SEMĂNĂTORUL (THE SOWER)

The Journal of Ministry and Biblical Research

Volume 5, Number 1

SERMON DESIGN AND SERMON STRUCTURE IN THE EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING

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ABSTRACT: This paper will provide an explanation of sermon design and sermon structure which are considered critical for the preacher in the effective development and delivery of expository sermons. It will further discuss sermon structure in the history of preaching. It will identify goals that the preacher seeks in designing the sermon and sets out guidelines, involving the Preposition, Main Points, Transitions, Functional elements, particularly the Introductory and Concluding elements of sermons. Guiding principles are discussed, including the guidance of the Holy Spirit. There is a focus upon inductive and deductive approaches, also the narrative and single idea sermon. The whole aim in any sermon must be to glorify God in making Him known and to transform lives.

KEY POINTS: Sermon design, sermon structure, expository preaching, sermon from, rhetoric, proclamation, Biblical exposition.

Introduction

Public discourses such as sermons or speeches presented before a group of people typically have some structure. Even extemporaneous messages follow a form or structure that may be loose or informal. Such discourses, including sermons, require some level of organization for effective communication. Michael Quicke affirmed by stating that „sermons are no different from other forms of public speech in their need for structure."[2]

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2 Michael Quicke, *360 Degree Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 170.

Sermon design is an important topic since this task is a critical component in the sermon preparation. The sermon design effort, oftentimes quite laborious, causes the preacher to work hard at organizing his message in a way that he can effectively deliver it contents. The preacher labors intently in designing the sermon structure so that its contents will be readily received by the hearers.

Sermon design is also an important topic since ideas on alternative methods of sermon construction are being proposed and practiced. Some of these innovative methods of preaching include inductive preaching, narrative preaching, and drama. Cahill commented on this trend in homiletics where, „Instead of the standard sermon structures of past generations, preachers have begun to talk of fresh and innovative ways to communicate the old story."[3]

This paper will provide an explanation of sermon design and structure and what this means for the preacher in the effective development and delivery of expository sermons. It will touch upon sermon structure in the history of preaching, and discuss the importance for sermon design and its necessity in expository preaching. The paper will identify some goals that the preacher seeks in designing the sermon and guidelines to make the exposition effective in the transformation of the hearers to the glory of God.

Explanation of Sermon Structure and Design

The concept of sermon design and structure necessitates a clear explanation and its role in homiletics. Specifically, what is sermon design? What is structure? Sermon design encompasses the „selection and arrangement of materials to be presented in the sermon."[4] Sermon structure or outlining is an essential element in the sermon design.

Cahill defined sermon structure, or form, that „has to do with the way in which the content of the sermon is proportioned and arranged."[5]

3 Dennis Cahill, *Shape of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 18.

4 Wayne McDill, *The 12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman, 1994), 159.

5 Thomas G. Long, „Form," in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching,* ed. William H.

The sermon structure is the output of the sermon design produced by the preacher. The sermon structure serves as a „skeleton" upon which the „flesh" of the sermon content is built. Haddon Robinson referred to sermon structure as the „blueprint, which is the outline of [the] sermon."[6] The outline manifests the sermon structure which gives order and flow to the sermonic discourse.

The structure of the sermon serves as a container or conduit through which the sermon contents are communicated. Donald Hamilton defined the structure as the „vehicle meant to allow the substance—the content—of the sermon to be more effectively communicated.[7] The sermon contents need adequate design to accomplish the preacher's purpose in communicating his message. Without structure, the communication between speaker and hearer will likely be less than optimal.

The sermon design is an important step in the process of developing expository sermons. The sermon design is the next logical step following the exegetical study of the passage to be preached. In Vines' and Shaddix's process of exposition, they specified the sermon design as the step that followed textual analysis and development of the unifying theme.[8] Michael Quicke in his „preaching swim" paradigm described five stages in sermon preparation where stage 3 is „design the sermon."[9] The

Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 144.

6 Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 131-132.

7 Donald L. Hamilton, *Homiletical Handbook* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 22.

8 Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 143-171. The exposition process presented included: analyzing the text; unifying the theme; designing the structure; maturing the ideas; and building the sermon. The sermon design is centric in their sermon development methodology.

9 Michael Quicke, *360 Degree Preaching*, 130-131. Quicke's „preaching swim" model contains 5 stages in sermon preparation. The sermon design stage followed stage 1 („immerse in Scripture") and stage 2 („interpret for today"). The stages that succeeded stage 3 („design the sermon") are stage 4 („deliver the sermon") and stage 5 („experience the outcome"). Although Quicke used terminology conducive to his analogy, he maintained the usual designation for sermon design which can suggest its foundational purpose in expository

sermon design step is the bridge that connects the findings of the study to the delivery of the message. The preacher is better prepared to deliver his message once he has done the hard work of organizing his thoughts in the best way that he deems possible to connect his message to the people.

