

A WORKBOOK FOR FIRST-TIME PREACHERS

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*The Preacher's*  
*Preparation Guide*

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*A step-by-step framework for turning a biblical passage  
into a faithful, well-crafted sermon.*

## P R E F A C E

# Before You Begin

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This document is intended as a tool and resource to help you turn a biblical passage into a sermon. Many faithful pastors and preachers use different methods to develop their study, thinking, and sermon delivery. What follows is a clear, time-tested framework you can return to every week as you grow in this calling.

Work through the steps in order. Don't skip ahead. Each section builds on the one before it, and the discipline of moving slowly through the text is itself part of the formation of a preacher.

*Note: Passage selection is a prerequisite. Before opening this guide, you should already know which passage of Scripture you intend to preach.*

## SECTION I

# Prayer for Illumination

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Before you read a single commentary or write a single word, pause and ask the Holy Spirit to open the text to you. The Spirit who inspired the Scriptures is the same Spirit who illumines them. No amount of study technique can substitute for a heart submitted to God in prayer.

Prayer is not the first step you check off and leave behind. It is the air you breathe through every step that follows. Return to it often.

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*“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak from Himself, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.”*

— JOHN 16:13

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## SECTION II

# Familiarization with the Text

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Before you can preach a passage, you have to live in it. The goal of this section is simple immersion. Don't analyze yet — just read, slowly, repeatedly, and prayerfully.

### **Step 1 — Read the passage multiple times**

*Read your passage out loud at least five times. Read it in two or three different translations if you can. Notice what stands out, what feels confusing, what stirs your affections.*

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### **Step 2 — Read the passage in the context of its book**

*If the book is short — like James, Galatians, or Ephesians — read it through in one sitting, more than once. If the book is long, read at least the surrounding chapters. Ask: where does this passage fall in the book? Beginning, middle, end? What role does it play in the overall argument or narrative? Understanding the part it plays in the whole feeds directly into your literary context work later.*

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### **Step 3 — Identify the thought unit**

*Find where the passage naturally begins and ends. Don't let chapter and verse divisions decide for you — they were added centuries after the text was written.*

**D E F I N I T I O N**

*Thought Unit*

A complete unit of meaning in the biblical text — a single argument, scene, or movement that hangs together as one. The thought unit is the natural preaching portion, regardless of where chapter or verse breaks fall.

*Write the boundaries of your thought unit below:*

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## SECTION IV

# Context

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A text without context is a pretext for whatever you want it to mean. Before you can faithfully interpret a passage, you must understand the world it came from — both its literary world (what kind of writing it is) and its historical world (who wrote it, to whom, and why).

### **Step 1 — Literary Context**

*What kind of writing is this passage? The genre shapes how you read it.*

Is it narrative? Poetry? Proverb? Letter? Apocalyptic? Law? Wisdom? Prophecy?

*Write your answer here:*

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*Now consider the immediate context. Do the verses immediately before or immediately after your passage help you interpret it? Will you need to bring them in to make your text understandable to your audience? Note what you find.*

*Write your answer here:*

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### **Step 2 — Historical Context**

*Answer the following three questions to locate the passage in its original setting.*

**A. Where is this taking place?**

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**B. Who was this written to?**

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**C. Who is the author?**

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## SECTION V

# Discovering Authorial Intent

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Here is the central question of all faithful interpretation:

*What is the original author communicating to his original audience?*

### DEFINITION

#### *Authorial Intent*

The meaning the human author of Scripture intended to communicate to his original audience, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The preacher's job is to recover that meaning — not to invent a new one. Until you know what the text meant then, you cannot know what it means now.

### Step 1 — Identify and record

#### A. What are the key words in this passage?

*List each key word alongside its meaning in the original language. A simple study Bible, Logos, or Blue Letter Bible will get you there.*

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#### B. What are the grammatical clues in this text?

*Words like "but," "and," "therefore," and "so that" help you trace the author's argument. Circle them in your text and write down what each one signals.*

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**C. Are there any commands in the text?**

*Note every imperative. Commands are not suggestions — they are part of the author's direct intent for his readers.*

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## SECTION VI

# The Exegetical Idea

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Now distill everything you've learned into one clear sentence. This is the moment of synthesis — the main thrust of the text, in the author's own world, in his own day.

### DEFINITION

#### *Exegetical Idea*

The single, central truth the biblical author was communicating to his original audience. It is stated in past-tense, third-person language because it describes what the text meant then.

Every sermon should have one — and only one — exegetical idea.

