**Spiritual Formation**

**Preparing a Biblical Message**

**Session 8**

**Tom Stebbins**

**Introduction**

Welcome to the Advanced Theological Studies Program of Evangelism Explosion. I am Dr. Tom Stebbins, Global Ambassador for Evangelism Explosion. I am a former missionary for 20 years to Vietnam, a pastor in Hong Kong for three years, an outreach pastor in Omaha, Nebraska at Christ Community Church, and after that I served as Dr. Kennedy’s vice president for eight and a half years. I made a commitment to Christ when I was 16 years old to recognize him as Lord of my life. It so changed my life that I began to study God’s word, three chapters every weekday, and five on Sunday. My first year, I finished my entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Some years later I learned a process whereby I could study more thoroughly God’s word. I recently completed studying the entire New Testament, paragraph by paragraph.

Let me share with you a recent experience that showed me the value of this Biblical process of studying God’s word for message. I was visiting Vietnam and saw the construction of a new seminary there. They had a financial need and I had a burden for that financial need, so I came back to America and sent out some various proposals to different organizations to give financial aid. I didn’t receive one letter back, much less a dollar. Well, I was going through my Bible study every morning and at that time I was studying the book of Acts. I was studying Acts 4, where the church was filled with the Holy Spirit. They were praying and they began to sell their houses and lands, and give money to the needs in the church. Barnabas, one of them sold his land and laid his money at the feet of the apostles. Well, the Lord laid on my heart a passage of about five verses that I should prepare as a Biblical message on stewardship. It was entitled “Needed More Barnabases”. After I prepared that message following this method I made another trip to Vietnam and I asked the executive board of the church if I could preach that message among their churches. Praise God they said, “Sure!” So I preached it to them first, then I preached it in the seminary to about 800 pastors, and then I preached it in Hanoi and Denang and Saigon. I got a tremendous response from the message. In fact, since then I have been able to raise over $300,000 for the seminary from one simple message that God gave to me in this Bible study method.

I could tell you other instances of evangelistic preaching where I did an evangelistic Bible study on Revelation 20, the great white throne judgment, another one on the Prodigal Son in Luke 15, and God used these to bring amazing fruit for his glory. So what I am sharing with you is not something just in theory, but out of my own personal experience. In fact, this morning I did a study before I came to do this message for ATS and was greatly blessed by how appropriate it was to the need that I had at hand.

**Preparing a Biblical Message**

Let’s go now into the subject of Preparing a Biblical Message. Do you find it difficult to prepare a message, especially an expository message on the word of God? I did. In fact, as a pastor I used to spend five days a week and eight to ten hours a day just preparing one message because it was such a difficult process to do an exposition of God’s word. Then one happy day when I was on furlough from Vietnam as a missionary, living in Nyack, New York I heard that Nyack College was having a one-day seminar on how to prepare a Biblical message. I went and learned a process, or a procedure on how to prepare a message in a very simple and fun way. I would like to share it with you with the prayer that God will use this method, this process to help you to discover a simple, easy, joyful way of preparing messages in your particular ministry. This is a step-by-step process, about 17 steps, very simple, not complicated at all, in contrast to two homiletic classes I had in Bible college on how to prepare a message. This is very simple and I will illustrate it as we go through.

**Acts 11 – This is the passage we are going to use to illustrate this method of preparing an expository Bible message.**

**\* Pray** – First ask God to open your heart and mind to understand the passage you are studying because the same Spirit who wrote the word of God can illuminate it to your heart.

* 1. I have found that to be true. If I have read a Scripture without prayer I have found it to hard to understand, but after prayer the Holy Spirit will illuminate my heart and mind with clarity so that it is easy to understand and teach to other people.