The sermon design is the essence of homiletics. Quicke referred to the sermon design stage as „homiletics" that „involves designing a sermon that says and does the same things the biblical text says and does."[10] The critical task for the preacher includes designing his discourse so that the text speaks to the lives of his hearers. Homiletics as the art and science of preaching pertains to „sermon structuring and how to apply the structuring methods learned to the various kinds of literature found in Scripture."[11]

The use of structure in the sermon does not guarantee that the preaching of the sermon will be effective. Structure solely for the sake of structure can obscure the message and confuse the hearers. Stilted outlines with no movement, harmony, or pertinence to the hearer may impede the message that the preacher attempts to convey and the people need to hear. Outlines constructed to impress the hearers or bring attention to the preacher could result in a loss of credibility for the preacher.

The preacher should strive to achieve the right amount of structure without overuse or abuse. Chapell commented on the balance that the preacher should seek in designing his sermon: „Preachers want to provide enough structure to avoid confusion and enough craft to avoid bringing attention to the structure. The goal is to sweep listeners up into the glory and the power of the Spirit's revelation rather than have them worry about where they have gotten all the points."[12]

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sermon preparation.

10 Quicke, *360 Degree Preaching*, 131.

11 Hamilton, *Homiletical Handbook*, 20.

12 Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 139.

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Historical Developments

Early Influences

The idea of sermon form can be traced throughout the history of preaching. The earliest observation of designing form in public discourse was the fourth century B.C. During this time, Aristotle developed a systematized approach to persuasive speaking in his famous treatise *Rhetoric*.[13] This systematic approach to rhetoric became the basis upon which many others were trained in public speaking. Adherents to rhetorical discourse within the Graeco-Roman culture such as Cicero and Quintilian made further contributions around fourth century A.D.[14] The growing influence of rhetoric influenced principles and rules that were assimilated into the educational system.

Early Christian preachers did not immediately adopt the form of Greek rhetoric in their preaching. Because Christian preaching began in Palestine, their form of preaching resembled „the pattern of the Old Testament prophet and the teaching rabbi."[15] Early preaching took on the form of the Jewish rather than Gentile culture.

Christian preaching, however, eventually adopted rhetorical forms. The cultural influences of rhetorical speaking became assimilated into Christian preaching. Broadus gave two reasons that drew Christian preachers to the use of rhetoric in their preaching. The first was the spread of the gospel among Gentiles „among whom Jewish traditions and forms were not well known."[16] The second reason for the influence of rhetoric among Christian preachers is the conversion of men who were already trained in rhetoric.[17] As these men eventually became preachers, they applied their rhetorical background and experience in preaching the

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13 Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 144.

14 John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, New and Revised ed., rev. Jesse B. Weatherspoon (1870; revision, San Francisco: Harper, 1979), 9.

15 Ibid.

16 John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 9.

17 Ibid.

gospel. Sermons preached from the fourth century until modern times reflected the rhetorical influence as structure in sermons became more prominent. The traditional homiletic that consists of a proposition with points or ideas to support the proposition is based upon the rhetorical form.

Controversies about Forms

The question of whether sermons should have structure has been a controversy throughout the history of preaching. This issue continues to be debated in homiletical circles. Many of these critics include „scholars and practitioners who espouse a more existential nature for modern homiletics. This group has reacted strongly to outlined sermons and championed an emphasis on movement and experience. Much of the criticism is rooted in the accusation that traditional homiletics relies too much on propositional ideas."[18]

Some critics of the traditional homiletic object to the idea of shaping sermons in an artistic fashion. They contend that structuring sermons draws attention away from main purpose of preaching—the gospel. Thomas Long summarized the critics' argument:

> [It] is unbecoming, perhaps even faithless, for a preacher to allow the sermon in any sense to become a literary product, an object of art, and, thus, to be concerned in a significant way about the sermon's design. Since the purpose of a sermon is not to be beautiful, but to be faithful, not to draw attention to the preacher or to itself, but rather to point to the gospel, does it not follow that matters of form should be suppressed in favor of matters of substance?[19]

Advocates of this argument point to the apostles who, when they preached, were not concerned with such structure or style. These arguments, however, do not stand against a careful study of history. The sermons of Jewish synagogue teachers, from whom early Christian preachers patterned their preaching, used structure in their discourses.

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18 Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 144.

19 Long, „Form," 144.

Long described these early Jewish sermons as „quite cunning in terms of structural strategy and sophisticated in communicational design" and „from the very beginning, there has been a self-conscious artfulness to preaching."[20]

Although the historical assessment of the critics is debatable, their concern about structure drawing attention away from the gospel is a valid one. Much of the criticism against the traditional homiletic may be a reaction to the many abuses that preachers have done. The criticisms of traditional forms are mostly attributed to poor sermon design, lack of creativity, and overemphasis on certain rhetorical devices such as alliteration.

