

# Preparing the Word

Nigel Barge

Workbook



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# Preparing the Word

**A course to enable people to share the  
Word of God with others in any context,  
from an epilogue at a youth club to a  
Sunday sermon**

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## Workbook

# Before the first meeting

*It will greatly increase the benefit from our study of a passage together if we prepare in advance, alone.*

## **Task: Read Luke 15:11-32**

**Imagine you have been led to (or asked to speak from) the parable of the prodigal son.**

*First, answer the following questions on the Exposition of the passage, using the 'Hearing the Word' method.*

### **A. Exposition**

'Expose' the passage, writing down your thoughts in answer to the following questions-

#### **1. Any questions?**

*What questions arise from the passage? Write a full list, whether or not you already know an answer.*

#### **2. Any surprises?**

*It is often the thing that doesn't 'fit' that may hold the key to the meaning of the passage.*

#### **3. Main Point?**

*Every type of literature has a main point or theme that the author is trying to communicate. What do you think it is here?*

#### **4. Key verse?**

*Every type of literature may have a sentence that expresses the main point of a paragraph or chapter. What do you think it is?*

#### **5. What does it show about God / Jesus?**

*NB This is the primary goal of the Scriptures.*

#### **6. What should the response be of ...**

a) ... the original hearers?

b) ... us today? - *The very important, but secondary, purpose of the Scriptures.*

**Task continued on next page:**

## **B. Possible Audience**

*Secondly, before preparing a talk to a group based on this exposition,*

1. **Describe an imaginary situation** (e.g. Youth service to open the BB/GB season; The Guild, Sunday sermon etc
2. Arising from your exposition, suggest **how you might present it to *that* audience**, showing also:
  - a) **A conclusion**  
How you might sum up the message
  - b) **An introduction**  
How you might introduce the talk to that audience
  - c) **An illustration**  
How you might illustrate the main point

*Come prepared to share your thoughts at the first session*

# Session 1 – Introduction

## What happens in a good sermon?

*The first session is an introduction. It is an opportunity for reflection and discussion about past experiences of receiving a Word from God and for opening up the subject of God communicating his Word to one person through another.*

### A. God's Word

#### 1. God speaks by His Word

“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these days, He has spoken by his son.” (Hebrews 1:1-3)

NB This has been written down and gives us the written Word of God – Old and New Testaments.

The principal means through which God gives His Word today is in the Bible. All that He says conforms to it.

#### ***Task 1 – How God speaks***

- a ) How has God spoken to you through his Word in the past – specific examples, sermons, Bible readings etc?***
- b) How do you expect Him to speak to you today?***

<b><i>Think</i></b>	<b>by yourself:</b>	<i>3 minutes,</i>
<b><i>Discuss</i></b>	<b>in Groups of 3 or 4:</b>	<i>3 minutes,</i>
	<b>All together:</b>	<i>3 minutes.</i>

## **2. God's Word makes things happen**

It is –

### **a) Creative,**

'In the beginning God said, "Let there be..." and there was...' (*Gen 1: 3,6 etc.*)

### **b) Effective**

'My Word will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it'. (*Isaiah 55:11*)

### **c) Living**

'The Word of God is living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit' (*Heb 4:12*).

## **3. God's Word induces faith**

'Faith comes by hearing the message and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.' (*Romans 10:17*)

As we listen to the Word, the Holy Spirit may apply it to our lives and we 'hear' God speaking to us. Our response to this is, *faith*. Such faith is 'living' and inevitably then leads to a change in attitude or behaviour.

## **B. Receiving the Word**

### **1. Personally**

When we read the Bible, we minister the Word ('preach') to *ourselves*. We seek, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to apply it to our lives.

### **2. Through another**

One person might present the Word to another, with regard to a specific situation. "Here is a scripture. I believe it may be for you..."

### 3. In a group

A person may present the Word to a group of others, explaining it and applying it in ways that may be relevant to that audience. In such a context, God might speak to individuals: a hearer receives the Word with faith and is moved to act upon it. This is what is commonly called ‘preaching’.

