

## Expository Preaching: Focus on 1 Corinthians

Mako Nagasawa

Last modified: May 21, 2014

Definition: Preaching that powerfully illuminates and applies the original meaning of the biblical text.

This document is a tool to help you feel more comfortable teaching straight out of the Bible in an expositional fashion. It is also a tool to help you get feedback from others by asking them in what concrete ways you can improve your teaching style. By no means is it an exhaustive guide, simply a tool I thought would be useful. See also Ray Stedman's papers on expository preaching (<http://www.pbc.org/dp/stedman/misc/expos.html>, <http://www.pbc.org/dp/stedman/misc/primacy.html>), and Bruce Mawhinney's excellent, easy-to-read book for anyone wanting to teach, *Preaching With Freshness*. Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* is the standard text for seminaries.

I recommend three main criteria to train and evaluate expository preachers: Context, Content, and Communication. As a preacher prepares an expositional message, s/he will move through three basic outlines of a text: a Grammatical Outline, an Exegetical Outline, and a Teaching Outline.

### I. CONTEXT

*This is always the first step toward accurate teaching of the Bible. It starts with treating the entire book in question as one unit. Context answers the historical question, "Who was this addressed to?" and the broad literary question, "What does this book mean?"*

#### A. Where is this book in the canon of Scripture?

##### 1. Genesis

The Old Testament. Origin, fall, start of the redemption story: God was shaping His chosen family to be a blessing to the world. Now that we inherit the mission of Jesus, God also shapes us to be a blessing to the world, too. But what they experience is both similar to and different than what we experience.

##### 2. First Corinthians

The New Testament. Jesus has redeemed human nature in his resurrection. The Corinthian Christians are influenced by the Greek dualist view where the body doesn't mean anything.

#### B. Is the book theme explicit or implicit (developed by the unfolding of a motif)?

##### 1. Genesis

<sup>12:1</sup> Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; <sup>2</sup> and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; <sup>3</sup> and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.' (Blessing is a literary theme from creation to the chosen family)

##### 2. First Corinthians

<sup>15:1</sup> Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, <sup>2</sup> by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. <sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried,

and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. (Resurrection is a conceptual and literary theme running throughout the letter)

For a discussion about narrative books, see my paper, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.

**C. Application: Briefly reminding your audience to look backward and forward in your selected text.**

## II. CONTENT

*After you've determined what the book is about on a high level, you are ready to start breaking up the book into smaller units and selecting a text to teach. Content answers the question, "What does this particular passage mean"*

**A. Have You Observed, Observed, and Observed the Text?**

Outline the passage in Grammatical/Poetical form. Say what the text says and stick close to it. Don't try to make points that aren't there. For a helpful illustration about what it means to observe a text carefully, see also "The Fish and Agassiz." For a discussion about narrative books, see my paper, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.

**B. Are You Operating With the Arrow Theory (sharp) vs. the Shotgun Theory (scattered)?**

Assume that the text you're studying has one main point. This may depend on how you've divided up the passage, but try to find one main point around which other minor points are threaded around.

**C. Have You Identified Points of Emphasis Set By the Text Itself?**

Literary structure is one way to find out the main point of a particular text. Some examples of literary structures in the Bible are:

*1. Repetition of a Theme or Motif*

Greek Wisdom vs. God's Wisdom in 1 Corinthians

- <sup>1:18</sup> For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.' <sup>20</sup> Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.
- <sup>3:18</sup> Let no man deceive himself; if any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise. <sup>19</sup> For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God For it is written, 'He is the One who catches the wise in their craftiness'; <sup>20</sup> and again, 'The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless.'
- <sup>4:8</sup> 'You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings' without us; and indeed, I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you.
- <sup>6:12</sup> 'All things are lawful for me,' but not all things are profitable. 'All things are lawful for me,' but I will not be mastered by anything. <sup>13</sup> 'Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food,' but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body.
- <sup>7:1</sup> Now concerning the things about which you wrote, 'It is good for a man not to touch a woman.'
- <sup>8:1</sup> We know that 'we all have knowledge.' Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.

- <sup>14:34</sup>The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. <sup>35</sup>If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.

