



10 Mistakes Made in Moving from Study to Presentation

Sermon Préparation

Baptist Ministers of Houston and Vicinity

President: Max A. Miller Chairman of the J.J. Roberson Institute: Reverend J.R. Parker

Presenter: Reverend Yuri Solomon

Introduction

Preaching John 3:16 should be the easiest assignment in the world — after all, it's the verse everyone already knows, right? "For God so loved the world" practically preaches itself... until you realize half your sermon sounds like a Valentine's Day card from Walgreens and the other half like a seminary lecture. Too many preachers have treated this verse like a family heirloom locked in Big Mama's China cabinet — polished, admired, but never touched. Others have gone the opposite route — turned it into a Sunday morning pep talk about "believing in yourself," like Jesus went to Calvary to help you start your side hustle. Somewhere between over-explaining and under-feeling, between dissecting the text and detaching from its theology, the pulpit lost its pulse. Sermons that should burn with divine love too often cool into polite monologues or explode into entertainment. We've built outlines that overshadow Scripture, illustrations that outshine the gospel, and conclusions that end before anyone meets Christ. It's no wonder some sermons finish with applause — when they should end with repentance. The problem isn't the text; it's the preacher who treats revelation like information instead of invitation. As Haddon Robinson said, "*The purpose of preaching is not to fill minds with facts but to set hearts on fire with Christ.*" Because a sermon without Christ at its center is like a lamp with no plug — beautifully designed, but powerless to give off any light.

Here's are 10 points on the difference between "Study for Sermon Preparation" and "Preparation for Sermon Presentation." Each section builds from the inner work of the preacher to the outer delivery before the people.

I. THE HERMENEUTICAL SIDE (EXEGESIS)

1. Treating Exegesis as the Sermon

MISTAKE: Mistaking *study notes* for *sermon notes*.

CORRECTION: The hermeneutical outline is a map of discovery; the homily is the journey of delivery. Translate insights into a narrative that feeds souls, not just proves points.

Example from John 3:16 – Treating Exegesis as the Sermon

MISTAKE:

The preacher spends twenty minutes explaining Greek terms like *agapē* and *kosmos*, walking through syntax and verb tense, but never moves beyond explanation. The sermon becomes a Bible study lecture that proves the preacher's scholarship but leaves the congregation hungry.

CORRECTION:

The hermeneutical outline is a map of discovery—it shows what the preacher found in study. The homily is the journey of delivery—it brings people into that truth with warmth and life. So instead of saying, "*The word 'world' in Greek is 'kosmos,' meaning the ordered system of creation,*" the preacher might say:

"When John says, 'God so loved the world,' he's telling us that God's love reached into a broken system that had shut Him out—and He loved it anyway."

Here, the insight is translated into narrative and nourishment, not just linguistic proof.

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2. Failing to Identify the Dominant Theme (Big Idea)

MISTAKE: Leaving the study with multiple truths but no unifying message.

CORRECTION: Every sermon should have one controlling idea — everything else should serve it (Haddon Robinson).

Example from John 3:16 – Failing to Identify the Dominant Theme (Big Idea)

MISTAKE:

The preacher teaches John 3:16 as a list of truths — God’s love is great, salvation is free, faith is necessary, and judgment is real. While each statement is true, the sermon feels scattered, with no clear center pulling it together. The people leave informed, but not transformed, because there was no single focus to remember.

CORRECTION:

As Haddon Robinson teaches, every sermon must have one controlling idea that everything else serves. In John 3:16, the big idea could be: “*God’s love initiates salvation through the gift of His Son.*” Now each point supports that theme —

- Love expressed: “For God so loved the world...”
- Love given: “...that He gave His only begotten Son...”
- Love received: “...that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

The sermon now moves with unity — every truth flows from and reinforces one central message: God’s saving love revealed in Christ.

3. Preaching the Outline Instead of the Text

MISTAKE: Exalting the structure above the Scripture.

CORRECTION: Structure should serve Scripture, not overshadow it. Keep the biblical text central to every point.

