



Preparing Bible Messages

A Workbook in Bible Exposition

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How to Use this Workbook

Preparing Bible Messages is a workbook with 20 lessons on the methods for Bible preaching and teaching. It may be studied on an individual basis. It may also be used as the textbook for a class in biblical preaching.

Christian workers who wish to prepare effective Bible messages will find that this workbook is written for them. They need not have higher education. They need not go away to school. They need not purchase additional textbooks. They need not even have a teacher.

The textbook for this study is the Bible. The purpose of the study is to present a method for using Bible texts as the basis for Christian messages. The view of Scripture is also based on the Bible. The view of the church is Bible based. The view of the messenger of God is based on the Bible.

If you wish to study this workbook, do so with your Bible in hand. You will also need a pencil or pen and paper. The key to success in the study will be the time spent in the study of Bible texts. You may read all the lessons in the workbook and still receive no benefit from it. Only as you take your own pen in hand and analyze the Bible texts will the study be helpful.

The lessons are brief. The major investment of time will be in completing the simple exercises at the end of each lesson. The more you repeat these exercises with various texts, the more quickly you will become skilled in this method of preparing Bible messages.

The best way to study this workbook is to work with other students. A partnership will help each student involved. Those who seek to proclaim the word of God will be stimulated and encouraged by working together.

Do not hurry in this study. Be patient as you work through these lessons. Do not become discouraged if this work is not easy. Preparing Bible messages is not intended to be easy. It is the most important work the servant of God does. The life and work of the church depends on the effective proclamation of Scripture truth.

If this study is helpful to you, pass along the information to others. As you become comfortable with this method, you will find that others will want to follow that example. Tell them where they can get the workbook. Perhaps take on the responsibility of teaching another Christian worker.

Lesson 1

The Messenger of God

You are God's *messenger*. If He has called you to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to those who are lost, you are His messenger. If He has called you to plant new churches, you are His messenger. If He has called you to teach his people wherever believers gather and worship Him, you are His messenger.

Human Agents

Sometimes God has spoken through Angels (Judges 6:20). Sometimes God has spoken through dreams (Genesis 41:25). God has spoken with a still small voice (1 Kings 19:12) and with the sound of thunder (John 12:29). God even spoke one time through a donkey (Numbers 22:28). But God's normal way of speaking to man is through his chosen servants. He spoke in every generation through his prophets to make his will known (Hebrews 1:1).

God calls his messengers to speak his word to their neighbors. Sometimes He calls them to go to far away places to speak for Him. Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). He commands them, "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:2).

What an amazing truth: God uses human messengers to give His message to mankind. His messengers often feel they are unworthy for such a task. Like Moses, they may complain, "O Lord, I am not eloquent, . . . but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue"

Lesson 1

God calls and enables human messengers to declare his word to the people.

"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" Romans 10:14

(Exodus 4:10). Or, like Jeremiah, they may say, “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth” (Jeremiah 1:6).

God does not accept these excuses. He does not call those who are capable; He makes capable those He calls. “Who made man’s mouth?” He asked Moses, “Have not I, the Lord?” (Exodus 4:11). He told Jeremiah, “Do not say, ‘I am a youth,’ for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you” (Jeremiah 1:7, 8).

Though God’s messengers are weak and imperfect human beings, they bear a powerful and divine message. Sometimes God’s messenger finds it hard to adjust to this divine calling. It is not a small matter to speak for God. Paul said, “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). God’s message is a treasure and we are but clay pots. He is to receive the glory for using such unworthy vessels.

The words of God’s messenger will be heard only if his life is faithful as well. It is the silent message of his attitude and behavior that makes his spoken message believable.

A Message without Words

God’s messenger is not only a speaker for God, he is a hearer of God’s Word. He does not declare what he does not believe. The message of God is first in his own mind and heart and then on his lips. When the people watch his attitude and behavior, they see that he lives what he preaches. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom,” Paul wrote, “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Colossians 3:16, 17).

The words of God’s messenger will be heard only if his life is faithful as well. It is the silent message of his attitude and behavior that makes his spoken message believable. He cannot preach one message and live another. His *word* and his *works* must be one.

Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). Notice how the light of our witness causes men to look closely at our good works. That is always the case. If you say you belong to Jesus, others will watch to see if your life speaks silently about Him as well.

If a person’s behavior is good, but he does not identify with Christ, others will say he is a good man, and fail to see that God is making him good. If his words are about Jesus, but he does not live the life of a believer, they will call him “hypocrite.” Only as his words are clear and his works are upright will others look at him and glorify God for his life.

The attitude of God’s messenger about his calling will affect his message to the people. He can become proud. He can think of himself as better than the people. Instead of the ministry of Jesus Christ through him, he can think of his calling as his own ministry.

If his character is not based in biblical truth, those who hear him preach will know it. There is no way to separate his character and personality from his preaching. Who the messenger of God is will have as much impact as what he says.

The Messenger’s Example

Paul urged Timothy, his young son in the ministry, to “be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12). Even though Timothy was young, he could show others how to live by his own example. He could be faithful with the silent message of his life. Then they would be more likely to accept the spoken message of the gospel. The messenger of God must live what he preaches.

This charge to the preacher sets a direction for his own attitude. It names important qualities for his character. But it is

“You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? . . . You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?”

Romans 2:21, 23

more than that. It is also what the congregation needs if they are to have respect for the messenger and his message.

An example is a pattern to follow. Is it possible for a young minister to be an example to older believers? Yes, it is. Whatever your stage of maturity now, you can be a godly example. Even though you will continue to grow, you can earn respect and set a pattern for others to follow. Remember this: you cannot be one kind of person and another kind of preacher.

This verse names six qualities in which the preacher is to set the pace for others. Examine these points of example more closely with me.

Remember this: you cannot be one kind of person and another kind of preacher.

First, the messenger of God is to set the example "in word." The people will not only note what you say in your sermons, they are listening to what you say in everyday speech. They notice whether your speech follows Paul's admonition, "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Eph 4.29). Our speech is to build up the hearers so that our very words minister the grace of God to them.

Secondly, God's messenger is to set the example in "conduct." This is his behavior and manner of life. The people expect the messenger of God to live a life above reproach, in the sight of believer and nonbeliever alike (1 Tim 3.7). The congregation notices how the preacher treats his family, his courtesy to his wife, his handling of his children. They notice his manners. They notice his attitude.

Third, the messenger of God is to set the example "in love." Christian love is not an emotional response to others. It is a matter of decision and action. Christian love seeks the interests of others, to give them the good that God would want for them. Some of the people are hard to like, but the messenger of God is to love them. He knows that love "suffers long and is kind," that it "does not envy, . . . does not parade itself, is not puffed up" and so on (1 Corinthians 13.4).

Some translations include "in spirit" in this text. This can mean the attitude of God's messenger. One expression of attitude is his fervency for God's work and His Word. The people will hear the teaching and preaching of God's servant for his passion as much as for his message. If the preacher is not passionate about the message, will the people take it seriously? The way the preacher delivers his message will determine whether the audience hears what he has to say.

The messenger of God is also to set the example is "in faith." Of all the qualities needed by the minister and the people, faith is most vital. Faith is the goal of every sermon. Out of genuine faith comes obedience. God's messenger really believes God's Word. He really trusts God to do everything He has promised. If so he is setting the right kind of example for the people, whatever his age and maturity.

The last quality named in the verse is "in purity." The messenger of God is to set the example in his moral faithfulness. There is no place in the church for the stain of the world. You will see moral failure all around you in your community. But God's messenger must avoid even the appearance of evil. He will not

"Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity."

1 Timothy 4:12

allow himself in a situation that brings doubt about his moral life. A minister can be respected only if he is pure.

There is much more to say about the preacher's character and attitudes. The truth is simple: You cannot be one kind of person and another kind of preacher.

Lesson Exercises

1. Review the main ideas of this lesson:
 - God calls human beings to take his message to others.
 - God does not call those who are able; he makes able those He calls.
 - The silent message of our lives determines whether our spoken word will be heard.
2. Read of God's call to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jesus' first disciples, and Paul. Write down what you see as the features of God's call. (Isaiah 6:1-10; Jeremiah 1:4-10; Matthew 4:18-22; Acts 26:12-18).

Lesson 2

The Written Word

If God's messenger is to be faithful to his calling, how will he know what to say? Should the messenger declare his own thoughts? Should he preach the traditions of the people? Should he say what he hears others saying in their preaching? Should he pray for a new message that has never been heard? Does he have to leave his home and go to school to learn what to say?

These questions can all be answered by another question: Does the messenger of God have a Bible that he can read in his own language? If he does, he can preach the Word of God. Those who have higher education may more easily understand the Bible. God's messenger will want to get all the training he can. But those who can only read the Bible for its plain meaning can also understand it.

So the messenger of God can preach God's Word if he will declare the plain message of the Scripture text. In this lesson, we will think about the importance of God's written Word.

The Book of God

The Bible is a book like no other. It is a book of books. In it are 66 books, 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. The books in the Bible include history, poetry, songs, prophecy, letters, and sermons. The Bible tells the story of God's world from before creation to after the end of all things. God revealed himself to man through many generations. The collection of that revelation is now our Bible.

Lesson 2

God has given his written word in the Bible so that the message can be faithfully preached in every generation.

Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.'" Exodus 34:27.

God used human writers to put his revelation into words. Each one lived in his own time and wrote in his own language. Each one wrote in his own words to the audience of his day. Though the message was spoken in the words of man, the message was also the thoughts of God. Each Bible writer wrote what God inspired him to say.

Different cultures from the Middle East are reflected in these writings—from Mesopotamia, to ancient Palestine, to Egypt, and back to Palestine. Many different peoples and cities and kings and wars are mentioned as God’s servants dealt with them. The Bible writers wrote about how God involved himself in their own experience.

Preaching must not be about ancient religious heroes and how we can be like them. Preaching is to be about God and how we can trust Him.

Though the Bible tells the story of many ancient peoples, it is mainly about God. The great plan of God for the world and for man is revealed through the generations. God’s plan is fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. Whatever the text and whatever the theme, the story of Jesus is the key.

Jesus’ story is called the *Gospel*. This means “good news.” Paul defined the *gospel*, “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve” (1 Corinthians 15:3-5). The death of Jesus on the cross was for the sins of the people. God gave His own Son as a sacrifice for sin so that we can be right with Him. That is the good news.

Since the Bible is mainly about God, the preacher will want to look at every text for what it tells him about God. Preaching must not be about ancient religious heroes and how we can be like them. Preaching is to be about God and how we can trust Him. It is not only about the law of God. It is also about the grace of God by

which He accepts us and enables us to live for Him. Preaching is to be about how to know God through Jesus Christ and live as His servants in this dark world.

God's Word Written

Since God has given us His message in the written Word of Scripture, every messenger must go to the Bible to learn what to say. God did not think it wise to have His message pass only from one to another, from mouth to ear. Instead He wanted it written down so that the words would remain the same. He wanted the message to be sure and clear for every generation.

If we did not have the Bible as God's written Word, those first to receive His Word would have passed it along to others, and then to others, and then to others. By the time the spoken message got to us, it might not be faithful to the original word. God gave His words to Moses and told him to write them down. God gave His words Jeremiah and told him to write them down. God told His first disciples to write down the story of Jesus.

“Now go, write it before them on a tablet, and note it on a scroll, that it may be for time to come, forever and ever:” Isaiah 30:8.

Do you remember the children's game of passing a message along? The children sit in a circle. One thinks of a message and whispers it to the next child. Then that child whispers the message to the next one. And so, the message goes around the circle. Finally the last child announces what he heard the message to be. Most of the time he is uncertain about it. After he tells what he thinks he heard, the child who started the message tells what it was meant to be. Everyone gets a laugh at how the message was changed .

It would not be funny today if the message of God were corrupted as it passed from one to another. God wants His people to hear a sure message from Him. The only way we can do that as

His messengers is to give the people what He has to say in His written Word, the Bible.

Some messengers who say they speak for God do not bring a word from His book. These preachers and teachers tell what they have heard from others. They tell about their dreams. They give their own religious ideas. They sometimes mix their old religion with their new faith in Jesus. They may speak boldly and claim God's authority, but the message is not from God's book.

How much of what they say is from God? How can we know if a message is from God? Does the preacher take God's holy Book and explain what it says to the people? If he does not, is he a faithful messenger?

"For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!"
1 Corinthians 9:16

Faithful Messengers

Like a herald sent by the King with an urgent message for his people, God's messengers must speak. We must keep preaching, even when we are weary. We must keep preaching, even when we are threatened. We must bring the message of the King or the people will not hear. We must speak it carefully, only what the King wants to say. We must not give our own message. We are messengers, but the message is not ours. It is God's

Ours is a ministry of the Word of God. God has spoken and we have His words in the Bible. In the Bible we learn how to put our faith in Jesus as our Savior. In the Bible we learn how to live as God's people in a corrupt world. In the Bible God has promised us His forgiveness. He has promised us His power. He has promised us a heavenly home.

Unless God told us in His Word, we would never know about our Savior. Unless he told us in His Word, we would never know that God loves us, that God loves all men and calls them to be His

children. Unless God told us in His Word, we would never know how to rejoice in our troubles.

Without God's Word in the Bible, we would never know how to pray rightly. We would not know how to love one another. We would not know how to live holy lives. None of these wonderful truths come to the mind of man unless God tells him. And He tells us in the Bible.

When new believers put their faith in Christ, they do not understand the life of faith. Their minds are still filled with the thoughts of unbelievers. They do not know how to pray. They do not know how to obey God. They do not know how to be a light in a dark world. Who will teach them the thoughts of God? God calls and enables his messengers for that work.

To be faithful messengers, we must first receive the message we are to deliver. That means going to the Scriptures and discerning in them what God has said. Then we will make sure our lesson or sermon says what God says. We may have to explain it to this generation. We may have to relate it to the experience of our hearers. But we must not change the message or present one of our own.

The religious thoughts of a godly preacher may be helpful. He may think they sound very wise and challenging. But his own ideas will not have the effect in the hearers that the direct message of God's written Word will have. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways," says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8, 9).

The preacher's challenge, then, is to have the message of the biblical text become the message of the sermon. That is faithful preaching. The word of God is "living and powerful, and sharper

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than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). When the message of the text becomes the message of the sermon, the people hear the word of God.

In this workbook, you will learn how to let the ideas of God from the Bible speak through the message you give to the people. That is your job as the messenger of God. You are to speak the message of God. Even though the message is through your voice, it will be God’s message. Even though the message is in your language, it will be God’s message. Even though you explain it according to the life of the people, it will be God’s message.

Lesson Exercises

1. Review the main ideas of this lesson:
 - The Bible is the Book of God and tells of his dealings with men through many generations.
 - The Bible is about God, particularly about his Son, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.
 - Believers can know the thoughts of God and understand the true faith only from the Bible.
 - The faithful messenger will judge his own thoughts by ideas from the Bible and teach the people what God says.
2. Read these texts about God’s Word and write down the main ideas in them. What do you learn about God’s Word that you did not know? (Deuteronomy 4:1-8; Psalm 119:9-16; Isaiah 55:8-11; Hebrews 4:12).

Lesson 3

Choosing a Bible Text

The first task in preparing a Bible message is choosing a text. In this study, we will show you that every Bible message can be based on the ideas in a particular text. Instead of teaching his own ideas, God's messenger will teach the ideas of God from a Bible text.

A text is a portion of Scripture selected for teaching or preaching. It can be as little as one verse or as much as several chapters. Modern Bible translations very often show these sections of Scripture for the reader. Though the messenger of God may not choose to follow the divisions in his translation, they will usually be helpful.

A text should be long enough to serve as the source for a sermon and short enough to be manageable in the time available. In the letters of the New Testament, a text may be only a few verses. This is so because the letters have so much to say in such a few words. Look at Romans 12:1 and 2. In the stories of the Old Testament, however, the text may include more than a chapter. Consider the call of Moses in Exodus 3 and 4.

The messenger of God will choose a text that fits the need of his audience. He will pray and ask God to lead him to the right text. God will lead the messenger of God to the kind of Bible texts and themes the people most need to hear.

Lesson 3

The first task in preparing Bible messages is to choose a specific text.

Preparing the Message

- Choose a text
- Copy the text
- Action words
- Important words
- Observations
- Bible themes
- The main idea
- A limiting theme
- Supporting ideas
- Major points
- The People
- Word pictures
- Telling stories
- Application
- Aiming for faith
- Outlining

Why Choose a Text?

If the messenger of God is to teach the people the truth of God, how will he decide what to say? He could talk about his own religious ideas. He could speak of what he hears other teachers and preachers saying. He could tell stories of his own experience with God. He could talk to the people about how they should behave. All of these words may be helpful, but the messenger of God should deliver the message of God.

God has given his message to man in the book we call the Bible. He did so because He wanted his words to be guarded from change and corruption. He wanted his truth to be read by every generation until Jesus returns. There is no book like the Bible. It is a precious treasure from God for his people. The Christian faith cannot be understood apart from the words of the Bible.

There is no book like the Bible. It is a precious treasure from God for his people. The Christian faith cannot be understood apart from the words of the Bible.

Choosing a text keeps the messenger of God from talking about so many ideas at one time. It is better to teach the people about one great truth from God in one lesson. Sometimes preachers speak about many ideas that come to mind while they are talking. They do not have a clear message from God and the people become confused. The preacher with one text to explain can talk about the one message of that text.

Choosing a text from the Bible gives the messenger of God authority to speak. When his message comes from God's book, the people will listen because they are hearing from God. The authority of God's servant is closely tied to his confidence in the Bible and his preaching from it. The people will trust him as a leader because he submits himself to God's Word.

Choosing a specific text for the lesson or sermon allows the people to follow his teaching in their own Bibles. If the people have no Bibles, the preacher can show them the words in his own. If they have Bibles, they can look at the words and make sure the

messenger of God is presenting what God says. This allows the believers to gather around the Scripture with God's servant and hear from God together.

Different Kinds of Texts

When the preacher chooses a text for each message, he soon learns that the Bible is made up of several different kinds of writing. Some of the Bible books are mainly history. Some are collections of God's laws. Some are mostly poetry. Some are prophetic. Some are accounts of the life of Jesus. Others are letters. Most of these books contain a mixture of various kinds of writing. Each text has its own form.

Most of the Bible is written as stories. These stories tell of the history of Israel. They tell of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the fathers of faith. They tell of great heroes like Joseph, Gideon, David, and Daniel. The Bible stories tell about tribes and nations, battles and wars, glory and disaster. In the New Testament, the stories are about Jesus and his disciples. They are about the growth and struggles of the early church.

Even though some stories tell about real people and events, they are really about God. God's great plan for the ages of history and eternity is in the stories. God's love for man in his sin is made clear. The coming of God's Son to pay the price for man's sin is the great story, the Gospel. The word "Gospel" means "good news." The story of Jesus is good news for all who believe.

Other stories in the Bible are not about real people and events. But they have in them the truth of God. Jesus told parables to help his disciples understand the truth of God. He knew that the people would remember a story better than a law. He knew they would understand his teachings much better if he drew a word picture they could see in their minds.

"You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; For they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation."
Psalm 119:98, 99.

Other kinds of texts in the Bible are poetry and songs. The book of Psalms is poetry. It is made of songs to be sung. It is the worship book of the Bible.

Prophecy is also an important kind of Bible writing. The prophets of the Old Testament preached to the people about what God expected of them. Many of them also wrote down their sermons. They told something about their lives as well.

The Bible also has letters in it. Though there are a few letters in the Old Testament, most of them are in the New Testament. These letters were originally written to believers by the close followers of Jesus after he had returned to heaven. They were written to teach the people what to believe and how to live.

“How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.

With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!

Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You!”

Psalms 119:9-11.