Some sermons can be designed in such a way that undermines the message or even the gospel. The structure can be stilted or stagnant causing the hearer to miss the message or outright reject it. Some structures can be improperly applied to a certain genre of text. Some structures also may work well with one audience and not another. These critiques, therefore, present valid concerns that the preacher needs to address in appropriating a sermon design.

Alternatives to Traditional Form

Some critics of the traditional homiletic do not argue for the abandonment of form but the use of different forms. They declare that the Scriptures prescribe no particular form for preaching and that the biblical authors used many different forms.[21] These practitioners, therefore, suggest that the preacher consider alternative forms for sermon design. Haddon and Torrey Robinson stated, „There are many different ways to communicate God's truth. Any minister reluctant to acknowledge this fact will speak with boring predictability. Sermons can take various forms in the service of the Word."[22]

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20 Ibid.

21 Haddon W. Robinson and Torrey W. Robinson, *It's All in How You Tell It* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 11.

22 Ibid.

Using different forms provides advantages to the preacher and his audience. The preacher can avoid the stagnancy of using the same sermon structure every time he preaches. In teaching his students, Robert Smith stated that preachers should „be open to fresh approaches in preaching" and that preachers should „be fresh so that they will get a hearing."[23]

The most common alternative to the traditional form being proposed is the inductive form. The inductive form differs from the traditional deductive form in the place of the proposition or thesis in flow of the sermon. In the deductive form, the proposition is placed at the beginning and the supporting points or ideas follow the main idea. In the inductive form, the proposition or main idea is presented later in the sermon. The inductive-formed sermon presents the conclusion as late in the message as possible. The preacher takes his audience along for a „sermonic journey" with the purpose of „not so much in the communication of information but the bringing about of an event."[24]

Some advocates of the inductive form suggest narrative storytelling as a way to design and present biblical truth. The narrative sermon is built on the redemption narrative prominent throughout Scripture. Calvin Miller defined narrative preaching as „a form that more nearly resembles how the Bible itself tells stories" which is „a single story that is composed of a great many lesser stories."[25] Narrative preaching is an art form that appeals to a broader culture that appreciates stories. Miller declared the advantage of narrative preaching as „not only the best form of getting and keeping attention, it is also a great teacher."[26]

H. Grady Davis introduced an alternative form that was metaphorically based on the organic nature of the tree. Davis' „organic form" is „the structure of a sermon [that] assumes as a result of the state in which the

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23 Robert Smith, telephone interview by author, August 26, 2011.

24 Cahill, *The Shape of Preaching*, 21.

25 Calvin Miller, *Preaching: The Art of Narrative Exposition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 148.

26 Miller, *Preaching*, 147.

germinal thought exists in the preacher's mind."[27] The structure of the sermon progressed from „a subject discussed" to „a thesis supported" to „a message illumined" to „a question propounded" to a „story told."[28] The introduction of this sermon form was revolutionary at the time. Vines believed that Davis' „new homiletic" opened the door for more criticism of the traditional form and the introduction of more alternative forms.[29]

Another form of preaching involves structuring sermons according to life principles called „principle preaching."[30] This form differed from the previous forms in that the main points are not derived from the Scripture text, but life principles. The sermon designed according to life application principles which the hearer can readily connect with and apply.[31] This form of preaching is based on human needs and is focused on the hearer. Sermon structures built on this philosophy are suited more for topical sermons rather than expositor or textual.

Importance of Sermon Design

Since sermon design is an essential part of the preacher's preparation, a rationale is necessary for affirming its importance. Sermon structures provide considerable advantages to both the preacher and the audience that make the hard task of sermon design worth the effort. The preacher who undertakes to design his sermons for the maximum effect needs to understand the significance of sermon structure. There are considerable reasons to go through the challenging process of sermon design for effective expository preaching.

A key motivation for sermon design is order. Order is a fundamental characteristic of creation. Such order did not happen as a result of incidental happenstances but the intentional work of God the Creator. God

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27 H. Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), 139.

28 Ibid.

29 Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 144.

30 John R. Bisagno, *Principle Preaching* (Nashville, Broadman, 2002), 3.

31 Ibid.

the Creator is a God of order.[32] A well-ordered sermon does more than communicate the contents of the message. Ilion Jones stated that „outlining a sermon is simply a way of organizing an order sequence what one wishes to say."[33]

Preachers should also be concerned with sermon structure because of its impact on the quality of the message. Well-designed sermons are often well-preached sermons. As the preacher pores over the text and information gleaned from his exegetical study, he can construct a structure that is clear to him and his hearers. If the message is not clear to the preacher, it will not be clear to the hearers. Vines and Shaddix affirm, „Without clear, logical development and organization, a sermon does not have the effect and power it could have."[34]

The sermon structure is necessary for the speaker and the listener. The speaker benefits from structure by having his thoughts ordered before speaking to his audience. A disorderly preacher will likely ramble and frustrate his audience. Designing the sermon prepares the preacher to present an orderly discourse to his hearers. Broadus asserted, „Whether in preparation or in delivery of sermons, a man's feelings will flow naturally and freely only when he has the stimulus, support, and satisfaction with come from conscious order."[35] If the preacher has clarity and order in his mind, he likely will preach with order and clarity.

