

# Preaching the Gospel

**A monthly magazine for preachers and those who want to preach.**

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## MORE ON THE PURPOSE STATEMENT

I want to emphasize again that the preacher should have a purpose for his sermon, and he should be able to write that purpose in a clear sentence. In fact, you should have the purpose statement at the top of the page when you prepare your sermon. It should be clear to you throughout your preparation; the organization of your sermon should lead to that purpose; and your conclusion should show that you have accomplished the purpose.

Mark Roberts wrote to me:

Once again I enjoyed *Preaching the Gospel Magazine*. The material on a purpose statement for sermons is so needed. I once heard a sermon that I titled (in my notes) three times, each with different titles! I ended up finally crossing out the last title as the preacher abruptly ended and gave an invitation. I could not tell you the title of the sermon or its purpose, and I suspect no one else could either! One fellow said "Preaching should be a rifle shot and not a shotgun blast" and I believe a purpose statement helps it achieve that end. Thanks for your good work.

Your purpose should not be, "To explain the verses." You should decide what point found in those verses you want to press home to your hearers. And a topic is not a purpose statement. "Faith Without Works" is a good topic, but it does not tell what you want to accomplish. "My purpose is to prove that faith alone, without works of obedience, will not save a person." With that as your purpose statement, you will see how to construct your sermon and will know when you have done what you want to do.

Please, please prepare your sermons with carefully constructed purpose statements. If you have not been doing this, you may be pleasantly surprised to see how much more effective your sermons become.

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**Article 3 on How To Prepare A Sermon—**

## HOW TO WRITE A SERMON – BE SURE IT IS YOURS

**J. Ken Williams, Bangor, Maine**

In my previous article I listed a number of resources for sermon notes, including a couple that include complete sermon outlines. You might wonder why I go to all the trouble (4 to 6 hours per sermon) of writing my own sermon when I could just use one

that someone else has already written. While I don't believe it is a sin to preach from someone else's outline, I do believe you are cheating yourself as well as your hearers when you do that. In this article I would like to explain why I say that.

My first need when I do research for a sermon is to learn the topic for myself. As I explained in my first article, off the top of my head I was only able to fill about half a page with notes about turning the other cheek. I simply did not know enough about the topic to be able to preach a decent sermon on it. When I use those other resources for notes I am first of all teaching myself. I mentioned that I spend two to four hours over several days collecting those notes. I am doing more than just recording ideas to be used in my sermon. I am learning what Jesus meant when He told me to turn the other cheek. A lot of those hours at my desk are spent thinking. Reading what other writers say about the passage makes me think about it. I will read what Albert Barnes said about the passage, then I will think about it. Do I agree with him? Matthew Henry said that I must forgive the person who slaps me on the cheek. Is he correct? Does the Bible say I should forgive someone who has not repented? I may not want to cover all of those questions in my sermon, but the study and the thinking gives me a deep understanding of my subject. It won't hurt to make notes on those thoughts, because I can always leave them out if they don't fit my outline. (I will have more to say on that in a future article.)

I want to be really full of my topic before I ask my audience to give me an hour of their time. If I take the lazy way out and let someone else do the studying for me, I am cheating my hearers. They will not hear a good sermon – one that leaves them really wanting to turn the other cheek. I am speaking from experience. There have been times when I *have* taken the lazy way out and I have seen my sermon fall pretty flat as a result. I have listened to sermons where I felt the preacher had not prepared well enough. He should have spent a few more hours at his desk. He wasted my time. I don't want to do that to people anymore.