Planning Your Preaching

Planning your preaching ministry is largely a matter of choosing and studying the biblical texts you will use. Once you have chosen the text, preparing a sermon is mostly the study of that text. The plans you make for preaching will depend on the opportunities you have and the nature of your audience.

If you are planting new churches, your preaching and teaching will be designed to introduce interested unbelievers to the Christian faith. If you are serving in an established church, you will want to feed that flock with Bible truth. Remember, the messenger of God is faithful only when he brings the message of God from His written Word.

If you have not prepared sermons from a careful study of the text, you may want to begin with texts of a few verses. Here are some of my favorite brief passages.

- Luke 21:1-4 -- The Widow's Mite
- Matthew 7:24-27 -- Parable of the Builders
- Isaiah 66:2 -- The One to Whom God Looks

- 1 Peter 1:3-5 -- A heavenly inheritance
- Romans 12:1, 2 -- Proving the will of God
- Luke 9:57-62 -- Three would-be disciples
- Romans 3:21-26 -- Righteousness in Christ
- James 1:12-15 – How temptation works
- Jeremiah 2:9-13 -- Broken cisterns
- 1 John 2:15-17 -- Love not the world
- Mark 4:35-41 – Jesus stills the storm
- Luke 6:43-45 -- A tree known by its fruit
- Isaiah 40:27-31 – Those who wait on the Lord
- Mark 10:46-52 – Healing of Bartimaeus
- Psalm 15:1-5 – A godly man

In an established congregation, you will also want to plan a series of sermons. To do this you can preach through a book of the Bible. You may also preach through a section, such as the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5-7. You can preach other kinds of series on various Bible characters, on the Ten Commandments, or on the teachings of the Bible on particular subjects. In each case, however, take a text for your sermon and study it carefully for its intended message.

I have preached a series of 18 sermons from the Letter of James. To begin, I divided the book into preaching texts. Then, I planned on the date for each sermon. The first sermon was an overview of the book. Here are the 6 other texts and titles from chapter 1 of James:

- James 1:2-4 Responding to Trouble
- James 1:5-8 Asking for Understanding
- James 1:9-11 The Glory of Life
- James 1:12-15 How Temptation Works
- James 1:16-20 Getting What You Want

“Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah; and Baruch wrote on a scroll of a book, at the instruction of Jeremiah, all the words of the LORD which He had spoken to him.”
Jeremiah 36:4

- James 1:21-27 Beyond Hearing to Doing

Preaching through books of the Bible has great value, for the preacher and the people. We will look at how to plan this kind of preaching in Lesson 19.

In our next lesson, we will learn how to begin studying the text carefully for the meaning it has. I have chosen John 3:1-8 as the specific text to study. This text is very important for understanding the Christian life.

Lesson Exercises

1. Review the main ideas of this lesson:
 - A message based on a specific text of Scripture assures God's messenger that his sermon presents God's ideas.
 - Choosing one text keeps the messenger focused on one idea from the Bible.
 - Preaching from a text gives God's authority to the message.
 - Preaching from a text encourages the people to study God's Word.
2. Look again at the list of texts in this lesson. Read over those you think might be best for your preaching and teaching. What kind of text do the people need?

Lesson 4

Copying the Text by Hand

You have chosen your text. So, now you must study it carefully to understand what the message of the text is. This is the first task of the messenger of God. You are studying the text to learn what it says. The author had a message to his own audience when the text was written long ago. That message has in it the thoughts of God for our generation as well.

In this lesson, we will begin several important tasks in the work of studying the words of your text. All of these tasks have to do with looking carefully at the text. We do not begin to plan our message by thinking our own thoughts. We do not begin by asking someone what we should say. We do not begin by preaching what others have said. We begin by choosing a text as God leads and looking carefully at every detail of that text.

Working with a Text

To begin our study in this lesson, I have chosen an important text that you will want to preach to your people. This is the story of Nicodemus coming to Jesus at night to talk with Him about his miracles. It is here that Jesus declares, "You must be born again." In your Bible, this text will look like this:

John 3:1-8

1. There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.
2. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

Lesson 4

Writing the text out by hand, phrase by phrase, can help you see important details of the text.

Preparing the Message

- Choose a text
- Copy the text
- Action words
- Important words
- Observations
- Bible themes
- The main idea
- A limiting theme
- Supporting ideas
- Major points
- The People
- Word pictures
- Telling stories
- Application
- Aiming for faith
- Outlining

3. Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

4. Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

5. Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

6. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7. "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

8. "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

You are like a doctor examining a patient to discover what causes him to be sick. You look at every clue in the text as to the writer's intended meaning.

Read the text over several times carefully. Look closely at the words and phrases. Notice how the story unfolds. You are like a doctor examining a patient to discover what causes him to be sick. You look at every clue in the text as to the writer's intended meaning. Remember, you are not looking for a sermon at this point. You are trying to understand what the text is saying as the writer and the Holy Spirit originally intended it.

As you read over the text, look also at the part before and the part just after the text you choose. You will understand your chosen text better when you see what else the writer said and how your text fits into his thought.

Write the Text by Hand

The simplest and best way to examine each word in the text is to copy the entire passage in your own hand. I suggest you copy it in large letters down the left side of your paper. Later you will make notes on the right side of the sheet.

Copying the text by hand will help you know it much better. You will take the words of the text from the Bible and put them on your own paper. You will also put them in your own thoughts. When you write the text words on your paper, you can then mark them, as I will suggest in this study. You will often be able to repeat

the words of the text from your heart when you have written it out and marked it.

You will find that copying the text by hand allows the word to speak more directly to you. You must read it, preferably aloud. Then you copy it word-by-word and phrase-by-phrase. You must also check to make sure you have it correct. At every step you are handling God's Word. At every step He can speak to you with its riches. Even if you are not planning a message, this way of studying Scripture can change your life.

When you copy the text word for word from the Bible, you will have to spell each word. This will cause you to look at the words carefully. You will notice that the writer chose his words to say just what he meant to say. The words he chose are reflected in your own translation of the Bible in your language. The original words of the Bible were in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. What you read in your own language is faithful to the meaning of the original words.

When you copy the text by hand, you will also notice groups of words that go together. When we talk, we do not say one word at a time to give our meaning. We say groups of words, called *phrases*. The way these words go together is very important to our understanding of the Bible text. Sounding one word by itself does not always give a clear meaning. But groups of words together make the idea clear.

As you copy the words of the text, write them in the groups. These *phrases* break the text down into smaller parts. They also make clear what words go together. Do not be too concerned about exactly how to separate the phrases. Just write them in the way they naturally are expressed in your language.

Here is the text from John as a sample.

“Observe and obey all these words which I command you, that it may go well with you and your children after you forever, when you do what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God.”
Deuteronomy 12:28

John 3:1-8

1. There was a man
of the Pharisees
named Nicodemus,
a ruler of the Jews.
2. This man came
to Jesus
by night
and said to Him,
'Rabbi, we know
that You are a teacher
come from God;
for no one can do these signs
that You do
unless God is with him.'
3. Jesus answered
and said to him,
'Most assuredly, I say to you,
unless one is born again,
he cannot see the kingdom of God.'
4. Nicodemus said to Him,
'How can a man be born
when he is old?
Can he enter a second time
into his mother's womb
and be born?'
5. Jesus answered,
'Most assuredly, I say to you,
unless one is born of water
and the Spirit,
he cannot enter the kingdom of God.
6. 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh,
and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.
7. 'Do not marvel that I said to you,
'You must be born again.'
8. 'The wind blows
where it wishes,
and you hear the sound of it,

"Therefore, if anyone
is in Christ, he is a
new creation; old
things have passed
away; behold, all
things have become
new. "

2 Corinthians 5:17

but cannot tell
 where it comes from
 and where it goes.
 So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

When you copy this text yourself, you might divide it in a different way. There is no one way to do it. Read the text aloud and see how the words would be grouped as you speak. That will be the phrasing that sounds natural to your audience. Copy the text in those phrases.

Already you can see that copying the text by hand has helped you better see what the writer is saying. Think about the way some of the phrases connect with other phrases. In the first verse, the phrase "of the Pharisees" tells about the "man" in the phrase above it. Then, "named Nicodemus" tells more about the man. The phrase, "a ruler of the Jews," tells even more about him.

Remember that your aim is to understand the text writer's intended meaning. Seeing the way the phrases relate to each other will show you more clearly what the writer is saying. The little connecting words in most of the phrases help you at this point, words like *of*, *and*, *for*, and *unless*. We will discuss these connecting words again later in the course.

Here is another text as you might copy it by hand.

Matthew 5:13-16

13 "You are the salt
 of the earth;
 but if the salt loses its flavor,
 how shall it be seasoned?
 It is then good
 for nothing
 but to be thrown out
 and trampled underfoot
 by men.

"All Scripture is given
 by inspiration of God,
 and is profitable for
 doctrine, for reproof,
 for correction, for
 instruction in
 righteousness, that
 the man of God may
 be complete,
 thoroughly equipped
 for every good work."
 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.

14 "You are the light
of the world.

A city that is set on a hill
cannot be hidden.

15 "Nor do they light a lamp
and put it under a basket,
but on a lampstand,
and it gives light
to all who are in the house.

16 "Let your light so shine
before men,
that they may see your good works
and glorify your Father
in heaven.

In the next two lessons, we will continue to work with your hand-written copy of this text. Do not be concerned if your writing is not pretty. Your study notes are for your use. As long as you can read them, they are helpful.

Lesson Exercises

1. Review the main ideas of this lesson:
 - The clues to the text meaning are in the details of text wording.
 - We must learn to look carefully at the small matters in the text if we are to get the overall picture.
 - We can see the details of the text better if we copy it in our own hand, phrase by phrase.
2. Before moving to the next lesson, look at other texts as we have done here. Copy them by hand, phrase by phrase. I suggest that you study Psalm 1 and Romans 12:1, 2. Do not hurry. Take the time you need. As you study more texts, you will be able to work faster.

Lesson 5

Finding the Action Words

Now you have selected your text. Then you wrote out the text in your own hand by phrases. The next step is to discover all the action words in the text and underline them in your handwritten copy. These words will be very important for opening the meaning of the text to you.

In the study of language, these action words are called *verbs*. Though we are not aiming to study language use in this course, the way different kinds of words do their work will be important to us. We want to understand the intended meaning of the original writer of the text. Looking closely at his words is the only way to discover what he intended to say.

Underlining the Verbs

Now mark your handwritten copy of the text by underlining all the action words. They are important in any text because they tell us what action is reported in the text. Very often the action words are the key to understanding the meaning of the text.

I have gone over my handwritten copy of John 3:1-8 and underlined the action words. Did I miss any?

John 3:1-8

1. There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.
2. This man came to Jesus

Lesson 5

Marking all the action words in the text will help you see what the text writer intended to say.

Preparing the Message

- Choose a text
- Copy the text
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by night
 and said to Him,
 "Rabbi, we know
 that You are a teacher
come from God;
 for no one can do these signs
 that You do
 unless God is with him."

3. Jesus answered
 and said to him,
 "Most assuredly, I say to you,
 unless one is born again,
 he cannot see the kingdom of God."

4. Nicodemus said to Him,
 "How can a man be born
 when he is old?

Can he enter a second time
 into his mother's womb
 and be born?"

5. Jesus answered,
 "Most assuredly, I say to you,
 unless one is born of water
 and the Spirit,
 he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

6. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh,
 and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7. "Do not marvel
 that I said to you,
 'You must be born again.'

8. "The wind blows where it wishes,
 and you hear the sound of it,
 but cannot tell
 where it comes from
 and where it goes.

So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

"For the hearts of
 this people have
 grown dull. Their
 ears are hard of
 hearing, And their
 eyes they have
 closed, Lest they
 should see with their
 eyes and hear with
 their ears, Lest they
 should understand
 with their hearts and
 turn, So that I should
 heal them."

Matthew 13:15

Already you can see, from underlining the verbs, that the text is opening its meaning to you. Did you notice some words that are repeated often? I have counted 8 times that the word “born” is used. This tells me that in this text the idea of being born is very important. Writing the text out by hand and underlining the verbs makes the idea of being born stand out.

Kinds of Verbs

Even though we call them “action words,” some *verbs* do not show any action at all. They just tell us that the person lived. These are called “to be” verbs. Notice in John 3:1-8 that the first verb is “was.” The first verse says “There was a man . . . “ This word does not describe the man doing anything or taking any action. It just says that he lived. There was such a person. Another such verb is in verse 2 when Nicodemus says, “You are a teacher . . . “ Even though there is no action involved, underline these “to be” verbs also.

Some verbs are passive. That means someone else does something to the person involved. Look again at verse 1 of John 3. There the writer says that the man was named Nicodemus. He did not name himself. His father and mother probably named him. Though the action was not by Nicodemus, it affected him. That is passive, meaning the subject received or was affected by the action.

Other verbs are *action* words. This means that the person identified in the sentence did the action. Nicodemus did not name himself. So “named” is passive. But in verse 2 we read that he “came” to Jesus and “said” to Him. These are *active* verbs. This is what Nicodemus did.

Some verbs report on action that took place at another time. We read that Nicodemus came to Jesus. This verb is past. The

“So Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, ‘All the words which the LORD has said we will do.’”
Exodus 24:3

action happened in another day that is past. It is not still happening. It is over. These *past tense* verbs are used very often for telling stories, either true stories or made up stories.

The verbs talking about what is happening now are called *present tense*. In verse 2 Nicodemus says, “We know . . . “ He means to say they are still knowing at the time he speaks.

Other verbs also tell of what has not happened yet; these are *future tense* verbs. There are no future verbs in John 3:1-8. But look at Psalm 1. Verse 3 says of the godly man that “whatever he does shall prosper.” This is *future tense*. It predicts what will happen later. The Psalm writer says that in the days to come this man will be fruitful in every way.

Watch for the various kinds of verbs for what they tell you about the writer’s meaning. We have noted that there are *to be* verbs, *passive* verbs, and *active* verbs. Verbs can also tell us about the time of the action, whether *past*, *present*, or *future*. There are other special kinds of action words, but we will not concern ourselves with them in this study.

Learning about God and Man

Verbs in the Bible text help us most by telling us about God. Also important is what they tell us about man. Early in the Bible, in Genesis 1:1, we are told, “God *created* the heavens and the earth.” We learn in Genesis 1:27 that “God *created* man in His own image.” Then God told the man that he could *eat* of every tree but one, of which he *shall not eat*. In 2:22 the text tells us that God *made* a woman and *brought* her to the man. In Genesis 3:6 the Bible tells us that the woman *took* of the forbidden fruit, *gave* it to her husband and he *ate* of it. Then they were *afraid* and *hid* themselves from God (Genesis 3:10).

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son.”
Hebrews 1:1, 2

These actions, by God and by the man and woman, tell us much about them. They tell us that God is the Creator of all. They tell us that He made man and woman. They tell us that He gave them all they needed to eat. But we also learn that he forbade them eating of one tree. Then we learn from the action that they ate of this forbidden tree. From that point they were afraid of God and hid from Him.

When you look at any Bible text, the verbs will be important for understanding its message. That message will often be about God. Look at what the action words tell you about God. Since God always acts in a way true to His own nature, His actions reveal His character.

The message may also be about man, and the action words will tell you much about him. Man may not always behave true to his own nature. He can be a hypocrite. But he cannot always hide his true character. His actions will tell on him.

Verbs are used to tell us how to obey God. Often these commands tell us what we must not do. Look at the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. Eight of the commandments tell us what we must *not* do and two of them tell us what we *must* do. These action words are important for telling us about what God expects of us. The New Testament also uses many action words to tell the reader plainly how he is to behave.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul gives a brief statement of the Gospel of Jesus. Look at the action words in verses 3-8. They tell us that Jesus *died* for our sins, that He *was buried*, that He *rose* again, and that He *was seen* alive by many people. Did you notice that there are two active verbs and two passive ones in this text?

In the next lesson, we will look at other kinds of words as well. Remember, we examine the words of the text like scientists,

“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock.”
Matthew 7:24

to discover what we can learn. We do not study the text for a quick sermon idea. We study it to discover what the inspired writer was saying. Then we can make the truth of that text the truth of our message to the people.

Lesson Exercises

1. Review the main ideas of this lesson:
 - Verbs are action words that help us see what the text writer intended to say.
 - Underlining the verbs in your handwritten text will call your attention to the action in the text.
 - Verbs are of various kinds, including *to be* verbs, *passive* and *active* verbs, and various tenses.
 - Verbs often describe the actions of God and help us understand His character and His mighty works.
 - Verbs also reveal the character of man by describing his actions.
2. Look carefully for the action words in the two texts mentioned last in this lesson: Exodus 20:1-17, *The Ten Commandments* and 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, *The Gospel*. Also examine Matthew 9:35-38 to see what action Jesus takes toward the multitudes and what action He asks of the disciples.

Lesson 6

Marking the Main Words

Words carry meaning. Some words carry the heavier weight, like a wagon loaded with produce for the market. Other words in a Bible text are not so important, but do serve to hold the ideas together. Some Bible words are the basis for our beliefs about God. These are very important words. All the words of the text are of some value to your understanding.

You will carefully study the words of the text. The text writer put his thought into these words. Now you must open the words and discover the message of the writer to his generation. Only as you understand his message to his people will you be able to declare God's message to your people.

Looking for Important Words

In this lesson, we will search through the text for the main words. These words are filled with God's truth. They provide the names for the important ideas of the Christian faith. They carry the meaning that must be given to the people of God. The messenger of God will learn these important words so that he can faithfully teach the people what God says.

We have underlined the *verbs*. These are usually action words. They are very important for understanding the message of the text. As we mark the most meaningful words in our text, we will mark many of the verbs again.

Words like "a" and "the" can be important, but they do not carry the message of the text. Other words like "and," and "but"

Lesson 6

Identifying and marking the main words in the text will open its meaning to you for your message to the people.

Preparing the Message

- Choose a text
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can be important too, but do not carry the message of the text. Words like “to,” “unless,” and “how” can be important, but are not likely to carry the weight of text ideas.

We are looking for words that are important for the message of the writer. Three kinds of words usually carry the most weight in bringing the writer’s ideas to the reader. Some of these words are *naming* words. They are as important as the *action* words we examined in the last lesson. Besides the *naming* words and the *action* words, a third kind are *describing* words.

As you go through the text, you will find many *naming* words. In language studies, we would call them *nouns*. These words give a name to places, persons, and things. They can name ideas and feelings as well. Just as a person has a name, we name other things as well so we can talk about them. I will point out some of the naming words in the texts.

“At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth.”

Philippians 2:10

Other words are *describing* words. They tell something more about persons, places, and things. They also tell something about actions. In language studies, these words are called *modifiers*. We will find some of these words in the texts below.

Marking Important Words

Now, go back over your handwritten copy of John 3:1-8 again. This time mark the words that seem to carry the weight of meaning in the text. It is better to mark too many words than to mark too few. You may mark them any way you wish. Most of the time, I just circle the words.

Here is my handwritten text of John 3:1-8 with the important words shadowed. I have marked words like “Pharisees,” “ruler,” “Jesus,” “night,” and others. These words do not all have the same weight of meaning. But together they will help you focus on the

message of the writer. Would you choose different ones? Did I miss an important one?

John 3:1-8

1. There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.
2. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."
3. Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."
4. Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"
5. Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.
6. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.
7. "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'
8. "The wind blows where it wishes,

and you hear the sound of it,
but cannot tell where it comes from
and where it goes.

So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Most of the words we marked are *naming* words.

"Nicodemus" was the name of the man who came to Jesus.

"Pharisees" names a religious group Nicodemus was in. "Jesus" is named in the text. The man came to Jesus by "night." This is the name we call the dark part of the day. But it also describes when he came to see Jesus. "Teacher" is the title for Jesus that Nicodemus gives him.

