WORKSHOPS ON BIBLICAL EXPOSITION

WORKSHEET PREPARATION GUIDE

Preparing a Worksheet for your small group can be challenging, especially if it is your first *Workshop on Biblical Exposition*. We want you to work hard and do your best. But we also don't want you to feel overly anxious about what is going to happen when you present in your small group. Of course, the best way to understand the concepts in the Sermon Preparation Worksheet is to attend a Workshop. If this is your first Workshop, we won't expect you to have gotten it all. This document clarifies some of the terminology and the intention of the questions on the worksheet. You can also visit the website and listen to some of the audio from previous Workshops to help you prepare.

As you complete the Worksheet, know that each question builds off the one before. The questions follow a *Pathway for Preparation*. You start with Exegesis figuring out the structure, emphasis, and context. All those parts together lead you to the author's main point. (Another way to say it is that the author's main point is the emphasis in context.) Then you move on to Theological Reflection where you'll consider how your author's main point connects to the gospel. Having seen the author's main point in light of the gospel, you now begin to consider what your main point will be. You also need to think about how you will argue for that main point in your preaching outline. Then consider what applications will flow from the main point and argument for the different kinds of people in your audience.

1. How has the author organized this passage? Please a) show the structure in sections with verse references and b) explain what strategies you used to see this structure. c) What is the emphasis revealed by the structure?

The *author's organization* (or *structure*) is a way of talking about the shape or form of a biblical passage. Beneath the surface of each passage is an underlying arrangement of material and a logic that the author has used to organize the passage. You might think of it as the author's outline. And each part of the passage has a role to play in that structure. When we ask you to identify the structure of a passage, then, we are asking you to identify that underlying shape. It might be a grammatical or logical structure (common in discourse), or it might be a plot, comparison of characters, or literary device (common in narrative), or it might be the separation of the passage into stanzas (in poetry). However you determine the author's structure, you should mark the sections of the passage, including the verse numbers. Please note that we are using the term *structure* to refer to the organization of a passage. For the structure of a whole book, the term *macro-structure* is more appropriate.

Importantly, the structure will reveal an *emphasis* that the author is making and has communicated through the structure. This is why understanding the flow of the passage, not just the parts, is so important. Think through the structure and how the parts relate to one another. Ask the *why* and *how* questions to see if you can observe the author's emphasis.

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Finally, explain how you arrived at this structure or what strategies you used to find it. We are looking to see how you think about your work, about how you try to find the emphasis of a passage.

What about Genres and Text Types?
Genres are categories of literature that have distinctive characteristics and, as a result, require some particularized reading strategies. Most people would not read a newspaper the same way as a novel, or a recipe, or a letter, or song lyrics. The Bible has several different genres within it, including Old Testament History, Prophetic Literature, Wisdom Literature, Apocalyptic Literature, Gospels and Acts, and Epistles. While each Workshop will focus on a genre, and usually a specific book as a representative of that genre, the worksheet questions are based on principles, and so apply to any genre.

Text types are a slightly different idea from genres. They are both categories of literature, so it can be a little confusing. Genres are a bigger category and take into account things like content, place in history, form of literature, and rhetorical purpose. Text types, however, refer only to the form of the text in the passage—this is why this is so important for structure work. In the Bible, there are three major text types: narrative (or stories), discourse (or speeches), and poetry. Importantly, each of these text types appears in each of the genres. That is, there is narrative and discourse and poetry in each of the genres listed above. Each text type has specific structures and requires specific strategies for finding those structures. Of course, you should always begin by reading and rereading your passage (in a literal translation) and then trying to find the text type. Once you have a sense of the text type, use the following strategies:

- *Discourse* (or speeches): This text type is most common in the speeches within Old Testament History books or the Epistles (which were most likely preached material). It is typically a single person speaking and tends to have a logical flow to it. As such, to find the structure in discourse, you want to trace the logic or reasoning of the passage. You might try grammatical analysis (such as identifying the verbs or noting how some clauses and ideas are subordinated to other more dominant ideas) or tracing the flow of ideas (similar to arc-ing) or discourse analysis. Key words and transitional words are also very important, especially as they help you see the grammatical and syntactical qualities of the passage. And as with every text type, you will want to pay special attention to repetitions.

