

The Development Of Expository Sermons (Steps 7-8)

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In the introduction and conclusion, we certainly could spend a lot of time on each one of these points, and it's not exhaustive. I'm not a homiletic professor, I'm a preacher. I just know how to study and get in the pulpit and do what I do to the best of my ability, and hopefully to the good of the listeners and the glory of God. Let's talk about the introduction and the conclusion. Every sermon should have an introduction and a conclusion. Like I said, I like to read my text first. Sometimes people like to introduce their subject, then read the text. There's no rule of thumb that's the "Law of the Medes and the Persians," whatever suits your fancy. Again, I like to read my text first because I want people to hear the Word of the Lord; when the Bible speaks, God speaks. I want to hold it out in front of the congregation, and I want the text to be master and dictate the topics and the subject, that we're there to study the text. So, preferably, I like to read the text. If it's a long narrative passage, I may just introduce it. Depending upon the genre of material I'm in and depending upon the length of my text will determine whether I read the text and then introduce it or whether I introduce it then begin to read my text.

The introduction, its importance, during the introduction your audience decides whether or not they want to listen to you. Just a couple words out of your mouth, just even the opening greeting, people think, This guy's going to be boring. This guy doesn't know how to talk. You want to captivate people from the very beginning so they know whether they want to listen to you or not. You want to gain their attention. It's the "front porch" of the house. I'm going to come back to this metaphor of the introduction being a front porch of the house, but the introduction has been likened unto the front porch of a house. I want you to picture this. You don't want to have a little house with a huge front porch. You don't want to have a big house with a tiny, tiny, tiny little front porch. You want the front porch to be proportionate to the house, so don't make it too big, don't make it too small.

Let's talk about its purpose. First, it's to command attention and awaken interest. An old Russian proverb has, "It is the same with men as with donkeys; whoever would hold them fast must first get a very good grip on their ears." So, you want to grab and hold their attention. How do you get attention and awaken interest? First, you ask a question that surfaces need. Let me give you some ways to grab attention. You ask a question that surfaces need. This is one of my favorite ways to introduce a sermon. I don't do it every week, and there ought to be variety in your introduction, but knowing your topic, you ask a question that your sermon's going to answer. Maybe you're going to preach a message that deals with prayer, you would say, "Have you ever struggled to pray and found it is difficult to spend time in prayer?" (Boom!) "You got my attention, yeah preacher. I know that's a battle, and I struggle with that." Well, Paul's going to give us some practical steps on how we should pray or who we should pray for or the pattern for prayer. So, you start with a question. Make a note of that. Just use a question that introduces your topic, and if the question surfaces need, it's going to grab their attention.

Secondly, tell a story. Now, make sure that you don't tell a story every week that's about you.

You're not there to tell everybody how wonderful you are. You tell a story, but let me say your story...again, not too small, not too big. You don't want a big "front porch." You're not going to spend all your time introducing, your story needs to be short, quick and brief, and to the point, but not about you is the main point I want to make.

Thirdly, you can also tell a joke, a story can introduce your topic or you can use a quote, you can tell a joke. Now, we talked about that. Tim mentioned that. I appreciate what he said. I'm not a big joke teller that leads into sermons, but one thing I want to make perfectly clear, again it should be tasteful, respectful, and you should never use coarse jesting. But when you tell a joke, it should introduce your topic.

Sometimes preachers will tell jokes just to warm up the congregation to get comfortable in the pulpit, and then say, "Okay, the comedy hour's aside, now let's get to the sermon." That's unbecoming, and I don't think it's very profitable. Even J. Vernon McGee, one time he was preaching in San Diego, I think it was at the church David Jeremiah's at, he just told a bunch of jokes. He just told a bunch of jokes. He said, "It has nothing to do with my sermon," and he just told a bunch of jokes. It's not uncommon for guys to tell jokes that have nothing to do with their sermon. I don't think that preachers should do that. If the joke doesn't introduce your topic, then don't tell a joke. You're not a comedian, you're an expositor.