We do not find as many *describing* words in this text. But notice that Nicodemus described himself as "old." He spoke of his "mother's" womb. Jesus talked about "water," "flesh," and "spirit" to describe various kinds of birth. These words are all used for *describing* in this text.

Even though different preachers and teachers might mark different words, most of the important ones will be marked. It is these words that open the meaning of the text as the writer intended. They also show us the meaning of the text for our own hearers.

Now look at the way another text would be written by phrases and marked. Here is my copy of Psalm 1 with verbs underlined and main words of all kinds marked. What do you notice about this text?

Psalm 1:1-6

1 Blessed is the man
Who walks not
in the counsel
of the ungodly,
Nor stands
in the path
of sinners,

"Teach me good
judgment and
knowledge, For I
believe Your
commandments.

Before I was
afflicted I went
astray, But now I
keep Your word."
Psalm 119:66, 67

Nor sits
 in the seat
 of the scornful;
 2 But his delight is in the law
 of the LORD,
 And in His law he meditates
 day and night.

3 He shall be like a tree
Planted by the rivers of water,
 That brings forth its fruit
 in its season,
 Whose leaf also shall not wither;
 And whatever he does shall prosper.

4 The ungodly are not so,
 But are like the chaff
 which the wind drives away.

5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand
 in the judgment,
 Nor sinners in the congregation
 of the righteous.

6 For the LORD knows the way
 of the righteous,
 But the way
 of the ungodly
shall perish.

Some of the most important words in this text are *action words*. The righteous man is said not to “walk” in the counsel of the ungodly, nor to “stand” in the path of sinners, nor to “sit” in the seat of the scornful. He “meditates” on the law of the Lord. He is like a tree that is “planted” by rivers, “brings forth” its fruit, does not “wither.” He shall “prosper” in everything. In contrast, the ungodly are like the chaff that the wind “drives away.” They “shall not stand” in judgment. They shall “perish.”

Notice in the text the many *naming words* used. In this case, words usually used for *describing* are used to name certain men.

“Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully.”

Psalm 24:3, 4

Some are called “the ungodly,” “sinners,” and “the scornful” in the first verse. There is a striking picture of the godly man in verse 3, comparing him to a fruitful tree. Those God favors are called “the righteous” in verse 5. The text presents a vivid contrast of the “righteous” with the “ungodly.”

In our next lesson we will make notes of what we see in the text that helps understand its meaning. This will call for a sharp eye to the details in the words of the text.

Lesson Exercises

1. Review the main ideas of this lesson:
 - Marking the main words in the text will open the writer’s ideas to you.
 - In addition to *action* words, we will look for *naming* words and *describing* words.
 - Some Bible words are the basis for our beliefs about God.
2. Before moving to the next lesson, study other texts as we have done here. Copy them by hand, phrase by phrase. Then underline the verbs. Finally, mark the important words that carry the text’s meaning. I suggest that you study Matthew 5:13-16. Do not hurry. Take the time you need. As you study more texts, you will be able to work faster.

Lesson 7

Noting What You See

The more carefully you look at the text, the more you see. Now that you have written the text out by hand, you are beginning to see details you did not notice before. Underlining verbs and marking important words has also opened the text to you. The next step is to make your own notes about what you see in the text. Go back over your hand-written copy and write down your observations.

Looking and Seeing

Have you been to a doctor for an examination? Did you notice how he works with you? If you are sick, he asks you how you feel, or where you are in pain. He asks about other symptoms. Are you short of breath? Do you sleep well? Do you have a good appetite? He may also listen to your heart and your breathing. He may look in your mouth, your eyes, and your ears. He is looking for clues to your sickness.

In the natural world, the small things are very important. A skilled fisherman will watch the look of the water and the time of day. A skilled hunter will notice a broken twig, the slightest footprint, and animal droppings. A skilled farmer sees the movement of insects, spots on the leaves of his plants, changes in the weather.

A skilled police investigator is also alert to the small details. He sees the scratches around a lock. He notices faint footprints under the window. He notices a torn thread from someone's

Lesson 7

Making notes of what you see in the text will prepare you for identifying the writer's meaning.

Preparing the Message

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clothing. It is with these clues that he begins to understand what took place at a crime scene. What others miss, the investigator sees. Without noticing the smallest clue, he would not be able to do his job. Each of these careful observers is like a scientist who must see and write down the smallest details of his work.

You may be wondering what the work of these skilled observers has to do with the messenger of God in the study of the Bible text. It has very much to do with it. As you read and study your text, your first task is to look carefully for the details in the wording. You are not looking for a quick sermon idea. You are looking at what the text writer said and how he said it. You want to notice every clue to his meaning.

Some preachers use Bible texts as a support for their ideas. They already know what they want to say. They find a Bible verse to go with it so that their message will seem to have Bible authority. But the faithful messenger of God does not study his Bible in that way. He rather goes to the text to receive what it says. He wants to give the Bible truth to the people when he speaks to them.

To understand what the text is saying, we must study it carefully. We must see every possible detail. We must think about what those details mean. The words are to us like the ripples on the water for the fisherman, or the broken twig to the hunter. They will lead us to the meaning of the text. Then we can present that message to the people and they will hear the very Word of God.

Writing Our Notes

Now let's go back to our handwritten copy of John 3:1-8. Since you copied it on the left side of your sheet, you have room on the right side for your notes. I have written some of my notes here. They may not be the same things you would write down. But you

You are not looking for a quick sermon idea. You are looking at what the text writer said and how he said it.

can see from my notes how looking more closely at the words helps us understand the text.

John 3:1-8

1. There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.
2. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."
3. Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."
4. Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"
5. Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.
6. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.
7. "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'
8. "The wind blows where it wishes,

Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews

He wanted to talk with Jesus.

He came at night. Was he afraid?

He already had ideas about Jesus from seeing some of his miracles.

He thinks God is with Jesus.

He thinks only someone from God can do these signs.

Jesus seems to change the subject.

The word "born" is used 8 times in this text.

"Born again" pictures physical birth, but describes a new life in Christ.

Jesus refers to the "kingdom of God" two times, to "see" and "enter."

Nicodemus did not understand Jesus' use of "born again."

He was an old man.

He is taking the "born again" picture as literal instead of figurative.

Jesus talks about the "water" of physical birth and the "spirit" of the new birth.

The kingdom of God is different from the kingdoms of men.

Jesus contrasts the physical birth and the spiritual birth.

Though we see and hear evidence of the wind, we cannot control it.

and you hear the sound of it,
but cannot tell where it comes from
and where it goes.

*Neither can a man
control the Spirit of God
that gives new birth.*

So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Noticing Details in the Text

Even though different preachers and teachers might make different observations, they are still letting the text determine what they see. This is very important. We intend to teach the Bible instead of our own religious views. God uses human messengers, but He wants them to report His message faithfully.

Be careful with your notes to stay with the clues in the text. Do not begin to guess about ideas that the text does not give you. For instance, some teachers have said that "water" in verse 5 refers to the water of baptism. But Jesus is talking about birth. The "water" more likely refers to the water that comes when a child is born. It symbolizes physical birth. Baptism is taught in many other texts, but probably not in this one.

"Deal bountifully with
Your servant, *That* I
may live and keep
Your word. Open
my eyes, that I may
see wondrous things
from Your law."
Psalm 119:17, 18

For every note you make there should be words in the text you can point to that suggest it. Do not answer, "What do I see here?" by trying to think of some religious ideas. Instead answer that question by looking carefully at the words of the text.

Remember that you are trying to understand the meaning intended by the original writer of the text. You are not trying to make up a meaning that you prefer.

Now look at the observations I have noted. What are some of the details in the text we have noticed? Let's make a list. Getting some of our observations down in order can help us understand the text:

1. The word "born" is used 8 times in the text. The repetition makes us think this is an important idea.

2. Jesus compares the experience of putting faith in God to a baby being born. Each is a new beginning.
3. Nicodemus was an old man, a ruler of the Jews, and he came at night. Maybe he was afraid to be seen with Jesus.
4. Jesus speaks of “seeing” and “entering” the kingdom of God, a spiritual kingdom man cannot see.
5. Nicodemus did not understand being “born again” as a picture of new spiritual life.
6. Jesus contrasts the physical birth and the spiritual birth to help Nicodemus understand.
7. Jesus uses a picture of the *wind* to describe the unseen but real nature of the new birth.

You may think that all these observations on the text are too hard to see. Do not be discouraged if you do not see so many clues in the text at first. As you continue to study your Bible this way, you will become more and more aware of the little details in the text that help understand it.

Remember as you make note of what you see that your observations can be of any kind. They can be historical. You can note what you see about the language. You can see cultural details that are of interest. Your primary concern, however, is always with *theology*. The Bible was written to communicate a message about God and His ways with His creation. That is a theological message. That is what we are to teach the people.

In our next lesson, we will look again at our notes and the words marked in the text. The purpose will be to list all the Bible themes we see in the text. These themes will lead us to the main idea for our message.

Your primary concern is always with theology. The Bible was written to communicate a message about God and His ways with His creation. That is a theological message. That is what we are to teach the people.

Lesson Exercises

1. Review the main ideas of this lesson:

- A Bible teacher or preacher is like a scientist who sees the small details and understands what they mean.
 - The messenger who teaches the Bible will look carefully into the text for his message.
 - Though different messengers might note different things in the text, they are still looking to the text for their message.
 - The faithful messenger is trying to understand the meaning intended by the text writer.
2. You have already written out Psalm 1 and Matthew 5:13-16 and marked key words. Now go through and make notes of what you see in the details of those texts. Don't be afraid to write down your ideas. But be sure there is evidence in the text for your idea. Do not leave the text behind and begin to put your own thoughts about the subject.

Lesson 8

Listing Bible Themes

What do we mean by *Bible themes*? They are the ideas found throughout the Bible. They are the topics or subjects we must speak of if we talk about Bible teachings. Often these Bible themes are represented by particular words. So when the word appears in a text, the Bible student knows that theme is there.

The Bible themes we are looking for are *theological*. That means they are words about God and His dealings with His world. These theological themes are timeless. They are as important to your audience as they were to the ancient people of the Bible. The *theology* is the true message of the Bible. The language, history, and culture of the Bible help us interpret the theology.

In any text, we are expecting to find one theme that is the main idea of the portion. Other themes are there as well. These support the main idea and make it clearer. The themes we find in Bible texts are throughout the Bible in different combinations. Each text must be interpreted in terms of the way the themes appear in it. The more you study the Bible, the more familiar you will be with the Bible themes that are so important to our understanding of God and His ways with men.

Naming Ideas

In Lesson 6, we said that different words in the text function in different ways. Some words are the *action words* we call *verbs*. Others are *describing words* called *modifiers*. Some words are

Lesson 8

You can open the message of the text by identifying and listing the themes expressed in the text.

Preparing the Message

- Choose a text
- Copy the text
- Action words
- Important words
- Observations
- Bible themes
- The main idea
- A limiting theme
- Supporting ideas
- Major points
- The People
- Word pictures
- Telling stories
- Application
- Aiming for faith
- Outlining

naming words, and these are called *nouns*. Many other words hold the thought together in a text, but they do not carry Bible themes.

The *action* words often reveal Bible themes in a text. When you underline the action words in your text, you will see some of the main themes. We have already noticed that the word “born” appeared 8 times in John 3:1-8. That tells us that this is an important theme for this text. This word carries the Bible theme of the “new birth.”

Other action words in the text may help as you interpret it. One is “know,” for Nicodemus thought he knew something about Jesus. Another action word is “enter,” used literally of entering a second time into his mother’s womb, and used figuratively of entering the kingdom.

The *naming* words in a text can also reveal its themes. These words give a name to persons, to places and to things. But they also name ideas and feelings and qualities of character. A look at John 3:1-8 shows us that the *naming* words carry meaning as well. Here are “Nicodemus,” “Jesus,” “teacher,” “signs,” “kingdom,” “Spirit,” “flesh,” and “wind.” Let’s think about whether these can be Bible themes.

“Nicodemus” is not a Bible theme. It is the name of a man rather than a theological idea. “Jesus” is, of course, the major Bible theme. It is the name given to the Messiah in his earthly ministry. The names of people cannot be ideas for Bible themes. The name of Jesus is the exception.

Jesus is called “teacher.” The idea of *teaching* is a Bible theme. The word, “signs” points also to the Bible theme of *miracles*. “Kingdom of God” is a theme that appears throughout the Bible as well. “Spirit,” is a theme meaning the Holy Spirit. Or, it can mean the spirit of man.

“Remember the word to Your servant, Upon which You have caused me to hope. This *is* my comfort in my affliction, For Your word has given me life.”

Psalm 119:49, 50

“Flesh,” meaning the natural skin or body of man, is another important Bible theme. It often means something other than man’s skin or body. It can refer to the shortness of life and weakness of man. The word “flesh” is used by Paul to mean the sinful nature of man. This word for the body of man has become an illustration of the deeper problem of man’s corrupt nature. This is what we call *figurative* language.

Figurative Themes

Bible themes will often be *figurative*. This means the words identify common things in the natural world, but they stand for spiritual ideas. “Wind” is not a Bible theme, except as it is used figuratively to mean the storms of life or the Holy Spirit. As we have already said, “born again” is figurative. It does not mean going back into your mother and being born. It means being spiritually changed as you put your faith in Christ. When you write down the themes you see in a text, they will often be *figurative*.

One of the texts you practiced on in lesson 4 was Matthew 5:13-16. This text about “salt and light” is familiar to most Christians. At once, you recognize that these terms are *figurative*. Jesus does not mean actual salt, like you would use to season your food. He does not mean actual light, as comes from a lamp. He means something else. He means something about how Christians relate to their world.

Matthew 5:13-16

13 “You are the salt
of the earth;
but if the salt loses its flavor,
how shall it be seasoned?
It is then good
for nothing
but to be thrown out

“Now go, write it
before them on a
tablet, And note it on
a scroll, That it may
be for time to come,
Forever and ever.”
Isaiah 30:8.

and trampled underfoot
by men.

14 "You are the light
of the world.

A city that is set on a hill
cannot be hidden.

15 "Nor do they light a lamp
and put it under a basket,
but on a lampstand,
and it gives light
to all who are in the house.

16 "Let your light so shine
before men,
that they may see your good works
and glorify your Father
in heaven.

"These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father."

John 16:25

So as we write down the themes from this text, we will list these figurative words: "salt," "flavor," "seasoned," "thrown out," "trampled," "light," "lamp," "basket," "lampstand," "house," and "shine." Some of them are common Bible themes. Most of them are not. They are actions and things used to represent spiritual ideas. You must translate them from the *figurative* to the ideas they represent.

Many of Jesus' parables use *figurative* language like this. He talks about "seed" and "soils." He talks about fishing, farming, housekeeping, buying and selling, home building, weddings, banquets, weather, trees, birds, flowers, and many other such common features of life. He uses these common things to illustrate spiritual ideas. If we are to understand what He is saying, we must translate the *figurative* into the *literal*.

Many Bible Themes

The Bible reveals many great *themes*. These themes are ideas about God and His will. Some Bible themes tell us about

God Himself. These are themes like *the power of God, the love of God, the knowledge of God, and the grace of God*. These same great themes about God are found in many portions of Scripture, all through the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Other themes tell us about what God has done and what He will do. God *created* all that is. God *sustains* all creation. God *watches* over all that He has made. God *cares* for all His creation.

Some Bible themes tell us about man. He was made in the *image of God*. He was *tempted to sin*. He fell to the temptation and became *corrupt*. His sin brought him under the *wrath of God*. *Judgment* is coming to all men. But God provided a *Savior* for man, His Son, Jesus Christ. Now man can have his sins *forgiven* and the *promise* of a home in *heaven*. He can have a *new life* in Christ. These are wonderful themes in the Bible.

There seem to be more themes in the Bible than we can count. These ideas are what God wants His people to know. They appear in many places in the Bible. Sometimes the Bible themes are stated clearly in a text. Many of these great themes have specific Bible words to identify them. These are words like *sin, salvation, faith, grace, judgment, new birth, forgiveness, heaven, and hell*. When we see these words in a text, we know that theme is being discussed.

Sometimes the special word for the theme may not be in the text. This is true especially when the text has figurative language. There may be expressions like “salt” and “light” that must be interpreted as to their meaning. Remember that the theme is to be theological. For example, Genesis 3:1-8 does not use the word “temptation.” But the story of Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit is surely about temptation.

“Now when they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?’”
Acts 2:37

Our themes List

We have already listed the figurative themes we see in Matthew 5:13-16. Our other working text has been John 3:1-8. Now let's write our list of themes that appear there. We have already noted many of them in this lesson. Here is my list. How is yours different?

man	knowledge	born again	born of flesh
Pharisees	teacher from	kingdom of	born of Spirit
ruler	God	God	marveling
Jesus	signs	birth	must
night	God with us	born of water	

As I already said, some of the words marked in the text are not suitable for the list of themes. I left out "Nicodemus" because he was a man and could not be a theological theme. I left out "Jews" because it is a people, not an idea. I included "night" because sometimes it is *figurative* for sin and ignorance.

This list of themes allows us to move to the next step. Now we will choose from among these themes the one main theme of the text. We will answer the question, "What is the writer talking about?" with that one main subject.

"And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation.'"

Acts 2:40

Lesson Exercises

- Review the main ideas of this lesson:
 - Bible *themes* are ideas found throughout the Bible.
 - We expect to find in any text the one theme that is the main idea of that portion.
 - Other themes in a text will be supportive of the main theme.
 - Some themes are expressed literally, others figuratively.
- Go back to Psalm 1 and Romans 12:1, 2 again. This time list all the theological themes you find there. As you look at the figurative language, try to discern what the intended theological meaning is for each expression.

Lesson 9

Wording the Main Idea

Our study of the text now comes to a crossing point from the text to the sermon. We have written out the text by hand. We have identified the main words in the text. Now we will choose, from the themes in the text, the one subject that is the writer's intended topic. That idea will become the subject of our message.

The Power of Words

Words are powerful. God's word is especially powerful. The Bible says "the word of God is alive and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, penetrating to the separation of joints and marrow and soul and spirit. It is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). As messengers of God, we want to declare his word faithfully. We want our words to give His truth to the people.

Most human communication requires words. It is possible to talk with hand motions and facial signals. The deaf use sign language. But normally, if you want to bring a message from God's book, you will use spoken words. A very important task in your Bible study is to discover the text writer's intended message. Then you must find the right words to give that message to the people.

A good friend of mine was a craftsman in wood. He loved to work with wood. He enjoyed the beauty of wood. He enjoyed the texture and the smell of wood. He was able to create clocks, trays, and platters of wood to give to friends. In most parts of the world are woodcrafters who can carve and shape wood. They make

Lesson 9

Carefully choosing the best word to name the main idea of the text helps you to give a clear message to the people.

Preparing the Message

- Choose a text
- Copy the text
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figures of animals. They make jewelry. They make ornate boxes for your treasures.

Can a Bible messenger also be a skilled craftsman? I believe he must. His task is much more important than that of the woodcrafter. Instead of wood, God's messenger works in words. He should know the strength of words, and their weakness. He should love the beauty of words, their texture, and their sound. He should work to become as skilled with words as his gifts allow.

Whatever other skills you may have, I hope you will aim to become skilled in the use of language. Language includes our words and the way we commonly use them to speak to one another. With language, we can describe our experiences. We can express our wishes. We can tell our feelings. We can explain our ideas.

God's messenger works in words. He should know the strength of words, and their weakness. He should love the beauty of words, their texture, and their sound. He should work to become as skilled with words as his gifts allow.

Ideas are sometimes hard to put into words. God's messenger must teach the people ideas about God, about His law, about His promises. The biblical writer put his ideas about God into words. We study those words to understand them. Then we must choose words of our own to teach the people what God says. We can use words from the Bible. But we must also use other words as well to explain the meaning of the text.

