

## The Great Commission Missionary Institute

The Great Commission Missionary Institute is a practical instrument of Baptist associations, fellowships or churches to enlist and train large numbers of dedicated Christian workers to disciple and evangelize the unchurched people of their community and to open new work in unchurched communities.

<b>Required Courses</b>	<b>Classes</b>	<b>Hours</b>
Missions	<i>The Great Commission Is Personal</i>	6
Personal Ministry	<i>Your Little Flock Ministry</i>	6
Disciple Making	<i>Teach to Save Lives</i>	8
Discipleship	<i>First Steps in Christian Discipleship</i>	8
Church Planting, Growth	<i>The Church on the March</i>	9
Spiritual Basis of Ministry	<i>Spiritual Power</i>	6
Pastoral Leadership	<i>The Pastor God Uses</i>	6
Pastoral Ministry	<i>Pastoral Ministries in the Church*</i>	6
Biblical Homiletics	<i>Preach the Word</i>	10
Biblical Homiletics	<i>Dramatic Preaching, Stories of the Bible</i>	12
Christian Doctrine	<i>Doctrines of the Bible*</i>	12
Family	<i>Ministry to Families*</i>	9
Christian Leadership	<i>Dynamic Spiritual Leadership</i>	6
Christian Stewardship	<i>Your Prosperity Pleases God</i>	6
<u>Elective Courses</u>	<u>(Listed separately)</u>	<u>12</u>
Total hours:		120

### **Certificates Offered**

Certificate of Study	First 60 hours
Diploma of Missionary Preparation	Final 60 hours



# DRAMATIC Preaching

*Preaching the Stories of the Bible*

GREAT COMMISSION MISSIONARY INSTITUTE



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**Textbook of the Great Commission Missionary Institute**

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# 1

## Why Will People Listen to You, the Preacher?

Surely, every preacher of God's Word wants to be heard and understood. We want our listeners not only to understand the will of God but also to do it! We want our listeners to see themselves as God sees them, to repent of their sins, to receive the love and grace of God, to love and understand God better and commit lives and very being to Him. We do not simply want to preach the truth. We want the truth of God to grip the hearts and souls of our listeners so that they will cast themselves upon Him, turn to Him, love Him, trust Him and live for Him.

This kind of preaching cannot be ordinary preaching. It must be extraordinary. It must be sensitive, impassioned, Spirit-filled. It must be urgent, important, a clear matter of life-or-death for those who hear. It must not be filled with religious platitudes, even the commonly repeated sayings of Evangelical orthodoxy. It must be, in every case, a fresh message from the heart of God to the hearts of His people.

**Comments:** Why is extraordinary preaching needed today? In what ways must it be extraordinary?

Most honest preachers would agree with these statements, and, at the same time, may wonder if they can possibly meet the demands of such preaching. We who preach and teach are just ordinary men and women. We are not as Michael, an angel sent from heaven. We are altogether human with the unsightly faults and limitations of human beings. Most of us are of common and humble origin. Who are we to preach and teach others? And how can we do this powerfully and successfully?

## What Right Have We to Preach?

In answer, we must realize that we are a very special people by God's unmerited favor. We are simple men and women who are blessed to know God through the grace-filled work of Jesus Christ, our Lord, and the Holy Spirit, our Guide. We are people who are commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit and are so filled when we meet simple conditions. We are people who are under a divine world-wide commission, to go and preach everywhere in Jesus' Name and under His supreme authority. We who have been saved from sin are all that God has available to do the job. He is not sending Michael or the heavenly hosts to proclaim His Word. He is sending us! We must, therefore, go with courage and great wisdom. As we speak, it is not a question of who we are but Who He is Whom has sent us. So, we say, as did old Amos, "Therefore, hear ye the word of the Lord!"

**Comments:** Why do you think you have a right to preach?

## What Are We To Preach?

"What shall we preach?" is our urgent question. How will our message be unique, speaking to the very hearts of our listeners? If we are not orators by nature or training, how will we gain the interest and maintain the attention of our listeners and move them to obey God?

Here is the answer: We will do it by telling stories, Bible stories.

"No!" some will answer. "We must preach the truth of God, the doctrines of the Bible!" They are right, except that we will preach the truth and doctrines of God in good part by telling stories.

Why should we preach with stories? Above all, we will do it because it is God's preferred way, used by Moses, the prophets, the Apostles, and, above all, by Jesus Christ Himself. Consider the Bible itself, by which God reveals Himself. Most of it is in story form.

Some may object to using the word "story" as against "history" or an earlier term: "biographical preaching." However the stories of the Bible include history, biography, prophesy, proverbs and parables. Even the epistles, the Psalms, Proverbs and almost all other non-historic books of the Bible are interlaced with stories. Jesus rarely spoke without using stories, which we call "parables." "Parable" is brother of the word "parallel", because it lays down a common material truth or story, understood by all, alongside or parallel to a spiritual truth or doctrine which had not been understood by the listeners.

Theologically, why are Bible stories so important? Primarily it is because God has presented Himself to mankind through His actions in history. The Mormons claim their greatest truths came on golden tablets read through magic eye-glasses. The Muslims believe the greatest truths of God are the written thoughts of Mohammed, the originator of their religion. The Hindus and Buddhists claim their divine knowledge are from the thoughts of Buddha, a shadowy figure of some past century.

Jews and Christians, on the other hand, know God by what He has visibly done in the sight of His people, and not by the imagined writings or teachings of holy philosophers or of books dropped out of heaven. God stepped into history, and led a slave nation out of Egypt, and destroyed the pursuing army in the sight of all. He brought his people into a land "flowing with milk and honey" to houses they did not build, and to harvest from vineyards they had not planted. Later, because of His people's persistent disobedience, God brought mighty hosts against them and later, as He promised, He sent them back

to their land with the help and blessing of what was then the greatest empire on earth. Jesus came to earth to be born of a virgin, to live gloriously, to teach and serve among men, with many signs and wonders. The greatest of these was his voluntary sacrifice on the cross and his astonishing resurrection, witnessed by over 500 disciples. The history of Christianity is the story of God's acts among a people who were not a people, but became the Holy Spirit-filled people of God. Against great powers of thrones and darkness, they spread out across the world declaring their experience that "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." Our supreme revelation is what God has done in history, confirmed by our own personal history. The Bible is the written testimony of men who beheld the acts of God and recorded them for later generations. Our God is One Who acts in History, and the written Word is a record and interpreter of those acts.

**Comments:** Tell briefly how God reveals Himself through His actions.

### **Telling Both Stories and Doctrine**

Doctrine is a clear interpretation of these acts, and many preachers prefer to rush to the conclusion, to the doctrine, without telling the story. People may forget doctrine more easily than stories. The stories will help them to remember the doctrine. Powerful preaching will both tell the story and give the doctrine. For this reason, we say that all preaching should tell the story and give the teaching, the doctrine. Some sermons will use a Bible story as a text and will tell how the story proves the doctrines of God. Other sermons will use a doctrinal text but should not fail to tell the story or stories that demonstrate the doctrine.