## 2. *Inverted Parallelism*

In an inverted parallel structure (or chiasm), the central point is the main point, while the parallel points around the center have similar meanings to each other. This is useful in knowing that the emphasis is in the center. Kenneth Bailey observes the following chiastic structures in 1 Corinthians:

Introduction: 1:1 – 10

First Essay: Unity in the Corporate Body: 1:10 – 4:16

- A. Division in the Church: 1:10 – 16
  - B. The Wisdom of God in the Cross: 1:17 – 2:2
  - B'. The Wisdom of God in the Spirit: 2:3 – 16
- A'. Christian Unity: 3:1 – 4:16

Second Essay: Sex and Our Body: 4:17 – 7:40

- A. Immorality in the Church Without Discipline: 4:17 – 6:8
  - B. Theology of Sexuality: Kingdom Ethics: 6:9 – 12
  - B'. Theology of Sexuality: Joining the Body: 6:13 – 20
- A'. Christian Sexuality: 7:1 – 40

Third Essay: Our Bodies and the Mission: 8:1 – 11:1

- A. Food Offered to Idols, Freedom and Responsibility: 8:1 – 13
  - B. Paul's Personal Freedom and Responsibility: 9:1 – 18
  - C. Freedom in Mission is for Identification With Others: 9:19 – 27
  - B'. Old and New Covenant Lessons, Partial and Non – Identification: 10:1 – 22
- A'. Food Offered to Idols: Use of Your Freedom for God: 10:23 – 11:1

Fourth Essay: Worship in the Corporate Body: 11:2 – 14:40

- A. Women and Men in Worship, Prophets and How They Dress: 11:2 – 16
  - B. Order in Worship, the Lord's Supper: 11:17 – 34
  - C. Gifts and the Nature of the Body: 12:1 – 31
  - D. Love: 13:1 – 13
  - C'. Gifts and the Upbuilding of the Body: 14:1 – 25
  - B'. Order in Worship, Prophets and Speaking in Tongues: 14:26 – 33
- A'. Women and Men in Worship, How They Speak: 14:34 – 40

Fifth Essay: Jesus' Resurrected Body and Our Future Resurrection Bodies: 15:1 – 58

- A. Resurrection and the Validity of Christian Faith: 15:1 – 20
  - B. Adam and Christ, the End of All Things: 15:21 – 28
  - C. Resurrection and How to Live: 15:21 – 28
  - B'. Adam and Christ, the Nature of the Resurrection Body: 15:29 – 50
- A'. Resurrection and Victory: 15:51 – 58

Final Remarks and Greetings: 16:1 – 24

## 3. *Dynamic Parallelism*

Dynamic parallelism is typically the poetic style found in the Psalm and the Prophets, where 2 or 3 phrases correspond with each other. There are various types of dynamic parallelism.

- a. **Synonymous:** the same thought of the first line is repeated in different words in the second
- b. **Intensification:** the second line explains or further develops the first line
- c. **Antithetical:** the first line is emphasized by a contrasting thought in the second
- d. **Consequentiality:** the subject in the first line causes the subject in the second

An example would be Psalm 8, which Paul quotes in defense of the goodness of the created world and Jesus' reign over it (1 Cor.15:27).

<sup>1</sup> O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth, Who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!	Intensification
<sup>2</sup> From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength Because of Your adversaries, To make the enemy and the revengeful cease.	Consequentiality
<sup>3</sup> When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;	Synonymous
<sup>4</sup> What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him?	Intensification
<sup>5</sup> Yet You have made him a little lower than God, And You crown him with glory and majesty!	Intensification
<sup>6</sup> You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet,	Intensification
<sup>7</sup> All sheep and oxen, And also the beasts of the field,	Intensification
<sup>8</sup> The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, Whatever passes through the paths of the seas.	Intensification
<sup>9</sup> O LORD, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth!	

#### D. Identifying Points of Emphasis by Investigating Culture

Many times the main point of a text is clear once we understand the cultural background.

