

Application

"As for the things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you." Philippians 4:9

The scriptures are clear. What we hear, learn, and study should be applied to everyday life. The task of preaching requires the speaker to connect the scripture to everyday life. For many pastors, studying the passage is not the difficult part. The challenge comes in delivering a life-transforming challenge based on the truth of God's word. In this brief essay, I will provide an analysis of why integrating applications into your message can be challenging, why we often fail to apply the scriptures effectively, and how to craft a message that has a greater impact on the listener.

Why is application integration difficult?

Little Training. Much of my time in seminary was spent learning to interpret the Bible. This involves breaking down a passage to understand its meaning. I am so thankful for that training and would regret not having it. Many men who enter ministry naturally enjoy reading and studying. It's a great starting point, but it's not the only thing required for a great sermon. My homiletics courses focused on extracting the main idea of the passage and explaining it to a modern audience. The application was difficult for most of my professors to teach and for students to grasp.

Hard Work. Preparing a sermon is hard work. Developing an application is even harder. Pressing timelines, administrative duties, multiple preparations per week, and simply a lack of time make the application process tough. Often, speakers save the application for last. Last in preparation and last in presentation.

The Audience. Have you ever asked your congregation what you preached the week before? I have, and it came with a spattering of general answers. The audience needs assistance bridging the gap between the text's meaning and its practical application. As pastors, we study, meditate, and prepare all week. They have thirty to forty minutes to catch up. The more time that passes, the larger the gap becomes in understanding and applying a passage of scripture.

Isolation. When you disconnect from the local culture, it is more challenging to apply scripture. It is easy to remain within the confines of church culture and overlook the broader community.

What Application is *NOT*

Application is not just relevant illustrations. Illustrations give us insight into how others have navigated similar situations. Illustrations shed light, but they might not bridge into the life of the listener.

Application is not mere understanding. Just because a person can intellectually understand something does not mean they will apply it. My doctor explains the effects of sugar and salt in my diet in a clear and straightforward manner. This does not mean that I will stop incorporating it into my diet.

Application is not just motivation or inspiration. I have coached college soccer for many years. Just because I give an inspirational speech does not mean my players will apply it to the game plan. We all have left Sunday services feeling like we were about to turn things around, only to get into the car and forget what we were inspired to do.

What Application *IS*

Application answers questions. The first question is, what is the importance of this text to my spiritual journey? The application extends beyond the explanation of the text and delves into how the listener receives the message and puts it into practice. Other questions that need to be answered are:

- Do they understand what was said?
- How can the message change their life?
- What should they do about it?
- What should they do first?
- What is one step the listener can take to make a move forward?

Keeping these questions in mind will help craft a well-prepared sermon with plenty of points for application.

Four Tips for Preaching for Application

Provide tools for the application. I like to provide printed notes with application exercises for each sermon that I preach. This gives the audience another way to connect. They see concepts, questions, and examples of how the scriptures work in everyday life.

Slow down. Recently, I spent two weeks preaching on a single passage. In the first week, I primarily explained the passage. The second week, I worked through the personal applications for the congregation. In a day of podcasts, radio, and live streams, many congregants listen to as many as four or five sermons per week. While hearing the Word of God preached daily is a

wonderful thing, we need to make sure we are taking time to apply the abundance of information.

Read the Room. For me, this has been incredibly helpful. Being in the same place for more than twenty years has afforded me the opportunity to capture the spiritual vitality of the congregation. Letting the message marinate throughout the week has provided many points of application based on areas of application facing the congregation. Here are key categories to remember as you consider your sermon's application: relationships, conflicts, burdens, opportunities, and responsibilities.

Work to arrange your outline in an application-oriented manner.

In summary, do not miss one of the most important parts of preaching! We are not merely tasked with exchanging information. Application is a vital tool that helps our people change and grow.