PREACHING & TEACHING

Sermon Outline

A nine-movement sermon outline you fill with your own text and your own congregation. Written for preachers who have Sunday coming and a blank page: every movement has a stated job, a time budget, and the connective language written out so the joins between sections are already solved.

28 min preached · 9 segments

Nine movements, twenty-eight minutes. This is a frame to fill, not a sermon to read. The bracketed lines are yours to replace.

BEFORE YOU RECORD

- If you are recording this for a feed rather than preaching it live, the opening hook has to work without a room. A story that lands on a congregation can die into a microphone, so read the first ninety seconds aloud before you commit to it.
- Time budgets are per movement, not per point. Preachers overrun in movements five to seven almost every time. If you are long, cut a movement rather than compressing all three.
- Leave the pauses in. A written outline tempts you to fill every second; the silences after the tension and before the close are doing work.

01. Before you write: the one sentence

prep, not preached

[not spoken - do this before anything else]

Write the sermon in one sentence before you write anything else. Not the topic, the claim. "God is faithful" is a topic. "God kept a promise to Abraham that Abraham had already given up on" is a claim.

If you cannot get it into one sentence, the sermon is not ready to outline. Every movement below exists to serve that sentence, and anything that does not serve it comes out, however good it is.

[write your one sentence here and keep it in front of you for the rest of the outline]

02. The hook

2 min

[land this before anyone decides whether to listen - concrete, not abstract]

Open with something that happened, not something that is true. A moment, a question someone actually asked you, a detail from the week. The congregation gives you about ninety seconds before they decide whether this is for them.

[your opening moment, 150 to 200 words - a story, an observation, or a question you have been carrying]

Then the turn into the text. This sentence does the whole join and it is worth writing out rather than improvising:

"I want to put that next to something that happens in *[book and chapter]*, because I think the two are closer than they look."

03. The text

4 min

[read it properly - do not rush the reading to get to your own words]

[read the passage aloud in full]

Then set the scene in about ninety seconds. Who is speaking, who is listening, what has just happened, and what the people in the passage do not yet know. Most congregations have heard the verse and never heard the situation.

[context, 120 to 150 words - keep the history in service of the claim, not as a lecture]

04. The tension

3 min

[the sermon lives or dies here - name the real problem, not a tidy one]

Name what is difficult. Not a strawman difficulty you will dispatch in a minute, but the thing an honest person in the fourth row is actually thinking. If there is no tension the congregation has nothing to follow you through.

[the tension, 150 words - phrase it as a question if that helps you keep it honest]

Then stop. *[pause - three or four seconds, longer than feels comfortable]*

05. Movement one

5 min

[the most obvious reading of the text - earn trust before you complicate anything]

[movement one heading, in your words]

Start where the congregation already is. This movement should feel like agreement, because everything you say later depends on them believing you have read the passage the way they would.

[your material, roughly 600 words spoken - one idea, one supporting verse, one concrete example]

Transition: "That much is clear. What is harder is what comes next."

06. Movement two

5 min

[complicate it - this is where the sermon stops being a summary]

[movement two heading]

Here you go past the obvious reading. Something in the passage resists the tidy version, and this movement is where you say so. Congregations trust a preacher who admits the text is awkward far more than one who smooths it.

[your material, roughly 600 words spoken]

This is the natural home for your illustration. One, not three. *[illustration, 200 words - see the sermon illustrations page if you need one]*

07. Movement three, or the turn

5 min

[answer the tension you named in movement four - do not leave it hanging]

[movement three heading]

Go back and pick up the tension by name. Use the same words you used then, so the congregation hears the thread being tied rather than a new subject starting.

"I said earlier that *[restate the tension in one clause]*. Here is what I think this passage does with that."

[your material, roughly 600 words spoken - this is the claim from your one sentence, landing]

08. Application

4 min

[specific and small - one thing, not five]

What is different on Tuesday. Not "trust God more", which nobody can act on, but something a person could actually do this week and know whether they had done it.

[one application, 250 words - resist the urge to add a second]

If different parts of the congregation would act on this differently, say so out loud. The person in their first year of faith and the person in their fortieth are both sitting there.

09. The close and the send

2 min

[short - the close is the one part you should have memorised]

Return to the opening image. Whatever you started with in the hook, come back to it now and let it mean something different than it did twenty-five minutes ago. That is the whole job of the close.

[return to the opening image, 100 words]

Then your one sentence, said plainly, and stop. Do not summarise the movements. Do not add a final thought. *[your one sentence, then silence]*

USAGE

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