Hearers will likely judge a preacher's competence according to how they perceive the orderliness of his message. People perceive a well-structured message as an indicator of a preacher who is prepared. Chapell stated that „Organization not only promotes the communication of a mes-

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32 Glen C. Knecht, „Sermon Structure and Flow," in *The Preacher and Preaching*, ed. Samuel T. Logan (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1986), 275. Knecht further stated concerning the God of creation that „He did not create everything all at once, but in sequence."

33 Ilion T. Jones, *Principles and Practice of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1956), 88.

34 Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 143.

35 John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 94.

sage's content (logos) but is also a vital indicator of a pastor's competence and character (ethos)."[36]

The sermon structure serves the audience as well as the preacher. With structure, the listeners can follow what the preacher is saying. Quicke stated concerning a vital reason for structure, „so that hearers can sense order and progression."[37] The preacher in designing the sermon keeps the audience in mind as he creatively and diligently seeks ways to communicate God's revealed truth to them in the most clear and compelling way. When the listener is able to trace the message, the preacher is better able to convince the user of the truth he is trying to communicate. Vines stated that, „If you structure your sermon well, you will be far ahead in your attempt to get the biblical message across to a contemporary audience."[38]

For preachers who preach extemporaneous messages without notes, having a sound structure is vital. Homileticians such as Charles Koller and Wayne McDill believe that preaching without notes is the most effective way to deliver sermons. Preaching without notes requires the preacher to order the sermon ideas in such a way to support retention and recall. Koller affirmed that a „sound structure is helpful not only to the preacher, giving him a sense of timing, progress, and proportion, but to his audience as well. Intelligent listening requires that the course of thinking be made clear to the hearer."[39]

Purpose for Sermon Design

Sermon structure simply for the sake of structure is useless for the preacher who seeks to communicate effectively with his audience. The purpose for sermon design is not simply to organize the sermon but to organize the sermon for a purpose. The preacher in designing a sermon should have certain goals for effective communication of biblical truth. The goals

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36 Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 134.

37 Quicke, *360-Degree Preaching*, 170.

38 Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 143.

39 Charles Koller, *Expository Preaching Without Notes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 41.

for sermon design should be reasonable and relevant for the time and effort to be well-spent. In pursuing a sermon design, the preacher cannot guarantee that his hearers will receive his message in the way he intends. This does not, however, abdicate the preacher of doing his best to appeal to his hearers so that they readily receive the truth he proposes.

The most fundamental aim in sermon design is to communicate well with the hearers. McDill described communication as the „functional aim of preaching" and the „immediate, practical goal of sermon delivery."[40] Communication is more than just the sermon presentation. The preacher accomplishes his purpose in preaching only as he connects with his hearers. Communication is the means by which the preacher connects with the audience. McDill asserted, „Unless genuine communication takes place, no other objectives can be met."[41]

The preacher interested in effective communication wants his message to resonate with his hearers. The preacher attempts to design the sermon to gain the hearing and comprehension of his hearers. In discussing the arrangement of sermonic material, Smith argued that the sermon „has to be arranged so that it flows logically and is interesting."[42] The audience needs to be able to follow the flow of the sermon as the preacher is communicating. The preacher should aim to keep the hearers engaged throughout the entire discourse. McDill commented that the preacher should craft a sermon design that „will allow the hearer to assemble the whole in his mind just as the preacher conceives it."[43] Effective communication is similar to the preacher and his hearers taking a journey together along the path of the message from beginning to end.

The preacher aims to design the sermon so that it has unity. The unity of the sermon deals with the subject or main point of the message. The good sermon structure should deal with „one subject and only one aspect

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40 Ibid.

41 McDill, *The Moment of Truth*, 160.

42 Robert Smith, *Doctrine That Dances* (Nashville: Broadman, 2008), 113.

43 McDill, *The Moment of Truth*, 151.

of that subject."[44] The sermon that does not focus on one point will not be effective in persuading the hearer since the hearer will have to remember and analyze too much. Having a solid sermon structure will also lessen the risk of the preacher diverging on tangents which can further hinder his message and credibility.

The effective sermon structure should also have order and movement. Order refers to the movement of the sermon between its parts—the introduction, points, subpoints, and conclusion. The order should be discernible and meaningful. Movement refers to the sermon design that „moves toward a specific target and arrives there climactically."[45] Broadus stated the goals for order and movement in the sermon as „first of all that the various ideas comprising the unit of consideration be carefully distinguished from one another; secondly, that they follow one another in true sequence, making for continuity; and, thirdly, that the order of thought shall move toward a climax."[46]

The effective sermon structure should also have balance or proportion. The preacher in seeking balance in the sermon design allots an equal amount of time and detail given to each of the components. The preacher who spends disproportionately more time on one point than the others may insinuate to the hearers that the other points are unimportant in the message. The hearer may suppose that the lesser points are just „fillers" or undeveloped points that the preacher did not have the time or the competence to develop.