NB The Reformers understood ministry of the Word to others (i.e. ‘preaching’) to be a form of ‘prophecy’ (1 Corinthians 14:1-5) - God declaring His Word to one person through another.

### C. Choosing a Word

In presenting the Word to one or more others, our hope is that God will speak through what we say. If he doesn’t, we may entertain, captivate, and hold our audience – but it will be in vain as far as the Kingdom is concerned!

#### ***Task 2 – Choosing a passage***

- a) How would you decide on what to say if asked to give a Word (to Junior Church, BB, group devotions, sermon etc)***
- b) What passage might you speak on, if asked soon?***

<b><i>Think</i></b>	<b>by yourself:</b>	<i>3 minutes,</i>
<b><i>Discuss</i></b>	<b>in Groups of 3 or 4:</b>	<i>3 minutes,</i>
	<b>All together:</b>	<i>3 minutes.</i>



If we are preaching through a series or an exposition of a book of the Bible, our prayer is that God has already been in its choice and timing. For a ‘one off’ sermon, however, here is a possible approach to help us choose the passage that *God* would like! *E.g.*

- 1) **Prayer** – ‘Lord, what do you want to say?’
- 2) **Receive** - A thought / a scripture (s) / an idea
- 3) **Prepare** - Go to the Word and let it refine the idea.

*NB Ensure that it is the Word that drives the message and that you are not using the Scriptures merely to give weight to your idea!*

In whatever way you receive the Word (putting your finger in the Bible or angelic visitation?!), you need to come to the position in faith that this is what the Lord wants you to say.

## **D. Exposing the Word**

We need to ‘expose’ the Scripture – **It** has the power and **it** is the authority for all that we might say in Jesus’ name.

If you are led to a text / passage, go to work on it **before** you write your message. Make sure what you say conforms to the passage and not vice versa. That journalistic saying – ‘Don’t let the truth get in the way of a good story’ – is the polar opposite of how we should minister from the Word of God! (2 Corinthians 4:2)

## Session 2 – The Text

We are going to work on Luke 15:11-32 and through this, examine the basics of preparing a Word from the Bible to share with others. This will include the following components:

- i) Context
- ii) Exposition
- iii) Illustration
- iv) Application

### Read Luke 15:11-32 again

#### A. Context

If we break into a story at a certain point and want to make sense of the rest of the story as it unfolds, we are going to need some information on what has gone before.

*E.g. “When he returned, Sean said to her angrily, ‘Haven’t we been through this before?...’”*

To understand what follows, we need to know the answer to the following questions –

Who is Sean?

To whom is he speaking?

What have they been through before?

Where has he been and what has happened? etc

Why is he angry?

The answers to these questions will act as ‘**coat pegs**’ on which to place the details of the story as it is then told.

Similarly, when we break into the Bible story, we need to provide a framework for our hearers so that they can understand the passage before them. This may contain information from the surrounding text and from the overall picture of the Bible itself. The information given should be –

**a) Relevant.**

Only give information that is essential to the understanding of the passage before you. (Other information will act as a distraction to it.)

**b) Brief**

Different audiences will be able to put up a different number of ‘coat pegs’ so that they can absorb different amounts of information. If too much information is given, it is more likely that some of the essential details will be forgotten. (Some ‘non-essential’ information about its context may be included later during the talk.)

**c) Prior to reading**

It is hard to assimilate and arrange facts in your mind *in retrospect*. People will remember much more of the content of a talk if the context is made clear before the passage is read.

For instance, when you invite guests to your home, the ‘coat pegs’ need to be in place before they arrive. It is much more difficult for guests to find the right coat on their way out, if you first dump them all on a bed in a heap, then erect the pegs and hang them up yourself.