Students of this text are referred to its companion text, *Preach the Word*, a part of this missionary training curriculum. That study shows how to build a sermon on a doctrinal text, and recommends that such sermons always be strengthened by telling the stories behind the doctrine. This book, *Dramatic Preaching, Telling the Stories of the Bible*, in contrast, will help to show how to build a sermon on a text that is a Bible story. It will show how to use the story to present clear and vital Bible doctrines to the lives of the listeners.

Examine the sermons of Christ and the Apostles, and you will see these sermons are full of stories. Examine the sermons of the most powerful preachers in Christian history, and you will see that they are full of stories. The best stories are Bible stories, because they carry the authority of God's Word. However, true stories from recent times also illustrate the truths of God and help people to understand that God's power is for today as well as for the Biblical times.

**Opinions:** Do you believe Bible stories should be a large part of preaching? Why? Or, why not?

## ②

### Decide to Preach the Stories of the Bible

No man in history equaled Jesus Christ in wisdom. If Jesus used stories in his preaching, that should be enough reason for us to do the same. Even so, we may ask if Jesus' strategy was the wisest, if it was the most practical for today. Why is story telling a practical method of preaching the truths of God? Perhaps you can think of many reasons. These pages will help you with some.

#### It Is Interesting

Perhaps it might seem too practical to suggest that preaching the stories of the Bible is, first of all, interesting! There is something about a story that grabs the attention of the hearers. What good is it to preach the greatest truths of God if the people are too bored to pay attention or if they go to sleep during your sermon? Great doctrinal truths should never be boring, and Bible stories are given to keep that from happening.

From John 3:16, you can tell your audience that God's love was so great that whosoever believes on Jesus will be saved. How many times has the audience heard that great fact? Oh hum. Then, stop, and tell them how a rotten scoundrel, a bandit and murderer was dying horribly, as he should have, when he called out to Jesus, "Remember me, Lord, when you enter your kingdom." The blood-covered Lord called back, "Today, you shall be with me in paradise!" This is John 3:16 in living drama! Most of the crowd had already heard the text and also the story. But when you bring story and text together like that, the glorious dimensions of whosoever become suddenly clear and the crowd wakes up.

When most of your audience goes home, they may turn on the television. Are they more likely to look for a sermon somewhere, or will they look for a football game or a movie – something in which there is some action? When they come to church, will they just hear the preacher's interpretation of great Bible truths or will those truths be salted and peppered with spiritual action stories? Will you simply preach that God watches over each one when they are discouraged, or will you break into the possibly muddled thoughts of many present with the cry of Elijah, "Lord, just let me die!" Then, will you tell how God gently took over Elijah's life and how He will do the same with theirs? Word of God!

There are many clowns and too many shysters in the pulpits of the land, and we do not want to be like them nor become mere entertainers. Surely, John the Baptist never put any of his audience to sleep and you should not do that either. The stories of God's mighty deeds, well told and tied to the great spiritual truths of the Bible, should be the stuff your sermons are made of. We can only help the people we can keep interested. Godly stories help.

**Discussion:** Why is it so important that a sermon be interesting? What have you learned about how to make a sermon interesting?

#### It is Understandable

Perhaps one reason the children came to Jesus was that they could understand him. When he told about the man who risked his life out on the mountainside looking for just one lost sheep, the imagination of the children and their parents, also, was fired up. Jesus was not just telling stories. He was telling all that God loves and reaches for each one of them just as that lonely shepherd went out into the wilderness for just one little lamb. Jesus could have just told them the God loved them, but truth without a story is not very potent. Nor is it very comprehensible.

Many who are theologically-inclined struggle with the conflict between free will and the sovereignty of God. On one hand, some may say, man is completely free to accept or reject God. On the other hand, others will say that all is predetermined by the sole will and act of God. Both will find Bible texts to defend their extreme positions. How can we explain this conflict and come to a happy conclusion? The Apostle Paul wrote so clearly about the sovereignty of God and, at the same time, about the indispensable need for personal faith. If we read just the doctrine, we may be left to wonder, and also to wander.

Where is the story behind these doctrines? The Acts of the Apostles gives Paul's personal story and testimony three different times. What happened? Saul's personal history was obviously a training ground for him who would become Christianity's greatest apologist. God's sovereign acts and foreknowledge brought Saul, and the man he was, to the outskirts of Damascus. In His sovereignty, Jesus appeared to Saul, blinded him, put him on his knees, and, in time, opened his eyes. This is the sovereignty of God. Paul asked, "What will you have me to do, Lord?" and joyfully followed Jesus from that day on. Were these the mechanical words of a God-touched zombie, or did they come from the very heart and will of Saul, a living man, made in the image of God? Did Jesus Christ choose Saul? Or did Saul choose Jesus Christ? Or did they choose one another? Is such a thing possible? Doctor Luke wrote that it is.

Many simpler Bible truths are beyond the easy understanding of a great many of our listeners, perhaps beyond our understanding as well. This is why simple parables are so valuable, as well as are more complex stories found in Bible history and biographies. True stories can explain what mere doctrinal words may fail to convey.

**Discussion:** Why is it so important that a sermon be interesting? What have you learned about how to make a sermon interesting. Explain how Bible stories can clarify Bible doctrine. Why are sermons that use stories more understandable and more memorable than sermons that do not?

## It Reveals the Personality of God

Paul's constant prayer for God's people was that they might know God better. Preaching from Paul's Epistles will help this process, but much more so if those truths are dramatically illustrated and proven by stories. What is God like? How does He think? What does He think of me? Of course, many doctrinal texts can give answers to these questions. However, when God most wanted to reveal what He is like, He sent His only Son to do just that. The Book we have is precious and it is most precious because it carries us back to the days of Christ on earth. In its pages, colored by our imaginations, we can see God in Christ, in his acts, his words, his touch, his tears. See how excited Jesus was over the salvation of a "failed woman" outside the walls of a dusty Samaritan town. He completely lost his appetite in his excitement. "I have food to eat that you don't know anything about," he gleefully told his twelve fellow travelers! What doctrinal text alone can capture the full measure of that joy?

There are many heroes in the Bible and, of course, many anti-heroes as well. However, in every Bible story, the real Hero is the Lord Himself. Any story teller who fails to underline this will fail both his Lord and his audience. Bible stories are interesting, but more importantly, they reveal Who God is and they do it in an enormous variety of circumstances. The stories of God in the Bible enable us to look at God from thousands of angles, as if we were to examine a faceted gem such as has never before been seen by man. The doctrines tell of many of these facets, but the stories shine with them!

**Opinions:** How do Bible stories and doctrines go together in a sermon?

## It Is Fun

It may seem frivolous to say that to preach the stories of the Bible is fun, but we need to understand the importance of fun in preaching. If every story you tell, every sermon you preach, dramatizes how wonderful is God the Sovereign Father, Jesus the compassionate Savior Son, and the life-giving Holy Spirit of God, will that not be fun? If it is not, you have mistaken your calling and should not be in the pulpit!

If you see your congregation rejoicing with you at the mighty acts of God, as you are privileged to tell them by real-life stories of the Bible, will that not be fun? If your audience laughs at their own weaknesses in the face of God's mighty present power, is that not fun? If the lonely, the weak, the confused and the defeated find hope and strength and new power through the faith-inspiring stories of the Bible, is that not fun? If self-centered men and women learn to die to self and be filled with the joyous power of God in response to your message, is that not fun? If men and women, youth and children turn in saving faith to Christ, is that not great fun?

