

TheWordWorks

Expository Preaching Module 1

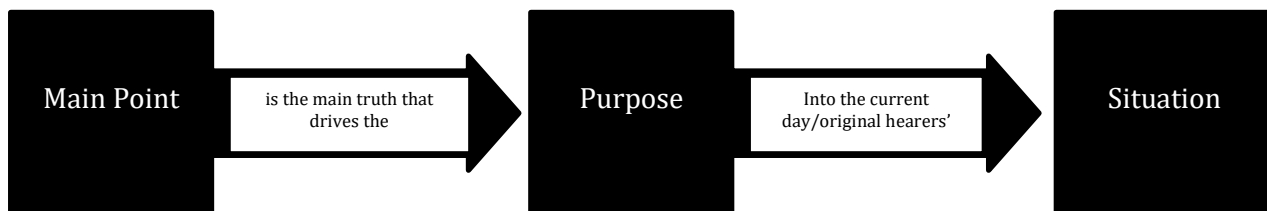
How to make good applications?

Aim of this module:

To be able to make good applications from any given passage

Recap

See Modules “What is expository preaching” and “Applying the Purpose”



The task of the preacher is to teach the author’s **main point** in order to achieve the author’s **purpose** in a **current day situation** similar to the situation of the original hearers.

In other words, we want our applications to be **purpose-driven** and **situation-specific**.

Why aim for purpose-driven and situation-specific applications?

1. It applies the passage the way the biblical author meant for it to be applied

This is an integral part of faithful preaching. It allows the biblical author’s intent (which is also God’s intent because of Scripture’s dual authorship) to be the sermon’s intent.

E.g. A sermon on Mark 1:14-15

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

If Mark’s purpose for Mark 1:14-15 is for his hearers to repent and believe the gospel (i.e. author’s purpose), then the sermon’s application for the current day hearer must also be “Repent and believe the gospel” (i.e. purpose-driven application).

2. It allows the main point to provide theological motivation for the purpose-driven application

The main point and the purpose go together. The purpose tells the hearer **how** to respond. The main point tells the hearer **why** they must respond in this way. Main point without purpose is dry theological truth. Purpose without main point is superficial legalism. Good applications are driven into the hearts, minds and hands of the hearer by the weightiness of the main point.

E.g. A sermon on Mark 1:14-15

Why must people repent and believe the good news? (the purpose-driven application). It’s because the Kingdom of God is at hand! (the main point).

3. It produces the sharpest applications

Motherhood applications are applications that are so generic, broad and blunt that the hearer dismisses them as soon as they are heard. E.g. “Let’s go out and evangelise!”, “Let’s give our lives to God afresh”, “Let’s follow Jesus with more fervour this week!”. These motherhood applications feel like they can be tacked on to every sermon.

Applying the purpose into a current day situation similar to the original situation gives specificity to your applications. You are not only preaching how to respond to the text (i.e. the purpose) but also who-in-what-kind-of-situations should respond in this way. These kind of applications, in our experience, feel “real” i.e. they are addressed to real people in specific situations. These applications are sharp in terms of purpose and sharp in terms of situation.

How to flesh out purpose-driven and situation-specific applications (using Amos 5:18-6:14 as an example)

1. Start with the Big idea

Situation of original hearers	Main point	Purpose
Israelites feel secure because of their religion, their prosperous life and their land conquests.	God will judge secure-feeling Israel because her religion is idolatrous and her prosperous life ignores justice	Wake up from your false security!

2. Work out who your hearers are

These are the groups of people who make up your hearers. These might be groups organised by age/life-stage: e.g. Seniors, Middle-age adults, Young parents, Young working adults, Teens. These might be groups organised by behaviour/thinking: e.g. “Secure-in-their-affluence” types, the “religion-justifies-me” types, the “I don’t believe in Jesus” types. Sometimes, you might choose to address the entire church in one aspect of their corporate behaviour.

