PREACHING & TEACHING

Sermon Series Ideas

Twelve sermon series plans with the arc already worked out: length, texts, and the single claim each week is making. Plus the planning test that separates a real series from four sermons on adjacent topics, which is the difference most series never survive.

12 series plans · 4 segments

One movement on how to plan a series, then twelve outlines from three to eight weeks. Take the arc and replace the texts if yours are better.

BEFORE YOU RECORD

- Plan the last week first. A series that does not know its destination produces three strong sermons and a fourth that has to carry everything, which is the commonest failure mode.
- Four to six weeks is the sweet spot. Under four and it does not accumulate; past eight and the people who missed week two have stopped following.
- If you are publishing a series as episodes, name the episodes for the claim rather than the series. Nobody searches for a series title they have never heard.

01. The test that decides whether it is a series

read first

[not preached - apply this before committing to anything below]

Write the one-sentence claim for every week, side by side, then try swapping two of them. If nothing breaks, you do not have a series. You have several sermons on a shared topic, which is a different and much weaker thing.

A real series moves. Week three should be impossible without week two. The congregation should be able to feel the argument accumulating even if they could not articulate it.

02. Series through a book

4 plans

[the most durable kind - the text supplies the arc for you]

Philippians, four weeks. Joy written from a prison cell. Week one: the circumstances. Week two: the hymn in chapter two and what it costs. Week three: counting things as loss. Week four: contentment as something learned rather than felt.

Ruth, four weeks. A famine, a foreigner, a field, a redeemer. The arc is built in and the fourth week lands on a genealogy that most congregations have never been shown the point of.

Jonah, four weeks. One chapter each. The arc is a man being progressively stripped of his reasons, ending on a question God asks him that the book never answers. Preach the unanswered question as the fourth week rather than resolving it.

James, six weeks. Faith and works, the tongue, wealth, patience. Blunt, practical and unusually easy to apply, which makes it a good series for a congregation that has been fed abstraction for a while.

03. Series through a question

4 plans

[good for reaching people who would not come to a book study]

Questions people are afraid to ask here, five weeks. Suffering, doubt, hell, money, other religions. Announce in advance that no question is off limits and take them in writing. Riskier and better attended than anything else on this list.

What Jesus actually said about money, four weeks. There is more material than most congregations expect and very little of it is comfortable. Do not schedule this the same month as your giving campaign.

Prayer when it is not working, four weeks. Unanswered prayer, silence, the psalms of complaint, and prayer as practice rather than transaction. Preach it honestly and people will tell you afterwards that nobody had said it out loud before.

Work, six weeks. Vocation, rest, ambition, failure, retirement, and what happens when your job is your identity. Most congregations spend fifty hours a week somewhere the church never mentions.

04. Series through the calendar

4 plans

[these write themselves into the year - see the advent and lent pages]

Advent, four weeks. Hope, peace, joy, love. The full plan is on the advent sermon series page.

Lent, six weeks. The wilderness, the temptations, the turn towards Jerusalem. Built on restraint rather than addition, which is a harder sell and a better series.

The summer of one psalm, eight weeks. One psalm, eight angles: as poetry, as complaint, as song, as history. Low-pressure, works with guest preachers, and teaches a congregation how to read.

September restart, three weeks. Who we are, what we are for, what we are asking of you this year. Short, direct, and the best three weeks of the year to say the thing you have been avoiding saying.

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