

Ten Steps on the Pathway to Preaching

Syllabus for Sermon Preparation and Delivery.

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Purpose: This outline is a step-by-step guide for applying various homiletical tools that ministerial students acquire in the whole range of seminary courses that serve the art of sermon preparation and delivery. It is subject to further editing and is offered freely. (Some concepts are credited to oral or written sources – see “References” on page 11.)

Section One: Scripture-Oriented Preparation

1. CONSECRATION – Preparation of your heart
2. OBSERVATION – Perusal of the English text
3. EXPOSITION – Penetration of the original text
4. UNIFICATION – Proposition and transition to text
5. DIVISIONS – Probing or completing the proposition



Section Two: Audience-Oriented Preparation:

6. ILLUSTRATION – Pictures clarifying timeless truths
7. APPLICATION – Practical value to this audience
8. MOBILIZATION – Planning an action for change
9. INTRODUCTION – Preliminary Understandings
10. NOTATION – Pulpit note construction

Expository preaching “exposes” the truth in each Bible text. I.e., the preacher “leads out” (exegetes) the meaning of the biblical text for the edification of the church he pastors.

1. CONSECRATION: Begin with heart preparation. We need the enablement of the Holy Spirit as much in the study as in the sanctuary. Commune with your Partner in preaching (John 14:16-17; 15:26-27; 16:7-11). (N)

Remember: “Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in it’s context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher to his hearers.” (R, 28)

Prayer: Psalm 119:18. “Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Thy law.”

2. OBSERVATION – “The Big Idea” (R, 31-45):

- a. **Read the English Text:** Read it several times, in various versions. View it in the broader context of the flow of thought from the previous material in the book, both before and after.
- b. **Set the “Expository Agenda”** (or “Exegetical Agenda”) (N) Write your observations of the English text. Ask questions. Form hypotheses. Postulate solutions. Specify assumptions. Look beyond the familiar. Ask, “What am I not seeing here?”
- c. **State the Big Idea:** Begin to formulate answers to these two questions. Write them down:
SUBJECT: “What is the writer talking about?” _____ (rough draft)
COMPLEMENT(s): “What is he saying about what he’s talking about?”

3. EXPOSITION – “The Exegetical Idea:” (R, 66-70) Answer your questions and test your hypotheses through careful, analytical study of the original text. (NOTE: there are so many good online tools to help find the meaning of the text, e.g., Bible-Soft or Word-Search.)

a. Literary Form: What kind of literature is this text? (R, 68-69)

Letter	Speech	Biography
Parable	Allegory	Drama
Prayer	History	Apocalyptic
Proverb	Contract	Story (Narrative)
Poetry	Laws	Other:

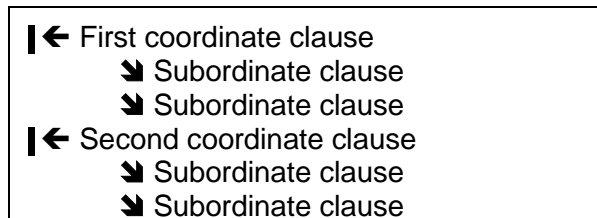
b. Exegesis: Probe the original language with the following steps: (T)

1.	Lexical Exegesis	Word meanings in the original text, context.
2.	Syntactical Exegesis	Grammatical construction in the original text.
3.	Synthesis/Outline	Think the thought of the writer with him.
4.	Problem Resolution	Select the best alternatives, and give reasons.
5.	Re-Evaluation	Integrate findings into a synthesis of thought.

c. Comprehension: Use the following checklist to remind yourself of the many devices, techniques and supplements which help sharpen the focus of your study on the precise meaning of the text in the context. (O)

