

THE PURPOSE OF PREACHING

Purpose of Preaching

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Good morning. My name is Rick Warren and it's a privilege to be a part of this "Walk Through Life With Purpose" seminar. I bring you greetings from Southern California. I wish I could be with you but I'm facing a major book-writing deadline for the book called "The Purpose-Driven Life" and I'm unable to be with you. Bruce asked me to come and talk with you today about preaching, which is one of my favorite subjects; and since I love Bruce Wilkinson, and since he's taught me personally so much about preaching and teaching, I couldn't say no. In this first session we're going to talk about the purpose of preaching.

The Bible says in Proverbs 19:21, "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails." God has a purpose for everything. He never created anything without a purpose. He has a purpose for every plant, every animal, every rock, every mineral and he has a purpose for your life, for your church and for the world. The Bible says in Ecclesiastes that there is a time for every purpose under heaven. So I want us to begin this session with a look at God's purpose for preaching. One of the great problems in our churches today is purposeless preaching. So many sermons are just words in search of a purpose; and if the purpose isn't clear to the preacher, it certainly won't be to the listeners. Chuck Swindoll says if there's a mist in the pulpit, there's going to be a fog in the pew. Without a clear purpose, preaching is a misuse of the Bible; it's a waste of time to people and it's a frustration to the preacher. Our preaching must be in harmony with God's overall purpose in people's lives otherwise we're just wasting people's time. Even worse you could actually be working against God's purposes. So a solid theology for preaching must take into account God's purpose for man, God's purpose for the Bible and God's purpose for preaching. Let's look at these three.

First - God's purpose for man. The Bible says in Romans 8:29, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the first born among many brothers." Now here is God's purpose for every human being – God wants to make us like Jesus Christ. This has been God's plan from the very beginning back when God started in creation. In Genesis 1:26, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.'" The Bible tells us in II Corinthians 3:8, "As the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more." The Bible tells us in I Corinthians 15:49, "Just as we are now like Adam, the man of the earth, so someday we will be like Christ." Now until you understand this, that this is the whole point of everything, you're not ready to preach. When God started back in creation and he made man, he made man in his image. But, of course, the fall destroyed and damaged that image and so Jesus Christ had to come to earth to restore, to reconcile, to bring us back and to put us back on track to God's original goal to make us like Jesus Christ.

Now I don't have time to look at all of the passages so let me just summarize. To be like Christ means to think like Jesus. For instance Philippians 2:5 says, "Have the mind of Christ." It means to feel like Jesus. Colossians 3:15 talks about putting on compassion and humility and integrity. And it means to act like Jesus. Colossians 3:17 talks about no matter what you do, in everything you do, do it to the glory of God and do it in the name of Christ. Now here's the implication. Since God's number one purpose is to make you, to make me, to make all of us like Jesus Christ, then the goal of preaching must be always to do the same. Everything else in teaching and in preaching is secondary. This is all that matters. If I haven't done this as a result to help people become more and more like Christ then I have failed as a preacher.

Now the objective of Purpose-Driven preaching is to develop Christ-like convictions (thinking like Jesus), Christ-like character (feeling like Jesus) and Christ-like conduct (acting like Jesus). How does God do that? How does God turn us into being Christ-like? How does he form us into Christ-likeness? Well the Bible tells us primarily two ways. The first way God makes us like Jesus is through circumstances. The Bible tells us in Romans 8:28, 29, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him." It doesn't say all things are good. It says God works in all things for the good of those who love him and have been called according to his purpose. Now think about this for a minute. Romans 8:28 doesn't make sense until you understand Romans 8:29 which explains why all things work together for good. They just don't work together for good for nothing. They work together for good because of what Romans 8:29, the next verse, teaches, which says, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son." All things work together for good because they are designed to make us like Jesus Christ. That's the goal. Now, of course, there are many, many verses in the Bible that talk about how God uses circumstances. James chapter one, Romans chapter five, I Peter chapter one and many, many others but God uses circumstances to make you and me like Christ.

The second way that God makes us like Christ is through applying God's word to my life. Acts 20:32 Paul says, "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified." What does that mean? Sanctification is just a big word for becoming like Jesus. Being Christ-like. In John 17:17 Jesus said, "Sanctify them through the truth. Your word is truth." Now one day, when we see Christ directly, we are going to instantly be changed into his likeness. The Bible tells us in I John 3:2 that we do know that when Christ comes again we will be like him because we will see him as he really is. But right now none of us see Christ literally face to face. If we did see him face to face we would be instantly changed into his likeness. But we don't. So what about right now? What about in the meantime? Well the Bible tells us in II Corinthians 3:18, "We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory just as it is from the Lord, the Spirit." Now I intentionally used New American Standard because it gives a literal rendering of the phrase 'beholding as in a mirror'. Beholding as in a glass is what the King James says. Did you know that the phrase in Greek is one single word? And that word is only used one time in the Bible. It literally means to reflect on, to look at, as if in a mirror. You don't see something

directly; you see the reflection of it as if you see it in a mirror. You consider it as in a mirror. Question? What is the mirror now that allows us to see Christ's glory? The answer – the word, the Bible. As I look into God's word, I see Christ in it and I am changed by it and as I look at his reflection (because I don't see him face to face) as I look at it, then I become more and more like him from one degree of glory to another. It is a process through life.

Now these two ways – circumstances and the word of God – God uses to make us like Christ. The Bible says that even though we have the word of God he depends even more on circumstances because you have circumstances 24 hours a day. Even if you read the Bible three or four hours a day (which I doubt you do) that would still give you 20 hours a day of circumstances. So although God does use the word to make us like Christ, he depends even more on circumstances because we have them all the time.

James 1:24, 25 says, “Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.” Follow this passage closely. “But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does.” Think about this for a minute. God promises blessing, not just if you read the Bible, but if we study, we memorize it, we meditate on it and then most important of all when we do it. When we get people to look at the word, remember the word and do God's word they inevitably are changed. That is the power of God's word. But there's a major problem. Most pastors are using a method and style of preaching that gets people to look at the word of God but not to remember it or not to do it. The number one problem in our churches is this – most preaching is producing hearers of the word but not doers of the word. They may be bringing notebooks to church; they may be writing notes and be full of facts and information; they may be familiar with Greek and Hebrew terms and all kinds of biblical background, but they are walking out of our churches informed but not transformed.

The truth is a lot of preaching is just historical lecturing with a little bit of Greek grammar thrown in. After watching thousands of lives be changed after I changed my preaching style to what we are going to share today, I am absolutely convinced that the problem is not the people. The problem is in the pulpit. It is a style and method problem. You know a while back George Gallup took a national survey and came to this conclusion. “Never before in the history of the United States has the gospel of Jesus Christ made such inroads while at the same time making so little difference in how people actually live.” Friends, something is terribly wrong with our preaching - how we preach the word. The convictions, the character and the conduct of people are not being changed, and it is that burden that drove me to begin studying what preaching is all about and then start offering this training. My goal is that all of us will become better equipped to preach sermons so that not only do people remember them, but they also act on them.

Let's look at God's purpose for the Bible because your understanding of the purpose of scripture will determine how you preach it and how you deal with it. Let's

look at this for just a minute. The Bible tells us this in II Timothy 3:16, 17 “All scripture is God-breathed and is helpful for doctrine, for rebuking, for correcting and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete for all good works having been thoroughly equipped.” That’s the Greek version of it. Notice here that the purpose of the Bible is not doctrine, it’s not reproof, it’s not correction, and it’s not training in righteousness. These are the four means to the ends. We don’t preach for the purpose of doctrine; we don’t preach for the purpose of rebuking or correcting or training in righteousness. Those are all good things. Those are the means to the end. We preach for the ‘so that the man of God may become complete’. Here’s the big idea. The purpose of the Bible (the Bible says) is for life change. So that our lives will be changed. Specifically to change our character so that it may be mature and perfect and complete and to change our conduct – replace all of our bad works with good works. II Timothy 3:17 in the Good News Translation says, “So that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed.”

John Calvin says this, “The word of God is not to teach us to prattle or to be eloquent and subtle. It is to reform our lives so that we desire to serve God and to give our entirety to him and to conform ourselves to his good will.” D. L. Moody said it even a little more succinctly. He said, “The Bible is not given to increase our knowledge. It was given to change our lives.” The Bible is not a history book, and if we treat it like that, we treat it not in the way God intended. It is a manual for life. It is about life, not about history. It’s about life. It’s not about doctrine, it’s about life. Jesus said in John 6:63, “The words I’ve spoken to you are spirit and they are life.” Paul says in Philippians 2:16, “Hold out the word of life.” Hold out the word of doctrine? No. Hold out the word of reproof? No. I John 1:1, “This we proclaim to you concerning the word of life.” In Acts 5:20 the Bible says, “Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.” I hope you are getting this. Jesus did not say, “I have come that you might have information.” He said, “I have come that you might have life.” Life in all its fullness; life in all its abundance. The Bible reveals how to live, how to live in a relationship with God. Any other use of the Bible, no matter how good it is, is secondary to this purpose. Here’s the implication – if I intend to be a biblical preacher, my message must be life oriented not information oriented because the purpose of man is to become like Christ, and the purpose of the Bible is to help men become like Christ. So the purposes of my messages must be to see it make a change in the convictions and the character and the conduct of the listeners, not merely to increase their Bible knowledge. We have a problem in our churches and this problem is that we already know far more than we are doing. We have far more believers of the word than we have doers of the word. And that’s why we have little behavioral difference between Christians and unbelievers.

What is the purpose of preaching? If you were to ask a lot of pastors to say what’s the purpose of preaching, what is preaching is all about – many would say, “to interpret the text”, to help people understand God’s word and that’s an ok answer but it’s inadequate. It only goes halfway there. The Bible says this in Ephesians 4:11-12, “Christ gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service in Christ, so that the

body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Again – to become like Christ. Note the purpose of preaching is the same as God’s purpose for the Bible and the same as his purpose for human beings and that is to become like Christ. We want to change the character and the conduct of the listener. We want to lead them to maturity and ministry and missions.

There is both a corporate purpose and a personal purpose in preaching and teaching. In other words, when you apply the word of God, you need to apply it not just to individuals but also to the church body as a whole. Many pastors miss out on this. The Bible tells us in I Timothy 1:5, 6, “The purpose of my instruction is that all the Christians there would be filled with love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience and a sincere faith. But some teachers have missed this whole point. They’ve turned away from these things spending their time arguing and talking foolishness.” In Colossians 1:28 Paul says, “We preach Christ to each person using all wisdom to warn and teach everyone in order to bring each one into God’s presence as a mature person in Christ.” Now notice here how that does this life change happen? One word – application. We must apply God’s word to our lives and to the lives of others. This is the number one problem in the church today - the lack of application in preaching and teaching. I am absolutely convinced that’s the problem. Many pastors today are still using a classical academic Bible lecture model of preaching that they learned in Bible school or seminary. It’s a method that has made interpretation and Bible knowledge an end in itself.

Now what’s the result of applicationless preaching? Well we see it all around us. Churches are half empty and financially strapped. The moral climate of our culture continues to decay. Christians act no differently than non-believers. Christians get divorced at the exact same rate as unbelievers. Christian singles and teens are sleeping together. All of these problems are around us. Now God has promised in his word in Isaiah 55:11, “My word will not return void.” But the reality is a lot of preaching appears to be returning void. Churches are empty. Christians are lethargic. What’s the problem? When God’s word does appear to return void, what’s the problem? Well, it’s not the message, it’s the way we are communicating it. My good friend Bruce Wilkinson says, “If people are not sharing their faith in your church, if they’re not having a quiet time, if they’re not living Godly lives, then you need to change your style of preaching. You are obviously not seeing lives changed through the word of God so what’s the problem? The problem isn’t the word. The problem is your preaching style.” Amen Bruce. I couldn’t have said it better.

Let’s look at God’s purpose for the preacher. I believe the best metaphor for preaching is bridge building. We are to be bridge builders. It is our job, as preachers, to construct the bridge that connects the ancient text on one side with the contemporary audience on the other side. Look at your notes and see that on one side we have the Bible text and on the other side we have people’s needs. We have application bringing them together in the middle. On one side the word and on the other side the world. On one side we have past revelation and on the other side we have the current situation. When

we bring those two together then we have where life is changed. On one side we have then and on the other side we have now. On one side we have interpretation and on the other side we have personalization and between those two we have the implication that you have to find in the text which brings the application to bear. Tell me which side you like to spend most of your time on – the interpretation side or the personalization side – the then or the now – and I'll tell you whether you are a communicator or commentator. Commentators like to live in the then, in the text, in the words, in the history and the documents. Communicators like to live in the here and now and what the issue is and where it needs to be applied to our lives. Both of them important. There is both a then and a now element to preaching and it's really kind of like walking a tightrope. It's very easy to fall off on either side. There are some pastors who tend to fall off the now side in an effort to be relevant and current and if all they focus on is not tied to the text their preaching becomes faddish or pop psychology or just little moralisms or success motivation with little or no scriptural challenge. You know it's chicken soup for the soul. You may as well be Steven Covey or Tony Robbins preaching. On the other hand, others fall off the then side and they drone on and on and on about biblical background and ancient world customs and original languages and doctrinal trivia with little or no application of the truth to today. Let me just be honest with you. Every pastor, including me, tends to be biased toward one or the other. Some of you love to do background studies and word studies; and if you could have it your way, you'd spend six days a week in your study. You're far more familiar with the streets of Jerusalem than you are the streets of your city; and if you could, you'd have a pneumatic tube connected from your study to the pulpit; and when you finished the study, you would be whisked right to the pulpit where you would deliver the material to the people and then immediately whisked back to the study where you could continue your study with God and the books and you wouldn't have to really deal with anybody else.