*Try to summarize the main concept or theme of the passage in a single sentence. If you can't say it in one sentence, you don't yet understand it well enough.*

### Examples:

*Paul is communicating to his original audience that \_\_\_\_\_.*

*John wants his readers to know that \_\_\_\_\_.*

### Write yours here:

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## SECTION VII

# The Homiletical Idea

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Now build the bridge from the ancient world to your hearers. The exegetical idea tells you what the text meant. The homiletical idea tells you what it means — stated in present-tense language for the people sitting in front of you.

### DEFINITION

#### *Homiletical Idea*

The exegetical idea translated into a timeless, present-tense statement that speaks directly to today's hearer. It carries the same truth as the exegetical idea, but it is phrased to land in the heart of a modern audience without losing the author's original meaning.

**Translate your exegetical idea into a homiletical idea:**

*John wants us to know that* \_\_\_\_\_.

**Write yours here:**

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## SECTION VIII

# Application Focus

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A sermon is not a lecture. The goal is not merely that your hearers understand the passage, but that they are changed by it. Before you build your outline, get clear on what this text is asking your people to believe, feel, or do.

Application is not something you tack on at the end. It should saturate the whole sermon.

**What does this passage call your hearers to BELIEVE?**

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**What does this passage call your hearers to FEEL?**

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**What does this passage call your hearers to DO?**

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## SECTION IX

# Outline the Message

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Outlining is the most critical part of taking a mountain of material and making it digestible for the people you are preaching to. To arrange your material into clear, memorable chunks, use the plural noun method.

Choose a plural noun that captures the shape of your sermon, then build your points around it.

### **Examples:**

*Tonight we will study three Truths from this passage.*

*What we will see in this text are four Revelations.*

*This passage gives us two Warnings and one Promise.*

### **My plural noun:**

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### **Point 1:**

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### **Point 2:**

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### **Point 3:**

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## SECTION X

# Flesh Out the Outline

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*Adapted from Haddon Robinson, Biblical Preaching (Baker Academic, 3rd ed., 2014).*

Your outline is a skeleton. By itself, it cannot move or breathe or persuade anyone of anything. Robinson puts it bluntly: an outline on its own is the body “Exhibit C, Victim of Starvation.” What gives a sermon flesh is supporting material — the explanations, stories, facts, and quotations that hang on the bones of your points and bring them to life.

This section gives you six tools for developing each point in your outline. Think of them as a palette. For every point you preach, ask which of these six tools that point needs. Most points will need two or three. Few points need all six.

### 01 RESTATEMENT

Restatement is saying the same thing in different words. It is not the same as repetition, which says the same thing in the same words. A reader who gets lost can flip back a page; a listener cannot. When you restate a point two or three different ways, you give your hearers a second and third chance to catch it.

Restatement also impresses the idea on the listener’s mind. Advertisers spend millions doing exactly this. You should too — but with eternal truth instead of toothpaste.

#### DEFINITION

##### *Restatement vs. Repetition*

Repetition says the same thing in the same words. Restatement says the same thing in different words. Repetition reinforces; restatement clarifies. Skilled preachers use both.

### 02 DEFINITION & EXPLANATION

A definition sets the limits of a term — what it includes and excludes. An explanation goes further, showing how an idea relates to other ideas or what it implies in practice. Both serve the same end: making sure your hearers know exactly what you mean.

Most people in your pews live in a different intellectual world from yours. They support you financially so that you can study what they cannot. You owe them a clear explanation of every term that matters — especially theological terms. Better to define too many words than too few.

*“A mist in the pulpit can easily become a fog in the pew.”*

### **03 FACTUAL INFORMATION**

Facts are observations, examples, statistics, and other data that can be verified apart from you. Facts earn respect for the speaker because hearers can check them. But be careful: much that parades as fact is opinion in disguise. Don't say “as a matter of fact” when you mean “in my opinion.”

When you use statistics, keep them simple. Round numbers usually serve better than precise ones. And whenever possible, translate raw data into something your hearers can picture: “That temple was longer than a football field, with columns taller than a five-story building.”

### **04 QUOTATIONS**

There are two reasons to quote someone else: impressiveness and authority. Use a quotation when someone has said the thing better than you ever could, or when their credibility on the subject is greater than yours.

A few rules. Use quotes sparingly — a sermon should not sound like a term paper. Keep them brief; long quotations lose your audience. And introduce them with a touch of freshness: not just “Spurgeon said,” but “When Spurgeon faced this same question, he wrote...”

*A special case: when the quotation you reach for is another verse of Scripture, you are using a cross-reference — a powerful tool with its own rules. See Appendix A for a full treatment.*

#### DEFINITION

##### *Choosing Authorities Wisely*

Before quoting an expert, ask: Are they qualified to speak on this subject? Is their testimony firsthand? Are they prejudiced? Will my audience recognize and respect them? An obscure name needs a one-line introduction so your hearers know why to listen.