<input type="checkbox"/> Proper word emphasis	<input type="checkbox"/> Summary paraphrase
<input type="checkbox"/> Etymology of words	<input type="checkbox"/> Supposition: What if . . .
<input type="checkbox"/> Grammatical construction	<input type="checkbox"/> Correct wrong interpretations
<input type="checkbox"/> Word used in other contexts	<input type="checkbox"/> Historical background
<input type="checkbox"/> Translation in other versions	<input type="checkbox"/> Biblical background
<input type="checkbox"/> Use of English dictionary	<input type="checkbox"/> Search the context
<input type="checkbox"/> Check the punctuation	<input type="checkbox"/> Explanatory cross-references
<input type="checkbox"/> Inferential truth	<input type="checkbox"/> Supplementary cross-reference
<input type="checkbox"/> Try substituting wrong words	<input type="checkbox"/> Confirmatory cross-references
<input type="checkbox"/> Try stopping in the wrong place	<input type="checkbox"/> Ideas often overlooked
<input type="checkbox"/> Ask questions focused on meaning	<input type="checkbox"/> Biblical illustrations

c. Mechanical Layout: It is often helpful to attempt to distinguish the biblical writer’s major assertions by means of a “mechanical layout.” (R, 68, 215-16)



Example #1: 1 Corinthians 4:5.

<p>Therefore . . .</p> <p>→ <u>do not go on passing judgment</u> before the time, but . . .</p> <p>→ <u>wait</u> until the Lord comes</p> <p> ↘ who will both . . .</p> <p> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <u>bring to light</u> the things hidden in the darkness and</p> <p> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <u>disclose the motives</u> of men's hearts;</p> <p> ↘ and then each man's praise will come to him from God.</p>
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Example #2: Ephesians 2:8-10

For by grace you have been saved
 ↳ through faith; and
 that not of yourselves,
 it (grace, salvation, faith – or all three?) is the gift of God;
 ↳ not as a result of works,
 so that no one may boast.
 For we are His workmanship,
 ↳ created in Christ Jesus for good works,
 which God prepared beforehand
 so that we would walk in them.

d. EXEGETICAL IDEA: In light of your research, restate the “Big Idea” so it expresses exactly the meaning of the biblical writer. (R, 66-86)

SUBJECT: “What is the writer talking about?” _____

The “big idea” will be a timeless truth about God, drawn from the text that can be understood in the way your audience can receive, believe, and obey.

COMPLEMENT(s): “What is he saying about what he is talking about?”

4. UNIFICATION – The “Homiletical Idea” (R., 97), or “Proposition,” (B, 115)

a. Proposition: Form the homiletical idea so that it reflects the truth of the text accurately AND relates meaningfully to the audience – in a single, exact, memorable, and compelling sentence. (B, 113-124)

- ✓ This main idea will contain a subject and one or more complements.
- ✓ The purpose of this statement may be more for you than for the audience.

b. Organization: What kind of “homiletical idea” (or proposition) is it?

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> IDEA to be explained? | Use the DEDUCTIVE approach (R, 116) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> PROPOSITION to be proved? | Use the DEDUCTIVE approach (R, 119) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> PRINCIPLE to be applied? | Use the DEDUCTIVE approach (R, 121) |
| ----- | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SUBJECT to be completed? | Use the INDUCTIVE approach (R, 122) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> STORY to be told? | Use the INDUCTIVE approach (R, 124) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> PROBLEM to be explored? | Use the INDUCTIVE approach (R, 127) |

c. Deductive Approach: You may choose to disclose the entire main idea (Subject and Complements) in the introduction. If so, the rest of the message will examine, prove and/or apply it. After the main idea has been presented, include the following:

- ✓ **Interrogative Sentence:** This will determine how the proposition is to be developed in the divisions. Using an interrogative adverb (HOW, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY, or WHO), raise a question in the minds of the hearers which anticipates your explanation, validation and/or application of the proposition. (B, 125-127)

- ✓ **Transitional Sentence:** Prepare the hearers for two or more divisions. It may also be an incomplete sentence which is completed by the short phrases of the main divisions. (B, 124-125) Examples: “Fruit of the Spirit are...” “Full armor of God” includes . . .”
- ✓ **Key Word:** It involves a plural, abstract (or metaphorical) noun preceded by the number of divisions to be presented. (B, 128) Examples:
 - **Abstract:** . . . features, qualities, characteristics, elements, essentials, etc.
 - **Metaphorical:** . . . steps, ingredients, facets, dimensions, mile-posts, etc.

d. Inductive Approach: Only the subject is presented in the introduction and the complements (divisions) are disclosed one at a time. The main idea becomes complete by sermon’s end, and is summarized and applied in the conclusion. (R, 125) Alternative elements include:

- ✓ **Subject/Question:** Introduce the subject only, often in question form, using a pronoun such as “**how,**” “**who,**” “**what,**” “**why,**” or “**when.**”
- ✓ **Preview:** Anticipate the divisions by categorizing the nature of each complement. Be general and descriptive here, not specific.