On the other hand, some of you care only about the now and the today and the current events; and you never really deal adequately and exegete the text. Let me point this out. It's easy to be biblical if you don't care about being contemporary, and it is easy to be contemporary if you don't care about being biblical. The difficult thing is being both – walking the tightrope. Now here is the challenge of preaching. To declare eternal truths that never change and apply them in a world that is always changing. Proverbs 1:2 in the Living Bible says, "He wrote them to teach his people how to live – how to act in every circumstance." That's what we need – to teach people how to live and how to act in every circumstance. We don't make the Bible relevant; the Bible is relevant. What's irrelevant is the way we teach it and preach it. We don't make the Bible relevant we just have to show its relevance. In fact, the Bible is not just relevant, it's not just current; it's ahead of its time because it can tell you where things are going to be tomorrow. If you always want to be relevant, don't talk about the latest theory, or the latest fad, or the latest fashion; talk about timeless truths because they are never out of date. You see friends, God wants us to build our lives on great principles, not petty rules. And while the message must never change because it is the truth once delivered for the saints, the applications and how we communicate those truths must change with every new generation. The message must never change but the methods have to change with every generation. You don't have the same audience that Spurgeon or Calvin or Wesley or

Finney or Luther had. We need preachers like David. In Acts 13:36, “David served God’s purpose in his own generation.” I love that verse. In fact, it’s my life verse because it says he did the timeless in a timely way. He did that which was eternal in a contemporary way. He did that which was never changing in a relevant, contemporary way. He served God’s purpose in his generation and then he died. I want people to say about me when I die that I served God’s purpose in my generation, and then I died. I mean who wants to stay around here anyway when God’s through using you? I want to go to be with God in heaven. It’s also my prayer for you that you will serve God’s purpose in your generation, and then you’ll die. That’s the kind of preachers we need. We need preachers like the men of Issachar. I Chronicles 12:32 says, “They understood the times and they knew what Israel should do.” I love this quote from Martin Luther, “If you preach the gospel in all aspects with the exception of the issues which deal specifically with your times, you are not preaching the gospel.” Pretty powerful!

So how do you build a bridge? Well there are four stages of bridge building. We’re going to get into this in much more detail in the time ahead. First you study the text. Of course, this is exegesis - observation and interpretation – you look at the text and say, “what does it say and what does it mean?” And you look at the background and you look at the words and you look at the literary structure and you look at the theology. You know how to do this. You were taught them in school. But then you need to find the timeless truths. That’s the implication there in the middle. You look for the universal principle that spans all of our cultures and you ask, “What response is called for by this text?” Then number three you think of your audience, and this is the contextualization. What are their needs? What are their hurts? What are their interests? How much do they already know about this passage? What reactions can I expect? Whenever I preach I know six things about every audience. Regardless of where I am in the world, I know six things are true about those who are listening.

1. I know everybody wants to be loved. I know that as I speak many of the people I’m talking to are lonely.
2. I know that everybody wants their life to count, that they crave meaning and purpose and significance. That’s universal.
3. I know that no matter how wealthy or successful they are, life is empty without Christ.
4. I know that many of these people are carrying a load of guilt.
5. I know that many of them are consumed with bitterness over a past hurt.
6. I know that there is a universal fear of death.

These are things that are a given; but as I listen to the people that I’m talking to, I can better learn their needs, their hurts, their interests and where to apply scripture to their life. And that’s the fourth step. You need to apply the truth to their situation. This is personalization. You translate the truth into action steps that are appropriate for the audience you are speaking to and that is going to vary. You have to consider their age, their spiritual maturity, their culture and a whole lot of other issues. This was a secret of Jesus’ effectiveness as a communicator. The Bible tells us in Mark 4:34 (the Message Paraphrase) “With many stories like these he presented his message to them fitting the stories to their experience and maturity.” He fit it to the audience.

Why aren't more sermons built around application? There are a number of reasons.

1. We often assume that people will make the necessary connection and that is a false assumption.
2. We often say we leave it to the Holy Spirit. Well listen – you are the Holy Spirit's tool and God wants to use you in application.
3. Personal application is often convicting and it makes people uncomfortable. I mean sometimes you make an application and people get mad. You start talking about tithing and say hey let's go back and talk about – you know - the Jebusites; let's talk about – you know – some kind of who is the beast in Revelation.
4. We often don't make the application because we haven't applied it in our own lives. There was a well-known pastor in Southern California who flamed out because of a moral failure and had an affair; and yet within just a few months was back on the radio preaching. I was interested to know what he was going to preach on after he had done that, and he chose to begin a long two-year study through the book of Revelation. And I thought now isn't that safe. He can go through that whole book and he won't have to deal with his own moral crisis and failure and the problem of character and integrity that is lacking in his own life. We don't want people to have to deal with the application in our life so often we will just skip it.
5. But there's another reason and that is it takes more time and effort and preparation. And the truth is a lot of times we just run out of time in sermon prep. We spend so much time interpreting the scripture, getting the background of scripture that we run out of time and then application gets the short end of the stick and we've left out the most important part.
6. Then in recent years I've heard of many pastors who are afraid of "being simplistic". And I've heard people say well now the Christian life is not a life of formulas. Well who said they were? I've never met a single person, never met a pastor who thought that the Christian life was a bunch of formulas. Now I have met pastors who were afraid to use the words 'how to' in a sermon title for fear that other pastors would think they were being simplistic. But you've got to decide who do you want to impress? Who are you living for? Are you living to see changed lives or are you living to please your former seminary professors and other pastors?
7. Another reason why we often don't do application is because we've just never been taught how to do it. And, although you've probably read several books on interpretation, you probably haven't ever read a single book on application because there aren't even that many in print. I only

know of three or four. In seminary I took all kinds of courses on interpretation. You probably did too. But I've never ever seen a seminary catalog with a course called 'how to apply the Bible'. Years ago I wrote a Bible study book, "The Basic Bible Study Methods". I wrote it because I wanted to learn how to study myself. I went out before I wrote that book and bought every book in print on Bible study methods. I think there were about twenty-five or thirty at the time and of course the most famous one was Robert Traina's "Methodical Bible Study", a famous text on Bible study – 269 pages – only six pages at the very end on application. Why didn't he do more? I don't think he knew how. I think he knew how to interpret it; I don't think he knew how to teach how to apply scripture.

8. Another reason we don't apply scripture is we haven't really realized the importance of it. Application is the message. It isn't just something you tack on to the message. It is the message. John Calvin said this, "I always make this my rule that those who hear me may profit from the teaching that I put forward. If I have not that affection, and I do not procure the edification of those who hear me, I am a sacrilege profaning God's word." Wow! What do you call messages that profit the hearer? I call them 'need-oriented' messages. Ok? I'd like to mail that verse to some guys. It's 'need-oriented' preaching which Calvin says, "I always make this my rule that those who hear me may profit from the teaching." He is saying, "I'm doing it for their benefit. To meet their needs."

Now let's talk just a minute about the danger, because there is a danger, of teaching information without application. The Bible says, first of all, that knowledge without application produces pride. I Corinthians 8:1 says, "Knowledge puff up, but love builds up." Some of the more carnal and cantankerous people I've ever met were veritable storehouses of biblical knowledge. They could explain any passage and defend any doctrine. They had major sections memorized and yet they were unloving, self-righteousness and judgmental because knowledge puffs up. The Bible says also that knowledge without application brings greater judgment. James 4:17 says, "Anyone who knows to do the good he ought to do and doesn't do it sins." That means that with deeper knowledge comes additional responsibility. You know our people already know a whole lot more than they are doing; and if we don't teach them how to do the word of God, then we're just heaping on deeper and deeper judgment for ourselves and for them.

How much of a sermon should be application? Let me ask you first. What percent of a typical sermon or Sunday school lesson do you think is usually application? I've asked that many times and most people usually say about 80 – 90% of instruction and then 5%, 10%, 20% application. Let's look at some of the New Testament preachers. Bruce Wilkinson, one of the first ones to point this out to me, said that if you take the book of Romans, which is the most doctrinal book of the Bible, you end up with about half of it being application. Think about this. Of the chapters in the book of Romans,

chapter 1 is doctrine, chapter 3, 4 and 5 are doctrine. But then you come to chapter 6 and that's application. Chapter 7 is application. Chapter 8 is application. Then chapter 9 is doctrine, 10 is doctrine, 11 is doctrine and then you go 12, 13, 14 15 and 16 all application. Now here's the point. I once preached through the book of Romans verse by verse and it took me two and a half years. It is the heaviest doctrinal book in the Bible and yet 50% of the most doctrinal book of the Bible, Romans, is application. You have eight chapters of doctrine and eight chapters of application. The most doctrinal book is half application.

How about Ephesians, the second most doctrinal book? Chapters 1, 2, and 3 are all doctrine. Chapter 4, 5 and 6 are all application. It's 50% application.

How about Galatians? Well, it's about 100% application because Paul is mad and he is saying you guys have gotten way off base.

How about James? James is almost 100% application, 80 –90% dealing with the practical aspects of life.

How about Peter? About 60 –70% application. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount I think is 100% application.

Jesus starts the Sermon on the Mount, the most famous sermon ever, by telling you eight ways to be happy. Blessed are you if you do this; blessed are you if you do that (blessed just means happy). He says let me tell you eight ways to be happy. Then he says let's talk about worry. Don't do it! Let me give you three or four reasons to not do it. It's not healthy, it's unreasonable, and it's unhelpful. Then he says don't get divorced. He says don't get angry and call your brother a fool. He talks about all these different things and then he comes to the end of the passage of the Sermon on the Mount and he says now if you do these things that I just told you, you are like a wise man who built his house on a rock; but if you don't do these things, you're a foolish man like the guy who built his house on sand. It says the people were amazed because he spoke as one having authority. Why? They weren't used to that kind of preaching. The Pharisees spoke in footnotes - Gamaliel says this, Hillel says this, and the prophets and the rabbis say this. Jesus spoke in personal application and he spoke as one having authority.

You can take the most profound theological passage in the Bible, Philippians chapter 2, where it talks about Jesus and how he humbled himself and emptied himself and it is set right in the middle of a very practical application about humility. Doctrine should never be divorced from application. Paul says in Philippians 2:5, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Bruce Wilkinson told me that once he did a study of the sermons of great preachers. First he studied the contemporary guys like Swindoll and Stanley and Howard Hendricks and others and he took a highlighter, and he highlighted all the application parts and discovered every sermon had over 50% application and some of them had even more than 75% and he was shocked. Next Bruce said he studied the sermons of great preachers of church history – Jonathan Edwards, Finney and Spurgeon and Moody and Oswald Chambers and Tozer. He said all of them

averaged between 45 – 75% application. When Bruce told me that, it changed my preaching. I realized that none of those great preachers were just 10% application guys. I decided then and there I was going to focus on being an application pastor and preacher.

Now let's talk about how do you do that. How can you become a purpose-driven preacher? Purpose-driven preaching is based on the great commission of Jesus. Matthew 28:19-20, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." The goal of preaching is not instruction. The goal of preaching is not information. The goal of purpose-driven preaching is obedience. It's to fulfill the purposes of God and what are purposes of God? That we become like Jesus Christ. What's the purpose of the Bible? That we become like Jesus Christ. And what is the purpose of preaching? That we become like Jesus Christ. The purpose is not to know, it is not to understand everything I've commanded you, or to know everything I've commanded you – that's incomplete preaching – the purpose of preaching, according to the great commission, is to do everything I have commanded you.

Now you may be getting tired of me hammering this point over and over and over but I'm going to keep saying it. The objective of preaching is never information, it's obedience and the result of purpose-driven preaching is a disciple. We are in a disciple making business – disciple development – that's our job. Now Jesus always expected people to do something as a result of his preaching. In John 13:17 he said, "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." Notice all of these other times when Jesus talks about doing. Luke 10:37 Jesus says, "Go and do likewise." Matthew 7:26, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand." Matthew 12:50, "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." John 14:23, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching." Luke 11:28 Jesus says, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

If you study through the scriptures, you will find that all of the New Testament preachers emphasis conduct. There are many, many verses that illustrate this. Just to mention a few – John the Baptist in Matthew 3:8 "Do the things that show you really have changed your hearts and lives." James in James 1:22 "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." James 2:14, "What's the use of saying you have faith if you don't prove it by your actions?" John - I John 3:19, "It is by our actions that we know we are living in the truth." You know I have discovered that you really only believe the parts in the Bible that you do. It's a lot easier to defend the Bible and it's a lot easier to die for the Bible then it is to live the Bible, practice the Bible and obey the Bible. It's easier to defend the faith then it is to live the faith. People say, "I believe in tithing." "Well do you tithe?" "No." "Well then you don't believe it." "I believe in witnessing." "Well, do you witness?" "No." "Then you don't believe it."

I John 2:17 says, “The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.” I John 3:18 says, “Let us stop just saying we love each other; let us really show it by our actions.” I John 2:3 says, “We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.” How about this verse – Ephesians 5:8 Paul says, “For though once your heart was full of darkness, now it is full of light from the Lord, and your behavior should show it!” Paul says in Philippians that in your lives you must think and act like Jesus Christ. So Paul and John and James and Peter and Jesus all talked about behavioral based preaching. Preaching for life change.

Paul gives a preaching tip to Titus. Titus 2:1 in the Jerusalem Bible says, “It is for you to preach the behavior which goes with healthy doctrine.” He says you must tell everyone what to do to follow the true teaching. God’s Word translation says, “Tell believers to live the kind of life that goes along with accurate teaching.” So what am I saying? You need to always preach for a response. You need to always aim at getting people to act on what is said.

Now I want to close this first session by talking to you about what I’ve learned about preaching for life change and I’m going to give you some basic things that I’ve learned.

1. All behavior is based on a belief. Did you ever ask the question why do I act the way I do? The answer is because you believe in something. If you get a divorce, you’re acting on a false believe – I’ll be happier disobeying God. If you have sex outside marriage, you are believing at that moment, this is the right thing to do. All behavior is based on a belief.

2. Behind every sin is a lie that I am believing. When you sin, at that moment you think it is the best thing to do. You have been deceived. When my kids do something dumb, at that moment they think they are doing the right thing. Titus 3:3 says, “At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.” When you look at your congregation, you can see their behavior. The tough part in preaching is figuring out what are they believing, what’s the big idea, what’s the big lie that is causing them to act that way. The wiser you get in ministry, the more discerning you become and some patterns you start seeing over and over and over.