##### 1. Jesus' parables

Good Samaritan: Luke 10:25 – 37

Prodigal Son: Luke 15:11 – 32

Pharisee and Tax Collector: Luke 18:9 – 14

##### 2. Paul's word plays

Baptism: Romans 6:1 – 11

Bondslavery: Romans 6:15 – 23

Adoption: Romans 8:1 – 17

##### 3. Paul's Greco-Roman context

Gospel: Romans 1:1 – 7; 1 Corinthians 15:1 – 11

Body: 1 Corinthians

#### E. Principle of Constancy

Motifs beginning in one biblical book are used consistently in later biblical books. This is important in decoding biblical symbolism.

1. *The number seven* is associated with completion: Seven days of creation, seven items in the Tabernacle, seven feasts of Moses, seven "I am" statements in John's Gospel, Jesus sent seven letters to seven churches, God has seven bowls of wrath in Revelation, Satan has seven heads.

2. *The number six* is associated with humankind: Adam and Eve were created on the sixth day, Goliath was 6 cubits tall, Nebuchadnezzar's image was 66 cubits tall, the anti-christ world leader's number is 666.

3. *Temple*: Paul speaks of Christians being the temple of God in 1 Cor.3:16 – 17 and 6:19 – 20. The idea of God dwelling with humanity begins at Eden (Gen.2). It reoccurred as God's 'plan B' in the form of the Tabernacle drawn up at Mount Sinai (Ex.25 – 40). David and Solomon recrafted the Tabernacle in stone and gold in the form of the

Temple in Jerusalem (1 Ki.5 – 6). But Jesus claimed to be the true Temple of God (Jn.1:14; 2:13 – 25; 14:1 – 21). By sharing his Spirit with his followers, he made them into the living Temple of God (Eph.2:11 – 22; 1 Pet.2:6 – 10).

### III. COMMUNICATION

*After you understand what the text says, you must think about how to communicate it. This is the most difficult part of teaching, so be prepared to spend a lot of time in this area. Communication answers the question, “How am I going to share with my audience what this text means?”*

#### A. Use the Arrow approach (not the Shotgun)?

Are you communicating one main point around which all your other points revolve? Or do you have points that aren't connected? What are your transitional statements and rhetorical questions?

#### B. Have you selected good illustrations and stories?

Taking time to select good stories is helpful for a number of reasons. First, a different part of your audience's brain is engaged when you tell a story. This helps them stay awake and involved because we are by nature story-telling animals. Second, a good story draws your audience in emotionally and can show that you have an understanding of them. Third, sometimes a story can draw your audience in intellectually and can show that you have an understanding of facts. Fourth, an appropriate illustration can reinforce your main point. For instance, if you are a man, you may want to tell a story about a woman who understood the same point you're making. Fifth, an appropriate illustration can often be its own application. This lets you spend less time confronting the audience directly.

Below is a list of places I look to find illustrations. Please note that the top sources are from real live people. The reason I insist on illustrating out of the lives of real people is that Christianity is based on *real events in history*. There is a trend today that makes the Bible just a collection of (possibly fictional) stories with an interesting metaphysical point. However, while the Bible is literature, but it is also *real history*. God acts and speaks to human beings in real *history*, and therefore, there is no separation between *historical facts* and *spiritual truth*. It behooves a Bible teacher to find *real historical events and people where God has already intervened* with which to illustrate a Bible that puts forward a God who really intervenes in us.

Songs and movies are therefore an interesting case. I believe movies are useful for illustrating negative points that can describe all human beings (sin, superficiality, selfishness, unforgiveness, unwillingness to repent, etc.), but for illustrating positive points (how Jesus really transforms our lives) I relegate movies to last place because it is too easy to illustrate with a Hollywood invention and it may cast a shadow of insincerity onto the Biblical message.