Harmony in the sermon structure refers to the synchronization of the points—points that harmonize with other points. The main points or subpoints „should echo one another."[47] Parallelism, the word order of the points, establishes harmony. Parallelism is similar to unity but does more through „repetition of phrasing in a consistent word order … an

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44 Hamilton, *Homiletical Handbook*, 23.

45 Hamilton, *Homiletical Handbook*, 23.

46 Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 98.

47 Chapell, *Christ-centered Preaching*, 136.

audio cue that another major idea is being presented."[48] The preacher uses various rhetorical devices to accomplish harmony such as alliteration, assonance, rhythm, rhyme, or wordplays. These literary techniques serve several useful purposes in communication such as retaining listener interest and memorization.

Parts of the sermon Design

The sermon design consists of components that together comprise the sermon structure. The components are necessary to provide the qualities of a sound sermon design. The absence of the necessary elements from the sermon structure possibly indicates an incomplete or inadequate structure. The following components of the sermon design primarily apply to deductively arranged sermons. These components, however, can also apply to inductively arranged sermons. The parts of the sermon design can be located within various places in the structure depending on the arrangement.

The most fundamental part of the sermon structure is the Scripture text itself. The preacher's essential call is to preach the Word of God.[49] If the sermon structure does not begin with one or more verses from a passage of Scripture, the sermon's authority could be based on a fallible source such as human thought. Such a message may not properly qualify as biblical preaching but public speaking. The preacher, however, should begin with the Bible as the authority for his message. He selects the text from which he will structure the sermon.

Proposition

The proposition represents the main idea of the sermon text. The proposition is a sentence that summarizes the essence of the message. The prop-

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48 Chapell, 137.

49 2 Timothy 4:2 (NASB) declares, „Preach the word;" The „word" (Greek *logos*) refers to „the entire written Word of God" or „the revealed truth as contained in the Bible" in John MacArthur, ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson, 2006), 1850.

osition provides the theme for the sermon structure. Warren Wiersbe defined the proposition as „the statement of a timeless truth found in Scripture. It declares the intent and determines the content of the sermon"[50]

Some homileticians used different nomenclatures to refer to the proposition.[51] The idea of the proposition, however, is the same. The proposition provides the „hook" from which all the supporting points or ideas will be based. The proposition helps the preacher in narrowing the focus for the content of the message. If the points or divisions support the proposition, then the sermon contents will adhere to the bounds set within the structure.

The proposition, while closely related to the exegetical idea, rewords the exegetical idea into contemporary language that is relevant to the hearers. The preacher needs to prayerfully study the text while diligently searching for how its truths meet him and the people in their lives. The development of the proposition requires investigation of the text with the consideration of the people. Wiersbe stated that „the proposition isn't a statement about the sermon; it's a statement about God and human life."[52] Studying the text and drawing out the proposition is critical to developing an effective sermon structure.

The preacher developing the proposition should strive for simplicity, clarity, and conciseness. If the proposition is complicated, the remainder of the sermon will likely follow suit. Bryson suggested that the propositional sentence be fifteen words or less so that „it will not be loaded with exaggerations or unnecessary embellishments."[53]

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50 Warren Wiersbe, *The Dynamics of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 60.

51 Other terms homileticians used for the proposition are „big idea" (Robinson, 33), „essence of sermon in a sentence" (Bryson, 319), „central idea of text" (Vines and Shaddix, 128), „dominating theme" (Olford, 141), „main point of the sermon" (Merida, 80).

52 Wiersbe, *Dynamics*, 60.

53 Harold Bryson, *Expository Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman, 1995), 320.

Main Points
The main points are the components of the sermon structure which expound the proposition. These main points are also called thoughts, divisions, or moves. Hamilton referred to the main points as the „subtheses of the main thesis."[54] The main points are necessary for the sermon structure to have order and movement.

Olford provided some guidelines for developing integrating thoughts.[55] He stated that the integrated thoughts should „be faithful to the text."[56] The preacher should draw these points from the text rather than impose ideas on the text. Developing the main points from the biblical text keeps the Bible preeminent throughout the preaching event. A crafty outline that does not adhere to the biblical text draws attention to preacher or his eloquence. The undue attention or impression that the preacher has wrought for himself steals the glory from where it belongs—to the Lord and His word. The preacher should be careful in designing his sermon not to eclipse the biblical text and prevent the people from being connected with the Lord and His word.

The preacher should order the main points in a manner that is logical and understandable. Olford stated that each point should capture „a specific distinct emphasis, thought, or movement in the text."[57] Ordering the main points by the flow of the biblical text is the preferred manner for staying true to biblical exposition. Some preachers, however, may structure the sermon according to the logical flow that they deems suitable for their audience. This method, while drawing ideas from the biblical text, may tend toward a topical message rather than an expository one.

