



Lay Preacher's Handbook



Commission for
**EDUCATION &
DISCIPLESHIP**

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Lay Preacher's Handbook

This booklet has been put together as a simple guide to help the lay preachers in the Anglican Diocese of Armidale in the extraordinary task God has given them.

We want lay preachers to grow in their ministry, to be supported and mentored. Ideally this booklet will be used by the lay preacher as he meets up with his mentor.

The lay preacher has an extraordinary task because of the God behind all faithful preaching. God's purpose in creating all things was to give to his Son, Jesus, a people who would be holy and blameless in his sight, who would be loved by him, become his dearly loved Children and enjoy relationship with him and others in a marvellous new creation. This purpose stretches back into eternity before the creation of the world and finds its fulfilment when God will put all things right under the Lordship of his risen Son.

God achieves this extraordinary purpose as people hear and respond to the powerful gospel of the Lord Jesus as it is applied to their lives through the working of his Holy Spirit.

- [Read section below with your mentor:](#)

Why preach?

God's creation purposes begun with him speaking and calling into existence things that were not. God's new creation purposes are fulfilled as he speaks his word into the lives of men, women and children whom he calls into the kingdom of his Son.

Paul said,

“What we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has

shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

2 Corinthians 4.5-6

As Jesus is proclaimed as Lord and as God applies the message of the gospel to those who hear, he does a new creation work in people's hearts. People are transferred out of the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of his Son whom he loves. This very gospel which transfers people into Jesus' kingdom is also the same gospel which has power to transform people's lives.

Again Paul says,

*“Of those you have heard before in the word of truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing - **as it also does among you...**”* Colossians 1.5-6

The gospel produces fruit. It has the power, not only to save, but also to work in the lives of believers. This is why Paul gives thanks to God for how the gospel is working in the lives of the Thessalonian Christians,

*“We also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God (The gospel), you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, **which is at work in you believers.**”* Thessalonians 2.13

In the same way we see that this powerful gospel produces faith in God and love for other Christians,

*“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, for we have heard of **your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints...**”* Colossians 1.3-4

What extraordinary things God does through the gospel of his Son! The gospel has the power to transfer people into God's eternal kingdom and it has the power to transform their lives to become more like Jesus, producing trust in God and love for other people.

Speaking God's message to his world, whether that be in conversation, in a teaching environment, in a book, in a sermon, is the means God uses to achieve his eternal purposes for his Son, to his glory.

There is no greater purpose to have the privilege to be involved in.

Discuss with your mentor

- What strikes you from the passages you read above?
- How does knowing God's purposes help when you get up to preach?
- What encouragement do you draw from this short review? What challenges flow out of this?

- [Read section below with your mentor:](#)

The preacher's task

Speaking God's message to men, women and children he has created can take many and various forms.

- It can be spoken to crowds, to smaller groups or to individuals
- It can happen in a monologue or in a conversation
- It can take the form of teaching, training or counselling
- It have happen through a letter, a book, an email, a testimony and more

The various forms in which God's message came to people can be seen in Jesus' ministry and is seen also in the ministry of Paul. Where does preaching come in? Well it depends what you mean by preaching!

For our purposes, we define 'Preaching' in our modern setting as

'a public monologue explaining the meaning of God's word and applying it to the hearts and minds of people assembled'

It is important to note that this is one form of the ministry of the word amongst other ministries of the word. Preaching cannot carry the burden of all ministries of the word in church life but it is an important and vital part of it.

In the rest of this handbook our focus will be on preaching as we define it above.

So what is the preacher's task in this ministry?

The preacher's primary task is to be true to what God has to say in his word - the scriptures fulfilled in his son Jesus - explaining it clearly and applying it wisely, both to himself/herself and to those who listen.

True to what God says

Preachers don't bring their own message to others, they bring God's message to people. As a result, the primary task of the preacher is to be faithful to what God says in his word. We must not preach our ideas, thoughts and feelings. We must preach what God communicates to us in his scriptures fulfilled in his son. All preachers must be judged first and foremost on this criteria.