With our words we try to express what is in our thoughts. We want the people to understand the words and have the same thoughts. Then we can be satisfied that we have given them God's message. Just as the ideas of the text writer of long ago come to use through his words, those same ideas from God will come to the people through our words.

Listing the Text Themes

In the other lessons, we worked on preparing a list of the

themes we find in John 3:1-8 and Matthew 5:13-16. Now we will go over that list and find the one main theme is for each text.

John 3:1-8	Text Themes
1. There <u>was</u> a <u>man</u> of the <u>Pharisees</u> <u>named</u> <u>Nicodemus</u> , a <u>ruler</u> of the <u>Jews</u> .	man ruler Jews
2. This man <u>came</u> to <u>Jesus</u> by <u>night</u> and <u>said</u> to Him, "Rabbi, we <u>know</u> that <u>You are</u> a <u>teacher</u> <u>come</u> from <u>God</u> ; for no one can <u>do</u> these <u>signs</u> that <u>You do</u> unless <u>God is</u> with him."	Jesus night knowledge teaching from God signs God with us Jesus
3. <u>Jesus answered</u> and <u>said</u> to him, "Most assuredly, I <u>say</u> to you, unless one <u>is born</u> again, he cannot <u>see</u> the <u>kingdom of God</u> ."	born again sight kingdom of God
4. <u>Nicodemus said</u> to Him, "How <u>can</u> a man <u>be born</u> when he <u>is</u> old? Can he <u>enter</u> a <u>second</u> time into his <u>mother's womb</u> and <u>be born</u> ?"	birth old age second birth mothers birth born of water born of Spirit
5. <u>Jesus answered</u> , "Most assuredly, I <u>say</u> to you, unless one <u>is born</u> of <u>water</u> and the <u>Spirit</u> , he cannot <u>enter</u> the kingdom of God.	enter kingdom of God born of flesh
6. "That which <u>is born</u> of the <u>flesh is</u> <u>flesh</u> , and that which <u>is born</u> of the <u>Spirit is</u> <u>spirit</u> .	born of spirit marvel
7. "Do not <u>marvel</u> that I <u>said</u> to you, 'You must <u>be born</u> again.'	necessity, new birth wind, will
8. "The <u>wind blows</u> where it <u>wishes</u> ,	hearing

and you hear the sound of it,
but cannot tell where it comes from
and where it goes.

source
destination
born of Spirit

So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

I have listed every theme I could identify in the text. Some of these themes name important Bible teachings. Others are less important. You will find these same themes related in different ways in many other texts.

Now our task is to choose one word to name the main theme of the text. That will become the one word for the subject of your message to the people. Here are some ways to choose that subject.

- Answer in one word this question, "What is the text writer talking about?" In this text, Jesus is talking with Nicodemus. John is writing to tell of their conversation. The main theme should be in one word if possible, or two if that is needed.
- Look for repeated words. In this text the word, "born" is used 8 times.
- See if the subject you choose is suitable for all the verses in the text. Even though the first two verses do not say "born," they tell of the visit of Nicodemus for this conversation with Jesus.
- Discover the meaning of figurative language in the text. The word "born" means that a person comes from his mother's body into the hands of his family. Jesus uses the word figuratively to mean a person having new life through faith in God.

What do you think the subject of the text is? It seems to me that the subject is "second birth" or "new birth." That is what Jesus

"But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

John 20:31

is discussing and John is reporting. So, if the text is about “New Birth,” my message to the people will be about “New Birth.”

Now let’s look at Matthew 5:13-16 and the themes in it.

Matthew 5:13-16	Text Themes
13 “You <u>are</u> the salt of the earth; but if the salt <u>loses</u> its flavor, how <u>shall</u> it <u>be</u> <u>seasoned</u> ? It <u>is</u> then good for nothing but to be <u>thrown</u> out and <u>trampled</u> underfoot by men.	salt earth salt flavor seasoned goodness, for nothing thrown out trampled men
14 “You <u>are</u> the light of the world. A city that <u>is</u> <u>set</u> on a hill cannot <u>be</u> <u>hidden</u> .	light world city hidden
15 “Nor do they <u>light</u> a lamp and <u>put</u> it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it <u>gives</u> light to all who <u>are</u> in the house.	light lamp cover lampstand light
16 “ <u>Let</u> your light so <u>shine</u> before men, that they may <u>see</u> your good works and <u>glorify</u> your Father in heaven.	house shining your light, men see, good works glorify God the Father heaven

- First, we ask, “What is Jesus talking about?” We are not sure because most of his words are figurative language.
- Looking for repeated words, we see “salt” twice, plus “flavor” and “seasoning.” Later in the text, we see “light” four times, with “lamp,” “lampstand,” and “shine.”

- Neither “salt” nor “light” is suitable for all the verses, but they go together for one idea. What is the one idea?
- The key to this text will be in discovering what the figurative words, “salt” and “light” are intended to mean.

In this text, “salt” represents the believer as he relates to the “earth.” “Light” represents the believer as he relates to the “world.” The believer’s “flavor” gives “seasoning” to the earth. The believer is to shine his “light” to give “light” to the world. These two pictures seem to be talking about the Christian’s *influence* on the people around him. Salt *influences* everything it touches. Light *influences* everything where it shines.

If we name the subject for this text “influence,” will that open the text to us? Does it work with all the verses? Does it make the message of the text clear? Can we then teach the people what the text is saying for their own understanding?

In our next lesson, we will continue to name the message by making the subject more complete. We will choose another word to limit the scope of our subject.

Lesson Exercises

1. Review the main ideas of this lesson:
 - God’s messenger must choose the right words.
 - God’s messenger is to be a craftsman skilled in working with words.
 - From the words of the text writer, the preacher can identify the one main subject of the writer’s thought.
2. To practice the task of this lesson look again at Psalm 1 and Romans 12:1, 2. You have listed themes from these texts. What subject would you choose from these themes for each text? Do you have clear reasons for selecting that subject?

"These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly, in the mountain from the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; and He added no more. And He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me."

Deuteronomy 5:22

Lesson 10

Limiting the Subject

We have identified the Bible themes in the text. Then we chose from those themes the one that seemed to be the main subject of the text. Now we continue the process by defining that subject more carefully. For this task, we will look again at the text and discover how the text writer limited the scope of his discussion on the subject.

Understanding the Text

The best way to interpret any text of Scripture is by studying other texts that speak on the same subject. Ideas in the New Testament are rooted in the Old Testament. The Prophets preached principles from the Law of God. The teachings of Jesus are based on Old Testament truths. The New Testament Letters explain the life and teachings of Jesus from the Gospels.

The great themes of the Bible are much too broad to be fully expressed in one text. These ideas from God are woven into the design of the whole Bible. They can be found in the Old Testament and in the New. They will speak in the Psalms and in the New Testament letters. They are present in the Books of Law and in the Gospels.

You will not bring a theme to the text from your own thoughts. You will never try to turn and shape the text to fit your ideas. You will never seek out a text that seems to prove your viewpoint. You will not study it for how it seems to support your

Lesson 10

To follow the thought of the text, you will choose another word revealed there to limit the scope of your subject.

Preparing the Message

- Choose a text
- Copy the text
- Action words
- Important words
- Observations
- Bible themes
- The main idea
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- Supporting ideas
- Major points
- The People
- Word pictures
- Telling stories
- Application
- Aiming for faith
- Outlining

thoughts. Rather you will let the text speak for itself. You will study the text for its intended message.

The faithful messenger of God may think of a theme that is needed by his people. He may seek a Bible text that speaks on that theme. But he will always study the text carefully to allow the ideas of the text writer to speak. He will make his first task discovering what the text writer and the Holy Spirit intended to say.

It is very important that you do not limit your preaching and teaching to your own wisdom. Only the text of Scripture has the full counsel of God. You may be a godly person. You may have many years of experience. You may have good Bible knowledge and great wisdom in the truths of God. But you must still study God's written word for His message to the people. Only then are you a faithful messenger of God.

It is very important that you do not limit your preaching and teaching to your own wisdom. Only the text of Scripture has the full counsel of God.

A Complete Text Idea

God's messenger will seek to discover the one theme that he takes to be the intended *subject* of the text writer. In this task he aims to answer the question, "What is the text writer talking about?" Then he will look again for another word in the text to be the *limiting theme* that will narrow the scope of the *subject*. For this second theme he will ask, "How does the text writer limit the scope of his subject in this text?"

In our study of John 3:1-8, we have suggested that the writer intended to deal with the subject of "New Birth." This idea is very important for understanding the Christian life. We learn from this idea that Christians are "born again."

This text in John is a key passage on the "New Birth." Sometimes we call this idea the "Second Birth" or "Regeneration." This subject is mentioned also in 1 Peter 1:23 and Titus 3:5. Even

though John 3:1-8 is the main text on this subject, it does not provide all the Bible information on the “New Birth.”

As you study any Bible text, you want to discover the main idea in that text. Though the theme or subject can be stated in one or two words, it may not yet be a complete idea. It is too broad. It is too great for this one text. We must look at the text carefully again to see the particular way the writer limits the scope of what he says about that subject.

In John 3:1-8, the writer is not telling everything that could be said about the New Birth. He is rather reporting on a conversation that dealt with this subject. In this conversation, Jesus was talking to an elder in the Jewish Council. This man was very religious. He thought that God was pleased with him. He did not think he needed to change. Jesus wanted him to know that all his religious activity would not change his heart. He needed to be born again.

Look at the text. Notice that Jesus told him that he could not see and could not enter the kingdom of God unless he was born again. The main phrase in the text seems to be in verse 7 where he says, “You must be born again.” He makes clear that the new birth is a “must” in the kingdom of God. This idea of *necessity* is the particular focus of Jesus’ teaching here on the new birth.

I am suggesting that the idea of this text is “The Necessity of the New Birth.” To say that the text is about “The New Birth” is too broad for the apparent intentions of the writer. Jesus was focused on the “necessity” of the new birth. That limits the scope of the discussion. It also helps to express a complete idea.

Finding The Limiting Theme

How will you discover this limiting theme in your text? Let me suggest steps to take:

1. List all the Bible themes you discover in the text.

“I understand more
than the ancients,
Because I keep Your
precepts. I have
restrained my feet
from every evil way,
That I may keep
Your word.”
Psalm 119:100, 101

2. Select the one theme that is the main subject of the text.
3. Look for a second prominent theme in the text.
4. Test this second theme as a limiting factor for the main subject.
5. Put the two themes together to state the *Text Idea*.

Let's go through these steps to discover the *limiting theme* for Matthew 5:13-16.

The first step is to discover and list all the Bible themes that are in the text. Here is our list of themes from Matthew 5:13-16:

salt	thrown out	light	shining your
earth	trampled	lamp	light
salt	men	cover	men
flavor	light	lampstand	see
seasoned	world	light	good works
goodness	city	house	glorify God
for nothing	hidden		heaven

"Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever, For they *are* the rejoicing of my heart. I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes Forever, to the very end."
Psalm 119:111, 112

We have selected the one theme that is the main subject of the text. Though the word does not appear in the text, the figurative use of "salt" and "light" suggests that Jesus is really talking about "influence." That subject seems to work well through all the verses of the text.

Now we are to look for a second prominent theme in the text that might serve as the *limiting theme*. "Salt" and "light" are figurative language for the main subject, "influence." As I have studied this text, I noticed that the word "men" appeared two times. Besides that, "earth" and "world" seem to mean the same thing, the people around the believer. The phrase, "all who are in the house," also points to the other people we know. From these indications, I have decided that a good secondary theme is "others," or "your world," or "men."

Another possible *limiting theme* is suggested by the use of “you” and “your” in the text. Jesus says, “You are the salt of the earth.” He says, “You are the light of the world.” He says, “Let your light so shine” and talks about “your good works” and “your Father in heaven.” It seems obvious that He is speaking to believers.

One more possible *limiting theme* in this text is “Christ.” Even though “Jesus” or “Christ” does not appear in the text, we know that Jesus is speaking. We also know that the believer’s influence is not his own, but is for the sake of Christ. We could just take for granted that the word “Christ” must be a part of the idea.

So, we have three possible themes that might serve as a *limiting theme* for the text. Do you see another one? You can see, as we have tried to work through this process, that you have to keep your eyes on the text. But you also must look at the larger portion, in this case the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5-7. Your growing understanding of Scripture will help you interpret the text.

Our next step is to test the possible *limiting theme* by joining it to the *main subject*. The *limiting theme* should help focus the *main subject*. Would the theme “others” effectively limit the subject of “influence?” How about “believer” with “influence?” Or does “Christ” work best to limit the idea of “influence?” Each of them seems to make sense when joined with the subject, “influence.”

Our final step is to put the two words together as a statement of the *Text Idea*. Together they should express a complete idea. Matthew 5:13-16 is spoken by Jesus to his disciples. So, we may see both “believers” and “Christ” as a necessary part of any *Text Idea*. We could say that the *Text Idea* is “Influencing Others for Christ.” Or we could call it “The Believer’s Influence for Christ.” Either of these seems to work for the *Text Idea*.

“You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; For they *are* ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, For Your testimonies *are* my meditation.”
Psalm 119:98. 99

How can we settle on one limiting theme only? Consider this. Since “believers” is understood as those Jesus is addressing, let’s leave that idea for a discussion in the sermon. Also, point out as you teach on this text that our influence is to be for Christ. The most helpful *limiting theme* is “others,” suggested by the words “earth,” “world,” and “men” in the text.

When I preached this text, I called it “Influencing Your World for Christ.” By “your world,” I meant the other people all around each of us who are affected by our life and witness. That seems to be what Jesus is talking about. He is using salt and light as analogies because they affect what they touch. In a similar way, the Christian is to affect the lives of those he touches.

The test for our *Text Idea* will be whether the text wants to speak to this subject. In our next lesson, we will see what it says by studying the writer’s treatment of his subject. We will ask, “What is the writer saying about this idea.”

“Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord *is*.”
Ephesians 5:17

Lesson Exercises

1. Review the main ideas of this lesson:
 - The great Bible *themes* are too broad to be expressed in one text.
 - We expect to find in any text the one theme that is the main idea of that portion and one theme to limit its scope.
 - A theme may be revealed in the text even though the word does not appear there.
2. Study Psalm 1 and Romans 12:1, 2 for the limiting factor, to narrow the scope of the main subject for each text. Remember that the word you use may be only suggested by the text.

Lesson 11

Looking for the Parts

The oldest plan for a Bible sermon is to go through a text verse by verse. The preacher who takes this approach may not try to identify the writer's *subject* or how he *limits* that subject in this text. He just explains the text one verse at a time. While this is a good method, I want to show you a better one. In this lesson, we will learn how to study the text for the way the text writer presents his subject.

What He is Saying

We have searched the text writer's words for his ideas. Then we listed these ideas as themes that appeared in the text. From these themes, we chose the most likely one as the main *subject* of the writer in this text. To bring clarity and focus to the subject, we chose a *limiting theme*. Now we are ready to look at the writer's words again. This time we will analyze his *treatment* of his subject in the text.

We are not talking yet about the structure of the sermon. We are still studying the text for what the writer says. We have asked two questions about the text writer's words. The first question led us to the writer's *subject*. We asked, "What is the text writer talking about?" Then we asked a question to lead us to the *limiting theme* that focuses the text subject. We asked, "How does the writer limit the scope of what he is talking about?"

Now we have a third question to ask. This one is designed to lead us to the writer's supporting ideas on his subject. We ask,

Lesson 11

You will begin the outlining process by searching through the text to see what the writer has to say about his subject.

Preparing the Message

- Choose a text
- Copy the text
- Action words
- Important words
- Observations
- Bible themes
- The main idea
- A limiting theme
- Supporting ideas
- Major points
- The People
- Word pictures
- Telling stories
- Application
- Aiming for faith
- Outlining

“What does the writer have to say about his subject?” With this question, we are recognizing that the writer may have presented several aspects of his *subject* in the text. Before we decide how to organize the sermon from this text, we want to see how the writer organized his own ideas.

The messenger of God wants to preach what God has said in his written Word. To do that he wants to follow the ideas of the text writer. Not only does he want to present to the people the subject of the text, he wants to give them the supporting ideas for that subject as they unfold in the text.

Noticing Details in the Text

Remember that your work calls for careful observation. You are like a detective looking for clues at a crime scene. You are like an investigator making notes of what the evidence teaches you. You are like a hunter in the forest noticing clues as to when an animal has passed this way and what kind it was.

Do you have an eye for such details? We have noticed that in many kinds of work an expert eye for details is needed. A farmer can see in the soil, in the sky, and in his plants the clues that help him plan his work. An accountant can see in the columns of numbers the story of a business. A teacher can see in the faces of her students whether they are learning or need special help.

A Bible teacher must also be able to look at his text for details that help him understand the meaning of the text. As we look at the text writer’s treatment of his subject, we find ourselves working as investigators again. Here are some of the clues you want to see:

- Notice *action* words and *naming* words in the text.
- Notice *repeated* words in the text and consider whether they present an important idea.

Not only does he want to present to the people the subject of the text, he wants to give them the supporting ideas for that subject as they unfold in the text.

- Notice *connecting* words like *and, but, when* and *that*. These words show the relationship between ideas.
- Notice *figurative* words that describe a Bible truth in terms of a familiar earthly experience or thing.
- Notice *descriptive* words that tell you more about the people and ideas in the text.
- Notice how the various words work together.

Necessity of the New Birth

Look with me at John 3:1-8 for what the writer (John) and the speaker (Jesus) say about the new birth. I have suggested that the writer's subject is "new birth" and the limiting factor is "necessity." That means we take the writer's main subject to be "New Birth." We see that he limits his discussion of the new birth by the idea of "necessity." So the text subject we are using is "The Necessity of the New Birth."

The next step is to take our proposed text subject through the passage, a verse at a time. We are looking for the particular ideas about the necessity of the new birth. These are the supporting ideas to help explain that the new birth is necessary. We are aiming to answer the question, "What is the text writer saying about his subject?"

The first two verses open the story and introduce Nicodemus. They do not seem to say anything specific about the necessity of the new birth.

The first verse that states clearly the connection of "necessity" and "new birth" is verse 3. Here Jesus says, "Unless one is born again, he *cannot see the kingdom of God*." Jesus is telling Nicodemus that he must be born again to "see" the kingdom of God. This seems to be a response to Nicodemus' mention of "signs" in verse 2. He apparently thinks he sees God at work.

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."
2 Timothy 2:15

In verse 5, Jesus says, “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot *enter* the kingdom of God.” Jesus seems to be responding to Nicodemus’ question about “entering” his mother’s womb as an old man. Nicodemus seems to be confused about the figurative language. He is talking in verse 4 about physical birth. Jesus is using “birth” to represent a spiritual change. So, Jesus distinguishes between “born of water” and “born of the Spirit.”

Verse 6 seems to be a further explanation of the difference between the physical birth and the spiritual birth. To enter the spiritual kingdom, one must have spiritual life by the Holy Spirit. Being born physically (of the flesh) makes one a physical being. To be spiritually alive, one must be born of the Spirit.

Now we come to verses 7 and 8. This part is difficult to understand. Here Jesus introduces another figurative word as he talks about “the wind.” He leaves the “birth” picture and shifts to the figurative use of the word “wind.”

The wind is like the Holy Spirit. Just as the wind blows where it wishes, so the Spirit does as He wishes. Just as you can sense the wind by its sound, so you might sense the Spirit’s movement by some effect. Just as you cannot tell where the wind comes from or where it is going, neither can you predict the movement of the Spirit.

