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Preaching Application

by **Darryl Dash**

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Introduction

This booklet has three major messages.

Application Is Important

Until we apply the sermon, we haven't really preached it.

Application Is Hard

Application is much harder than it looks! There are some big dangers we must avoid when we move to application in our sermons.

Good Application Is Possible

Good application happens when we follow a particular sequence of steps.

I'm thankful to Haddon Robinson for helping me think through these issues. I hope this short guide will provide you with some practical tools that you can use in your preaching.



Darryl Dash



The Importance of Application

Assumption: Application is required in preaching.

If we don't apply the text, there is no reason to preach it.

Application justifies exposition. If there is no apparent reason for listeners to absorb exegetical insights, historical facts, and biographical details, then a preacher cannot expect what seems inapplicable to be appreciated. (Bryan Chapell)

The goal of preaching is application. So end there. Challenge the congregation to live out the teachings of the faith. Exhort them to be doers of the Word. Explain why obedience matters. Show them what following Jesus looks like in practical terms. (H.B. Charles)

The Challenge of Application

Application is hard!

More heresy is preached in application than in Bible exegesis...Sometimes we apply the text in ways that might make the biblical writer say, “Wait a minute, that’s the wrong use of what I said.” This is the heresy of a good truth applied in the wrong way. (Haddon Robinson)

Three Challenges in Application

1. **Hermeneutical challenge** — How can we apply a text written to a particular audience at a particular time to today?
2. **Gospel challenge** — How can we avoid handing out more law? How can re-narrate the world and help people live in light of a better story?
3. **Practical challenge** — What does it look like in the lives of different people? Applications of the same truth can vary. Example: Proverbs 26:4-5

The Bible spends much more time on shaping the spiritual mind than commanding particular behavior. We need far more training in the ways of grace, of spiritual perceptions, and of what God is really like than we do in how to communicate with

our spouse. Understanding the glory of Christ is far more practical than our listeners imagine. Properly preached, every sermon based on a passage of Scripture is fundamentally practical. Every author of Scripture wrote to effect change in God's people. It is our job as preachers to find the persuasive logic of that author and put that clearly and persuasively before our people through biblical exposition. (Lee Eclov)

I've spent years trying to convince pastors and preachers that the application part of the sermon is the boring part, the part that doesn't really do us much good...A thoroughly practical sermon leaves us cut off from Christ because it has us looking in the wrong direction-looking at ourselves, not at Christ.

(Phillip Cary)

Textual Question One: What's the Big Idea and Purpose?

This is foundational. Good application depends on the work done here.

Big Idea Questions

- What is the big idea of the text?
- How do I express this idea to my audience?

Purpose Questions

- What is the author's intent?
- How does that shape my purpose in preaching the text?

STOP! *Don't proceed until you've completed this work!*

	Then	Now
Big Idea	Exegetical Idea	Homiletical Idea
Purpose	Authorial Intent	Sermon Purpose

Textual Question Two: What's the Vision of God, Humanity, and the Gospel?

The next step is to understand how this text fits within the big picture of the Bible.

God reveals himself in the Scriptures. The Bible, therefore, isn't a textbook about ethics or a manual on how to solve personal problems. The Bible is a book about God...Not only is it important to look for the vision of God in a passage, but you will also want to look at the human factor. (Haddon Robinson)

Key Questions

1. What is the vision of God in this passage?
2. What's the human factor (how people responded to this vision of God, and how these same factors show up today)?
3. How does the gospel apply to the vision of God and human need?
4. What response does the passage require? Important: think belief and attitude, not just behavior.

	Then	Now
Vision of God		
Human Factor		
Gospel		
Response		

Audience Question One: What Will My Audience Ask?

The first two steps deal primarily with the text. The next two steps deal primarily with your audience.

Three Questions Your Audience May Ask

One: What does this mean? Explores *explanation*.

- What does this statement mean?
- What do I need to explain?
- What won't my listeners understand?

Two: Is it true? Do I believe it? Explores *validity*.

- Is this statement true?
- Do we believe it?
- Do we buy it?
- Why is this statement true?
- Why does the cause-effect relationship hold true?
- What could cause my listeners not to accept or act on this statement?
- Do I need to prove or defend this statement?

Look for what would make someone yawn and what would make someone argue.

Three: So what? What difference does it make? Explores *implications and applications*.