The main points or integrating thoughts should be relevant to the audience. The main points developed as mere abstract statements are inef-

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54 Hamilton, *Homiletical Handbook*, 24.

55 Stephen F. Olford and David L. Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman, 1998), 145. Olford used the term „integrating thoughts" to refer to the main points.

56 Olford, 147.

57 Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching*, 146.

fective for reaching the hearers. The main points that make up the outline should be „a series of exhortations and applications of the text, but … [maintain] contact with both the theme and thoughts of the text."[58]

The preacher should use wording for the main points that are memorable. Such wording that is easily remembered benefits the preacher and the listener.[59] The preacher should use simple wording that all of his audience can understand and avoid words or terms that confuse the audience. Sermons should not be the platform for the preacher to showcase an extensive or scholarly vocabulary. The audience may be impressed but likely unaffected in being persuaded of biblical truth.

Each of the main points can have subpoints when needed. But the preacher must use caution not to overwhelm the hearer with a deep trail or points and subpoints that may disorient them. Each subpoint elaborates or qualifies the main point. The main point should be divided into subpoints when the main point requires further development or elaboration. All the rules of structuring points apply when developing subpoints—logical, relevance, and memorable. The preacher must take care that each main point and its subpoints do not turn into „miniature sermons" or „come across like three unrelated sermonettes."[60] Subpoints should not be broken down into subpoints. Such structure design contains too much detail that may confuse the preacher and confound the audience in minutiae that is far from the main idea of the message. If a subpoint requires subpoints, the sermon pericope could be too large for one sermon. The preacher, in this case, should consider partitioning the structure into separate sermons.

The main points and sub-points within the sermon structure serve as the foundation for further development of the sermon text. The points become the placeholders for further maturation of the sermon text and integrating other functional elements such as explanation, application, and illustration. While some of these elements of the sermon develop-

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58 Olford, 148.

59 Olford, 149.

60 Hamilton, *Homiletical Handbook*, 24.

ment may transcend the components of the sermon structure, having this organization facilitates sermon development around the main idea or proposition.

Transitions

Transitions connect the main points of the sermon structure making all the divisions integral parts of the entire structure. Transitions are „the glue that holds all the material of [the] message together."[61] Transitions provide the movement from one division to the next. Robinsons noted that „carefully constructed transitions help [the] listeners to think through with you so that together you and they move through the sermon. An effective transition notifies the audience that you are moving on."[62] This movement should occur with clarity and smoothness befitting a sermon structure with the proper design techniques. Vines and Shaddix provided characteristics of the good transitions as inconspicuous (least noticeable), simple (single sentence and helpful words), smooth (logical sequence and movement), varied (avoid predictable statements), and brief (made quickly to move the next division).[63]

Functional Elements

Once the sermon outline containing the proposition, divisions, and transitions is constructed, the preacher can further develop the sermon structure to include explanation, application, and illustrations. These functional elements expound the main points or ideas of the sermon. This step of the sermon development process does not usually occur until the structure is solid. However, as the preacher develops the components of the sermon structure, he may note these functional elements and integrate them when possible. When done well, the sermon design that contains the necessary elements aids in writing the sermon manuscript.

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61 Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 171.

62 Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 135.

63 Vines and Shaddix, 170.

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If the preacher writes out sermon manuscripts, the writing should not occur until all the activities of the sermon design are completed.

The explanation element for a main point or division is the clarification of the truth that preacher wants to convey to his hearers. „Explanation is the process of making a particular issue clear and understandable."[64] The preacher here fulfills an important aspect of his call in being „able to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:24). The preacher in providing explanation unpacks and articulates the meaning of a biblical text leveraging the discoveries from his exegetical study. Clarity is of the utmost importance in explaining biblical truth.

The application element involves the implications of the preacher and hearers in living out the biblical truth. The question that the preacher needs to ask in the application is: What does this text say to my hearers?[65] The preacher should make application for each of the main points or divisions of the sermon structure. The preacher can also make application in the introduction and conclusion of the sermon.

The illustration brings additional clarity and light to the truth of the message. When done well, illustrations „restate, explain, validate, or apply ideas by relating them to tangible experiences."[66] Illustrations can also motivate the hearers in compliance to the truth of the message since the illustrations add meaning and further relevance to the hearers. The preacher should use special care to use illustrations that do not master the message but serve the message in helping the hearers clearly see the truth.

Introductory and Concluding Segments
The sermon introduction and conclusion are critical to effective communication of the sermon. Their importance to the message requires careful attention in sermon preparation. The sermon introduction provides the „entry" into the core truth of the sermon. McDill stated five purposes for

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64 Merida, *Faithful Preaching*, 100.

65 Merida, 103.

66 Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 152.

the introduction: „(1) arrest the attention of the hearer; (2) awaken interest in [the] subject; (3) introduce [the] subject; (4) introduce the text; and (5) make a smooth transition into the body of the sermon."[67] If the sermon does not begin well, the preacher may lose his audience early and fail to convey the remainder or the main point of his message.

