



Questions for preachers

TN56 Training Notes series: Leadership

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Organisers are good at asking questions. The trick, of course, is to ask the right ones.

These notes take this technique to the task of Bible teaching or preaching. What questions might be appropriate to ask about a Bible passage in the preparation of a sermon or other application? Here are 40 ideas!

The first 30 will apply just as much to personal study of the Scriptures. But, whatever the application, the point here is most certainly not to set an agenda that has to be slavishly followed. Instead, the aim is to:

- present a method that then naturally becomes part of your preparation;
- suggest a general structure that can help;
- include some questions that you may not have considered or be neglecting;
- apply some principles of good communication in this area;
- stimulate you to become a better preacher.

The notes can be used in any way that you find helpful. You may well feel some key questions have been omitted. If so, please email me to suggest improvements to what is written here. This version includes amendments made in the light of comments to date.

The questions are divided into four groups of ten each, covering:

- Preparation
- Bible search
- Personal application
- Teaching.

You will find that some overlap with others, depending on the passage under scrutiny and the setting you are in.

Preparation

- 1 What kind of literature is this?
It might be history, story-telling, poetry, metaphor, prophecy, teaching, letter, etc.
- 2 Where does this fit within the whole Bible?
Perhaps it is one of a series of books, or part of a major Bible theme.
- 3 What is known about the author?
Consider the kind of person they were and what they would have been doing.
- 4 About when was this written?
Both the approximate date and context of that time – some simple research may help.
- 5 Where was this written?
The place may shed light on the passage (eg. Paul in prison, a prophet in exile).
- 6 Who was this written for?
Some books are addressed to an individual, others to one or a group of churches.
- 7 For what purpose did the author write this?
He may state this (Luke 1:3; John 20:31) or you may have to guess or research it.
- 8 Where might I mistakenly read my own background and context into this?
Given the answers above, you need to beware reading the text through your own lens.
- 9 What can help me understand this passage?
Don't try this early on but at some stage you will need notes, commentaries, advice.
- 10 Do I really want God to speak to me/others through this?
Silly question? Probably not. This is the one that leads to prayer.

Bible search

- 11 What does this passage actually say?
Which may be different from what we or others think it says. Context is crucial here.
- 12 What is the headline message of this passage?
Try to sum it up in one short sentence, but beware point 8 above.
- 13 How is the passage structured?
Forget the chapter/verse breaks and watch contrasts, lists, connections, context again.
- 14 What can I see, hear, feel, smell and taste as I read this?
Use your imagination and check on your emotions as if you had been there.
- 15 What does this teach about Father, Son or Holy Spirit?
Try listing any references in the passage, but it may need an overview instead.
- 16 What does this teach about people or about me?
It may say something about God's people, their leaders, the world or yourself.
- 17 Are there any promises to claim?
If so it is important to note any conditions and the context in which they are made.
- 18 Are there any commands to obey?
These may need to be applied to your situation today, but don't go easy on them.

- 19 Are there any warnings to heed?
See these in the context of your own weaknesses.
- 20 Are there any examples to follow or avoid?
Scripture often tells it straight: the good, the bad and the ugly.

Personal application

- 21 To whom do I most relate in this passage?
It may be a minor character or someone in a crowd. Consider the reason too.
- 22 What do I learn for my own discipleship?
It is worth finding one encouragement or warning.
- 23 What do I need to change in my life as a result of this passage?
This is where it gets painful, but teachers need to get real with themselves.
- 24 What do I learn about my relationships with other Christians?
Individual study of the Scriptures should have a corporate outcome.
- 25 What do I learn about my relationships with the world?
The passage should impact on daily work/school and life at home.
- 26 What one point do I want to go on thinking about today?
There may be a theme to carry through the day, or a verse to memorise.
- 27 What do I now want to praise God for?
Perhaps this will come as a result of points 15 or 17 above.
- 28 What do I now need to ask forgiveness for?
Perhaps this will come as a result of points 16, 18 or 19 above.
- 29 What will I now pray for others and myself?
Turning the passage into intercession.
- 30 How have I done since my last Scripture reading?
A chance to review this section from yesterday or last time.

Teaching

- 31 Who is likely to be in the congregation/group/online today?
No one answer of course, but note for example if children or visitors may be there.
- 32 What kinds of issues are they facing in their lives just now?
Good preachers know and understand the daily lives of their congregations.
- 33 What is happening globally, locally, in this church just now?
Anything from international news to a member's birthday may affect people.
- 34 How might they be feeling at this point in the service/meeting?
So they may need a stretch break, or something to link with what has gone before.
- 35 How does this passage address where they are at?
This may be different from how it addresses you.

- 36 Do they need encouragement or challenge?
Too much of one without the other may not be helpful, but getting the balance is key.
- 37 What are the surprises they might miss in this passage?
They may know it too well or fail to understand how it sounded when first written.
- 38 What kind of outcomes do I long for?
What am I praying for people to do or to think or to change as a result?
- 39 How long do I need to be?
This depends on the congregation, the message, yourself, expectations, etc.
- 40 Where might I get in the way of God speaking to them?
It might be your preconceptions, personality, pride, lack of preparation ... or your forced alliterations!

Practical issues

A range of practical issues may occur to you at this point.

- A How is the text to be read?
At a separate part of the service, within the sermon itself, in dramatic form, etc.
- B Would it help to use other means than just speech?
Examples: a visual aid in your hand, PowerPoint slides, printed notes or other supporting means.
- C If online, or if the service is being broadcast, what other points do I need to bear in mind?
Examples might include introducing yourself, explaining any local references, splitting the sermon into two parts, etc.
- D Is the traditional form of a monologue sermon the only or best way to teach this particular passage?
You might consider any other more interactive means that might be appropriate.

But these 40 questions seek to get to the heart of the Bible message and how it might address the needs of the listeners – and the speaker.

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> and then TN56. See also Articles A19, *Speaking so that people listen*, and A49, *How to read the Bible out loud*, plus Training Notes TN1, *Preparing to read the lesson*, TN21, *Ideas for a sermon on administration*, and TN123, *Speaking-to-camera tips*.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN56 under Leadership (with a link to Communication).

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