

# The Bivocational's Answer

## PASTORS' REPORTS



### PASTORS' REPORT #1

#### **"BIBLE JOE'S" THREE-STEP SERMON RECIPE**

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Hi, Pastor!

Thanks for requesting this special report. If you find that there is merit in it and you would like to share it with others in ministry, please feel free to do so.

You may copy it, e-mail it, publish it on your website, include it in your newsletter, or distribute it in any other way you desire. All I ask is that you not make any changes in it and that you use it in its entirety.

Over the last three decades I have learned a lot about how to preach the Word of God.

No surprise there. If I am allowed to preach another 30 years, I expect to learn a lot more.

I certainly don't think that I have arrived. As a matter of fact, many of my students have shown themselves to be better expositors of the Word than their professor!

Several of them pastor megachurches and have pulpit ministries that are internationally known.

But I **have** learned some practical things that may just benefit you as you seek to preach the Glorious Gospel of our Lord.

Of course there are some basic things that we all learned in Hermeneutics and Homiletics classes—things that every preacher ought to know.

If you have not had the privilege of a formal theological education, at the end of this report you will find a brief bibliography of resources where you can find these hermeneutical and homiletical “basics.”

In this report, though, I will assume your knowledge of the fundamentals. I really just want to share with you a few things that I rather “stumbled” upon—long after my last preaching class was taken.

It all began when I met “BIBLE JOE.”

I sure wish I had met him earlier than I did!

You see, as a young pastor, I found that the thing I enjoyed most about ministry—preaching the Word of God—soon became the thing that was most burdensome to me.

Not that it became less of a joy, and not that I ever lost sight of the importance of the task—indeed, the realization of its importance increased the burden.

The issue for me was simply time—and the lack thereof.

During my first pastorate I was working on a Ph.D. degree at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary in Memphis, Tennessee. I had a young family with two little boys and a third one on the way.

My church in rural Arkansas was small; but I didn't want it to remain that way, so visitation was imperative.

Doctoral studies, forty hours a week on campus in Memphis, a two-and-a-half-hour drive from home to school and then back again, church visitation, along with trying to have some semblance of family life—all of this left very little time for sermon preparation.

Nevertheless, preparation had to be done. We had Sunday morning worship, Sunday evening preaching, Wednesday evening Bible Study, and Sunday afternoon Discipleship Training Class.

I was the sole person responsible for bringing the Word of God to each of these five meetings every week.

In a year, that's about 250 different messages/lessons! Can you see the difficulty on the horizon?

Well, the problem soon became apparent to me too!

I struggled and sought help wherever I could find it. Assistance came from many different quarters:

- There were sermon outline books and the old *Sword of the Lord* and *Pulpit Helps* newspapers sometimes helped.
- On my drives back and forth to Memphis I found “inspiration” from the radio sermons of Adrian Rogers, Chuck Swindoll, Chuck Smith, John MacArthur, and a host of others. (One of my fellow doctoral students once confided, “When Swindoll starts preaching better sermons so will I”).
- During my days on campus I sometimes heard a couple of repeatable chapel sermons, but that was never a sure thing.
- In our doctoral carrels we would talk about Sunday’s sermons with one another and I would sometimes pick up a few ideas there from classmates who were fellow strugglers.

As helpful as these sources were, nobody ever helped me out like **BIBLE JOE!**

Once I met JOE, the burden began to lift. He shared a recipe with me that anyone could use to make a sermon without all the fretting.

The things I learned from JOE are simple, but they have been a great help to me, making my sermons easier and faster to prepare, not to mention tastier and more nourishing than ever!

Maybe you will find these tips helpful too.

I will share JOE’s recipe with you in three sections:

- 1. Pulling the Sermon Out**
- 2. Praying the Sermon In**
- 3. Putting the Sermon Down**

My apologies to Mrs. Shirley Nichols, my 9<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher. I know I’m not supposed to end sentences with a preposition—that is something *up with which Mrs. N. would not put*—but I believe my fellow preachers will forgive me.☺

So, let’s get on with it!

## **PULLING THE SERMON OUT**

There is a famous recipe for rabbit stew that begins, "First, get a rabbit."

Well, before you write a sermon, you must first "get one."

That should not be a problem; God has given us a Book full of them!

But **that's** the problem, isn't it? There are *so many* wonderful things we could preach about! How do we choose just one?

In [\*The Tentmaker's Time Machine\*](#), Volume One of the series we call [\*The Bivocational's Answer\*](#), I discuss how the establishment of an expository preaching plan solves the "*what shall I preach?*" dilemma that so many pastors face.