Explaining it clearly

Preachers also need to explain God's word clearly. God's word is not unclear, it is clear, yet to understand it properly we need to grasp things like: the purpose of the author who is writing; the context; the meaning of certain words; the structure of the passage; where the passage fits into the plan of salvation and more. God has gifted certain people to teach and preach his word in a way that others can grasp.

Preachers should strive therefore, with the help of God's Spirit, to understand the main message of any given passage, psalm or book and explain it in plain everyday language that people can understand.

Applying it wisely

The preacher's task isn't complete simply by being true to God's message and explaining it clearly. God's word to us should always produce a response from us. His word is always relevant to our lives and as a result it must be applied wisely.

The fundamental response we should have to hearing God's word is repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus.

When we hear God speak we should trust him and what he says to us (faith) and as result we should live the way he has made us to live, turning away from sin and treating him as Lord (repentance). The application of God's word to us will always involve these two aspects. The Christian life *begins* by trusting in Jesus as our saviour and living with him as our Lord, and the Christian life *continues* with this basic response.

Therefore the wise preacher will ask, “How is God’s word encouraging me to trust him in my life?”. He/she will also ask, “How is God’s word encouraging me to change my thinking or life to be in line with his good purposes.”

The preacher having heard and understood God’s word ought to apply God’s word to his own life first before he applies it to others. As he seeks to apply God’s word to others a wise preacher will seek to know something of the lives of his hearers so that the application of God’s word will be most helpful and pertinent.

Discuss with your mentor

- What stands out for you from what you read above?
- How does this correspond with your view on preaching?

- [Read the two sections below with your mentor:](#)

The preacher's resources

The preacher has 3 main resources to draw upon to help him in the task of preaching.

1) Prayer

The most important resource in preaching is the Lord himself. We are dependant on him for everything and, as a result, preachers are dependant on the Lord in order to be faithful and effective in their preaching. Preachers should talk to the Lord throughout the whole process of preparation, asking him for help so that he may be glorified through the preacher's work.

2) Power of the word

Since preachers are bringing God’s message to others from his active and living word - the scriptures - the preacher will spend much time in carefully

seeking to understand God's word. He will read, mediate on and pray through the passage(s) he will be preaching. He will seek to immerse himself in listening to his Lord and will ask the Lord to help him grapple with its meaning and application. He will remind himself that God's word is powerful, effective and all that is needed for his disciples to lead a godly life pleasing to him.

3) People

Finally, since the Lord has given 'apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to equip his people for works of service' (Ephesians 4.11-12) preachers can seek the help of other people who can assist him in his task.

This help may come in the form of a trusted, more experienced preacher who may be a mentor. It may come from good Bible dictionaries, it may come from good commentaries or books.

The preacher's authority ultimately comes from God and his word and so a preacher, although he may use the resources of other people, will carefully weigh their teaching and advice against the standard of the scriptures.

As a result the preacher will turn to prayer, seeking to understand the scriptures himself *before* he turns to the help of others.

Finding a mentor and why

The Lord has given us the resources we need for the important ministry of preaching God's word. One of those resources is other people who are gifted in handling God's word correctly. There is much one can learn from a book or an online seminar, however nothing quite replaces the value of an ongoing one-to-one mentoring relationship. Paul exemplified this as he encouraged Timothy in his ministry, and we want to promote this form of ministry for lay preachers in the diocese.

A mentoring relationship will help a preacher to stop making mistakes and help him to keep making progress. Good, wise, constructive feedback is invaluable for continued improvement as a preacher.

1) The role of the mentor

A preaching mentor will meet regularly with the lay preacher and pray with him. He will walk with the lay preacher through the preparation process. He will help him in grappling with a passage in view of delivering a faithful God-honouring message in an appropriate context. The mentor will observe the lay preacher deliver the message and then will meet up again to debrief the whole experience and give feedback.