Of course, preaching is the most important, most serious moment of the week for those of us who are lent the pulpit. But "important" and "serious" do not rule out "fun!" If there is rejoicing in heaven, there should certainly be the same on earth, especially when we are pouring out the glories of God on our audience and drawing them to His grace. This is most likely to happen when we preach the stories of the Bible and let them reveal Who God really is. We preach Bible stories for theological reasons and practical ones as well. The rest of our study will have to do with exactly how we may accomplish this.

**Discussion:** How can a sermon be important and serious and be fun at the same time? If you preach, what makes preaching most fun for you?



# 3

## Preach Dramatically

Preaching has been called “the communication of God’s truth through human personality.” Every preacher has a special personality and will therefore preach in a unique way. Some may speak loudly and excitedly. Others may do so much more calmly. Some gesture with their whole body while others use only their face or perhaps their hands. There is no standard method of preaching in this regard. However, whatever the preacher’s method, it is important to preach dramatically. This is especially true when one uses stories in the sermon or preaches whole stories from the Bible.

To preach dramatically is to dramatize the truth one is preaching in many ways. If one is preaching about the lostness of a soul, the preacher should not sound like he or she is reading a cooking recipe. Pathos is the correct emotion in this case. When one describes how God surprised someone with salvation, the preacher’s voice and face should show surprise and delight. If the story is about a serious spiritual or moral failure, a look of disappointment or disgust would be in order. If the preacher fails to dramatize in some real way the message, the audience will not be convinced of the speaker’s sincerity. Such colorless messages quickly put the audience to sleep.

### Learning to Be Dramatic

Drama is something everyone can learn. That is why schools offer drama classes. The preacher may not have the opportunity to attend such classes however, and, fortunately, there are other ways to learn to speak dramatically. Every pastor on earth has a group of teachers ready to help him or her to teach and preach dramatically. This may sound impossible! “Who,” you may ask, “is this group of teachers?” It is any group of children in the church or in the community. Children can teach the teacher and preacher what adults cannot do.

How can this happen? It is simple! Just teach Bible stories to a group of children week after week. The children will let you know when you are telling well the story and they will also quickly let you know when you are doing poorly! Adults, by contrast, are too courteous, and show little reaction – especially when you are not dramatic. Behind their smiling or nodding faces, they may be thinking about Sunday dinner or many other things. Children, in contrast, are honest about their feelings. They give you an instant response to what they see in you. If they see boredom, they will find as many as one hundred different things to do – none of which contribute to the calmness of the meeting. And if they see drama, their faces and bodies react immediately. No better tool has ever been invented by mankind to tell a teacher how well he or she is doing!

Of course, many who preach to adults feel that it would be beneath their dignity to go and teach or preach to children. Or, perhaps they realize that what they can get away with in preaching to adults won’t work with children.

**Class comments:** Why does the author believe that children are excellent teachers for those who want to learn drama? What experiences do they already have with teaching groups of children? What opportunities are available to the students to teach children the stories of the Bible?

Dramatic proof of this is seen in the life of Dwight L. Moody, shoe salesman in the city of Chicago in the 19th Century. When the Lord got a good grip on Dwight, he felt compassion for the unchurched children of his city. He rented a meeting place and started gathering them together to teach them the Bible. His ministry grew and he rented larger and larger buildings to gather hundreds of children. He used many teachers in small groups and he also spoke to the great youthful assembly by himself. He found that Bible stories were necessary to teach basic Bible doctrines. Month after month, as the group grew, Moody also grew in dramatic power. The children forced him to learn drama, and he learned well.

Then, groups of churches invited him to speak to them. Moody did not forget the lessons the children taught him, and he preached dramatically, using Bible stories. He forgot his false adult dignity, and told the stories dramatically, and the crowds of adults grew amazingly. He became perhaps the best known preacher in the United States, preaching successful campaigns in great eastern cities of the United States. Then, he was invited to London! Moody did not speak English well and even his grammar was lacking. This may be why he felt so at home with the children of Chicago. The English, however, tend to be very critical of anything short of linguistic excellence, and at the first, in England there was much fun made of this “semi-literate” American shoe salesman-preacher. Great and eloquent preachers graced the pulpits of England, and Dwight was not one of their number. To everyone’s surprise however, the people of England seemed to pay no attention to these criticisms, and came to Moody’s meetings, first by the hundreds, then the thousands, and finally by the tens of thousands. Moody stirred the soul of England and his example inspired other preachers all across the island. When he returned to preach in the United States, he was acknowledged to be the greatest gospel preacher of his age. Moody never attended a seminary or a drama class, but his children’s church trained him better than any expert could have done.

**Class comments:** Who was Dwight L. Moody. What do the students know about him besides the information given here? What lessons do the members of the class believe they can learn from him?

The American pulpit has grown ever more sophisticated but most of the American people would rather watch TV dramas than to hear the most eloquent preachers. The preacher must never look down on the congregation, even when that congregation is entirely of children. To preach the great stories of the Bible and to do so dramatically, however, is no disrespect of any audience—including the most distinguished adult congregations. And, when the children scattered across the congregation keep their eyes and ears fixed on the preacher throughout the sermon, he or she can be sure that the message is also reaching the hearts of all the adult listeners as well!

It may be fun to think about the power of Bible stories and the drama with which they need to be given. Now, however, the class has to get ready to go to work. Preaching can be great fun, but only when the preacher knows how to work hard to get the message ready. Good preaching requires a lot of work. The following lessons will be increasingly demanding of your work and your thinking. The first lessons will do much of the work for you and the latter lessons will put you out on your own. Lesson 7, Practice Outlining Story Sermons looks like the shortest lesson, but actually it is the longest. That is because the class should spend several hours in this lesson, working together and individually, on the detailed outlines of several good Bible story sermons. You are not ready to conclude this study until you are able to do this work all by yourself. Then, you will be used of God to be a blessing to those who come to hear you preach the story of God's love and life-changing power.



# 4

## Start Your Sermon Preparation

Everything you have read to this moment is simply to help you to get ready to work on powerful story-powered Biblical sermon. Now, you can be ready to get started once you know where you are going.

### Six Steps in Preparing Your Sermon

Preaching on Bible stories can be very simple, involving just six orderly steps. These are:

- 1. Choose your story.** See two ways to do this on the bottom of this page.
- 2. Study it carefully.** Read it several times, studying it carefully, visualizing all the details that are mentioned and imagining many logical details that are not mentioned.
- 3. List its spiritual truths and challenges.** Make a list of all the important practical and spiritual truths in the story. Decide what decisions the listeners should make as they hear the story.
- 4. Decide the main theme and challenge.** Decide what will be the main emphasis of the message and how the different parts of the story contribute to it.
- 5. Divide the sermon parts.** Develop your sermon in two, three or four progressive parts. They should show logical development, like a lawyer presenting his case to a jury.
- 6. Finish the Sermon.** Prepare the introduction and the conclusion of your sermon and give it a name.