*Expository preaching eliminates the time-consuming indecisiveness about the next sermon you are going to preach.*

If you announced a couple of weeks ago that you were going to preach through the Gospel of John, then you committed yourself (and the congregation)! You know before you finish this Sunday's sermon on the first miracle (John 2.1-11) that next Sunday's sermon will be on the cleansing of the temple (2.12-22) and on the Sunday after that you will be preaching about the New Birth (3.1-21)!

Without that preplanned schedule, it would not be uncommon to waffle back and forth from Monday morning to Wednesday night or later without ever settling on a sermon.

So, embarking on a preaching plan of expository series, as recommended in [\*The Tentmaker's Time Machine\*](#), will get you started . . . but only started.

Yes, you will know what Scripture **text** to deal with and the major **theme** of that text; but **what will you say about that theme?**

You need to “pull the sermon out” of the text. This is what we learned in seminary to call “exegesis,” from the Greek verb “to lead (draw, pull)” and the preposition “out.” The exegetical preacher coaxes the meaning of a text out of the passage.

The opposite of exegesis is “*eisegesis*.” *Eisegesis* is what happens when we read our own ideas “into” (Grk. *eis*) a text instead of “drawing out” the original author’s intended meaning:

***“Wonderful things in the Bible we see;  
Things that were put there by you and by me!”***

We must avoid *eisegesis* at all costs!

How do I “pull” a sermon out of a text? Here are some basic steps:

- **Read the text in its context several times and from several different Bible translations.**
  - If the text is from a short book (e.g., Philippians), read the entire book several times so that you can set the words and concepts within the flow of thought of the original author. (If you have been preaching through the book, this ought to be fairly easy.)
  - If the text is from a longer book (e.g., Isaiah), read the smaller subsection of the book that forms the context of your passage. This will usually be a few chapters.
  - If the text has parallel passages, read them to get the fullest picture (this is especially common in the Gospels—I recommend a “Harmony of the Gospels” like the one by A. T. Robertson be used in such a case)
- **In your reading, is there a phrase, a word, an event, or a concept that just *jumps out* at you as an important part of the text? I call this “JOE” (the “Jump Out Element”). You should keep your eyes open for “JOE.” In looking for “him,” be on the alert for special clues like:**

- “Key words” (words that are essential to the meaning of the text)
  - Repeated words or phrases
  - Repeated concepts
  - Comparisons and Contrasts
  - Unusual events
  - Picturesque analogies
  - An unusual turn of phrase
  - Connecting words (like “and,” “then,” “therefore,” “but,” etc.) that all lead back to a main concept
  - Answers to the Who?, What?, When?, Where?, Why?, and How? questions
  - Theological terms (e.g., justification, glorified, etc.)
  - Theological concepts (for example, you will not find the word “substitution” in the personal letter of Philemon, but it is strongly suggested in Paul’s attitude and words)
- **When you think you have found “JOE”, ask yourself if there are any elements in the passage that contribute to your understanding of that “jump out” element. Elements, for example, that tell you:**
- What JOE looks like
  - What we should know about JOE
  - Why JOE does what JOE does
  - Where to find JOE
  - Why we should be like JOE
  - How we can be like JOE
  - How to stay away from JOE
  - Etc., etc., etc.

***Okay, okay! Before this gets too confusing and you start looking for a character named Joseph in every text, let’s take time out for an example.***

Some years ago I was preaching through the Gospel of Mark. I came to Chapter 14 and the incident of the woman (Mary) who anointed Jesus with a costly ointment (vss 1-9).

Having preached through the prior portions of the Gospel up to this point, it was obvious that we were nearing the crucifixion of the Lord when this event happened.

As I read the account, two statements of Jesus seemed to **jump out** at me. Jesus said of Mary, “she has DONE A GOOD WORK for me” (vs. 6) and “She has DONE WHAT SHE COULD” (vs. 8).

Here were Jesus' disciples, practically in the shadow of the cross (vs. 2), doing nothing but eating, drinking, enjoying themselves—without a thought of what was about to happen—and *attacking Mary* for doing what Jesus said was “a good work” and what He further characterized as being ***all that she could do at the time*** (vs. 8).

In other words, while the others did nothing, ***Mary did all that could be done***. She left nothing on the table. She gave her all to Jesus.

So Mary had done her very best—it wasn't that much, but Jesus recognized it as all she could do. She had not held anything back. It was her “best work.”