### **Task 3 – Context**

**E,g. Luke 15:13-25**

You are going to talk on the parable to some 10-year-olds:  
*Look at the verses below that are found **around** the parable.*

Underline only the points which are essential for your hearers to know *before* you read them the passage (3 mins)

#### **On your own:**

1. Jesus had been eating at a Pharisee's house and had scolded them for inviting family and friends but not the poor etc (14:1ff).
2. He had just told the parable of the Great Banquet where those who should have been present made excuses and the poor took their places. (14:15ff)
3. Large crowds were following Jesus at this time. (14:25)
4. Jesus was popular with tax collectors & 'sinners.' (15:1)
5. Jesus was welcoming and eating with 'sinners.' (1)
6. The Pharisees were muttering and complaining. (2a)
7. Jesus was in the first instance talking to Pharisees (2b,3a)
8. Jesus told 3 parables – 1st 2 conclude with heaven's view: *viz.* More rejoicing over repentant sinner than the righteous (7). All in heaven share the joy at a repentant sinner (10).
9. There is a progression in the 3 parables Jesus taught - 100 sheep, 10 coins, 2 sons.
10. The parables have different emphases:
  - 1) The shepherd's *Commitment* to the lost sheep.
  - 2) The woman's *Value* of the lost coin.

**Groups** Share your ideas and form a consensus (3 mins)

**All together** (3 mins)



## **B. Exposition**

This is the ‘engine’ for the message – the place where the power lies. It is the part that you want your hearers to remember when they have forgotten the speaker, the illustrations, the jokes etc. It should receive the ‘glory’ of every other part of the talk.

Our authority is not our own. It comes from God, through his Word. We therefore cannot rely on ourselves. Paul told the Corinthians he had come

“in fear & trembling”! His preaching was...

“... not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom but on God’s power.” (1 Corinthians 2:3-5)

No amount of humour, illustration, oratory or other device will bring about any change in the spiritual world. Paul assures the Romans that -

“Faith comes by hearing the message and the message is heard through the Word of God.” (Romans 10:17)

It is our task to ‘expose’ that which is already there but may be ‘hidden’ in the text, or hidden to minds not yet ‘awake’ to God (2 Cor 3:16). Our goal, therefore, is to let the Word speak for itself. In seeking to do this, it is helpful to identify a main theme or point, and a topical sentence.

### **1 Main Point**

In any unit of written text, there may be many different things communicated. However, there is usually one, central, unifying point in the writer’s mind that holds it all together.

In approaching the exposition of a passage, amongst the many lessons that it may teach, it is vital to identify the writer’s point at the start.

### **Task 4 – Main Point**

***E.g. in Luke 15:11-32***

***Below are some lessons one may draw from the parable  
From your work on the passage, underline that which  
you consider to be the main point that Jesus is making.***

- a) God comes to meet and welcome the repentant sinner.
- b) The faithful are with God and share the blessing of all he has.
- c) A sense of unworthiness or conviction of sin precedes Conversion.
- d) Jealousy and pride kill joy in the church.
- e) God allows us to say sorry but not to try and pay for Forgiveness.
- f) When we repent, God the Father graciously gives back to us our inheritance as a son.
- g) God welcomes sinners and wants us to follow His example in welcoming them too.
- h) People who see working for God as ‘slaving’, can’t be enjoying Him.
- i) Sinners need enlightenment about their predicament.

**By yourself** Think, choose one, underline it – 2 mins

**In Group** Discuss, try to reach a common mind – 3 min

**All together** – 3 minutes

## 2 Key Verse

Another device we are taught in English lessons at school to help discern the theme of a paragraph, section or chapter is to try and identify a '*topical sentence*'. That is, a sentence that would best encapsulate the theme of the unit.

*(Note: this is not a guaranteed formula, but a device – a 'stone' on which to sharpen your attempt to get to the heart of a passage.)*

### **Task 5 – Key Verse**

**E.g. in Luke 15:11-32**

***Write down your thoughts of a Key Verse, with reasons***

***Think and write*** by yourself: 2 minutes,

***Discuss*** in Groups of 3 or 4: 3 minutes,

**All together:** 3 mins

**Key verse:** v. .... “

**Why choose that one?**

It is said that anyone giving a 'message' from the Bible, ought to be able to reduce it to a single sentence. Indeed in public speaking, the same can be said of any talk! For the expository preacher, that sentence should be the main point of the message!