5. DIVISIONS – Each division, or main point, grows out of the proposition. It contains a declarative statement in response to the interrogative sentence, and thus develops (or completes) the idea of the proposition. (B, Ch. 8) Next, test the wording of your divisions:

a. **Wording:** Do the divisions measure up to these standards? (O, B, 161-65)

- ✓ UNITY: Does each division help answer the question asked?
- ✓ PROGRESSION: Does each division build toward a climax?
- ✓ DIVERSITY: Does each division say something different?
- ✓ BEFITTING: Are there no more divisions than necessary?
- ✓ ACCURACY: Are the ideas correct, and drawn from the text?
- ✓ CREATIVITY: Can the divisions include parallel (memorable) wording?
- ✓ CLARITY: Is each division concretely worded, a single idea?
- ✓ VITALITY: Is each a “timeless truth,” anticipating an application?

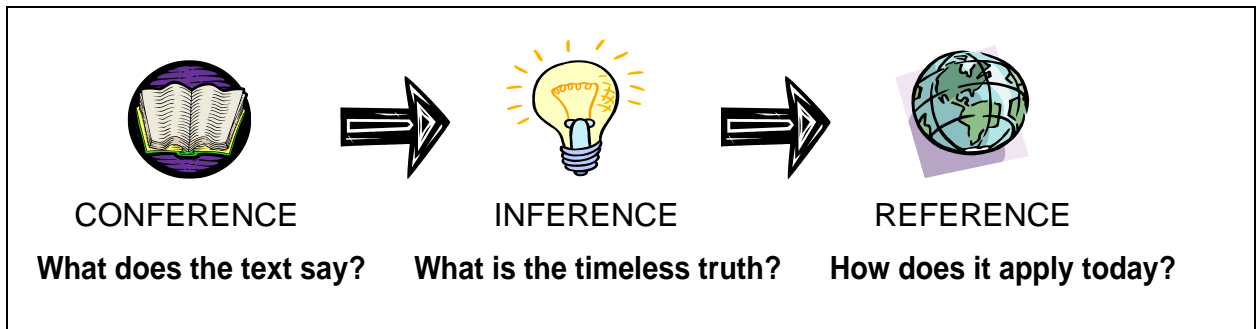
b. **Development:** Review, use these three developmental questions. (R. 137-56)

- ✓ **FIRST – Explanation: “What does it mean?”** Implications of exposition.
 - ❖ RESTATEMENT: “How can the statement be said in other words?”
 - ❖ EXPOSITION: “What historical, grammatical facts need clarifying?”
 - ❖ NARRATION: “Can they see it?” Description, imagination, dialogue.
 - ❖ DEFINITION: “What limits are there?” Inclusions and exclusions.
- ✓ **SECOND – Substantiation: “Is it true?”** Build faith, conviction, motivation.
 - ❖ CROSS-REFERENCE: “Which texts shed light on the interpretation?”
 - ❖ SUPPORTIVE QUOTES: “Which respected authorities confirm this?”
- ✓ **THIRD – Application: “What difference does it make?”** (See #7 below)
 - ❖ ILLUSTRATION: “How does this apply to us today?” (See #6 below)
 - ❖ TRANSITION: “How is each statement related to the whole sermon?”

6. ILLUSTRATIONS – There are two types of Illustrations. (S)

- a. **Illustrations that Explain:** Take the hearer from the familiar to the unfamiliar. These can come from almost any source, including the Bible itself, science, history, objects, visuals, fables, farming, sports, and personal experience. Be concise. Analogies can help us go from the known to the unknown, from concrete images to abstract truths.
- b. **Illustrations that Apply:** Specific, extended, visual accounts which directly correspond to the biblical truth being taught. They must relate that truth directly to the real experiences of today’s listener. Sources include personal experiences, true accounts of real people, current event, caricatures, and hypotheticals. We need to show how real people in real time struggle just like us, and how the truth taught in the text can impact them. (Guard confidentiality. Use pseudonyms when appropriate.)