Have you and I “*done what we could*”? Have we done our very best for the Master? How can we know? What would that look like?

In this example, the “**Jump Out Element**” (JOE) is “***Our Best Work***.” What does JOE look like? That is, what do our best works look like?

As I read through the text, I saw several elements that would help me determine if what I am doing for Jesus would qualify as a “best work.”

Mary's work clearly qualified (Jesus said so), and it had four easily seen characteristics.

If I want Jesus to say of me, as He said of Mary, “*he has done what he could*,” then my works should have these characteristics too.

Here are some of the things I noticed about Mary's work. Do you see them too?



1. It was a **COSTLY** work (vss. 3, 5)
2. It was a **CRITICIZED** work (vss. 4-5)
3. It was a **CROSS-CONSCIOUS** work (vs. 8)
4. It was a **COMPENSATED** work (vs. 9)

And there you have it! That's what I decided to say about our best works: they are costly, criticized, cross-conscious, and compensated.

### **Okay, let's stop for a moment; what did we just do?**

1. We read the passage until we found JOE—the “Jump Out Element.”
2. We read the passage several more times to find out what it could tell us about JOE.
3. We decided that what it said that we most wanted to share was, “This is what JOE looks like. . . .”
4. We began to study those characteristics of JOE (i.e., characteristics of a “best work”) so we could ask ourselves at the end, “Is this what **my works** look like?”

Remember, sometimes your passage will tell you something other than the **characteristics** of \_\_\_\_\_. Maybe it will be “the **results** of \_\_\_\_\_,” “the **reasons** for \_\_\_\_\_,” “the **benefits** of \_\_\_\_\_,” “the **way to do** \_\_\_\_\_,” or any number of other things.

The important thing is that you let **the passage** tell you how to present the topic; you want to pull the sermon *out of the text*, not import some foreign meaning *into the text*!

Notice how the following passages present their JOEs:

- **Joshua 1.1-9 → JOE = HOW TO ENTER A NEW ERA OF LIFE**
  - Enter It Claiming the Promises of God (vss. 1-4, 6)
  - Enter It Confident of the Presence of God (vss. 5, 9)
  - Enter It Committed to the Pathway of God (vss. 7-8)
- **Psalms 1.1-3 → JOE = WHAT THE BLESSED MAN IS LIKE**
  - He Is Different from the World (vs. 1)
  - He Is Devoted to the Word (vs. 2)
  - He Is Distinctive in His Witness (vs. 3)

- **Isaiah 1.1-18 → JOE = *WHO* SIN CAN HURT**
  - Sin Hurts the Father (vss. 2-3; 10-15)
  - Sin Hurts You (vss. 4-6)
  - Sin Hurts Those Around You (vss. 7-9)
  - Sin Hurt Christ (vss. 16-18)
- **Ephesians 1.1-14 → JOE = *HOW* WE HAVE BEEN BLESSED**
  - We Have Been Selected by the Father (vss. 1-6)
  - We Have Been Saved by the Son (vss. 7-12)
  - We Have Been Sealed by the Spirit (vss. 13-14)
- **James 1.1-12 → JOE = *WHY* We Should Rejoice When Trouble Comes**
  - Because of the **Results** Trouble Produces (vss. 2-4)
  - Because of the **Resources** Available (vss. 5-8)
  - Because of the **Re-evaluation** of Riches It Occasions (vss. 9-11)
  - Because of the **Reward** Awaiting the Victor (vs. 12)

Every passage of Scripture has a main theme, a “big idea.” I call this JOE, the “Jump Out Element.” Just find JOE and you are on your way—he will show you how to do the rest!

That’s Step One, “Pulling the Sermon Out.” What about Step Two?

### **PRAYING THE SERMON IN**

In Step One, I get the basic outline or, as political pundits call them these days, the “Talking Points.”

Now I know what specific things to zero in on so that I am not rambling all over creation as I contemplate the theme of the passage. I don’t have to comment on every minor thing in the passage, and if I choose to do that I will lose sight of the main message (and so will my congregation).

I just need to speak to the 3-4 “Talking Points” identified in Step One. But what am I going to say ***specifically*** about each of these “Talking Points”?

This is where time for reflection, meditation, prayer, and more study is indispensable.

Remember that rabbit stew recipe? Well, we got our “rabbit” in Step One. The main ingredients are all in the pot, so now we let them “simmer.”

First, I pray for God to reveal to me how I might make these characteristics real in my own life. Are there things that I am doing counterproductive to my message? Where can I make changes, for example, that will make my works of service more like Mary's?

