

TheWordWorks

Expository Preaching Module 1

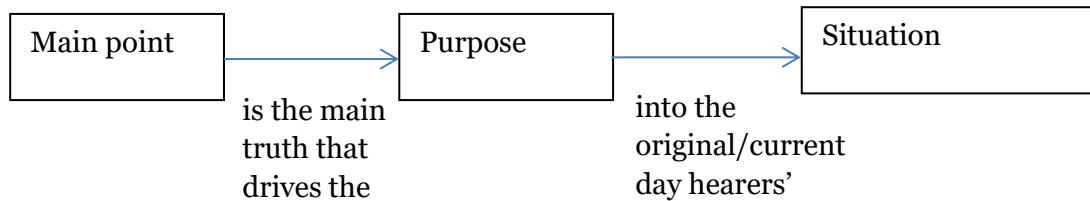
What makes a good sermon introduction?

Aim of this module:

To understand the purpose of a sermon introduction and therefore, what makes a good sermon introduction

Recap

Expository preaching is preaching which teaches 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



See also the Modules “The basic shape of an expository sermon” and “An overview of an expository sermon preparation process”

The purpose of a sermon introduction

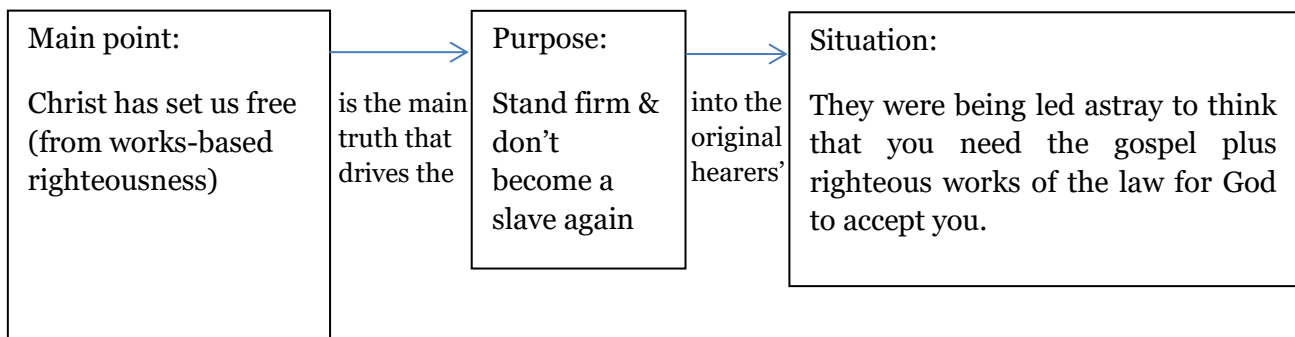
The sole purpose of a sermon introduction is to make the listener *want to carry on listening*.

Situation-based sermon introductions

These are sermon introductions which describe the **current day hearer's situation** (a situation similar to the original hearers) and in so doing, raise a live issue that the main point and purpose then addresses.

Example 1: A sermon on Galatians 5:1

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

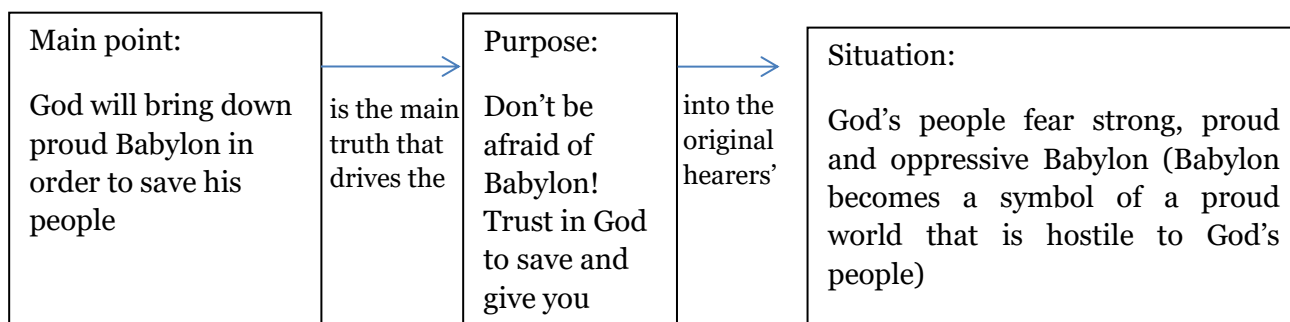


A situation-based sermon introduction might look like this:

“Have you ever felt like you had to prove yourself to God before he accepts you? Yes, you’ve put your trust in Jesus. But that seems almost a bit too easy doesn’t it? Don’t I have to prove myself by being a good person or by serving God in church?”