### Two Different Ways to Choose Your Bible Story

If you are going to base your whole sermon on a Bible story, you start by choosing the Bible story that will give you a powerful sermon. So, how will you choose the best Bible story? The fact is that most Bible stories can give you the basic information for a valuable sermon and, with growing skill and the Spirit's guidance, you can make it a powerful one. There are two common ways to find and choose the Bible story to be preached. One is to decide what will be the theme of your sermon and then search for a story that has to do with that theme. The other is to choose a book of the Bible that is full of stories, and preach through it, letting each story determine the themes you will preach.

**Class Assignment:** Tell what are the two common ways to choose the Bible story on which a sermon will be based.

Suppose you are going to preach on mother's day, and need to have a message that will bless the mothers, their children and their husbands. The first step is to go with your mind through the whole Bible, thinking of the stories of mothers – probably good mothers, but also bad ones. What do these mothers in Bible history have to show the mothers in your audience? The stories of many famous mothers such as Hannah, the mother of Samuel (theme: a mother who gave her child to God), Mary (theme: a mother who served God), Eunice (theme: a mother who raised a man of God in a pagan society.) Other mothers, even un-named, inspire great preaching. Consider the mother of Samson, who raised him faithfully. He disappointed her in many ways, for which she was not responsible, but he did much to save their people from destruction.

If you were to preach a series on the Great Women of the Bible, you would select your stories from the many stories about women. If you preach on the call of God to Christian service, a series can be based on men and women in the Bible who received God's call. In both cases, you begin with the theme and then look for the appropriate stories.

The other way to preach Bible stories is to preach through books of the Bible. This does not mean that you must preach on each and every part of the book, but normally you would preach through the book, starting at the beginning and finishing at the end. If, for example, you preached through 1 Samuel or the Book of Acts, you would find story after story in your chosen book. The stories would determine your theme, rather than your theme determining which stories you would use. This is valuable because God Himself will be choosing the themes you will preach. You will find themes that you might not have thought to ever preach, but the stories reveal things God wants his people to think about and to act accordingly.

**Class Work Assignment:** The rest of the class period should be dedicated to careful work by the entire class. The teacher should write the ideas of the class on a white board to help the group in its thinking.

**Part 1:** For each of the preaching themes below, the students should list three additional stories in the Bible that would give a strong Bible basis for that particular theme. Examine each story to decide if it is appropriate.

Theme 1: How God calls people to serve him in a special ministry.

- a. The call of the apostles. Luke 5:1-11
- b.
- c.
- d.

Theme 2: Prayers that God has answered in a powerful way

- a. The prayers of Nehemiah for Jerusalem. Nehemiah 1:4-11
- b.
- c.
- d.

Theme 3: People who have pleased God with their gifts

- a. Zacchaeus chooses to give to the poor. Luke 19:1-10
- b.
- c.
- d.

**Part 2:** In Mark chapter one, there are seven different stories. The class should choose four of these stories and decide what would be the main sermon idea they would use in each of the four stories.

# 5

## Study the Story and Find Its Spiritual Truths

The class will now begin to work on one story in the Bible and begin to have practice in studying a Bible story and find the spiritual truths that must be understood and acted upon by the listeners. First is the analysis of the story and then its application to the audience.

### Analyze the Story

The preacher needs to understand the story very well before preaching it. This is done, first, by reading the story in the Bible at least two times. Then, read the story a third time and begin to add details to the story that are not printed in the Bible but are probable. For example, if preaching about the Prodigal Son ask: When everything had gone wrong for him, imagine, where did he have to sleep? What did his pig farm smell like? What did he look like after working there a week? Describe the voice of the farmer when he told the boy not to eat any of the pig food. Where did the boy stay when it was raining? How did all this compare with the boy's home that he had been so happy to leave? Color the whole story with interesting details that are logical but not mentioned in the Bible. To tell a Bible story is not simply to repeat the words given in the Bible but to fill out the details according to one's reasonable imagination. Many Bible stories are already well known by the audience, and what will keep their attention are the details of the story that are not included in the brief Bible account. When the preacher prepares to tell the story in greater detail, he or she can actually begin to feel what the people in the story felt and the story will be told in a way that everyone in the audience will listen carefully. By the time the story has been carefully analyzed and imagined, the preacher will be able to see the story as clearly as if he or she had been there in person.

**Class Assignment:** Tell what is involved in analyzing a Bible story. Why is it important to imagine details that are not given in the Bible text itself?

### Interpret the Story

Unless the story is interpreted to the audience, the speaker is only an entertainer and not a preacher. The whole Word of God is given that people may wake up to the great truths of God and act differently because of them. To interpret the story is to explain to the listeners why the story was given for them, why it is so very important to them. If the preacher cannot find why a story is important for the lives of the listeners, it will be better to look for another story that is clearly important or to look for another preacher who knows how to do this! As you tell the story, you will emphasize how each of the people in the story was impacted by what had happened. Then, you must decide and then point out how the listener is impacted by what happened in the story. You will then challenge each listener to change his or her life as a result. The story must go from the experience of its characters straight into the hearts and lives of those who are hearing about it.

Every Bible story is given to illustrate spiritual truths. The preacher needs to carefully study the story and to write all the spiritual truths found in the story. This can be done on any sheet of paper. After doing this for the entire story, decide which of the truths will be included in your sermon. Use the truths that have most to do with the main emphasis you are making as you preach the story. If you try to emphasize everything, nothing will stick in the minds of your listeners!

So, think carefully about the story and what spiritual truths it contains. Briefly write every spiritual truth you find on a piece of paper. Then, choose which of these truths are important to the emphasis you are making.

**Class Assignment:** Opinions: Why do you agree or disagree with the statement "Unless the story is interpreted to the audience, the speaker is only an entertainer and not a preacher." What should be done about the spiritual truths that are waiting to be found in the story? How should the preacher decide which truths are to be included in the sermon?

### Bring the Story Up to Date

To best apply the story to the listeners, you should bring it up to date so they can understand its importance to them. For example, in the story of the Prodigal Son, he was a farm boy who ended up living with a bunch of pigs. Many of your listeners may never have even seen a pig, and cannot imagine hiking away from their parents' house to some distant town. So, you will help them by bringing the story up to date. Who would the Prodigal Son be today and how would he act?

Maybe he got tired of "always going to church" and not "living it up" as do some of his friends. Besides, he got tired of going to school and life could be much more exciting far away from home. So, he empties his bank account of savings, gets in his old car, and heads for the nearest big city. There he finds a fast crowd, gets into drugs and alcohol, and tries to enjoy life like he thought he should. But he finds out that his new friends aren't such good friends after all and ends up in jail on a drug charge. Now, you tell the rest of the story! There are many prodigal sons and daughters today, and it is your job to describe how they think, what they decide to do, and how they end up sorry they were ever such fools but may be ashamed to "come back home." They need to know that God, their Father, is waiting for them with open arms.

To bring a Bible story "up to date" is not to disrespect the Bible but is to make it a living message to people who live in a very different world than that of 2000 or 3000 years ago. Whatever may be the story you tell and preach on, be sure, in one way and another, to "bring it up to date" for the benefit of your audience.

**Class Assignment:** As a class, think aloud about Jesus calming the wild sea, and then tell what kind of wild "storms" in which people today find themselves. How does Jesus calm such storms as those? What examples of this have you seen with your own eyes?