3. Change always starts in the mind. This principle is taught all through the New Testament. Romans 12:2 says, “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The way you think determines the way you feel and the way you feel determines the way you act. I want to stop and explain this for a moment. Every time you think a thought there’s a pattern, an electrical impulse that goes through your mind; and every time you think that thought, that pattern gets deeper and deeper and deeper and it becomes a rut. Your thought patterns become the automatic pilot of your life. Let’s just say that you had a speedboat and you take it out to the lake. The automatic pilot on your speedboat is automatically geared to go north. So the speedboat on automatic pilot is taking you north and all of a sudden you decide that you want to do a 180 - you want to totally reverse the

direction you've been going. Well, you have a couple of choices. One choice is to manually override the automatic pilot and so you grab the steering wheel and physically force the steering wheel and turn it around until you are going south. As you go south, your conduct is going that direction but everything in that boat wants to go north because the automatic pilot wants to go that direction. So as you hold on to the steering wheel you are feeling tension because everything in the boat wants to go that way and you are forcing it to go this way. That's what happens when you try to force a change in your life. Pretty soon you get tired of the tension on that steering wheel and you let go and it automatically starts heading north again. This happens over and over again. When we try to change our lives by sheer willpower without changing the automatic pilot, without changing the way we think, we force ourselves to go around and we go on the diet until finally we get tired of holding on to the stress and we let go and we go off the diet. Or we say, I'm going to force myself to stop smoking and we turn the boat around and go this way until finally we get tired of all the stress of willpower and we let go and we go back to smoking. Name your habit, name your pattern. You will tend to go back to what your automatic pilot is. If you want to have lasting change, you don't start with the will and you don't start with the emotions. You start with what's in your mind. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. That's the only way that lasting change takes place. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. The way you think affects the way you feel and the way you feel affects the way you act. If you are acting depressed, it's because you feel depressed; and if you feel depressed, it is because you are choosing to think depressed thoughts. What do you do? You don't try to change your feelings and say, "I'm going to be happy if it kills me." That's like saying to a little kid who is crying, "I command you to cheer up." "I'm trying. I'm trying Daddy." It doesn't work. You can't command a kid to be happy. You can't command a person to have feelings. Feelings cannot be controlled by will. What they are controlled by is by our thoughts; and if you change your thoughts, then you change your emotions; and if you change your emotions, then you change the way you act.

4. To help people change we have to change their beliefs first. The battle for sin always starts in the mind. You must help them see the lie behind what they have been believing. John 8:32 says, "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." It is the truth that frees us. It's not willpower, it's not emotion, it's not an experience, and it's not a pill. It's the truth that sets us free.

5. Trying to change people's behavior without changing their beliefs first is a waste of time. I tried it for many years before I learned these truths. If you ask a person to change before their mind is renewed, it just doesn't work. They have to internalize God's word first. As I said, you think these thoughts, these electrical patterns go through your mind but eventually you have to change that pattern to break that autopilot and rebuild the program. It's not hard to obey when your mind is renewed, but it is impossible to obey when your mind isn't renewed. Jesus said in Matthew 15:18, "What people say with their mouths comes from the way they think; and these are the things that make people unclean." Too often as pastors we focus on external behavior but Jesus knows that the root of the problem is sinful thinking.

6. The Bible word for changing your mind is repentance. What do most people think of when they think of the word repent? They think of a kook standing on the street with a sandwich sign that says 'turn or burn, you're going to die and fry while we go to the sky'. And most people equate repentance with changing our actions. Clean up your act, stop doing bad, and start doing good. But that's not what the word means. The Greek word for repentance – metanoia – literally means to change your mind. Not to change your actions, not to change your emotions, not to change your will, it means to change your mind – metanoia. Repentance is changing the way I think about something by accepting what God thinks about it. Pastors, we are in the mind changing business. We are in the repentance business. Society's word for repentance is paradigm shift and repentance is the ultimate paradigm shift. It's changing minds at the deepest possible level – the level of values and the level of beliefs and it is a battle.

7. You don't change people's minds. The applied word of God does! I Corinthians 2:13 (NLT) says, "We speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths." In preaching there is both a word and a spirit element. Sadly today a lot of preaching is missing the spirit element and it's not covered in a lot of the textbooks. Preaching is not just a matter of intellectual study and presentation of facts and truths. In real preaching God is at work within the speaker. II Samuel 23:2 says, "The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me and his word was on my tongue. Zechariah 4:6 says, "It's not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord." II Corinthians 10:4-5 says, "Our weapons have power from God that can destroy the enemies strong places. We destroy people's arguments and every pretension that raises itself against the knowledge of God. We capture every thought and make it give up and obey Christ." I love that last phrase. That is the goal and essence of preaching. By the way that is spiritual warfare. Spiritual warfare has more to do with changing beliefs, changing values, changing perceptions, changing perspectives, changing convictions than a lot of these other things that we often hear about. Paul says we pull down strongholds. And where are they? They are in our minds. And life application is obedience. It's not interpretation, it's not knowledge, it's obedience. Now you know why you are exhausted when you have done Spirit led preaching because you are in a battle of cosmic proportion for the mind of men.

8. Changing the way I act, I believe, is the result or the fruit of repentance. Technically repentance is not behavioral change. It's not changing the way you act. It results in behavioral change but repentance is what happens in your mind. Repentance does not mean forsaking your sins. There is not a single Greek dictionary or thesaurus anywhere with that definition. That's why John the Baptist said in Matthew 3:8, "I want you to produce fruit in keeping with repentance." Acts 26:20 Paul says, "I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds." Deeds are not repentance. Beware of mixing works and grace.

9. I believe that the deepest kind of preaching is preaching for repentance. Life application, need oriented preaching is not shallow, in fact, it is the deepest kind of preaching when you are taking people's needs and teaching them to repent. What is shallow is teaching doctrine without applying it for life change. Now life change only

happens when you change somebody's thinking; and preaching for repentance is preaching for life change. This is the secret of the past twenty-two years at Saddleback Church. Every single week, it doesn't matter what subject I'm speaking on, what passage, what text, what book of the Bible, I try to communicate God's word in such a practical way that it changes the way people think. The way they think about God, the way they think about themselves, the way they think about life, the way they think about others, the way they think about money and the way they think about values. I am teaching them to repent. I only have one basic message – repentance – and I teach it over and over and over. Just different subjects. You need to change your mind about this, you need to change your mind about that. Unfortunately the word repentance has taken on a negative connotation so I rarely use the word, but I preach repentance every week without using the term. Repentance, I believe, is the central message of the New Testament preachers and I give these following verses as the proof of that statement. It is the central message of the New Testament. John the Baptist said in Matthew 3:2, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." Jesus said in Matthew 4:17, "From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.'" And his first message Mark 1:15, "Repent and believe the good news!" Mark 6:12, "They went out and preached that people should repent." Peter in Acts 2:38, "Repent and be baptized every one of you." Paul in Acts 17:30, "And now he commands all people everywhere to repent." John in Revelation 2 and 3 says to repent. Jesus said in Luke 24:46-47, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Repentance is the central message of the New Testament preachers. If you want to be a New Testament preacher, you have to teach people how to change their mind, how to change the way they think about every thing in life; to learn to see life from God's point of view, not their own and that produces Christ-likeness.

10. I believe to produce lasting life change you must enlighten the mind, engage the emotions and challenge the will. In other words, in true preaching there's a knowing element, there's a feeling element and there is a do-ing element. I believe that an effective message must appeal to all three of these. Sometimes the will needs to be encouraged and other times it needs to be challenged. This is one of the great weaknesses, I believe, in many preachers. They are afraid to stand on the word of God and humbly but forcefully challenge people's will. You see every message really comes down to two words – will you. You make the challenge and then you wait – will you. It takes courage to be a good preacher because it's risky to challenge people. Great preaching always takes risks. It also takes humility. You must be willing to be rejected because of what you ask. People may say no. A while back in front of my own people I lovingly challenged people to confront any sexual sin in their small groups. I said if you have sexual sin in your small group you need to deal with it and I taught them how to do a confrontation. During that message about a dozen people got up and walked out. It was very uncomfortable. Yet the Bible says the fear of man will prove to be a snare. The moment I worry about what other people think I'm in trouble; I've fallen into a trap. Now we have to be, we must be, sensitive to people's feelings but people's feelings do not set your preaching agenda. Because many preachers have been unwilling to

challenge our nature, our nation and our culture are falling apart. The Bible says in Proverbs 29:18, "Where there is no word from God, people are uncontrolled." We don't do this as bullies; we don't do this as braggarts; we do this humbly realizing that we are in the same situation; that we are sinners saved by grace. We don't point a finger acting as if we're better than anybody else, but we do it with humility and we do it with confidence. I love what P.T. Forsythe said (a preacher of a previous generation). He said, "What the world is looking for is an authoritative gospel in a humble personality." That combination of confidence in God's word and yet personal humility is attractive and it causes people to listen.

Now as we close this first session I have a personal challenge to you. Knowing that God's purpose is to make us Christ-like in conviction and character and conduct, and knowing that God's purpose for the Bible is to change our lives and knowing that God's purpose for preaching is to produce doers of the word and knowing that preaching for repentance - changed thinking - is the deepest form of preaching here is my question. Are you going to keep preaching the same way you've always preached with 10% application tacked on to the end? Do you need to repent? Do you need to confess your fear of man? That you have not used God's word the way it was intended? Will you change? You are going to have to make a mental shift from seeing your message primarily as explanation and interpretation and understanding with a few little applications added in on the end to make it practical. This is not merely a matter of style or preference; this is missing the intended purpose of the Bible. To fall short of what the Bible calls us to do there is a word for that and it's called sin. It is not an innocent mistake. So what are you going to do about it? Teaching the word of God for any other reason than application in my life and in other's lives is sin.

I want to say I honor you for being here, for coming to this conference. It says a lot about you. It says you want to learn. I believe the Bible teaches that all leaders are learners and the moment you stop learning you stop leading. We were meant to learn and I honor you for doing that. Thousands of people did not come to this conference but we have to settle this issue once and for all. Are you going to preach the way other pastors or other professors want you to preach, or are you willing to make life change the focus of your preaching? Are you willing to become a life application preacher? Are you going to please God or are you going to please what other people think great preaching is? If you start preaching like we've talked about today, I want to tell you, you will be criticized. It is not by accident that the most blessed ministries in America and around the world are also the most criticized ministries. If you are going to call the shots, then you are going to take the shots and pioneers take the arrows and there are many people who do not want their lifestyles changed. They like their character and their conduct just fine. They want you to stay with safe subjects like prophecy or word studies or biblical background. They say, "Forget about all that character and tithing and integrity and witnessing. Talk to us about the Hittites one more time." They are deeply in debt due to materialism and Dad's reading pornography and Mom's depressed and the teenagers are sleeping with their dates so they are very content to have you just explain the text and never really challenge them with an application.

I'll go back to that passage in I Chronicles. We need preachers like the men of Issachar who understood the times and knew what Israel should do and like David who served his purpose in his generation. That is my prayer for you.

I'd like to close by asking you to bow your heads as I lead you in prayer.

Dear God, I know that we've been pretty blunt, pretty frank in this session that we've just gone over, and yet it is so important that we be workmen who are not ashamed, who rightfully divide the word of truth and that truth is applied to our lives that there may be life change. May we fulfill the great commandment and the great commission through our preaching. May we teach them to do, to observe to do, to obey all the things that you have commanded us. And may we be doers of the word. Forgive us for preaching messages that were information without application. Forgive us for times when we spent too much time on interpretation and on background and on word studies without actually applying it to people's lives. Forgive us for the times we've been able to stand there in front of people and ask them the two words – will you. Will you do this? Help us to be like P.T. Forsythe said – to share an authoritative word with a humble spirit.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

In this session I'd like to talk to you about how I craft a message. The Bible says in II Timothy 2:15, "Do your best to win full approval in God's sight, as a worker who is not ashamed of his work, one who correctly teaches the message of God's truth." Now when it comes to handling the word of God, God wants us to be skilled workers or craftsmen; and in this session, I'm going to share with you my method of crafting a message.

First I want to say a word about the futility of preaching labels. Some of you are probably being attacked by members or maybe elders in your church who believe there is only "one right way to preach". I'd like to give you some ammunition in defense of your style of preaching. We often hear labels or modifiers used to categorize different kinds of preaching like topical or textual or expository or life situational or things like that. Personally I think it's a big waste of time and I've even given up trying to label other guys sermons, much less my own. The reason is because everybody has their own definition of the terms, and because of that these terms are meaningless. I actually have over 350 books in my library on the subject of preaching, and I have learned in reading those books that every book has its own definitions. Today the most popular and the most revered term is expository preaching. Of course, it is overused but it's rarely defined. In fact, I have made a hobby of collecting different definitions of the term expository preaching, and I've collected over thirty different definitions of the term. I once read an article where four preaching professors from the same seminary defined expository preaching and each of them gave a totally different, even contradictory,

definition of expository preaching. If they are in the same seminary and don't agree, how can we expect everybody else to agree?

One of the best authorities on preaching is Clyde Fant. He was the professor of preaching at Southwestern Seminary for many years and he researched and edited the magnum opus of preaching, "Twenty Centuries of Great Preaching" (13 Vol.). After studying all the preaching for twenty centuries Clyde Fant had this to say, "It's impossible to define the terms topical, textual and expository. There is no modifier that can explain all that God does through preaching or the way he uses the preaching. The only question that matters is does the sermon involve itself with the truth of God's word? When it does, you have genuine preaching and all the modifiers of the term become superfluous. If you use God's word to bring light and change to people's lives, then preaching has occurred regardless of the method used."

With that in mind let me give you my definition of expository preaching. I believe that expository preaching is when the message is centered around explaining and applying the Bible for life change. Notice some things about that definition. It says nothing about the amount of text used, it says nothing about the location of the verses – are they all in a row -, are they from several different books of the Bibles. These are all man made issues. Question often is "how much of a text is a text?" Well it depends on who you are talking to. G. Campbell Morgan often used an entire book of the Bible for a sermon. Alexander MacLaren usually preached on a paragraph. Calvin's general rule was to cover two to four verses. Spurgeon just chose an isolated phrase. Dr. D. Martin Lloyd Jones sometimes just chose a single word to preach on. He has a famous sermon called 'But God'. There is no one right way to choose a text. I don't know about you, but I honestly don't care whether you preach verse by verse or verse with verse as long as you accurately exposit the meaning and the application of those verses. Let me give you a little secret – I don't think God cares either whether you go verse-by-verse or verse with verse. I recently read the quote "Any kind of preaching other than verse-by-verse exposition is an aberration from the apostolic norm." There's a slight problem with that statement. The problem is none of the apostles was a verse-by-verse preacher. Paul never did it, Peter never did it, John never did it, James never did it and Jesus never did it. In fact, show me one example in the New Testament where anyone took a chapter of the Old Testament, parsed all the words, developed an outline and preached it verse by verse. You just can't find it.