Fourthly, give a startling fact or statistic. Give a fact or statistics. Fifthly, make a statement about the text. I find myself, it's kind of easy to do, I'll note some key words in the text or a key word, and after I've read the text, I want to introduce the text I'll say, "Did you see that Paul used the word 'justified' three times? Paul wants us to know about justification by faith." I'll go right back to the text, pick out a key word in the text, and use that word to introduce my topic of the passage; or maybe, if you're preaching a paragraph, maybe in that whole paragraph there's the key text of the paragraph which has your big idea or your main theme, and you go back and reread that verse and kind of drive it home or gain their attention by that, so a restatement about the text.

So first, how do you introduce your message? Question surfaces need, tell a story, tell a joke, give a startling fact or statistic, make a statement about the text. Secondly, its purpose is to introduce your subject, bring clarity, it should have unity, it should have brevity. Often you get people that go way too long in their introduction. Like I said, the "front porch" shouldn't be too large. It shouldn't be too big. An old Welsh woman said, of the puritan preacher John Owen, "He was so long spreading the table that I lost my appetite for the meal." I love that. He was so long spreading the table that she lost her appetite for the meal. I've heard sermons that have pretty good introductions, they're pretty captivating, then they go too long. It's kind of like, "Okay, come on. I want to hear the text. I want to understand the text. Take me into the text," and they just keep talking about their introduction. It's like, "Okay, the table's set, the food's on the table, let's sit down and start scarfing here. Let's go eat. Let's get on the road." Pay close attention to that in your introduction—brevity.

It should also have variety. There's a great book I think I mentioned the other day by Lloyd

Perry called, *Variety In Your Preaching*, and he deals with variety in your introduction, so that's a book that I would commend to you by Lloyd Perry, *Variety In Your Preaching*.

Seventh, it should not promise more than it delivers. An introduction should not promise more than it delivers. Don't promise some grandiose message and then you don't deliver, okay? It's better to underpromise, so don't give them some grandiose promises that you can never deliver in your sermon. I heard about a guy who announced he was going to preach a seven-week series on heaven, and that it was going to be so amazing, "You've got to come seven weeks and hear about heaven," and he hadn't really done his prep work or studied then starts to preach and found out he only had enough for two sermons, so he kind of fizzled out. So, don't promise what you cannot deliver.

Eighth, it should not be too loud, sensational, or emotional. If you're doing your introduction, that's certainly not going to happen with me, but you get real loud, real demonstrative, real amped, real exciting, and say, (monotone voice) "Okay, now let's turn in our Bibles." It's like, "Whoa, what happened there?" It's like fireworks. Have you ever had the fireworks you're going, "This is going to be awesome! This is going to be amazing!" Then it goes, (poof.) You say, "Well, that was a dud." You know, it just comes on strong, "It's going to be amazing," and just (poof) a little flicker. It just duded out, so don't promise more than you can deliver. Don't be too sensational, loud, or emotional. Keep it kind of even keel.

Ninth, try not to read your introduction. You need eye contact. This is why I like to have a very brief bullet thought for my intro. I'm not that great of a story teller, and I don't have that great of a memory, so I've got to keep it simple, keep it short, keep it connected to my point. Don't overthink it, just try to make sure that it introduces your topic. Tell the story rather than read your introduction. It should not be an apology. I've always found that interesting when a preacher gets up—and I know, I'm tempted to do this—and is going to introduce his sermon and says, "This sermon isn't going to be really very good. I didn't have time to study, and I don't know the subject very well, and I'm not a very good speaker. I'm just a humble little clay pot, but here we go." "Whoa! Then, I'm going to go home and watch the football game." Why am I here, you know?

Have faith in God's Word. Have faith in the Holy Spirit. Remember, Spurgeon, when he used to climb his pulpit would say, "I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe in the Holy Spirit." When we're our weakest, He is our strongest. God's chosen foolish things to confound the wise. If you haven't had time to study, you don't have to tell them, they'll figure it out pretty fast. They'll know. Better to just give it a shot and hope for the best and hope that the Lord comes through, which He always does - Amen? - so don't ever get into the pulpit and apologize that you didn't have enough time, your topic's not very good, you probably should've stayed home and watched tv, it's just not a good way to introduce your sermon. That's my points on introduction, not very thorough. (Now, I'm complaining.)