I also mentioned that I do not usually spend the two to four hours of note gathering in one session. One reason for that is that I work a secular job and have to grab time for sermon writing in bits and pieces. The other reason is that I need time to think and pray about the topic while I am doing research. I may spend half an hour before work jotting down ideas I get from Pulpit Commentary. The rest of the day I can think about it. I can talk to God about it in my prayers. Am I living like Jesus said to live? When I look back in my life, have I turned the other cheek when someone wronged me? (In my case, the answer is, "Not every time.") Have I sought God's forgiveness for those times when I failed? Have I asked that person for forgiveness? (Ouch!) If I haven't, what business do I have telling someone else to turn the other cheek? It would be better for me to let people go home early without a sermon than to get up and preach a sermon that condemns me for things I should have already corrected in my own life. Sometimes I hear a preacher say, "I am preaching this as much to *myself* as I am to *you*." While I appreciate the humility of that preacher, I fear what he may be saying is, "I'm not really doing a very good job of obeying God in this matter and I am hoping that preaching this sermon will help me do better." Maybe the sermon will help the man and maybe it won't. I know one thing – it won't help his hearers. If I preach a sermon that I have not been living in my life, all I am telling my hearers is that it is OK to preach something that you do not practice.

Mark Copeland wrote a good outline about turning the other cheek ([http://www.ccel.org/contrib/exec\\_outlines/matt/mt5\\_38.htm](http://www.ccel.org/contrib/exec_outlines/matt/mt5_38.htm)). I'm sure when he

preached that sermon it did a lot of good for his hearers. He has been kind enough to publish it so that I can benefit from it as well. But when I finish filling my pages with notes and my mind with the topic, I will probably want to say things a little differently than Mark did. I will write my own outline and preach my own sermon. With God's help at least some of my hearers will go home saying, "I needed that. I'm going to behave differently from now on." And God will be glorified.

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## THE INTRODUCTION

***Preaching the Gospel Magazine* is published about the middle of each month. It is free by e-mail, R24 per year by post in South Africa. Those who receive it are encouraged to print it for others. This file is formatted for printing on both sides of the paper, with room to punch holes on the left for inserting in a notebook.**

**W**hen you stand up to preach and announce your sermon subject, you should hear the whole audience saying to themselves, "So what?" Your job is to answer that question in your introduction.

This means you have to find a way to get your audience interested, and hopefully vitally interested, in the subject you have chosen. If you have a well-formed purpose statement, this will help you. You know what you want to accomplish, therefore you should have a good idea of why your hearers should be interested.

So, find a connection between the interests of your hearers and the subject you will be preaching on. Show in some way why they need what you are going to preach.

A good introduction often includes a vivid illustration. It may include questions which you intend answering in the sermon.

In fact, there are four things which should be found in most introductions:

1. An explanation of the text.
2. Something to get the hearers excited about what you are going to preach.
3. Your purpose statement, which you can clearly state or you can imply.
4. Your main points stated and, where necessary, explained.

Every part of the sermon is important. Don't slight the introduction. Prepare it carefully. You may find that preparing the introduction last is best. When your sermon is constructed and you are full of your subject, you can then see the way to lead your audience into it.

But I want to caution you not to make your introduction too long. One excellent preacher whom I knew in his late years had formed the habit of introducing his sermons by a careful explanation of the text. Unfortunately this often took twenty minutes. Twenty minutes of introduction is too long for most audiences. Explain your text, including the context, but don't weary the audience doing it.

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## WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE BOOKS

Many men who desire to preach do not have many books to help them. What can you do to study as you should? Here are some suggestions:

1. Spend plenty of time with your Bible. Learn to use the cross references in the margin, the maps in the back, and the concordance—if those helps are in your Bible. Study carefully—make notes, write down questions, write references in the margin, underline, highlight. Do everything to help you understand the text.
2. Write down your understanding of the passage, using your own words. Do the same for the other verses which you have found on the subject.
3. Discuss the passage with mature Christians. Preachers who study the Bible with other preachers gain a lot of understanding.
4. Borrow books. You may have a friend who has a book which will help you. But please, please—be responsible. Don't make him ask for it back. Return it promptly!
5. Pray—a lot!

### *Preacher, Consider*

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. Also, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

—Paul's instruction to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:1-7

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