

HOW TO PREPARE A TEACHING OR MESSAGE

This document will provide a few tips and ideas on preparing a Bible teaching lesson or preaching message. This is a solemn responsibility, but you are not alone. The Spirit will guide you and speak through you if your heart is right, and you desire to honor Him.

STEP 1 – Choose Your Topic

Some prophets of the past had a luxury you do not. Their message was narrow. God told them exactly what to say, and they repeated the same message until the people repented or judgment fell (see Ezekiel for an example). As a modern Watchman, you are called to present the “whole counsel of God,” warning that there is both heaven *and* hell, joy *and* judgment. Your 2 primary focus points, however, are to share the salvation message of Christ and what prophecy warns is about to come.

Your message still comes from God, so it is *His* message, but rather than communicate it directly to you, as He did for the prophets of old, He inspires and quickens your mind and speaks through His Word, the Bible.

Perhaps the most difficult task for any Bible speaker is choosing a topic and then narrowing its breadth. Self-limitation can be a challenge. There are many bible characters, topics, perspectives, illustrations, and applications. God inspired all of it, so every word is worth discussion, but not all at once.

How does a speaker decide on a single subject to teach?

Pray, ask for God to direct you, and address particular issues your group is facing. Speak to a current event and how that correlates with Bible Prophecy, and at all times, preach “*Christ Crucified*” (1 Cor. 1:18-31).

If you have the privilege of leading a group for a while, consider seeking God’s leading regarding teaching through an entire Bible book. Work your way through that book section by section, verse by verse.

Most books in the Bible have particular themes. Being aware of our group’s needs and each book’s specific themes will help you determine what book to teach. Preaching or teaching through one book often reduces research and topic selection time. This will allow more time and energy for study and delivery preparation.

Remember: though a strong delivery is important, more important than polish is passion. Believe and live what you teach and preach. Be transparent. Be real. Preach Christ Crucified, rose again and is coming again at the end of the Tribulation period. Include an invitation and explain how to become a Christian in every teaching.

STEP 2 – Evaluate Your Audience

The next part of your delivery preparation is the assessment of your audience. Your goal is not presentation but transformation. The best teachers are shepherds who know and care about the needs in their group (flock).

The beneficiaries of your study could be a group in a classroom, a large group or congregation, or a woman on a park bench. Your presentation may be an interactive discussion or a sermon. Both require the same preparation. The truths revealed in your teaching should shine bright across all potential venues. However, the *way* you present that truth will vary based on your hearers and your presentation setting.

If you are the leader of a small group, the best teaching approach is interactive studies. Ask leading questions. Wait patiently for responses. Pose questions that require individuals to consider how the biblical text applies to today's world but also their individual life.

Be aware that an interactive style removes some control over the flow of information. That is okay. When students are more involved, they are more inclined to internalize and apply the content. Gently bring people back on topic if the discussion strays off the main subject for that lesson.

A Bible study or small group interactive course setting may require the facilitator to understand the biblical text and topic more fully than a sermon would. Participants may ask questions you had not considered or raise issues outside your research. You will have to think quickly. Your skill level at this will grow as you practice. Do not hesitate to admit you don't know the answer to a question. Offer to do further study, find a solution, and bring it back to the inquirer. As appropriate, challenge the class to do this with you.

A sermon is a very one-sided communication—a monologue. As such, it gives great control to the speaker. Still, a pastor or whoever is delivering the sermon would be wise to interact with his audience. Much of that interaction happens *before* the delivery.

If the shepherd knows his flock – not just who they are but what they've been through – he can anticipate how they will receive and benefit from the teaching.

Every audience needs the truth but presenting that truth in a way that individuals can't receive or understand is unproductive.

Jesus knew His disciples. He told them SO much, but He did not tell them everything at once, or even in the first months of His earthly ministry (John 16:12-13). He reserved some of what He wanted to say until His disciples had a greater grasp of spiritual things.

The world's time is short. Every teaching must point people to Christ and help them grow in Christ. Follow Jesus' example: Help your group establish a good foundation before focusing on the deeper matters of faith.