## 05 NARRATION

Every passage of Scripture has people in it. Sometimes they stand out in the open — laughing, cursing, praying, plotting. Sometimes they hide and you have to look for them. But there is always someone writing and someone reading. Pull aside any doctrine and you will find personalities.

Narration brings these people and events to life. Use vivid verbs and concrete nouns. Use dialogue — the Gospels are full of it. When only one character is present, soliloquy can work, but use it sparingly: speaking in another person's voice is harder to deliver than it looks, and a first sermon is rarely the place to attempt it. The Holy Spirit knew the value of narration when He filled the Scriptures with it, and Jesus demonstrated its power in every parable.

#### DEFINITION

##### *Narration*

Bringing the people and events of a biblical text to life through vivid description, dialogue, and imagination — always staying tied to what the text actually says. Imagination is half-brother to interpretation: both work from the text, never against it.

## 06 ILLUSTRATIONS

An illustration is a window that lets light into the room of your point. Stories, analogies, and examples take an abstract truth and make it visible, memorable, and felt. Well-chosen illustrations can restate, explain, prove, and apply your ideas all at once — which is why they are the most powerful tool in this section.

But illustrations come with a non-negotiable rule. Robinson states it as a transitive verb: an illustration must illustrate something. There is no such thing as a good illustration in the abstract — only a good illustration of a particular truth. A story told for its own sake may entertain your hearers, but it gets in the way of your sermon.

*“Illustrations should illustrate.”*

The best illustrations come from experiences your hearers have actually lived. A story about something you and they have both been through will always land harder than a story about Alexander the Great. When you must use a distant example, work hard to bring it close.

*A special case: when your illustration is itself a person, place, or event from the Bible, you are using a biblical illustration — powerful, but it requires care to bring your audience along. See Appendix A for a full treatment.*

#### DEFINITION

##### *Three Rules for Personal Illustrations*

(1) It must be true. Never claim something happened to you that did not. (2) It must be modest. You should not always be the hero. (3) It must never violate a confidence. If a story involves someone in your church, ask their permission — every time, without exception.

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#### WORKSHEET

### Develop Each Point

Take each point from your outline (Section IX) and walk it through the two-step process below. The first step forces you to choose — because most points need only two or three of the six tools, not all six. The second step gives you space to draft the supporting material you chose.

#### DEFINITION

### *How to Use This Worksheet*

Step 1: For each point, circle the 2 or 3 tools that point most needs. Resist the temptation to circle all six — a point cluttered with every tool becomes a sermon nobody can follow. Step 2: Draft only the tools you circled in the space provided.

#### **P O I N T 1**

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*Write the point here:*

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#### **STEP 1 — Circle the 2 or 3 tools this point most needs:**

*Restatement • Definition • Facts • Quotation • Narration • Illustration*

#### **STEP 2 — Draft your chosen supporting material below:**

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#### **P O I N T 2**

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*Write the point here:*

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**STEP 1 — Circle the 2 or 3 tools this point most needs:**

*Restatement • Definition • Facts • Quotation • Narration • Illustration*

**STEP 2 — Draft your chosen supporting material below:**

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**P O I N T 3**

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*Write the point here:*

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**STEP 1 — Circle the 2 or 3 tools this point most needs:**

*Restatement • Definition • Facts • Quotation • Narration • Illustration*

**STEP 2 — Draft your chosen supporting material below:**



## SECTION XI

# The Introduction

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Make it interesting. Arouse curiosity. The first sixty seconds of your sermon will determine whether your hearers lean in or check out.

A good introduction does two things: it earns attention, and it answers the unspoken question on every listener's mind — why should I care about this?

### **Ideas for opening your sermon:**

- A notable quotation
- A stanza from a hymn
- Historical background
- A poem
- A pertinent contemporary situation — news, recent events, cultural moment
- A personal experience or shared experience
- The story of a historical person

*Why should your people care about this passage? How will it change their life? Try to communicate the value to them in your introduction:*

*"If you listen to this sermon, you will get \_\_\_\_\_ out of it."*

### **Draft your introduction here:**

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## SECTION XII

# The Conclusion

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A sermon does not end — it lands. The conclusion is where you bring your hearers home with the truth firmly in their hands.

Your conclusion should do three things, in this order:

- Summarize the lesson — briefly remind your hearers of the points you walked through.
- Provide the main application — call them clearly to believe, feel, or do something specific.
- Restate the big idea — leave them with the homiletical idea ringing in their ears.

*Example:*

*“Over the course of our time together tonight, we covered three truths...”*

**Draft your conclusion here:**

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## SECTION XIII

# From Workbook to Pulpit

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You have done the work. The text has been studied, the ideas distilled, the outline built and fleshed out, the introduction and conclusion drafted. But this workbook is not what you will preach from. A workbook is for preparation. The pulpit requires a different kind of document — one built for your eyes scanning quickly while you speak.

