

# How to Prepare to Preach through a Book of the Bible

## 1. Familiarize yourself with the book

- Start studying the book at least one month before you begin preaching it and work in that book daily.
- Read through the entire book numerous times (3-5) and watch for the way the book is composed. What are the major topics that are talked about and where do those major sections begin and end?
- Discover who wrote the book, to whom it was written, and why it was written.  
Caution: Be very careful what authors you read for this information. There are many authors who have academic credentials but no evident faith in God. These will try to discredit the validity of virtually every biblical book and will sow confusion and doubt into the reader's heart. They seem to think some unknown scribe wrote whatever book they are commenting on and that he must have written it centuries after when it was supposed to have been written. You must learn to recognize trustworthy publishers and authors, and those that are untrustworthy. Ask someone you respect and has taught the Bible for years for their recommendations. And remember, your goal is to build people's faith and help them understand what they are reading. Using information from the wrong authors will lead people in the opposite direction. So as you begin your study of a book, choose your research material carefully. You want to focus on what the Bible actually says, not become entangled in different theories about its validity.

## 2. Start "SOAPing"

- As I'm sure you've recognized by now, the SOAP process (or Hear, Do, Pray) is very similar to the three questions we've learned in this class (What does it say? What does it mean? What does it mean to me?). So begin SOAPing, but don't use the Bible reading schedule. Just watch for the next logical unit of thought and work slowly through the entire first chapter, and then the next, etc. Focus your normal reading time on SOAPing just one passage. The Table of Contents in Preaching Through .... will show you the logical units of thought that I saw, but you may see things differently. Read along and feel the breaks. Where does this thought start and where does it end? And you'll soon notice that some passages contain more than one truth so dividing the text into these units of thought can be messy.
- Depending on when you start you may not finish more than the first chapter before the date to start preaching arrives, but hopefully you will be at least one chapter ahead of the congregation. As you enter into this process you will quickly discover that the insights you are receiving as you SOAP will often become the starting point for your sermons.

### 3. Read through “Study Verse by Verse”

- This will help you with much of your question #1 (“What does it say?”) research. You’ll find answers to many of your questions in this commentary. You’ll also notice that, from time to time, I developed some of the biblical concepts that came up in the text. These are meant to provide you with a larger perspective on what’s being said in that passage. To understand one book of the Bible often requires knowledge from other books of the Bible. Brief references can be made in the text to major theological truths that the original Jewish readers would have understood immediately, but which most of us don’t because we don’t have the background knowledge. So I’ve tried to fill in some of that information for you, so you will be able to hear what the author is actually saying. When I take the time to expand on certain topics this is what I am trying to do. I am attempting to provide perspective.
- You will notice that I have also tried to highlight, and in some cases develop, the main spiritual truth I see in a particular passage (“What does it mean?”). This material can be the basis for a sermon. I’m trying to draw out the significance of what is being said rather than just restating what was said. And the application of that truth can be found in the companion book to “Verse by Verse” entitled, “Preaching Through....” There I look more deeply at one of the spiritual truths from that passage and then try to explain what obedience to that truth might look like in our daily lives. In other words, in “Preaching Through...” I try to answer question #2 (“What does it mean?”) more thoroughly, and then present an answer to question #3 (“What does it mean to me?”).

### 4. Start a rough outline

- When you have completed SOAPing a particular passage, see if you can identify the main elements of a sermon outline. Do you see the Proposition (P:)? Basically, it would come by putting your SOAP observation (or Hear) into one simple, declarative statement. And then you would identify the Key Question (Q:) that must be asked of the proposition in order to form the main points of your sermon (Pt:). These points will come by listing the major questions your sermon must answer for your listeners to understand your proposition and be able to apply that truth to their lives.
- Please notice: In some of the examples of sermon outlines that we worked on in earlier classes we found the answers to the Key Question in the text we were studying. So our proposition and main points all came from that single passage. But that will not always work. Often you will see a powerful truth in a passage that you will then use as your proposition, but the main points themselves aren’t found in that text. Your main points must be discovered logically. Ask yourself: what points must I preach to properly explain and apply this truth? You might use the three questions we mentioned in class to help you develop them (What is it? Why do we want it? How do we get it?). One way or another these three analytical questions need to be answered for any sermon to be effective. In fact, these three questions might, in some cases, become your main points.

- Forming our proposition and main points is always a very important place to ask the Holy Spirit for guidance. He has shown you a truth, but how does He want you to organize your sermon so that your listeners can understand it as clearly as you do?
- By the time you have SOAPed a passage and started a rough outline, you will have laid down the foundation for a future sermon. Here is a helpful hint: If, as you're working on this early outline and thoughts start to flow, go with it! Write down what you are seeing and hearing. Don't worry if it's messy. Just scribble (or type). There can be a tendency in us to say to ourselves, "Oh, I will remember this and can write it down later." But inspirations don't come back on command. You may only remember a point or two of what you received a few days later. Inspiration can be fragile. So capture it when it comes, even if it's in the middle of the night. Especially write down notes that will remind you of any stories or illustrations that came to mind. Then, when it's finally time to write this sermon, those notes will refresh your memory and the sermon will form much more easily.

### Outline

- The outline format that was explained in class may seem very basic, and it is. But the organized pattern of thinking into which it forces us is the basis of all good sermons and literature in general. The human mind normally needs certain elements to be present in order to understand something that's being communicated. There can't be a lot of topics in one sermon or it becomes confusing. The listener doesn't know what is important and what is not. They don't know what to focus on. And then there has to be a reasonable order to the information they are receiving. People need to understand certain pieces of information before they can understand others. Humans also need enough time to picture a new idea in their minds before they can come to a good conclusion about it or decide to make it a permanent part of their lives.
- If we understand the basic elements of an outline, we will be able to adapt them freely as our topic demands, but our flow of logic will remain intact. We will always start somewhere and move progressively toward a conclusion and application. Each of us must find our own style, but the basic principles of stating a proposition, asking a key question of it, and then developing points that answer that key question will always be present in our sermons regardless of the style in which we choose to express them. So, it will greatly help us if we learn to work with these outline elements until they make sense, and then as we continue preaching, they will become intuitive.

### Preaching partner or coach

- Finally, it is very helpful to have someone to whom we can present our outline and who will kindly, but honestly, evaluate it with us. There are people who love us and always say everything we do is wonderful. These are great cheerleaders, but they are not usually the best ones to offer us constructive criticism about our sermon. We need to find someone who is kind but blunt. Is there someone who has gone through the class with you and would give you an hour a week until you feel comfortable with your own outline skills? If there's not a fellow classmate available, do you know someone who writes well, or reads a lot, or just has a logical mind and would be willing to say, "That doesn't make sense!"

when your outline is getting muddled? And when that person questions you on a point, please don't be defensive. It's likely that if they can't follow what you are saying others won't either. Assure them that you won't get angry or reject them if they tell you what they really think. And in some cases you may disagree with them and choose to use a particular element in your sermon anyway. Ultimately, what goes into that sermon needs to be what you believe God is saying to you. But honest feedback is a precious gift because it is costly to the person who gives it to us. So be sure to thank that person for their help. And then be aware as you preach that sermon whether it was you or your partner/coach who was right. Did that element of the sermon work well, or not? When you're preaching you can often "feel" what works and what doesn't. And honest self-evaluation will help you recognize your own weaknesses and strengths in outlining.