7. APPLICATION – Expository preaching bridges from ancient text to the present world: (A)
We do this by stating biblical principles that apply in any age.



- a. **Conference:** What did the text mean TO THEM THEN? Exegetical idea.
What was the theological purpose of the Spirit-inspired biblical writer? (R, 92)
- b. **Inference:** What is the TIMELESS TRUTH? The explicit or implicit principle.
Does it relate directly or indirectly to the circumstances and culture of our day?
State the timeless truth as a principle. What do we learn about God Himself?
- c. **Reference:** What does it mean TO US NOW – *to you and me, right here, right now*?
Apply the truth to the folks in front of you who live in this present darkness. How does this text inform, convince, motivate and/or inspire them. Be specific.

8. MOBILIZATION – The conclusion moves truth from our “HEADS,” through our “HEARTS,” to the “HANDS.” Preaching aims at change, e.g., conversion, conformity to Christ, repentance, faith, trust, forgiveness, commitment, obedience, worship, etc. (You should not introduce more exposition here. Keep the focus clearly on your primary text. (N))

- a. **Purpose:** What should the sermonic truth accomplish in the hearers (N), and what should be the measurable result? (R, 108-112)
 - ➔ ☩ **INFORM?** Adding truth to the foundation of a Biblical World View.
 - ➔ ➔ ☩ **CONVINCE?** Pressing beyond information to conviction, commitment.
 - ➔ ➔ ➔ ☩ **MOTIVATE?** . . . Building conviction into action, obedience. Show them how.
 - ➔ ➔ ➔ ➔ ☩ **INSPIRE?**Lifting the hearer into love, worship, praise, surrender.

Progression of Flow: All sermons must present accurate biblical **information**. Solid biblical truths are the building blocks for **conviction**. Once **convinced**, the pastor can challenge folks to be **motivated**, to take action in light of the revealed will of God in this text.

Then again, the purpose of the text may be to “**inspire**,” i.e., to bring people into a deeper, immediate encounter with the Lord in worship, praise, thanksgiving, and security in Christ. **Inspiration**, too, must begin with accurate biblical **information**.

b. Conclusion: Reiterate and reinforce the proposition by one or more of these: (R, 167)

A Summary	An Illustration	A Question
A Prayer	A Visualization	Clear Directions

c. Invitation \ Action Step: Specifically, what will you ask them to do? Make a plan in your notes, but leave room for the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Your church culture may shape how you usually plan to conclude. Yet, consider some options, and be free to follow the leading of the Spirit. For example, these are some common practices:

- **Traditional Altar Call.** (This is a cultural form drawn from the Great Awakening.)
- Pray the appropriate **response prayer from the pulpit**, e.g., “the sinner’s prayer.”
- Guide them to a **prayer room** as you dismiss.
- **Remain at the front** of the church, approachable by folks with questions, needs.
- Refer to a “**Prayer Team**,” trained, badged, and strategically positioned.

9. INTRODUCTION – Prepare the minds, secure interest, and introduce the subject.

Now that the preacher knows where he is going in discovering, probing, and applying the “homiletical idea” of the text, it is time to design how to begin the sermon. The following elements are tools for getting started right. They can be rearranged and stressed as the communication situation requires. (o)

ATTENTION: Prepare carefully your opening words. Capture the imagination, curiosity.

BACKGROUND: Give the historical, contextual circumstance of the text. (Review?)

INTEREST: Raise a vital need that is relevant to the audience in this present world.

PROPOSITION: Introduce the homiletically idea in whole or in part.

SCRIPTURE: Determine the best time and manner of reading the text.

TITLE: The specific feature of the sermon suitable for advertising, graphic.

10. PULPIT NOTES – Choose what fits you best: “Manuscript” or “Device-Oriented Outline.”

The style you may develop for your pulpit notes is a matter of personal preference. The goal of written notes in the pulpit is to hold yourself on the pathway to honoring the biblical truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, (. . . so help you God!) Carefully designed notes are very helpful with time-management, and after-sermon follow-up and publication. Such notes also retain your hard work, allowing you to teach this same text at another time and place. NOTE: 3”x5” notecards rarely serve the biblical sermon delivery adequately. (N)

a. Manuscript as Pulpit Notes:

“Manuscript” pulpit notes generally resemble a formal term paper, with sentences and paragraphs making truth clear in a scripted, readable form and appearance.