- *Narrative* (or stories): This text type is found mostly in the Old Testament History books, some of the Prophets, and the Gospels and Acts. The structures in narratives tend to revolve around things like plot (or story arc), characters (similarity and contrast), or other literary devices (e.g., time of day, change of location). Perhaps the most common literary feature is plot, which has a distinctive shape: 1) *setting* (including the introduction of characters, time, location), 2) *conflic*t (or rising action, an inciting incident that demands a correction or solution), 3) *climax* (the turning point of the story, the point at which the resolution is set in motion and becomes necessary or inevitable), 4) *resolution* (the actual playing out of the solution in the conflict), and 5) *new setting* (or stasis, having shifted because of the plot arc, that paves the way for the next plot arc).

- *Poetry*: This text type is found throughout the Bible, but primarily in Wisdom Literature, Prophetic Literature, and Apocalyptic Literature. The key to finding structure in poetry is understanding how the stanzas work. Many English translations break poems into stanzas, usually with vertical spaces between the lines. However, the editors are not always right (nor do they agree)! You might try finding how the stanzas separate by noticing repetitions, changes in imagery, changes in voice/point of view/person (e.g., first person, second person, third person), changes in the type of parallelism (i.e., how the lines relate to each other in the pairs or triplets of lines), or other literary devices (e.g., alphabetical).

As noted above, one of the first things you want to do is try to identify your text type. One common challenge to identifying text type is when you encounter dialogue (often in narratives). Dialogues are, in a technical sense, narratives. A narrator is relaying the interactions between two people. However, you have to ask an additional question: Is this dialogue functioning as a narrative or as a discourse? Sometimes, the presence of a second speaker is not because it advances a plot, for example, but actually gives the primary speaker a question or a comment to help them along in a functional discourse. As such, do not be afraid to treat a dialogue as a discourse, if you think that is warranted.

2. How does the context inform the meaning of this passage? Please consider: a) the *literary context* (passages before and after the passage), b) the *historical context* (circumstances of the author's audience), c) the *cultural context* (details relevant to life as it was lived in this place at this time), and d) the *biblical context* (citations/allusions or historical connections to other books that the author is making). *Please list only those that are relevant to the meaning of the passage.*

For each genre, the best way of finding *literary context* (and the context of the whole book) is to read the whole book over and over again. Get a feel for the major themes and arguments of the whole book. Get a feel for the story arcs and arguments in the major sections. But mostly, just keep reading! Particularly important to placing your passage is the passage that comes before and the passage that comes after. How do they relate to your passage? Is there a larger discussion or topic that dominates them that might help you understand your passage?

For *historical context*, it might be good to consider the following:

- *Old Testament History*: When considering historical context in any book, you first must identify (as best you can) the original author and audience of the book. This can be difficult to determine in Old Testament History, but you can estimate an approximate date of writing. For example, the setting of the book of Ruth is "in the days when the judges ruled." However, the since the book narrates the completion of the events included, it must have been written later than when the events occurred. In the case of Ruth, it couldn't have been written in final form until at least after King David was born because he is mentioned at the end of the book. So, the historical context is at least after the monarchy was established. Finding references from other books throughout the Old Testament covering or addressing

the same period in history of the original audience might also be helpful (e.g., in the Prophets or other historical books).

- *Wisdom Literature*: The Wisdom books are, for the most part, somewhat separate from historical context. Song of Songs and Job, for example, do not really give us any clues as to their place in Israel's history. There are some good clues in Proverbs, but it is less clear that the historical context has a role to play in the book. So, ask yourself what you can learn from the Scriptures about the historical context, but be very slow and measured to rest your interpretations on it.

- *Prophetic Literature*: Like Old Testament History, it can be difficult to determine the original audience of a prophetic book. The original audience is not the people who heard the spoken prophecy or oracle but those who first received the completed written work. While it is not always possible to determine the situation of the original audience, they are normally people who lived at least after the events contained in the book. For example, in Isaiah, Sennacherib's attack on Hezekiah and Jerusalem is recorded as history. That means the earliest possible date of the completed written work is after that event.

- *Apocalyptic Literature*: This genre is found in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament it can be difficult to determine the original audience with certainty. Still, like the rest of the biblical genres, those who received the text are necessarily those who lived after the events recorded. Revelation is more straight forward; the historical context is the situation of the churches to whom John is writing (we can learn about them in Revelation 1-3.) You will want to consider how the words that John is writing would have been heard by the churches.

- *Epistles*: The best source of the historical context of an Epistle is generally the Epistle itself. Look at the beginning of the letter and the end of the letter for clues about the particular situation in history. Look throughout the letter for references to named people or locations. In the Pauline Epistles especially, look at the specifics concerning opponents or false teaches. Ask yourself: 'What is going on in the city/region of the recipient?' Also, look in related passages. For example, if you are studying 2 Corinthians, 1 Corinthians might give you some good clues. If you are reading 2 Timothy, both 1 Timothy and Ephesians might provide some help. And finally, the Acts of the Apostles is a very helpful resource. Look for corresponding references to places and people mentioned in Acts. This historical data is rarely going to be the key to reading a passage, but it almost always helps put the situation of the letter *in context*.