Some places to look for illustrations, in order of my personal preference:

1. Personal stories about your own relationships, either with God or with others, including stories about your friends or family
2. Biographies and stories about other Christian people illustrating God's work (e.g. Early Christian history and people)
3. Biographies and stories about non-Christian people illustrating a spiritual need or principle
4. Your feelings about
  - a. A news event
  - b. Certain findings, theories or statistics from sociology, psychology
  - c. Comic strips (e.g. Calvin and Hobbes)
  - d. Children's stories and fables (e.g. The Grinch illustrates heart transformation, the Wizard of Oz illustrates the quest for inner substance, Beauty and the Beast illustrates struggling with a conflicted identity, etc.)
  - e. A work of literature (e.g. Lord of the Flies, A Separate Peace, Crime and Punishment, etc.)
  - f. Poem and the poet's personal background (e.g. Emily Dickinson, Gerard Manley Hopkins)
  - g. A song or movie

**C. What is your tone? Have you identified the need or needs your audience has?**

After having prayed for God's wisdom and love for your audience, are you communicating respectfully? Are you connecting your audience with God in a relevant and spiritual way? Here are some do's and don't's:

Don't use the phrase "you should"	Do assume there are non-Christians in the audience who don't share a common moral sense; God personally invites and calls and commands people
Don't jump around in Scripture, except to substantiate a point or make a reference	Do focus on the passage you've selected
Don't elevate formal church positions as examples of obedience	Do illustrate a wide variety of life stages, life situations, careers, male and female, single and married, as examples of obedience
Don't assume that everyone believes in the goodness of God	Do assume your audience is suffering and questioning the character of God
Don't just give out information	Do carve out a place in your message where your passion and personal investment comes through; "stick the sword all the way in"
Don't be monotone	Do be aware of your audience's energy level

**DON'T #1. Don't use the phrase "you should." Rather, assume your audience contains non-Christians.**

This phrase or tone is very common where there is already some emotional boundary crossing. Unfortunately, saying "You should love others more" or "We should witness more" or "You should be more like Jesus" tends to cause an audience to feel a little beat up. Over time, that phrase (especially with a more heavy tone) tends to produce (1) a perverse sense of *pride* in people who have already done what you've said, (2) a tragic sense of *penance* because some people enjoy getting railed on by the preacher because they can then say, "Great sermon!" as if their spirituality is measured by their ability to withstand such verbal abuse, (3) an unproductive sense of *guilt* because they haven't done it yet, or (4) a desire to *flee* immediately. Show respect for your audience's ability to make their own choices. When commanding, either COMMAND WITHOUT APOLOGY or say, "Christ in you will do this, so yield yourself to him." But do not say, "You should."

There is a big difference between hearing, "You should be more loving, like Jesus was," and "Christ in you will love through you." The first statement hurls a huge gulf between your audience and Jesus, while the second places Jesus Christ squarely in the heart of each listener. The first motivates your audience to self-effort and performance, while the second motivates your audience to know Jesus and rely on him more. Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation," must be respected by the teacher. Condemnation is nothing less than separation from God and a break in relationship, and in the final moment of a lesson, a teacher must never let the audience feel separate from Christ thinking they need to reach Christ. Please see the spreadsheet called "How Do You Teach Jesus?"

This may be more challenging for you, but it has a number of very real benefits for an audience that is either Christian or non-Christian. You won't use terms that are unfamiliar to non-Christians. Focusing on a non-Christian audience often requires a teacher to be more insightful into people's real spiritual, emotional, and relational needs.

**DON'T #2. In general, don't jump around to other parts of Bible unless it really helps you make your point.**

This is called "Bible hopping" and it tends to distract the audience and lets you as the Bible teacher fill the time. Stick to the text you're working with. Two exceptions to this would be 1) dealing with Old Testament prophecy and finding its fulfillment in the New Testament; or 2) making the sermon a worship experience through call-and-response rhetoric. But in both cases, it should help you make your single main point. It should not be a digression.

Also, be careful about illustrating secondary analogies in Scripture. For example, in 2 Timothy 2:4-6, Paul uses three metaphors for being a teacher or servant of the gospel.

1) The focused soldier is like one who focuses on Christ: "No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier."

2) The disciplined athlete is like one who lives by the Word: "If anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules."

3) The hardworking farmer is like one who harvests spiritual fruit first in his own life, then he can produce it in others: "The hardworking farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops."

Now, you can tell stories about your favorite professional athletes or military heroes, but that would really draw people away from Paul's main point. The main point is living with great respect for the gospel and God's Word. Thus, be careful about illustrating the secondary analogy. Illustrate the REAL POINT!