Once we have a firm grasp of the message of the passage, we are in a position to construct a sermon.

## C. Application

If the exposition is the ‘engine’ that provides the power of the message, the application is the ‘gear-box’! It is the means of transmitting the power to the ‘wheels’ so that the vehicle moves. Without the gear box (application), everything else is almost worthless. We can sit in our car warming ourselves with the heater, but it will go nowhere! Similarly, if there is no action after hearing the Word, it has been all but useless –

‘Do not merely listen to the Word, but do as it says.’ (James 1:22)

Applications are our response to God’s Word. They are things that should lead to action. They may result in a change...

a) ...in attitude to God

*e.g. The Father goes out to both of the Sons*

*ie ...Recognise the Love of God for **all** mankind*

b) ...in our actions

*e.g. The Son came to his senses*

*ie ...Are you miserable and lost, disappointed and rejected by friends? – come home to God!*

In seeking ‘applications’ to a lesson as we speak from God’s Word, we are looking to help the hearers find the way in which God’s Spirit might want them to put it into an action in their own lives. This may be done by suggesting situations and ways in which we might respond.

This is a vital and time-consuming part of preparing a talk. As we prayerfully seek applications, we are aware that they may ‘prophesy’ into peoples’ lives.

An illustration - A story is told of the 18<sup>th</sup> century evangelist, George Whitfield. Once, as he was preaching, a young man in the audience leapt up and shouted out, ‘But it wasn’t my fault!’ So graphic was his ‘application’ that the man thought he knew of his situation and was addressing him directly.



(Though we take into account the general circumstances of our listeners, we must be careful never, under the cover of giving a talk on God's Word, deliberately to speak to a particular circumstance in a particular person's life.)

### ***Task 6 – Application***

**E.g. in Luke 15:11-32**

- 1) What does this passage show you about God / Jesus?**
- 2) What does God want His 'hearers' to do?**

***Write answers to the questions: by yourself: 5 mins,  
Discuss in Groups: 5 minutes, All together: 3 minutes***

***1) What does this passage show you about God / Jesus?***

*a)*

*b)*

*c)*

***2) What does God want His 'hearers' to do:***

*a) Jesus' original hearers:*

*b) Us today:*

*c)*

*d)*

*e)*

## Notes

## D. Illustration

An illustration is a ‘picture’ that sheds light. If done with words, it conjures up an image in the hearer’s mind, underlining the point that has just been made. This may be done with a story, an observation from life, a comparison with nature, even a joke.

It may come from within or without the Bible. E.g. many examples of how God deals with a believer in Jesus today may be drawn from how God dealt with Israel in the Old Testament.

In one sense, many of the parables are simply Jesus’ illustrations of what ‘the Kingdom of God is like...’. They are not allegories – everything in the story is *not* meant to correspond to a reality. Rather, they are intended to illustrate **one** main point.

An illustration needs to be:

### 1. Vivid

- a) If it is verbal, it needs to catch the imagination and paint a picture for the hearers.
- b) If it is visual it needs to catch the attention, create interest, make the point.

*(NB however spectacular a visual aid, it will be void in about 30 seconds unless its user can reward the attentive with a development.)*

### 2. Relevant

It must fall within the experience of the hearers

*Examples of ‘misfits’      Speaking to...*

*... a group of elderly women about – football*

*... the House of Lords about – Greyhound racing*

*... the youth fellowship about – Pension Credits !!*

### 3. Succinct

If it is too long, or tries to convey too much information, it will distract from the point being illustrated.

### 4. Pertinent

However ‘good’ an illustration is, unless it applies directly to the point being made in the word, it will be counterproductive.