This final section walks you through the four moves that turn finished prep into a deliverable sermon.

### 01 CHOOSE: MANUSCRIPT OR NOTES

First-time preachers tend to fall into two camps. Some write out every word as a full manuscript, then read it from the pulpit. Others scribble a few bullet points on an index card and hope for the best. Neither is ideal. A full manuscript kills eye contact and makes you sound like you're reading. A bare outline leaves you flailing for words mid-sentence. For your first sermon, write a full manuscript — every word, exactly as you plan to say it. This forces you to think through your phrasing in advance and protects you from rambling. Then, after your manuscript is finished, condense it into preaching notes: a one-page outline with key phrases, transitions, and the first sentence of each illustration. Bring both to the pulpit. Preach from the notes; keep the manuscript nearby as a safety net.

### 02 FORMAT FOR THE EYE

Your preaching notes should be designed for fast scanning, not for reading. The goal is that a single glance tells you where you are. Use these rules:

- Use a font size of at least 14pt — 18pt is better. You will be glancing, not reading.
- Bold every transition (“First,” “Second,” “Finally,” “Which brings us to...”). Transitions are the moments you are most likely to lose your place.
- Use generous white space between points. A cluttered page is impossible to navigate at speed.

- Print Scripture references in a different color or style so your eye finds them instantly.
- Mark your illustrations with a symbol or color in the margin. They are the moments you most need to look up at your hearers.
- Number every page and never staple them. If you drop them, you need to be able to put them back together.

### 03 TIME IT ALOUD

A sermon that reads like 25 minutes on the page will preach like 40 minutes from the pulpit. Reading silently is two to three times faster than preaching aloud. The only way to know how long your sermon actually is, is to preach it out loud, all the way through, with a timer running.

Do this at least twice before Sunday. The first time will reveal phrases that don't work in your mouth and transitions that fall apart when spoken. The second time will reveal whether your sermon fits the time you've been given. If it runs long, cut content — do not preach faster. Preachers who speed up to fit the clock lose their hearers in the first three minutes.

*My target sermon length:*

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*First out-loud run-through:*

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*Second out-loud run-through:*

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### 04 PRAY OVER THE SERMON

This workbook opened with prayer for illumination as you approached the text. It closes with prayer for power as you approach the pulpit. The same Spirit who opened the Word to you in the study must open the hearts of your hearers in the room. No amount of preparation, formatting, or rehearsal can substitute for this.

Before you preach, pray through your sermon one final time. Ask the Lord to take what is faithful and use it, to guard what is true and humble what is not, and to do in your hearers what only He can do. Then walk to the pulpit and preach the Word.

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*“And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.”*

— 1 Corinthians 2:4-5

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## APPENDIX A

# Cross-References & Biblical Illustrations

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Two of the tools introduced in Section X — Quotations and Illustrations — take a special form when the source you reach for is the Bible itself. A quotation from another verse of Scripture is called a cross-reference. An illustration drawn from a biblical person, place, or event is called a biblical illustration. Both are powerful. Both can be misused. This appendix gives each one the deeper treatment it deserves.

## PART 1 • USING CROSS-REFERENCES

### DEFINITION

#### *Cross-Reference*

A second passage of Scripture brought into a sermon to support, clarify, or deepen the point being made from the primary text. The Bible interprets the Bible — and a well-chosen cross-reference shows your hearers that the truth you are preaching is not isolated to one verse but woven throughout the whole canon.

A cross-reference functions like a quotation, but with greater authority — because the voice you are quoting is God's. That authority is also what makes the misuse of cross-references so dangerous. The verse you reference must mean what you are claiming it means in its own context, or you are not strengthening your point with Scripture; you are weaponizing Scripture against itself.

To faithfully use a cross-reference, the preacher must never take the verse being referenced out of its own context, and must never bend it to mean something the original author did not intend. The verse you cite carries the same interpretive weight as your primary text — it deserves the same care.

### **Three rules for cross-references:**

1. Confirm the verse means in its own context what you are claiming it means in your sermon.

2. Choose verses that genuinely deepen the point — not verses that just contain similar-sounding words.
3. Use cross-references sparingly. Three well-chosen references will preach better than ten thrown at the wall.

