

# Preparing an Exhortation





# What is an Exhortation

An exhortation is a religious talk given in a Christian church. It can also be called a sermon. 'Exhortation' is from a Greek word "parakaleo" meaning 'to call near' or 'to comfort'. It is a message of comfort to the listeners and a calling near to think about God and His message.

Exhortations should not be based on personal experience but rather on solid "blow-by-blow" exposition of scripture, using doctrines to exhort. (2 Timothy 4:2, Titus 1:9)

*"This world does not need to hear what you think. What it needs is what God thinks. Go to a favourable place and get down on your knees, with your Bible stay there reading prayerfully until you know what God thinks. And the next time you stand up to preach, tell people what God thinks."*

*"If the proclamation of God's word doesn't come out of an intimate walk with Him, it will be empty words instead of the living word."*

## The Purpose of an Exhortation

- To encourage the Ecclesia to follow Christ (Hebrews 3:13)
- To encourage unity in the body of Christ (Acts 2:42-47)
- To help us focus our minds on the bread and wine hence remembering Jesus in His death and resurrection until He comes (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)



- To comfort those who are faint hearted, weak and in problems. (1 Thessalonians 5:12-15)
- It is a call to faith, love and good works. (Hebrews 10:23-24)
- To help us examine our relationship with God. (1 Corinthians 11:27-28).

Exhortations are intended to unite believers and not to divide them. Never use an exhortation as an opportunity to cause controversy and division. **Jesus is not divided.** (1 Corinthians 12:13, 10:17)

It is an honour to exhort the ecclesia. Your duty is to help them by your exhortation.

## Steps for Preparing an Exhortation



### Step 1: Seek God and His Word (prayer and daily reading)

- Pray and spend time alone with God reading the Bible prayerfully to determine what He would have you preach. (1 Cor 2:10-13, cf John 6:63)
- Allow God to reveal His written word to you by reading it.

### Step 2: Choose the Scripture Verse or Verses

- If you are preaching a textual or expository exhortation, you will begin with choosing the scripture verse or verses, and if you are preaching a topical exhortation, you will begin with the topic (subject).

- Study the passage of scripture and the related passages of scripture completely.
- Does it really say what you are telling the people it says? Remember, it is God's word we are preaching. We are not giving our thoughts since teachers will be judged more strictly. (James 3:1)
- When you are studying the passage of scripture, read 'between the lines' and imagine God is speaking to you.
- Ask yourself the following questions - you will use the answers to help you develop the main points.

What happened in this passage of scripture?

What important truth or lesson is God giving us?

What does this passage of scripture tell us to do?

Is God telling us about something bad we are doing?

Is He giving us advice on how to change?

Is He warning us of punishment?

Is He praising us for doing something good?

What does the passage tell the ecclesia to do?

What does the chapter reveal to us about God?

What does the passage tell us about Christ?

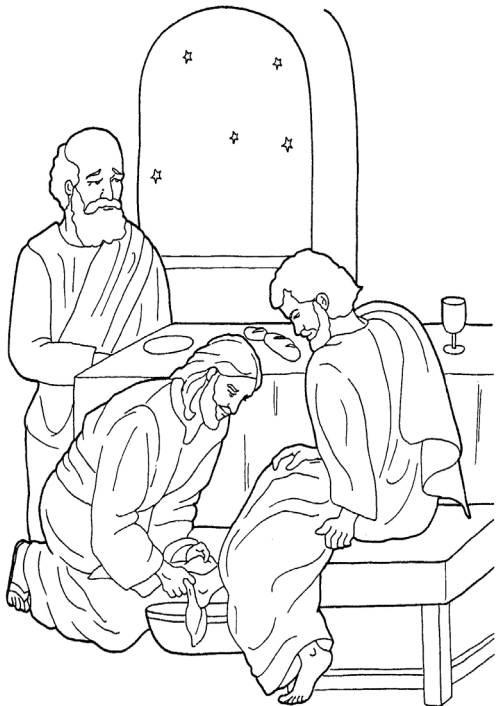
What is the main idea (dominant thought) of this passage of scripture?

(eg the main theme of Hebrews 11 is Faith, in 1 Corinthians 15 it is Resurrection. The main theme is repeated over and over in the Bible passage you are reading).

- Summarise the passage of the Bible you are studying in one sentence.

### Step 3: Choose a Subject

- You may find that taking one or more from passages from the day's readings is a good way to choose a subject. Many brothers exhort on the day's readings.
- If you are preaching a topical exhortation, many times you will begin with the subject and then discover the relevant Scripture verse or verses.
- However, if you are preaching a textual or expository exhortation, you will begin with choosing the Scripture verse or verses and then discover the subject.
- Your exhortation could be based on a character mentioned in the readings. You may look at how they pleased God by the things that they did or at the bad things they did and the relevant lessons that we learn from their conduct.
- Your exhortation may be based on a story from the Bible.
- Make people think about what they would have done if they were in the story. For example, how would you have washed Judas' feet if you had been Jesus? Would you have treated him in love like Jesus did, even after knowing that Judas Iscariot would betray him? Or would you have pressed hard into Judas' feet to make him feel pain because he was going to betray you?