Phillip Brooks once said, "Preaching is truth through a personality." So we shouldn't be surprised if there are as many styles and methods as there are personalities. Most of us learn textual exposition in seminary and you are all familiar with this method so I don't need to cover it. First you select a paragraph or more of a text, preferably in a series when you are going through a book, then you study the historical, grammatical, theological background of the text, then you outline the text in the natural divisions, then you add illustrations and then you make your applications. The best book on this method is Haddon Robinson's "Biblical Preaching." I highly recommend that book.

Now I've actually heard some people say the only way to grow a church is through verse-by-verse preaching. I would say that's not quite true, and I want to share an additional method this morning which we developed over the years at Saddleback. Looking back on over 22 years of preaching I'm humbled by the way God has used us. Thousands of people have come to Christ through this style of preaching. In fact, in the last seven years we've baptized over 8000 new believers and the church grew from just Kay and me to well over 16,000 people. But I am most of all thrilled with the level of commitment and maturity of our members. I would, without hesitation, match the spiritual maturity and commitment level of any 500 Saddleback Church members to any other church in the country - the percent of tithers, the percent involved in ministry, the percent of people reading their Bibles through each year, the percent of people bringing their friends to Christ. I am genuinely thrilled by the fruit that we have seen here.

My method that I am going to share with you today – the craft method of preparing a message – is biblically based. It's based on a passage, a very important text, by the wisest man who ever lived – Solomon. Ecclesiastes 12:9-11, “In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly. The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd.” First it says he pondered – that means he carefully thought about, and then it says he searched out – he researched and he studied; and then it says he arranged – he categorized and he set in order; and he looked for just the right words. Notice, in these steps, he didn't cut any corners. This preacher is worth listening to because he did his homework, and the result is that his words are like goads and like well-driven nails. He's saying here that a point that is well prepared and well delivered is like a goad. Do you know what a goad is? It's a sharp stick that is used to guide animals. Today we call it a cattle prod. They are electric now; and it spurs the animal to move. A goad actually spurs people to action. It motivates you to get moving and do something.

- The best crafted messages have action steps. They goad you to be a doer of the word, not hearer only.

Then the Bible says it is like a well-driven nail. That means it's firmly embedded, it's driven deep and what that means is it is memorable. People will remember a message that is crafted this way.

- The best crafted messages make the truth memorable.

Let's look at how to craft a message. After you have identified your audience (to whom am I speaking?), and you have clarified your purpose – (what does God want me to say to them?) now you're ready to build the sermon. Let me give you a little background on this method. In 1977 I wrote a book on how to study the Bible – “Personal Bible Study Methods, 12 Ways to Study the Bible on Your Own”. I wrote this book because I wanted to learn how to study the Bible myself. My preaching style evolved out of my Bible study methods. I want to warn you that the method I am going

to teach you in this session takes far more time to prepare than does a textual exposition. It takes a far broader knowledge of God's word and it takes a lot of work. It's much easier to do a textual exposition than to do all the work we are going to talk about in crafting a message. I have put these ten steps into a five-letter acrostic and it spells C.R.A.F.T.

C – Collect and Categorize

R – Research and Reflect

A – Apply and Arrange

F – Fashion and Flavor

T – Trim, Tie and Title

First let's look at collecting and categorizing. This is built on the verse Ecclesiastes 12:9 where it says, "Because the teacher was wise he collected proverbs and classified them." Collected and classified. This is the first step in biblical preaching. Solomon said he collected and he classified them. The first thing I collect is Bible verses. Even when I am preaching on a single text I still want to know all God has said about the subject. And I want to ask, 'what else does God have to say about this?' It's important to always check the context. A text without a context is pretence. Verses out of context are a great source of heresy. Notice you don't have to explain the context of every verse you use in a message, but you had better have checked it out yourself. How do you find relevant Bible verses? First develop the habit of memorizing Bible verses. I cannot tell you how many times the Holy Spirit just brings a verse to mind as I've been thinking and writing. If I hadn't spent years of studying and memorizing, I couldn't do that. The word of God only becomes a sword in our mind when we've got it there; and he can bring it to mind even when we don't have our Bible in hand and we don't have a concordance. The more scripture you memorize the easier this craft method of preaching becomes. One reason why topical exposition is harder than textual exposition is because it takes a broad understanding of what the Bible says.

Next you make a list of all the words related to your subject. I once did a series of messages on the purpose-driven life. I had studied over one thousand verses and collected them in a binder before I even preached the first message in that series. That took an enormous amount of time but it made the series have depth. Use concordances to discover what God says about the subject. Today software is an incredible timesaver. You used to have to lay out all your concordances and painstakingly take the time to look at each one, but you don't have to do that anymore. I recommend WordSearch and Logos. Those are both very good software programs. WordSearch actually has my version – Rick Warren's Bible Study Software – the fourteen major translations that I use most often in my sermon preparation. This software will save you hours and hours. I also want to encourage you to save your concordance studies – to create your own personal topical Bible. As your file grows this becomes easier and easier to turn back to.

For instance if you have studied all the verses on pride, then you save all of those verses and the translations that you like best. Save them in a document and then when you come back to it years later you've already done that research because there is no way you can use all the verses you are going to study in a single message. So you create your own topical Bible by saving the verses that you've looked up.

But Bible verses aren't the only thing that I collect in the 'collect and compare' stage. I also collect quotes on what people have said about a particular topic. I collect articles on what the human problems and hurts and resistances are on a topic. I collect books on what has been written on a topic or text. I collect sermon tapes on what other men of God have said on a topic. I collect illustrations on what the current events are that relate to this. I collect comments on cards from people in our church and file them topically. I file everything topically, even the testimony letters I receive. How do you do this? The first thing I suggest is you get a bucket file. What that means is that you go down to Wal-Mart or Target or K-Mart and you buy one of those little letter size plastic buckets. As you are reading and find things that would be great for a message you just file them in there. Just file all your good ideas in that bucket. It doesn't even have to be categorized. Your personality will determine how organized your bucket file is and it will affect how you set up your bucket file. Don't stress out if you're disorganized. Just throw it in there. Write on the corner of the article the possible series ideas. I create folders of ideas. Much more than my bucket file I have filing cabinets where I've been saving material on different text and on different topics for years. I save things that have moved me. When I hear about an intriguing book title, I'll look it up on Amazon.com and I'll print that page out and file it. Some day I may have to get that book if I'm going to do a study on that particular issue. I also save magazine articles with series ideas. I save magazine covers to use. I also read constantly. I read everywhere I go. I skim everything. I take small scissors with me on trips and I cut stuff out. I take a Dictaphone and I make self-notes when I'm reading something in the doctor's office.

Another way to collect is to take advantage of the Internet. It is an incredible free resource at your fingertips. When you find something interesting, just save it to your hard drive because then it can be searched. You can go to any of the Internet search engines (i.e. www.google.com) and type in your topic that you want to search. For example 'the mind of God'. The search engine will bring up all items matching – both truthful and untruthful, good and bad illustrations – and you can pull that up and if anything there is worth saving, you just save it to your hard drive. Later you can type in on your computer's hard drive the topic you need and the computer will bring up those items. This is much faster than trying to find it where you filed it on a hard copy.

In this stage I would encourage you to recruit a volunteer research team. I have a large number of volunteers who work with me and they serve just because they like to read. I'll sit with them and suggest sermons that I will be working on, books of the Bible, series and I let them read them in advance. Have one of the volunteers be the director you can relate to instead of the whole team. I have two requirements with the volunteers – don't expect me to respond back because I can't say thank you every time someone sends me something and don't expect it back – don't give me a book that you expect back

because it takes too much energy. Photocopy what's needed and then I will get rid of it. You don't even have to have your research team live in your area. I had a woman on my team who lived in another state and she would send things to me by email. After twenty years my staff has given me a staff researcher who handles my library. But for the other years it was all volunteers. Just find someone in your church who will be glad to study and research to help you.

As I begin to collect all these verses I then do the next step which is categorize. I begin to group them. As I group them I look for similarities between the verses; I look for reoccurring themes; sometimes they just pop out at you. As you are categorizing the best way to do this is to ask the six journalistic questions – Who, What, When, Where, Why and How. Rudyard Kipling called them his six faithful serving friends. If you want more information on this, I would suggest you read chapter four in my book 'Personal Bible Study Methods' which talks about how to do a thematic study of the Bible. This step can be done years in advance. You just set up a filing system and add continually to it.

One of my most effective series that I did at Saddleback was a series I did through Psalm 23. During that six-week series 446 were saved. One of the reasons it was a very full, very rich series is because I had been collecting material on Psalm 23 for over twenty years. When I was in college, I started collecting books on Psalm 23, sermons, illustrations, quiet time insights and I tossed it all in my file. Then when I got ready to teach that series that put me way ahead of the ball game and now I could deal with the other steps of craft since the collecting had been done way in advance. So set up a filing system for collecting, filing and retrieving your study notes. This is really one of the most helpful habits you can develop as a preacher – the habit of collecting and categorizing every single day of your life. Don't go through a day without collecting something, and it will save you hours in the long run and your messages will be far meatier.

Once you've done that you go to the "R" in CRAFT which stands for 'research and reflect'. This is based on the Ecclesiastes 12:9 where it says, "the preacher pondered and searched out." Psalm 119:15 says, "I will study your commandments and reflect on your ways." Research is studying with my mind and reflection is listening with my heart. Research is the technical part of sermon preparation; it's commonly called exegesis. It's the serious study of the text and you ask things like "what does it say, what does it mean?" I'm assuming you already know how to do exegesis because it's taught in every Bible school and every seminary.

The serious study of any text begins with understanding four things – historical background of the text, the literary style of the text, the grammatical structure of the text, and the theological framework of the text. I'm not going to go into that because it's in a lot of different books. By using lexicons and word studies and commentaries you can search out the true meaning of the text and even each individual word. Let's be honest – I'm going to say something that no seminary will say but it's the truth – you don't have to know Greek to be a great preacher or a great pastor. In fact, throughout history - the last

two thousand years of the church - very few of the great preachers have been Greek scholars. With all of the resources available today in word studies you don't have to know Greek and Hebrew anymore. Think about this. If I take ten translations of the Bible, and those translations have been translated by the top 300 Greek scholars in the world, if I find a word that's different than what's in one of those translations, it means one thing – I'm wrong. They've already done the study. If you have a good translation, or multiple translations, there really isn't going to be much more depth to what you can get out of a word than what the top scholars in the world have already translated. My favorite tool for exegesis (for this research stage) on sermon prep is "Expositors Bible Commentary" (12 Vol. - 78 scholars). What I like about it the most is it's on CD Rom. You can search very quickly- you don't have to have all 12 volumes to find the original meaning of the original text. I would like to recommend a book by D.A. Carson, "Exegetical Fallacies". This book talks about the most common mistakes pastors make in trying to find the root meaning of a particular word or text. One of the biggest fallacies is when we try to get the meaning of a word from the root of the word, which often is totally wrong because words have their meaning from their context, not from what they meant a thousand or two thousand years before the time they were being used. For example – pineapple, pine and apple but pineapple is neither pine nor apples; grapenuts – grape and nuts but it is neither of those. So the root of the word means nothing. I could say hotdog and the root of the word hotdog is a warm canine but it would have nothing to do with what the word really means. You can make anything mean anything by just talking about the root of a particular word. Even worse is when we read a contemporary meaning into an older Greek word. For instance in Romans 1:16 it says, "It is the power of God unto salvation." The Greek word there for power is *didimas*. I can't tell you how many pastors I've heard say – *didimas* – that's the word from which we get dynamite and the power of God is the dynamite of scripture and the dynamite of salvation. Well dynamite wasn't even invented in 50 A.D. when that was written so you are taking a new meaning and pushing it back into an old meaning. In the research part you use your mind to study the meaning of the text.

Then you quickly move after that to reflection and this is the devotional part of sermon preparation. This is where lives are changed. In the reflection period I read over the material I've collected. I read all of the Bible verses, I read all of the thoughts, all of the articles, all of the other sermons that I've heard, collected or read or ones I have done. I think on it over and over and over and I mull it over in my mind. I reflect on the word of God. I reflect on it during my quiet time, in my study, when I'm driving, when I'm showering, when I'm running, and literally I reflect on the word of God all the time. God says repeatedly that he has promised to bless us if we reflect on his word. Reflection is just another word for meditation. David says in Psalm 119:99, "I have more insights than my teachers because I meditate on your statutes." It's ironic, I think, that seminary taught me how to research but it didn't teach me how to reflect; it didn't teach me how to meditate on scriptures.

What is meditation? Meditation is not putting your mind in neutral, crossing your legs in the lotus position and contemplating your naval and going ummmmm. Meditation is simply focused thinking. It means to contemplate, to be fascinated with

text. A synonym for meditation is rumination. Rumination is what a cow does when it chews its cud. It chews up grass as much as it can, swallows it down where it sits in one of its many stomachs for a while then it brings it back up to chew on it a little bit more. It is digesting it; getting every ounce of nutrition and nourishment it can out of that grass. In the same way, meditation is just thought digestion. It's thinking about something over and over and over in your mind. How many of you know how to worry? I'm sure we can all worry. If you know how to worry, you know how to meditate. When you take a positive truth, like scripture, and you think on it over and over, that is called meditation. When you take a negative idea, and you think on it over and over, that is called worry. Worrying on scripture is called meditation. If you want some more information on how to meditate, in my book on Bible study methods, pages 33-36, I talk about six different ways to meditate.

