Lesson #3

Powerful Planning

By

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Soul Preaching

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Foreword

Thank you, thank you, and thank you for sticking with us in this very important program. As always, we have a few important things about the course to notify you of.

First, if you want to drop out of the program and still receive your refund, you need to do it after the next lesson. If you are planning to cancel your membership, I strongly advise you to stay on and get the next lesson before cancelling your membership. The reason is the next lesson is so important in that we will talk about exegesis of a scripture. You don’t want to miss that.

Next, I want to encourage you to make sure that you are receiving the email. Some people are only accessing the site, but never did “confirm” their email to receive emails. Those who have confirmed their original email have been receiving the email notifications to remind them to come to the course. If you are in the course, you want to confirm your email address.

Now we are making a move in our course. The first two lessons were overview lessons, but in this one we will begin our step by step description of the phases. Then, we will go back through them with some in depth examples.

If you have any questions about this course, please do not hesitate to email me at preacher@superchargeyoursermons.com.

P.S. – OK. Enough with the housekeeping. Let’s get to this week’s training!!
Introduction

Perhaps the most often overlooked portion of the sermon construction process is the planning phase. I must admit that even my own ebook *You Can Preach: 7 Steps to an Effective Sermon* does not even touch the subject. Preachers finish preaching and then the next day begin searching for a text to preach. Some simply begin reading the scripture and ask God to help them find a scripture. However, they make no effort to look beyond the next sermon.

But then there are preachers who preach in series. This is a little better, but they simply look at the next series that they will preach. These sermons may or may not be “hitting the mark.”

However, there is one thing that you can do that can come close to guaranteeing that the people will get what they need from your sermons. And that one thing is Sermonic Planning!

In this lesson, you will learn the fundamentals of sermonic planning. Constructing a sermonic plan requires following at least the following steps. This lesson is very important in that you cannot find this information anywhere else. You can look in the literature, and you will find very little on this aspect of preaching. So I would encourage you to jump at learning this important point.

Now I make a couple of assumptions. First of all is I assume some sort of connection to the particular congregation. You understand the congregation in some way. This may be from your interaction as a pastor with your people or as an associate minister or whatever. If you’re not actually a member of the congregation, then you might have to depend on others as you’re piecing together these particular steps.

It’s important, however, to have some idea of who the congregation is before you preach to it if, at all, possible. If not, then you just have to do the best that you can. But it’s important to exploit the connection—any connection to the congregation that you can have—whether it is someone you know in the congregation or past congregation or whatever, to get an understanding of that congregation.

Another assumption I make—and I didn’t finish this out—but you preach often to that particular congregation. You’re going to preach more than one sermon to that particular congregation. Sermon planning can be helpful even if you’re
preaching one sermon, but it really helps your preparation, it helps to economize
your resources and your efforts if you preach more than once to a congregation.
And as I said before, this may be a revival, it may be some sort of a Week of
Prayers or Week of Messages or Week of Sermons, or you’re a pastor who is
addressing a congregation over many, many times.
Step One – Prayer

So now we’re ready to begin. How do you put together a sermon plan? The first step is Intense Prayer. Intense Prayer is an important component of putting together a sermon plan. Why? The job is beyond you. You are seeking to preach God’s words to this congregation. It is a very difficult job. And because of that, you need help, supernatural help, more help, more than you can do on your own. And because of that, you must have an intense prayer.

Next, you need intense prayer because it’s going to foster humility in you. You’re going to need more than your own resources to preach to this congregation, but not only to preach to this congregation but to have the audacity to believe that God can use you to guide this congregation forward into where God wants this congregation to be.

Another thing that intense prayer will do is that it will foster openness in the preacher. The preacher will become open to the Spirit’s leading. The preacher will become open to God’s leading in through other people. The preacher will become open and sensitive to what others are saying, how others are feeling and how that can play into the actual presentation of putting together the sermon plan and the preaching of the Word.

These are all important components of putting together a sermon plan, getting the preacher straight. This is something that not a lot of resources on preaching talk about and I haven’t talked about it a lot in some of my own resources. But it is important for the preacher to be straight, the preacher to be in a good shape before the preacher can actually put together an effective sermon plan.

Now, we’re going to continue on that particular theme in Step 2. But in Step 1—Intense Prayer—one writer said we shouldn’t even open the Bible without getting down on our knees and praying for help and for knowledge from God. As preachers, we even need to do it even more so.