This type of mentoring relationship will continue over at least a year and preferably over two years. We believe a good achievable rhythm, for both a busy pastor and lay preacher is to have the lay preacher preach at least once a term. Over a two year period the lay preacher will have been guided in the preparation and delivery of at least 8 sermons. He/she will have accrued good and valuable experience.

As a rough guide this demands about 8 hours work for the pastor each term and around 20-30 hours work per term for the lay preacher.

This type of mentoring relationship could help the lay preacher to grow in his Christian faith, help him to serve well, and it will also be encouraging to the pastor who meets up regularly with a Christian brother, sharing in the ups and downs of Christian ministry.

2) The attitude of the lay preacher

The most important attitude the lay preacher needs, apart from wanting to please God first, is a willingness to learn. This requires humility. A lay preacher will need to accept feedback and be disciplined to follow the guidelines of his mentor in order to grow in this ministry.

As a result we believe it is important that the lay preacher discuss with his mentor the big idea before writing the first draft (usually a meeting 2 weeks in advance, about an hour long). Then the lay preacher will submit a first draft to the pastor at least one week prior to preaching, for detailed critique and review in view of producing a second and, perhaps, third draft. It is the briefing/debriefing feedback cycle which will allow the lay preacher to grow and be reflective in his ministry. Humility comes with the readiness to accept feedback, and humility is an essential quality any preacher must pray for. Anyone who aspires to be a lay preacher but who is not prepared to work hard, follow a certain discipline, and accept feedback, is not yet ready for this type of ministry.

- Read the section below with your mentor:

Putting a message together

Adopt the following timetable with your mentor:

Week 1

Meet with your mentor, pray, read over the passage and discuss it together (1 hour 30 minutes). During the week keep working on the passage following the guide below (3–6 hours work)

Week 2

Meet with your mentor after coming up with your ‘Big Idea’. Pray together, read the passage again and present your ‘Big Idea’ to your mentor. Discuss this ‘Big Idea’, honing and refining it to be as simple and faithful to the passage as possible (1 hour). After meeting with the mentor start writing your message following the guide below (3-6 hours work).

Week 3

Send your first draft to your mentor at least one day before meeting with him. Your mentor will print the draft, read it, and write notes on it. Meet with your mentor and go over your first draft, discussing issues and being prepared to take on board changes. After meeting with the mentor write your 2nd draft (2 hours work).

Week 4

Send your 2nd draft to your mentor for final comment. Adopt any further changes. Practice your sermon out loud 6 times, adjusting things along the way as you hear them (2 hours work). Deliver your message where you have planned.

In the following pages we develop this simple working process both for pastor and lay preacher to work through. What is proposed is not a magic bullet formula for every type of sermon, but a good basic guide which will serve the lay preacher well as he/she begins and seeks to develop in this ministry. Like in any discipline, certain foundational skills have to be acquired first before developing in other areas.

But first, discuss the section below with your mentor.

Discuss with your mentor

- Work out a mentoring plan with your mentor. Consider the following:
 - How often you will meet over a year or two
 - Work out what you will preach and where
 - If you are beginning, start by doing 2 sermons in a Gospel, then 2 in a New Testament letter, then have a go at preaching in different Old Testament genres, and finally move to preaching in Apocalyptic literature towards the end of 2 years. In other words, work from more familiar texts to less familiar.

Week 1: **Getting a feel for the lie of the land**

1. Pray

- Ask the Lord to guide your heart and mind and to help you to understand what he is saying and to apply it to your own life.

2. Read the passage in its context

- Read the whole book and/or the immediate chapters around it. Note things you discover.

3. Start grappling with the following questions

A. What type of writing is it?

B. Who wrote the book and any ideas you may have about why it was written?

C. Reread the passage using the 'question bombardment' method. Ask all the questions you can think of! Jot down your discoveries and questions along the way. Who, what, where, why, how, when...etc

What does it teach me about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, myself, people, life etc?

What stands out? What words are repeated? Who are the characters in the story? How do they relate, interact? Is there a problem being addressed? An issue being discussed?