- Ponder a passage. Ponder means to seriously think about it over and over in your mind.
- Pronounce it. That is to literally say it aloud word by word, each time giving emphasis to a different word. That way each time you say the verse you give a little different flavor, a little different perspective, like a multi-faceted diamond and you see the verse from a different angle each time. That's called the pronouncing method of meditation.
- Picture it in your mind. If you are studying the woman at the well, picture that story in your mind and how would you feel. You imagine it and visualize it in your mind.
- Probe it and ask certain questions. In a moment I'm going to give you the twelve questions that I ask when I apply scripture.
- Paraphrase it. Say it back in your own way, in your own terms. Make it personal. Personalize it. Put your name in it. "For God so loved Rick Warren that he gave his only begotten son, that if Rick would believe in him, Rick would not perish, but Rick might have eternal life."

You cannot rush reflection. It takes time. You need to allow days to think about your subject. I will often write my final outline on Friday of the week that I'm preaching and actually type up my final draft on Saturday morning; but I start thinking, reflecting on the text days, sometimes weeks, in advance. This is one of the biggest problems that pastors have. Most pastors start way too late in the week thinking about the text. The more time you allow for incubation and reflection, the better the message is going to be. If you just start thinking about it on Thursday or Friday, you don't have that much time to think about it. If you allow several days, and allow some time of relaxation in between it, you'll be far more creative. Your most creative thoughts will come after a period of rest. If you study any text on creativity, relaxation is an essential element of creativity. You have to learn to relax. Pressure kills many great ideas. You get writer's block or you get preacher's block. So start thinking on it early in the week or even weeks in advance. Let

it simmer and put all the data in your mind and fill your mind with the truth, then go do something else. Let your unconscious mind play with it. I will often sit down and spend several hours studying on a text; then I'll get up and I'll go do something totally different. I'll go play some ball, go outside, stretch, run on a treadmill or do some gardening. Often in that moment of creativity, that moment of relaxation, the ideas come to you. Another thing you can do is go to bed with a prayer. You can fill your mind with the things you've been studying and as you go to sleep you pray, "Holy Spirit I can't figure this all out. Make some sense out of this." You ask the Holy Spirit to put it together in your mind and sometimes you wake up in the morning and the outline just starts to flow out and some thoughts and new angles.

What do I do during reflection? First I listen to what God is saying to me. I lay aside all the commentaries, all the technical, and I like to pray what David prayed, in Psalm 119:27, "Let me understand the teaching of your precepts. Then I will meditate on your wonders." What I do is read and reread the text and I like to read it in every translation possible. I like to think about how it applies to me and to our church and to our culture. I just let it simmer.

Next I record the insights that I have. Sometimes I literally write them down on paper and sometimes I record them on a small tape recorder that I keep with me all the time. Ideas will come to you in the strangest places so always have a notepad or a dictation recorder. Two of my favorite tools in sermon prep are the dictation recorder and a variable speed recorder. The variable speed recorder allows me to listen to a tape at twice the speed of a normal message. This will allow you to listen to a 30-minute tape in 15 minutes. As you listen you can also record insights on your dictation recorder. So you reflect by putting down your ideas on paper and record your own thoughts.

The third step in the CRAFT method is to apply and arrange. It is built on Ecclesiastes 12:11(NLT) that says, "A wise teacher's words spur students to action and emphasize important truths." That is applying and arranging. We've already talked about the important of application so now let me show you some ways to do it. In a nutshell, application answers two questions – "so what" and "now what". You show people what to do and then you convince them to do it. Let me share with you three ways to apply scripture.

1. THE APPLICATION PYRAMID

Adapted from Dave Veerman (senior editor of *Life App. Bible*)

Nine questions to ask:

PEOPLE: Who are the people in this passage and how are they like us today?

PLACE: What is the setting and what are the similarities to our world?

PLOT: What is happening? Is there any conflict or tension, and how would I have acted or felt in that situation?

POINT: What was the intended message for that audience?
What is the purpose of the passage?
What did God want them to learn or feel or do?

PRINCIPLES: What are the timeless truths?

PRESENT: How is this relevant to our world today?

PARALLELS: Where does this truth apply to my life?
(at home, work, school, church, neighborhood)

PERSONAL: What needs to change in me?
(a belief, value, attitude, or action)

PLAN: What will be my first step of action?

2. THE APPLICATION WINDOW

From Bruce Wilkinson, Founder of *Walk Thru The Bible*

This is based on II Timothy 3:16, “All scripture is good for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness.” These four areas actually become four areas of application.

In doctrine I ask – What should I believe? (as a result of the text)

In instruction in righteousness I ask – How should I behave? (as a result of the text)

In correction I ask – What should I not believe? (the error that I should avoid)

In reproof I ask – How should I not behave?

Bruce points out these are four methods of application: Believe or not believe, behave or not behave. And if you answer these four questions about any text you are going to have an application.

3. MY APPLICATION ACROSTIC

12 questions to ask about the text. They happen to spell out ‘application’.

- from “Personal Bible Study Methods”, www.pastors.com

ASK - IS THERE...

Attitude to adjust?
Promise to claim?
Priority to change? (something out of whack in my life)
Lesson to learn?
Issue to resolve?
Command to obey?
Activity to avoid or stop?
Truth to believe?
Idol to tear down? (anything that takes the place of God in our life)
Offense to forgive?
New direction to take?
Sin to confess?

These are twelve questions that I ask when I go to look at scripture and try to make a personal application in my life.

This is very important – there is both a personal application and a corporate application, I believe, in every text. That means we need to apply it, not just to our lives, but to the church as a whole. Not just to individuals (you must touch the individual lives and their problems and deal with them); but you need to do more than that. For most Christians the sermon is the only pastoral care they are going to get, so you obviously have to deal with it in a personal way; but you must also deal with the implications to your church body. In Revelation 2:11, Jesus said, “He who has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” So you always want to incorporate the corporate responsibility. What do we need to do as a church? How do we need to practice this as a church family? How is it going to influence our strategy and philosophy? You don’t have to do a separate message to your church, just integrate it into the message as you are teaching. A lot of pastors know how to make an application to individuals and to seekers, but they don’t know how to make it to the church at the same time. You can teach vision and you can teach spiritual growth at the same time. For instance, if you are dealing with loneliness you can say, “By the way this is one of the purposes of the church; that our church exists to help people not feel lonely; to have relationship.” If you are dealing with parenting you say, “By the way this is one of the purposes of the church - to help parents know how to raise their kids and to grow.” How can you make an application to the church while you are talking to seekers? Just tell them this is what church is all about. So you make the personal application but you also make the corporate application. This is one of the keys to helping your church grow healthier and larger. A lot of pastors teach spiritual truth week after week and people are growing, but there is no corporate growth because they’re not applying it to the church as well as to the person. How do you put more application into your message? Let me give you some practical suggestions.

1. Always aim for a specific response. The greatest weakness of most preaching is a fuzzy focus. So many sermons are just vague and abstract. If the pastor isn’t really clear about why he’s teaching this and what kind of response God wants,

then the people aren't going to get it either. If there's a fog in the pulpit, there's going to be a bigger fog in the pew. It's easy to be abstract; it takes special effort to be specific. The more concrete you are the more effective you become in your preaching. Nothing becomes dynamic until it becomes specific. A purpose-driven sermon is like a bullet - you know your purpose and you aim right for it. It's kind of like a wood screw and with each turn it bores deeper and deeper into the wood. So the most important question you can ask after you've studied the text, is this - what specific response am I going to ask for as a result of the message? No attorney would go into a court without knowing what verdict he was asking for. Yet a lot of pastors stand in the pulpit thinking the only goal is simply to explain the text, and they don't have any idea what they are going to ask for - the big request at the end of the message. A lot of preaching books talk about finding the big idea in the text - the CIT - Central Information in the Text. You need far more than just knowing what's the central idea of the text. You can have a big idea and people still walk out thinking - so what! You need to get specific. You need to say, "What do I want them to think?" "What do I want them to feel?" "What do I want them to do as a result of this?" You need a behavioral objective for every sermon. You need to condense your objective into a single sentence. There may be many possible applications in a text but there is only one interpretation. You need to focus. My wife did her college degree in education and if she didn't have a behavioral objective in each lesson plan she would get an 'F'. Yet pastors prepare sermons all the time without actually writing down what the behavioral objective is that they want to see as a result of what they've taught from the word of God. You have to aim for a specific action, decision, change in the life of a person - change in behavior, change in belief.

2. Model it from your own life. This is very important in application. Set the example by applying it to yourself first. Paul was an expert at this. He says in I Corinthians 4:6, "Now brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, 'Do not go beyond what is written.'" Many of you worry about this and ask how can you set yourself up as an example. You don't have to be perfect, but you do have to model what you are struggling with. As a pastor you are just a fellow struggler and you say this is what I'm learning. In fact, the more relevant and the more fresh it is in your life, the greater the impact it will have. The more personal it is the more powerful it will be.
3. Ask penetrating questions. Jesus was a master of this.

Matthew 17:25 says, "When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. 'What do you think, Simon?' he asked. 'From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes - from their own sons or from others?'" Jesus uses the phrase "What do you think?" over and over.

Matthew 18:12 – “What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off?”

Matthew 21:28 – “What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'”

Matthew 22:42 - "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?"

Luke 10:36 - “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” Notice Jesus is asking this question over and over again.

Luke 13:2 - “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?”

Luke 13:4, “Of the eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?” He is asking here a pointed question but he also doing it from a personal viewpoint – tell me what you think? He is soliciting opinion. I often include a self-evaluation quiz on our outlines. I’ll say – rate yourself, do a personal inventory. Or we’ll have a red light- is there something they need to stop doing, is something way out of line; yellow light – caution – I need to be aware of what’s going on here; green light – this is smooth sailing in my life. Sometimes we’ll put a percentage chart and ask them to estimate the percent of time they are giving to Christ in service, the percent of their life they feel is under their control, the percent of money they’re giving to Jesus Christ. It’s a way to help people to apply it to their lives.

4. Give specific action steps. You want to show how it can be done. In other words - believe this, don’t believe that; do this, don’t do that; remember this, change that. You give them a step-by-step procedure. Many of you know that I am a fourth generation pastor and for several years as I was growing up my father was on the staff of a seminary so I’ve heard thousands of sermons. Many times as I heard a message I would write in the corner of my Bible - **YBH** – **Yes But How?** I’d hear a sermon on you need to be a Godly father and I’d write **YBH**; you need to study your Bible – **YBH**; you need to witness – **YBH**; you need to let the Holy Spirit control your life – **YBH**. People say Christ is the answer and most of the time they know, but they need to know how he is the answer. We need to do this by giving practical examples.
5. Give practical examples. Show how it has been done by others. This is the awesome power of testimonies. The New Testament is the book of instruction; and the Old Testament is the book of illustrations for every principle that’s found in the New Testament. In fact, Paul tell us this in I Corinthians 10:11, “The things that happened to those people are examples. They were written down to teach us.” It is the power of testimonies that this is what Jesus Christ did in my

life that helps people apply it. You can teach truth, but once you give a testimony people are going to say, “Oh that’s what you mean.” They understand it better now. You can give a testimony from your own life; you can have testimonies from people in your church; you can read testimonies out of books or you can give calls to people and record a conversation. We will talk more about testimonies during the section on ‘flavoring’.

6. Offer people hope. People need encouragement if they are going to change. If they think it’s hopeless, they’re not even going to try. You have to give them hope. You hear people saying, “I just believe in telling it like it is.” Well that’s ok because you are being truthful, but there’s even a better way to preach than ‘telling it like it is’. Tell it like it can be; tell it like it could be. That’s preaching for faith; that’s preaching for hope. In fact, the Bible is a book of hope. Paul says this in Romans 15:4, “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.” Notice in that verse that it says everything was written to teach us. That means even the difficult passages, even the negative passages, even the warnings, even the judgment. The Bible says that everything was written in scripture to give us hope. So no matter what passage you are preaching on in scripture somehow there has to have hope in it. There has to be an angle of hope because people can only change when they are given the hope to change.
7. Make your applications your points. This is the secret weapon for preaching for changed lives. Let me give you a bad illustration, a better outline and the best way of saying it in making your applications your points. For example Jonah has four chapters so that would be a good section of scripture to do a sermon. You can do a whole message on his life. . First you can do it in a typical way where you describe what happens to Jonah.
 - Jonah chapter 1 – See Jonah Running. God told him to go to Nineveh, which was to go east, but he went as far west as possible – as far away in the known world he could go. So chapter 1 you would say ‘see Jonah running. He’s running from God.
 - Jonah chapter 2 – See Jonah Repenting. He gets thrown overboard by the sailors when he tells them he is the cause of the storm. He is swallowed up by the great fish and taken to the bottom of the ocean. In chapter 2:7 we have his prayer of repentance, “When I had lost all hope, I turned my thoughts once more to the Lord.” This is one of my favorite verses in the Bible.
 - Jonah Chapter 3 – See Jonah Returning. Jonah 3:1 says, “And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah a second time.” Aren’t you glad we serve a God of the second chance? He is a God of grace. In Jonah chapter 3 God gives Jonah a second chance and Jonah hits the ground running and heads straight for Nineveh.

- Jonah Chapter 4 – Now you spend the next two hours trying to find the fourth “R” to match the other three. We all laugh because we’ve done that – alliterate the text by simply explaining it by alliteration and yet is that really what you want people to remember. In Jonah chapter 4 he goes into Nineveh and there is a great revival so you could say, “See Jonah Reviving the people. There is a great revival and Jonah gets mad and he goes out and he says in Jonah 4:2, “I knew you were going to do this, God and that’s why I didn’t want to go preach in Nineveh and why I didn’t want to go there in the first place because you were going to save the people I hate the most.” It was a matter of prejudice and he is out there ranting and raving so you could have Jonah Chapter 4 – See Jonah Ranting and Raving.

Now is that what you really want people to remember about the story of Jonah – a cute alliteration that describes the content in four chapters – running, repenting, returning, ranting and raving. NO. That doesn’t change anyone’s life and they’re not even going to remember it.