- What difference does this statement make in our lives?
- What does it look like in everyday situations?
- Where does it show up in real life?
- What are the implications, the practical applications?
- How, exactly, would my people carry this out in the daily events and circumstances of their lives?
- How can I specifically visualize this for my listeners?
- What ought to happen?
- What ought to change?

(Source: Haddon Robinson's three developmental questions in *Biblical Preaching* and Donald Sunukjian's "Questions That Put Muscle on Bones " in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*)

"Would there ever be an occasion when someone might come to me with a problem or need and I would point them to this passage and this truth?" (Haddon Robinson)

Audience Question Two: What Does This Look Like?

Think through the different people who will hear your message and ask, "What would it look like if the truth of this passage was lived out in their lives?"

In my experience, when people say, "I need more application in the sermon," they mean, "Can you illustrate this in another way so I can understand it better?" or, "Can you show me what living the new reality looks like Monday to Friday?" They are not really asking for "how-to steps." They simply want more help to navigate the new world into which they implicitly realize they are being called. ([Darrell Johnson](#))

Don't just think behaviors. Think beliefs and attitudes too.

The goal is not to use every application point you might devise. It's simply a device to force you to preach through different kinds of application.

Application Grid

What will this look like in the lives of the following people and groups?

	Beliefs	Attitudes	Behaviors
Public			
Non-Christian			
New Christian			
Mature Christian			
Child			
Youth			
Men			
Women			
Singles			
Husbands			
Wives			
Student			
Blue Collar Worker			
Professional			
Retiree			
Church			
Etc.			

Change People on the Spot

Don't just focus on application when the sermon is over. Aim for an encounter with God on the spot.

The first and primary object of preaching is not only to give information. It is, as Edwards says, to produce an impression. It is the impression at the time that matters, even more than what you can remember subsequently. (Martyn Lloyd-Jones)

I have to see Jesus to change me. When you see Jesus in a new way or sense his salvation this will change you on the spot... In the sermon there is an act of worship. God takes the word of the preacher and gives a person a vision of Jesus that shapes the heart on the spot. We are looking for a divine supernatural light. You can know honey is sweet without tasting it. But we need the sense of the sweetness – give them a taste of Jesus and you will see them change on the spot. (Tim Keller)

Come and experience God with me in this text. (Ryan Fullerton)

Be practical...but remember that nothing is more practical than the gospel.

Checklist for Application

- Can I communicate the big idea of my sermon?
- Is my sermon's big idea in line with the exegetical idea?
- Can I clearly communicate my sermon's purpose?
- Does my purpose line up with the author's intent?
- Have I captured the vision of God in this passage?
- Have I expressed the human factor?
- Have I explained how the gospel applies to the vision of God and the human factor?
- Have I communicated the response that this text demands?
- Do I know what I need to explain?
- Do I know what I need to prove?
- Do I know what I need to apply?
- Have I explained what this will look like in the lives of my various listeners?
- Have I helped people experience God and his gospel in my sermon?

About the Author



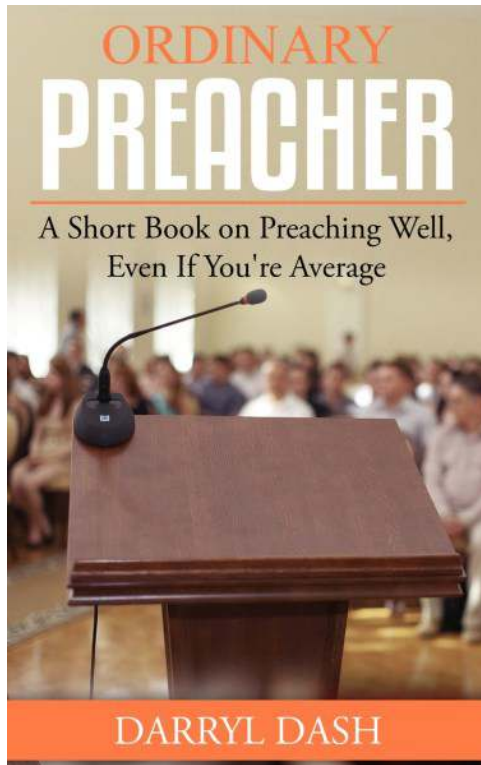
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Find out more about Darryl at [DashHouse.com](#).

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