Are there logical markers that explain the flow of the argument - therefore, since, but etc.? What do I learn about the writer, the recipients?

When and where does this take place? What ideas are hard to grasp? Are there concepts that come from the Old Testament? What is the author's purpose in writing?

Are there exhortations to put into practice? Are there warnings to heed?

Are there encouragements to take on board? What are the main themes?

4. Write out your initial impressions of what the main theme/s might be

5. Pray and keep meditating on the passage during the week. Use the passage to inform your prayers.

Week 2: What is the main message?

1. Pray

- Thank the Lord for what you have learnt so far. Ask the Lord to guide your heart and mind and to help you to understand what he is saying and to apply it to your own life.

2. Reread the passage. Is there a structure to the passage? Try to work out its logic or main sections.

3. Go over your notes. Try to find answers to outstanding questions. Use this method in the following order:

A. Are there allusions to an Old Testament story or passage? If so read those passages in their context and note any relevant points.

B. Use a concordance (Strong's if possible) to search for difficult or unusual words in the same biblical book/author.

C. Use a good Bible dictionary for background information.

D. Lastly refer to a good commentary.

4. Pray that the Lord would help you to come up with the

“main message/big idea of the passage.”

The big idea is really a summary of the main message of a passage. It is expressed in a simple sentence which expresses the main idea.

Establishing this simple sentence is critical to putting your sermon together.

This can be challenging and may require 5-10 attempts. Don't be surprised if it takes you an hour!

Write out one idea and keep refining it until you are satisfied you have come as close as you can to being faithful to the passage's message.

Write out the main idea and keep refining it

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A few examples of 'big ideas'.

- “Christian leaders are to be above reproach because they lead God’s people to uphold the truth.”
- “Jesus is a servant king using his power for the sake of others and he calls us to follow him in using our power to serve others.”
- “God’s mercy triumph’s over his judgement and this is seen most clearly at the cross.”

5. Note down some application points

A. What does it teach you about God, Jesus and yourself?

B. How does it encourage you to trust God/Jesus (faith)? What does it encouraged you to change (repentance)?

C. How might this apply to those I’m preaching to?

D. How does it apply to the Christian? How does it apply to the non-Christian?

E. Seek to be both general and specific in your application. (General - how it applies in the world, specific - how it applies to a person or church).

Week 3: Writing the first draft

1. Pray

- Thank the Lord for the work he has helped you to do so far. Ask the Lord to guide your heart and mind as you begin to write the message

2. Take your big idea/main message and use that to give structure to your sermon.

An example

The big idea: “God’s mercy triumphs over his judgement and this is seen most clearly at the cross.”

Contains 3 main ideas. 1) God’s judgement 2) His mercy which triumphs 3) How this is seen at the cross. The sermon then has 3 points

Introduction

- 1) God’s judgement**
- 2) God’s mercy that triumphs**
- 3) How that is seen at the cross**

Conclusion

A good method is the following (*This is not the only way, but it often produces good results and is helpful for preachers who are starting out.*):

- *Start by writing point 1)*
 - State the point
 - Show where you got it from the Bible
 - Explain the point (eg. What is God’s judgement? Why does it come? etc.)
 - Illustrate the point
 - Apply it to your life and the lives of others
- *Follow by writing point 2)*
 - State the point
 - Show where you got it from the Bible
 - Explain the point (eg. What is mercy? Why is it important that mercy triumphs over judgement? etc.)
 - Illustrate the point
 - Apply it to your life and the lives of others

- *Follow by writing point 3)*

- State the point
 - Show where you got it from the Bible
 - Explain the point (eg. How does the cross show how mercy triumphs over judgement? Why is this important for God, for us? etc.)
 - Illustrate the point
 - Apply it to your life and the lives of others
- Then write your conclusion, which is just restating in summary form the main idea again in different words.
 - Finally write the introduction.

The introduction should aim to get people's attention and tell them why it is important to listen to the message. The introduction should be related to the main idea.