✓ GOOD EXAMPLE · Cross-Reference

*Preaching Romans 5:8 (“God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”), the preacher cross-references 1 John 4:10 (“this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins”). Both verses are about the same truth: God’s love is demonstrated, not earned. The cross-reference deepens the point and shows the same theology emerging from a different apostle in a different letter.*

X BAD EXAMPLE · Cross-Reference

*Preaching John 4 about the woman at the well, the preacher jumps to Jeremiah 29:11 and says, “See, God’s point here is that He wants to prosper this woman and give her a better life.” This is a bad cross-reference because Jeremiah 29:11 is not controlling the meaning of John 4 — it is being pulled in loosely because it sounds encouraging. Instead of helping explain the text, it distorts it. The verse you cross-reference must actually deepen the meaning of the passage you are preaching, not be imported because it sounds like it fits.*

## PART 2 · USING BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATIONS

### DEFINITION

#### *Biblical Illustration*

Using a person, place, or event from the Bible to function as an illustration for the point being made from your primary text. Biblical illustrations carry the weight of inspired Scripture, but they require the preacher to bring the audience along — most modern hearers no longer share the biblical literacy that earlier generations could assume.

Biblical illustrations can be the most powerful tool in your kit, because they show the same truth playing out in real human lives recorded by the Holy Spirit. But there is a catch.

Robinson warns that biblical illustrations often fail because they illustrate the unknown with the unknown — most modern listeners do not know the Bible well enough to recognize the story you are referencing without help.

The cure is not to abandon biblical illustrations. The cure is to bring your audience with you. When you reach for a biblical illustration, you must briefly set the scene — who, where, when, what was happening — before you make the connection to your point. Otherwise the story will land in confusion instead of clarity.

### Three rules for biblical illustrations:

1. Briefly set the scene before making the application. Assume your hearers do not know the story.
2. Make sure the illustration genuinely illustrates your point — don't force a connection that isn't there.
3. Use the story's own emotional weight. Biblical narratives are dramatic for a reason — let them be.

#### ✓ GOOD EXAMPLE · Biblical Illustration

*Preaching on Jesus' call to deny yourself and take up your cross, the preacher briefly points to Abraham offering Isaac as an illustration of costly surrender and trust in God. Abraham was willing to place even the most precious thing in his life into God's hands — helping the audience feel the weight of what self-denial can look like. Why this works: Abraham's story does not replace Jesus' meaning. It illustrates the kind of faith, surrender, and trust that Jesus calls for. Important caution: do not say Abraham and Isaac is the meaning of the passage unless that is actually the point of your text. Use it to illuminate the passage, not to control it.*

#### X BAD EXAMPLE · Biblical Illustration

*Preaching on faith, the preacher says: "This is just like what happened with Mephibosheth and David." He moves on, assuming the audience knows the story. Most do not. Half the room is still trying to remember who Mephibosheth is when the preacher has already moved to his next point. The illustration didn't illustrate — it confused. The preacher needed thirty seconds of scene-setting ("Mephibosheth was the crippled grandson of King Saul. By every cultural rule of the ancient near east, he should have been killed when David took the throne. Instead, David*

*sought him out and gave him a permanent seat at the king's table...") before the application could land.*

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*The Bible is the most powerful supporting material in your sermon — but only when you handle it with the same care you handle the primary text.*

## APPENDIX B

# Recommended Tools & Resources

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The workbook tells you to read in multiple translations, do word studies, check the original languages, and consult commentaries. This appendix tells you what to actually use. Every tool listed here is one a working preacher would reach for — and most of them are free.

Start with the free tools. They will carry you through your first year of preaching with room to spare. Add paid tools only when you outgrow what the free ones can do.

### 01 READING & COMPARING TRANSLATIONS

For Section II (Familiarization). Use these to read your passage in multiple translations side by side.

#### **Bible Gateway • [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com) • Free**

Lets you display two or three translations in parallel columns. Best free tool for quick translation comparison.

#### **YouVersion • [bible.com](http://bible.com) / mobile app • Free**

Best mobile reading experience. Audio Bible built in. Useful for reading aloud during familiarization.

#### **STEP Bible • [stepbible.org](http://stepbible.org) • Free**

Made by Tyndale House Cambridge. Offers translation comparison plus original-language tools in one interface. Underrated.

### 02 WORD STUDIES & ORIGINAL LANGUAGES

For Section V (Authorial Intent), specifically the key-words step. You don't need to read Greek or Hebrew to use these — they translate the lookup work for you.

#### **Blue Letter Bible • [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) • Free**

The standard free word-study tool. Click any word in any verse to see the original Greek or Hebrew, Strong's definition, and every other place that word appears in Scripture. Start here.

**NET Bible • [netbible.org](http://netbible.org) • Free**

A modern translation with over 60,000 translator notes explaining grammar, word choice, and textual variants. Read like having a translator look over your shoulder.

**Logos Bible Software • [logos.com](http://logos.com) • Paid (free starter tier)**

The serious upgrade. Built-in interlinear, lexicons, commentaries, and original-language tools all linked together. Worth the investment once you're preaching weekly. Start with the free tier and add resources as you need them.