# 6

## Learn How to Analyze and Interpret a Bible Story

The best way to learn anything is to try doing it yourself. At first, you may make a lot of mistakes, but every time you do it you should improve. You now know many things about preaching a story of the Bible, maybe more than some who have preached for a long time. However, you need to change your head knowledge into practical working knowledge of how to do this.

The following study takes you to a precious parable or story told by Jesus Christ himself. In this chapter, half of the work will already be done for you. You will not have to make your own questions, but use those that are given to you. In later assignments, you and the class will have to make most of the questions yourselves. Your ability to ask questions will determine your ability to analyze and interpret any Scripture passage.

### The Parable of the Wedding Feast Matthew 22:1-14

The historic background. (See Matthew 21): This parable was told during Jesus' last week before His crucifixion. He is confronted daily by the hostility of those who would kill him – the priests, the scribes and the Pharisees. In Jesus' sermon on the Prodigal Son, these hard-hearted people were illustrated by the older brother of the prodigal. This story is followed by the parable of the murderous tenants, who also represented the enemies of Christ. Then comes the story of the wedding feast – of those who rejected God's invitation and even killed those who brought the invitation. These three stories picture Jesus' enemies as the enemies of God who oppose the joys of the Kingdom of God among men. Now, we turn to the story at hand, the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22.

**Class Assignment:** At this time the teacher should have one or more students to read aloud the entire story, found in verses 1 to 14.

Now, we will divide the story into four parts. For each part of the story, you need to ask two kinds of questions. First, **analyze the story**, studying its details without making any spiritual application. After this, go back and ask questions that will lead you to **interpret the story** for its spiritual meaning and applications.

It will be helpful to have a large whiteboard on which the teacher can write, with very few words, the basic idea of each answer given by the class. Later, you will pick out the nuggets to be used in your sermon.

**Class Assignment:** The class should now read Matthew 22:1-4. Then, answer the following questions, briefly writing your class answers on the white board.

Analysis: What were to be the pleasures of the party? Who prepared the party and paid for it? How much would the guests be charged to attend? When was the party to be? Who were those to be invited? Who delivered the invitations? What was the initial response of those who were invited? Did the first refusals stop the giving of invitations?

Application: Why is the Kingdom of God compared to a party? What does this tell us about the character of God the Father? How does it conflict with many common ideas of God? What do people have to pay to attend God's party? What does this teach us about grace? What are the pleasures of God's party? Would these pleasures leave people "full" and content? In whose honor was the party given? Why for him? In what sense was the party now ready? Who do you think were the first to be sent out with invitations? Who were the second group to be sent out? What does this say about our message to the world and our way of testifying? Historically, who was Jesus referring to as the invited guests? In today's society, who does this story speak about? What does this story challenge your listeners to do?

**Class Tasks:** Read aloud Matthew 22:5-7. Write briefly the class's answers to the following questions on the white board.

Analysis: What was the passive reaction of some who were invited? What was the violent reaction of others? Were those of passive reaction any better off than those of violent reaction? Finally, what did the king do to those who rejected his invitation?

Application: Today, who are those who would rather go about their business than come to God's party? Who are those who fight or kill the messengers? Who are the messengers being killed? What other indignities do God's messengers face today? What did God do to Jerusalem, the city where His Son was killed? What will God do today with those who reject His Son and God's gracious invitation? What examples have you seen of people who ignore or reject God's invitation? Are examples of this to be seen in events of the Bible? Which ones? What warning does this give to those who are present?

**Class Tasks:** Read aloud Matthew 22:8-10. Briefly answer the following questions on the white board.

Analysis: When was the party ready? Whom does God say do not deserve to come to the party? How do they prove they do not deserve it? Was the king just in saying the first to be invited did not deserve to come? What did the king do to go on with the party in honor of his son? What kind of people were invited: good people or bad people? Did enough people come to fill the palace?

Application: Historically, who was rejecting Jesus when this parable was told? Do you think these were only Jesus' worst enemies or the Jewish nation as a whole? Was God fair and just in saying they did not deserve to be at the party? What did God do in order to proceed with the party for His Son when the first to receive the invitation rejected it? Who is God inviting today to His party? Historically, what people did come to the party? Who is He sending out to deliver the invitations? Where do we fit into the story today? Why is this story important for your listeners?

**Class Tasks:** Read aloud Matthew 22:11-14

Analysis: What person was thrown out of the party? What was the one thing he lacked? What punishment did he suffer? How many people were called to come to the party? How many people were chosen to be in the party? Why did the king not choose for this man to stay in the party? What spiritual truth was Jesus giving when he told of the man's punishment?

Application: What do you think the "wedding robe" stood for? What did Paul mean when he said we were to put on Christ? Can either "good" or "bad" people come to God's party without being "dressed" with Christ? Is the "wedding robe" something we made by people or something God gives? How can people become "dressed with Christ?" What danger is there to be in God's world without putting on Christ? What joys are there for those who do put on Christ? When should people put on Christ? What should the listeners do in obedience to these spiritual truths?

Congratulations on your good thinking as you answered these questions. Already, you should be able to see that this parable deserves to be preached because it speaks to the needs of your listeners. The story has many different applications. It can be preached for different reasons. The next step will be to determine the emphasis of your sermon and pick out those gems that will make it powerful.



# 7

## Find the Different Themes of the Story and Decide the Main Theme

No doubt, you and the class have discovered many rich truths in the story of God's party that would make for a good message. The collection of these good ideas, however, is just the raw material with which to make your sermon. From all its riches, you need to decide what will be the primary message of your sermon and the different truths that deliver this message to the heart of your listeners. You are not simply going to entertain your audience with a good story, but as a powerful preacher you are going to bear down on one central message and your whole sermon will be designed to deliver that one message to the hearts of the listeners.

Let us think together for a moment about the variety of themes brought up in the parable. They are found in the truths you have already discovered. Perhaps they may include the following:

- ☐ God has planned His great party from before the world was made.
- ☐ All of human history is preparation for God's party.
- ☐ God sent Jesus to tell about the party, and he did so when he told this parable.
- ☐ The party is the Kingdom of God itself. It is described as a party because it speaks of joy, of satisfaction, of blessing of being with God, of glorifying the Son, of enjoying fellowship with one another, of being a celebration.
- ☐ The party is something God offers without a price—God paid the full price through Christ's redemption of the lost world.
- ☐ God sent the prophets in Old Testament times to invite the Jews to the party. The Son himself came to the Jews, only to be rejected by them.
- ☐ Jesus sent the Apostles and us to invite the gentile world.
- ☐ As God's messengers, we will meet three different responses: rejection with indifference, rejection with hostility, and acceptance.
- ☐ Both "good" people and "bad" people are invited and welcomed to the party—they pay nothing and do nothing to deserve to come to the party.
- ☐ People have to want to come to the party. They have to come.
- ☐ All must come in wedding robes, which means to be dressed in Christ.
- ☐ To miss the party is to be condemned by God to terrible suffering.
- ☐ The most important thing in any life is to hear God's invitation and to come to His party, dressed in Christ.