A better way to teach the book of Jonah would be to teach the primary truths of each chapter. You could make those truths your actual application statements; actually make those the points of your message. You could say:

- Jonah chapter 1 – The message of chapter 1 is, “You can run but you can’t hide.” No matter where he went God was there with him.
- Jonah Chapter 2 - The message of chapter 2 is, “When you hit bottom, look up.” Jonah has to go all the way to the bottom of the ocean, be swallowed by a whale or great fish and there he repents. It’s never too late to turn back to God and so the point there is when you hit bottom, look up to God.
- Jonah Chapter 3 - The message of Jonah chapter 3 is, “God loves to give people a second chance.” Jonah 3:1, “The word of the Lord came unto Jonah a second time.” Your point might be God loves to give people a second chance.
- Jonah Chapter 4 – The message is, “God wants everybody to know him.” When Jonah is ranting and raving and complaining to God about this great revival in Nineveh, God says, “Don’t you know Jonah that I love those people too, that I care about them, that I want everybody to know me?”

Now that's definitely a step up over a message outline of running, repenting, ranting and raving. But even still there is nothing I can do about that and so the best way is to turn it into something that people can do.

So an even better outline would be this – “What to do when you are running from God.” Which, of course, is a good theme of Jonah.

- Chapter 1 might be “Recognize his presence.” Because in Jonah chapter 1 we are taught the truth that God is everywhere. You can run but you can't hide. Recognize his presence. Even when you are running from God he is still with you.
- Chapter 2 – “Ask for his help.” Jonah at the bottom of the ocean cries out to God and prays, “God help me!” You can ask for God's help no matter how far you've run away from God.
- Chapter 3 – “Accept his grace.” The word of the Lord comes to Jonah a second time. You need to accept the grace of God when you've been running from him. He wants to forgive you and he wants to bring you back into his presence and into his fold and into his love.
- Chapter 4 – “Share his love.” That's what Jonah 4 is all about. Share the message. God wants everybody to know.

That's a much better outline because it is something that I can do. I can recognize his presence, I can ask for help, I can accept his grace and I can share his love. This brings us to the eighth way to make an application in your message.

8. Put a verb in every point. The easiest way to help people be doers of the word is to put a verb in each point and this turns truths into action steps. I did a message once called “How can I live courageously?” The points were: 1. By owning up to my sin. 2. By standing up for what's right. 3. By speaking up for Christ. Those were all action steps. I also did a message called “Bringing out the best in your kids.” The points were: 1. Accept their uniqueness. 2. Affirm their values. 3. Trust them with responsibility. 4. Correct them without condemning. 5. Love them unconditionally. That is a message where the points actually become the action steps. The way you turn your points into actions steps is by putting a verb in the point.

I never could find a dictionary of just verbs so I created my own list of verbs. I made a list of positive and negative verbs I would most likely use that would relate to changing lives. I have them on my computer in a document and I can go through all the verbs and many times it will create some creativity in where I want

to go. If you would like copy of this list, send an email to info@pastors.com and they can tell you how to get a copy of that verb list. What if you just want them to believe something - you don't want them to do something. Use the verb believe. Say, "Believe this." "Believe that."

9. Put Jesus or God in the point. This is very important in application. You aren't just giving a moralistic pep talk. This isn't 'Chicken Soup for the Soul'. This isn't Tony Robbins or Steven Covey. The power to change comes from God. Let me give you an example of the difference of putting God in the point.

I Corinthians 10:13 tells us, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." If you were going to do a message on that verse on overcoming temptation, you could state it like this – "You can overcome temptation for three reasons and the three reasons are right in this verse – I Corinthians 10:13.

- Because temptation is common. We all experience it.
- Because temptation is limited. God will limit the amount that he allows on you.
- You can overcome it because it is escapable. God will make a way of escape.

That's an okay outline but let me give you a better way to outline that text.

"What do you do when you are tempted?"

- Believe God has seen it before. That is a great comfort. I'm being tempted but it's common to man and God has seen it before so he knows what I am going to be experiencing.
- Believe God will limit its intensity. God said, "I will not allow more on you than I put in you to bear it up."
- Believe God will make a way out.

Notice the difference between these two outlines. The first outline encourages self-confidence. The second outline encourages trust in God. The first outline builds faith in myself. The second outline builds faith in God. So when you put God, when you put Jesus, in the point, it points them to God more than just a little moralistic message that might not be biblical.

10. Personalize the points by using personal pronouns. Use the word 'you'. Use the word 'me'. Use the word 'I'. I rarely use 'we' because it tends to weaken the application. We say Jesus came for me. Jesus died for me. Jesus is coming again for me. This is the difference between a communication outline and an academic outline. Academic outlines are what you find in all the commentaries and sermon

books. They are taught throughout seminary and they have this third person, non-personal, non-involved approach to dealing with the text.

An example of an academic outline on I Corinthians 12 is, “The Corinthians and Spiritual Gifts.” Notice first that even the title has nothing to do with me, with my family, with today; it has to do with ‘then’, to those people. There are three points in this academic outline.

- The source of the Corinthians’ gifts.
- The function of the Corinthians’ gifts.
- The purpose of the Corinthians’ gifts.

That is an adequate explanation of what I Corinthians 12 is about. That’s a good division. Sermon books are filled with this kind of outline but it isn’t a preaching outline. This is a lecturing outline. It’s a seminary outline. What’s wrong with it?

- It’s abstract.
- It’s in the third person so it’s impersonal,
- It’s in the past tense and
- It’s not about either people or God.

When you preach the Bible in an impersonal way, you remove all the power. And if you use this kind of outline, your preaching has to be “in spite of the outline”. It’s an ‘Oh by the way this relates to you.’ Because your outline doesn’t say it relates to you; it says it relates to the Corinthians. Remember the purpose of preaching is to bring God and people together. It’s very easy to be abstract. It takes a lot more thinking to make something specific and make it personal.

Let me take that same passage (I Corinthians 12) and share it in a personal way, not in an academic way. I would call it ‘Using your gifts.’ That’s personalized. Here are the points:

- God gave you gifts.
- God gave you gifts to use.
- God gives you gifts for the benefit of the body

What’s right about this outline? It’s personal, it’s practical, it’s God-centered and it’s positive. These are all things that make it a strong outline.

An example of an academic outline on I Corinthians 13 would be:

- Its Ministry of Healing
- Its Simplicity of Language
- Its Competency for Problem Solving
- Its Superiority of Value

Does this make your heart warm up? Could you preach those points with passion? NO. What a way to treat the most world-changing subject of love. What's wrong with this outline?

- It's impersonal. It's too theoretical.
- It uses complex language.
- It's passive. It uses incomplete sentences.

I don't know how we can take such a warm, passionate truth like the love chapter and teach it in such a sterile, scholastic format. It's no wonder churches don't grow, lives aren't changed, and why people think church is the most boring place to be. Let's take the same passage (I Corinthians 13) and make it a life-changing outline. We'll call it 'How your love can change others.'

- Your love heals.
- Your love speaks.
- Your love can solve problems.
- Your love is of great value.

You see how much better that is.

Let's look at a message I did on James 3:13-18 "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness." The Bible says that wisdom is a life-style and yet it also says in that same passage that disharmony and all kinds of evil are the lack of wisdom. Lack of wisdom causes conflict. Based on these two truths – wisdom is a life-style; lack of wisdom causes conflict - I did a message called "How to relate wisely to other people" based on verse 17, "But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere." If I were going to study this verse from a typical standpoint, I would go through and parse all the words, explain the root meanings and I would have a nice doctrinal message. There is nothing wrong with explaining words and teaching doctrine, but the Bible says the purpose of doctrine is that we are to show the kind of behavior that

comes out of that sound teaching. So I want to focus on how I can use this in my life and how to relate wisely to others.

- If I'm wise, I won't compromise my integrity. Why? Because the Bible says that the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure. Proverbs 10:9 says, "The man of integrity walks securely." So if I'm wise I won't compromise my integrity because that certainly destroys relationships.
- If I'm wise, I want to relate wisely to others. I won't antagonize your anger because wisdom is peace loving. I don't intentionally make you upset. It's not wise to do that. The Bible says any fool can start arguments – the wise thing is to stay out of them. The Bible says a wise man can control his temper; he knows that anger causes mistakes.
- If I'm wise, I won't minimize your feelings. Why? Because wisdom is considerate. Proverbs 15:4 says, "Kind words bring life but cruel words crush your spirit"
- If I'm wise, I won't criticize your suggestions. Why? Because wisdom is submissive, open to reason, allows discussion. A wise person is open to suggestions, open to criticism.
- If I'm wise, I won't emphasize your mistakes. Wise relationships are built on not emphasizing others mistakes. Why? Because wisdom is full of mercy and good fruit. The Bible says in Proverbs 17:9, "Love forgets mistake. Nagging about them parts the best of friends."
- If I'm wise, I won't disguise my weaknesses. The Bible says wisdom is impartial and sincere. Proverbs. 28:13 says "You will never succeed in life if you try to hide your sins."

What have I done? I've given people six things that they can actually practice this week.

Another example would be a message on Hebrews 11:6, "Without faith it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." I'd start this message with "what does it take to please God?" "How do you make God smile?" "What makes God smile?" I might talk about some of the different ways that people try to make God smile – through chanting, good moral works, through church attendance, - through rituals and many others. Yet after all these things the Bible says there is one thing that pleases God – Faith! If faith is what brings pleasure to God I have to learn how to live by faith. Fortunately we have a good example of that in Hebrews chapter 11. I have used six of these examples out of this chapter. That then means that I have to ask, "What is faith?"

- Faith is believing when I don't see it. Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."
- Faith is obeying when I don't understand it. Hebrews 11:8, "By faith, Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his

inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.”

- Faith is giving when I don't have it. Hebrews 11:4, “By faith Abel was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings.” You can talk about giving in faith at that point. II Corinthians 8:2,3, “Out of extreme poverty welled up rich generosity. They gave as much as they were able and even beyond their ability.” How can you give beyond your ability? By giving in faith.
- Faith is persisting when I don't feel like it. Hebrews 11:27, “It was by faith that Moses left Egypt and was not afraid of the king's anger. He held to his purpose like a man who could see the invisible.” If ever there was an example of a man not giving up, it was Moses. Forty years being Pharaoh's son and forty years in the middle of Midian doing nothing and then forty years leading God's people back through the wilderness.
- Faith is thanking God before I receive it. Hebrews 11:30, “By faith the walls of Jericho fell after the people had marched around them for seven days.” They praised God in advance. In praising God in advance, thanking God before they had received it, the walls came down.
- Faith is trusting God even if I don't get it. This is the highest level of faith. It is talked about in Hebrews 11:35-40 where it says they were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised because God had planned something better.

See what I've done here? I've taken stories and rather than just saying this is what someone else did, you actually make your points your applications. That is preaching for application. After forty years of preaching Warren Wiersbe says this, “The way I approach a sermon has changed. I used to concentrate on what the text says ...how I could make it mean something to somebody else. Now I ask, ‘What does God want these people to hear?’ My preaching was academic; now it's more personal... Everybody I talk to carries some pain. Woe to that church that doesn't recognize people's needs..” That is from an interview with Warren Wiersbe in Leadership Magazine.

So I want to ask you to promise me you will never preach another academic outline. This will change your life and it will change your church if you change your preaching.

11. Suggest a practical assignment. Jesus often gave practical assignments. Over and over he says, “Go thou and do likewise.” At Saddleback we often assign homework. I did a message on getting out of debt and I had them go work up a simple budget. I actually gave them some tools. I did a message on wisdom and I asked them to find the sixty-nine characteristics of a fool in the book of Proverbs. When we did a message on family, I gave them instructions on how to have a family conference on the points of the message. When I did a series on the purpose-driven life, I taught them how to do a life inventory. When I did a message on friendship, I had them invite a neighbor to service the next week.

When I did a message on values, I had them write out a personal value statement and we gave them a plan on how to do that. Once we did a message on conflict resolution and we asked them to have reconciliation the next week with someone they had a damaged relationship with. Don't just preach on evangelism; ask them to write down three unbelievers to pray for. If you are going to do a message on anger, have them memorize suggested Bible verses dealing with anger. Give them projects, application homework.

Here is how you give a smart assignment.

- S – they are specific
- M – it needs to be motivational
- A – it has to be attainable
- R – it must be relevant
- T – trackable – can I measure my progress?

That's how you do smart homework for your people.

Now we come to the second part of "A" in CRAFT which is arrange. After applying you now begin to arrange what you want to say. The Bible says in Ecclesiastes 12:9, "The preacher arranged many proverbs." This is the step of organizing your outline. You arrange your insights and applications in some kind of order. Someone said that a sermon without a clear outline is like the earth before creation - it's without form and void.

I deeply believe the statement, "The text should determine the substance of your message, but the way people hear and learn should determine the structure of your message." I believe Jesus modeled this truth in every single sermon he delivered. Even when you're preaching on a single passage, you are obligated to apply the truth of that passage, but you are not forced to organize your points in the order of the text. That is a man made rule and it will hinder your communication. There's not a single example in the New Testament where Jesus, or anybody else, took a chapter of the Old Testament and parsed the words and gave an alliterated order, or outline, and a verse-by-verse explanation. The bottom line is are you really more interested in the literary order of the text or are you interested in making it easy for people to apply it and have their lives changed?

Most sermons are arranged in one or two ways. First is the old traditional way where you have a point describing the text and then an application underneath it. A purpose-driven outline is the opposite - you reverse the order. You put your present tense application as your point and then you put the content of the text underneath it. The question you have to ask is, "What is the purpose of your points?" Is the purpose to help you stay focused as a speaker, or to get your audience to remember how you organized the text, or is it to show your abilities with alliterations? The strength of a message is not measured by your ability to alliterate a group of verses; the strength of your message is

determined by how easily people can apply and act on the truth. If your points aren't application, if they are just there to keep you on track, then there is no need to share an outline. If they are only going to remember the points, what do you want them to remember? You want them to remember the applications. If the point of the message is application, then my applications should be my points.

How do you arrange your outline for maximum impact? Here are some tips.

1. Keep it simple. Reduce your insights to just a few major points. Haddon Robinson has said, "Television has destroyed linear thinking." People can't follow sub-points without a hand out outline.

I want to show you the difference between a textual outline and a straight forward, life changing outline.