- Your exhortation may be based on a topic. Study all the passages of scripture that relate to this topic or subject.
- You may choose topics like Repentance, Forgiveness, Anger, Love, Pride, Jealousy, Giving, Preaching, etc.
- Choose only a few verses from the Bible – about 4-10 verses or passages – many more than this may make people become tired.
- The subject is the main idea, topic or theme of the exhortation, and answers the question “What is the exhortation all about?”
- Use the answers to your study questions given in Step 2 to help you develop the main points.

#### **Step 4: Establish the Main Points**

- This is developing the passage of Scripture or the subject of the exhortation.
- If you are preaching a textual or expository exhortation, you will develop what you have learned from the passage of scripture. If you are preaching a topical exhortation, you will develop what you have learned about the subject.
- This is the part of your exhortation when you tell people what you have learned from your study of the passage of Scripture or the subject of the exhortation (What are the answers to the questions? What has God shown you to tell the ecclesia?).
- Each main point should contain only one idea.
- Main points will support the passage of scripture of the exhortation.

## EXAMPLE:



- What is repentance?
- Why is repentance important?
- What is the evidence of repentance?

## Step 5: Select the Title

- The title is what the preacher calls his exhortation.
- Its main purpose is to gain attention.
- Sometimes you will know what your title should be when you first start preparing your exhortation. However, many times your title is the last thing you choose.
- Do not allow the lack of a title to stop you from preparing the rest of the exhortation.

**EXAMPLE:** *"The need for Repentance"*

## Step 6: Write the Introduction

The introduction helps to attract the interest and attention of those listening. Start from the known to the unknown.

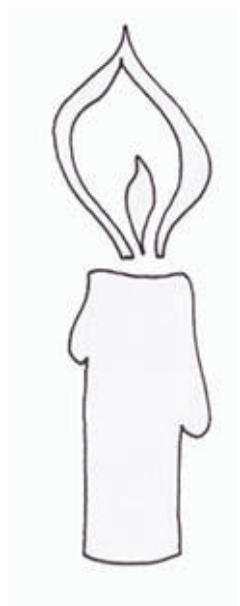
- It helps the audience understand why they should listen.
- It helps the audience understand where you are going in the exhortation.
- It should point to the main idea (subject) to be developed in the exhortation. It is a background to the topic, character or story you are talking about in the Bible.



- The majority of your preaching time should not be spent on the introduction. Save your time for the main points.
- Try to **start** your talk on the readings for the day as people can connect your exhortation with what they have been reading in the week and also you will have a good background to the chapters you are using.

## **Step 7: Choose Illustrations**

- An illustration can be a story, poem, song, quote or some type of visual aid. Illustrations could be everyday stories from everyday life and will help people understand Bible teaching better. You could use Bible stories and make your audience realise that people in the Bible are real and their teachings and experiences are really like ours.
- The illustration can be chosen at any point in the preparation of the exhortation but it should be relevant.
- The illustrations are used to make your introduction, main points and conclusions easier to understand and memorable.
- You do not need an illustration for every part of the exhortation.
- Any illustration should be appropriate and something your congregation can relate to. For instance if you were talking about Jesus as the Light of the World you could use a candle. If you were talking about the parable of the sheep and goats you could bring one along.
- Any illustration should not be dangerous to the members (eg bringing a live snake to the meeting).





### **Step 8: Write down and pray over your Exhortation**

- Write out your exhortation. It does not have to be word for word. However, you do need to at least write an outline.
- Once you have finished preparing and writing out your exhortation, spend time in prayer over it.
- Allow God's word to guide you in any changes or additions that need to be made.

### **Step 9: Presentation tips about your Exhortation**

- Your exhortation talk should take 20-40 minutes. After this some people may stop listening. However, remember the apostle Paul exhorted all night at Troas at the Breaking of Bread (Acts 20:7-9). We somehow do not like the idea of a brother 'going on and on' for an hour or two, yet evidently this was acceptable in the First Century (and even the 20th for that matter). If what is said is worthwhile and relevant, there is no harm in a long exhortation.
- Keep repeating your theme in many different ways as you advance in your talk for the congregation to follow easily.
- Make sure people understand you. Speak eloquently, slowly and lively. If you are bored, everyone will be bored too. Feel happy when expressing a happy state and sad if you are stressing a situation of sadness.
- Your references from the Bible should be well explained and let the Bible verses not be many. Keep your key words together and link them together in your message.

- Avoid quoting real life examples in the ecclesia as it may affect some members poorly.
- Avoid using abusive language.
- When speaking you should involve yourself in the exhortation by using the word "we" and not "you".

**EXAMPLE:** We have sinned **NOT you** have sinned.

- Please motivate your listeners. Read their faces to know whether they are tired. If they are tired then either become more interesting or summarise your talk and sit down.

## STEP 10: Conclusion

- Your exhortation should conclude with emphasis put on thinking about the breaking of bread and partaking of wine, thus the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- Make sure you summarise the main points of your talk. This is the encouragement the listeners will take home with them. It is important that the brothers and sisters are spiritually well-fed so they are strengthened to face the troubles and challenges of the coming week.

