

A SHORT GUIDE FOR SERMON EXEGESIS
From *New Testament Exegesis* by Gordon Fee

I. Getting started [1 hr]

- a. Read the larger context (say, for an epistle, read the entire letter)
- b. Read the passage repeatedly
 - i. Read for content
 - ii. Try reading it aloud
 - iii. Get a feel for it as a unit conveying God's word
 - iv. Try to become sufficiently familiar with it that you know its main points
 - v. Use a number of different translations
 - vi. Adjust, if necessary, the boundaries so you have a reasonably self-contained passage
- c. Make your own translation
 - i. "Try this even if your Greek is dormant or weak"
 - ii. Use, e.g., Zerwick & Grosvenor's *Grammatical Analysis of the Greek NT*
- d. Compile a list of alternatives
 - i. E.g., find alternative translations for words where there's a range of possible meanings
- e. Analyze the structure
 - i. I.e., do an outline of the grammatical structure, indenting for clauses and phrases
 - ii. This will help you to identify flow, structure, parallels, etc.
- f. Start a sermon "use list"
 - i. "Include the very things that you would feel cheated about if you did not know them."
 - ii. Maximize at first; you can trim back later.

II. Matters of Content [1 hr]

- a. Check for significant textual issues (e.g., phrases which aren't fully supported or might be the result of scribal error)
- b. Note any grammar that is unusual, ambiguous, or otherwise important.
 - i. "Your primary interest is to isolate grammatical features that might have some effect on the interpretation of the passage."
- c. Make a list of key terms
 - i. Find the terms which lie near the center of meaning for the passage
- d. Do a mini-word study for any crucial terms
- e. Investigate important historical-cultural matters
 - i. E.g., in Mk 9:42-50, where Jesus talks about salt, dig in and find what salt was used for, and what meaning it might have conveyed.

III. Contextual Questions [1 hr]

- a. Epistles (and Acts and Revelation)
 - i. Examine the historical context
 1. Determine the recipients, the city they lived in, their composition (Jewish, Gentile, ...), etc.
 2. Reconstruct "the historical situation that occasioned this section within the epistle."

- ii. Examine the literary content (and add to the *sermon use* list)
 - 1. What is the point of the passage?
 - 2. How does it fit into the overall scheme of the letter?
 - 3. How does it fit right at this point into the author's argument or exhortation?
 - b. Gospels
 - i. Identify the form
 - 1. E.g., parable, narrative, proverb/hyperbole, etc.
 - ii. Use a synopsis
 - 1. Compare the synoptics if appropriate.
 - 2. What emphases do the different Gospel writers bring out, and why?
 - 3. Investigate possible life settings where appropriate
 - a. E.g., if Mark is written to the community in Rome under persecution, does this play a role in the passage under consideration?
 - 4. Describe the present arrangement or adaptation
 - a. "What you are looking for are those items that will give you insight into the author's emphases and his point in including the passage right here. Thus you are here going about answering the questions of literary context."

IV. Secondary Literature [50 mins.]

- a. Consult commentaries
 - i. To look for scholarly opinions about places of difficult exegesis
 - ii. To listen to "at least three other interpretations of the text, with which you can compare your own and make adjustments if another turns out to be more convincing."
 - iii. "To be alerted to issues or opinions that you overlooked"
- b. Read other literature

V. Biblical-Theological Context [half an hour]

- a. Analyze the passage's relation to the rest of Scripture
 - i. What is this passage similar or dissimilar to?
 - ii. What gaps does it fill?
 - iii. Does anything hinge on it elsewhere?
 - iv. Do other Scriptures make it comprehensible? How?
 - v. What value does it have for the student of the Bible?
- b. Analyze the passage's use in and relation to theology
 - i. To what theological doctrines does the passage add light?
 - ii. What are its theological concerns?
 - iii. How major or minor are the issues addressed?
 - iv. How does the passage fit in with the full system of truth contained in Christian theology?

VI. Application [40 mins.]

- a. List the life issues in the passage
- b. Clarify the possible nature and area of application (e.g. informative/directive, faith or action, etc.)
- c. Identify the audience and categories of application