- *Gospels/Acts*: The Gospels are slightly more complicated because we know very little about the authors (remember that the Gospels are technically anonymous, though the traditions are very old and likely authentic) or, more importantly, we only have speculation as to where they were written and to whom. It is quite likely, in fact, that the Gospels were meant to be distributed widely throughout the ancient Mediterranean and so should not be tied to

the particular situation of a particular church in a particular place. To be clear, this hint is entirely in reference to the historical context of the Gospels. Issues concerning that field of Biblical Studies called *historical Jesus* as well as the *cultural context* of the ancient Mediterranean are still very much relevant and should be reconstructed from the Gospels themselves.

For *cultural context*, one has to consider the setting in the daily life of the people/characters in the book and how that will have been understood by the first audience. This is distinct from historical context in that it does not relate to a particular audience in a particular place at a particular time, but the details of life that the people/characters in the text had in common. So, for example, reading an agrarian parable in the Gospels might require an understanding of certain agricultural or economic realities that the people in the parable (and passage) and the first audience of that Gospel would have both had. Or, to connect with an earlier example, to understand cultural context in the book of Ruth, you could look at the book of Judges because the setting of the characters in the book is "in the days when the judges ruled." That means reading Judges would tell you what life was like when Ruth's story occurred. In the prophetic books it may be helpful to look at the reign of a particular king to get a sense of what problems Israel and Judah were facing to understand the prophet's agenda. Remember, the first fulfillments of prophecies are often in the history of Israel and Judah themselves. Anything that can be derived from the Bible itself is, of course, reliable. Anything that requires extra-biblical knowledge should be treated a bit more cautiously.

For *biblical context*, you need to look very carefully in the passage. Is the author referring to some previous historical event captured in the Bible? That is, is the author citing or alluding to some previously written passage? Keep in mind, this is part of *exegesis*, so we are asking for what connections the author could have reasonably expected his first audience to make. We are not looking for theological connections (e.g., the author mentions *grace*, so let's look at three other passages that talk about *grace*). That is part of *theological reflection* and will come into play in question 4. Here, we are looking for what references the author makes to other parts of the Bible (whether through direct citation or broader allusion). Go back and read them. And remember, the most important question is *why*? Why has the author chosen to make this biblical connection? What about that event or story or the context of that passage has captured the author's attention? What is the author's purpose in making that connection?

3. What is the main point the author is arguing to *his audience* (in one short sentence)?
The *author's main point* is a way of talking about the aim of a passage as a whole. It can be descriptive or prescriptive. It is not simply a summary statement. But rather, it is the idea of which the author is trying to persuade his audience. As you work on articulating the author's argument, please keep in mind that 1) it needs to be specific enough to the passage that it clearly comes from *the particular passage* (and not any other passage), 2) it is for the *first audience* (we'll get to modern readers later), and 3) it should be one single sentence that is both short and clear, and captures the *argument* of the passage. The goal is NOT to cram as much of the passage into your sentence as possible or to summarize the passage, but rather to focus on the main point and main purpose as clearly as possible. Often, the *main point* of a passage is not merely a descriptive statement. Rather, it might

be phrased as an *imperative* because the author's primary point is a call to action. In any case, we hope that you will supply your best attempt at the *main point* as a way of demonstrating that you understand and can articulate the central point of the passage and the author's agenda or claim in arguing it.

4. How does this passage connect to the gospel of Jesus Christ? What *part of the gospel* is in view? These two questions are getting at the idea that every part of the Bible, every passage of Scripture, in some way relates to the gospel of Jesus Christ (cf., Luke 24:13-49). The first question is asking in what way your passage—or really what parts of your passage—connect to the gospel. Your passage might anticipate the gospel. Your passage might be looking back and reflecting on the gospel. The important thing here is that the connection is legitimate and textually driven. We want to avoid the subjectivity of allegory or over-spiritualizing our passages. For this, you might do well to consider several strategies:

- *Explicit Reference*: This is the easiest strategy to see as, sometimes, the gospel of Jesus Christ is just right there, stated directly in your passage. This happens occasionally in the Gospels, but more frequently in the Epistles. Just make sure you treat the gospel the same way the author did.

