

## Five Steps to Deeper Preaching and Teaching

Dr. Andy Miller III

How do we go deep as preachers and teachers? Those of us who preach and teach on a regular basis have all been at a point of wanting to be more effective in our study and communication. We get into ruts and know our people need more from us. The question of how to go deep is inevitable as we seek to serve the groups we influence for the kingdom. The secret comes in learning to surround yourself with the text and discover its meaning. Once you've taken a deeper dive yourself, you can passionately communicate to your audience to encourage their faith and knowledge to grow.

The famous preaching professor, Fred Craddock, suggests that preaching has two major moves:

1. Getting something to say
2. Figuring out how to say it

He illustrates these two parts of preaching by comparing them to a chair: the hardwood chair and the sofa chair. The hardwood chair in the library is where one's time is spent in study where the preacher/teacher develops something to say. The sofa chair is the place where the preacher/teacher lays out his or her structure, illustration, and manuscript/outline.

As the preacher, you must tackle these two steps outlined by Craddock: getting something to say and figuring out how to say it.

The tool I've developed deals primarily with that first step, while keeping the second step in mind.

I don't outline tips for better communication in this document. While effective communicating is vital, this tool is mainly about the first step: getting something to say. The secret to deeper preaching comes through deeper study. As you wrestle with the text and envision your audience as you study, your efforts should translate to a deeper message for the people you serve. Here you will also find tips to blend your study with preparing, to enhance your content and communication.

# MORE TO THE STORY

Before we get started, here are a few things to keep in mind.

- While we all enjoy a good commentary, don't jump ahead to steps three, four, and five. One of the biggest mistakes people make in preaching and teaching is to go to an outside source before getting their own souls into the text. You will have an opportunity to learn from others, but you will learn so much more if you observe a text first. God will use your faithfulness to reading the text and the Holy Spirit to illuminate the text, so do not jump ahead to the outside sources.
- What you see here is a modified version of the Inductive Bible Study Method. This is a tried and true method and has provided a framework for many preachers/teachers to know how to study the Bible. For more resources about this method check out these resources:

David Bauer and Robert Traina's *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics*

Matt Friedeman's *Life-Changing Bible Study*.

David Thompson's *Bible Study that Works*

## Step One – Pray

It's easy to treat this task as if it is another item on your 'to do' list. Don't forget that you are working with the divinely inspired word of God. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your study.

*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit thank you for your word and its power for our world. As I study this passage, on behalf of the people you have called me to serve, please direct my mind and study. Lead me by your Spirit's power to connect this study to the purposes of your kingdom. To the Glory of our Triune God, and in Jesus' name, Amen.*

## Step Two – Observe

- Before you can take steps toward having something important to say to the people who serve you – read what is there.
- This is a discovery phase where you read carefully to gain important information that you notice in the text.

## MORE TO THE STORY

- Be attentive to the various clues within the text and raise questions about what you see. If you ask good questions, you will get good answers. If you were unwilling to ask questions, then you'll have a difficult time going deeper in your preaching and teaching.
- When you are observing a text, you are not trying to establish what the text means. You are just seeing what is there.

Jot these things down:

- The scripture passage you are studying.
- What is going on in that specific book of the Bible? For instance, if you are preaching about Isaac in Genesis, what happens before Isaac (i.e. Creation, Noah, Babel, Abraham) and what happens after Isaac (i.e. Jacob and Esau, Joseph). How does your passage fit into this whole book?
- What is happening in the portion of the book you are studying (generally indicated by a chapter)?
- What do you observe in the smallest section surrounding the verse/passage you are studying?
- Look for words that connect the passage through:
  - Repetition – what words are repeated?
  - Preparatory statements – does the author get us ready for what's coming?
  - Comparison – Are two or more ideas being compared.
  - Contrast – Look for words like 'but,' or 'however.'
  - Climax – Look for a word like, 'finally.'
  - Cause-effect – Look for words like 'therefore,' 'for,' 'because.'
  - Instrumentation – movement from a means to an end (words like 'so that.').
  - Particularization/generalization – Is there a movement from general to specific ideas?
- What is the genre? Is it law, wisdom, psalms, prophesy, etc? What difference does the genre make on your study?
- Write down as many questions as you can think of about a passage. Start your questions with 'how,' 'what,' and 'why.'
- As you observe this passage tap into your own emotions. What snags, sparks, images, stories, memories, and experiences emerge for you as a preacher? Does something bring you comfort or challenge?
- Considering what you have observed, now think of your people. Get them in your mind. What would their questions be about this passage?
- Develop a theme, even at this early stage, and state it succinctly in one sentence.