Next, I begin to think about my congregation. What challenges are they encountering day in and day out that might make this message especially relevant for them?

I notice things in the world around me—in the news and on TV—that relate to these concepts of sacrifice, criticism, being aware of the cross, etc.

Thinking about the various Gospel accounts of this incident, I remember that, though all of the disciples criticized Mary, it was the one person in the room that didn't love Jesus (Jn 12.4) that started the tirade. Is there a lesson there about who we should let influence us?

In my devotions, I begin to look up passages that have to do with the four talking points:

- What does the Bible have to say about the **cost** of loving God?
- What does it tell us about the sin of uncharitable judgments or the inevitableness of being **criticized** and persecuted when you follow Christ?
- What does it say our **response** to Christ should be in light of His great love for us?
- What does it teach about the **rewards** that shall come to those who love Him?

Scripture, of course, has much to say about all of these points, and some of all that it says made its way into my sermon very naturally.

After discovering JOE and what the passage had to say about “him,” and after letting my thoughts about JOE simmer for awhile in the various “talking points,” I sometimes see what others think of the passage.

Did they see “my JOE” there too? Did they notice things about JOE that I had missed?

There is not always time to consult others, but if you have some time this is a profitable use of it.

I do this, as mentioned in [\*The Tentmaker's Time Machine\*](#), by listening to skilled expositors during my walks, drives, and other would-be wasted moments (see Strategy #8—“Get Your Ears On”—in [\*TTM\*](#)).

I also do it, as readers of [\*TTM\*](#) will recall, with less professional communicators—my wife and kids—in family devotions.

And, of course, I “listen” to the writers of commentaries and other study helps; but that usually comes with Step Three.

So let's move on to the final phase.

### **PUTTING THE SERMON DOWN**

By this time, JOE and I have pretty much figured out what we want to say. I just have to put it down on paper in a logical, ordered format.

I like to do this on my laptop so that I have access to online Bibles and commentaries right where I sit.

Usually I just close my eyes and begin to visualize the congregation. Then I ask myself, what is the best way to introduce JOE to these folks?

Depending on who (I mean what!) JOE is in any particular sermon, I may decide that a story, an illustration, a polling statistic, or some other relevant item would be the best way to begin.

Whatever I decide I need, it is at my fingertips because I am sitting at the computer, have my Bible Study software loaded, and am connected to the internet (see the resources listed at the end for some suggestions regarding this).

A few weeks ago, for instance, I was preparing to preach on Paul's words in Phil 3.10, "that I might know Him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings."

I needed something to say about the powerless lives of most Christians. Having put a few introductory words on paper, I simply opened Internet Explorer and went to <http://www.sermonillustrations.com>.

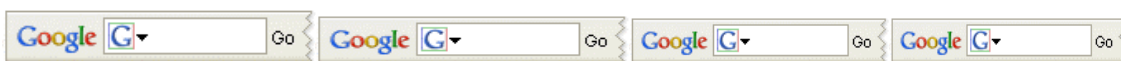
There I found an alphabetical listing of topics. I clicked on "P" and then "Power" to find this gem:

***One New Year's Day, in the Tournament of Roses parade, a beautiful float suddenly sputtered and quit. It was out of gas. The whole parade was held up until someone could get a can of gas. The amusing thing was this float represented the Standard Oil Company. With its vast oil resources, its truck was out of gas. Often, Christians neglect their spiritual maintenance, and though they are "clothed with power" (Luke 24:49) find themselves out of gas.***

A quick "copy and paste" and I had my opening story (the way it was written didn't much sound like me, so I modified it a bit, but the point is I didn't have to struggle to find a way to begin . . . it was right at my fingertips.)

Sometimes as I am explaining a text on paper, a new question will occur to me that I had not thought about in Phase Two. No problem! I can go online to [Blue Letter Bible](#) or open up my own [Logos Scholars software](#) and check out a commentary or two (there are hundreds of them on [Logos](#)).

If I don't get my answer quickly, I can simply "Google" the question into the search engine and see what answers come up!



To keep myself from getting carried away on the information super highway, I use a template of one landscaped 8 ½ x 11 page for my

sermon notes. When I have filled up one page with 10 pt. type, it's time to quit.

