**How to Prepare to Teach a Bible Study**

**By Joe McKeever**

Somewhere I read that G. Campbell Morgan, the great British pastor and expositor, would read through a book of the Bible at least 40 times before teaching it. Any less and he felt unprepared.

We pastors often set aside a few days on the church calendar for an intensive Bible study on a particular theme or book of Scriptures. Our denomination–the Southern Baptist Convention–has for many years promoted a “January Bible Study” or “Mid-winter Bible Study.” This time–January, 2019–it will be Revelation 2-3, “The Letters to the 7 Churches of Asia Minor.”

I’ll be teaching this for several days at a church near Birmingham, Alabama, and hopefully another place or two. But months in advance, I’ve been working on it, trying to learn all I can in order to feel competent to teach it. Never mind that I’ve taught through Revelation several times and preached sermons on these seven churches in the past. None of that means much at the moment. The challenge is not to dig out old notes and rehash ancient messages, but to listen anew for what the Holy Spirit is saying through His always-up-to-date Word. The Word does not change, but its application to our daily lives is as fresh as it’s possible to get.

Furthermore, I’ve changed. I’m not the same person as decades ago when I pastored churches. So, I open the Scriptures and tackle this delightful project with excitement about what the Father has in store.

It’ll be interesting to see how this Bible study develops.

Here are some parameters I’m setting for myself which I urge upon others who set about to teach a portion of God’s Word.

1. Pray.

From the beginning, prayer is the greatest necessity. “Lord, what do you want these people to know from Thy word?”

I pray for myself as I study. “Lord, you inspired this. You’ve heard every Bible study and sermon from it. Now, be my Teacher, please.”

2. Plan.

Plan what to cover and what not to cover. The challenge is not to give the people so much information as to overwhelm them, nor so little as to leave them unchallenged. For that, the Holy Spirit will have to guide. It’s so hard to know.

So, early on I decide on a plan: “I want to give background to Revelation and to each of the seven cities. But I will spend most of the time and energy on opening these seven letters in the text. The goal is not to make our people smart, but wiser in the ways of the Lord and to give more of themselves into His service.”

Consider this a caution, pastor/teacher. It’s possible to overwhelm your people with word studies, historical background, theological ramifications, history of the interpretation of this text, quotes from various writers and preachers, and your personal point of view. Unless you give advance thought to what you will bring in and what you should omit, you may find yourself spending too much time introducing a Scripture and preparing the audience but not leave yourself enough time to deal with the actual text.

That’s why there is no substitute for preparation.

3. Fill your mind with the text.

Beginners mistakenly think they should start by reading commentaries and other peoples’ writings on the text. This is backward. Long before opening a commentary, the would-be teacher should read the assigned Scripture again and again until it is fixed in his mind. Only when that Scripture lives in him and he has thought it well through should he open the writings of others to see what help they can give.

4. Think about the text.

Whether you call it studying, meditating, or just “thinking,” after reading the text enough to fix it in your mind and heart, it’s best to reflect on it as much as you can. Our guide on this comes from Deuteronomy 6 where God told His people they were to put the Word in their hearts, then to teach them to their sons and talk of them when they sit in the house, walk by the way, when they lie down, and when they rise up. All of that is to say, Let these Scriptures permeate your mind and heart and every facet of your life. Think and talk about them.

“In that Law (Word) doth he meditate day and night” (Psalm 1:2).

5. Your goal will determine your methods.

What do you wish to accomplish here? Your audience will often determine both the goal and the methods. Are you teaching seminary students working on masters degrees? Students in a Bible college? Laypeople in a classroom setting? Are you teaching high schoolers? Are you in the church auditorium addressing the entire congregation or a classroom of Sunday School teachers seated before tables?

Is this going to be a devotional study? If so, your emphasis will be on truths to live by, and you’ll want to have some good illustrations and examples. Tell some stories of people who got this right. Or is it going to be academic with you employing exegetical methodology in order to explain systematic theology?

6. Decide what study helps you will use.

You do not have time to read everything written on any Scripture or everything available on the internet. Unless you are experienced at this, the best way to choose study helps is to ask veteran ministers and teachers.

7. Ease up on yourself.

Decide in advance that you will never feel adequately prepared. So, set yourself free from the burden of perfectionism.

I suggest you not take too many study helps into the classroom/pulpit with you. Do not take study books planning to read large explanatory passages to your people. They want to hear you.

They want to hear what God has taught you. So, fill your mind and heart with the subject and go in the Spirit of God, and give it your best.

When the meeting is over, leave it with the Father. You did great in some things and perhaps poorly in others. But you did your best. If you plan to teach this again in another church or with another group, go quickly to your study and make notes on what you learned, where you were weak, and what you want to improve on.

Have fun. Smile. Love this. You are so privileged getting to do this. Make the most of it, friend.

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This article may not be written by an Apostolic author, but it contains many excellent principles and concepts that can be adapted to most churches. As the old saying goes, “Eat the meat. Throw away the bones.”