So, the person born of the Spirit cannot control the Holy Spirit. He cannot be sure where He comes from or where He is going. But the born-again person can sense the movement of the Spirit. He can experience the work of the Spirit in his life. Our experience with the wind pictures our experience with the Spirit.

My interpretation of what Jesus is saying here is this. Nicodemus was a very religious person who sought to please God by keeping rules and observing rituals. He pursued his relationship

“And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke the word of God with boldness.”
Acts 4:31

with God by religious activities. Jesus was telling him that his relationship with God should be of a different sort. Rather than trying to please God with religious activities, he should try to discern the sovereign activity of God. In this, I see a third idea about the “Necessity of the New Birth.” A person must be born again to rightly relate to God as Spirit.

In the next lesson, we will look again at this text.

Remember, at this point we are aiming to discover the way the writer talks about his subject. This is not yet the outline for a lesson or sermon. The structure of our message should follow the text writer’s structure. But we will often have to choose different wording as we present the same ideas to the people in this generation.

Romans 12:1, 2

Look at how the structure is revealed in another text. We have already pointed out the importance of the “action words” in any text. These verbs are often the key to the writer’s thought. Be sure to watch the verbs closely when you are answering the question, “What is the writer saying about his subject?”

Open your Bible to Romans 12:1, 2. This text provides a very good example of the importance of action words. The verbs in this passage reveal the organization of the text. Read these verses and notice the verbs there: *beseech*, *present*, *be not conformed*, *be transformed*, *prove*. When you look at what Paul is “beseeching” the readers to do, you can immediately see a simple structure:

- *present yourself* to God
- *do not be conformed* to the world
- *be transformed* by the renewing of your mind

The final verb is *prove*. The wording is “that you may prove . . . the will of God.” The word *that* here means *in order that* or *for the*

The structure of our message should follow the text writer’s structure. But we will often have to choose different wording as we present the same ideas to the people in this generation.

purpose of. So, the text is saying that believers are to take these three actions in order to prove the will of God, that it is “good,” and “acceptable,” and “perfect.”

So, the verbs in the text tell us that all the action is for *proving the will of God.* The writer (Paul) is saying that the believer should take three ongoing actions to prove God’s will. These are very important ideas to teach the people. The rest of the words in the text support these action words by providing additional information.

You could teach this passage by just using the writer’s words as your statements of truth. In our next lesson, however, we will talk about how to plan the wording of these ideas so that your audience can better understand the teachings here. We will continue working with the structure of the text, as it becomes the structure of the message.

Lesson Exercises

1. Review the main ideas of this lesson:
 - We have looked for answers to the question, “What is the writer saying about his subject.”
 - We concentrate our attention on what the writer is saying in the text.
 - We are looking for the details in the text.
 - We search the text for the writer’s ideas that support his subject.
 - We see that verbs may lead us to the writer’s structure.
2. Study Psalm 1 and Matthew 9:35-38 to discover the writer’s treatment of his subject in each text. Look for the supporting ideas that complete the main idea.

“Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, For I have hoped in Your ordinances. So shall I keep Your law continually, Forever and ever. And I will walk at liberty, For I seek Your precepts.”
Psalm 119:43-45

Lesson 12

Phrasing Major Points

Now we come to the bridge across the gap. The distance is wide between the ancient world of the Bible and that of your audience. Yours is a different age, a different culture, and a different language. How will you take the ideas of the text to this generation as God's message for today? That is the challenge of this lesson. Here we will move from an analysis of the text to the wording of sermon ideas.

What kind of ideas are we to bring to our people from the text? Do they need to know Bible *history*? Perhaps. Do they need to know the *culture* of the Bible peoples? Perhaps. Do they need to know the *geography* of the Bible lands? Perhaps. But there is one aspect of Bible knowledge they need to receive without fail. It is *theology*. This is the message of Scripture about God and His dealings with His creation.

Our challenge is to get the theological message from the text across the gap of time, and culture and language. To do that we have taken several steps in our study of the text. (1) We have identified the many themes in the text. Then, (2) we chose the one theme that we took to be the text writer's subject. To focus that subject, (3) we chose another theme from the text to limit the scope of the subject. (4) We have then identified the supporting ideas the writer gives on his subject.

Now our task is to word carefully those ideas for our own audience. This will allow us to take the theological message to the

Lesson 12

The text writer's ideas for aspects of his subject can be put into carefully worded phrases for the main points of the message.

Preparing the Message

- Choose a text
- Hand copy text
- Action words
- Important words
- Observations
- Bible themes
- Word main idea
- Limit the subject
- Supporting ideas
- Major points
- The People
- Word pictures
- Stories
- Application
- Aiming for faith
- Outlining

people from the text. So, let's return to the texts we have been studying and see how we might word their message for today.

The Necessity of the New Birth

Look again at the text in John 3:1-8. If you were to state the idea of the text in a sentence, what would you say? I have worded it this way, "The new birth is necessary in the kingdom of God." The two themes that make the idea are "new birth" and "necessity." We found these themes in the text. One we call the *subject* and the other we called the *limiting theme*.

After a careful examination of all the words of the text, we took these themes to be what the writer intended to say. He is talking about his *subject*, the "new birth," and he *limits* his discussion to the "necessity" of the new birth. So we put these two themes together to make the complete idea, "The Necessity of the New Birth." In our idea as a sentence, we include the theme of "the kingdom of God" as Jesus does in the text.

We ask, "What is the kingdom of God?" It is that place where God reigns as King. It is an unseen spiritual kingdom in the hearts of men. Only those who are born again can understand or enter it. Nicodemus, as a religious leader, surely thought he was in the kingdom of God. But Jesus is telling him that without the new birth he cannot see or enter that kingdom.

So, we have a formula for stating our message idea as a sentence. We include these ingredients: *subject*, *limiting theme*, and *other key text themes* like "God," "spiritual," or "kingdom of God." These other themes may be implied in the text or stated clearly. They show that the message is theological.

The Text Writer's Treatment

The third question we asked as we studied the text themes was this, "What is the writer saying about his subject?" We know

So, we have a formula for stating our message idea as a sentence. We include these ingredients: subject, limiting theme, and other key text themes.

that he will usually present his subject in a number of ways. This is the writer's treatment of his subject.

We do this often in our conversation. You could say, "I have some beautiful horses." Then you can say about your horses, "One beautiful horse is white. One beautiful horse is black. One beautiful horse is spotted. One beautiful horse is brown". So, your main idea is "beautiful horses." But you are saying that they are black, white, spotted, and brown.

In Lesson 11, we analyzed the text for what the writer was saying about his subject. Now let's look at those ideas again and see the theological statements we want to make in our message for this generation.

We have found in his words that Jesus is talking about "The Necessity of the New Birth." Then we discovered in verse 3 that He told Nicodemus, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." This, then, is one of the reasons in this text why the new birth is necessary.

Nicodemus thought he saw the hand of God in Jesus' miraculous signs. But he did not understand that Jesus was the Messiah. He did not know the meaning of what he saw. That kind of spiritual insight can come only to the one who is born again, and so able to see the kingdom of God.

For our message on this text, we can say, *The new birth is necessary to see the kingdom of God.* This statement does not name Nicodemus. It is not about the past. It is the truth for all time and for all people.

Verse 5 is worded in the text very much like verse 3. Here Jesus says to Nicodemus, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." Jesus is again responding to what Nicodemus has said about being born when he

"Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever."
1 Peter 1:23

is old. Jesus wants him to see that He is speaking figuratively. “Born of water” refers to the physical birth. “Born of the Spirit” refers to spiritual birth.

So, the new birth is not a matter of beginning again from your mother. It is not “entering” into her body a second time. It is rather being born a second time spiritually and “entering” the kingdom of God. For our message on this text we can say, “*The new birth is necessary to enter the kingdom of God.*” This offers a second reason the new birth is necessary in the kingdom of God.

The next part of the text is in verses 7 and 8. In these verses, Jesus continues talking about the “birth” illustration. But he also uses the figure of “the wind.” Just as the believer experiences the wind, so can he experience the Holy Spirit, but only if he is born again. Nicodemus approached God through his ritual and rules. The illustration of the wind suggests that we are to relate to him by spiritual relationship.

At this point, a number of statements could be used to give this part of your message to the people. You could say, “*The new birth is necessary to experience the Spirit of God.*” Do you think of other theological issues that are suggested by the “wind” illustration? We will consider it again in our next lesson.

Now let’s return to Romans 12:1, 2 and see how we might word the truths of that text.

Proving the Will of God

In our examination of this text in the last lesson, we noted that the verbs in the text suggest an outline of the writer’s thinking. We saw a connecting word, “that,” which was very important for understanding the text. The three actions of believers that Paul calls for are “that you may prove” the will of God. We can say, then, that the *subject* is “will of God.” The *limiting theme* is “prove.”

“And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. . . . And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.”
Acts 2:2. 4

This means “give evidence for” or “demonstrate.” Paul is describing how the Christian can prove in his own experience that the will of God is “good,” and “acceptable,” and “perfect.”

The three actions he names are then ways to prove God’s will in ones own experience. The first is “present your bodies a living sacrifice.” We can say, “*The Christian can prove the will of God by presenting himself wholly to God.*”

The second action called for in the text is, “do not be conformed to this world.” We can say “*The Christian can prove the will of God by refusing the world’s corrupting influence.*”

The third admonition of Paul in the text is, “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” For this idea we can say in our message, “*The Christian can prove the will of God by submitting to the transforming power of God’s Word.*” The renewing of your mind can only come as you are affected by the truth of God’s Word.

More Personal Wording

The wording of the ideas in these texts can be made more personal by addressing the hearer directly. Instead of saying, “The new birth is necessary,” you can say, as Jesus did, “You must be born again.” Then our three sentences are:

1. You must be born again to see the kingdom of God.
2. You must be born again to enter the kingdom of God.
3. You must be born again to experience the Spirit of God.

For the Romans 12 text, we can also change the wording to make it more direct and personal. Instead of “*The Christian can demonstrate the will of God,*” you can say, “*You can experience the will of God.*” The three statements would be as follows:

1. You can experience the will of God by presenting yourself wholly to God.

“You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; For they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation.”
Psalm 119:98, 99.

2. You can experience the will of God by resisting the world's corrupting influence.
3. You can experience the will of God by submitting to the transforming power of God's Word.

These two texts happened to have three supporting ideas each. That does not mean that your message will always have three points. The supporting ideas in the text may vary in number from text to text. Your message will follow the text in that regard.

Lesson Exercises

1. Review the main ideas of this lesson:
 - Our purpose was to choose carefully the words we can use to give the ideas in the text to our audience.
 - God's messenger is presenting *theology* from his text.
 - God's messenger is to be a skilled observer of the details in the text.
 - From the words of the text writer, we can find the supporting ideas on his subject.
2. Your aim in this exercise is to word the supporting ideas in the text in such a way as to make them clear to your audience. Look at what each writer is saying about his main idea in Psalm 1 and Matthew 9:35-38. Write the supporting theological ideas as you would give them to the people.

Lesson 13

Thinking of the People

On the one hand, the messenger of God will deal carefully with the written Word of God. On the other hand, he will carefully study the people who hear his message. In most cases, God's servant will work among his own people. He will understand them because he has come from them. But God calls some to go to those of other languages and cultures. Then he will have to study to learn their thoughts and customs.

In one sense, all people everywhere are the same. God creates them all. They have all fallen into sin. They are all in need of a Savior. In another sense, they are all different. They speak in different sounds. They relate to one another in different ways. They trace their history with different stories. They worship many different gods. So, the messenger of God knows that people everywhere are different and they are alike.

The Messenger's Attention

Most of our study in this workbook has been about understanding the text of Scripture. We want to know the meaning of the original writer. So, we study his words, his sentences, his pictures and his stories. We work to discover the theological ideas in his words and use our own words to make them clear to the people. We study the text writer's message for his generation and take from it God's message for all generations. Our attention has been on the text in all its details.

Lesson 13

Just as the messenger of God studies the written word carefully, he will study the people who are to hear it.

Preparing the Message

- Choose a text
- Copy the text
- Action words
- Important words
- Observations
- Bible themes
- The main idea
- A limiting theme
- Supporting ideas
- Major points
- The People
- Word pictures
- Telling stories
- Application
- Aiming for faith
- Outlining

The preacher's attention must also be on the people who will hear his message. In one hand he holds his Bible, the written Word of God. With the other hand he reaches out to touch the people who need to hear God's message. God's messenger is their spokesman for the kingdom of God. He is their voice for the thoughts of God. He is the herald of the grace of God in Christ.

Just as God's messenger studies the written text in all its details, so he will study the people as well. He knows that they will hear his message only if he speaks to them in their way. He must use their language. He must relate to their customs. He must know their history. He must connect with them in terms of the way they live their lives. To speak to them in this way, he will have to study the people as he studies the text.

Where do you think the heart of God is as His messenger speaks to the people? The Holy Spirit is working in everything about the message. But His heart is surely with the people for whom Christ died. The Good Shepherd is most attentive to the sheep. If the attention of the Spirit is to the people, the messenger of God should also be thinking about the people.

Even before he begins his study of a text, God's messenger has the needs of the people on his mind. As he studies, he cannot help thinking about the audience he will face with this message. When he plans his words, he will be seeing the faces of the people in his mind. Just as the heart of God is toward the people, so is the heart of His messenger.

Studying the People

If the messenger of God is working with his own countrymen, he may understand them well already. Even so, he will want to learn about their attitudes and their experiences. He will want to discover how receptive they are to God and His Word.

In one hand, he holds his Bible, the written word of God. With the other hand, he reaches out to touch the people who need to hear God's message. God's messenger is their spokesman for the kingdom of God.

If the messenger of God is called to a people unlike his own, he will have to study the people more carefully. They will have different customs, different taboos, and different history. The more he understands these people, the better he will be able to declare God's truth to them.

Study their religious views. If you are preaching the message of God, you will challenge the religious views of the people. It will be important for you to understand their religion, especially if they do not believe in Christ. You will plan your message carefully to find an opening in their thoughts for the truth of God.

Study their language. The language of any people will explain why they live the way they do. Listen carefully to the things they say. Study their words. Notice how the youth speak to elders and how men and women speak to one another. Learn the special words that are code language in the tribe.

Study their economic conditions. What kind of work do the people do? Are the people generally hard working and self-sufficient? Or do they wait for someone else to help them? When you plan your message, you will want to speak to them in terms of their economic condition. You will want to draw pictures that are familiar in their work.

Study their social customs. Cultural background and customs will affect how the people hear your message. An important area in any culture is family life. The roles of men and women vary in different customs. How elders are treated is important. Also, look at wedding customs, ceremonies for a child coming of age, and traditions for honoring the dead.

Study their moral life. Sometimes the moral life of the people will have good features you can encourage. Many people

“But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because he knew all *men*, and he had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.”
John 2:24, 25

groups have strict rules about theft or marriage faithfulness. Others do not. You can say a good word about some of their moral ideas. But you will have to give them new standards from God's Word for other areas.

Study their receptivity to God's Word. The openness of the people to the word of God can vary because of the conditions of their life. Refugees are usually more receptive than affluent merchants. Those with long traditions of secular thinking are usually less open than those accustomed to religion. You will want to understand these conditions as you prepare your messages.

Text Ideas and Needs

The challenge of God's messenger is to bring the timeless message of God from Scripture to the particular audience he faces as he speaks. His message becomes a bridge to God's truth for the people. It becomes a voice for God's revelation to the people. The servant of God must be faithful to the Scripture and to the people.

Every biblical idea has a corresponding need in man. Every person is interested in his own personal problems and needs. Any message that addresses those needs will have his attention. Whatever the need in man, it can be traced to a promise of grace in Scripture. The messenger of God can connect Bible ideas with needs in his audience.

If you preach "You must be born again" from John 3, you know that the people need this new beginning with God. They are spiritually dead. They are outside the kingdom family of God. They have no experience of the Spirit's work in their lives. These spiritual needs result in personal trouble and pain that can be a point of contact for the preacher.

Whatever the need in man, it can be traced to a promise of grace in Scripture. The messenger of God can connect Bible ideas with needs in his audience.

You might preach from Psalm 1. There the godly man avoids the advice of the ungodly. The people listen too much to the ungodly. They do not know where to turn. Tell them about the godly man: “His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.” Show them how they will be like a well-watered and fruitful tree.

You may preach a message from 1 John 1:9 about forgiveness. You know the people have guilt for their sins. You know they carry regret for a life of wrong choices. Connect their pain with the promise of God’s forgiveness. Show them how Jesus provides this wonderful blessing through His shed blood (1 John 1:7). Explain to them that they need only confess to receive God’s forgiveness in Christ.

Praying for the People

Your most important thoughts about the people will be when you pray for them. The messenger of God must have the power of God as he declares the Word of God.

Pray for yourself as God’s messenger. Ask God to cleanse your heart of sin (1 John 1:7). Ask Him to fill you with the Spirit (Galatians 5:16). Ask Him to open the mysteries of the Scripture to you (John 16:13). Ask Him to set you afire with passion for the message (1 Corinthians 9:16). Ask him to give you the best words for helping the people understand (1 Corinthians 2:4). Ask God to make you bold with His truth (Acts 4:29).

Claim the power of God’s Word. Affirm that the Word of God is “alive and powerful, sharper than an two-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12). Thank God that His Word will not return empty, but will accomplish what He intends (Isaiah 55:11). Affirm that God’s Word is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in right living (2 Timothy 3:16).

“The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints”
Ephesians 1:18

Pray that the people may be open to the Word of God. Ask God to allow them to hear it gladly (Mark 6:20). Pray that the Holy Spirit may overcome their spiritual blindness (2 Corinthians 4:3-6). Pray that their eyes may be opened, to turn them from darkness to light (Acts 26:18). Pray that their hearts will be like good soil that receives the word and bears fruit, that they will have “ears to hear” what God is saying (Matthew 13:8, 9). Pray that the Holy Spirit will convince the unbelievers of sin, of righteousness and of judgment (John 16:8). Claim removal of specific defenses against the knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Pray that Christ will be exalted in the message. Assert the Lordship of Christ in the life of the people (Philippians 2:9-11). Pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal Christ to your audience (John 15:26). Pray that in the message of the cross Jesus will be lifted up, and draw the people to Himself (John 12:32). Pray that the Holy Spirit will glorify Jesus in the message (John 16:14).

Lesson Exercises

1. Review the main ideas of this lesson:
 - People everywhere are very much alike as human and very different in their cultures.
 - The messenger of God will give attention where the heart of God is, with the people.
 - God’s messenger will study to learn all he can about the people he addresses.
 - God’s messenger will connect the biblical truth with the needs of the people.
 1. God’s messenger will pray for the people.
2. Examine again the texts we have been studying. Look at the theological ideas and try to connect each one with a need in your people. Think about how you would describe that need.

“Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, For I have hoped in Your ordinances. So shall I keep Your law continually, Forever and ever. And I will walk at liberty, For I seek Your precepts.”
Psalm 119:43-45

Lesson 14

Drawing Word Pictures

When you plan your sermon, you will want to preach and teach like Jesus. You will think of ways to make the Bible ideas clear to the people from their own experience. So, the text idea and the supporting ideas cannot stand alone as your message. There is much more to plan.

We will follow Jesus as our example for how to use word pictures to teach God's truth. As you teach or preach a text, be sure to use the analogies in the text. Do not just refer to them. Draw the picture with your words. Let the people see the analogy for themselves in their minds.

Ideas and Experiences

We have talked about the *ideas* that are expressed in a text. These truths from God apply to every person. In every generation, these ideas are still true. In every tribe, these ideas can still work. Any person on earth who hears these ideas can see that they apply to him. But ideas are sometimes hard to understand. They seem to be high and away from life in its everyday activities.

For every *idea* from the text you will talk about *experience* so the people will go away with the message in their hearts. The *ideas* of God must be presented in terms of the *experience* of men.