The introduction should include the sermon proposition and any other relevant ideas from the exegetical study that help the transition into the body of the message. The preacher can use a variety of means in building the introduction such as stories, contemporary events, or statements of a problem for which the sermon will offer a solution. The preacher should keep the introductions brief and relevant to the main body of the message.

The sermon conclusion likewise requires careful attention from the preacher. The preacher in designing the conclusion aims to finish well. The preacher has the opportunity to reiterate the main idea of the sermon and call for a response from the hearers. The conclusion is not just a „wrap-up" of the message, but a call to action. The message's clarion call and the hearer's response to it should be prominent. An inadequate conclusion could negate an otherwise well-prepared and presented message.

Practices in Sermon Design

The sermon form—deductive, inductive, narrative exposition—employed by the preacher will govern the approach in sermon design. There are, however, some general principles that apply for any form of preaching. The preacher must establish some parameters before endeavoring to do the sermon design. The preacher will also need to avoid some traps that could subvert or undermine his purpose in sermon design.

Guiding Principles

The preacher needs the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the sermon design process. Greg Heisler stated that „preachers must expect the Spirit's help in the preparation of our sermon just as we anticipate the Spirit's help in

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67 McDill, *12 Essential Skills*, 173.

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preaching it."[68] Designing the sermon must not be a mere academic activity. The preacher needs to make prayer an integral part of his preparation.

The sermon design serves as the vehicle to transport the sermonic content to the hearers. Quicke stated that the preacher „must design its content into a sermon that will adequately carry its message."[69] The preacher seeks to design the sermon in a way his hearers can resonate with the truth he is proposing. The preacher has the responsibility to remove any obstacles in communication that he knows or foresees. The preacher in pursing sermon design „must arrange his presentation in such an order and utilize such material as will meet them where they are, rather than requiring them to overcome any and all the communication obstacles on their own."[70]

Merida suggested developing outlines in an oral or conversational style „written for the hearer and not the reader."[71] McDill concurred in stating that „sermon design is not for the eye, but for the ear. Significant differences in written communication and oral communication call for sermon design specifically geared to the hearer."[72]

From the exegetical study of the biblical text, the preacher will discover and assemble much information if he has spent adequate time and worked diligently. As the preacher designs the sermon and shapes the structure, he will likely have to determine what information to include and what needs to be left out. Heisler stated that determining what material to leave in or take out is a matter of „the Holy Spirit's leadership."[73] He explained that the Spirit influenced and illuminated the preacher during the preparation which caused the preacher to „pause and more certain insights more than others."[74] While the preacher seeks the guidance of

68 Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman, 2007), 91.

69 Quicke, *360 Degree Preaching*, 131.

70 McDill, *The 12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching*, 168.

71 Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman, 2009), 91.

72 McDill, *The 12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching*, 159.

73 Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 96.

74 Ibid.

the Spirit during all of preparation, determining the sermon material will likewise be a time to seek the Spirit's direction.

An important principle in sermon design is selecting and applying the proper form—deductive, inductive, or some other form. While the deductive approach is typically used for expository sermons, the preacher should not be confined to this form. The preacher should adopt the form that suits the biblical text being preached. Akin, Allen, and Matthews stated concerning the choice of sermon forms in „text-driven preaching does not entail enslavement to a deductive sermonic form nor artificial outlining techniques such as a three-point structure and alliteration. A good text-driven sermon that explains the meaning of the text can be couched in a variety of forms."[75] Jeffrey Arthurs offered that the genre of the biblical text should shape the sermon structure. In this proposal, the preacher applies certain design techniques based on the genre of the biblical text being preacher.[76]

Challenges to Overcome
Preaching—and preparation for preaching—is hard work. Accomplishing the sermon design will not happen without much toil. Quicke noted the challenge in stating, „The most difficult part of any communication is not what to say but how to say, and preachers must work at both."[77] Ordering thoughts and ideas for effective communication is challenging. Quicke further observed that the „design stage perplexes … students more than any other part of sermon preparation."[78] The preacher must be diligent in this phase of the sermon preparation. He can trust that his wrestling with the text and designing the sermon structure will reap a Spirit-anointed message during the „moment of truth."[79]

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75 Daniel L. Akin, David Allen, and Ned L. Matthews, *Text-Driven Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman, 2010), 104.

76 Jeffrey Arthurs, „Form-Fit Preaching" in *Leadership* 29 no 1 (Winter 2008): 41-43.

77 Quicke, *360-Degree Preaching*, 131.

78 Quicke, *360-Degree Preaching*, 169.

79 „Moment of truth" is McDill's phraseology for the preaching occasion in McDill, *The Moment of Truth*, 1.