1. **Choose A Passage**
   1. Pick a passage or a paragraph from 1-25 verses.
   2. Usually, I use between 4-8 verses.
   3. Acts 11
      1. The passage we are looking at is Acts 11:1-18.
2. **Write** **It Out** 
   1. It is so important to write out word for word the passage you are studying. It helps you to understand the passage much better.
   2. I did it this morning; it doesn’t take very long, but it is so helpful.
   3. The Navigators train their staff with this quote, “Thoughts disengage themselves as they work themselves out from the lips to the fingertips.” Just thinking, then speaking, then writing the passage that you are studying helps illuminate it and make it clearer to you.
   4. Don’t Take Short Cuts - You will be tempted to say, ‘This is not all that important. I’ll just jump through this real quickly.’ Or you might be tempted to write it into your computer.
   5. The best way is with a pencil and a notebook. I have here six notebooks that I have filled with notes I have taken of day-to-day study of God’s word. Sometimes I’ll have to get a message from a passage that I may have studied a long time ago. I will go back to that passage and there I have an outline. That gives me a start to preparing that message to share.
3. **Ask, “What is the Big Idea?”**
   1. The **Big Idea** is the same thing as the main idea of the passage.
   2. The **Big Idea** should sum up the passage.
   3. The **Big Idea** should only be one short sentence.
   4. **Acts 11**
      1. The **Big Idea** is “God wants Christians to witness”. That is short, but it sums up the passage.
4. **Re-Read** **The Passage**
   1. This time read it with the **Big Idea** in mind.
   2. Ask 6 Questions about the passage, related to the Big Idea:
      1. **What?**
      2. **Why?**
      3. **Where?**
      4. **When?**
      5. **Who?**
      6. **How?**
   3. Write out the answers to these 6 questions as you find them throughout the passage.
   4. The passage may not answer all these questions, but you are looking for the predominant question that is answered by that passage of Scripture.
5. **Choose A Key Question**
   1. This should be the question, which your passage answers with the most detail.
   2. **Acts 11**
      1. I chose the key question **How?**
      2. **How** did God mold Peter to become a witness to the Gentiles?
6. **Main Points**
   1. These should be nouns that best answer the key question you have chosen.
      1. What? – **Experiences**
      2. Why? – **Reasons**
      3. Where? – **Places**
      4. When? – **Times**
      5. Who? – **People**
      6. How? – **Steps/Experiences**
   2. The **main points** are your bridge from the **Big Idea** to your Outline. This is a comfortable connection that leads you into your outline for the message.
   3. **Acts 11**
      1. “Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the outermost parts of the Earth” would be the **main points** that answer the key question **Where?**
      2. To answer my key question **How?,** the **main points** were steps.
      3. There are 3 steps that God used to get Peter off the rooftop and into Cornelius’ house.
      4. These 3 steps create my outline for this message.
7. **Create Your Outline**
   1. Read through the passage again.
   2. List the **main points** that answer the key question you chose.
   3. Number these answers, as many as you need.
   4. This morning in my personal study I came up with 7 noun answers to the question I chose, so I listed them all.
   5. **Acts 11**
      1. **Big Idea:** God wants Christians to witness.
      2. Key Question: **How** did God mold Peter to become a witness to the Gentiles?
      3. **Main Points** that answer the key question **How?**
         1. **Vision** - The first step that God used to Get Peter off the rooftop and into Cornelius’ house. Peter had a vision of a four-cornered sheet filled with unclean animals that came down out of heaven (verse 6).
         2. **Voice** – The second step God used. Peter heard a voice telling him to take the food and eat it (verse 7).
         3. **Visit** – The final step God used to get Peter to Cornelius’ house. Three men from Caesarea visited Peter (verse 11).
8. **Look For Sub Points**
   1. Sub Points should not be listed as numbers or letters, but as bullets (see below).
   2. This is meant to prevent your audience from being confused.
   3. **Acts 11**
      1. **God wants Christians to witness.**
      2. **How did God move Peter to become a witness to the Gentiles?**
         1. **Vision** 
            * **God gave Peter a vision of lost people** - The unclean animals represented the Gentiles, which the Jews considered lost without hope. God wanted Peter to cross the cultural barrier to witness to Cornelius who was a Gentile, a lost, unclean person.
            * **The four-cornered sheet represented the four corners of the Earth** - God wanted Peter to witness all over the world. He was the first of the apostles to initiate a witness to the four corners of the Earth.
         2. **Voice**
            * **Personal Voice -** God is a personal God. God spoke to Peter using a personal voice. God wanted Peter to know that God was personally interested in him (verse 7).
            * **Resistance to the Voice** - Peter is insisting that he won’t eat unclean meat. He is arguing with the Lord (verse 8).
            * **Persistent Voice** – It is very interesting to note that God was persistent. The Lord repeated over and over until Peter finally submitted (verse 10).
         3. **Visit**
            * **Visit to Peter’s Place of Worship** – Doesn’t this sound like EE, having lost people visit us in our place of worship? (verse 11)