So that’s Step 1, to put together an effective sermon plan—Intense Prayer.
### Using the Concepts

Now it is time to use this in your preaching. In your next week of sermon preparation, I want you to do the following:

**Pray** – Recognize your need and pray for God’s leading. Humbly ask God for what God wants the people to hear. This is the first step to supercharging your sermons. Ask God to put power in your message as you preach God’s word to the people.
Step Two – Who is the Preacher?

Who are you as a preacher? Who are you as a human being? This is the first step that you must make. Now some would ask, “Why worry about myself?” The answer is simply; who you are will filter into your sermons. However, if you do not know who you are, if you do not know what’s going on in your life, then you will not have control over what comes into the sermons.

This is something that we often do not put a lot of emphasis on, but it is a very important thing. And that is to **Look at Yourself**. Here, we look at the preacher’s needs so that we can learn how to address them correctly. We’ve all heard preachers who tell us exactly what is going on in their lives in the pulpit. When they are having some difficulty, that’s the only thing they preach about. But **God has called you as a preacher to preach, not just to yourself but to the whole congregation**. You have a whole congregation to deal with and so you need to look at yourself, see what your needs are and make sure that you understand your needs within the context of the congregation when you are talking about preaching as a pastor or as a preacher. Now you shouldn’t totally ignore your needs but you should understand your needs within the context of the congregation.

Another thing that’s important when you look at your own self, you will see that you have some actual failings, you have some problems, you have some things that you are dealing with. **It is important for you to recognize that your failings are not necessarily everyone else’s failings**. Sometimes, preachers will preach as if their own problems are the problems that everyone is dealing with. And so, they end up preaching their own needs rather than the congregation’s needs. So how do you address the congregation’s real needs? We will get to that!

Another point that the preacher must recognize is **all of your enemies are not standing in the way of God**. This actually should be carefully considered by every preacher. Some preachers preach as if to disagree with them is to disagree with God. But you can disagree with the preacher and not necessarily with God. In fact, if the preacher is not allowed to be disagreed with, then there is no possible way of correcting the preacher. I think that it’s important for the preacher to recognize that the pulpit is not a bully pulpit to use against enemies. In fact, your enemies are most in need of the ministering of the Holy Spirit. And so as preachers, we must keep that in mind as well.
If you are going to put together an effective sermon plan, you need to recognize who you are so that who you are doesn’t overly guide the topics are addressed in sermons. I’m trying to be careful here because who you are is important and even your needs are important but it shouldn’t overly guide the sermon process. We should leave that to the Spirit as well as our understanding of what the congregation needs.

Now don’t hear me wrong, I’m not saying that the pastor... there’s definitely a time for the enemies of God to be addressed. The enemies of God are to be addressed openly and powerfully at the correct time. But one should be sure that it is the enemies of God and not merely the enemies of the preacher that are being addressed at that particular time.

So Step 2 is to look at the preacher, understand who you are, understand your needs, understand which you are not getting from your understanding of God, understand what you are struggling with, the problems that you are dealing with, the struggles that you are dealing with. There may be times where there’s a convergence of which you are dealing with and what the congregation needs and if that’s the case, then it really can be very powerful. But in any case, it’s important to understand who you are and what you are dealing with.

Using the Concepts

OK, how do we do this? We should consult a few groups to find out who we are.

God – Ask God to enlighten you as you seek to look at your issues, needs, and problems. God will answer, just be ready!

Yourself - Ask yourself, what are your sins? What are your vices? What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses? This is a humbling thing to do. I would encourage you however, to be very careful about whom you share this information with. This is largely to help you become a better preacher, not provide ammunition for those who do not like you, or to confuse the young in the faith. See the appendix for specific questions to ask

Your Mentors and Inner Circle - Now the previous step will get at a lot of stuff, but it
won’t get at it all. You have a blind eye to some of your strengths and weaknesses. So you need to ask a mentor in ministry many of the same questions.

**Your Enemies** – Your enemies don’t have your best interests at heart, but sometimes there is a grain of truth in their attacks. Often they exaggerate or put things in the worst possible light, but you still can look at what your enemies are saying about you and truly ask yourself, if there is some truth to what they are saying. It might be enlightening.

**Now after having gathered the information**

Ask yourself, If you have vices, do you preach on them? How do you preach on them? Do you always talk about grace when it is your vice you are preaching about, but law when it is someone else’s? Or maybe the opposite, maybe you only preach law when talking about your own vice, and grace when speaking of other’s? Maybe you ignore your own vices altogether.