If you’ve ever thought this way before, then you’ll understand what the Galatian Christians were thinking. They were....[insert situation of the Galatian Christians]”

Example 2: A sermon on Isaiah 13:1-14:2



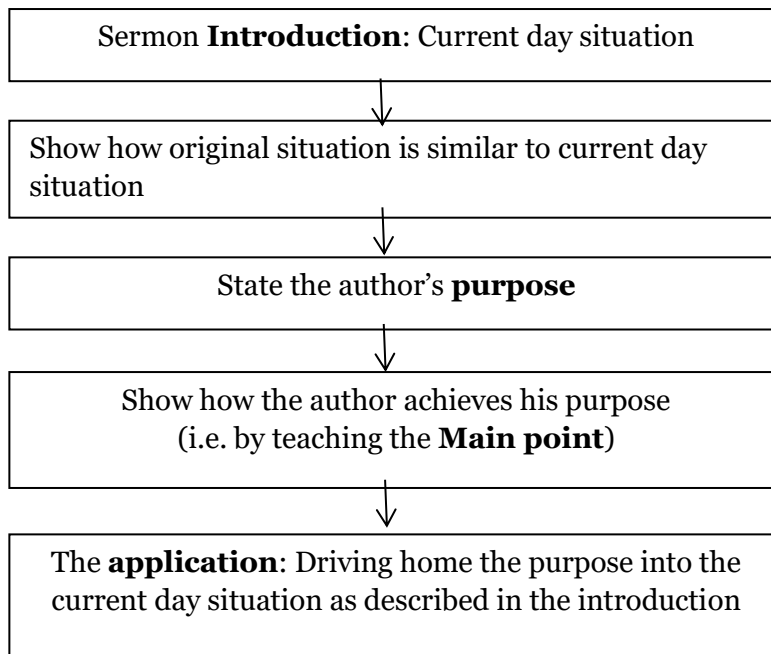
A situation-based sermon introduction might look like this:

“If you’re anything like me, you have a lot of fears in your life. You might have fears about bullies. A boss that exploits you. A cruel classmate. Some of our Christian brothers and sisters around the world are bullied by hostile governments. How do I cope in a world where the one with the biggest stick tramples on everyone else?”

If you’ve ever felt this way before, then you’ll know how the folks in Isaiah’s time felt. They were....[insert situation of original hearers]”

The advantages of situation-based sermon introductions

1. It frames the rest of the sermon as something that will be of **relevance to the listener**. This is the best way to make the listener want to carry on listening (see the purpose of a sermon introduction above). A funny joke or humorous manner might make someone listen to you for 5 more minutes because they like your style. But an issue/question posed at the beginning that is of direct relevance to the listener will make them want to keep on listening until there is some resolution to the issue.
2. It allows the **main point and purpose** of the passage to **be brought in in the most natural way**. The situation is the “target” where the biblical author wants the main point and purpose to “land”. Therefore, a situation-based sermon introduction sets up the target for you the preacher to shoot the arrow! In the Module “The basic shape of an expository sermon”, I suggest the following sermon flow to most naturally bring in the main point and the purpose:



3. It outlines early on the specific kind of situations where the purpose-driven application will land in the concluding part of the sermon (see above diagram). Therefore, you come full circle: In the application, you make reference to the situation you described in the introduction. This is a way to signal to your listeners that finally, this is the resolution to their issue they've been waiting for since the sermon introduction. The tension is finally released.

This avoids the feeling, in some sermons, of the applications being tacked on at the end of the sermon like some alien guest to the main body of the sermon. Instead, sermons that start with a situation-based introduction and ends with the application in those same situations are like an organically whole entity that fits together naturally.

Exercise:

For the next sermon you prepare, after you've worked out the Big Idea of the passage (Main point, Purpose, Situation), **write out a short 1 paragraph situation-based sermon introduction** and then from this introduction, see if you work out (through scribbles on the back of an envelope) how the rest of the sermon will flow from this introduction.

Appendix 1 – Practical wisdom for Sermon introductions

1. The first minute of the sermon is critical for your listener in deciding whether to carry on listening in an engaged manner or not. So, don't waste it with general niceties about how great the weather has been or how happy you are to be there or a biography of your life¹. Get straight to the issue and show how what you're about to say for the next 20-40 minutes will be relevant to them.
2. Don't take too long for your sermon introduction. If not, you'll run out of time for the main point and purpose-driven application and it'll feel like a really well set-up crime thriller movie that rushes through its final 30 minutes with an unsatisfying conclusion because the movie maker ran out of time. A good rule of thumb is between 10-15% of your total word count.
3. Make the situation in the introduction as concrete, specific and real-life as possible. If you have a real life example, use it (e.g. Isaiah 13 sermon: a friend you spoke to recently that told you about his fears of persecution, Galatians 5:1 sermon: behaviours you've observed in your church which might show a works-based righteousness mentality). This shows your listeners that you're dealing with real situations and are concerned about real people, not some laboratory people of your own imagination.

¹ These things, if necessary, can be done in an interview section or earlier section of the meeting. Keep the sermon and this other stuff separate because you want your listeners to be engaged on the sermon from the first sentence.