Step 8, conclusion. Let me commend to you Swindoll's commentary series called, *Living Insights*. As Dennis mentioned the other day, always at the end of each passage it has some

real good life applicational points. Swindoll has always been a master of wrapping up his sermons with rubber meets the road, put it in shoe leather, life application points. There have been times when I'm struggling to conclude a sermon and so I'll go to the Swindoll commentary and look at the end of the section that I've covered, and he has a lot of times really good wrap up of two or three points that can be valuable, helpful, and beneficial.

The conclusion is likened unto landing an airplane. If the introduction is like the front porch of a house, the conclusion is like landing an airplane. A good sermon has to have a good landing. They should be clear, compelling, and climactic. Those are elements of a good conclusion: clear, compelling, and climactic. Conclusions can take different shapes and forms, so seek to create variety in your conclusions, again Lloyd Perry's book, *Variety In Your Preaching*.

Have you ever been on an airplane after a long flight, you're comfortable, and they say, "Okay, seat backs up, tray tables up, put your things, stow it in the seat in front of you. Get ready to land." And you're like, "Oh, man, I just want to keep sleeping. I'm tired. Don't land the plane yet." So, I sit up and get ready, and then you go and you go and the landing time is longer than you expected. It's like, "Man, why did you interrupt my sleep? Why did you make me sit up and put my tray away? Why did you make me stop doing what I was doing?" They say they're going to land, and they don't land. It takes forever to land the plane. So, be real careful about announcing your conclusions. If you announce your conclusion, conclude. Don't tell them you're going to land the plane and don't land the plane. It's so very important.

What are some of the elements that we can use to land the sermon? First, summary—restatement, but rephrase it. In other words, you summarize what you just taught. There's that old adage, "Tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em; tell 'em; tell 'em what you told 'em." You say, "This is what I'm going to tell you," then tell them, then you tell them what you told them. That's a legitimate, valid way to conclude a sermon—restatement. But if you're going to restate your main points, you might want to rephrase them a little bit so you grab them, keep their attention, or a story to drive home the point or application. If you use a story, again, make sure that it does wrap up and conclude and cover what you taught and then applies it to their life.

You can also use a quotation of a poem. I'm kind of a traditionalist. I love a good poem that wraps up/summarizes the sermon. I find more and more that a hymn will wrap up or conclude what I wanted to preach. Maybe you've been preaching on consecration or dedication of your life to God, Romans 12, and you close with the hymn, "I Surrender All." I surrender all / All to Thee, my blessed Savior, / I surrender all. One of the blessings of having been raised in church and hearing hymns my whole life is that I have those hymns stuck to my brain, and some of the stanzas in those hymns are so beautiful to be able to quote.

Or, a verse of Scripture, sometimes it's really cool that if you can wrap up your teaching with one verse that powerfully, wonderfully summarizes and applies what you taught. Wednesday night I used that 1 Corinthians 15 passage, "Therefore . . . unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for . . . ye know that your labour is not in vain," so you're quoting Paul's words from Corinthians at the end of his section on the rapture in 1 Corinthians 15, but you're

exhorting and applying and putting in shoe leather pretty much the whole message that you just gave. So, a poem, a hymn, a verse of Scripture, but it should be short—the quotation, the hymn, the verses should be short. If you're going to quote a hymn, you don't want to quote all four stanzas, the chorus two times, break into a song, and start singing, you know. It's a little over much.

Fourthly, a question, you can actually close your sermon with a question and let the people muse and think about that question in a way that draws them back into your topic. You have a question, "So, are you ready for the rapture? Are you ready for the soon return of the Lord for the church?"

Fifthly, a specific direction, a call to action, a call to pray, a call to preach, a call to witness, a call to resist the devil and he will flee from you. You call to action, and I find myself doing that quite a bit sometimes.

Sixth, run to the cross. What do I mean by that? You can always find a connection from your message in your text to come to the cross of Christ and preach the gospel. I remember I was sharing with Jess and Garrett last night as we were in the car together that I had time together with John Walvoord shortly before he died, and he said that the Lord had really laid it on his heart that wherever he lectured, taught, preached to any congregation, that he would give a clear gospel presentation and an appeal to put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ. So, ". . . do the work of an evangelist," remember Paul's words to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4, ". . . do the work of an evangelist." You don't have to be an evangelist, but you should do the work of an evangelist. So, you should run to the cross and preach the cross of Christ; and to really adequately and sufficiently preach the cross, I think you need to preach man's sin, which made the need for the cross.