### **03 COMMENTARIES**

For Sections IV and V (Context and Authorial Intent). A commentary is a scholar's detailed walk through a book of the Bible. Consult one only after you've done your own work on the text — never before.

**ESV Study Bible • Crossway • Paid (one-time)**

The single best starter resource. Has introductions to every book, maps, charts, and a brief commentary on every verse. If you buy one resource for your first year of preaching, buy this.

**The Bible Knowledge Commentary (BKC) • Walvoord & Zuck • Paid (two volumes)**

Two volumes — one Old Testament, one New. Faithful, accessible, and dispensational. A trustworthy first stop for any passage.

**Commentaries on individual books • see Carson's NT Commentary Survey**

As you preach through specific books, you'll want a dedicated commentary on each one. D. A. Carson's New Testament Commentary Survey is the standard guide for choosing well; for the Old Testament, Tremper Longman III's Old Testament Commentary Survey is the equivalent.

**StudyLight.org • [studylight.org](http://studylight.org) • Free**

Hosts dozens of older public-domain commentaries (Matthew Henry, Spurgeon, Calvin, Jamieson-Fausset-Brown, etc.). Useful when you can't access modern commentaries — but verify modern scholarship before relying on these alone.

## **04 ILLUSTRATIONS & QUOTATIONS**

For Section X (Flesh Out the Outline). Robinson is right that the best illustrations come from your own life and reading — but a curated collection helps when you're stuck.

### **Preaching Today • [preachingtoday.com](http://preachingtoday.com) • Subscription**

From Christianity Today. Searchable database of sermon illustrations organized by topic and Scripture reference. The most professional resource in this category.

### **Sermon Central • [sermoncentral.com](http://sermoncentral.com) • Free + paid tiers**

Large free archive of sermon illustrations. Variable quality — read with discernment, especially around theological accuracy.

### **Your own commonplace book • Notebook, app, or Notion • Free**

The most important resource you will build. Every quote that strikes you, every story worth keeping, every illustration that occurs to you — capture it the moment you see it. After two years of disciplined collection, your own notebook will outperform any subscription.

## **05 SERMONS WORTH LISTENING TO**

You learn to preach by listening to good preachers. Listen analytically — not just for content, but for how they introduce, transition, illustrate, and land their points. These are good places to start.

### **John MacArthur • [gtj.org](http://gtj.org) • Free**

Decades of verse-by-verse expository preaching through the entire New Testament. The standard for the genre.

### **Martyn Lloyd-Jones • [mljtrust.org](http://mljtrust.org) • Free**

Recordings going back to the mid-twentieth century. The standard for serious expository preaching with theological depth and pastoral warmth.

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*Tools sharpen the workman, but they do not replace the work. Spend more time in the text than in the tools.*

*“Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.”*

— 2 T I M O T H Y 4 : 2

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I n s t r u c t o r s   G u i d e

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*The Preacher's*  
*Preparation Guide*

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*A filled-in packet walking through*

**Matthew 5:13–16**

*Salt and Light*

## NOTE TO THE READER

# How to Read This Packet

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This is a filled-in version of the Preacher's Preparation Guide — the workbook as it would look after a preacher has actually done the work. The instructional prose and prompts of the original workbook are preserved so you can see exactly what was being asked at each step.

Anything appearing in a cream-colored box with a thick gold left border is a preacher's handwritten-style answer — the response written into the packet. Definition boxes (cream with a thin gold border on all sides) are unchanged from the original workbook.

The passage worked through here is Matthew 5:13–16, the “Salt and Light” section of the Sermon on the Mount.

THE PASSAGE

## Matthew 5:13–16

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*“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out to be trampled under foot by men.*

*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.*

*Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”*

— Matthew 5:13–16

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## SECTION II

# Familiarization with the Text

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Before you can preach a passage, you have to live in it. The goal of this section is simple immersion. Don't analyze yet — just read, slowly, repeatedly, and prayerfully.

### **Step 1 — Read the passage multiple times**

*Read your passage out loud at least five times. Read it in two or three different translations if you can. Notice what stands out, what feels confusing, what stirs your affections.*

### **Step 2 — Read the passage in the context of its book**

*If the book is short — like James, Galatians, or Ephesians — read it through in one sitting, more than once. If the book is long, read at least the surrounding chapters. Ask where your passage falls in the overall argument or narrative.*

*I read this passage within the context of the Sermon on the Mount — Matthew chapters 5–7.*

### **Step 3 — Identify the thought unit**

*Find where the passage naturally begins and ends. Don't let chapter and verse divisions decide for you.*

#### **DEFINITION**

#### *Thought Unit*

A complete unit of meaning in the biblical text — a single argument, scene, or movement that hangs together as one. The thought unit is the natural preaching portion, regardless of where chapter or verse breaks fall.