- *Prophetic Fulfillment*: Sometimes, the best connection is made explicitly, but in relation to a prophecy or its fulfillment found elsewhere in the Bible. In the Prophets, for example, messianic prophecies are stated that have both a proximate historical fulfillment and an ultimate fulfillment in Jesus. The Gospels and Acts and the Epistles often take a look back at such prophecies. When you have such a connection in your passage, explore whether this is a way of connecting to the gospel.

- *Historical Trajectory*: This is one of the harder strategies to use as it requires having a fairly good grasp of redemptive history. Each of our passages describes something with a redemptive-historical value that exists on a timeline of all history, from creation to new creation. At the center of this timeline is the death and resurrection of Jesus. As such, your passage might include some kind of historical anticipation, some marker in history that inches closer (forward or backward) to the death and resurrection of Jesus. You might think in eras of or epochs of salvation history and ask how your passage plays a role in the trajectory of history that is aimed at the cross and resurrection.

- *Typology*: An analogy is a broad set of comparisons (both of similarity and contrast) between two concepts. *Typology* is a kind of analogy used in biblical literature. It may compare people, objects, institutions, or other things. Importantly, there is a kind of progression in the comparison, where the final person or object or event is escalated in value in some way. In other words, a *type* is a pattern or a shadow that in some way points to an ultimate expression of it. And, for the purpose of connecting to the gospel, the type is a shadow cast by a particular face of the gospel. Moses was an important prophet that anticipates the ultimate prophet in Jesus. David was a good king that anticipates the ultimate king in Jesus.

It is worth noting that there are always aspects of similarity and dissimilarity present in analogies and typologies.

- *Biblical Theological Themes*: Themes are larger ideas that, themselves, progressively develop throughout the Bible. In this way, they might be seen as following the *historical trajectory* strategy as well as combining large sets of multiple *typological* connections. Major themes include kingdom, exodus and exile, priest and temple, and covenant. There are several others. Consider how one of these themes might be present in your passage and, as a result, how that theme then connects you to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- *Gospel-Based Teaching*: Sometimes, your passage revolves around ethical action. It can be hard to see the gospel of grace in passages that so easily lend themselves to a message of obedience. The important thing here is to get the ideas in the right order. When we are saved, we are given the righteousness of Christ (justification), a righteousness that depends on faith (Phil 3:8-9; cf., 2 Cor 5:21). Works of righteousness do not save us, but they are how we are commanded to live in faith for our own good (sanctification), having been saved. When we come across the teaching or ethical demands God makes of his people, we need to understand these demands in light of the gospel. So, you might look for foundational theological ideas in the context that provide the gospel basis for the ethics. You might think of it as the ethics by raising a question or presenting a problem that the gospel answers or solves.

In general, the best way to demonstrate the legitimacy of a gospel connection, especially in the Old Testament, is to make sure you have a passage (complementary to your own) that drives the connection. That is, you want to make sure you are teaching gospel connections in the Bible, not just loosely related abstract theological concepts.

In addition to showing the connections, you need to also reflect on the part of the gospel that is in view. In other words, to what aspect of the gospel does your passage connect? Or what angle on the gospel does your passage take? As you might expect, *the gospel* is both an incredibly simple, and yet complex and multi-faceted concept. The heart of the gospel is, of course, the death and resurrection of Jesus as a substitutionary atonement for human sin, providing eternal life in relationship with God. But there are other angles on the gospel that might be more relevant to your passage, including the Incarnation, the Ascension, the Second Coming, and the life and miracles and teaching of Jesus. There are also implications of the gospel like repentance, faith, and obedience. And there are also results of the gospel like forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Any one of these might be the strongest, textual, legitimate connection from your passage to the concept of the gospel.

5. What is the main point you will argue to *your audience* (in one short sentence)?

The *main point* of a sermon is the fundamental statement of what you, as a speaker today, are trying to convince your audience today.[1] In expository preaching and teaching, it will certainly be intimately related to the author's *main point* for his original audience and it will consider the gospel connection. You might think of it as that most basic idea of which you are attempting to persuade your listeners. It should be well reasoned and, perhaps, articulated as the result of a proof (so depending on premises and building arguments).

6. What applications will you make? Consider both Christians and non-Christians.
The *applications* (and implications) will also likely be related to the *main point* of your sermon. You might have multiple applications or just one. You might articulate them throughout your sermon or just at the end. But use your work up to this point in the worksheet to draw out primary (and secondary) applications from the text and know how you will argue them. Additionally, these applications should be tailored to two specific parts of your audience: the believers and the unbelievers, thus taking into account how your passage relates to the gospel and not merely its meaning for the first audience.