Here's how you set up such a page:

1. Open up your word processor (I use MS Word)
2. Click the "File" tab at the top of the screen for a drop-down menu
3. Click the "Page Setup" link for a pop-up box
4. In that box, there are three tabs at the top: "margins," "paper," and "layout." You should be in the "margins" section.
  - a. Make the top and bottom margins 0.2"
  - b. Make the left and right margins 0.3"
  - c. Click the "Landscape" option for your page orientation
  - d. Click the drop-down menu on the "pages" section and choose "Two Pages Per Sheet"
  - e. Close the box

This gives you a printed copy of the sermon that easily fits folded into most Bibles. I open my Bible to the text, place the sermon in that place, open the sermon page, and then put a large rubber band around the Bible spine and the open sermon to hold it all in place. The sermon then fits in the Bible just as if it were two added pages.

That's all there is to it! With your page set up, it's time to "Put the Sermon Down" so that on Sunday you can "Serve the Sermon Up!" (I'm afraid the "Serving" step will have to wait for another Report.)

Ready to do your own now? Happy Cooking!

By the way, when you see JOE in YOUR preaching text this week, tell him I said "Thanks a million!" That's how many ways he has helped me through the years!



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## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

### BOOKS

#### Hermeneutics (Biblical Interpretation)

Fee, Gordon and Douglas Stewart. *How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993.

Geisler, Norman L. *Explaining Hermeneutics: A Commentary on the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics*. Oakland, California: International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1983.

Kaiser, Walter C. *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981.

McQuilkin, J. Robertson. *Understanding and Applying the Bible*. Chicago: Moody, Revised Edition, 1992.

Sproul, R. C. *Knowing Scripture*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1977.

Sterrett, T. Norton. *How to Understand Your Bible*. Rev. Ed. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1974.

Traina, Robert A. *Methodical Bible Study - A New Approach to Hermeneutics*. Wilmore, Kentucky: Robert Traina, 1952

Zuck, Roy B. *Basic Bible Interpretation*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1991.

#### Homiletics (Biblical Communication)

Adams, Jay E. *Preaching With Purpose*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982.

Bragga, James. *How to Prepare Bible Messages*. Portland: Multnomah Press, 1969.

Broadus, John Albert. *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*. New York: Harper and Row, 1979.

Bryson, Harold T. *Building Sermons to Meet People's Needs*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980.

Lloyd-Jones, David Martin. *Preaching and Preachers*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971.



**MacArthur, John. *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*. Dallas: Word, 1992.**

**Macpherson, Ian. *The Art of Illustrating Sermons*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1964.**

**Robinson, Haddon W. *Biblical Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980.**

**Shaddix, Jim and Jerry Vines. *Power in the Pulpit*. Chicago: Moody, 1999.**

**Unger, Merrill F. *Principles of Expository Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980.**

## ***WEBSITES***

### Exegesis

<http://www.biblequery.org>

This site answers almost every conceivable question on practically every verse in the Bible from a balanced, conservative perspective. Put in the chapter and verse and see for yourself.

<http://www.bible.org>

This site is a treasure trove of helps for finding the meaning of Scripture. Many other kinds of pastoral and theological resources are found here.

<http://www.nextbible.org>

Many-faceted online study Bible

<http://www.ccel.org/wwsb>

Many-faceted online study Bible

<http://www.freegrace.net/gill>

The exhaustive and enlightening commentary of John Gill, an eighteenth-century Calvinistic Baptist scholar. His views are extreme in some regards, but his expositions of the Scripture are often helpful and always interesting. He is especially knowledgeable in rabbinic and Reformed literature.

### Homiletics

<http://www.sermoncentral.com>

Manuscripts, audios, powerpoints, etc. of thousands of sermons from contemporary pulpits

<http://www.sermonillustrations.com>

The name says it all.

[More Illustrations](#)

More word pictures for your sermon.

[Power in the Pulpit Conference Audios](#)

Addresses from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's Preaching conference.

[Shepherd's Fellowship Blog](#)

Blog of John MacArthur's preaching fellowship

<http://www.desiringgod.com>

John Piper has a multitude of great free resources on this site.

Would you like to be notified when other free reports like this are available? They are coming out all the time, but you won't know if you don't sign up for our updates. Don't miss out; [sign up here](#):

[http://glorystory.faithweb.com/whats\\_new.html](http://glorystory.faithweb.com/whats_new.html)



Would you like to learn how to **TEACH LIKE JESUS**? Yes, you can! Find out how at [http://www.teachlikejesus.faithweb.com/index\\_1.html](http://www.teachlikejesus.faithweb.com/index_1.html)

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<http://www.instantbibleinstitute.com/indexk.html>