            * **Visit to the Lost Person’s Home –** Then we should do the same and visit them at home(verse 12).
            * **Visit by the Holy Spirit –** We are in tri-logue. There are three people involved in our witnessing experiences: The Holy Spirit, the witness, and the lost person. Just as Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and was able to preach a powerful message that brought 3000 people to Christ, now in a one-on-one experience of sharing the Gospel with Cornelius, the Holy Spirit visits and brings power, clarity, and conviction, so that Cornelius and his whole family come to Christ as a result of Peter’s Spirit empowered witness (verse 15).
9. **Three Things** – You need to do these three things for each of your main points and sub points.
   1. **Explain** –Explain each point and sub point, as well as the facts surrounding these points, such as context, culture, and reasons.
   2. **Illustrate** – Tell a story from your own life or someone else’s that relates to each point in the passage.
   3. **Application** – Apply each point to the audience, so that they live by the truth of what you are teaching them from the passage.
   4. **Acts 11**
      1. **Explain**
         1. Why Peter did not want to eat the unclean meat.
         2. The Jews and the Gentile did not relate or interact with each other. In fact, if a Jew saw a Gentile approaching him on the street, he would cross the street and walk on the other side of it because the Jews considered the Gentiles unclean.
         3. Why God brought this vision to Peter. God needed to deal with this stigma surrounding Gentiles so that the Jews who knew Christ would witness to the Gentiles.
      2. **Illustrate**
         1. I would tell a story about how I went to someone’s house and shared Christ with them using EE. The Holy Spirit empowered me and helped me in my early days with EE when I would forget points of the outline. The Holy Spirit made up for my deficiencies. To my amazement, the Holy Spirit would bring that person to conviction and a relationship with Christ.
      3. **Application**
         1. I would say, “You are a faithful worshipper in your church, but have you gone out of the sanctuary and witnessed to people in their homes yet? You might learn a lot from Peter, who overcame his fear of talking to Gentiles after having this vision and hearing God’s voice and having the visitation of the Holy Spirit.”
10. **Introduction** 
    1. A good **Introduction** relates to the **Big Idea** of the passage you have chosen.
    2. The **Introduction** should capture the interest of the audience.
    3. This could be a story from someone else’s life.
    4. This could be something from nature that you have observed.
    5. This could be a story from your personal experience.
    6. **Acts 11**
       1. **Introduction** – I went to Hong Kong as a pastor and missionary. I preached for a whole year with no conversions. Then I met Evangelism Explosion through Buddy Gains and started to go into people’s homes, like Peter did. I found an effective ministry in Evangelism Explosion that helped our church grow from 60-360 people in three years.
11. **Conclusion**
    1. A good **Conclusion** is appropriate to the message you have just taught.
    2. This could be a story from someone else’s life.
    3. This could be a story from your personal experience.
    4. The **Conclusion** could also be a personal testimony from someone else.
    5. The **Conclusion** needs to include the **Application** of the message because people won’t naturally make application.
    6. **Acts 11**
       1. **Conclusion** with **Application** – I trained a friend in EE and he came alive through this to witness outside of the sanctuary. He went into homes and led many people to the Lord.
12. **Title** 
    1. Choose a brief contemporary title for your message.
    2. Acts 11
       1. Title: ‘How Worshippers Can Become Witnesses’
          1. ‘How Peter Became a Witness’ would not be a effective title.
13. **Serendipity Bible**
    1. If you study and preach the word in English, I would recommend this Bible to help you in preparing Bible messages.
    2. There are three kinds of questions in the margin of this Bible that will help you with your message.
       1. Open Questions – This will help you come up with a good introduction to your message.
       2. Dig Questions – This helps you with your exposition of the passage.
       3. Reflect Questions – These are application questions.
    3. If you can, go to your nearest bookstore and order a copy of this Bible for your sermon preparation.
14. **Suggested Passages**
    1. These would make easy studies for you.
       1. Psalm 1
       2. Psalm 133
    2. (check the video for the rest of these passages)
15. **Assignment**
    1. Prepare 2 messages using the steps above.
       1. You are welcome to use a passage other than one of the passages suggested.
       2. Turn in the assignments to Lindsay
16. **When Preaching**
    1. Keep your notes simple; use a small piece of paper.
    2. Don’t read your notes
       1. Preachers that read their notes, put their audience to sleep.
    3. Maintain eye contact with your audience and smile often.
17. **Opening Remarks**
    1. Complement someone or something, such as the choir, the sanctuary, the building, or the meal that was served beforehand.
    2. Be truthful because if you’re not truthful, you have lost your credibility and the audience won’t believe the rest of your message.
    3. Don’t flatter.
    4. This builds rapport with your audience.
    5. Keep to the time frame given to you.
    6. Use humor in your introduction.