Example from John 3:16 – Preaching the Outline Instead of the Text

MISTAKE:

The preacher builds a catchy outline—*The Passion of God, The Presentation of the Son, The Possibility of Salvation*—and spends the sermon explaining his clever headings rather than the verse itself. The congregation remembers the outline’s rhythm but not the richness of the text. The structure becomes the star, and the Scripture takes a back seat.

CORRECTION:

The structure should serve the Scripture, not overshadow it. Let each point grow organically from the text:

- “*For God so loved the world*” — reveal the depth of divine love.
- “*That He gave His only begotten Son*” — explain the costly gift of grace.
- “*That whosoever believeth in Him...*” — invite faith and response.

Now the outline is invisible but effective — it organizes truth without eclipsing the text, keeping God’s Word, not human wording, at the center of the message.

4. Losing the Theology in the Transition

MISTAKE: Moving from hermeneutics to storytelling without keeping the doctrine alive.

CORRECTION: Every true homily must still carry the theological weight of the text; explanation must never be replaced by entertainment.

Example from John 3:16 – Losing the Theology in the Transition



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MISTAKE:

After studying John 3:16 deeply, the preacher begins the sermon with humor and stories about love — parental love, romantic love, friendship — but never ties them back to the divine love the verse reveals. The message becomes sentimental and inspiring, yet the doctrine of God's redemptive love through substitutionary sacrifice is lost in transition from study to storytelling.

CORRECTION:

A faithful homily keeps the theology alive even in illustration. Instead of saying, "*Love makes us do crazy things*," the preacher might say:

"God's love was not reckless but redemptive — He gave His only Son, not because we were lovable, but to make us lovable through the cross."

The story now serves the theology, illustrating rather than replacing it. The sermon remains engaging, but the congregation walks away with more than emotion — they leave grounded in the doctrine: God's love is saving, not sentimental.

5. Over-Explaining Instead of Proclaiming

MISTAKE: Getting stuck in commentary mode, never crossing into conviction or calling.

CORRECTION: Hermeneutics informs the head; homiletics must inflame the heart. Move from *explanation* to *exhortation*.

Example from John 3:16 – Over-Explaining Instead of Proclaiming

MISTAKE:

The preacher spends the entire sermon unpacking grammar and background — explaining that "*so loved*" in Greek (*houtōs egapēsen*) indicates manner and degree, detailing that "*world*" means humanity, and parsing verb tenses. The people understand the verse academically but feel no urgency, no call, no gospel heat. It remains a lecture, not a proclamation.

CORRECTION:

Hermeneutics informs the head, but homiletics must inflame the heart. After explaining, the preacher should cross the bridge into proclamation:

"God didn't just love — He *so loved* that He gave His only Son for you! The cross is God's open invitation to believe and live!"

Now the truth moves from information to transformation, stirring conviction and calling for response. The sermon becomes not just an exposition of John 3:16, but a proclamation of divine love demanding faith.

II. THE HOMILETICAL SIDE (PRESENTATION)

6. Disconnecting from the Original Context

MISTAKE: Making the message so "modern" it no longer reflects the ancient intent.

CORRECTION: Application without accuracy is manipulation. Keep the "then" in view while showing its relevance to the "now."

Example from John 3:16 – Disconnecting from the Original Context

MISTAKE:

The preacher turns John 3:16 into a motivational message about *self-love* and *believing in yourself*, saying,

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“God loves you so much—so start loving yourself and chasing your dreams.” It sounds positive and modern, but it ignores the original conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus about spiritual rebirth and God’s redemptive plan through His Son. The ancient intent is lost under contemporary sentiment.

CORRECTION:

Application without accuracy is manipulation. Keep the “then” in view while showing its relevance to the “now.” The preacher should say:

“Jesus told Nicodemus that God’s love was not a license for self-confidence but a call to new birth through faith in the Son. That same truth still speaks today — God’s love offers life, not self-promotion.”

Now the message stays faithful to the original context while still connecting to the listener’s world. The sermon bridges time without breaking truth — honoring both the then and the now.