*Matthew 5:13–16 can stand alone as a thought unit, with verse 12 informing the context and interpretation.*

## SECTION III

# Initial Observations

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Before you reach for a commentary, before you dive into context or word studies, stop and listen. The Holy Spirit who inspired this text has more to teach you in the silence of your own attention than you might expect.

Write down any initial observations or thoughts the Holy Spirit brings to your mind. Capture everything: a command you noticed, a vivid word picture, an illustration that came to mind, words or phrases that repeat, things that surprised you, things that confused you, and every question you need answered.

*Categories to consider — commands, word pictures, illustrations, repeated words, surprises, confusions, questions, connections to other Scripture, things that stirred your affections.*

*Jesus is speaking to a crowd.*

*Question: Is Jesus speaking to His followers — are these rules for His followers? — YES.*

*Question: In what sense is He using the word “salt”? Preservative? Its expensiveness? Salt on a wound irritates? Salt on food adds flavor?*

*Jesus focuses on the taste of salt, which seems to indicate that He is referring to the flavor it adds to food.*

*What does it mean to be salt of the earth?*

*Wow — if someone isn't adding the “salt” value, Jesus is saying they are worthless. That's convicting.*

*Light of the world — that's interesting, because Jesus calls Himself the light of the world.*

*What are the effects of light? Sunlight gives life. It illuminates darkness. It exposes truth and reality.*

*V. 15: Jesus highlights the foolishness of when light is misused.*

*V. 16 is a command — the purpose of shining light is to glorify the Father in heaven.*

*What is the original Greek word for "glorify"?*

*How are Christians supposed to glorify God through good works to "outsiders" (i.e., the earth)?*

*It seems like the main thrust of this argument lands in verse 16. Jesus uses salt and light as a word picture and illustration to point out that a good thing used improperly becomes foolish, useless, and meaningless.*

*Ooh — another possible cross-reference might be the branches that do not bear fruit: "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vine-grower. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He cleans it so that it may bear more fruit" (John 15:1-2). And verse 8: "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples."*

*I'll have to research this reference later to make sure I'm not text-jacking and that I'm using the passage in a legitimate manner.*

## SECTION IV

# Context

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A text without context is a pretext for whatever you want it to mean. Before you can faithfully interpret a passage, you must understand the world it came from — both its literary world and its historical world.

### Step 1 — Literary Context

*What kind of writing is this passage? The genre shapes how you read it. Is it narrative? Poetry? Proverb? Letter? Apocalyptic? Law? Wisdom? Prophecy?*

*Gospel of Matthew.*

*Jesus is delivering a sermon: Matthew 5–7.*

*Now consider the immediate context. Do the verses immediately before or immediately after your passage help you interpret it? Will you need to bring them in to make your text understandable to your audience?*

*Matthew 5:12 states: “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

*This informs that this text might also be about persecution. For a better understanding, I will pray over this and consult a commentary or two to see if anyone else made this connection.*

### Step 2 — Historical Context

#### A. Where is this taking place?

*This is taking place in Israel — in Galilee (Mt. 4:23).*

#### B. Who was this written to?

*This book was written to the Church — Matthew 28:18-20: “Teaching them all that I commanded you.” Jesus is speaking to Jews in the moment, but God is preserving His teaching for the Church.*

**C. Who is the author?**

*The author is Matthew. The speaker is Jesus.*

## SECTION V

# Discovering Authorial Intent

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The central question of all faithful interpretation:

*What is the original author communicating to his original audience?*

### DEFINITION

#### *Authorial Intent*

The meaning the human author of Scripture intended to communicate to his original audience, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The preacher's job is to recover that meaning — not to invent a new one. Until you know what the text meant then, you cannot know what it means now.

### Step 1 — Identify and record

#### A. What are the key words in this passage?

*List each key word alongside its meaning in the original language. A simple study Bible, Logos, or Blue Letter Bible will get you there.*

*Salt*

*Earth*

*Glorify*

*Light*

*Light of the world*

*City on a hill*

*Hidden*

*Good works*

#### B. What are the grammatical clues in this text?

Words like “but,” “and,” “therefore,” and “so that” help you trace the author’s argument. Circle them in your text and write down what each one signals.

*“You are...”*

*“You are...”*

*“Let your...”*

*“In such a way that they might...”*

### **C. Are there any commands in the text?**

Note every imperative. Commands are not suggestions — they are part of the author’s direct intent for his readers.

*“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”*

## SECTION VI

# The Exegetical Idea

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Now distill everything you've learned into one clear sentence. This is the moment of synthesis — the main thrust of the text, in the author's own world, in his own day.

### DEFINITION

#### *Exegetical Idea*

The single, central truth the biblical author was communicating to his original audience. It is stated in past-tense, third-person language because it describes what the text meant then. Every sermon should have one — and only one — exegetical idea.