# MORE TO THE STORY

## Step Three - Interpret

Now that you have observed the text, take some time to establish a possible meaning of the text. At this phase, you are trying to figure out what the text *meant*, *not* necessarily what it means today.

Take one or more of your questions from the observation section, write it out, and answer it. You will want to choose a question that you see as getting to the heart of the passage. Create an answer based on the big picture of the book you're studying, the section, and the exact verse(s) you are studying.

Now, get your emotions involved in some additional observation and write down examples for each one in your passage of scripture:

**Electrically Charged Words:** Look at several English translations and see what words stand out to you. For instance, Isaiah 59:14 describes that "truth has fallen in the streets." If you know how to research the original languages, now is the time to study the grammar and meaning of the words.

**Overlooked Clues:** Does something pique your curiosity or not seem to fit? It could be an aspect of the text's structure or style, the use of distinctive words or phrases...

**Freeze dried emotions:** Do some of the words in this text convey intense emotions? For instance, Mark 15:39, "when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, 'surely this man was the son of God!'" Does an image(s) speak to you from the text?"

**Conflict:** Is there conflict in this passage? What brought about the conflict? Remember that conflict can occur both in and behind a biblical text.

**Missing in Action:** Is there a character or an idea that is the background of this text? (Think about the older son in Luke 15)

**Use Your Senses:** What do you hear, smell, taste, and/or see in the text?

**What if? Ask painful questions that make you and the text uncomfortable:** What if? What if Peter had walked on the water all the way to Jesus? What if God had answered Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane? We aren't questioning the

## MORE TO THE STORY

text's authority, but pursuing a way to think about the text from different perspectives.

**What does this passage tell us about what God is doing in this passage?**

**What does this passage assume about God's world?**

Now that you have spent time studying the passage, offer an interpretation. Your work up to this point comes together here. For instance, you might say:

"This passage begins with the word, "therefore," indicating a cause and effect. The effect is\_\_\_\_\_. The cause is \_\_\_\_\_. This indicates\_\_\_\_\_."

### Step Four – Evaluate

Now that you have made observations leading to an interpretation, it's time to use tools to evaluate your own interpretation. Where were you right? Where were you wrong?

Within the whole of scripture, the canon, there is a dialogue of thoughts. For instance, there is a trajectory on the movement of women and slaves' rights in scripture. We see that slavery is not a directive and that women are made to be leaders and preachers in scripture. Imagine all the authors of scripture sitting around a table. What does each one of these authors have to say about your interpretation? Is there a monologue instead of a dialogue?

**One way that we evaluate our interpretation is to look at the interpretation of others.**

Place your insights and questions in conversation with the commentary authors. Tips on good commentaries to use see David Bauer's, *Biblical Resources for Ministry*. Read from three exegetical commentaries and let them help you in five different ways:

1. What did you learn that was new to you? Saying, "That's interesting..."
2. Confirm some of your initial hunches. "I knew it!"
3. Eliminate others "I was on the wrong track."
4. Spark new insights. "This gives things a new twist."
5. Sharpen the point (the direction) of the sermon. "This helps me decide where to go with this."

# MORE TO THE STORY

## Step Five – Apply

- What ideas can be applied from this passage to other times and places that are not restricted to the original audience?
- What is happening in your world that might benefit from the message of this text?
- Offer a reflection of the emotions of this text, and think about specific scenes, images, and insights.

**Stake your claim. This is the culminating point that you draw from steps 1-5.** Considering all that you have gained from your study, what is this passage saying? Write this out, in your own words. Your claim should be 2-3 sentences.

**Establish one focused sentence.** Now, considering the process you have been through, establish one concentrated sentence. This sentence should say something about God, humankind, and how they interact.

Example:

After studying the armor of God in Ephesians 6:10-20 and walking through these steps, my claim is this: Paul urges believers to stand against the present darkness by putting on God's armor, as God himself (Isaiah 59:17) empowers us to stand.

Once you have moved through this process you are ready to work through the process of developing *how* you will say what you have studied. Now you are better positioned to develop a rhetorical strategy, employ illustrative material, and connect with your audience.