**Biblical Examples** – These are messages I have prepared using this method.

1. **Matthew 17** (This is an exception to the rule I gave you earlier. In this message I preach from a whole chapter rather than a few verses. Turn with me to this passage.)

a. **Title**: ‘Dealing with Life’s Roadblocks’

b. **Big Idea**: Faith is Needed to Move Roadblocks (verse 20) - When you encounter roadblocks in your life and ministry, Jesus suggests that you need faith to move those mountains. With faith you can see obstacles removed.

c. Key Question: **What** are the obstacles that we encounter in life where we need faith?

d. **Main Points**: Three Mountains - Peter encountered these mountains and he needed faith to move them.

1. Geographical Mountain (verse 1)

* Explanation:
  + High Mountain – about 7,000-8,000 ft. high
  + Peter, James, and John were fishermen. They had never climbed a mountain.
* Illustration: I started a fishing company on the island of Guam. I learned that the closest a fisherman ever comes to a mountain is a marketplace where they sell their fish.
  + I’m sure Peter, James, and John were tempted to complain and ask, “Jesus, what is on that mountain? There aren’t people living up there. There aren’t even trees up there. They wondered why God would take them up this high mountain. When they get to the top of the mountain finally, we're told that Jesus was transfigured before them (verse 2). I'm sure when they started to climb up the mountain, Peter would not have said that it was good to be climbing up that mountain, but after he got up there:
* **What** did Peter experience on that mountain, which increased his faith?

1. Vision of God's glory: Peter saw Jesus' glory like he had never experienced before.

2. Visitors: Peter met two heroes of the faith: Moses & Elijah had come to the mountain top. What an experience it was to meet these two heroes of the faith.

3. Voice: A voice came from heaven saying, "This is my beloved son. Hear him."

* Conclusion: Peter faced an obstacle in going up this mountain. God blessed him through this obstacle by increasing his faith.

2. Faith Roadblock (verses 14-21)

* Explanation:
  + When they came down the mountain, they encountered a father and son. The son was being troubled by a demon; he would sometimes fall into fire. The father came to the disciples and asked them to remove this demon, this evil spirit from the son, but they couldn't do it. So the father brought his son to Jesus and Jesus delivered the son from the evil spirit. Peter came to Jesus and said, "Lord why couldn't we do that?" And Jesus said, "It's a matter of faith (Matthew 17:20) Peter found in this spiritual experience, another lesson in how to handle roadblocks, problems, obstacles that came into his path while following the Lord.
  + It is interesting that the Lord compared faith to a mustard seed. That is the smallest thing that the human eye can see, even smaller than a grain of sand. Here between the smallest thing: a mustard seed, and the largest thing: a mountain, stood a man of faith. Jesus said, 'If you have faith like a tiny mustard seed you can deal with the biggest obstacles, the most enormous mountains in your life.'
  + And of course, demons were a tremendous spiritual force in Peter's day as it is in ours. By faith, Jesus showed him how that demon could be removed.

