

PRAY

You need the Holy Spirit to speak to you through the word. Ask God to show you what the text means. Ask Him what it means for your audience today. Ask him to help you faithfully communicate the text. Ask him to protect you from saying something really stupid. Ask him to keep you humble and listening. Ask him to show you how you need to change your own thoughts/life/beliefs, before you go preaching to others. Repent of anything you need to repent of. Embrace the text. Live in it. Learn it. Think about it. Pray it. Pray. Pray, asking God to keep his glory central. Ask him to help you focus on Christ and his gospel, and to keep the cross central in all your preaching. We preach to point people to the cross, and the gospel of Jesus Christ, the grace we so desperately need. We do not preach to make good people better. We preach to point rebels to their redeemer! Pray. Ok, now begin.

READ

Read the passage multiple times. If possible, read the entire book at least once. The more the better! If you do not have time to read the entire book, make sure to at least read the passages surrounding the verses you intend to preach from. CONTEXT IS KEY. If you don't have a handle on context, chances are you will end up preaching something other than what the author intended. Needless to say, that's not good. One guy told me, "seeing the whole picture protects the preacher from distorting the parts which make up the whole." That observation about preaching is worth its weight in gold. Basically, if you can't summarize what the book or letter is about (who wrote it, to whom it was written, and the author's intention in writing) you probably don't yet have a handle on context. Ideally, you basically want to be able to explain the argument, overall point, or general message of your particular book or letter. If you can do that, you are well on your way to getting a basic handle on context.

If you do not have the time to get a handle on the context of a book, or if you just feel like you've been unsuccessful in this endeavor (which happens, so don't beat yourself up), it's probably a really good idea to read what other trusted scholars have written about the book/letter from which you will be preaching. **But, and this is important, please strive not to read expositional commentaries about the verses from which you will be preaching yet.** You have some work of your own to do before you read what others have preached about the (your) text. If you have a study Bible, that's a great place to start when it comes to reading about the context of books of the Bible. If you don't own a study Bible and you don't have access to commentaries, the internet is a great place to go for this information. The following link gives you the introduction to every book of the Bible straight out of the English Standard Version:

http://www.blueletterbible.org/study/intros/esv_intros.cfm

PRAY

OBSERVE

As you do some prep work, here are some great insights to discern about your text:

- Who wrote?
- Who received?
- What is the book all about?
- When was it written?
- Where was it written from?
- Why was it written?
- Is there a key word, idea, doctrine, theme, etc?
- Main characters in the book?

PRAY

Journey from Text to Sermon

Now that you have read and performed some basic observation about your book/passage, you are ready to take the next steps, steps which will lead you on a journey from raw text to ready sermon! But how? Great question!

1. Read your passage in the translation you plan on preaching from. (Pray)
2. Jot down any initial observations and/or questions you may have about the text. (Pray)
3. Read the passage in other translations, sometimes this is really helpful in clarifying something in the text. (Pray)

4. Determine the meaning of the verses leading up to your text, and immediately following it. (I know this sounds tedious, and maybe you feel like you already did this in the steps above, but remember, context is key! So, if you can't just basically understand and explain the verses before and after your text, and WHY your text is stuck right there in the between those other verses, you probably don't see the context yet. You're not trying to write sermons about these additional verses, just make sure you generally understand them and could explain them to someone. (Pray)
5. Diagram your text. (Pray)
 - a. Identify the sentences within the verses you will study and preach.
 - b. Identify the subject and verb of each sentence. One professor told me, the verbs are used to advance the argument (or story)! You've got to find those verbs!
 - c. I'll give you another document which will basically demonstrate this.
 - d. Some general tips...
 - i. If you see the word "therefore" ask yourself, what's it there for?
 - ii. Conjunctions are very important...they are clues which point your attention to the flow of a conversation or argument (but & and, or, for, nor, yet, so, etc...)
 - iii. Other neon signs in the text include: So that, for this reason, then, etc...
6. Outline your text (Don't try to get crazy or overly creative with this...let the outline flow right from the text!)
 - a. How in the world do I outline? Basically, you want to simply write out the main clauses (subject and verb) on one line, then with indented lines, write out the dependent clauses (which almost modify and/or explain your main clauses) right below the independent clauses they are related to). Doing it in this manner will help you see the main points jump right out...and you will see how the author employs everything else in the passage to explain or describe the main points. Here is a good hint in preaching. Make sure your main points in the sermon flow from main points in the text. The last thing you want to do is make something up, or preach something that simply is not there. (Pray)
7. Word study time! Now that you have identified those main verbs (and other key words) it's time to make sure you understand what they mean. Just make yourself a list of words, and then do a little research for each one. Again, if you don't have access to any Bible study tools of your own, here is a great place to go: <http://www.blueletterbible.org/index.cfm> And from what I have heard, though you have to download some stuff, this is also a good place to go: <http://www.olivetree.com/pc/>
8. Biblical Theology time! (Pray)
 - a. What are the key theological themes in your text? Mercy, grace, sin, sanctification, etc., etc.? Make sure you can pick them out, and make sure you can explain them...don't try to write papers about these themes, just make sure you can explain them in a sentence or two.
 - b. See what else the author of your passage has to say about those same words elsewhere in this same book or letter.
 - c. Has your author written other books/letters? Search those for any theological ideas which show up in your passage.
 - d. Then, go ahead and conduct a Bible search for those themes as well.
 - e. Again, the blue letter Bible site will let you do these searches.
9. You are now ready to write a rough draft. How?
 - a. Use the outline you have already developed from the text.
 - b. Use these guiding questions as you develop your outline further.
 - i. What does the text say?
 - ii. What does the text mean?
 - iii. What do I need to know, believe, do, or stop doing in response to this text?
10. Now that you have done all of this work, now you may read some commentaries. This is important. You want to make sure you are not way out in left field cranking out some crazy heresy. Here is a tip. If what you have written, or what you are about to preach, is really different than many or even just a few of the commentaries you are reading...you are probably the one who is wrong (not definitely, but most likely).