*So make sure an illustration actually fits the point it is illustrating!*

#### ***Task 7 – Illustration***

**E.g. in Luke 15:11-32**

**How might you illustrate the main lesson of the parable: ‘God welcomes sinners who turn to him – and expects us to do likewise.’**

***Think***                      **by yourself:**                      *3 minutes,*

***Share your ideas*** **with the group:**                      *3 minutes,*

**All together:** Listen to some examples from the groups of their illustrations.



# Session 3 – ‘Topping and Tailing’

We look at the way the message opens and closes, starting with the latter:

## A. The Conclusion

### 1. The Purpose

- a) to give a reminder of the **Main Point** of the message
- b) to encourage people **to act** on what has been heard

### 2. The Needs

- a) Brief.  
*NB If too long it will ‘blunt’ the message.*
- b) To the point  
*NB If it tries to hit too many targets, it will miss them all. Concentrate on just the main point. Restate it with a reminder of a course of action for the faithful.*
- c) ‘Old hat’  
*NB If new information is given, it will distract from the message.*
- d) Memorable  
*NB If people remember the conclusion and forget all the rest, they should still have enough to go on!*

### **Task 8 – Concluding**

**E.g. in Luke 15:11-32**

**Having shown the parable’s main lesson: ‘God welcomes sinners who turn to him – and expects us to do likewise,’ how would you conclude?**

**Think** by yourself: 3 minutes,

**Share your ideas with the group:** 3 minutes,

**All together:** Listen to some examples from the groups of their concluding remarks..

## B. The Opening

### 1. The purpose

It is to 'introduce' the main point of the passage. Its goal is to encourage listeners to start thinking along the desired line and to prepare them, without 'giving the whole show away'.

### 2. The effect

An introduction should immediately **engage** the hearers and leave them with a sense of anticipation. This may be done by raising in their minds unresolved questions which *you already know* the passage will answer.

It should resonate with the current experience of the listener. It can be topical, from that week's News, popular TV programme, local industry/event, a person's work, or family life etc. It uses modern language, especially if the Bible passage seems a bit archaic. It might show the hearers' need for the 'meat' of your main point. When you reach your application (already deduced from the passage) your opening will tie in.

### 3. The needs

It is rather like an introduction to a guest speaker. It needs to be

- a) *Brief* – not taking up the speaker's time and not stealing his thunder; so no more than 5% of the time that the speaker (or in this case, your main point) will use..
- b) *Direct* – introducing, not waffling about unrelated things.
- c) *Interesting* – disposing the hearers to receive the speaker and listen to them expectantly
- d) *Varied* – If you preach to the same group every week, the style of the opening can become stale to them. E.g., if you always start with something funny, they will listen till the punch line, then switch off. And you **will** run out of jokes!

Does this 1960s Elocution Teacher's analogy apply to sharing God's Word?

*“Any good talk should be **like a Bull**:  
two horns on the front to grab attention,  
a body with ‘meat’ in it – something worth saying –  
and a swish in the tail!”*

### **Task 9 – Opening**

**E.g. in Luke 15:11-32**

**Recognising the main lesson of the parable: ‘God welcomes sinners who turn to him – and expects us to do likewise,’ how would you introduce it?**

**Think**                      **by yourself:**                      *2 minutes,*

**Share your ideas with the group:**                      *3 minutes,*

**All together:** Listen to some examples from the groups of their concluding remarks.

# Session 4 – Assembling a word

When constructing a word to share with others, keep in mind:

## A. Preparation

### 1. Prayer

Our hope is that God will speak from His Word, through us, to our hearers. The whole thing is dependent on Him. We therefore need to seek Him in prayer, asking Him to work:

a) ... through the speaker...

If we are to communicate, God needs to show us what *he* wants to say and then enable us to say it.

b) ... in the hearers...

If the Word is to be received in faith, God needs to prepare hearts to believe and act.

### 2. The priority

As the power lies in the Word of God, not the preacher, the focus of our preparation should be on the text itself.

### 3. The order

Given that we are imparting God's message by the power of his Spirit, we might take our steps in this order:

a) Heartfelt Prayer

b) Start with the exposition of Text, in Context.

c) Draw out the applications for the lessons.

d) Add the illustrations to underline the lessons.

e) Bring the teaching to a conclusion.

f) Choose a fitting way to introduce the thinking behind the lesson.