The student-minister in class may be required to manuscript for evaluation and learning. Some speakers can use scripted notes effectively. Some, however, find it difficult not to be reading rather than relating. Eye-contact is important. Try working from your manuscript and see how other students evaluate your impact. Listen to them.

b. Device-Oriented Outline:

You may experiment with constructing your notes from your study of the text into an extended outline, using words, phrases, or concise sentences that will trigger your memory while preaching. Each portion of text can be marked with a code or symbol to allow you to know exactly the purpose and flow of your unfolding sermon plan. This “symbol-augmented outline” takes fewer pages and allows you freedom to unfold the truth of the text in a more natural, relational communication style. (N)

c. Symbols and Annotation Conventions: Helpful symbolic devices, often placed in the left margin, can be useful in abbreviating your pulpit notes. They may also be helpful in annotating manuscript pulpit copy. This is easily done using your word-processor. You can also annotate your text or outline with markers and highlighters as well. Key: Be consistent! They will become more helpful with use. Suggestions:

- Roman or Arabic Numerals Main points (only)
- ALL CAPS, **Bold** Key word(s) in main points
- = “means,” or “... can also be translated...”
- → (or any bullet) Sub-points, Exegetical notes
- ** Principle, or restatement
- “ Introduces a quotation
- // Parallel passage, cross-reference
- □ or [] Illustration, a “window”
- ++ Application
- Yellow highlighter Key words or phrases to catch my eye
- Underlining Emphasis

d. Familiarity: Pulpit notes must aid, not hinder, the flow of your thoughts. Therefore . . .

- You should have your manuscript or outline completed and marked up well before the moment of delivery. Re-read the text and notes as time permits, praying it into your own heart and experience. (S-D, 102-104)
- Think about the audience – specific people – that can be helped by the timeless and timely truths of this passage.
- Visualize your anecdotes, illustrations, and the unfolding of narrative texts. Practice narration by seeing the events in your own mind and describing them with concrete, active word pictures.

e. Outline Form: Sample templates for both deductive and inductive outlines appear on the next page. When you find a general form that works for you, consider creating a “**sermon notes template.docx**” file you can open and save for your next sermon.

DEDUCTIVE APPROACH

TEXT: _____ TITLE: _____ DATE: _____

- ⇒ ATTENTION: (Opening words should be striking, contemporary, vivid.)
- ⇒ BACKGROUND: (Give essential contextual and background information.)
- ⇒ INTEREST: (Anticipate application to a vital need of the audience)
- **PROPOSITION:** (State the homiletical idea completely and concisely.)
- ⇒ INTERROGATIVE SENTENCE: (Use adverb: What, Why, How, etc.)
- ⇒ TRANSITION SENTENCE: (or incomplete sentence.) Key Word: _____

1. First MAIN DIVISION:

- EXPLANATION: (“What does the text mean?” “Do they understand it?”)
- SUBSTANTIATION: (“Is it true?” “Is it clear?” “Do they believe it?”)
- PRINCIPLE: (“What timeless truth is evident?”)
- APPLICATION: (“What difference does it make to us?”)

2. Second MAIN DIVISION: etc.

- ⇒ CONCLUSION: (Restate and apply the homiletical idea.)
- ⇒ INVITATION TO RESPOND or ACTION STEP: (be specific, practical.)

INDUCTIVE APPROACH

TEXT: _____ TITLE: _____ DATE: _____

- ⇒ ATTENTION: (Opening words should be striking, contemporary, vivid.)
- ⇒ BACKGROUND: (Give essential contextual and background information.)
- ⇒ INTEREST: (Anticipate application to a vital need of the audience.)
- **SUBJECT or QUESTION:** (Disclose your subject only, in question form.)
- ⇒ PREVIEW: (Categorize the nature of the divisions to be discussed.)
- ⇒ TRANSITION SENTENCE: (or incomplete sentence.) Use no key word.

1st MAIN DIVISION: (The first truth from the text in answer to the question.)

- EXPLANATION: (“What does the text mean?” “Do they understand it?”)
- SUBSTANTIATION: (“Is it true?” “Do they believe it?”)
- PRINCIPLE: (“What timeless truth is evident?”)
- APPLICATION: (“What difference does it make to us?”)