Do the same thing with the other questions. What are your strengths? I can remember a preacher who never preached about leadership development. Never preached about strengthening the people to become better leaders. After looking at the preacher, I realized that he was a very strong leader. For that reason, he may have been ignoring the needs of his own congregation. If he did not analyze himself, he wouldn’t be in a position to know that he is allowing his own strengths to hide the needs of the people.
Step Three – Where are the People?

Now we’re moving to Understanding the Congregation. We need to know who the congregation is and get a big-picture look at the congregation.

First, **what is the story of the congregation in the immediate and more long-term past?** You want to know the story or the narrative of the congregation. What kind of story is the congregation living? Is it a glorious story? Is it a pessimistic story? Is it a story that is getting better, one that looks to the future? Or is it one that looks to the past? What is the story that the congregation is living?

**Who are the leaders in the church and who are they and what have they done?** You may find that there are leaders in the church who were strong leaders in the church who have stopped being so strong. You might want to ask them why. They may have given up totally their positions or they may have gone to other congregations and left that particular congregation altogether. There may be others who have stuck around. Who are they? What kind of leaders are they? Are they autocratic leaders? Are they democratic leaders? What kind of leaders are they?

**Where would the church probably go if left to its own devices?** If the church was just to go forward on the trajectory that it is currently on, where would the church be in a year, two years, three years? In other words, if this story was to play out, where would it lead?

**What kind of preaching did the particular church hear in the past?** What kind of preaching did the pastors give? What kind of guest preachers did they bring in? What did they preach? What kind of preaching do the people seem to resonate with? What kind of preaching kind of grates against their nerves? You want to put some of these things in because you are going to try to understand where the congregation is right now.

**What kind of pastor was in this church before?** What kind of pastor immediately before and even further in the past? What kind of pastors were they? Were they strong pastors? Like I said, were they autocratic leaders? Were they democratic leaders? Were they strong leaders? Were they weak leaders? Were they up and comers? Were they on the move or were they on the way down? You
want to ask that question when you are looking at a particular church and seeking to understand the church.

Once again we need to look at this from a multi-pronged position. First you analyze the congregation alone. Then you want to have a “sermon plan team” that comes together to help you plan sermons. Many of these questions can be asked of that team. This can be formal or informal.

I do think that the team should be balanced. It should not be totally friends. It should not be totally young or totally aged. It should not be all leaders and no pew-members. It should not be all theologically trained. It should be a balanced representation of the congregation.

So the first thing you should do is put together a team. The nice thing about the modern world is that you can use the internet to facilitate this, but do try to get together if possible. Then you want to ask all of those questions of that team.

Using the Concepts

OK, how do we do this?

1. Analyze your congregation using the questions at the end of this lesson.
2. Construct a sermon planning team if possible.
3. Compare and analyze your analysis with that of the sermonic planning team.
Step Four – Finding Sermon Goals – Where is God leading now?

If we are to find sermon goals, we must take the analysis that we have had before and generate themes that must be addressed in the congregation. You have all of the analysis you need. You must prayerfully ask, in light of where the congregation is, what do I need to preach?

Ok, your previous analysis shows some strengths and weaknesses in the congregation. Now the themes that you want to emphasize are the weaknesses. But not just the weaknesses, but the weaknesses that are already being addressed by God in your congregation. Look in your congregation for indications that God is already addressing the weaknesses in the congregation. And when you see that, then follow God by promoting those elements.

Ask the following questions:

1) Take the problems from previous steps. Now ask yourself where is God already fixing this?
2) Write down all of the illustrations of grace, hope, and peace in your congregation.
3) Find a counter example in your congregation for every element of evil.

You will find some areas where God is already working. You see some preachers come into a congregation ready to force on the people what they already know is God’s will for the congregation. However, if you look at the congregation and see places where God’s grace is already working, then you will have divine help in your struggle to make the congregation a better vision of God’s coming kingdom.

So look at the congregation. You may see a lay person starting a soup kitchen in the midst of a congregation that thinks that the pastor is the only minister in the church. That is God already working to help that congregation become a more Godlike congregation.

You may just see a woman who is always friendly to everyone in the midst of a congregation of people with sour dispositions. Here is God already working to take that congregation to the next level of grace and love.
Keep looking at the worst problems in the church, and you will see God already doing something to fix the problem. It is your job as a preacher to note those areas where God is already working. Write them down. These are themes to preach. These are illustrations for your sermons. These belong in your sermons as you seek to bring your people to the next level.