***NB If you rush on to c), d), e) or f) before doing a) or b) thoroughly, you may interest and entertain, but you are likely to miss the Word of God.***

## **B. Talk construction**

### **1. Let the main point determine the outline.**

The danger is that we latch on to incidental lessons, say what we want to say and ignore the main lesson.

As we expose a passage before others, it is helpful to remember that “***the main thing is to ensure that the main thing remains the main thing!***”

### **2. Structure your talk**

This will make it easier for the hearers to assimilate what you are saying and then to remember it.

Try not to impose *your* structure on the passage but look for structure *in* the passage.

*NB A good ‘text’ from the passage might be helpful in this.*

### **3. Headings are useful**

- a) You may be used to sermons with the classic three main points but don’t be restricted by this.

*NB To make headings more memorable, some speakers use alliteration. It may occasionally be a useful tool if it comes easily, but is not worth too much sweat!*

*Actually, it is more memorable if the initial letters, instead of repeating, progress, either alphabetically, or to spell a word, e.g. when speaking about prayer, ‘Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication’ spells ACTS, an easily remembered word.*

*Or, the steps taken by someone wanting to become a Christian:  
'Loving Lord Jesus, I Admit my sin...; I **B**elieve you died for sinners and rose again; I have **C**ounted the cost of following You; I've **D**ecided to Do so. Please forgive me, come into my life as Saviour and Lord, and fill me with your Spirit....*

b) It can be helpful to present headings together beforehand to prepare hearers and note-takers for what is to come.

*ie "Tell them what you are going to tell them,  
tell them,  
then tell them what you've told them"!*

#### **4. Mix it up**

The modern mind has been schooled and made lazy by television, where scenes and camera angles change frequently. It may be that hearers' minds are only able to concentrate for 3 to 5 mins. If so, the way to cater for this is to give frequent interplay between explanation, illustration and application. That will help to hold their attention.

#### **5. Balance of Exposition to Application**

Imagine you are cooking a meal for some folk, and while you are doing it you are also giving them a cookery demonstration. They are hungry and impatient and want to eat, but you want to teach them as much as you can.

There is a balance to be struck. If you talk for too long they will lose interest and stop listening. If you simply feed them, they will learn little. To keep them engaged you need to give them something to eat at regular intervals

So it is with preaching! Application is 'eating' and teaching is 'cooking'! Therefore, it is important to

- a) Make applications frequently.
- b) Relate those applications directly to the point of teaching.

### ***Task 10 – Have a go***

Imagine there is a **church weekend** coming up.

You have been asked to give a talk (not more than 2 mins) during Sunday's announcements to encourage folk to sign up and come.

Details - All age, Lendrick Muir, Fri 20<sup>th</sup> – Sun 22<sup>nd</sup> Sept. Using the principles above construct an imaginary talk, with

- 1] an introduction    an eye catcher
- 2] the main point    'meat'
- 3] an illustration    identify (*or invent!*) some activities
- 4] an application    something they need to do
- 5] a conclusion                    exhortation

***Write the announcement by yourself:***                    *3 minutes,*

***Share your talks        in the group:***                    *3 minutes,*

**All together:** Listen to some examples from the groups.

## **And finally...**

The principles shown in this course would hold, whether you are preparing to share God's Word as an epilogue at a youth meeting, a sermon on Sunday, or in a range of different situations

*A cautionary tale about the time required in preparation:*

A student once asked a famous preacher, "How long it would take you to prepare to give a talk lasting, say, five minutes?"

"Oh," he said. "that would take me hours and hours."

Somewhat awed, the eager student asked, "Then how long would it take to prepare a talk of say, *forty-five* minutes?"

"Oh," replied the old preacher, with a twinkle in his eye, "I could start that straight away!"

## **(Preparation for 'Sharing the Word')**

Using the principles highlighted in 'Hearing the Word' and 'Preparing the Word', prepare a short talk of around 5 minutes to an audience of your choice (Youth Group, The Guild, Bible Study Group, Children's or all-age Talk etc)

Bring that to the next Session, 'Sharing the Word', and we will use it in our small groups.)