*First attempt:*

*Jesus is communicating to His followers that they ought to glorify their Father in heaven through good works — which function as an illuminating presence to the world that adds taste like salt.*

*Boiled down:*

*Jesus is communicating to His followers that the way to glorify their Father and shine light is through good works.*

## SECTION VII

# The Homiletical Idea

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Now build the bridge from the ancient world to your hearers. The exegetical idea tells you what the text meant. The homiletical idea tells you what it means — stated in present-tense language for the people sitting in front of you.

### DEFINITION

#### *Homiletical Idea*

The exegetical idea translated into a timeless, present-tense statement that speaks directly to today's hearer. It carries the same truth as the exegetical idea, but it is phrased to land in the heart of a modern audience without losing the author's original meaning.

*Jesus wants us to know that the way we shine the light of Christ to this world is by doing what is good.*

*Jesus is communicating to us that we need to shine light through good works for the glory of God.*

## SECTION VIII

# Application Focus

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A sermon is not a lecture. The goal is not merely that your hearers understand the passage, but that they are changed by it. Before you build your outline, get clear on what this text is asking your people to believe, feel, or do.

Application is not something you tack on at the end. It should saturate the whole sermon.

### **What does this passage call your hearers to BELIEVE?**

*Christians are lights.*

*Christians add “flavor.”*

*Christians are valuable.*

*Christians have a corporate identity — no “cowboy” / “I’ll do good on my own”*

*Christianity.*

### **What does this passage call your hearers to FEEL?**

*Convicted about failing to do good to outsiders.*

### **What does this passage call your hearers to DO?**

*Let your light shine.*

*Be bold in the face of persecution.*

*Do not be hidden.*

## SECTION IX

# Outline the Message

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Outlining is the most critical part of taking a mountain of material and making it digestible for the people you are preaching to. To arrange your material into clear, memorable chunks, use the plural noun method.

Choose a plural noun that captures the shape of your sermon, then build your points around it.

### Examples:

*Tonight we will study three Truths from this passage.*

*What we will see in this text are four Revelations.*

*This passage gives us two Warnings and one Promise.*

*Working the passage again, marking the grammatical clues that break up the text:*

13 “**You are** the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out to be trampled under foot by men.

14 “**You are** the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden;

15 nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

16 “**Let your** light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

*It seems like there are 2 “calls” Jesus has for His followers and 1 command.*

**My plural noun ideas:**

*Desires, Instructions, Duties, Responsibilities.*

*I like "Responsibilities" because Matthew is recording Jesus' words for Christians, and Jesus is describing the attributes of His followers.*

**My plural noun:**

*3 Responsibilities*

**Point 1:**

*Responsibility #1 — The call to be salt.*

**Point 2:**

*Responsibility #2 — The call to be light.*

**Point 3:**

*Responsibility #3 — The command to glorify God through good works.*

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S e r m o n   S t a r t e r

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# *The Preacher's Sermon Outline*

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*A Step By step Outline to aid in the sermon development process*



## THESIS

### Thesis & Big Idea

*State the big idea of this sermon in one sentence — the homiletical idea your hearers should walk out remembering.*

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## OUTLINE PREVIEW

### What We Will See Tonight

*Use the plural noun method. Tonight we will see \_\_\_ truths / revelations / warnings / promises...*

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- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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**B O D Y — P O I N T 1**

## Point 1

*Write the verse text and reference here. Then unpack it using the structure below.*

<p><b>V E R S E</b></p> <hr/>
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**1.**

---

**a.**

**b.**

**c.**

---

**2.**

---

**a.**

**b.**

**c.**

---

**3.**

---

**a.**

**b.**

**c.**

---

**B O D Y — P O I N T 2**

## Point 2

*Write the verse text and reference here. Then unpack it using the structure below.*

<p><b>V E R S E</b></p> <hr/>
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**1.**

---

**a.**

**b.**

**c.**

---

**2.**

---

**a.**

**b.**

**c.**

---

**3.**

---

**a.**

**b.**

**c.**

---

**B O D Y — P O I N T 3**

## Point 3

*Write the verse text and reference here. Then unpack it using the structure below.*

<p><b>V E R S E</b></p> <hr/>
-------------------------------

**1.**

---

**a.**

**b.**

**c.**

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**2.**

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**a.**

**b.**

**c.**

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**3.**

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**a.**

**b.**

**c.**

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## CONCLUSION

# Conclusion

*Three moves: (1) summarize the points, (2) deliver the main application, (3) restate the big idea. Land it — don't just trail off.*

## SUMMARY

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## MAIN APPLICATION

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## RESTATE THE BIG IDEA

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## CLOSING PRAYER

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