7. Failing to Humanize the Truth

MISTAKE: Delivering principles without personality or pathos.

CORRECTION: The truth must wear flesh — through illustration, story, and experience that embody the text.

Example from John 3:16 – Failing to Humanize the Truth

MISTAKE:

The preacher declares, “John 3:16 reveals God’s universal love, the necessity of faith, and the promise of eternal life,” but never connects it to a living heartbeat. The sermon is doctrinally sound yet emotionally dry — no story, no picture, no human touch. The truth is correct, but it feels cold and distant.

CORRECTION:

The truth must wear flesh — it must live through illustration and experience. The preacher might say:

“Imagine a father watching his only son suffer to save the very people who rejected him — that’s the picture of God’s love in John 3:16. He didn’t just say He loved; He proved it on a cross.”

Now doctrine breathes. The congregation doesn’t just hear the truth — they feel it. The message moves from abstract theology to embodied reality: the love of God seen, felt, and lived.

8. Ignoring Movement and Flow

MISTAKE: Stacking points mechanically instead of building momentum logically.

CORRECTION: A homily is a *living argument*. Each point should climb toward the conclusion; every step must feel necessary.

Example from John 3:16 – Ignoring Movement and Flow

MISTAKE:

The preacher presents John 3:16 in three disjointed points: *God loved... God gave... We believe*. Each truth stands alone, but there’s no sense of progression — no rising movement that draws the listener toward a climax. The sermon sounds like a list, not a living message. The people hear truth, but they never feel its pull.

CORRECTION:

A homily is a living argument, not a pile of facts. Each point should build toward the conclusion like steps up a staircase. The preacher might frame it this way:

1. Love initiated — “For God so loved the world...”
2. Love demonstrated — “That He gave His only begotten Son...”
3. Love received — “That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish...”



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Now the sermon flows with movement — from God's heart to His gift, from His gift to our response, from response to eternal life. Each step feels necessary, guiding the listener toward the climactic truth: God's love moves — and it moves us toward salvation.

9. Neglecting the Gospel Center

MISTAKE: Preaching moral lessons or motivation but missing the redemptive thread.

CORRECTION: Every biblical sermon must ultimately find its resting place in Christ, who is the center of all revelation.

Example from John 3:16 – Neglecting the Gospel Center

MISTAKE:

The preacher uses John 3:16 to encourage people to “love one another more” or to “believe in themselves because God believes in them.” The message sounds moral and motivational, but it never reaches the cross. It offers inspiration without redemption — a good word, but not the Good News.

CORRECTION:

Every biblical sermon must find its resting place in Christ, who is the center of all revelation. The preacher should proclaim:

“John 3:16 is not about human love but divine rescue. God's love was proven when He gave His Son to die for sinners — so that through faith in Christ, we might live.”

Now the sermon reclaims the redemptive thread. It doesn't end with what man must do but with what Christ has done. The moral becomes meaningful because it's anchored in the Gospel — Christ crucified, risen, and offered for the world God so loved.

10. Ending Without an Encounter

MISTAKE: Concluding with knowledge but no summons — information without invitation.

CORRECTION: A sermon isn't finished when the preacher stops speaking; it's finished when the hearer starts responding. End with encounter — repentance, faith, hope, or obedience.

Example from John 3:16 – Ending Without an Encounter

MISTAKE:

The preacher closes the message by summarizing the theology — “We've seen God's love, the giving of His Son, and the promise of eternal life” — and then simply says, “Let us pray.” The sermon ends with information, but no invitation. The congregation understands the verse but leaves untouched, with no call to believe, repent, or respond.

CORRECTION:

A sermon isn't finished when the preacher stops speaking; it's finished when the hearer starts responding. The preacher should close with encounter, saying:

“Friend, this love demands a response. God has given His Son — will you give Him your heart? Eternal life isn't just a doctrine to learn; it's a gift to receive. Believe today and live.”

Now the sermon moves from education to transformation — the Word not only informs the mind but invites the soul. The conclusion becomes a moment of divine meeting, where truth leads to faith, repentance, and new life in Christ.

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