John Stott discussed two dangers of which the preacher needs to be aware in producing the sermon structure. The first danger is to make the sermon outline „too prominent."[80] Such issue occurs when the sermon structure becomes a distraction from the content of the message. Occurrence of this issue takes place when the sermon outline becomes too rigid with points that are more exegetical than expositional. The problem is also seen when the preacher misuses or overuses alliteration in developing the sermon points. The preacher needs to understand that the structure is a means of communication but should not draw undue attention to itself. Stott metaphorically referred to the structure as the skeleton „to support the body, and in so doing to keep itself largely out of view."[81]

The second danger that Stott identified is the sermon structure obscures the text and its relevance to the hearer. Stott referred to this danger as „artificiality" where „some preachers impose an outline on the text which neither fits nor illumines it, but rather muddies the clear waters of truth and confuses the listeners."[82] A modern illustration of this is the „three-point" sermon where the preacher always designs three points for a pericope of Scripture whether the sermon text reveals more or less to be developed.

Deductive/Inductive Approach

Deductive sermon forms move from the general (the main idea or proposition) to the particulars (the points or divisions). The deductive sermon „starts with the biblical principle and moves to the needs of the people."[83] The proposition, or thesis, of the sermon is located in the introduction and re-stated or applied in the conclusion. Much of the design in traditional homiletics follows the deductive form. The deductive

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80 John Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Nashville: Eerdmans, 1992), 229.

81 Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 229.

82 Ibid.

83 Hugh Litchfield, „Outlining the Sermon," in *The Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 166.

sermons typically take the traditional rhetorical form of introduction, body, and conclusion. The deductive arrangement is typically used for expository sermons. „Sermon structure that reflects the structure of the given biblical text has been considered a distinguishing characteristic of expository sermons."[84]

The most common way to design deductive sermons is according to the structure of the biblical text. The preacher who deductively shapes his sermon will need to intensively analyze the biblical text to discover its structure. Massey stated concerning this analysis: „This means wrestling with the biblical writer's structure statement, and watching for how he wedded function with form."[85]

The inductive sermon moves from the particulars (points or divisions) to the general (main idea or proposition). The design for the inductive sermon will often begin with a particular issue of the listener such as sin, difficult circumstance or struggle and move toward a resolution.[86] The points or divisions discuss ideas from the biblical text as the sermon moves toward the main idea. Transitions, therefore, should be structured well to allow smooth flow between the sequences of ideas in the inductive sermons.

Other Approaches

The narrative exposition sermon design follows the story as it is narrated in the biblical text. Since the sermon flows in a narrative fashion, the sermon design follows the flow of the biblical text. Calvin Miller affirmed that the narrative sermon should „in no part should ever stray … from where the preacher has set the homily to travel."[87]

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84 Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 153.

85 James Earl Massey, *Designing the Sermon: Order and Movement in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 54.

86 Cahill, *The Shape of Preaching*, 122-4.

87 Calvin Miller, *Preaching: The Art of Narrative Exposition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 151.

The preacher's objective in the narrative sermon is to tell the story in such a way that the hearers can experience the biblical truth as the story unfolds. Massey stated that the preacher in preparing the narrative sermon „must be fully acquainted with the story and be prepared to deal with its components."[88] The design of the narrative sermon should, therefore, be shaped around the elements of the narrative such as characters and setting.

Another approach to sermon development involves designing the sermon around a single idea. This type of sermon focuses on one idea from the text with no further divisions or points. This pragmatic approach in sermon design intends to simplify the communication process and allow the hearers to better grasp the sermon content. Andy Stanley devised the paradigm referred to as „Me-We-God-You-We".[89] This design approach involves finding common ground with the audience (Me-We), talk about God in the text (God), apply the message (You), and discuss the potential (We).[90]

Conclusion

The purpose of preaching is to change lives. Such transformation ultimately takes place through the power of the Holy Spirit. Dependence on the Holy Spirit, however, does not diminish or dismiss the need for the preacher to be intentional and diligent in seeking the most effective means of reaching his hearers. Sermon design provides the discipline for the preacher who wishes to make the most of his preparation to preach the Word. Wiersbe stated, „we preach to be understood, and that involves clear thinking, careful preparation, and organization."[91]

Sermon design is a necessary part of the preacher's preparation. The preacher who becomes proficient in sermon design will maximize his

88 Massey, *Designing the Sermon*, 46.

89 Andy Stanley, *Communicating for a Change* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2006), 119-130.

90 Ibid.

91 Wiersbe, *The Dynamics of Preaching*, 68.

moment to present biblical truth to the glory of God. A good structure will not guarantee a good sermon, but a poor structure makes a good sermon highly improbable.[92] The skill to produce effective sermon designs requires commitment and dedication from the preacher.

The ultimate goal in preaching is the glory of God. Sermon design should never eclipse God's glory by drawing attention to the craftiness of the preacher or his message. Piper stated that „God is the goal of preaching, God is the ground of preaching, and all the means in between are given by the Spirit of God."[93] The sermon design allows the preacher greater opportunity to tailor his communication to make God known to the people through His word.

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92 Koller, *How to Preach without Notes*, 41.

93 John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 23.

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