

Passage Preparation Worksheet

_____ | Kirk E. Miller

Textual Properties

Structure: How is this passage organized to communicate its emphasis (i.e., how do all the parts fit and work together to communicate a unified argument)? What strategies for discerning structure proved most fruitful?¹

...

Context: How do the context(s) function to inform or illuminate your understanding of this passage?²

...

Tone: What is the tone of this passage³ and how does its tone inform the author's goal in this text?

...

Original Meaning

Claim: What is the author's controlling thought in this passage and message of which he intends to persuade his audience?

...

Aim: How does the author intend this passage to function in the lives of his audience? What is the desired effect, or intended response, this claim is meant to have in them? What is God seeking to get done through this passage?

...

Contribution: How is this passage's claim illuminated by its connection to the book's "melodic line"? What is this passage's unique contribution to the development of that melodic line?

...

Gospel-Connection

Gospel: How does this claim direct us to Christ and relate to the gospel-event?⁴ In other words, how is this passage good news in light of Christ? Provide any Biblical theology helpful for elucidating this connection.

¹ Tools for discerning structure according to text type:

Discourse: flow of thought, repetition, syntax, transition words, controlling propositions (main verbs), thesis statement, question and answer, theme clusters.

Narrative: plot arch, relationship between scenes, repetition, character comparison, shift in setting (geography, temporal markers), dialogue, parable, sandwiching (intercalation), editorial comments.

Poetry: stanzas, repetition, banner statement, theme clusters, shifts in imagery, grammar, speaker, addressee, or point of view, comparison and contrast, literary devices (chiasm, acrostic).

² (a) Immediate literary context—sections immediately before and after.

(b) Macro-literary context—placement in and contribution to the whole book.

(c) Historical-cultural context—known historical circumstances or cultural phenomena serving as background to this passage.

(d) Intended context—the situation of the original audience into which this was written and would have been received.

(e) Biblical context—allusions or references to other Biblical material.

(f) Redemptive-historical context—location in the storyline of scripture.

³ If the author had the opportunity to speak these words out loud to the original audience, what type of tone do you think he would have used? Where might he place emphasis and how (e.g., inflection, increase and decreased volume, pace, pauses, laughter, sarcasm, sorrow, non-verbal cues, etc.)?

⁴ • Command/ethic only Christ can fulfill or empower.

...

Christ's Work: What part(s) of Christ's ministry, anchored in his death and resurrection, are in view in this connection?⁵

...

Significance

Conclusion: What is the synthesized message of this passage as it comes to bear on us through Christ and in light of our place in redemptive history (your "sermon in a sentence")?

...

Response: What does it look like for us to respond to this message and embody the aim of this passage? What would it look like for today's audience to grow in and live out the truths of this passage?⁶

...

Evangelistic: How will you present the truths of this passage to a non-believer with the aim of showing them their need for salvation, communicating an apologetic for Christianity, and persuading them to trust in Christ?

...

Mission: How does this passage fit into God's plan of working redemption and renewal through the local church? In other words, how does this passage equip the church for its mission?

...

Persuasive Presentation

Argument: How is the argument of this passage developed within the text? What are the significant exegetical observations that contribute to this development?

...

Arrangement: What will your homiletical strategy be?⁷ How can you best convey the message of this passage in a way that reflects its argument? Sermon outline?

...

Adornment: What homiletical features (title, tagline, introduction, questions, meditations, examples, illustrations, quotes, etc.) can I utilize to communicate this message and its content effectively?

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- Hope or promise in which only Christ can give real reason to trust and rest.
 - Recurring theme that eventually climaxes in Christ.
 - Ill that can only be made right and resolved in Christ.
 - Storyline development toward the redemption accomplished in Christ.
 - Type picturing an aspect of the Christ event.

⁵ E.g., incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension, session, intercession, return.

⁶ What ready-made responses might already be present in the text?

⁷ E.g., deductive, inductive, "SPA" (story-point-application), fallen-condition-focus, tension/movement, application placement, etc.? Will you use primary (sourced in the central message) or secondary (sourced in its subordinate points) applications?

...

Audience: What are and how can I address the unique needs my audience has that this passage addresses? What difficulties, struggles, or hurdles might they face in fully understanding, embracing, or living out its message?

...

Application: What are particularly notable and relevant ways my audience can response to this message?⁸

...

Signified & Pledged

Lord's Supper: How can you lead people to experience the good news of this passage through the Lord's Supper?

...

Intercession

Prayer: What is your prayer for your audience and how God would use this sermon?

...

⁸ See "Application Grids" and "Application Prods" below.

Sermon Preparation Process

Text Work

- Read the passage slowly, meditatively, and prayerfully – start making notes.
- Exegete and interpret – look at text in original language; look at various translations; attend to text critical matters, grammar, syntax, significant words, passage structure, tone, contexts, relevant parallel passages, etc.
- Construct a tentative structure, claim, and aim.
- Consider the passage's relationship to redemptive history, Christ and the gospel-event, and the church's mission.
- Anticipate sermon development: develop initial ideas about possible sermon strategy; consider illustrations and applications; etc.

Secondary Resources

- Use resources (e.g., commentaries, sermons). Note *key* observations.
- Revise any interpretations and conclusions as needed.

Sermon Composition

- Finalize sermon strategy and outline.
- Write: exposition, explanations, illustrations, applications, introduction, etc.

Refining & Familiarizing

- Edit and refine sermon.
- Review sermon.
- Preach the sermon to yourself.
- Pray for sermon delivery and effect.