The people live their lives every day as *experience*, not as *ideas*. They understand work, and play, and family, and friends, and eating and sleeping. They also experience fear and happiness and sorrow and disappointment. These are the experiences of life.

Lesson 14

Biblical ideas will be understood by the people only as they are presented in the language of their own experience.

Preparing the Message

- Choose a text
- Copy the text
- Action words
- Important words
- Observations
- Bible themes
- The main idea
- A limiting theme
- Supporting ideas
- Major points
- The People
- Word pictures
- Telling stories
- Application
- Aiming for faith
- Outlining

If we talk to them about ideas, we may miss their thoughts. All our ideas must be presented in terms of experience.

In the text we have been studying, Jesus explained the new life of a believer in terms of being “born again.” He used a familiar experience of life to picture how a person has new life in Christ. Everyone understands about “birth.” They can grasp “spiritual birth” or “new birth” as well.

God’s messenger must fit his word pictures to his audience. If he ministers to people in the city, he will use illustrations for life in the city. If he is in the countryside, he will use analogies from rural experience. Many of Jesus’ analogies are very basic to the experience of people everywhere. As we go through them, you will see that most people can understand their meaning.

As you read your Bible, notice how Jesus taught. He always put *ideas* in the clothing of *experience*. He talked about God’s love for every man by telling a story about one lost sheep. He talked about new faith in old religion by warning about putting new wine in old wineskins. He talked about how men receive the Word of God by telling of a farmer sowing seed on different kinds of ground.

Word Pictures Jesus Used

Let’s look at some of Jesus’ analogies. As we do, think about how you would enlarge on his word picture to help your people see the idea in their minds. Also think of how you could plan similar analogies from your experience. Some of Jesus’ word pictures are stories. We will look at these in the next lesson. For now, we will concentrate on the more brief analogies that do not tell a story.

Jesus’ word pictures came from the many different aspects of life the people knew. When you plan word pictures for your messages, think about these life experiences.

The people live their lives every day as experience, not as ideas. If we talk to them about ideas, we may miss their thoughts. All our ideas must be presented in terms of experience.

Household affairs. Normal life around the home provided Jesus with many familiar word pictures: a lamp giving light (Matthew 6:22, 23); sewing unshrunk cloth on an old garment (Matthew 9:16); new wine in old wineskins (Matthew 9:17); a strong man guarding his house (Matthew 12:26); pet dogs (Matthew 15:26, 27); straining out a gnat (Matthew 23:24); hen and chicks (Matthew 23:37); the eye of a needle (Luke 18:25); sifting wheat (Luke 22:31).

Eating and drinking. Everyone understands eating and drinking, so Jesus used this picture often: man shall not live by bread alone (Matthew 4:4); hungry and thirsty (Matthew 5:6); the children's food (Matthew 15:26); the leaven of bread (Matthew 16:6, 11, 12); drinking the cup (Matthew 20:22, 23); taste (Mark 9:1); a drink of water (John 4:13-15); seasoning (Mark 9:46); food that perishes (John 6:27); bread of life (John 6:32-35); eating and drinking (John 6:52-59).

Farming. Jesus used many word pictures from farming: gathering fruit (Matthew 7:16-20); abundant harvest (Matthew 9:37, 38); a yoke for oxen (Matthew 11:29); trees and fruit (Matthew 12:33); lack of laborers for the harvest (Luke 10:2); one sows and another reaps (John 4:35-38); how a seed germinates (John 12:24); grape vine and branches (John 15:1-8).

Shepherd and sheep. One of the richest and most familiar source of word pictures was sheep and sheep herding: wolves in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:6); the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 10:6); sheep among wolves (Matthew 10:16); the sheepfold, doorkeeper and shepherd (John 10:1); the sheep following the shepherd (John 10:4, 5); voice of the shepherd (John 10:3, 27); thief, hireling and shepherd (John 10:10-14); feeding and tending sheep (John 21:15-17).

“For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.”
Romans 1:20

Light and darkness. Men commonly experience light and darkness in the day and night. They could understand Jesus' use of this experience: the light in you (Matthew 6:23); light reveals what is in the darkness (Luke 12:2, 3); light, walking in darkness (John 8:12); stumbling in the night (John 11:9, 10); make the most of daylight (John 12:35, 36); a light, living in darkness (John 12:46).

Natural world. God's creation provided a good source for Jesus' analogies: birds of the air (Matthew 6:26); flowers of the field (Matthew 6:28, 29); grass of the field (Matthew 6:30); dogs and swine (Matthew 7:6); foxes and birds (Matthew 8:20); wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Matthew 10:16); sparrows (Matthew 10:29-31); a reed in the wilderness (Matthew 11:7); predicting weather (Matthew 16:2, 3); serpents and vipers (Matthew 23:33); lightening flashing (Matthew 24:27); an eagle at a carcass (Matthew 24:28); the sun, moon and stars (Matthew 24:29); clouds (Matthew 24:30); wind (John 3:8).

The human body. We experience everything through our bodies. Jesus used this familiar source of analogies: an offending eye (Matthew 5:29); a hand causing sin (Matthew 5:30); a good or bad eye (Matthew 6:22, 23); bodily stature (Matthew 6:27); a speck in the eye (Matthew 7:1-5); health and illness (Matthew 9:12); sight and blindness (Matthew 9:39-41); hairs of your head (Matthew 10:30); hand or foot (Matthew 18:8); dead men's bones (Matthew 23:27); body and blood (Matthew 26:26-28).

Besides these aspects of life, Jesus used others as well. He used figurative speech about *servants and masters* (Matthew 6:24). He talked about *family life* (Matthew 7:9, 10), *children* (Matthew 11:16, 17), *wedding customs* (Matthew 9:15), *military life* (Matthew 10:34), *politics* (Matthew 12:25), *robbers and thieves* (Matthew 12:29), *doors and keys* (Matthew 16:19; Luke 13:24, 25).

Life Experiences for Word Pictures

Household affairs

Eating and drinking

Farming

Shepherd and sheep

Light and darkness

Natural world

The human body

Servants and

masters

Family life

Children

Wedding customs

Military life

Politics

Robbers and thieves

Doors and keys

It is difficult to separate these word pictures from the more elaborate parables Jesus told. In the next chapter we will look at those parables. They tell a story, while the figures cited in this lesson are mostly passing analogies.

How to Plan Word Pictures

Using word pictures is very important to your message. If you do not draw pictures (with words) and tell stories in your sermon, the people will not listen. Neither will they learn. You can teach them every Bible idea in terms of familiar images that will help them know what you mean. When you do this you will be preaching and teaching like Jesus.

Let me suggest the steps you can take to plan word pictures for your Bible lessons and sermons.

1. First, state the idea from the text as clearly and simply as you can. One of the ideas from John 3:1-8 was, "The new birth is necessary to see the kingdom of God." The key words in that statement are "necessary to see."

2. Think about common experiences for what is "necessary to see." What must we have in order to "see?" Write down some of your observations or experiences you have had.

3. Look at the groups of word pictures Jesus used. They are *household affairs*, *farming*, and the others. Write down how "necessary to see" is experienced in each group. For example, a lamp may be necessary to see in a dark house. Or, the keen eye of a shepherd is necessary to see a wolf stalking his sheep.

4. Describe the word picture so that the people "see" the experience in their minds. Let them "see" the dark house and someone lighting a lamp. Let them "see" the nervous sheep, the watchful shepherd and the stalking wolf. To do this you will have to use very specific and descriptive words.

You can teach them every Bible idea in terms of familiar images that will help them know what you mean. When you do this you will be preaching and teaching like Jesus.

5. Connect the word picture with the Bible idea. “Just as a lamp shows what is in a dark room, so being born again opens our eyes to the kingdom of God.” “Just as a shepherd’s keen sight notices the hidden wolves, so being born again gives us new awareness of the unseen spiritual kingdom.”

Sometimes you can use analogies that are understood by the people even though they have never experienced it themselves. This is particularly true when you are using the analogies given in the Scripture text. The people may not know about sheep, but since Jesus used that analogy, you can use it. Be sure, however, to make it vivid.

Some word pictures are so common that everyone understands them. Jesus used the term “Father” to refer to God. No matter where people live, they know what that means. Even if a person did not know his father, he knows what a father is. He knows what a good and kind Father would be.

Lesson Exercises

1. Review the main ideas of this lesson:
 - Every *idea* in the message should be presented in terms of *experience* so the people will understand it.
 - The people live their lives every day as *experience*, not as *ideas*.
 - An *analogy* is a word picture that compares one thing with another.
 - Jesus’ word pictures came from the many different aspects of life the people knew.
2. Choose some of the texts listed in this lesson with Jesus’ word pictures. Could you use the same imagery with your audience?
3. Devise a word picture of your own from each of the categories Jesus used.

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

2 Timothy 2:15

Lesson 15

Telling Vivid Stories

Clearly stating the theological ideas in the text is a beginning for your message. As we learned in the last lesson, the messenger of God must also turn those *ideas* into the language of *experience*. The people live their lives in the down to earth experiences of life. They understand experience. So, we must explain ideas in terms of natural experiences.

Again, we follow the example of Jesus. He often gave his hearers principles and laws. But He also told stories to illustrate those spiritual truths. God's messenger can do the same. He can tell the biblical stories effectively. He can also tell present day stories that capture the meaning of God's truth. In this lesson we will consider the power of stories and how to use them in a Bible message.

The Power of Stories

Telling stories is a normal part of life in almost every culture. From ancient times, men have sat around a fire and told the stories of the fathers. Today, in many tribes, the men still sit around the fire and tell those same stories. In other cultures, men sit before the fire in clubs, or on fishing piers, or at family gatherings and tell the stories that interpret life for the group.

Women are storytellers as well. If the culture does not include them in the circle of elders, they tell their stories over their needlework. Or they gather for tea and recount the events of life and what they mean. They tell their children what happened before

Lesson 15

Telling stories to illustrate sermon ideas will make the biblical truths more interesting and understandable.

Preparing the Message

- Choose a text
- Copy the text
- Action words
- Important words
- Observations
- Bible themes
- The main idea
- A limiting theme
- Supporting ideas
- Major points
- The People
- Word pictures
- Telling stories
- Application
- Aiming for faith
- Outlining

they were born. They tell them the meaning of their name and family and people.

The stories we tell are sometimes for entertainment. Sometimes they are for education. Sometimes they are just to make conversation. Often, however, the stories we tell carry the meaning of life. They give a new generation a sense of identity and belonging.

Much of the Bible is in the form of stories. The mighty acts of God are presented in stories. The deeds of ancient believers are told in stories. The most important truth of all, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is in story form. God intended to make His truths known to man in a way he would surely remember. He gave us stories.

The wise preacher of God's word will also be a storyteller. He will make the mighty acts of God live again for his hearers.

Stories in Your Message

The wise preacher of God's Word will also be a storyteller. He will make the mighty acts of God live again for his hearers. He will introduce the ancient heroes of the faith with their joys and their sorrows, their victories and their defeats, their faith and their fear. In all these stories the faithful messenger of God will present the great truths of God's Word in a dramatic and vivid way.

The messenger of God will also tell the stories of his own people. He will present to them the events and conditions of their own time as seen through the eyes of faith. The great truths of the Bible are true for every generation. The messenger of God will place those truths into the events and conditions of his own generation and show the people how God speaks to them.

The people do not know the full account of their own stories. They are missing very important parts. But the messenger of God will give them this missing information. He will tell them from God's written Word how they came to be on this earth. He will tell them God's purpose for their lives. He will tell them of life after death.

He will tell them how to overcome the forces of evil, within them and without.

Every person interprets his own life in terms of the stories that explain who he is. The messenger of God can tell the believer his own story as a new creation in Christ. He is a part of a new saved community of people. He is part of a new family of faith. His role in the world has changed. To understand all of this, he needs to hear the great stories of faith from the Bible. He also needs to hear parables set in this generation that interpret God's Word.

Again, Jesus is our example for using parables to make the truth of God clear to the people. In the last lesson, we looked at many of Jesus' word pictures to see how they carry spiritual truth in natural images. The parables of Jesus are the more complex word pictures that tell a story. In Jesus' use of the parables, the messenger of God can see how he might use story to make God's word clear.

Every person interprets his own life in terms of the stories that explain who he is. The messenger of God must tell him his new story as a new creation in Christ.

What Makes a Good Story?

The stories Jesus told to illustrate his ideas were always true to life. They presented scenes familiar to the people. They were believable. Whereas the abstract truth would have been forgotten, the parables found a home in the memory of the people. The stories you use in your messages can have the same qualities as Jesus' parables.

You can tell stories in your message that are *true to life*. The stories of the Old and New Testaments picture the same struggles we have today. The Bible characters are real people, sometimes wise and sometimes foolish. Jesus' parables were also true to life. Think of the story of the prodigal son, the waiting father and the elder brother (Luke 15:11-32). We understand them. You can tell stories of this generation that are true to life as well.

Jesus' parables also portrayed *familiar scenes*. He described a sower who went out into the field to scatter his seed (Matthew 13:3-9, 18-22). The seed fell on various kinds of ground and produced differing yields. Jesus was illustrating with the various soils the differences in the hearts of men to receive the Word of God. His audience had seen the sower many times and knew of the fields. As you tell stories to your people you can also describe scenes that are familiar to them.

The parables of Jesus presented *believable plots* as well. By "plot" we mean the way the story unfolds. Jesus' parable of the Lost Sheep (Matthew 18:10-14) had a very familiar plot to his hearers. A shepherd counts his sheep and discovers one is missing. So he searches everywhere for it. When he finds it he rejoices. Your stories can also describe the kind of challenging experiences that your people know well.

The stories you tell can also be *memorable*. Jesus told of a man who had an unexpected guest, but nothing to feed him (Luke 11:5-8). It is a great offense to be unable to feed your guests. So he woke his neighbor and insisted he loan him some bread. The man was persistent, as we are to be in our prayers. Those who heard this story could see it unfold in their minds. They would not soon forget it.

The Limitations of Stories

Stories can be very effective for illustrating Bible truths. God has chosen to use stories to communicate his message to men. But the messenger of God must be careful, because stories have their limitations. Simply telling stories cannot be adequate as a proclamation ministry.

Stories without clear theological meaning may be ineffective.
Some preachers feel that the stories of the Bible can be told without

A Good Story
True to life
Familiar scenes
Believable plots
Memorable

any explanation. The great narrative texts are no doubt powerful. And the people can often understand the theological idea without explanation. God's messenger will not assume everyone understands. He will make sure that the Bible stories he tells and his own illustrations are clear in their meaning.

Stories designed merely to entertain often carry little meaning. The messenger of God likes to have the attention of his audience. He must work hard to make sure his presentation keeps their interest. But he must be careful about being satisfied with only keeping attention. Some preachers tell stories that are like empty wagons carrying no goods. Their rattling gets attention, but they offer little help. Like Jesus' parables, our stories must carry the weight of God's truth.

Stories with unnecessary details are often confusing. Stories can go too long and involve too many details. Some preachers enjoy stretching out their stories with information not really necessary to the point. The audience tends to be distracted by the extra information. Remember that the story is an illustration to help the hearer grasp the biblical idea. Keep that idea in mind as you tell the story.

Great portions of the Bible are not in story form. Retelling the Bible narratives is a good way to preach, as long as the meaning is clear. But parts of the Bible such as commandments, psalms, prophecies and letters are not in story form. The writing form of the biblical writer should guide the messenger. If there is no story in the text, it cannot be preached as a story. Even so, stories can be helpful as illustrations.

The messenger of God likes to have the attention of his audience. But he must be careful about being satisfied with only keeping attention.

Major Parables of Jesus

Lamp under Basket—Matt. 5:14-16	Sheep and Goats—Matt. 25:31-46
Wise and Foolish Builders—	Growing Seed—Mark 4:26-29

Matt. 7:24-27	Watchful Servants—Mark 13:33-37
Sower—Matt. 13:3-9, 18-22	Moneylender—Luke 7:41-43
Wheat and Tares—Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43	Good Samaritan—Luke 10:30-37
Mustard Seed—Matt. 13:31, 32	Friend in Need—Luke 11:5-8
Pearl of Great Price—Matt. 13:45, 46	Rich Fool—Luke 12:16-31
Dragnet—Matt. 13:47-50	Unfruitful Fig Tree—Luke 13:5-9
Lost Sheep—Matt. 18:10-14	Lowest Seat—Luke 14:7-14
Unforgiving Servant—Matt. 18:21-25	Great Banquet—Luke 14:16-24
Workers in the Vineyard—Matt. 20:1-16	Building Tower—Luke 14:27-30
Two Sons—Matt. 21:28-32	King to War—Luke 14:31-33
Wicked Vinedressers—Matt. 21:33-40	Lost Coin—Luke 15:8-10
Wedding Feast—Matt. 22:2-14	Lost Son—Luke 15:11-32
Fig Tree—Matt. 24:32, 33	Shrewd Manager—Luke 16:1-8
Faithful and Evil Servants—Matt. 24:45-51	Rich Man and Lazarus—Luke 16:19-31
Wise and Foolish Virgins—Matt. 25:1-13	Master and Servant—Luke 17:7-10
Talents—Matt. 25:14-30	Persistent Widow—Luke 18:2-8
	Pharisee and Tax Collector—Luke 18:10-14

Lesson Exercises

- Review the main ideas of this lesson:
 - To be understood, theological ideas must be explained in terms of natural experiences.
 - The wise preacher of God's Word will also be a storyteller.
 - The stories you use in your messages can have the same qualities as Jesus' parables.
 - The messenger of God must be careful, because stories have their limitations.
- To practice the skills in this lesson, look at each of Jesus' major parables. Plan how to tell them in a vivid way. Now think of how you could clothe the Bible idea in a new story for this generation.

Lesson 16

Calling for Change

A key issue concerning the message of God is how to respond. When Peter preached at Pentecost, the report says, “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37). That is indeed the question. Upon hearing the Word of God preached, what shall we do?

This is the question of application. The truths of Scripture call for response. Something must be done. The messenger of God will prepare as a central part of his message the appeal to do something about God’s truth. As we consider application in this lesson, we will again follow the example of Jesus.

The Need for Application

Some Bible teachers and preachers think specific application by the messenger of God is not needed. They are of the opinion that we are to preach the ideas of the Scripture text and let the people make their own application. They trust that the Holy Spirit will stir the hearts of the people to respond to the message. Other preachers and teachers hold that the application is a central part of the message. They think that the real preaching doesn’t begin until you start the application.

Throughout the Bible there is the assumption that hearing the Word of God calls for a response. In the Old Testament the only right response to the Word of God is compliance. “So Moses came and told the people all the Words of the LORD and all the

Lesson 16

Effective application in a Bible message calls for careful planning, with study of the textual truths and the audience.

Preparing the Message

- Choose a text
- Copy the text
- Action words
- Important words
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- Supporting ideas
- Major points
- The People
- Word pictures
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- Outlining

judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the LORD has said we will do" (Exodus 24:3).

At the close of his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told the parable of the wise and foolish builders. One built his house on the rock. One built it on the sand. The storm could not affect one house, but destroyed the other. His point was clear. He said, "Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man, who built his house on the rock" (Matthew 7:24). He said the person who did not obey his teaching is like the one who built his house on the sand.

James drew a direct relationship between hearing the Word of God and obeying it. He wrote, "He who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:25). He went further, to connect the validity of faith with the actions of the believer. He wrote, "Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works." (James 2:18)

"Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your soul. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

James 1:21, 22

Jesus' Use of Application

Again, we will look at Jesus' approach. As we examine his use of application in the New Testament, we can learn for ourselves how to use it. Consider several observations as to Jesus' use of application

Jesus often gave the reasoning behind his instructions. The people not only heard what to do, they could know why they should behave that way. He urged the people not to store up wealth on earth, because it can be lost to corruption and theft (Matthew 6:19).