Your audience may be mature or immature (1 Cor. 3:2), receptive or resistant, single or married, young or old, free or imprisoned, highly educated, or barely graduated. You will have to adjust your delivery to the needs and spiritual readiness of your audience.

We are not suggesting that you compromise your message based on who will receive it. However, it is wise to consider your audience as you develop and deliver your message; it will increase its effectiveness. Your audience will be unknown to you at times, but they are never unknown to God's Spirit. Listen to Him. Let Him direct your thoughts and your tongue.

You, the speaker, are the initial audience for your message. Let it impact you first (Matt. 7:3-5). If you have control over your speaking calendar, delay delivering your message until you have applied it in your life. Sadly, you will not always have that option, but make it your goal, nonetheless. Admit your struggles to your listeners; revealing your vulnerabilities will earn their empathy and support.

STEP 3 – Research Your Topic and the Selected Scripture Passage

Use good resources to study the passage of Scripture you are teaching. This may include reputable commentaries which profile what scholars believe the text means, Bible dictionaries, Study Bibles, and Word Study books. These resources add depth to presentations, but they are not a requirement of good teaching. Use them if you can, but don't let that compromise your calling if you do not have them.

Note: The First Century Church did just fine without any of these resources. Let God lead you, inspire you, and help you secure any resources you need to learn the deep matters of Scripture. Remember, it's His message.

STEP 4 – Arrange Your Material

Research and study are a necessary step. It can be strenuous work. However, your most difficult task may be arranging that material correctly so that it has the greatest possible impact.

Arrange your material in a logical order. Consider your audience. How will they most easily follow the progression from one thought to the next?

Using one passage of Scripture simplifies the process of arranging your thoughts. Just find and follow the writer's inspired train of thought.

Every section has one central thought or truth. The surrounding material provides context and supports this truth. The teacher's task is to find that central idea and see how the text develops it.

Key words in the sentences can direct the thought process. Key words are bridges from one idea to the next. "And" signals that this thought continues and builds on the previous one. "However" and "but" indicate contrast. "Though" shows exception. "Then" means progression, and "therefore" concludes a thought that may have been ongoing for several verses or chapters. A writer uses "because" to show justification or evidence.

Words referencing time (after, before, the next day) show a connection between one event and another. They might progress the thought, or they might simply advance the story. Pay attention to them. Evaluate their importance to the message.

Just as your body depends on a skeleton, so does an effective message. Divide it into sections, otherwise known as an outline. This outline should present a logical progression of key spiritual information you wish to convey.

People will not remember everything you say no matter how powerful of a speaker you become. They are more likely to recall two or three main points. Phrase important points in a single sentence and keep them concise. Craft them to be memorable. Use literary tools such as alliteration, parallelism, or acronyms to help your audience remember.

Look for ways to help your audience connect with and remember the truth. Share stories that show how people can apply teaching points. Give examples of how growing in the faith can change the lives of the people in your group.

Explain difficult concepts from multiple perspectives. Be creative. In the Bible, spiritual truths are taught via drama, music, prophecy, parables, illustrations, poems, and strong, straight-forward preaching. Ask God to anoint your efforts and show you which method is best for that teaching.

STEP 5 – Present the Message

Watch facial expressions and body language as you speak. Adjust, as necessary. Smiles and nods usually indicate agreement and understanding. Quizzical looks suggest you need further explanation. Use an illustration or example to clarify, or simply ask, "Does that make sense?"

When someone squirms, whether it be a child or an adult, they are telling you that they would rather be somewhere else. Be careful in your evaluation of why they are uncomfortable. They may be under conviction, or they may be confused. Ask God to reveal which it is and proceed accordingly.

Tears mean you have reached someone's heart. Tread softly. Encourage. Let the Spirit move. Pray for discernment. Follow up after the presentation. And be willing to abandon one method if it's not working.

Pray much. Study diligently. A great effort in the preparation will result in great peace during the presentation. God will give you a message and will be honored by teachings designed to glorify Him.

We pray that you will experience the joy of having something to say rather than the dread of having to say something. To teach is a solemn calling. Great will be the reward for the faithful.