7. What is your sermon title and your preaching outline?[2]
A sermon title is a short, simple phrase that is attempting to capture the main idea of the sermon. It is a way of focusing the mind of the audience to what it is they are to be absorbing from listening to the sermon. In this way, it should be shorter and more precise than a statement of your *main point*. It should also be poignant or provocative. It needs to capture the attention of the *audience* and draw them in. As such, it should probably be stated in modern and accessible language. It is, after all, your first use of rhetoric in attempting to persuade your audience.

A *preaching outline* is sometimes called a homiletical outline. It is simply a way of organizing your sermon or message. It should be derived from your work in the passage and will most likely be related to the structure of the passage. In the same way, your *sermonic main point* is related to the *author's main point*, how you organize your material to make your argument (your outline) should be related to how the author argued his point (his structure). But as with your sermonic main point, you also need to take into account both your *audience* and the *gospel connections*.

While *structure* is behind-the-scenes work, the homiletical outline is shaped and prepared to help your listeners follow along with your presentation of the passage for your church audience. While some might include detailed notes in a homiletical outline for teaching, your homiletical outline for the Workshop presentation needs only to be the outline itself—the headers you might attach to each section of your sermon.

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[1] Please note: We are using the term *sermon* throughout this document to refer to the message or teaching session of a preacher or teacher. We realize that in some contexts, women may be uncomfortable using this terminology to refer to women teaching women. Please keep in mind that we wrote this document with male pastors in mind and our use of this terminology does not imply anything about gender for us. Our doctrinal statement is clear as to what we believe about issues of gender and ministry.

[2] In the women's version of the worksheet, the question reads: "What is your *talk title* and your *teaching outline*?"

You might be wondering: 'Do I really have to write a homiletical outline?' Yes, you are required to write a homiletical outline. People in ministry fulfill a lot of teaching roles. Some find themselves in preaching or teaching settings where a homiletical outline would be helpful. Other teachers lead ministries of the local church, write curriculum, train lay leaders, etc. Whichever way you are doing Word work, it is incredibly important to think homiletically!

OTHER FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the difference between the *author's main point* and *my main point (and applications)*?
If the *author's main point* (question 3) is for the author's original audience, then *your main point* and *applications* (question 5) are our way of talking about the goal of the passage for our people today. Another way to think of it is that the *author's main point* is the passage applied to them/then, and *your main point* is the passage applied to us/now.

What should my handout look like and why do I need to bring several copies?
Your handout should include your answers to the questions on the preparation worksheet. It is most helpful for small-group discussion if your handout is on one page (front and back, preferably typed). The art of being clear and concise is invaluable for preachers and teachers! Providing copies for your small group will make interaction more fruitful as they peer-review your work.

What should my presentation look like for my small group?
Your five-minute presentation will consist of simply presenting the content of your preparation worksheet, including your preaching outline. The discussion that follows will build on that work with the hope of giving you one or two things on which to work. We cannot necessarily delve into assessing your choice of illustrations, your tone or speed of speaking in public, etc. But, we will focus on skills in studying the passage in order to get it right, so that we can get it across.

This is my first time. How am I supposed to prepare without having received the training?
We are glad you are coming to a Workshop! This document and the resources on our website are meant to help you prepare. We'd all love the chance to hear instructions *before* completing our homework, but that would mean attending a three-day Workshop without doing the homework. We have found we can't really grow in our teaching unless we bring our own work to review. So, whether you are a first-timer or repeat-participant, everyone will tell you there is more to learn at every Workshop.

Why don't you provide a sample completed worksheet?
We have found that two things happen when we give sample answers. First, it limits the scope of answers that participants give. That is, without intending to, participants limit themselves too much to the confines of (the types of) answers we give in the sample worksheet. We'd rather handle the discernment necessary for doing this work in discussion in the small group rather than limit the work up front. Second, sometimes participants view the answers we give on the sample worksheet as what we view as 'the right answers.' We hope that we are still making progress and will do a

better job on our worksheets every time we approach a passage. We certainly don't want anyone thinking we have perfected any particular passage. We are still growing too!

What if I get it wrong?

This is the last question listed here, but often the first question on everyone's minds. It's okay to be nervous. We all worry about handling God's Word well. As Christians, we recognize the learning process is ongoing. We can always be stretched in new ways. Part of the hope of having interactive instructional sessions and these small group discussions is that the instructors and small group leaders learn new things as well. Our small group leaders foster a collegial environment where we will each be encouraged and challenged to grow. Most of us are not used to peer-review of our work, but we will all find it is invaluable in helping us grow as preachers and teachers. So, enjoy the Workshop!

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