Instead, he charged them to store their treasure in heaven, where no loss is possible. In telling them about the danger on earth of corruption and theft, he gives a reason for this admonition. Then

he adds a deeper reason, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21).

Jesus cited familiar commandments and gave them a deeper meaning. He introduced some teachings with these words, “You have heard that it was said of old” (Matthew 5:21, 27, 31, 38, 43). Then He took the command to its logical conclusion. Or he gave it a deeper meaning, making it a matter of the heart. He took the commandment against murder deeper, to include anger (Matthew 5:22).

Jesus associated much of his application with the parables he told. At a banquet, Jesus noticed how the guests chose the best seats for themselves. He told them a parable about going to a banquet and being embarrassed as the host asked them to take a lower seat.

Then he gave his instructions: “But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place” (Luke 14:10). He predicted that the host would ask them to take better seats. Jesus’ point was clear, “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 14:11).

Jesus described scenes or situations the people might face and told them how to behave in that case. He wanted the people to be ready in advance when they faced these circumstances. He said, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone” (Matthew 18:15). He continued with two more steps for dealing with an offending brother: take witnesses with you, and finally take it to the church. Jesus knew that most of the people would face such conflicts.

Jesus used real events or circumstances to teach lessons. Jesus was a guest in the house of Simon the Pharisee. A prostitute came in and wept as she washed his feet and dried them with her

Jesus’ Application

Reasons behind the instructions
Deeper meaning of commandments
Using parables for application
Situations people might face
Real events used to teach lessons
Described wrong behavior clearly
Using vivid imagery for analogies
Appealed to hearers’ commitments
Using exaggerated language

hair (Luke 7:36-50). When he was criticized for letting this woman touch him, he used the occasion to teach a lesson. He pointed out that his host had not washed his feet when he arrived. The point was that the one who was forgiven most loved most.

Jesus pointed out unacceptable behavior and described it vividly. He was especially uncompromising against hypocrisy. Look in Matthew 23 for his chastisement of the scribes and Pharisees. For example he said they were careful to wash outwardly, but leave their hearts unclean. He said, "You are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead *men's* bones and all uncleanness (Matthew 23:27).

Jesus used analogies to make His application clear and believable. For example, Jesus urged the people not to worry because God would take care of them. To make this application vivid, he used imagery about the birds of the air and the flowers of the field (Matthew 6:26-30). He described the birds not planting crops and harvesting. He described the flowers not spinning thread to make clothing. His argument was that if God took care of these least creations, He would take care of us.

Jesus sometimes appealed to the professed commitments of his hearers to make application. A young ruler came to him asking how to inherit eternal life (Luke 18:18-22). He claimed to have kept all the commandments. He was obviously dedicated, wanting to know what else he lacked. Jesus told him to go and sell all he had to give to the poor. Then he could follow Him. The man went away sad. His apparent dedication was shown to be false.

Jesus used exaggerated language to make his point. He took the commandment against adultery deeper, to include looking at a woman with lust. Then he instructed his audience, "If your right

"Make me understand the way of Your precepts; So shall I meditate on Your wondrous works. Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; Indeed, I shall observe it with *my* whole heart."
Psalm 119:27, 34

eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you.” He said further, “ If your right hand causes you to sin cut it off and cast it from you” (Matthew 5:29, 30). Jesus did not literally mean for them to mutilate themselves. Neither did he mean that an eye or hand is the cause of sin. He was using this exaggerated language to emphasize the importance of a pure heart.

How to Plan Application

Here are some steps you can take to plan your application. I will also point out some approaches to application you should avoid. Remember that telling the people how to respond is as important as giving them God’s truth.

1. *Look carefully at the lesson text to see if there is application already there.* Jesus told his disciples, “Love your enemies” (Matthew 5:43, 44). Then he told them how to do it, “Bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” When you teach this text, don’t miss the specific applications here to the command to love our enemies. Explain them clearly to the people in terms of their own experience.

2. *Clearly state the biblical idea you want to apply to this generation.* You are answering the question, “What shall we do?” Or maybe your application answers this question, “How shall we please God in this?” The theological truths in your sermon call for a response. There is a difference between the *principles* and the *response* the people should make. If the text is all about *response* (as in Matthew 6:1-21), you can connect these actions to the *principles* behind them. Avoid applications that do not directly connect to the truths of the text.

3. *Go over the list above of Jesus’ nine approaches to application.* See if each principle can be applied in one of these

ways. Think of as many ways as you can to apply each principle. For Romans 12:1, 2 we stated a principle like this: “The Christian can prove the will of God by presenting himself wholly to God.” You can apply this by explaining the *deeper meaning* of being a living sacrifice, or by *describing a situation* in which you may want to step back from God’s will, or by using the *vivid imagery* of the temple sacrifices to show the unreserved surrender.

4. *Choose from your possible applications the ones that best express the biblical idea and best fit your audience.* Avoid overusing “religious” applications that focus on good works instead of faith. The key to our response is always a faith surrender to God.

5. *Give the applications in clear and practical ways.* The people should not be uncertain about the practical actions they can take to put the Bible principle to work in their lives. Avoid using general applications that do not call for specific response.

Lesson Exercises

1. Review the main ideas of this lesson:
 - Throughout the Bible there is the assumption that hearing the Word of God calls for a response.
 - Jesus’ use of application shows God’s messenger many ways to challenge his people to apply God’s truth.
 - God’s messenger can take steps to plan specific applications for every biblical truth in his text.
2. Look again at the texts you have studied in this workbook. Plan how you can apply each of these truths, using some of the methods Jesus used.

Lesson 17

Aiming for Faith

Every Bible message is supposed to accomplish something. But many sermons are delivered with uncertainty as to what they are supposed to do. Some messages are delivered to “straighten out” the people. Others aim for repentance. Others have evangelistic goals. Some sermons are aimed to comfort and encourage the people. Others are to teach doctrine.

The messenger of God wants to see something happen as a result of his message. Otherwise why would he preach and teach? God’s messenger may have an idea what he hopes for as a result of his sermon. But he may not be sure how to plan what he will say to achieve that goal. He may just preach because he is called of God. He feels God’s Spirit is pressing him to preach the Word.

A close look at the whole of Scripture will make clear that the one great aim for all preaching and teaching is to evoke faith in God.

The Necessity of Faith

The one necessary response to God is to trust Him. His revelation is given to man to evoke his faith. Even though we often think of obedience as the right response to God, faith comes first. Faith and obedience are two sides of the same response. There can be no acceptable obedience without faith. And faith that does not result in obedience is not true faith.

In the Old Testament, God made himself known so that men would trust him. That trust would lead to obedience. In the present

Preparing the Message

- Choose a text
- Copy the text
- Action words
- Important words
- Observations
- Bible themes
- The main idea
- A limiting theme
- Supporting ideas
- Major points
- The People
- Word pictures
- Telling stories
- Application
- Aiming for faith
- Outlining

age, the purpose is the same. God has spoken “at various times and in various ways by the prophets” (Hebrews 1:1). But that word that was preached to them did not profit some, says the Scripture, “not being mixed with faith in those who heard it” (Hebrews 4:2). The hearing of the Word of God, without faith, is ineffective.

God makes himself known through his written Word today. His messengers declare the truth of the written Word. The purpose of this proclamation is to call the hearer to faith in God. Paul writes, “How, then, shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:14). In response to preaching, they are to hear, to believe, and to call upon God. Faith is essential to this process.

God makes himself known through his written word today. His messengers declare the truth of the written word. The purpose of this proclamation is to call the hearer to faith in God.

Throughout the Bible, faith is closely associated with the grace of God. At the same time, faith is contrasted with works designed to gain God’s favor. A major error of religion is the view that man has to earn a right standing with God by his religious efforts. Paul settles this as he writes, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

Faith is essential to every aspect of the Christian life. Faith draws upon the grace of God. Everything is to be by grace. “And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work” (Romans 11:6). So, in everything they do, believers are to live by faith, counting on God’s grace. Four different places in Scripture we read, “The just shall live by faith” (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; and Hebrews 10:38)

The role of the messenger of God is vital in the call for faith. Faith is not some spiritual virtue implanted in the Christian. It is a

living response to a word from God made possible by the Holy Spirit. In that process, God's Word is the key ingredient. Paul writes, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). Only as God's messenger proclaims His Word will faith be kindled in the heart of the hearer.

Encouraging Faith

The messenger of God is to preach and teach in such a way as to encourage faith. The only appropriate response to the message of Scripture is to trust God. "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). Here are some guidelines for presenting messages that encourage faith.

Always preach the truth of God from Scripture. Take a Bible text and let its ideas come through your message. As we have already mentioned, many preachers seem to give only their own opinions and stories. Do not think that your religious views are enough for a sermon. Have the people open their Bibles if they have them. Have them follow in the text. The truth of God's Word stirs faith in the hearer as the Holy Spirit confirms it.

Interpret the text as God-centered rather than man-centered. Help the people see that the Christian movement is not about what we can do for God. It is about what God is doing in the world. Our salvation is not about living a cleaner life to please God. It is about God accepting sinners and making them right with Him through Christ. The burden of responsibility is not ours alone to carry. Jesus said, "My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:30).

Balance your message with law and gospel. The Bible has many texts that present the law of God. These texts tell us how to

"Jesus said, 'I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.'" Matthew 17:20

behave morally. Other texts describe the sins of man that dishonor God. This moral obligation is a key aspect of the Christian life. But in addition to *law* (moral obligation) the Bible has *gospel* (good news of grace). No matter what text you preach, work for a balance when you explain it to the people. Every law text calls for grace. And every text on grace calls for law.

Seek to live by faith yourself and preach from your own faith.

It is not likely that the messenger of God will encourage faith in the people if he himself is not a genuine believer. Every aspect of the Christian life is rooted in our relationship with Christ by faith. No matter what circumstances we face, the question of Christ to us is clear, "Will you trust me in this?" He put it to a blind man in these words, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" (Matthew 9:28). If you are trusting the Lord fully, your preaching and teaching ministry will also encourage faith in others.

Use the language of faith in your messages. Faith in God means that I trust Him with everything. Jesus said to a man whose son had an unclean spirit, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." (Mark 9:23). When you preach, use the language of the possible instead of the language of obligation. Obligation says, "We must," "We ought," and "We need to." Every week the preacher keeps saying "We need to" as though there is no hope of ever achieving the goal.

The language of faith is the language of hope. It is the language of certainty concerning who God is and what He will do. The language of faith is "God is," "God has," "God will," and "God can." It is the language of the possible by the grace of God. To the believer we say "We can," instead of "We need to." Nothing God requires of us will lack His grace. Whatever he commands we can do by His power. That is the reality of faith.

Encouraging Faith

- *Preach the word of God*
- *Interpret the text as God-centered*
- *Balance law and gospel*
- *Seek to live by faith*
- *Use the language of faith*

We will further consider the matter of preaching for faith in Lesson 20 as we talk about Building up the Body of Christ.

Salt and Light

At the heart of the challenge of preaching for faith is the issue of man-centered or God-centered preaching. Any text may be interpreted in such a way that the emphasis is on what the hearer is to do for God. Or it can be interpreted as what God has done and is doing for believers and through them. The Bible is written to reveal God and His will for His creation. Every text should be interpreted in light of that larger Bible message.

Look again at Matthew 5:13-16 about “salt” and “light.” Jesus begins by telling his hearers, “You are the salt of the earth.” We have noted that his use of salt here means *influence*. This seems very man-centered. So the messenger of God might explain it to the people solely in terms of their own behavior. He might criticize them for not being the godly people they should be. He might charge them with the great task of influencing their neighbors for Christ.

Such an approach might be understandable. But we now ask, “What is there about God and His will that makes this *influence* important?” We will try to see the text as part of the greater story of God’s desire to draw men to Himself. We will also notice that God’s method is to use human agents to do His work in the world. So we now see the text in a different light. It is not only about the believer and his influence. It is about God’s love and His purpose in the world.

You do not change the meaning of the text. But you do explain it to the people in larger terms. This shows them how important their influence is among those they know. It also shows them that this is God’s work. It is not a great burden they must carry

So we now see the text in a different light. It is not only about the believer and his influence. It is about God’s love and His purpose in the world.

in their own power. They have the privilege of being God's agents in the world by His grace. They can let their "light" shine, knowing that it is God that gives it the brightness.

Any person in Christ is a new creation. It is God who has made us "salt" and "light" in the world. It is God who works through us to deal with the earth's corruption and its darkness. The messenger of God can encourage the people to be bold in letting their light shine. They are agents of the living God. They are the very light of Christ in this dark world. He is the light of the world (John 8:12 and John 9:5) and we can let that light shine through us.

Lesson Exercises

1. Review the main ideas of this lesson:
 - The one necessary response to God and His Word is to trust Him.
 - The messenger of God can follow specific guidelines for encouraging faith through his messages.
 - Every text should be interpreted in light of the larger Bible message of who God is and what He is doing.
2. Go back to the various texts we have studied in these lessons. Divide a sheet for each text into two columns. List on one side the ideas the text suggests if interpreted in a man-centered way. On the other, write the ideas as a God-centered interpretation.
3. Look at your sermon outlines for the language you are using. Is it the language of religious duty or the language of faith?

Lesson 18

Outlining the Message

In lesson 12 we began to explain how to plan your message according to the structure of the text. Your message will reflect the text writer's idea, expressed as a *subject* with a *limiting theme*. You will also follow his *supporting ideas* as they are expressed in the text. These ideas can be stated as the basic framework of your message. Now we will consider how you can plan what you will say to the people to help them accept the message.

Remember, the messenger of God is called to present ideas from God, from his written Word. The message is very important. It should be carefully prepared. Whether you speak to many people or to very few, their life and faith may depend on your message.

Parts of an Outline

An outline is not the message. It is a plan for presenting the message. You will plan how the message will unfold in the time you have to speak to the people. A good plan will include several key elements.

The *main idea* of your message is the same as the main idea of the text. It is a theological idea. It is stated in a complete sentence. It is build around a *subject* and a *limiting word*. In our study of John 3:1-8 we said the "The *new birth* is *necessary* in the kingdom of God." That is the main idea of the text. It is also the main idea of our message from this text.

Lesson 18

Organize your message to reflect the structure of the text in the way the writer presents his ideas.

Preparing the Message

- Choose a text
- Hand copy text
- Action words
- Important words
- Observations
- Bible themes
- Word main idea
- Limit the subject
- Supporting ideas
- Major points
- The People
- Word pictures
- Telling Stories
- Application
- Aiming for Faith
- Outlining

Another part of any outline will be the *supporting ideas*. We have tried to discover what the text writer was saying about his main idea. These are the supporting ideas we sometimes call sermon points. They provide more details concerning the main theological idea.

For John 3:1-8, we said the supporting ideas were three:

- The new birth is necessary to see the kingdom of God (3).
- The new birth is necessary to enter the kingdom of God (5).
- The new birth is necessary to experience the Spirit of God (7, 8)

Sometimes a minister will think that if he has three or four ideas like this, he is ready to preach. He may not even take these “points” from a Bible text. But there is much more to a presentation outline than this. Here are five more elements you should plan into your outline.

Each of the ideas in your message requires *explanation*.

This applies to your main idea and to supporting ideas. After you state the theological idea, you will want to explain it to the people. Even though you have chosen your wording carefully for the idea, you can use other words to make sure it is clear. You can point where the idea is revealed in the text. You can go over various features of the verse or verses in question.

Ideas also need to be *illustrated*. This means you want to use word pictures and stories to help the people see the idea in terms of human experience. Look again at lessons in this study on word pictures and stories. Try to use some of the categories Jesus used, as we noted in Lesson 14. Also use stories like His as we discussed in Lesson 15. Search the text for figurative language and stories you can use again. Plan for using effective illustration for every idea in the message.

Ideas in your message will also need *application*. We have already seen many kinds of application from the teaching of Jesus.

Outlining Elements

- *The main idea of the message from the text*
- *The supporting ideas discerned in the text*
- *Explanation for each idea in the message*
- *Illustration for each idea in the message*
- *Application for each idea in the message*
- *An opening section to introduce the idea*
- *A closing section to call for response*

Look again at Lesson 16 and plan your application in one of the many ways Jesus used application. Plan your application for each idea in the sermon with one or more of these. Make sure that the people understand how to put the truth of the text to work in their own experience.

Another important element of your outline is the *opening section*. We usually call this the “introduction.” That is because it is for introducing the subject. But you must do more. Your opening section of the message should make contact with the audience. It should help them to see why this message is important for them. It should connect the main idea to the life and experience of the people. So the opening section introduces the subject, but it does much more.

The final element in your outline is the *closing section*. This is sometimes called the “conclusion.” For a Bible message this section is designed to call for a response. Yours is not just a head message, something to think about. It will be that. But it must be more. It should bring the hearer face to face with the claims of God on his life. It should call for a change in his understanding, his attitude, and his behavior. You may call on the people to respond at that moment to the call of Christ.

Using Notes as You Speak

Your outline is a plan for the message you will bring to the people. Since this is what you plan to follow for your presentation, you may think it best to take the outline with you when you speak. Let me recommend that you do not do that. It is much better to have only your Bible when you present your message. This tells the people that the message comes from Scripture. It also tells them that you know it well and are speaking out of the overflow of your bible study.

“So Ezra the priest . . . read . . . from morning until midday, . . . and the ears of all the people *were attentive* to the Book of the Law. . . . So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped *them* to understand the reading.”

Nehemiah 8:3, 8

Since your outline follows the text so closely, you will not need to take notes with you when you speak. You will have your Bible to remind you of your plan. The main idea of your message comes from the text. The supporting ideas come from the text. Much of the explanation is from the text. In this sense the Bible itself provides the notes you need when you speak.

I have found it helpful to mark important words and phrases in the text with a crayon. My main idea and supporting ideas are tied to specific language in the text. These words easily remind me of the points I want to make. My marked words help me know I need not fear forgetting my ideas. I just look again at the text to remember what I am to tell the people next.

You will find that speaking without notes makes your message more effective with the people. You will be free to look at the people, to see their response, to respond to their interest or uncertainty even while you are speaking. The people will be able to see your facial expression and your body language better when you are not distracted by reading from notes.

The sermon lives only in the moment it is presented. However well planned your outline, it is only a plan. You will want to be open to the Spirit as you speak. You will adjust what you say to meet the challenge of the moment. Without notes you can do that.

Lesson or Sermon?

Throughout this study, we have emphasized that the messenger of God is to study the Bible text carefully. The aim of such careful Bible study is to give the message of God to the people. I have referred to your message as a “lesson” or “sermon.” I think of you as a “teacher” or “preacher.” How do you see your calling? Do you think of what you do as “teaching” or “preaching?”

Speaking without Notes

- The message is clearly from the Bible.
- The message comes out of the overflow of study.
- The Bible text serves as sermon notes.
- The message is more effective with the people.
- The messenger can adjust to the audience
- The messenger can respond to the Holy Spirit.

In the minds of Christians who have heard the message of Scripture for a while, there is a difference between “preaching” and “teaching.” Let’s examine this difference and see if it affects how you present your message.

There may be a difference in the *aims* of preaching and teaching. Teaching primarily aims to impart knowledge. Preaching primarily aims to encourage response. While the teacher hopes the people go away with better understanding, the preacher hopes to persuade them to change.

Of course, there should be teaching in every sermon. A person cannot respond in faith to God’s message if he does not understand it. Sermons should present the truths of God’s written Word so that everyone learns from the message. They cannot respond to God with new behavior if they do not learn what God requires.

A good Bible teacher also hopes that in the end his lessons will result in changed lives. His belief is that if the people hear and understand the Word of God, they will eventually have to make decisions about what to do about it.

