end of your introduction should have a transition, which is a statement that marks the end of your introduction and makes it clear to your audience that you are beginning to make your main points.

An example may be “Luckily, God has provided us the wisdom to avoid that fate, because the Bible teaches here in ~ FIRST MAIN POINT~.”

*Introduction -> **Body** - > Conclusion*

The Body

The body is where you do the work to prove (or fulfil) your purpose statement, but not the place to declare any new purposes or unrelated ideas. It is desirable to keep the scope as narrow as possible in order to clearly convey the information and fulfil the purpose of the presentation. It should contain at least one main point with at least two substantial, direct proofs, and optionally an indirect proof. Avoid digressive statements and feeble arguments.

1. Main Point 1
 - a. Direct Proof A
 - b. Direct Proof B
 - c. Indirect Proof (optional)
- ^ Reiterate Main Point already covered

Main Points

Main Points are statements that make up the structure of your body and determine how you prove/fulfil your purpose. These should be simple sentences that are easily understood on their face, and are directly related to your purpose.

An example may be “God demands for women to be modest”

Direct Proofs

Direct Proofs are clear scriptural statements that indisputably prove your point when read in the context of the chapter. These are generally matter-of-fact and considered “milk” of the Word of God, but have their perfect place in deriving authority to fulfil your purpose statement. They should be accompanied

with an Indirect Proof in order to drive in your point with a real-world example. An example of a direct proof is “1 Timothy 2:9 says- In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel...”

Indirect Proofs

Indirect Proofs are usually parables or stories where you can draw a clear and easy to understand lesson from the illustration provided. These have a main purpose of showing what happens when deviation from the Bible occurs, and are extremely powerful at cementing the idea of your main point in your listener’s mind by completing a causal relationship between real life and the main point.

Before being used, they need a complete evaluation to be sure the indirect proof is not being used out of context or as an excuse to say whatever you want. If it is not appropriate, do not use it. A single erroneous indirect proof can quickly erode trust of your listeners, and increase the doubt of the legitimacy of your purpose. It may have been an earnest mistake, but it is one that is critical to avoid. An improperly used indirect proof can be classified as a type of Feeble Argument.

An example of an indirect proof would be to use the verse “Leviticus 21:14 - A widow, or a divorced woman, or profane, or an harlot, these shall he not take: but he shall take a virgin of his own people to wife.” Correlating with Proverbs 7, and how if you dress like a whore (or like a man) you might as well be one – and you don’t want people to think of you like that.

Indirect proofs can also be simple clear observations about the world such as current and historical events and their reflection on the Word of God. These are known as drawing parallels.

Feeble Arguments

Feeble Arguments should be avoided at all costs because they erode the trust of the listener, as well as pisses off God because you are basically lying. If your main point relies on a feeble argument, you may need to reevaluate that main point and restructure how you prove your purpose statement, or you may simply be incorrect and need to read your Bible more and pray the Holy Ghost will reveal the truth to you.

There are many types of feeble arguments, but the most dangerous one is the errant indirect proof, mentioned above. Additional feeble arguments are statements that are added as filler in order to appear to have a large quantity of arguments for a position rather than a couple extremely high-quality arguments. Never mix low quality arguments with high quality arguments, as it deteriorates the entire argument in the mind of the listener.

Digressive Statements

Digressive Statements are sentences that have little to nothing to do with your main point, commonly known as ‘tangents’ – extremely loosely related to your main point, but carry a significant danger of derailing the thought process of your audience, and in many cases will cause them to simply forget what you were talking about. These should be avoided because they waste time and distract the listener.

*Introduction -> Body - > **Conclusion***

The Conclusion

The conclusion of a sermon should reiterate the Declaration of Purpose and your main points (with or without an extremely brief reference to couple proofs each) and to drive home a call-to-action if it is appropriate for the subject, and an appropriate closing blessing to God’s people.

Your audience will not remember every single point or proof, but they will remember if you had proved it well, and they will remember if you did it poorly.

An example: “Brothers and Sisters, we know from the Word of God that women must dress like women, not only because of our own sensibilities, but because God said to and the consequences of disobedience is to look mannish or like a whore. Fathers, don’t let your little girls walk all over you! Raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and remember to teach these things at home. Mothers! Educate your lady friends and edify them to a proper appearance. God bless you all.”

Selecting a Topic

There are several approaches to selecting a topic to preach on.