An example: you might talk about something triumphing over another thing and then explain how you are going to consider how that also happens in regards to God and why that it is important for us.

A few tips as you write

- Ask: Can I say the same thing but with less words? Shorter sentences in preaching are better. Avoid long sentences.
- Ask: Is there Christian jargon that needs to be avoided or explained?
- In explaining the context be as short as possible. (The less familiar the book in the Bible the more work you may have to do, but be aware: new preachers tend to spend too much time in explaining the context.)
- Avoid the passive voice, the active voice is a lot more engaging. Check out <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cOhUmttk90> or other youtube clips on the passive/active voice.
- Use a thesaurus to give variety to the words you use. Be as precise in your choice of words as possible.
- As you write, say it out loud, speak to your computer screen or sheet of paper. Hearing the sentence will help you to produce a more oral style rather than adopting a more literary style.
- True illustrations about people are the most engaging. Illustrations that are personal and first hand are even better. If you use yourself as an illustration, make sure it doesn't make you look like a fantastic Christian or some sort of hero etc. Avoid the humble brag, this turns people off listening. Also avoid illustrations that put people down. Make sure the illustration reinforces the point you are making.
- In application keep in mind both the non-Christian and the Christian
- Bear in mind the sceptical listener, the person who says 'so what!' In other words you need to show how the message is relevant to everyone. Or consider the person who says 'yeah, but!'. In other words, the person who might stumble over an obstacle in the passage. You may need to address that potential obstacle along the way.

- Illustrations from movies generally don't work well unless you know everyone has seen the movie.
- Save your best illustration for the end.
- Aim for your sermon to peak in intensity and relevance towards the end, like climbing a mountain and reaching the top. If your second point is the mountain top in your sermon, consider reordering the structure.
- Those are a few tips, your mentor will hopefully give you further ideas.

3. Having written the first draft, give it to a trusted/mentor preacher for feedback.

4. Pray that the message would work in your life and that the feedback would be helpful and bring honour to the Lord.

Week 4: **Write the second/third draft and deliver the message**

1. Pray

- Thank the Lord for the work he has helped you to do so far and the feedback you have received. Ask the Lord to guide your heart and mind as you finish writing the message.

2. Write the 2nd draft

- Humbly take on board the feedback and rework your message. Don't be too precious to chop out a section which you have worked hard on but which doesn't help your main idea.
- If you have been given a time frame for the length of the sermon, seek to see if it fits and adjust accordingly.

3. If you have the chance, show the 2nd draft to your trusted preacher for final tweaking

4. Write your 3rd and final draft

3. Practice the message out loud 4-6 times

- Ask the Lord to help you make final adjustments as you practice it out loud.
- Practicing the sermon out loud 4-6 times can be tedious but it can produce good fruit. Less experienced preachers should aim to practice out loud 6 times. Hearing yourself giving it out loud a few times will help you to see if it flows well. It might identify for you things to add or change and it will also help you to deliver it without always looking at your notes. This is a good way to be more engaging and to serve those who come to hear.
- If you get a chance. Preach it to your mentor/trusted preacher. He can give you feedback on body language, voice projection, eye contact, etc.

- Read the section below with your mentor:

Developing as a preacher

Preachers, like all Christians, can grow in three main areas.

1. Convictions

All Christians can grow in understanding who God is and what he has done. God wants us to grow in our understanding of the teaching of the Bible and grow in our conviction of the truth.

One of the vital areas for growth for Christian preachers is to have a solid foundation in Christian doctrine. Grasping the key fundamental truths relating to God's character and his work in the world is vital in preaching faithfully. Any lay preacher will benefit from doing study in Christian doctrine.

Added to this is an understanding of how the Bible fits together and how God's plan of revelation unfolds over time - what is sometimes technically referred to as 'Biblical Theology'. This is very valuable when preaching from the Old Testament. We need to know how the Old Testament is fulfilled in Jesus and how it points to him.

For doctrine

- A good place to start are the 'Blue Print' studies sold by St Matthias Media.
- After that do the Preliminary Theological Course 'Doctrine 1' by Moore College.