Application Grids

	Unawakened	Immature	Mature	Convicted	Complacent	Resistant	Troubled
Mind Communicate necessary beliefs; aid understanding							
Will Call for decision, self-determination, resolve							
Motives Address proper (or improper) motives							
Heart Stir the affections							
Hands Speak to actions, behavior, lifestyle							
Examination Call for honest, self-examination							

God	Church Community, Ministry	Family Spouse, Parent, Child	Society Evangelism, Missions, Work, Politics	Creation

Application Prods

Why It Matters

1. What if this truth was not real? What would the world be like? What would life be like?
2. Why do you think people need this truth?
3. What is at stake if we fail to live in light of this truth?
4. How would you explain to someone that this truth is essential to finding true joy in this world?

Dissecting the Message

1. Consider each word of the *message*. What does each word contribute? Why is each word important for what God is communicating to us here?
2. What words or phrases would most significantly impact what this *message* is communicating if it were eliminated or altered?
3. What are the three most important words in your stated *message* for this passage and why?
4. If you had three minutes to tell this truth to a stranger, what part of it would you want to emphasize the most, and how might you do it, both in tone and explanation?
5. What word or phrase could be easily glossed over (not given much attention), but is in fact quite significant to what's being communicated here?

Clarifying the Message

1. How could someone misunderstand what this *message* is saying? What might help to clarify things for them?
2. How could someone make this truth say too much or too little? What would it look like for someone to over-apply or under-apply this truth?
3. What do you think people in general find most confusing about this truth? What do you think Christians specifically find most confusing about this truth?
4. In what ways do you think this truth is misunderstood (e.g., overheard, underheard, poorly defined)?

Analyzing Our Reaction

1. How do you find yourself responding to the *message* of this passage? What does our response teach us about ourselves and our own need for this passage?
2. What do you find most encouraging about this passage's *message*? What do you find most challenging? And why?

Addressing Our Struggle

1. Why do we fail to live in the good of the *message* of this passage?
2. What do you think are the main reasons why people doubt or outright reject this *message*? What would be a helpful response to each challenge?
3. When are the moments I need this *message* the most?
4. What are some reasons why we find it functionally difficult to live as if this is true?

Challenging Frameworks

1. How does the *message* of this passage challenge any operating frameworks we have?
2. How does this truth challenge common cultural conceptions, viewpoints, and visions of reality? Does our culture and world tell us a different, competing *message*?

3. How do you think someone living in a different culture might hear this *message* with a different nuance or focus than us? What might we learn from their perspective?
4. What is one way you think God may want to adjust your thinking by revealing this truth to you?
5. What false beliefs (about God, man, the world, etc.) can this truth combat?

Shaping Loyalties

1. How might this truth strengthen your faith in God?
2. How might this passage help you to persevere in, or alter, a goal you have in your life?

Envisioning Its Realization

1. How might life be different this next week if trusted in this truth more?
2. Envision a church characterized by this *message*? What would it look like?
3. What sort of good fruit do you think this truth can stir up when a local church collectively enjoys this truth together?
4. What is one risk you would take if you trusted in this truth more?

Ministering Its Truth

1. How can you pray the truth of this passage for someone in the church?
2. What is one way you could encourage someone with this truth?
3. What might it look like to minister this truth to people in different situations (e.g., depressed, lonely, scared, overwhelmed, angry, hurt, arrogant, domineering, selfish, grumbling)?
4. How might you pray this truth for this local church or for our city?

In Real Life

1. What are three real-life situations we can name where this truth could give our souls stability and hope?
2. How do you think this truth can help you faithfully follow the Lord in particular situations this week?
3. If someone watched your life and could hear all your thoughts, in what ways would they discover you not to be fully resting in and living out this truth?

Pursuing Growth

1. What is something you can do to help you grow in trusting in this truth?
2. What motivations does this passage present for fulfilling its applications? In light of this, what might it look like to pursue these applications?
3. What part of this truth do you think you give the least amount of attention to? Why do you think that is? What might it look like to grow in thinking on that aspect and/or living in the good of it?

Reaching Unbelievers

1. How might you illustrate this truth to an unbeliever?
2. What questions do you think this message would raise for someone who has never heard the gospel before?

Sermon Checklist

Integrity (exegetical soundness)

True to the passage's...

- Authorial intent?
- Passage structure or form?
- Genre and tone?
- Context, book, and occasion?
- Aim (affections, belief, trust, obedience, thoughts, actions, etc.)?

Integrated (Biblical theology)

- Redemptive-historical context considered?
- Relationship to Christ?
- Passage interpreted in light of the gospel?
- Mission-equipping?
- Inspiring vision of God set forth?

Clarity (homiletical quality)

- Main point—clear and frequently stated?
- Demonstrative—was this main point clearly demonstrated from the text?
- Well organized—clear and helpful structure?
- Simple—avoids unnecessary complexity?
- Lean—trim and tight, selective and intentionality about what's included?
- Brief—"less is more"; distinguish what is *important* from what is merely *interesting*?
- Unified—every element serves the central message of the sermon?
- Perspective—don't miss the "forest for the trees" or the "trees for the forest."
- Christ—held up as the heartbeat of the passage?
- Use of pithy, memorable phrases?
- Helpful illustrations, examples, introduction?
- Practical? Down to earth? Thoughtful, engaging, quality applications?

Engagement (audience consideration)

- Sermon oriented specifically to *this* audience?
- Clear, understandable language?
- Helpful explanations of theological issues?
- Answers given to questions the average person may have of the text?
- Audience's translation(s) considered?
- Conscientious of how nonbelievers will hear this message? Gospel presented?