Each one of these themes could be a sermon by itself. Or you might take two, three or four of these themes as progressive parts of your sermon. These themes must form the part of a greater theme, which in just a few words is what your sermon is all about. Some great truths may not even be mentioned, or may be mentioned briefly, but not as a major part of the sermon. You need to focus the message of the sermon on one goal.

**Comments:** Each student should underline three truths in this list that he or she would use in a sermon to be preached in church.

You have carefully studied the story and you probably agree that all of the things mentioned above are in the story. However, this treasure chest has more than an audience can receive and understand in 30 minutes or less! Therefore, from all that is here, you must decide what will be your main theme, what will be the heart of your message. To be able to do that, you must think about your audience and what they most need from this story. In a new and young congregation, you will probably have lost people present and most of the Christians will be spiritual "children" still. In an older congregation, you may have few lost people and may need to challenge the congregation to invite people to the Kingdom of God. The congregation may be complacent, with little spiritual concern for their lost family members and friends. They need to be awakened to the terrible danger in which these loved ones are found. They also need to understand how attractive the invitation should be.

Therefore, your first job is to decide to whom you mainly will be telling the story, and what aspects of the story are most important for the listeners. Then, list these great truths in the order you will preach them and what will be your main challenges to the audience. Here are four different ways this story can be told, depending on the need of the audience:

### Sermon Title: "You Are Invited to God's Party" (Evangelistic sermon)

#### Goal: Invite the Lost to Accept God's Invitation

1. You are invited to God's party – joy, blessing, satisfaction, joy, now and eternally.
2. You must decide how to respond—beware of rejecting the invitation. Rejection brings terrible consequences.
3. The party is free, but you must come dressed in Christ, receiving Him. The party is ready, now!

### Sermon Title: "Invite Others to the Party" (Challenge to Evangelize)

#### Goal: Help Christians to Invite Many Others to Christ

1. God invites everyone to His great party – an eternal life of joy with Jesus.
2. God sends us to deliver the invitations – He has no one else to send. We are to invite them to God's party – something that is joyous.
3. We can expect three responses: indifference, hostility, and joyful acceptance
4. Therefore: Let us go and tell the good news and not be discouraged by those who do not decide to come immediately. Many will come!

### Sermon Title 3: "God's Plan for Now and Eternity" (Christ's Return)

#### Goal: Encourage Christians As They Await Eternity

1. God has planned for an eternal party at the end of time
2. Jesus is the honored one in the party – Jesus Christ is Lord
3. All those who come to Christ now will be in the eternal "party"
4. Jesus sends us as messengers of God's invitation. Let us do well our assignment!



**Sermon Title 4: “God’s Grace Illustrated” (Doctrine of Grace)****Goal: Convince Listeners That Salvation Is a Grace-Gift of God**

1. God prepared a party for His special people, the Jews. When they rejected Him, He sent the invitation to us gentiles.
2. He invites “good” and “bad” — we do not deserve the party
3. God paid the full price for the party in the Cross of Christ. God provides us Christ’s robes of righteousness
4. We simply must accept the invitation and come to God

Do you see that one story can be told in several different ways? Each way is for a special audience and a special reason. You may tell the story one way now and perhaps later tell the same story, but for a different purpose.

In these examples, there are three or four truths that are given to change the lives of the listeners. Each one of these truths is a division of the sermon. These are sermons with three or four divisions in each.

**Comments:** If you were to preach on this text on Sunday, which of these four sermons would you use? What is there about your congregation that leads you to choose this?

A sermon is like fastening a sign on a wind-swept wall—we will need to nail it down with more than one nail. And we need to be sure that every nail is hammered all the way in. That means that each of our major points needs to be strongly given. In a sense, each point is a special message of its own. But it is a message that forms part of one greater message, which is the central theme of your sermon. You are a lawyer using one argument after another to prove your case. You are a boxer in a two, three or four round fight, and you want to win every round. Fight every “round” with all your might as God’s Spirit gives you His strength and wisdom.

When you preach your sermon on this parable, you will first tell the whole parable and then you will give three or four main parts, sub-themes, leading to a general invitation.

**Class Assignment:** As a class, choose one of the four suggested sermon titles and talk about what you might say in explanation of each one of the main parts of the sermon.

## 8

**Choose and Work on the Divisions of the Sermon**

Sermons have three basic elements: 1) the introduction, 2) the body, 3) the conclusion and invitation. Before doing the introduction and the conclusion/invitation, you must complete the main body of your sermon. As you have already seen, the body of the sermon has one major theme, but it is dealt with, usually, in two, three or four inter-related parts or divisions. This is true of every sermon, regardless of its Scripture base. It is as true of sermons based on an entire story or on a single verse. The drawing shows the parts of the sermon:

Introduction (Do this later)
Body of the Sermon Tell the Whole Story, Saving Some Details for Later
Division 1
Division 2
Division 3 (optional)
Division 4 (optional)
Conclusion and Invitation (Do this later)

The introduction and conclusion exist to prepare the listeners for the message and then to sum it up in a final challenge. The two or more divisions are the main body of the sermon. Each division requires a lot of careful thought and preparation, because these are the “rounds” of your fight and struggle for the minds and souls of your listeners.

Let us work on the first of the sermon examples presented in the previous lesson. It uses the story as the basis for an evangelistic message. You will find what you need to emphasize from among the interpretations we have already made. In each part, you are like a lawyer trying to prove your case, based on the Bible passage. Of course, every preacher will develop the sermon in his or her own way. Following is a sample of how one did this:

**Sermon Title: “Come to God’s Party Now”**

**Text: Matthew 22:1-14**

Start by telling the whole story, saving some details for later

Three divisions or progressive ideas in the story:

1. You are invited to God’s party

Tell more about God sending out the invitation

Describe how God is inviting the listeners to come

Illustrative doctrinal text: **Class read Matthew 11:28**

2. You must decide how you will respond

Tell more about the way the first group heard and rejected the invitation

Warn the listeners of the danger or neglecting or rejecting the invitation

**Class read Isaiah 55:6-7**

3. The party is free, but you must come dressed in Christ

Tell more about the second round of invitations, how people responded, and why it was essential to be dressed right for the party

Show how wise it is to accept the invitation and urge a response

**Class read Romans 6:23**

**Class Assignment:** As a class, find doctrinal texts in the Bible that you can use to explain and emphasize each of the three divisions seen above. You will see such a text already given for each point. Now, as a class, find at least one other verse for each division that would be useful.

### The Sermon’s Main Message or Theme

You should be able to write the main theme or message of the sermon in one sentence. This sentence should include all the major parts of the sermon. In the future, you will have to write your own sermon theme sentence. Here, we will show you how this is done:

**“God invites you to his everlasting party, and you must respond to the invitation and come dressed in Christ as your Lord and Savior.”**

You may or may not tell this to your audience in a single sentence. But everything you say in your sermon should be to explain and emphasize this truth. Anything else you say will only weaken your sermon and confuse the audience.

### Tell the Story

When you preach this, you will briefly tell the story of the great party that God prepares, with His Son being the Guest of Honor and how God sent out the invitation to everyone. Use your imagination and tell the story dramatically and as interesting as

possible. Then you deal with the different parts or divisions of the message. You can then add other details about the story, as you present different parts of the story and explain them. Each division may be thought of as a short sermon of its own. These parts, however, all fit together in this one great spiritual truth given above.