What we call “teaching” and “preaching” may differ in the *involvement* of the audience. The teacher tends to get the people discussing the ideas of the lesson. The preacher, however, usually presents his message without comment by the hearers. They may say, “Amen,” but they probably do not ask questions or make other comments.

The *application* may be another way we distinguish between “teaching” and “preaching.” The preacher tends to challenge his hearers with the actions they must take to trust and obey God. He may spell out steps and calls for a response. The teacher,

Preaching or Teaching?

- A difference in *aims* of the message.
- A difference in *involvement* of the audience.
- A difference in *application* of the message.
- A difference in *content* of the message.
- A difference in the *style* of the presentation.

however, may not include much application in his lesson. He probably will not offer an invitation at the close of the lesson.

Another difference between “teaching” and “preaching” may be the *content*. The Bible teacher tends to present a lot of history and tell the Bible stories. The preacher, however, may not be satisfied to give history only. He wants to talk about the principles of Scripture and how we can put them to work in our actions.

Sometimes the *style* of the presentation is different in a lesson and a sermon. A teacher tends to be more quiet and thoughtful in his manner. A preacher is sometimes much more dramatic and passionate. The language they use may seem more like a lesson or a sermon. Gestures and the use of notes can suggest whether a message has a preaching or teaching style.

I hope you will not make so much of the differences we see between preaching and teaching. The people may tell you that your message is like one or the other. This will depend on what they are used to and what they prefer. Either is good if the message is presented effectively.

“For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!”
1 Corinthians 9:16

Lesson Exercises

1. Review the main ideas of this lesson:
 - Seven elements are necessary in an effective outline for planning a Bible message.
 - The use of notes in the presentation of a Bible message may hinder its effectiveness.
 - Though a message may seem to be teaching or preaching, either approach can be effective.
2. Go back to the several texts you have been working on. Plan an outline for each one that includes the elements necessary for an effective presentation.

Lesson 19

Planning Your Preaching

The preaching and teaching ministry of God's messenger is more than one sermon. Opportunities to present the message of God's Word may come in many forms. Sunday sermons in a worship service, Bible studies in homes, evangelistic sermons in the field, special studies for men, or women, or youth—the forms and styles of Bible proclamation are unlimited.

You will plan each message carefully. But you can also plan groups of sermons. You can plan for special events. You can plan for special needs and circumstances in the community. You can plan to address spiritual weaknesses among the people. You can teach the great truths of the Bible. You can deal with moral problems in the church. In all of these ways, you can preach groups of sermons that do what one message alone cannot.

Knowing the People

In Lesson 13 we considered the importance of the people in the preparation and delivery of Bible messages. Now we will look again at the people who will hear your messages. What you know about them will affect your planning in many ways. If they are your own language and cultural group, you already know them well. If they are a group that is strange to you, you will have to study them carefully.

When a minister comes to a new area, he is wise to listen and learn all he can about the history of the people. Ministers tend to be talkers. Even in private conversation, they feel they must say

Lesson 19

The messenger of God will plan his preaching and teaching ministry to include sermon series from Bible books.

something religious. But they might be wiser to ask questions about the traditions and the customs of the people. Only then will they really learn the history and heart of the people.

Many factors about the people will affect your planning of Bible messages. Do they live in a rural or urban community? What is the dominant religion in the area? What are economic conditions? Are the people educated? What is the primary tribal or ethnic group in the area? What is the specific ethnic background of your audience? What kind of work do the people do? How would you describe their spiritual receptivity?

God's messenger may be a missionary, an evangelist, a church planter, a teacher, a pastor or other kind of minister. Whatever his role, he will need to have a shepherd's heart. Like Jesus, he will be moved with compassion at the condition of the multitudes. Their physical circumstances will touch his sympathies. Their spiritual condition will stir his heart as well. When he preaches, the people will know that he loves them.

Their physical circumstances will touch his sympathies. Their spiritual condition will stir his heart as well. When he preaches, the people will know that he loves them.

Planning Sermon Series

A pastor speaking to the same congregation every week will want to plan series of sermons. The nature of the Bible calls for groups of sermons preached over several weeks or months. The Bible comes in books. It is a book of books. These books contain historical accounts, poetry, prophetic sermons, visions of the future, letters, and more. One message from a text of several verses gives a very limited glimpse of Scripture truth.

For the people to understand something of biblical theology, the messenger of God will have to preach through whole books. In doing so he will deal with subjects he would not otherwise choose. He will cover more key doctrinal themes than just his favorite ones.

He will meet some needs of the people that he may not even know. Most of all, he will allow the Bible to speak for itself in the way it is arranged.

The basic series of messages will come from one book or a portion of a book. Let me suggest the steps you can take to plan such a series.

Read through the whole book a number of times. If you are planning a series from a brief book like James, Jude, or Philippians, you can make your series cover the whole book. If you are taking a part of a book, such as the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), you can concentrate your study on those chapters. But you will also want to read the whole of Matthew's gospel.

Notice the way the writer presents his thoughts. His method will depend on the kind of book it is. As you read, you will see a string of ideas unfolding. Notice how the writer begins his presentation and what his key points are. If he argues for an idea, notice the kind of arguments he uses. Look at his figurative language and discern its meaning. Let the book as a whole make its impression on you.

Divide the chosen section into preaching units. Each message from the book will require a specific text. Your Bible will probably have the text divided into paragraphs. These units of study will usually be a good way to organize your series. Sometimes you will spend two sermons on a paragraph. At other times, you may use two or three paragraphs for one sermon. In narrative sections the text for a sermon may be much longer than those from the New Testament letters.

Plan the calendar for the series of messages. You may be speaking every week to the same congregation. If so you will be able to lay out a calendar for the weeks to come. If you are with a

Planning a Series

- Read through the Bible book.
- Note the writer's sequence of ideas.
- Divide the passage into text units.
- Prepare a chart of the series.
- Plan the calendar for the series.

group only occasionally, you can still go through the series. When special holidays or events occur, you may want to interrupt the series for the occasion.

Prepare a Series Chart

Planning your series on the calendar is one way to get it before you on paper. Before you get to the calendar, you can plan a chart of the whole series, with notes for each text.

Here is the chart I made to plan a series from the Sermon on the Mount. I went through the whole section (Matthew 5-7) and divided the text by portions for each message. The chart here deals only with the first of the three chapters. On it I have listed the message number, the text, the theme of the text, and my sermon title. I also added my own observations about the text, but there is not room here for that much.

"For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled."
Matthew 5:18

Matthew 5			
Sermon on the Mount Series			
1	5:1 & 2	Introduction to series	<i>Marks of the Kingdom Man</i>
2	5:3 - 6	Beatitudes, part 1	<i>Attitudes that Change You</i>
3	5:7-12	Beatitudes, part 2	<i>Surprising Ways to Get Along</i>
4	5:13-16	Salt and light	<i>Influencing Your World</i>
5	5:17-20	Jesus fulfills the law	<i>Fulfilling God's Moral Law</i>
6	5:21-26	Murder in the heart	<i>The Poison of Anger</i>
7	5:27-32	Adultery and marriage	<i>The Power of Sexual Purity</i>
8	5:33-37	Jesus forbids oaths	<i>Speaking the Simple Truth</i>
9	5:38-42	Go the second mile	<i>Giving Generous Forgiveness</i>
10	5:43-48	Love your enemies	<i>Loving Those You Don't Like</i>

Notice that I divided the Beatitudes for two messages. There seemed to be so much to cover that I could not deal with all of it in one session. The division worked well when I gave each message a title.

Notice that the titles are written to address the audience in their own experience. They are not doctrinal titles, even though the message presents theological truth. The sermon is the messenger's presentation to his audience. It takes the biblical truth and gives it to the people in their own terms. Preaching is for this generation. The message is for their own life situation.

Advantages for a Series

You will find many advantages in planning your messages for a series through a Bible book. Here are a few of these benefits.

You will study the Bible more thoroughly yourself. In this workbook you are learning a method that takes the Bible seriously. The messenger of God is only faithful when he delivers God's message from God's written Word. Effective Bible messages call for study of the text in its setting. Knowing the whole book will help make sense of each portion.

You will avoid limiting yourself to your favorite subjects. Preachers tend to concentrate on their favorite themes in their sermons. Sometimes they seem to preach the same sermon over and over, no matter what text they read. The faithful messenger will deal seriously with the original meaning of the text. The text theme will be his sermon theme.

You will not have to search for a message at the last hour. Pastors are busy, as are church planters, evangelists and missionaries. It is too easy to put off studying for a message until only a poor job can be done. Planning a series of messages from a book settles the text and theme for every occasion. No last hour searching is necessary.

The people will become more familiar with the teachings of whole books. For many believers the Bible is a mystery. They have only dipped in here and there to read a favorite passage.

Series Advantages

- Study the Bible more thoroughly
- Avoid limiting to favorite subjects
- No last hour searching for text
- People become familiar with Bible
- People motivated to study the Bible

They cannot see how it all goes together. They do not have a sense of the larger story of Scripture. Preaching through books will expose the people to larger sections in their context. They will begin to see the big picture.

The people will be more motivated to study the Bible on their own. I have visited many churches where the congregation did not bring Bibles to the meeting. They had no need for them because the pastor did not follow the text. They were not motivated to study the Bible with the pastor. Nor were they motivated to study on their own. Expository preaching through books will help them in this vital discipline.

Lesson Exercises

1. Review the main ideas of this lesson:
 - The messenger of God can plan groups of messages from a book to be preached in series.
 - The needs and circumstances of the people will help him decided what series to plan.
 - He can take specific steps that will open the Bible book to him for planning an effective series.
 - Preaching through Bible books has many advantages for the minister and the people alike.
2. Choose a book or part of a book that you want to preach to your people. Take the steps suggested in this lesson in your study of the book. Plan out the series on a chart like the one above. Do not be concerned if you are uncertain about whether you are doing it the right way. The more you work at this, the clearer the process will become.

Lesson 20

Building Up the Body

Now we come to the last lesson in this study of how to prepare Bible messages. Our emphasis throughout has been that the messenger of God must preach and teach from the written Word of God. Only then is he faithful to his calling. Only then will the people of God be “transformed” as their minds are renewed by God’s truth (Romans 12:2).

In this lesson we will think about the church. The messenger of God has a key role to play in the health and work of the church. As he proclaims the Word of God, he will be used of God to move the congregation toward maturity in Christ.

What is the Church?

The Bible uses a number of pictures to talk about the church. Each of these figures helps us to understand the role of the church in the world. Unless the people of God know who they are, they will not be faithful to serve God in the world. Here are some of these pictures:

The church is the “body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:27). Jesus is not present physically in the world today. But the believers are His body here. They are His hands to minister to others. They are His voice to declare the good news. They are His feet to go into all the world. They are one body with many individuals serving according to their gifts.

The church is a “holy temple” (Ephesians 2:21). They are a “a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices

Lesson 20

The messenger of God is His agent for building up the body of Christ by the ministry of the word.

acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). This has to do with the worship of God’s people. It does not have to do with church buildings. The people themselves are a temple for worship. Each believer’s body is also “the temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19). Wherever they gather for worship becomes the very temple of God.

The church is “the people of God” (1 Peter 2:10). Once they were not a people, but now they are “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people” (1 Peter 2:9). Of all the tribes and languages of the earth, none has this role. They have a special assignment: to “proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). They are to tell the world of what God has done for them in Christ.

The church is “the flock of God” (1 Peter 5:2). They are the sheep and Jesus is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11). The servant of God is a shepherd under the “Chief Shepherd” (1 Peter 5:4). He is not a “stranger,” a “thief,” or a “hireling” (John 10:1-14). His ministry is to feed the sheep and tend the lambs. He guides them, protects them, and feeds them.

All of these pictures of the church in the world describe God’s people. They are not about church buildings and equipment. They are about a living organism rather than an organization. The messenger of God must be careful not to focus his work on the organization and facilities of the church instead of the people.

Equipping the Saints

The messenger of God may serve in different roles, according to the call and gifts of God. Paul writes that “He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians

Pictures of the Church

- The Body of Christ
- A Holy Temple
- The People of God
- The Flock of God

4:11). Notice that the aim for them all is “edifying of the body.”

This means the building up of God’s people.

Like constructing a building, God’s messenger is to build up the church body. Especially is this true of the pastor. This does not mean constructing church buildings. It means strengthening the congregation. The verse above continues, “till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

How is this “building up” to be accomplished? The text says that God gave these gifted servants to the church “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry” (Ephesians 4:12). This *equipping* means “furnishing” or “perfecting.” It even means “mending.” God’s servant is to serve the people of the church in ways designed to get them ready for their work.

The work of the believers is clear in these verses as well. God’s servant is to equip them “for the work of ministry.” They are equipped to serve God. They are to do the work of ministry in the church and in the world. The God-called ministers are not the ones who alone do the work of ministry. It is the “saints,” the believers who are the church. They are to do the work of God in the world, with the ministers of God leading and equipping them.

The result is also in the verse. The people are to come to unity. They are to be together in some important ways. The work of the God-called servants is to bring them to that oneness. Their unity is to be in two specific areas. They are to be one in “faith” and one in “the knowledge of the son of God” (Ephesians 4:13). Only through the teaching of God’s written Word will the people come to one view as to their faith, the basic truths they believe. Neither will

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they come to unity in their relationship with Christ apart from knowing God's Word.

God-Centered Interpretation

There is one aim in preaching that overshadows all others. The basic objective of all preaching is to evoke a response of faith in God. No matter what text is used, the messenger of God should point to Him and call upon the people to trust Him. This calls for preaching and teaching that is God-centered rather than man-centered.

You can interpret any text in a man-centered way or a God-centered way. Preachers seem to be biased toward man-centered interpretation. For most ministers the basic purpose of preaching is to change the behavior and attitudes of the people. This often results in sermons promoting moral reform. But we must remember that the change needed in man is not merely moral. The hearer needs to trust Christ for the transformation that makes him a "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The moral change we seek will come only with a deeper trust in God. If a person attempts to reform himself without faith, he is falling from grace (Galatians 5:4). He is estranged from Christ because he is seeking to be justified by the law. This legalism is condemned in the New Testament as works righteousness (Ephesians 2:8-10). No preacher should promote an approach to God that does not count on His grace alone.

God-centered preaching emphasizes the reality of God to the people. Every text is approached for what it reveals about God. The messenger of God searches his text for truth about the *character* of God, the *power* of god, the *intentions* of God and the *faithfulness* of God in the past. As the text is interpreted in terms of

The messenger of God searches his text for truth about the character of God, the power of god, the intentions of God and the faithfulness of God in the past.

who God is and what He can do, the people are called to faith. The focus is on God.

Some preachers will be uneasy with such an approach to preaching. They see the great need of the people to leave their old lives of sin and obey God's Word as true Christians. They are not sure how preaching about who God is will accomplish this. But remember that a vision of God always leads to repentance.

The pattern is clear—a vision of God's holiness provokes repentance and confession. In a temple vision Isaiah saw God "high and lifted up" (Isaiah 6:1). Ultimately, his response was to cry out about his own uncleanness (Isaiah 6:5). Look also at Peter's response to Jesus when he saw his power with the catch of fish. He fell to his knees and cried out to Jesus, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Luke 5:8).

How You See the Text

The preacher's own human nature may also cause biases that affect his preaching. He may be critical of the people for their worldliness. He may be impatient that they are so slow to learn. He may be disappointed in those he hoped would be faithful. He may struggle with his own failures and frustrations. All of these feelings and attitudes can be reflected in the preaching. The messenger always leaves his mark on the message, even if he does not realize it.

Let me suggest that you ask of every text what the God-centered interpretation would be. Some passages have nothing to say about the character of God. But you will want to interpret these texts in light of the whole of the Bible message. Every commandment in Scripture is based on the character of God. Every text that points out sin is rooted in the nature of God. Every

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text that describes the salvation we have in Christ is reflecting the nature of God. The whole truth is only evident as you see this.

As you study the text, you can look carefully at what it says and discern the God-centered message there. Trace every idea in the text back to the character and will of God. If the text has instructions, ask why God would give them. If the text deals with sin, ask what there is about God that He rejects such behavior. Explaining this connection to the congregation will open the truth of the text to them in a richer way.

The messenger of God is so affected by his calling that he may think the work of the church revolves around him. But it is God's church. It is God's work. It is God's purpose. The work of ministry is ultimately not about you and me as God's servants. It is about what God is doing. We are privileged to be called into His service. And we are determined to be faithful. But we know that must keep "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith" (Hebrews 12:2). And we must point the people to Him.

Lesson Exercises

1. Review the main ideas of this lesson:
 - The New Testament uses several figures of speech to describe the church.
 - The messenger of God is called to "build up" the church by "equipping" believers for the work of ministry.
 - God-centered will be much more effective than man-centered preaching in increasing the faith of the people.
2. Look at the texts we have already studied. Think about how they can be helpful in "equipping the saints" and "edifying the body of Christ." What does it take to strengthen and nourish the flock of God?

"For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith."
Romans 12:3

For the Teacher

The **Preparing Bible Messages** workbook is designed for individual use. With very little guidance, a literate Christian worker can understand and apply the message presented in this study. The initial target audience for this study was church planters and bi-vocational pastors. For that reason the educational level required for using the workbook was set at a basic level. Versions in some languages may be written on a more difficult level due to the educational background and literacy in that language group.

The basic textbook for this study is the Bible. The study is designed to help the student implement a particular method for preparing bible messages. The first phase of this method is the careful study of a specific Bible text in order to discern the intended theological meaning of that passage. A second phase involves the statement of those theological truths and supporting ideas for the contemporary audience. The third phase for preparing a Bible message involves following the example of Jesus in the use of application and illustration. With these elements in view the messenger of God will be able to plan the outline of his message in a way that reflects the meaning of the text and engages the contemporary audience.

The immediate aim of this study is to have the student learn this method. The ultimate goal, however, is for the Christian worker to deal with his preaching and teaching responsibilities by letting the Bible speak through its various texts. The study is not designed for the memorizing of concepts in the workbook. It is primarily designed for dealing with specific Bible text using specific study techniques. The student must be reminded that he will develop skills in the use of these techniques only as he applies them repeatedly to specific texts of Scripture.

Though individualized study can be effective, the most profitable use of the workbook will be to have students work in groups. Groups of three or four students will learn this method more quickly by supporting each other in the study. Weaker students will gain from stronger ones. The sense of accountability and mutual support will accelerate the learning. Even if a larger class meets regularly to go over the material, small groups of three or four should still work together as often as they can.

The designers of this study hope that missionaries, pastors, denominational leaders, and other more experienced Christian workers will take responsibility for teaching these methods to any who are interested. God-called messengers do not receive with their calling the understanding needed for effective Bible interpretation. They need training. It is neither possible nor advisable to take these workers from the field for advanced training. Those who are called to pursue college and seminary training should do so. But the great majority of Christian workers across the world will continue to be effective without such

higher education. With the Bible in hand and an understanding of how to proclaim its truths, they can “equip the saints for the work of ministry” in an effective way (Ephesians 4:12).

If the church planting movement across the world were required to wait on higher education, it would grind to a halt. God is raising up his servants in people groups throughout the earth to reach people with the good news of Christ and assemble them into viable New Testament churches. These new church plants must have effective Bible teaching to develop into healthy, reproducing churches.

A teacher for this study needs only to understand and apply this method in his own preaching ministry. Once he is ministering the Word of God in this way himself, he can teach this approach to others. Whether he works with only one student or with dozens, he can multiply his ministry.

The workbook is free, so the only cost will be the local printing. Wayne McDill has published this workbook on line to make it as widely available as possible. Anyone may find the document under “books” at Wayne McDill’s website (www.waynemcdill.net) and download the workbook to make as many copies as needed.

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