Finally, you will have to add certain themes that simply must be addressed in your community. This may be mother’s day, youth day, revivals, pastor’s anniversary, watch night, easter, and other important themes of the church year. You want to add these themes to your plan.

Using the Concepts

OK, now complete this step.

1. Take the themes that are strengths of your congregation and write them down. You want to address them some.
2. Take the themes that are weaknesses of your congregation where you can’t find elements of God working in your congregation. You want to address them some.
3. Take the themes that are weaknesses of your congregation where you can see active elements of God already working; you want to address these primarily.
4. Remember to add the important themes that must be addressed in your congregation like Mother’s Day, Easter, and other important themes from your ecclesial tradition. Some denominations create calendars; you want to consult these when you are putting together your plan.
Step 6 - Create a Sermonic Plan

Now you are ready to create your plan. A plan is where you take the themes that you need to address from the previous step and plan what sermons will address these themes. You will assign a scripture and some themes and some high level interaction to address these various themes in a systematic way. You want to spend some time in celebration of the places where God has worked a change in the congregation. You have seen strengths. You need to preach those strengths. Let them know that they are on the right track. Move them forward.

Next, you need to look at the areas of where the congregation has fallen short. You already know that God is working on those areas. Those areas where you have seen the blessing of God already working, you should preach those. As I noted before, use the examples of hope as illustrations in your sermons. You are seeking to be helpful to God in this work.

Using the Concepts

Now it is time to use this in your preaching. In your next week of sermon preparation, I want you to do the following:

1. **Theme Emphasis** – Determine the themes that you want to address over the next sermonic timeline. If you plan a quarter ahead, then determine the themes that you will address in that quarter.
2. **Initial Scripture Selection** – Use your lectionary, or simply seek to address these themes you need to address
3. **Apply the Themes** – Now you need to assign the themes and texts together. What themes will you address and when?
This Week’s Assignments

1. Plan a week-long planning retreat, or ease into the plan!
2. Find out how your issues are guiding your preaching by completing step 1.
3. Think of one or two themes that you have not addressed in a while, but are strengths of the congregation. Add these themes to your future preaching.
4. Think of one or two themes that are weaknesses of your congregation and address them.

God Bless and Keep on Preaching,

Sherman Haywood Cox II
Publisher, Supercharge Your Sermons

Coming Up Next ...

Lesson #4: “Quick Start: Experiential Exegesis “

This lesson is perhaps the most important one in the series. We will take you step by step through the process of a real experiential exegesis. You need to read and study this lesson to push your sermons forward. What happens when you take the black preaching mindset and apply it to bible exegesis?
Special Supercharge Idea for Week #2 Easing into the Plan!

It is preferable to take time off from all responsibilities to create this sermonic plan. However this is not always possible. If you find that responsibilities remove the possibility of taking time off, then you must create your plan while continuing in ministry and other work.

The way to ease into your plan is to work through each step in addition to your regular responsibilities. So for the first week, add step one to your regular sermonic plan. As you are constructing your sermon for the week, add in intense prayer for your plan.

Then the next week you want to work on yourself. So in addition to your ministry responsibilities, add in time to do the analysis of yourself. And so on through all the rest of the steps in the process.

Once you have your plan, you will be very happy about the results and you will be ready with themes that you know will address your congregation.

Adding planning to your preaching will help to Supercharge Your Sermons

Sherman Haywood Cox II
Questions to Aid in Analysis of Yourself

1) What are your vices?  - What are the things that you do that you wish you did not do?
2) What are the things you are working on? – Some of us have vices that we are not even trying to work on.
3) What are the things you are not working on?
4) What are the things you are not planning on working on?
5) What are your strengths in ministry?
6) What are your weaknesses in ministry?
7) Do you enjoy preaching?
8) Do you enjoy ministry?
9) Do you like your people?
10) Do you love your people?
11) Do you hate or despise your people?
Questions to Aid in Analysis of Congregation

1. What is the number one thing that you think the congregation needs?
2. Is the congregation living in the past, present, or future?
3. Is the congregation hopeful or pessimistic about the future?
4. Does the congregation respect your leadership?
5. What kind of preaching is the congregation used to hearing?
6. What is the congregation’s understanding of theology?
7. What is the congregation’s understanding of the bible?
8. What are the congregation’s present challenges?
9. What are the congregations’ past challenges?
10. What are the congregation’s strengths?
11. What are the congregation’s weaknesses?
12. What is the congregation’s relationship with the parent body?
13. Who runs the congregation?