For Biblical Theology

- Start by reading 'God's Big Picture' by Vaughan Roberts
- After this read, 'Gospel and Kingdom' by Graham Goldsworthy
- After that do the PTC course 'An introduction to the Bible'.

2. Character

Character is king in Christian ministry. A person who has all the gifts in the world but who does not watch over their life of godliness does not bring honour to the Lord.

Christian preachers therefore should watch over not only their doctrine but also their lives, seeking to give an example in speech and conduct to those they serve.

It is not perfection that is required of preachers, but progress. Paul exhorted Timothy to guard his life and doctrine, but he expected Timothy to make progress in these things. Progress is the key when it comes to character.

Lay preachers ought to watch over their lives, that is why they must seek to apply the Lord's word to their own lives first before they preach to others. This is what makes preaching distinct from other forms of public speaking. The preacher is not simply conveying information detached from his own life. Preaching is profoundly personal and this is where the battleground rages most keenly for all preachers. The preacher's own sin, the temptations he faces from the world, and the attacks of the evil one, are all very real and come into play when the preacher seeks to serve his Lord in this way. The preacher must reckon with this reality and realise it is a spiritual combat he is involved in. It is the Lord who helps him in this struggle as he brings all things to God in prayer.

3. Competence

Character flows from convictions. One of the convictions that all Christians should have is that God's plan for our lives is to grow in Christlikeness. As a result it is part of a disciple's DNA to serve. Jesus served us and we are to serve others. This means that the preacher will work on his competence and skill in order to serve well. The aim in growing in his skill is to bring glory to his Lord and to help those to benefit from his ministry.

One of the reasons we are proposing a mentoring program is to help lay preachers grow in this area. The mentor/mentoree relationship is invaluable for making progress. Books, lectures and seminars can't replace the hands on experience that comes with having a go yourself and getting helpful feedback.

That being said there are many good resources that can help the preacher hone his ministry. Listed below are some we recommend:

Books

- 'Setting hearts on fire', John Chapman, Matthias Media.

(Although this is a book for evangelistic preaching, it is one of the best introductions to preaching, its importance and how to go about it. It is a great place to start, with lots of practical help.)

- 'The archer and the arrow', Phillip D. Jensen, Matthias Media.

(This would be a good second book to read. It is helpful in giving a method to use, stemming from the Gospel of the Lord Jesus. It also has good tips for fledgling preachers.)

- 'Saving Eutychus', Gary Millar and Phil Campbell, Matthias Media.

(Another great resource from Mathias Media. Its focus is in how to be both faithful and engaging in our preaching. It would also be a good second book to read with lots of practical tips.)

- 'Speaking God's Words', a practical theology of preaching, IVP.

(This wholesome book reflects on the Biblical foundations for preaching. It helpfully shows us that the sermon is one ministry of the word amongst others, and it is a good third book to read for the preacher who has had a little more experience.)

- 'Expository Preaching', Haddon W. Robinson, IVP.

(This book shows us the importance of letting the Bible set the agenda in our preaching and is very helpful in helping us come up with the 'Big Idea' or the main message of a passage. This would also be a good 3rd book to read)

- 'The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text', Sidney Greidanus, Eerdmans.

(This book would be a good 4th book to read for the preacher who has a few years experience and who has already done the Doctrine and Biblical Theology studies recommended above, and who has already read a few of the books above. It may be challenging in parts for someone who isn't doing theological study, but it goes into more depth in regards to how we are to understand and apply the Scriptures to our lives.)

Internet resources

- Listening to good preachers is valuable

(However we don't recommend you listen to someone on a passage you are going to preach, as it will lead you to want to say what that preacher says rather than what you have worked on yourself.)

- The Centre for Biblical Preaching, <https://www.cbp.org.au>

(This site offers videos to watch and also, like us, recommends getting into a mentoring relationship for preaching. Worth a visit.)

Discuss with your mentor

- What achievable next steps would be good for you in developing your preaching ministry?