2nd MAIN DIVISION: (The second truth in answer to the question.) etc.

- ⇒ SUMMARY: (Restate the complete idea, with subject & all compliments.)
- ⇒ APPLICATION: (Use an illustration that applies the truth to people today.)
- ⇒ INVITATION TO RESPOND or ACTION STEP: (be specific, practical.)

ADDENDUM: Here are some subjects and often come up in classes on expository preaching:

1. Can an expository preacher ever offer a topical message?

Yes, so long as every biblical text used in either type of sermon is approached with the same exegetical integrity. Ordinarily, to teach “the whole council of God,” it is best to set as your most common practice to teach verse-by-verse through each Scriptural book.

Topical messages have often succumbed to the preaching agenda being set by contemporary issues or popular topics. Don’t let the secular world’s issues dictate the subjects on which you teach. However, there are times when a biblically relevant matter may arise that needs to be explored throughout the whole breadth of Scripture. Study the urgent admonition of Paul to Timothy to “. . . preach the word.” (**2 Timothy 5:1-5**)

2. What must be our personal spiritual preparation?

Preaching is a calling. Those who hear and respond to this ministry are privileged and blessed in so many ways. There is an awesome anointing God gives to those who obey Him, to those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

Jesus said, “*I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*” **John 15:5** ESV. Before he ventures into the pulpit, the pastor must settle his spirit to be completely dependent on the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Re-read the Upper Room Discourse of Christ in John 13-17, especially as He calls his disciples to “abide” in Him. Set sufficient time to pray through this passage.

If you can arrange it, consider a personal prayer walk around the church the night before preaching. Pray aloud. “Preach” your message to an audience of One. Exercise your faith in His faithfulness. Offer yourself to serve Him in honesty, humility, total dependence, and love. Wait on Him to manifest His presence to you.

Prepare yourself for the battle. It is important to know that teachers who proclaim the Word of God are subject to attacks by the powers of darkness. Often the enemy will “chase the pastor home” Sunday afternoon. It is common to feel like you have failed. Often a word of criticism comes that deflates you. That can hurt! Below are a couple of insights that will help you handle criticism in a biblical way.

3. HOW CAN I OFFER CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM TO THOSE WHO PREACH?

Here is what can be called “A Practical Theology of Criticism: HOW TO GIVE IT.” In each homiletics class I taught at seminary, I found it valuable to lay out a biblical plan for “constructive criticism” by which fellow classmates could give feedback to each other. It proved to be an essential pastoral skill with value well beyond the classroom setting. Here is the four-step pattern that is easily remembered: Plus, Minus, Minus, Plus.

+ Plus	Start with an appropriate affirmation. “I liked this about your sermon.”
– Minus	Ask permission: Then be specific about what might be improved.
– Minus	Graciously offer a possible corrective to make the sermon stronger.
+ Plus	Return to positive affirmation. “I benefited from this truth you shared.”

Support 1: Consider this “+ - - +” pattern we can see in **2 Timothy 3:16-17** ESV.
¹⁶ *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching [+plus], for reproof [-minus], for correction [-minus], and for training in righteousness [+plus],
¹⁷ *that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.**

Support 2: Consider the pattern that Jesus used as He brought corrective criticism to the seven churches of Asia Minor. Pretty consistently, the “+--+” pattern can be seen. For example, here is His first letter -- to the church in Ephesus:

Revelation 2:1-7 ESV. ¹ *"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.*

1st Plus: ² *"I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. ³ I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.*

1st Minus: ⁴ *But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.*

2nd Minus: ⁵ *Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.*

2nd Plus: ⁶ *Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'*

So, when critiquing one another in a sermon preparation class, we sought to do for fellow students what we were hopeful that they will be doing for us. Start positive. End positive. And be sensitive, yet clear, on how we suggest improvements, as Paul instructs us: **Colossians 4:6**. *Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*

Finally, when giving any corrective to others, best practices require that we OFFER and RELEASE rather than IMPOSE and CONTROL. We ask permission, we speak the truth in love, and we release them to evaluate this before their Lord.