A textual outline on Zacchaeus might have the points:

- Though he was rich, yet he was poor.
- Though he was sought, yet he was found.
- Though he was hated, yet he was loved.
- Though he gave, yet he received.

That may be poetic but it certainly isn't personal and life changing. This is a typical text-based message that alliterates, or describes, the text but doesn't transform.

A life changing outline on Zacchaeus could have the points:

- No matter how insignificant I feel, Jesus notices me.
- No matter what others say about me, Jesus affirms me.
- No matter what I've done, Jesus wants me.

This outline is about Zacchaeus but I've stated it in words that relate to the hearer. That is a life changing message; that is a message of comfort, of challenge. I used the text to support the truths because it is the truths you want them to remember, not an alliteration of the text. You take the truth and the timeless implications and you turn it into a personalization so that lives may be changed. Beware of alliterations. It's more important to be clear than it is too cute. Also be aware of rhymes, which can be a little too cutesy.

2. Get to the point quickly. When you read classic sermons of the last century, they are long and flowery and they often have very long introductions and long, complicated points. Today audiences have changed. People don't listen the way they used to listen the way they did when Spurgeon was preaching. You may not like that but you can't change it. You have to minister in today's culture with today's limitations. Some pastors think that the golden age was the reformation and they want to live and preach like it's the sixteenth century. You can't do it. In today's world, people want it quickly and up front, whether it's on the radio, television, magazines, people are conditioned to get their information in bullet points, so get to the point quicker.

3. State your points in complete sentences, not in phrases or in words. Your points should be so clear that people could understand them even without the text of the sermon. Many outlines don't say anything. An example would be an outline I found in "Power in Expository Preaching" by Whitesell. It was on the passage Luke 18:6-8.

- The helpless
- The helper
- The appeal
- The encouragements

What is that outline saying? It is saying nothing. Is it worth remembering? No. Is it helpful? No. Is it worth writing down? No. Is it something I can share with my neighbor? Absolutely not.

4. Make sure your points have unity and balance. Ask if the points make sense together. An example:

- You can be free.
- You can be forgiven
- It will save you from the fire of eternal damnation.
- You can be fulfilled.

Is there anything out of symmetry in that outline? I think so. Remember I Corinthians 14:33 says, "God is not the author of confusion." All of these points are true but it is an unbalanced arrangement. Make sure all your points are tied together. One of the ways to create unity in a message is to use category words to describe all your points and how they are similar. I have made a list of category words and put it in a document on my computer. Send an email to info@pastors.com to see how you can get the category word list. Some examples of category words are:

- Abuses
- Acts
- Advantages
- Dangers
- Decisions
- Demands
- Encouragements
- Fears
- Habits
- Hopes

Don't use the word 'things'. Instead of just saying here are five 'things', say here are five possibilities, five promises, six lessons, four methods, three needs, or five obligations. Use category words to show how your points all fit together.

5. Make sure your points follow a clear, logical progression. Follow the natural steps, sequences in your message. An outline needs both unity and movement so you feel you are making progress. Your message must have movement if you want people to move. Tell them why and then show them how. An example of a simple outline of movement could be:

- Establish a personal need.
- Give personal examples.
- Present a plan.
- Offer hope.
- Call for commitment.
- Expect results.

That's an outline that shows how movement takes place.

Another way you can do it is called, 'what, so what, and now what. In that outline you are just stating what you want to talk about, why you are talking about it and what should be done as a result.

6. Arrange your points to climax with a commitment. Figure out what order will make the most impact. For impact you want a strong beginning and a strong ending. I often put my strongest point last and my second strongest point first. If you are planning to challenge for commitment at the end, you don't want to end on an emotional dud. You need to figure out what's going to make the biggest impact. This is very important. Sermon preparation requires being able to feel the emotional impact of a point, not just understand it intellectually. A sermon's power is determined both by the content and the emotional appeal. So a point might have good content; but if it doesn't have emotional appeal, you don't want to put it at the end of a message because you are building toward a decision. You're building toward a 'will you' commitment where you are asking people to do something that is going to change their lives or take a step in spiritual growth.
7. Arrange your points to use tension and release. All good communicators understand that this principle of tension and release has mountains and valleys. You can't keep people tense constantly. They will listen longer to you if you give them little breaks. Television has conditioned people to listen in modules. They build to a cliffhanger and then they have a commercial. The most popular movies today are a combination of suspense and humor. They have you on the edge of your seat one minute and then you are dying laughing the next. Americans love to feel their emotions.

I helped DreamWorks with the movie "Prince of Egypt" and one of the things they had in that movie was what they called an 'emotional beat chart'. They had

a graph that showed the emotional peaks and valleys in that film. In that 90-minute film there were 9 peaks and valleys. In a 60-minute message you might have 10 peaks and valleys where you take it up and down.

At Saddleback we use an acrostic IMPAC. We start the service with an upbeat note. "IM" inspire movement. Rick Muchow's initial goal is to get people moving. We say that you wake up the body (the body of Christ) by waking up the body (individual bodies). After that initial moving we bring it down with a pastoral prayer and a moment of quietness. Then there is a PAC series of songs. P – praise songs about God; A – slower adoration songs to God; C – celebrative songs. I want to start the message on an upbeat. Two or three times during the message there are ups and downs. We can bring that up and down with humor, video clips, testimonies, skits or all different kinds of things. We bring it down right before the close of the message to a time of personal commitment where there is a quiet moment of introspection and thinking about what God wants to do in your life. After that is over we bring it back up and we always end on an upbeat with a fast celebrative type song. This allows us to keep people's attention over an extended period of time.

In sermons, some points are more convicting than others. Some points are lighter than others. You know that when you preach that not every point is equally powerful. You can often get away with a stronger rebuke if you sandwich it between lighter points. A couple years ago I did a two part series on money. We did the five principles for financial stability based out of the book of proverbs.

- Keep good records
- Plan your spending
- Save for the future
- Return 10% to God
- Enjoy what you have.

Here is the question. Which of these would be the lightest, least convicting point? No doubt about it – keeping good records. On the other hand, which point is going to make people most nervous? The point on returning 10% back to God. Am I going to put the point on tithing first? No because they will likely tune out. Am I going to put the point on tithing last? I could but they would probably say this message was only to get me to tithe and that is not the truth at all. I want them to obey all five principles of money management and I wanted them to see tithing as only one of five pillars of financial stability. So what I did is put that point between two less threatening points. At the end of the message I challenged them to commit to all five principles in following God's financial plan. As a result, nearly 3000 people signed on a commitment card that day – FGP – Follow God's Plan. Our weekly giving increased 33% instantly. Consider how your points move toward impact.

8. Consider how your points sound when you are arranging them. Remember that you are going to speak these points, so you want complete but short sentences. They are the best for oral communication. They allow you to develop a cadence; they allow you to recap frequently. I did a message on “Making Time for Relationships”. I could have done that message in an academic format where the points could have been:
- The priority of loving relationships – making love a priority.
 - The proof of loving relationships – spending time with people.
 - The period of loving relationships – do it whenever you can.

The problem is you can't say those points with passion, so I rephrased those points in a more personal, more passionate way; and I called the message “Remembering What Matters Most.”

- The best use of life is love.
- The best expression of love is time.
- The best time to love is now.

You can say those points with passion. It is all in the way that you shape it that you are going to be able to say it.

9. Provide an outline with the Bible verses written out. There are enormous benefits to passing out an outline where the verses are actually written out.

Benefits:

- Unchurched people don't bring Bibles.
- It relieves the embarrassment of finding a text.
- You can cover more material in less time.
- You can have everyone read aloud together.
- They can review it later on.
- It can become the basis of a small group discussion.
- It allows you to use multiple translations.
- It increases participation.
- Without it people forget 90% of what they hear within 72 hours.

If you use the fill-in the blanks outline, you need to make sure that the fill-in matters. What do you leave blank? As a general rule you want to leave blank the most important word; you want to leave blank the word that would create the most suspense. I don't like to use the first word blank because it is harder to follow.

Now we come to the “F” in CRAFT, which stands for fashion and flavor. The Bible says in Ecclesiastes 12:10, “The preacher sought to find delightful words.” Now

you must start to shape the style of how you intend to say it and I cannot over emphasize the importance of choosing just the right words. J.B. Phillips said, “If words are to enter people’s hearts and bear fruit, they must be the right words, shaped to pass defenses and explode silently and effectively within their minds.” This is where you need to develop your skills as a wordsmith. Many preachers have good content but they don’t know how to turn a phrase. The Bible says in Proverbs 15:2, “When wise people speak, they make knowledge attractive.” Proverbs 16:21 says, “A wise, mature person is known for his understanding. The more pleasant his words, the more persuasive he is.” Colossians 4:6 in the CEV (Contemporary English Version) says, “Be pleasant and hold their interest when you speak the message. Choose your words carefully and be ready to give answers to anyone who asks questions.”

How you say it matters. If you went to another country, you would have no problem realizing the necessity of learning their language in order to speak. It all matters how you say it. You have to make sure that the words you are using mean the same thing to the people you are talking to.

But you also have to learn new languages every new generation. In the 21st century we cannot use the same terms as in the 16th century or even the first half of the last century. If you want to reach the unchurched, you have to communicate in their language. That’s not compromising the message. In fact, it’s valuing the message. If I refuse to learn the language of the people that I want to communicate to, then I’m the one compromising the message because I’m allowing my own stubbornness, my own arrogance, my lack of love, my fear, my unwillingness to change, to cloud the message.

In the Purpose-Driven seminar I do a lecture called eight questions that changed my preaching. Six of those questions deal with how you say it and this is the point in my preparation where I ask them.

1. What is the most practical way to say it? I want to tell them why; I want to show them how; I want to give them step-by-step procedure.
2. What is the most positive way to say it?
3. What is the most encouraging way to say it?
4. What is the simplest way to say it? You want to avoid using religious terms.
5. What is the most personal way to say it? The most personal way is the most powerful way to say it.
6. What is the most interesting way to say it?

I spend hours on this stage of preparation. I find that a computer is indispensable; it allows for quick editing of words and I want to “Fashion” the word so it can be delivered.

Then I come to the ‘Flavoring’ part of sermon preparation. The Bible says in Colossians 4:6 (RSV), “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt.” In the JB Version it reads, “Talk to them agreeably and with a flavor of wit, and try to fit your answers to the needs of each one.” In a meal the flavoring is not the meat but it sure

makes the meat taste better. Chuck Swindoll said, “If you think that the gathering of biblical facts and standing up with a Bible in your hand will automatically equip you to communicate well, you are deeply mistaken. You must work at being interesting. Boredom is a gross violation. Being dull is a grave offense. Irrelevance is a disgrace to the gospel. Too often these three crimes go unpunished and we preachers are the criminals.”

After I have the basic message down, I try to flavor it with three things:

1. I try to flavor with quotes and illustrations. Illustrations are the windows of the message. They allow light in and they allow people to see what is actually happening in the story. Jesus was the master of this. He was a master storyteller. Matthew 13:34 tells us, “Jesus always used stories and illustrations like these when he was speaking to the crowd. In fact, he never spoke to them without using such parables.”

Never make a point without a picture. How do you do that? Here are some suggestions:

- Throw away all your old illustration books. They are filled with stories by guys you’ve never heard of who died 100 years ago.
 - The best sources for illustrations are the television, magazines, newspapers, the Internet and, of course, life.
 - Check your motive when you use personal illustrations because if you don’t use them correctly it can turn into a lot of self-promotion.
 - Get permission to use illustrations that involve your family or even members of your church. Be careful about using too many of those ‘cute kid’ stories from your own family.
 - Be sure to tell the truth.
 - Be sure to think through your transitions (in and out of your illustrations).
 - Be sure to eliminate all non-essential details. Shorten your stories. A story that takes too long to tell actually detracts from the message. So non-essential details can weaken your illustration; they bore your listener. Make it succinct
 - Use overly dramatic stories very sparingly. You can’t cry every weekend.
2. Flavor with humor. One of my favorite verses is Luke 7:34 (Phillips Paraphrase), “The Son of Man came enjoying life.” Humor really is the spice of life.
 3. Flavor with special features. Special features are testimonies, dramas, film clips, interviews and many different formats that you can use to

insert into your message to add just a little bit more and capture the attention of the people. I have learned you can preach much longer when you also use features interlaced in your messages.

- Testimonies – one of the most powerful factors in Saddleback’s growth. When I get up to teach, people look at me as the paid salesman, the paid professional, but when we have a testimony, they are the satisfied customers. In a non-believers view who do you think has more credibility? No doubt the person giving the personal testimony. Personal testimony is still the most powerful form of persuasion and it’s why advertisers still use it. We’ve had thousands of lives changed because of the hundreds of shared testimonies. Sometimes in a sermon we will have one, maybe two, testimonies. We might have a testimony for each point. When we have a single testimony in a message, they might go seven to eight minutes. If we have several, they are only two to three minutes each.

We get many of our testimonies from our Celebrate Recovery program. We also ask people to write out their testimonies in CLASS 301 and CLASS 401. I ask our staff and small group leaders to constantly be looking for them. I send out emails. Every letter that is sent to me is filed as a possible testimony.

In most churches testimonies are only given at a mid-week service or a prayer meeting where there aren’t any unbelievers. Testimonies need to be presented at the service where you have the most non-believers.

At Saddleback we have them write out their story, we edited it; we cut it down; we have them practice it; we give them a coach and rehearse it and then it has tremendous impact when they deliver it.

- Skits or dramas. There are many good resources for these.
- Interviews. You can use interviews three different ways. You can use them live, you can do them by video and third you can do this telephone. A ‘man on the street’ interview on video is a lot of fun.
- Film clips. There is a site on the Internet - <http://teachwithmovies.org/> that even categorizes the films by different character qualities that they portray.
- Intersperse songs between your points. At Saddleback we call this ‘the point and play’ service. We’ve had an incredible response when we do this. We always do this format at Christmas and Easter. It breaks the service into modules and it maintains high interest. Sometimes we use perform songs by a soloist or a choir, and sometimes we sing congregational songs. Putting a song at the

end of each point often adds an emotional, powerful punch that allows people to express what they feel as a result of a point. Sometimes we show a video while we sing.