1. Holy Spirit places a message on your heart
2. Current events in the light of the Bible
3. Sequential progression
4. Random

Remember that not every sermon has to be worldview-shattering. (2 Timothy 4:2) – Leave it up to the listener to apply the topic in their lives – you do not know if what you think is mundane might have a significant impact on their life.

Holy Spirit

You know the feeling – the hard part can be narrowing down a somewhat abstract truth into something tangible and backed up by scripture. It’s the hardest time when you are busy, have all the scripture at your tongue and could preach it RIGHT NOW – but later when you go to write it down you draw blanks.

If you cannot, then just write down the topic in a list for future sermon ideas. Lord willing – you will have many opportunities to preach.

Current Events

The world is filled with all sorts of perversions, and the church is expected to not perfect on doctrine. Do not be afraid to preach on the topics which may be difficult to counter in the church. We want to be as perfect with the Word of God as possible, and sometimes great fear comes with disagreeing with some church doctrines. When you do, pray the Holy Spirit reveals that truth to you, and to the congregation. If the churches were perfect – what were the Epistles written for? Reproof and correction, from love.

Sequential Progression

Start at the beginning of a book and begin reading, and preach on whatever the topic is at hand.

Random

You can get a guaranteed random Bible verse at the API URL below. Read the chapter, see what God reveals to you about it, and preach on that.

<https://api.1611.social/random?view=rich>

Guidelines for Outlines

Your outline is a document that you take to the pulpit and it contains your notes and printed-out verses of scripture you plan on using. You do not want to read from your outline like a script, but it should be used to keep you on topic and in order.

Labeling

You should keep every sermon you outline saved to the computer. This will allow you to share them with others, and go back and fix things once you learn and correct yourself. These should not be throwaway documents, but ones you can go back to and read when you need to refresh yourself on a topic you have already preached on. On the first page of your sermon outline, you should have:

1. Sermon title
2. Your name
3. Your church
4. The date prepared
5. The passage to be read before the sermon

Label the page numbers so you do not get them out of order.

Consider making inline markers for structural elements using your text editor or by prefacing with a symbol, spacing in the horizontal axis, text justification, color code, whichever you prefer for easy readability when delivering. You want most of your time to be making eye contact with the listeners and focusing on body language rather than reading.

Optionally at the very end, you may consider adding a page with nothing but the “scripture used in this sermon.” In the short term, copies can be made of these so listeners do not have to struggle to keep up with where you are in the Bible by your voice alone, and in the long term, the data can be used by our data scientists for building Baptist Bible-sermon concordances.

Typing Styles

When it comes to how you write what you plan to say, you can decide to explicitly write every single word in a prepared way like a script – or to have your scripture and main points in brief sentences, which is a more implicit typing style.

Explicit Typing

Explicit typing has the advantage of letting you practice in advance and make sure you don’t lose your train of thought that you had while writing your sermon, as well as to check for flow in delivery. They generally offer a more well-thought-out presentation of arguments, and it is much easier to avoid the pitfalls of feeble arguments and digressive statements.

The main disadvantage is if you decide to go another direction on the fly, it can be difficult to keep track of which fundamental parts you have already covered, and it may be an awkward pause as you have to read a paragraph or two to get back on track.

Explicit Typing Example: “Turn to 1st Timothy. Women should be wearing traditional women’s clothing, such as dresses and skirts that doesn’t make them look like harlots. We know this because the Bible says in 1 Timothy 2:9-10, ‘In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with

shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.”

Implicit Typing

If you are a skilled/dynamic orator or are particularly spirit-filled, an implicit typing style has the benefit of letting you cover the points and proofs you wanted to hit, while letting the explanations happen on the fly.

The severe weaknesses are you are much more likely to make feeble arguments or digressive statements, as well as failing to properly transition from one point to the next.

Implicit Typing Example: “1 Tim 2:9-10 ~ Don’t dress like a whore. (read 1 Tim2:9-10)”

Delivering the Message

When preaching a sermon, there will be many distractions from and to the congregation, including yourself. Not letting distractions rule your presentation is key to keeping attention.

Dynamic Delivery is the methodology that encompasses many preachers to great effectiveness. This is the combination of Volume, tone, rate, body language, eye contact, use of pauses, managing distractions, and interaction. Not having these methods perfected does not mean that you cannot deliver an effective sermon, as it is the Holy Ghost that will help you with that, but preaching is a skill like teaching is, and there is a way to approach it, to break it down into easier to be understood attributed that, when combined, make an effective mode of information delivery.