3. Financial Roadblock (verse 24-27)

* Explanation:
  + Here they had a financial roadblock. Jesus did not have a place to lay his head (Matthew 8:20). He lived his life depending on others. He traveled in other people's boats. He was buried in another man's tomb.
  + When it came to finances, where is he going to get the money to pay taxes? It was time to collect taxes. Jesus says to Peter, 'Go catch a fish.' Peter didn't like climbing mountains, but he loved catching fish, so when Jesus told him to catch a fish, Peter said, 'Fine. How many do you want?' Jesus said, 'Just one fish is enough for me'. I'm sure Peter was tempted to say, 'Lord, I've caught thousands of fish and never found a coin in the mouth of a fish. Are you sure that this will meet our financial need?'
  + Of course, it took faith for Peter to obey the Lord. He trusted and obeyed. There is no other way to find God's answer to our prayers. So he went out and cast his hook into the water and when he opened the mouth of the fish there was enough money to pay the taxes that Jesus and he were required to pay.
* Application: You encounter financial mountains. If you find roadblocks in your life. If you find situations where you don't have the finances and you need money, go to the Lord Jesus in faith. He can meet those needs.
* Illustration: When I was a student in college I needed 15 cents to do my laundry. And I didn't get paid until the end of the week and I didn't have 15 cents. All my clothes were dirty and I didn't have 15 cents. My college didn't allow me to do my laundry in the bathroom sink. I had to use the automatic washing machine. I said, "Lord, I need 15 cents. I don't know where it is going to come from, but I pray that you would supply that 15 cents." My job was delivering food from a meat market. That day I delivered food to a lady's home. She had never tipped me before and she never tipped me again. In fact, none of the customers in that town would give tips, but that day she said to me, "Tommy, here's the funds for the groceries and there may be a few extra pennies there. You can put those in your pocket; keep the extra money." Well, I got into my pick-up truck and counted out the money. There weren't 14 pennies or 16 pennies, but exactly 15 pennies. God had moved a financial mountain. I didn't walk up to the college; I ran, excited that God had answered prayer by faith. So in your life, as you walk with God you need faith to move financial mountains. He'll answer your prayers as you pray.

1. **Conclusion**: What roadblocks are you encountering?
2. **Personal Illustrations**:

* Are you serving somewhere geographically? When I was in Vietnam I was assigned to every place I didn't want to serve. I didn't want to serve in the city and I was assigned to the city. I didn't want to serve in the mission school for children, but I was assigned there for 6 months. I was assigned to be field director in Saigon and work in an office even though I didn't want to work there. As I followed the Lord in faith, each one of those places where I didn't want to work became places I didn't want to leave, just like Peter climbing that mountain. Peter wanted to build three temples on the top of the mountain and stay there. I found by walking in faith that God transformed the geographic mountains in my life from places I didn't want to serve into places I didn't want to leave. Those became great experiences.
* Our daughter was born with a broken leg and we prepared a place to burry her. God worked a miracle and saved her life and today she is a pastor's wife in Minnesota at Crown College. It was faith in prayer where we saw that mountain move, so I would encourage you in your life to trust God and ask him to move those mountains you are encountering.

1. **1 John 1**
   1. **Title**: Life Abundant
   2. **Big Idea**: Abundant life is found only in Jesus Christ (verses 1-7) – John is explaining to his readers how he found abundant life in Jesus.
   3. **Introduction**: What does the world consider to be life? There are some who consider it to be feasting and drinking and meeting their appetite needs. There are some who think it means having a girlfriend, or having a wonderful occupation, or having expensive possessions, or going on expensive vacations, or being wealthy, or being an athlete, or getting an educational degree. For many people this is abundant life. But there is no life like that which we find in Jesus Christ. Sophocles said, “No one loves life like him that is growing old.” Life always ends with death. Even this physical life that can be so wonderful is not abundant like the life God has for us.
   4. **Main Points**: Seven Traits
2. Abundant Life in Jesus Comes From the Source of Life (verse 1)

* Explanation:
* The Triune God created the universe and when he breathed into the nostrils of man he became a living soul.
* Science tries to explain life, but it can’t explain the source of life. The Scripture tells us that life itself comes only from God.
* John says, ‘From the beginning life was created by life itself, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.’

1. Abundant Life in Jesus Can Be Sensed (verse 1)
   1. Explanation:
      1. There were those who thought that Jesus was just a phantom, that he wasn’t physical, but we are told that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, that he lived 33 years on earth before he died and rose again, and that he went back to heaven. John says, ‘Wait, I touched him. I even put my head in his lap.’
      2. Jesus could be sensed through the physical senses that we have: sight, hearing, touch, etc. He is real; not a phantom.
2. Abundant Life in Jesus is Sensible
   1. Explanation:
      1. *Logos* – The Greek word for life, which means ‘logic’. The most logical life you will ever experience comes from Jesus. He will give you the reason for everything in life. If you study the word and follow him, he makes life sensible.
3. Abundant Life in Jesus is Secure (verse
   1. Explanation:
      1. Life in Christ doesn’t end in death. It goes no for an eternity in heaven. He gives us security in life. We are no longer afraid of death, but ready to die at a moments’ notice.

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