**DON'T #3. Don't elevate people in formal church positions because of their position.**

Preachers are to equip the saints for ministry (Eph.4) in their day to day lives. A Bible teacher needs to stimulate people to have vision for their family relationships, friendships, neighborhood and community transformation, and professional relationships. Thus, when illustrating what it means to be a servant, don't use the Sunday school teacher or the worship leader as the "great examples" of servanthood because of their formal position. That belittles the audience for not holding "formal" responsibilities within the church. It also leaves them ill-equipped to deal with their own lives. Think about what your audience is going through, and what possibilities God may be putting before them. This helps build a fellowship/church culture that is primarily *outward looking and relational* rather than inward looking and organizational.

If you illustrate once with a story about a man, tell another story about a woman. If you tell a story about Jesus doing a work of inward healing (which people would naturally like), tell a story that would challenge your audience (which they would naturally be uncomfortable with). **Be balanced about taking the opportunity to implant radical suggestions into the minds of your audience.** As an example, if you are going to talk about sacrificial love, talk about a student who gets lower grades because she cared about people (against success), a student who changed her major because she wanted an occupation where she could care more about people or certain communities (against laziness and a self-centered approach to future planning), an old woman who quietly writes letters to prisoners (against the desire for fame and recognition), about a person who gave up material wealth (against materialism), about a person who reaches beyond their own socio-economic group (against cliquishness), about a person who serves in a Third World country or neighborhood (against comfort and safety), about Anne Mansfield Sullivan who spent years teaching and sharing the gospel with Helen Keller (against the desire to have large audiences appreciate you). We have twenty centuries of Christianity, and many wonderful examples to learn from!

**DON'T #4. Don't assume everyone believes in the goodness of God. Rather, assume your audience is suffering and questioning God's goodness.**

I believe that most people are not really Trinitarians in their hearts and minds. That is, they struggle with believing God is really 100% good, and 100% loving. Instead, most (and certainly non-Christians!) believe in a god who is either actively or passively evil, and complicit in human evil. For example, 'Why didn't God stop my father from abusing me? Why doesn't God stop sex trafficking?' If you're not addressing this problem by talking about why God honors our free will but attacks the root problem of evil in our corrupted human nature, then people are going to be left with the very strong leaning that God is either actively or passively evil.

You can be firm, challenging, and summon people to repentance, but there should be some time in the sermon where you connect with great sympathy and empathy with your audience over the issues that they are pained by. Learn to think as a counselor and link people to Jesus that way. This is an effective way to teach a mixed non-Christian and Christian audience. The non-Christians will be directed to Christ in terms very relevant to them, and Christians will also be ministered to and/or will learn how to think as a counselor also. For example, the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) was a woman desiring good relationship. Jesus used common, non-hyperspiritual language (a thirst) to link her need with the Spirit.

**DON'T #5. Don't just give out info. Carve out a place in the sermon where your passion really comes through.**

There should be a place in your sermon where your passion and emotion for both the text and your audience shines through. Speak personally, as if you were talking to just one person. Speak with controlled emotion (either compassion, concern, etc.)

**DON'T #6. Don't be monotone. Be aware of your audience's energy level**

Generally, the more formal schooling and education people have, the more they will be interested in your reasoning process regarding the text. The less formal schooling and education people have, the less they will be interested in original context, etc. Regardless of the audience, however, when you discuss the biblical characters/text, your audience tends to lose attention and energy more quickly. On the other hand, when you address your audience's life issues directly, they tend to gain attention and energy.

Also, when you make propositional statements, your audience tends to lose attention and energy more quickly. On the other hand, when you tell stories, they tend to gain attention and energy. We are wired that way. We are simply story-telling creatures. Telling good stories (not cliché ones) keeps people alert and expecting more.

Thus, your audience is most attentive when you just get done telling a good story about either yourself or someone they can relate to directly. Make your strongest points then, succinctly and powerfully. If you need to call for people to allow Jesus to change their lives, do so explicitly. As some have said, 'Stick the sword all the way in.'