Now, I want to take just a quick second, I don't want to belabor this and go too long, but I want to give you, if I can, and this is just kind of from memory, step by step how I give the gospel and then how I give the invitation when I sometimes do invite people to receive Christ and even call them down to the front of the church to pray to receive Christ. I understand that there's those who disagree with that method. They don't think that we should give a public invitation in inviting people to come forward and accept Christ is dangerous and could be turned into cheap grace or they may not get saved. They don't think that there's any altar calls in the Bible, so they don't think we should do that. I disagree. If the gospel's preached clearly, and you're decisively asking for a decision, it has nothing to do with whether God's elected or chosen somebody or not, God's going to do what He's going to do sovereignly by His grace, and we trust the Spirit to work, and we understand not everybody that says, "I want to accept Jesus," has really been regenerated or born again, we get that from the parable of the sower and the seed, but we still want to sow the seed and give people opportunity.

When I'm coming to the end of my sermon, I make sure that while I'm preaching my sermon that I have preached that we are sinners, separated from God. I touch on the fall. I touch on Adam and the fall and that God created us to know Him, have fellowship. But sin separates us.

Then, I talk about God sending Christ, Christ coming of His own volition, and I make sure I explain that He was born of a virgin, that He lived a sinless life, that He was God in flesh, and that He came for the purpose of dying for our sin on the cross, and that the cross was Jesus taking our place and paying for the sin that we committed, that we were born in sin, that we commit sin, so I go into substitutionary atonement, preach the cross, and you can do it as deep or as simple as you want. Preach sin, preach the fall, preach the cross, and then tell people, "Do you know that you've trusted Christ? Have you been born again? Have you ever put your faith in Jesus Christ? Do you know that your sins are forgiven? Do you know that if you died right now, you'd go to heaven? Do you have assurance of salvation?" I make that appeal directly to people.

Then, I ask for every head bowed, every eye closed, and I don't always do it exactly like this or in every way the same, every head bowed, every eye closed, then I pray and say, "Lord, I pray that You'll speak to the hearts of those that are here. If there's anyone here that doesn't know they're saved or they haven't trusted You, they haven't been born again, they haven't put their faith in You, that You would convict them and convince them of their sin and their need for You. Draw them to Yourself right now," and then I'll say, "With heads bowed and eyes closed, if you're here, and you want Jesus Christ to come into your heart, forgive your sins, and be your Savior, if that's your desire, or you want Christ to come into your heart, I want you to indicate that because I want to pray for you by raising your hand," so with all the heads bowed and eyes closed, I will ask—not every time I preach—for hands to go up. When a hand goes up, I say, "I see your hand. I see your hand, thank you. I see your hand. God bless you." And, after the hands, "Okay, you may put your hands down," and say, "Lord, I pray for everyone that raised their hand. I saw their hand, but You see their hearts. I pray that You would convict them, speak to them, and help them to trust in You and You alone for salvation." Whether I use the word "repent" every time or not differs because I think genuine belief involves repentance, that you turn from sin to Christ, believe in Him as your Savior.

Basically, I've asked for hands to go up, I acknowledge the hands, after the hands go down I pray for those people who raised their hand. When I'm praying, I pray, "Lord, give them the courage, give them the boldness to make a public confession for You. Give them the courage to confess You before men. You say that if we confess You before men, You'll confess us before the Father and the holy angels," and then I say, "Amen." Then, I have everybody stand, everybody on their feet, and then I say, "I'm going to ask those of you that raised your hands, if you want Christ to forgive your sins, to come into your heart, you want to trust Him as your Lord and Savior, you haven't ever made this commitment, the minute we begin to sing this song," the worship team's on the stage and plays, "I'm going to ask you to step out into the aisle and come down the aisle," I'm pointing at the aisles, "come forward. I want you to stand right in front of me here on this stage, and I'm going to lead you in a prayer of accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior."