**Class assignment:** Write the three divisions on the white board. Briefly write your answers to the following questions under the appropriate division of the sermon. Write other ideas or illustrations that occur to the class members. This is a class project.

### Division 1: You are invited to God's party

Tell the story found in Matthew 22:1-4

**Class task:** Write on the white board your answers to the following questions. Your answers will be the basis for your preaching this part of the sermon.

Who is invited to the party? How does God send the message to your listener? Who else is invited? What did the party cost God? What does He charge to those who choose to come? Who is the special Guest of Honor at the party? Can "bad" people as well as "good" people come? Why is it called a "banquet" or a "party?" In what ways will those who come be filled and satisfied? When does the party begin? When does it end? Why did God decide to have such a party? In what ways has the party already started here on earth?

Testimony: Describe how someone got the invitation to the party. It may be you, it may be a Biblical person like Matthew or Saul, or it may be someone you know. As a "lawyer" you are presenting witnesses in support of your case.

### Division 2: You must decide if you will come to the party

Tell the story found in Matthew 22:5-7 and answer the following:

Did the Jewish nation respond to God's invitation to come to Jesus' party? What do you think held them back? What was the tragic result? How many people today give excuses for not coming? What does God think of these excuses? What are the consequences of not accepting God's invitation? What reasons might hold back the listener from accepting the invitation? What are the reasons the listener should accept the invitation? How important is this decision for the present life and the future existence of the listener?

Testimony: Tell how someone struggled with this decision. It may be someone who chose not to come, but paid a price for not accepting. You may tell of someone who decided to come, and then tell of their blessing. Again, this may be someone in the Bible, like the "rich young ruler" who said "no" or like Zaccheaus who said "yes." Or you may tell about someone else you know.

### Division 3: Come in God's chosen party clothes (dressed in Christ Himself)

Tell the story found in Matthew 22:8-14 and answer the following:

Why is it important that the listener not just get the invitation but accept it? What does it mean to come to God? What does one have to believe to come? Explain why the listeners cannot come in their own righteousness using Isaiah 64:6 We are all as an unclean thing and all our righteousness is as filthy rags. Explain Romans 13:14 Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. What do people leave behind when they come to God? How does a person dress in Christ? Use 2 Corinthians 5:17 to show what it means to be "in Christ." What two things happen when a person is in Christ? What does the listener need to do to be in Christ, to be "dressed" in him?

What happened to the man who tried to come to the party, but was not dressed in Christ? Who are like this man today? What must the listener do to avoid being like him? What will you say to the lost listeners to urge them to "come to the party" now? What importance does this message have for the Christians who are present? What invitation will you give them?

### Close the Sermon

Sales people talk about "closing the sale." That means, they wind up their argument for buying something and then encourage the customer to go ahead and buy it. The preacher should close every sermon in the same way, inviting the people in the audience to make the necessary decision. From the beginning, you should preach to lead people to make decisions. This sermon, as developed, is special for lost people, inviting them to come to God's party, dressed in Christ alone. Christians may relax, thinking the sermon does not ask anything of them. But after inviting the lost, you can then tell the Christians God has sent this message to the Christians, because God is calling us to take the message out to people everywhere. We are God's messengers!

You may close the sermon in many ways. You may briefly tell the story of someone who came to Jesus and whose life was blessed and change. It may be your own testimony. Or you might close with Jesus' own words, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." Give a lot of thought to how you will close your sermons.

**Class Assignment:** The class should think of several convincing ways to close this sermon. This gives the students practice in doing so and begins to show many of the ways a good sermon can be closed.

## Introduce the Sermon

It may seem strange that we study the very first part of the sermon last of all! However, you can best prepare the introduction of the sermon when it is finished and you know what it contains. You now know why the sermon is going to be important to your listeners, and you want to get them ready for the blessings the sermon will bring them.

A sermon introduction should be brief, not taking much time from the body of the sermon itself. But it should in some measure upset or unsettle the audience, helping them to realize that there is something they need to discover in the sermon. This may be done through a question that you challenge the people to answer in their own heart.

If you preach this sermon on the Banquet to many lost people, you may tell them, "Jesus preached to a great crowd of Jews who all thought they were all right with God because of being faithful to their religion. What a surprise they were to get – he explained that God's way is altogether different from man's and unless they learned God's way, they would miss it altogether. But, what is God's way? That's exactly what we are going to find out by the story Jesus told the Jews, and which he now tells us."

If you are preaching the story to Christians, you might tell them, "Most Christians are afraid to tell lost people about Christ and so they hardly ever do it. Their problem is that they somehow don't realize how easy and wonderful it can be to tell people about the party God is inviting them to. Listen now to Jesus about this great party, and see what a difference it can make to all your relatives and friends, and how you can tell them."

# 9

## Practice Outlining Bible Story Sermons

The last lesson gave you help to preach the story of God's Great Banquet. Now, it is your turn to do the same thing with other Bible stories, but with little or no help! You will do it together as a class. Each student would be wise to prepare two or three Bible story sermons at home, and briefly share his or her work with others.

**Assignment:** The class should work together to prepare sermon plans for three or more Bible story sermons, until the members of the class feel they have enough experience to prepare such sermons by themselves. This may require several hours of class time.

### Steps in Preparing Each Sermon

After choosing a Bible story, you need first to decide what are the great spiritual truths to be found in it. Then, you must decide which of these truths will be used in your sermon and what are the two, three or four parts or divisions of the sermon.

Then work each of the divisions of the sermon, asking and answering as many questions as come to your minds. First, analyze the text for what it actually says. Then make application of the story to the lives of the audience. The application must always be based upon a good analysis of the story.

After you have developed your sermons, decide on the invitation you will give and also how you will introduce the sermon. Then, look for an opportunity to preach the sermon! You might do it with a group of lost neighbors or friends in someone's home.

The first step of your sermon preparation you are only interested in the major divisions of your sermon without going into any detail. Having the major divisions, you know where you are going with the sermon, and then you can add the sub-points of your sermon, as you will see in the next chapter.

**Comments:** What is the first thing you must decide after studying the Bible story? What, then, is your second task?

**Instructions:** Following are the texts for several Bible stories that will make powerful sermons. As a class, write on a white board all the important spiritual truths you find in the story. Then decide what are two, three or four related major truths that will make the divisions of the sermon you want to prepare.

God Appears to Samuel **1 Samuel 3:1-21**

David Defeats Goliath **1 Samuel 17:4-11, 17:31-51**

Elijah on Mount Sinai **1 Kings 19:1-18**

Four Men Bring a Friend to Christ **Mark 2:1-12**

Jesus Feeds Five Thousand **John 6:1-15**

Philip and the Ethiopian Official **Acts 8:26-40**

To help you get started, you will find below a list of spiritual truths found in the first Bible story, "God Appears to Samuel" **1 Samuel 3:1-21**.

