

1. What is this text functionally?
  - a. That is, on the basis of its content and structure, what does it seem designed to do? Is there a name for that? Is it, for instance, a reminder, an explanation, a plea, a rebuke, a command, a description, or something else?
  - b. Notice that this is not the same thing as the genre of the text. That is a much more general category. This question forces you to look more closely at a smaller unit of text to see what purpose is built into it. There will be clues that help us answer this question. Statements in the imperative mood, for instance, point toward commands or exhortations. The presence of woes or other negative consequences suggests a warning; positive outcomes may signal a promise. Purpose and result clauses alert the reader to an argument, or to an explanation, or to some cause-and-effect relationship. A story may well be an example. Other features may lead us to conclude that the text is a description, a rebuke, or that an event is being reported. The text may be a functional combination, such as an exhortation followed by reasons for obeying it.
  - c. If we don't ask this question, we may be tempted to turn everything into an exhortation, when simple observation tells us that it is something else altogether.
2. What is the main thing this text is speaking about?
  - a. Answering this question requires weighing the various things the author mentions and discerning which of them is central. Sometimes in narrative, the subject itself is implicit. The story could be an example of loyalty or divine providence without the words themselves being used. Recalling the themes of the Bible book may alert us to their presence in the text at hand. Every passage is about God and about humanity, yet for preaching we must narrow down the answer.
  - b. A valid answer to this question could be a word, such as prayer, faith, hope, or judgment. It could be a phrase such as "God's dealings with the nations." There are usually several possible answers to this question. You have to decide which best captures the essence of the whole text. The value of this question is straightforward. If the passage is about prayer, our message from this text should be about prayer. We preach about what the text is speaking about.
3. What is this text saying about its subject?
  - a. If we have accurately discerned the subject of the text, everything else in it will relate to the subject in some discernible and supportive way. The answer to the previous question will be a word or phrase; the answer to this one will be a sentence. To answer this question, we read the text to let it say what it will about the subject. If parts of the passage do not say something about the subject, revisit the second question to see if another answer is better. Thesis summary sentence is what we will later refer to as the thrust of the passage.
4. What response does this text call for?
  - a. Accurate answers to the first three questions already incline us to certain answers to this question. So a text that is an exhortation concerning the indispensability of prayer fairly dictates the response a sermon from this text should seek: pray! Nevertheless, we want to let the text call for the response its

author has in mind, not the one we think of. Something in the text or context will indicate the sort of response the author is aiming for in writing the text.

- b. Conversely, many responses, though worthwhile in themselves, are not what the text you are studying is aiming to elicit. Validity in application begins with an accurate answer to this question. The response may well be a change in attitude, thinking, feeling, or will, as well as some specific action. The text may call for more than one response. The intended response may be implied, but be careful not to read implied exhortations into every passage. To ask and answer this question with integrity is to repent of the textual abuse of commandeering a text as a pretext for a response we want as opposed to the one(s) God intends.
5. How does this text elicit that response?
    - a. This question helps us expound the text as opposed to vaguely referring to it. Here we look more closely at the features of the text, now not for how they develop the subject (question 3) but for how they move the listener towards the response the author intended. When preached as God's word, the Bible goes to work in those who receive it as it is (1 Thess. 2:13). This question looks for ways this text transforms the life of the believer by renewing the mind (Rom. 12:1-2), and how it sanctifies him or her (John 17:17).
    - b. Does it appeal to the hearer's mind, emotions, will, conscience, sense of duty, love for God, sense of need, or love of the truth? Does it use questions, examples, reminders, word pictures, scripture citations, or argumentation? Is the means employed repetitive, hitting the same note again and again, or is it more cumulative, building a case for the desired response by a range of rhetorical techniques? Your message may use additional legitimate means of moving people to valid responses, but to neglect those within the passage itself is a mistake that robs the sermon of authority, implying that without our help the message won't come through powerfully enough.
  6. How does this text contribute to the larger drama of redemption?
    - a. The previous questions may lead the preacher to thoughts that are consistent with the text but are inadequate because they are out of touch with how this passage fits into the larger picture. Each preaching portion is an integral part of the biblical book in which it is found, but also contributes to the history of redemption, and in some discernible way points to Christ. Our task as Christian preachers is to discover the connections and articulate them. For example, when we preach Psalm 110 we do not speak only, or even mainly, about David, but about Jesus, who applies it to himself, as do Peter and the writer to Hebrews. We discover that the Father is expressing to the Son his unshakable commitment to the Son's lordship. Until we preach that, we haven't really done justice to Psalm 110. Of course, other Old Testament passages are not so clearly linked to Christ, but according to Luke 24:27 all of them serve this Christocentric purpose in one way or another.