Volume

You always want to speak loudly enough to be heard, but not too loud where you will be tuned out. Figure out where your baseline volume will be, usually a small degree louder than a normal conversation. If you are too loud, your message will simply be overshadowed by your volume, your pronunciation and rate of speech will suffer, and your tone will be hard to be distinguished.

Tone

Depending on the content of the message being preached, and if you are making a mockery of a Bible character, you will need to adjust the tone of your voice to match the situation. When reading scripture, to help differentiate between characters, you may change the inflection of your voice to make it easier to be understood. When it’s God speaking, you may speak with power. This requires practice, projection of character traits, and consistency to get right, but when it is done correctly, it can make the message easier to be understood, and carry connotations to nudge the understanding of the listener into the correct direction.

Rate

When preaching, your sense of time is distorted. When preaching, you may feel you are speaking slower or faster than you think. Don’t roll over commas and periods with a fast tempo. The goal is not to get as many words out as possible, but to deliver a clear and understandable message. It is useful to practice recording yourself, and see if you ended up hyperventilating or skipping syllables in words. Remember that you already have the words in your mind, but your listeners have to receive it through their ears first, process it, and structure it in their brains. If you’re going too fast, many will get lost and not retain the information.

If you go too slow, the listeners may get bored, and their minds will catch up and try to fill in the blanks with distractions.

Body Language

Face the audience. Stand behind the pulpit, but do not be afraid to traverse to it's sides to expose your torso, while maintaining eye contact.

Weak body language breeds contempt by the listener by default. Do not cross your arms unless you are combining the body language with your tone for the purposes of bringing Bible characters to life.

Keep hand gestures single-motion, meaning from point A to point B without going all over the place, unless it's a very enthusiastic moment. Avoid "Goebbel's wrist" if possible.

Beat and strangle the pulpit if you must, but don't make it a point to do it either. Any sort of aggressive body language should come from the spirit and not to be pre-planned enthusiasm.

Eye Contact

Preaching is a group activity, but you want each listener to feel like they're being spoken to individually. A great way to keep active listeners is to simply look at them. Not for more than one or two sentences at a time, you want to give them a break, but they should expect for you to look back at them.

Pauses

Managing pauses is a powerful tool to encourage the listener to retain and process your speech. Between proofs, between points, it's appropriate to give a brief pause in your speech, as the change in volume and tempo will prevent the listener from tuning you out over time. You should incorporate pauses to control the rate of information, give emphasis to points, and give a mental break to the listener.

Managing Distractions

Often there will be external distractions such as parents taking their children to the bathroom, people on their phones, people looking around, children fidgeting or making noise, people and vehicles moving outside the building.

The listeners that are making eye contact with you will follow your eye contact. If you get distracted, they will get distracted. If you follow any sort of moving object with your eyes and slow your rate of speech by any amount, everyone else will notice, and the distraction will affect your listener severely. Look at the people you are speaking to, do not look at distractions. If the person you were looking at becomes a distraction, look at someone else.

Interaction

Sometimes it is appropriate to instigate an "Amen" from the congregation, but you will generally receive verbal affirmations from the men of the church when you are preaching hard. If you do not get them, that's ok as well. Sometimes brothers are paying very close attention to what you are saying, and other times they're spirit filled and want to get up and yell scripture. Both are fine, but be prepared for both.

Do not fish for interaction, either. If it gets a little quiet, don't just say something you know will get an "amen" if it has little to do with the topic.

Practicing

You don't need to practice in front of a mirror if you don't want to, but it does help to read the parts of your finished outline out loud to make sure it flows properly.

Review your outline again the next day to make sure it still makes sense to you.

Outline Template

Your First Sermon
Brother First Last
Darn Good Baptist Church
01JAN9999
Read: 1 Timothy 2

INTRO

[Greeting]

[Introduction]

[Declaration of Purpose]

[Emphasis on Importance]

[Transition to Main Point 1]

BODY

1. Main Point 1

- a. Direct Proof A
- b. Direct Proof B
- c. Indirect Proof (recommended)

^ Reiterate Main Point already covered

2. Main Point 2

- a. Direct Proof A
- b. Direct Proof B
- c. Indirect Proof (recommended)

^ Reiterate Main Points already covered

3. Main Point 3

- a. Direct Proof A
- b. Direct Proof B
- c. Indirect Proof (recommended)

^ Reiterate Main Points already covered

CONCLUSION

[Remind listeners of Purpose]

[Briefly reiterate all Main Points]

[Call to Action]