- ☐ God looks for men and women of pure heart and conduct to give His message to the people.
- ☐ God cannot speak through men or women who overlook sin and are not responsible to correct it in their own lives
- ☐ God looks for humble people to speak for Him.
- ☐ God often chooses to use those whose parents have dedicated them to God's service.
- ☐ God may call us at any time, even when we least expect it.
- ☐ God's call may be repeated, so we may be sure that it is He Who is speaking.
- ☐ God gives us the message we are to give to others.
- ☐ To permit evil that can be corrected is to invite God's punishment.
- ☐ When God's messengers speak the truth, the people know that the message is from God.
- ☐ People recognize those who speak honestly and lovingly for God.
- ☐ If we speak God's message faithfully, God will use us again and again

Again, there are more spiritual truths in this story than we should use in a single sermon. Therefore, we must choose which truths we will use in our message and build the sermon around them. Any of the truths above can be used. Following is one idea how the sermon might be developed.

### God's Spokespeople (Witnessing)

1. God looks for pure-hearted people who can speak for Him
2. God gives us the message we are to give to others.
3. People listen to those who speak honestly and lovingly for God.

**Class Assignment:** Develop each of the parts of the sermon, asking questions and giving answers for each division. Remember, give an analysis of how these three truths are found in the story and then give applications of these truths as they affect the listeners. Illustrate these three truths with Bible or contemporary examples. Consider doctrinal verses that might explain clearly the three truths.

**Class Assignment:** Choose other Bible stories and prepare them together as a class on the whiteboard. Decide how you will introduce each of the sermons in an interesting way and also what conclusion and invitation(s) will be given.

### The Next Class Periods

As you read in Lesson 3, this Lesson 8 is the longest and should occupy several hours of class time as you work together on sermon after sermon. Students should work alone in writing their outlines to the sermons and bring those outlines as starting points for the class to develop the story more fully in a class-made sermon. Every idea given by students is valuable. Remember, however, as a class, to be faithful to what is in the story itself. Avoid preaching about anything that you do not find in the story. Remember that every Bible story can be preached in different ways for different emphases and respect the thinking of every participating student. Let these times of exercise to be like a team sport. Work together and applaud every winning point made by your teacher and your fellow students. Have great fun in the Lord and His Word.



# 10

## Plan Ahead What You Will Preach

Sometimes it is easier to prepare a sermon than it is to decide what sermon you should prepare. This can be a difficult task, especially if you are not working according to some plan. When you have a general plan in mind, it will help lead you to the sermon you should prepare and preach.

There are two good plans by which you can find your text and prepare your message week after week. One plan is to preach through certain books or parts of the Bible and let the Bible passages decide the preaching themes for you. The other is to have a calendar of preaching themes and find the Scripture texts that present each theme. Look at both of these methods:

### Preach Through Selected Parts of the Bible

If you have decided to preach the stories of the Bible, you might decide to preach through a certain book of the Bible that is full of stories. Preaching through a Gospel like that of Luke will give many stories about Christ. Each story is different and reveals Who Christ is in a unique way. You may preach the stories of the Acts of the Apostles which will challenge you and your listeners with a missionary vision and a commitment to sharing the gospel of Christ with the lost. Genesis and Exodus are two books filled with faith stories from the earliest years when men walked with God. Joshua is the story of one man leading the people of God to fulfill God's plan for His young nation of Israel. 1 and 2 Samuel encompass the stories of David, a greatly favored man of God, who was called by God when he was still a boy. Other books of Old Testament history dramatize the call, the struggles and the messages of God's great prophets.

There are special benefits to preaching through selected parts of the Bible. There are also some things to watch out for.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of preaching through a book or section of the Bible is that you will find a variety of themes that you will present to your congregation. Some of these themes are not something that you would have thought of. In other words, God is choosing the specific subjects and emphases of your preaching instead of you doing this. The congregation also becomes aware of this, and may be more excited about what God is leading you and them to consider.

The difficulty of this approach is that you have no choice but to study well the texts, especially those that deal with themes you might not ordinarily preach. This is a challenge, however, to help you to grow in dependence on the Lord and to learn to preach the messages of God that you might not think to preach otherwise.

**Comments:** What is an advantage of preaching through certain parts of the Bible? What challenge does this give to the preacher?

### Choose Stories Based On the Same Common Theme

Instead of preaching through a Bible book, you may choose to preach from certain kinds of stories. For example, preach the parables of Jesus and what they tell us about the Kingdom of God. You will find the parables, with different details, in all four Gospels. If you choose to preach on the life of Paul, you will find your messages in the Acts of the Apostles and his words of testimony in his epistles. Or you may decide on stories from many parts of the Bible that deal with one general theme. For a stewardship series, you might preach on the amazing wealth-building of Abraham's faith, on the rewarding family loyalty of Ruth, on Paul's holy use of tent-making, on King Saul's trading his life and kingdom for some cattle, on the parable of the rich fool, etc. The theme takes you all over the Bible and every message is very different. However, the major theme is brought home to the heart again and again.

There are good reasons to dedicate certain times of the year to certain themes. Religious holidays, such as Easter and Christmas turn the thoughts of your listeners to those themes. A series on the godly family will draw you to inspiring Bible stories. An evangelistic preaching series will take you to such parables and stories as the prodigal son, the Samaritan woman, the parable of the soils, Nicodemus, the paralytic and his four friends, the thief on the cross, and many others. While the general theme is that of the gospel itself, every story looks at the gospel from a different angle, avoiding monotony and bored audiences.

Theme-based preaching is best accomplished by establishing a calendar of preaching themes for the year, taking into consideration times of the year that call for certain themes. The wise preacher following this plan will make a list of themes that will stretch out across a whole year.

For greater variety, the preacher might preach through a certain book of the Bible for a time and then preach on chosen themes of the Bible afterwards. In either method, story-based preaching, under God's inspiration, enables powerful pulpit work in your church.

Many pastors struggle week after week with the question of what they will preach, without the help of any plan. Not only does this give the preacher uncertainty and constant frustration, but the church soon realizes that he is a preacher without a plan. It might be wise to read again this book every year. When you come upon this chapter, you may be helped to stay on a sound course letting God use you to inspire your church week after week by the planned preaching of His story.

**Comments:** How does having a plan for preaching make the preacher's task much easier? How might this affect the church's impression of its preacher?

For most preachers, it may be wise to simply say that you will be preaching a series of sermons on a certain book of the Bible or on a certain general theme, without saying how long this will last. This leaves you freedom to change to another book or theme when you believe it is time to do so.

### On to the Adventure

If God could make a great gospel preacher out of an unnoticed shoe salesman like Dwight L. Moody, He can make an effective preacher out of anyone He calls and who will take up the task with humility. As with Moody, your best teachers will be children. Get your best preaching practice by telling children Bible stories and what those stories mean to their lives. You can skip this if you wish, but know that your preaching will never be all that it could be as a result. Even if you are quickly asked to preach to a congregation of adults, find time to also be teaching children if you are serious about becoming a powerful Bible preacher.

You have learned a lot in these past lessons. Now, put the lessons to practice. In the months and years ahead, go back to these first lessons and remind yourself what they taught. Some of their truths will make more sense to you after you have preached many sermons.

Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus – not only as your inspiration but also as your example in preaching. Witness his compassion, his simplicity of speech, his love for stories that deliver spiritual truth. See his purpose to use every speaking opportunity to bring people to faith, repentance, salvation and ministry. There is no higher calling given to us than this. Now, on to the adventure!