Situation of original hearers	Main point	Purpose	Current day hearers
Israelites feel secure because of their religion, their prosperous life and their land conquests.	God will judge secure-feeling Israel because her religion is idolatrous and her prosperous life ignores justice	Wake up from your false security!	Affluent seniors/middle-aged adults
			Religion-justifies-me types (e.g. proud-never-missed-church person)
			Church as whole

3. Ask 2 questions about your hearers

- a. What is a current day situation in their lives that is similar to the situation of the original hearers? (see 2nd column from the right)

The more accurately you describe their situation, the more impactful the purpose-driven application will be. People will think “You’re addressing me! This is a word for me!”

- b. What does the purpose-driven application look like in their situation? (see 1st column from the right)

Situation of original hearers	Main point	Purpose	Current day hearers	Current day situation	Purpose-driven application
Israelites feel secure because of their religion, their prosperous life and their land conquests.	God will judge secure-feeling Israel because her religion is idolatrous and her prosperous life ignores justice	Wake up from your false security!	Affluent seniors/middle-aged adults	Secure in cushy retirement/high quality of life. “God has blessed me with the good life”. But self-idolatrous living.	Wake up! Stop thinking your good life is insurance cover for your idolatry
			Religion-justifies-me types (e.g. proud-never-missed-church person)	Secure in religious performance. “God must be pleased with me because I do...”. But self-idolatrous living.	Wake up! Stop thinking your religion is insurance cover for your idolatry.
			Church as whole	Secure in our blessings and religion but ignoring justice in the midst of the church?	Wake up! Take heed of the bullied and uncared for (financially needy?) in our midst

Common pitfalls in applications

Pitfall #1:

Getting the author’s main point but applying the main point in a way that is different from the author’s purpose (see Module “Applying the purpose” for an elaboration of this point)

Pitfall #2:

Applying the purpose but into a generic situation and not the specific situation similar to the original situation (see Module “Applying the purpose” for an elaboration of this point)

Pitfall #3:

Pre-determining what the application should be about by making applications always a fixed combination of **heart** (attitudes/emotions to be fostered, **hand** (behaviour to be modified) and **head** (truths to be believed). In other words, an application without a heart component, a hand component and a head component would be deemed incomplete.

However, different biblical authors have **different purposes for writing**.

Some may write to effect a **heart response** in their hearers (e.g. Ephesians 3:1-13 “Do not be discouraged”, Ezekiel 43:1-12 “Be ashamed”)

Some may write to effect a **hand response** in their hearers (e.g. 1 Thessalonians 4:1-7 “Avoid sexual immorality”)

Some may write to effect a **head response** in their hearers (e.g. Mark 1:14-15 “Believe the gospel”)

The key thing then is to **follow where the author’s purpose leads you** rather than pre-determining what kind of application there should be.

Some practical wisdom about applications

1. Make your sermon introduction and conclusion oriented towards application

This signals to your hearers that the purpose of the sermon (and the scriptures) is to cause something to happen in the hearer. God seeks to transform his people through his Word. He calls people into his Kingdom through his Word.

One way to have your introduction oriented towards application is by having situation-based sermon introductions. See module “What makes a good sermon introduction” for more details.

2. Use illustrations (See module on “Effective illustrations” for an elaboration of the points below)

Illustrations used in the application part of the sermon serves to give the listener a mental image of what the application looks like in actual situations.

- a. The illustration can be a description of likely scenarios the listener will face in the coming week and what application looks like there
- b. The illustration can be an example of someone you know that has lived out the application or your own personal experience living it out.

Exercise

Work out the purpose-driven applications for a sermon on 1 Corinthians 3:18-4:5 using the 3 step approach given above

- The situation of the original hearers, main point and purpose have been given to you
- Assume you're preaching this in your own church. Think of 2 groups of hearers in your congregation and the application for them.

Situation of original hearers	Main point	Purpose	Current day hearers	Current day situation	Purpose-driven application
The Corinthians were following certain human leaders (Apollos, Cephas, Paul etc) in order to be more spiritually impressive than others. They evaluated these leaders by worldly standards of impressiveness (e.g. eloquence, miracle/sign working). This led to disunity/factionalism in the church.	God ultimately judges human leaders on the basis of faithfulness not futile/irrelevant worldly standards	Don't judge human leaders on the basis of futile/irrelevant worldly standards			