

The Introduction to the Sermon

How are we going to get from reading our text to points one, two, three, etc.? The greatest sermon in the world will be a flop if the foundation for preaching it is not properly and effectively laid. If no one is listening, what good is our homiletic outline?

The introduction to the message is important for two reasons: First, it must capture the attention of the audience. We must engage their interest and give them a reason to listen. They must sense from the very start that this is going to help. I need this!

Second, the introduction must lay the groundwork for what is ahead. It is a foundation for what is going to be built later. It must establish the purpose and reason for the message so the audience can be prepared to respond.

The length of the introduction will vary with the material of the message and to some degree the length of the entire message. There can be a danger in being too long and thus taking away from the main body of the sermon, or being too short and thus not allowing the listener enough time to focus on the subject matter. Some messages will need more of an introduction because of the historical material that is necessary to set the stage. Other messages can be introduced in a few simple statements and an illustration.

We have already covered illustrations in general, and in most cases, we will need a good one in our introduction at some point. Now let's look at the three basic parts to a solid and effective introduction or foundation to the sermon.

I. The Declaration

A. Determining the subject of the text

1. The subject should come from the theme of the passage of Scripture that you have selected as a text.
2. This is the basic subject upon which you are going to build the message.
3. Sometimes a repeated word or phrase is helpful in determining the subject matter.
4. The subject of the passage can be determined by finding the main idea of the text.
5. This central idea may be:

- a. A doctrine to proclaim
 - b. A duty to perform
 - c. A principle to live
 - d. A problem to solve
 - e. A calling to pursue
6. The _____ subject _____ of the text becomes the _____ subject _____ of the message.
 7. Subjects for sermons are often one _____ word _____ or a short _____ phrase _____.
 8. Be careful not to make the subject too broad in scope that the message misses the _____ specific _____ emphasis of the passage.

For instance, prayer is a worthy subject for a sermon, but if the passage deals with a certain type of prayer, such as intercessory prayer, then this should be the subject.

B. Surveying the Subject

1. We must now gather some _____ material _____ on the subject that we have determined.
2. Some good questions to ask when gathering information to guide you:
 - a. What have I _____ read _____ on this subject?
 - b. What have I learned through experience which may throw light on the subject?
 - c. What does the Bible say in other _____ passages _____ on the subject?
 - d. Do I have any personal bias or prejudice on this subject?
 - e. Does the _____ audience _____ have any bias or attitude on this subject?
 - f. Are there any famous quotations, poems, or illustrations that I can immediately recall on this subject?

g. Is the subject current or relevant to a present situation?

C. Formulating the declaration statement

1. The first part of our introduction is what we will refer to simply as the declaration.
2. The declaration states the subject matter.
3. The declaration helps to establish the direction of the sermon.
4. The declaration defines the subject matter down to a statement.

Example: <u>Subject</u>	<u>Declaration Statement</u>
Prayer	There is great profit in prayer.
Soulwinning	Every Christian is called to be a soulwinner.
Hell	Hell is a literal and awful place.
The Home	The home is God's first and foremost institution.

5. This declaration sentence is the basis for the message and lets the listener know where we are headed.
6. This statement should always be declarative or exclamatory in nature.
7. Keep it as simple as possible.

II. Constructing the proposition

A. The proposition is the key to the introduction.

1. In reality, this is where the application of the message begins.
2. This is what you will be asking your audience to respond to during the invitation.

B. It is called different names in books on preaching:

1. Some call it the central idea.

2. Some call it the purpose statement.
3. Some call it the thesis.
4. We will refer to it as the proposition.

Think of it as that which we are going to propose that the audience do with the subject matter of the text.

C. The proposition is the driving force in the message.

1. It will keep you as the preacher on track.
2. It will keep your audience focused on the subject matter.

D. The proposition helps to tie biblical truth with the present.

1. Good preaching is always in the present tense.
2. It must speak to the concerns of the day in the language of the present.
3. It must be true to the impact of the text and at the same time be relevant to human experiences.

E. The proposition should be referred to often in the message.

1. In *Purposeful Preaching*, Jay Adams calls this the “purpose” and suggests that preachers write that purpose on the top of each page of their notes so as not to lose sight of why they are preaching the message.
2. Repetition of the same sentence throughout the sermon can become monotonous, and so varying its form can be helpful. For example:
 - a. Prayer brings many benefits to our lives.
 - b. What are the benefits of prayer that you are experiencing?
 - c. Are you seeking the benefits of daily prayer?

G. Personally, I like to use a question form for the proposition.

1. Questions are convicting. (The earlier the conviction begins in a sermon, the more time the Holy Spirit has to use that conviction to bring about a decision.)

2. The question that you present in the introduction can then be answered in the points of your message.

Example:

- a. Are you experiencing any benefits to prayer?
- b. Have you discovered the benefits to prayer?
- c. What benefits have you received lately from prayer?

III. Establishing a transitional sentence

- A. We are now ready to form a bridge that will take us from our introduction to the body of the sermon.
 1. The platform or foundation is set: We have declared the subject matter, we have challenged them with the practical application, but we now must smoothly make the transition to the body of the sermon.
 2. The transitional sentence is a bridge which takes the information that has preceded it and makes a logical transition to that which is to follow.
- B. The body of the sermon is going to answer some questions from the subject matter.
 1. How can I receive benefits from prayer?
 2. Why should I desire benefits from prayer?
 3. When should I expect benefits from prayer?
 4. What are the benefits from prayer?
- C. The transitional sentence must have a key word.
 1. This key word provides a logical answer to the questions just asked.

Example: Today, from our text, we will see three important STEPS to obtaining benefits from prayer.
 2. Usually, an additional adjective is put with this key word for emphasis.

- a. In the example above, the adjective is *important*, but it could be *vital*, *necessary*, or *imperative*.

B. Examples of key words:

1. Arguments set forth
2. Blessings to be received
3. Commands given
4. Dangers to be avoided
5. Effects produced
6. Gains to be received
7. Honors to be bestowed
8. Imperatives given
9. Improvements to be made
10. Judgments to be rendered
11. Lessons that can be learned
12. Losses sustained
13. Needs manifested
14. Orders given
15. Privileges offered
16. Profits to be gained
17. Results to be obtained
18. Rewards promised
19. Values to be realized
20. Blunders, dangers, excesses, extremes, mistakes, instructions, guidelines, patterns, plans, practices, prescriptions, rules, steps, stipulations, admonitions, commands, laws, fears, precautions, sayings, preparations,

provisions, details, directives, injunctions, teachings, barriers, fundamentals, lessons, obstacles, powers, means, alternatives, systems—the list is endless!

NEVER USE THE WORD _____! There is always a more descriptive key word.

IV. Putting it all together

Example:

Let's suppose that you have selected James 1:5-7 as your text. You might scratch out the following as you begin your sermon preparation:

Text: James 1:5-7

Subject: Prayer

Proposition: The benefits of prayer

Transitional Sentence: Basic steps to seeing these benefits in our lives

So let's _____ formulate _____ it into an introduction:

Text: James 1:5-7

Declaration: Prayer is a powerful tool that God has given to each Christian.

Proposition: Are you experiencing the benefits from prayer in your daily life?

Transitional Sentence: Notice with me from James 1 three important steps that we need to take in order to reap the benefits from prayer.

Conclusion:

In the section above, you have the basic _____ components _____ of your introduction. Granted, you may have an illustration somewhere in there, some additional Scripture emphasizing the subject matter, a quotation, etc., but you have now determined exactly where you are going in your sermon.

Quite frankly, the rest is a piece _____ of _____ cake _____!