4. HOW CAN I BEST HANDLE CRITICISM FROM OTHERS?

Let's call this discussion -- “A Practical Theology of Criticism: HOW TO TAKE IT.” How we handle criticism, whether we feel it to be legitimate or inaccurate, is a huge indication of our humble maturity in ministry. Paul got lots of criticism. Many Corinthian Christians factionalized around Apollos, criticizing the Apostle Paul in the process. Here is how Paul modeled for us the proper handling of criticism: **1 Corinthians 4:1-7** ESV.

¹ *This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ² Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.*

□ **Identity.** Know your true ministry identity in Christ – you are a servant like others, yet you are also a steward with responsibilities over other servants. You are accountable to God. Be secure in your calling, gifting, and anointing.

³ *But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself.*

Humility. When you know your true identity as a steward of the mysteries of God (v. 1) before Whom you are accountable, “human judgement” by friends,

enemies, and even courts are secondary to the Supreme Court of heaven. God has the absolute right to do the judging. But prayerful self-evaluation is not the same as personal self-condemnation. Human opinion must be held in subordinate to the higher Judge.

⁴ I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.

Openness. Humility is displayed in listening. So, go ahead. Try the criticism on for size. Don't be afraid to seek insight from the criticism. But process this with the God of truth. Is God trying to say something important through this human criticism? If not, let it go. Just be right with the Lord. And love your critic. Look for their good intentions.

⁵ Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

Confidence. Young pastor, memorize this verse! God alone is God! He's good at being God! He sees it all – the good, the bad, and the ugly. We can trust His gracious intention to reveal and reward what is commendable in our ministry. It will be worth it all when we see Jesus -- the a smile on His face!

⁶ I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.

❑ **Vigilance.** Be aware of the bigger picture unfolding in the context of preaching the Word in the local church. Not every critic may be walking in the Holy Spirit. Paul calls the Corinthians to stay within biblical limits. Unity is the prerequisite of full blessing (anointing) according to **Psalm 133:1-5** and **Ephesians 4:1-3**. A main strategy of Satan is to disrupt the unity in the Spirit. Immature believers can be the strategic target of our adversary, who desires to discourage and provokes division in local churches. Some criticism is inevitable. And some is valid. How we handle it is a testing of our own maturing spiritual character -- our honesty, humility, submission, and faith. And love the critical brother or sister, forgiving them if they are offensive.

5. WHAT ABOUT THE INCLUSION OF HUMOR IN MY SERMONS?

The answer is tricky. Yes, but with major cautions. Note that Jesus used humor at times. It is worth studying how He used it. Humor can help people engage, relieve tension, open a door for spiritual impact, etc. Some pastors are known for their Sunday "joke" because the people have been conditioned to expect it. Please don't start this. The decision to include humor should take into account:

- **Relevance:** What is your purpose in using this humor, story, quote, word-picture, etc.? How will it support the "Big Idea" of the text?
- **Purpose:** How will this humor help the listener sustain or regain focused attention?
- **Appropriateness:** Is this joke possibly offensive to a segment of the congregation?
- **Brevity:** Does it take up too much time otherwise needed for explanation and application?
- **Integrity:** Is there a fleshly pride factor in using humor to gain the approval of men?

REFERENCES: At appropriate points, this guide has acknowledged the following teachers and resources. Some ideas were borrowed with appreciation from published material; other inclusions above were drawn from oral teaching and seminars. In either case, the purpose of tagging an idea with the initial of the source is to give these men credit as possible. Note: This “Ten Steps on the Pathway to Preaching” syllabus is not offered for sale.

- ❑ **B** = James Braga. How to Prepare Bible Messages. Multnomah Press, 1969
- ❑ **R** = Haddon W. Robinson. Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages. Baker: 1980
- ❑ **S-D** = Dwight E. Stevenson and Charles F. Diehl. Reaching People from the Pulpit. Baker, 1978
- ❑ **A** = Dr. James Andrews (Source of a concept taught in a class or seminar.)
- ❑ **N** = Dr. David Niquette, Compiler of this guide for sermon construction and delivery.
- ❑ **O** = Dr. Glenn O’Neal, Make the Bible Live.
- ❑ **S** = Dr. Donald Sunukjian, “Clarity and Relevance in Preaching.” Extension Class, Dallas Theological Seminary.
- ❑ **T** = Dr. Robert Thomas. (Source of a concept taught in a class or seminar.)