- There is one other feature we use at Saddleback. It is tag-team preaching. Sometimes we will actually have pastors share a point. Another associate pastor and I will take turns during points of the message. I've done messages with my wife on marriage where she would do a point and I would do a point. I've brought in guest speakers and alternated points with them. Sometimes just having a different voice shakes things up just a little bit. Don't try this unless you've got great speakers, but it is a powerful tool if you have somebody who can tag-team the sermons with you. It's very helpful when you have multiple services to do.

Now we come to the T in CRAFT. T stands for trim, tie together and title. First you have to trim it. Now you start editing and cutting out material. You take out all the unnecessary words and you reduce the verbiage. If you can say a sentence in seven words, don't use twenty. This is one of the major differences between a great message and just a good one. You want to reject any unrelated material. Don't try to put everything into the message. I always have far more material than I can possibly use. What this does is refine the focus of your message. What do you trim?

1. First trim the number of verses you are going to use. My outlines have an average of a dozen to fourteen verses. But I might have studied up to a 100 verses and then selected it down to 25. I have to admit this is always a very difficult task for me because I hate to trim. The new translations have so many clear verses and since I spent hours finding and studying those verses I'm often not a very good objective critic in deciding which ones are going to get cut. So I usually have my wife help me with this. I ask her to look at the verses and tell me which of the verses could be left out so the message can be more focused.
2. Trim the background material. I hate to tell you this but your members aren't nearly as fascinated by archeology and linguistics as you are. Do as much background study as you can in the exegesis but share as little of it as possible in your sermon. Remember preaching is not a Bible lecture; it's not a seminary class and it's not a course. Remember your purpose. You are preaching for life change. You don't have to explain everything about a text to your congregation. Let me give you a little warning – describing too much detail of the text can actually hide or dilute the power of the text. When you pay too much attention to secondary issues, you miss the point and purpose of the verse. You need to figure out what the purpose of the text is and how to emphasize that.

One of the popular myths is that the slower you go through a text, the deeper you are. One danger of verse-by-verse teaching is explaining things that really don't need an explanation, and going into detail on things that are really peripheral issues. People don't care about all the nuances of a text. They care about what's happening in their lives and what God wants to do in their life. Jesus never spoke about the nuances of a text.

What do you call a sermon that takes a message from one verse and then cross-references over to other verses all over the Bible? You call it topical. It is ironic that some of the pastors who attack topical preaching do it all the time. They just start with one text so they can call it verse-by-verse but they are actually going all over the Bible. I see Sunday morning like an emergency room. When people are bleeding to death, you can't always deal with secondary issues. You have to stop the bleeding first. More does not necessarily mean better and slow does not necessarily mean deeper. To touch people you must move beyond your preaching, beyond the cognitive. Howard Hendricks said, "A lot of preaching has too much brains put into it and not enough guts." What people want today is not more information, but they want meaning. Today we are grossly overloaded with too much information. There's so much information that people shut down mentally so you have to trim your content.

3. Trim your points. The puritan preachers often would preach 30, 40 or 50 points. But exhaustive sermons are exhausting to the congregation. Here is a principle of life – confinement often produces power. When an artist confines his painting to a canvas, then a picture comes out. When water is confined to one channel, it produces hydroelectric power. When pianists confine their playing to the score, music is produced. When air is compressed, it has tremendous power and you can run a pneumatic drill with it. If you compress your message it has far more power – so trim.
4. Trim your quotes and illustrations. Sometimes you will find an archaic quote that has a kernel of a good idea in it. Well, just rephrase it. Shorten it to make it zing. Sometimes you need to trim an illustration. One of the most common mistakes is spending too much time telling a story. Don't draw it out – condense it.

Once you have finished your trimming, tie it together. There are four things that tie your message together.

1. Introduction – tie it to your purpose. During my sermon preparation I type all of my introduction ideas at the top of the document, but I

rarely write my introduction until I've completed the message. What are the purposes of an introduction?

- To connect with the audience. Identify them. Establish a rapport. You have to establish a relationship before you can get a response.
- To gain attention. I want to arouse curiosity. I want to wet their appetite. In the first three minutes, people are either going to tune in or tune out.
- To introduce the purpose of your message. If the sermon is a bridge, the introduction is a bridge to the bridge.
- To answer the question – why should I listen?

A good introduction has brevity. It's not too long. You don't want to waste precious minutes. So many pastors spend so much time on the introduction that they have to cut short their conclusion. I would also recommend variety. Don't start the same way every week. Sometimes you start with a quote; sometimes you start with a question; sometimes a shocking statement; sometimes you can start with an object lesson or a humorous story. My favorite introductions are funny news items. One thing you need to avoid - elaborate greetings and responses to introduction. Never begin a sermon with an apology. "I'm not really feeling good today." Don't begin with totally unrelated humor.

2. Transitions – the way you get from one point in the message to the next point. It's kind of how you shift gears and I just have one suggestion here. Use your category words. Use the words that relate to different points in the message by using the same category. I like to look over my transitions between the points to make sure that they are smooth. Transitions are pretty easy if you give them a handout outline. It's much more difficult if you don't give them an outline because they're not looking and they're not seeing where you are going to go.
3. Conclusions – the call for commitment. When you read the great preaching masters, even many of them were weak at conclusions. Their sermons just didn't press for a verdict. A lot of their messages just trail off. More pastors fail at this area than in any other part of the message. This is an area I spend a lot of time on because a sermon without a conclusion is a message without a purpose. Changed lives come from great conclusions so work hard at tying these together.

Some mistakes to avoid:

- Don't just summarize your message. Your conclusion is much more than just a summation. It should ask people to act now on your applications.

- Don't say, "now in conclusion" unless you mean it.
- Don't blame the clock for needing to conclude. "I see our time is late and so I'm going to wrap it up."
- Don't introduce anything new in your conclusion.
- Also don't add a fourth or fifth or sixth point that you wish you had said or you forgot in the sermon. That just confuses people.

What to do:

- Always point back to Christ in some way in your conclusion. No matter what you preach on, close with a focus on Jesus Christ.
- End with intensity. Put your heart into it. "Preach through the head to the heart." Your conclusion ought to be the emotional high point of the sermon. The sermon should move toward a crescendo. You have now informed their minds, touched their emotions and now you are challenging their will. I never forget that eternity is in the balance.
- Have the courage to ask for a specific response. You look at the people and you say, "Will you?" Nothing becomes dynamic until it becomes specific. Someone has said that the goal of the sermon should be to storm the citadel of the will and capture it for Jesus Christ. Here are some ways that I try to do this:(these aren't on the outline so just write them in somewhere)
 - a. Use argument. Anticipate their objections and logically refute them.
 - b. Use a warning. Warn them of the consequences of disobedience.
 - c. Use indirect conviction. Arouse moral indignation and then turn it on them. A good example is the story of Nathan and David. (II Samuel 12)
 - d. Use pleading. Express God's love and concern for them and others.
 - e. Use vision. Paint a picture of what is possible if they obey God. Help them to have faith.
 - f. Use encouragement. Tell them they can do this with God's power.

Another thing you need to do is really make it personal. The person listening should feel like you are talking only to them.

Ways to conclude:

- Restate your major points forcefully and personally. You reinforce the truth by summarizing it.
- Use a compelling illustration to conclude.
- Use a piercing question.

The best conclusions sneak up on congregations. They aren't forewarned. You just surprise them.

- Write out your closing prayer so you don't say the same thing. I think through this closing prayer and I go over it and over it. I write it out word for word. I always lead in a closing prayer of commitment that applies the points of the message. When you do the closing prayer, say it slowly.
- Rewrite your conclusion after the first service to make it better. This is an advantage of having multiple services. You know how the sermon feels after preaching it so you can write a stronger conclusion if you need to. I don't change the message but I often will rewrite the conclusion.
- Always offer an opportunity to receive Christ and expect people to respond.

How do you give an invitation to make a commitment? Let me give you a little background first. Over the past twenty-two years literally thousands of people have come to Christ at Saddleback Church. When I started Saddleback I had every intention of giving a traditional come-forward, Billy Graham style altar call. That was my background. I had been involved in full time evangelism and in every service that I preached (I had preached over a hundred evangelism type meetings before I was twenty years old) I gave a come-forward altar call.

At the end of the very first service at Saddleback church I realized a couple things. Our first service was in a small theatre in a high school and there were no aisles. To get out a person would have to say excuse me to about fifty people, walk outside and come back around to the front. Then I noticed that right in front of the pulpit there was no place to stand. All that was there was an orchestra pit. So it just wasn't going to work. So we tried a number of experiments. One of the ways we tried was to ask people to go to a counseling room after the service. If you are going to have a counseling room, don't call it that because to many people it means psychiatric ward or shrink. They also didn't know who would be in that room or what was going to happen.

Finally we decided on using a decision card. This little card is used by thousands of churches around the world now. It's called the Saddleback communication card, response card. On the front of the card it has a place to register your name, address and information about who you are – a typical registration card. Everybody (regulars, visitors, new members) fills out this card every week. On the back we turned it into a decision card. It says I'm committing my life to Christ, I want to be baptized, enroll me in the membership class, I want to know more, renewing my commitment to Christ, and other decisions.

When I come to the time of commitment, I have people bow their heads and I lead them in a public commitment of prayer. I tell them to follow along in their heart and God will hear their prayer. Then I say, "If you prayed that prayer will you take out a response

card and let me know about your decision. There's something real about sharing your decision with other people, making it public. I want you to take the card and check on the back, 'I'm committing my life to Christ.'" The last thing we do at Saddleback is take an offering. So when everyone is giving their offerings we say, "If you are a member or regular attender, or if you are a visitor, or if you are giving your life to Christ, just drop this card in the basket and I have a free packet of material I'll send you that will help you with your decision. I'm not going to embarrass you; I'm not going to publicly make you stand up. We don't do that here but we would like to register your decision and I would like to send you some material." The other thing we do with this card is give them an alternative. I'll say, "If you don't want to wait for me to mail you the new believer packet, you can take this card out to the patio after the service. We have a 'Fresh Start With God' table; and if you'll take this card to them, they will give you the free packet of material. You don't have to say anything, just hand them the card and by doing that you will be saying that you followed Rick in that prayer and you opened your life to Jesus Christ."

Your question might be, "If they are only making their decision on a card, where do they make their public profession of faith?" Well that's what baptism is all about. In the New Testament that's what baptism was - the public demonstration of your faith. You made a decision in your heart and you made the public statement in baptism.

The come-forward invitation is a method that's only about 180 years old. Finney popularized it and it became widely accepted. There's nothing wrong with it but they certainly didn't do it in the New Testament. There were no church buildings or aisles for the first 300 years of Christianity. It's ok to create alternate ways of leading people to make a commitment.

Now regardless of the method that you choose to use, here are some suggestions for giving an invitation or call to commitment.

How to give an invitation to commitment:

- Clearly explain why you want them to respond and how you want them to respond. Too many invitations are misunderstood and the unchurched people have no idea what's going on. Oversimplify the invitation. Take them through a step-by-step procedure.
- Plan out your invitation. Be very creative in inviting people to Christ. If you don't plan out your invitation, you are going to tend to say the same thing over and over every time and people will mentally check out because they've heard it a hundred times. It's too important to just tack on at the end of a service without thought. Remember this is why you're doing what you're doing.
- Lead unbelievers in a model prayer. Help people verbalize their faith. Give them an example to follow.
- Don't over extend the invitation. I have discovered that pressure actually becomes counterproductive. It becomes a battle of the wills. Actually pressure hardens the heart instead of softening it. I believe that if the fruit is ripe, you don't have to yank it. You are asking people to make the most

important life decision that they've ever made. Unchurched people need time to think about the implications. I believe that if people listen to God's word on a consistent basis, it's only a matter of time until the Holy Spirit melts their heart. I like to tell people to take the time to make the right decision.

- Don't create artificial barriers. Don't say, "If you want to be saved, you have to walk this aisle." That can actually become a form of works. Jesus never said you must walk from point A to point B in a church in order to become a believer. In fact, in many churches the aisle has replaced baptism as the public demonstration of faith.
- Offer a new believer table with follow-up packets. That's what we call our "Fresh Start with God" table. We found that actually having the table right out in the open where there was a lot of noise made people feel less threatened than if we had it over in a quiet room. If you give a traditional invitation in your church, I am not suggesting that you stop that or replace it. I'm just saying add the card idea. What you can do is give an invitation and say that if they didn't feel like making a come-forward commitment but they did want to make a decision for Christ today to just take the card, fill it out, leave it on your chair or hand it to me on the way out.
- Expect people to respond to the love of Christ. We are in a spiritual battle. God has a will for people's lives; the devil has a will for people's lives; and we have a will to make a choice. Somehow when I, as a pastor, believe in faith and expect that people are going to come to Christ, they do. Somehow that faith helps others in that spiritual battle. I don't know how it works, but I do know that "According to your faith, it will be done unto you."

When you are giving an invitation and asking for a response, get out from behind the pulpit. Get out where people can see you so there is no barrier between you and them. Another thing is to give multiple invitations. You can start a service with an invitation. You can say, "At the end of this service today I'm going to give you an opportunity to give your life to Christ." And then you mention it two or three times in the message. You are actually preparing people to make that decision long before you get to the invitation time.

4. Tie your title to your purpose. Usually the last thing I do is think up the title. There are two questions that I ask.
 - a) Does this title imply good news?
 - b) Does this make sense on its own. I call it the tape label test. If six months from now if I'm looking at a cassette tape of the message and if the message title does not explain what is on the tape, it's not clear enough.

This is my method for crafting a message and if any of this has helped you that is great. If you have something that works for you, I'd love to hear it. My attitude is that I do what I can in the study, then I trust God to do what only he can do in the pulpit.

I'd like to tie up this session with a verse that we began with. It describes the reason for this seminar.

II Timothy 2:15, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

God wants us to be skilled in our craft and my prayer is that you will renew your commitment to doing the hard work of crafting messages in order to be used by God.

Prayer:

Father, I've done the best I could to share with these wonderful folks the things that you've taught me about preparing to preach. I ask you now to bless them and bless their ministry and bless their work as they commit themselves to becoming master communicators.

In Jesus name. Amen.