Then, the music starts, and as the music starts I say, "If you raised your hand, I want you to come forward," and then the people step out in the aisle, they begin to come down, they stand in front of the platform, the music stops, and I tell them, "This prayer, it has to be your prayer,

but I'm going to lead you, and if you want just repeat it after me but make it your prayer from your heart inviting Jesus Christ to come into your life and to forgive your sins." I'm always careful to say, "Make it your prayer." I say, "You can use your own words, if you want," and then pray something to the effect of, "God, I'm sorry for my sin. I ask You to please forgive me. I believe Jesus died for me on the cross, rose again from the dead, I'm trusting Him now as my Savior. Come into my heart. Fill me with Your Spirit. Help me to live for You all the days of my life, in Jesus' name, I pray. Amen."

Now, whether you think that's good or bad, I don't know, but I have seen lives changed, people that show great evidence of being born again, regenerated, over the years of having that opportunity to pray. Is it necessary? No, they can pray right where they're at, they can pray at home, but a lot of times just to dismiss the service and let people go is kind of sad when there may be somebody there that wants to be born again or wants to trust Christ and they need to know how to do that or what to do to do that. We, at least, need to explain the gospel and appeal to people to pray and trust Christ, and if you feel so led to give an invitation to call them forward to pray and put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

I also have—as far as concluding a sermon, let's move on—just pray. I actually believe that you can just stop preaching and just say, "Let's pray." I tend sometimes when I'm praying to then wrap up or summarize. My wife, a couple of weeks ago said, "You always say some great things in your prayer when you're closing," she said, "why don't you say them in the sermon?" Thanks a lot. It's like, "Because I'm praying," don't cap on my prayers, "I'm praying. I'm praying that God helps what I just covered to just be driven home in their heart." She says, "Yeah, but it's like another little mini sermon. It's really good." I sometimes will summarize or wrap up the sermon by praying, and I'll pray for my own heart. I'll pray that what I just preached will be true of me, that I'll experience in my own life.

What are the dangers we should avoid in conclusions? First, is the danger of announcing the conclusion and not concluding. I had someone come up to me once, years ago, I'll never forget, they go, "You lied!" I said, "I lied?" They go, "Yeah, you lied! You said you were going to close, that was going to be your last point, and you went on to make three more points." I go, "Oh, forgive me." If you say, "This is my last point," they're counting, especially if you've been boring, "Oh, praise God! He's almost done," and then he goes on another one, another one, another one, so I personally believe that it's a good idea not to announce your conclusion. Don't even announce it, just conclude. Don't even tell them you're going to conclude. You don't need to announce your conclusion. In other words, just land the plane.

Don't introduce new material when you're concluding. If you're starting to land the plane, have you ever had the plane's starting to land you're going, "Oh, thank God, we're going to land," and then all of the sudden it takes off again? "Oh, we've got to make another trip around the airport." It's like, "Oh, no." So, the preacher goes, "I'm going to land," he starts landing, "Oh, it's going to land," then he takes off again. That's not good. You're going to lose people. They're going to jump off the plane.

Here's another danger, don't introduce new material during your conclusion. So, you're concluding your sermon and you think of something and say, "Oh, yeah," and you preach another whole sermon. It's like the plane landing and then takes off again. Don't do that, not a good thing.

Here's my last step, and then I will conclude, don't forget to pray. Acts 6:4, "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." Don't forget to pray. I want to recommend E.M. Bounds' book, *Power Through Prayer*. It's a little tiny paperback, *Power Through Prayer*, by E.M. Bounds. Whenever I find my prayer life lagging and I need to pray for my preaching, I'll read E.M. Bounds and get fired up—*Power Through Prayer*, by E.M. Bounds.

Why should we pray before our preaching and after and while we're studying? It keeps us humble and dependent on God. It keeps us humble and dependent on God. Secondly, it brings the power of God. Lloyd Jones says, "Fire in preaching depends on fire in the preacher, and this in turn comes from the Holy Spirit. Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire."

Lastly, it reminds me to give all glory to God. It gets my perspective on God, and our sermon study and prep should be an act of worship. Our sermon preaching and presentation should be an act of worship to God. Sometimes when I'm praying before I preach, I just say, "Lord, I just offer this sermon to You as a sacrifice. I just give it to You," because remember all glory should be to God. Someone said in a poem:

When telling Thy salvation free

Let all-absorbing thoughts of Thee

My heart and soul engross;

And when all hearts are bowed and stirred

Beneath the influence of Thy word,

Hide me behind Thy cross.

I love that. Let's pray.