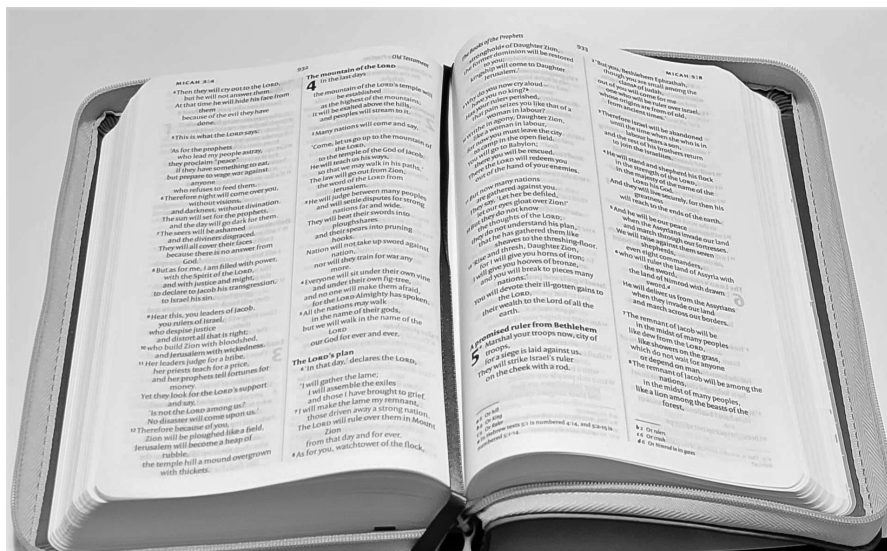


How to give a Bible Talk



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Introduction

Jesus gave many Bible talks during his ministry. He went around the towns and villages of Israel teaching the Good News of the Kingdom of God and telling people how they could live a life which pleased God. He often explained the Old Testament to his listeners so they could understand God's true message. He frequently used stories about situations they were familiar with to help them remember the lessons.

Jesus also sent his disciples out to do Bible talks and instructed them to carry on teaching the message. Later, we read of Peter, Stephen, Paul, and many others giving Bible talks, telling the people the message of God. Giving Bible talks is an important part of the work of being in Christ.

There are two types of talks. Firstly, there are talks aimed at the baptised brothers and sisters in the ecclesia. We do this so the brothers and sisters have God's word in them, "*Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom.*" (Colossians 3:16). We encourage each other by doing this; "*Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing*" (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Teaching, admonishing, encouraging, and building up each other is what ecclesias must do. In the ecclesia, this is usually done by someone giving a Bible talk.

Giving a Bible talk enables the ecclesia to grow in Christ. As it says, "*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*" (2 Peter 3:18). Everyone in the ecclesia needs to grow into Christ. They are helped in this by listening to Bible talks. Paul gave many talks about Jesus, "*He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ*" (Colossians 1:28). The word 'admonish' means to 'put in mind.' By speaking the words of God, we put His words into the minds of the hearers.

The second type of talk is teaching those outside the ecclesia the Good News of the Kingdom of God. God wants all people to hear the gospel message, but someone needs to be the message giver. As Romans 10:14 says, "*how can they hear without someone preaching to them?*"

Preaching gives other people the hope of the gospel and eternal life in God's Kingdom. Preaching literally saves lives.

If God's word is to be heard and understood, then people need to speak about it to others.

We can share God's message to people individually. We can also share God's good news to groups of people. This requires someone to prepare and give a Bible talk.

The purpose of this booklet is to help speakers give Bible talks to different groups of people, whether in the ecclesia itself or somewhere else.

The Importance of Speaking the Word of God

When God set up the Christian faith, He gave different gifts to help the ecclesias become established. Among the most important was the gift of prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:1). We are told what this gift was; *"the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort"* (1 Corinthians 14:3).

The gift of prophecy was the gift of speaking God's word, so that the brothers and sisters were strengthened, encouraged and comforted. While prophesying can include foretelling the future, it is more often used to pass on what God wishes people to know. Prophecy was the most important gift because *"the one who prophesies edifies the church"* (1 Corinthians 14:4).

God explained the types of gifts He gave the early ecclesias. In a list of these gifts, the importance of teaching is highlighted, *"And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues"* (1 Corinthians 12:28).

We have an order of apostles, prophets, teachers, and then others. This shows us the importance of communicating the God's message to others.

We do not have apostles or prophets today. But we do have those who teach the word of God. The role of humbly teaching God's word is the most important role within the ecclesia. This is highlighted when speaking about elders, *"The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching"* (1 Timothy 5:17).

The importance of speaking comes from the fact that the speaker presents the Word of God. It is the Word of God that is important and brings about the transformation of people.

We remember the words in Timothy where it says, *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work"* (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

When the speaker presents the Word of God in a Bible talk, he presents God's teaching, God's rebuking, God's correction, and the training in righteousness from God. It is not the speaker's own words. It is the words of God that do this.

The speakers in the New Testament presented the Word of God (eg Acts 4:31, 13:5, 16:32, 17:13, 18:11). Anyone who takes on the role of speaking takes on this role of speaking the words of God. As Peter said, *"If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God"* (1 Peter 4:11).

Those who speak must be careful that they present the Word of God in the way that God wants. To do this, they must make sure they understand the word first and then they must present it faithfully. This is what Paul advised Timothy, *"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth"* (2 Timothy 2:15).

Anyone who does not present the word of God in the right way is someone who changes and twists the Word of God. These people change the Word of God into something that is the word of man mixed with the Word of God. Those who do this are false teachers.

The apostle Paul makes it clear that he did not misuse the Word of God, *"we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God"* (2 Corinthians 4:2). God is watching to see whether speakers present His Word in the right way or not.

Paul tells us plainly, *"Do not go beyond what is written"* (1 Corinthians 4:6). We should not add our own ideas to what God has written. We have this same warning in Proverbs, *"Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar"* (Proverbs 30:5-6).

We should just speak the words of God. The Pharisees and teachers of the Law went beyond Scripture by adding to God's commands. They were condemned by Jesus. We should not be like them.

It is also essential that we do not leave out important parts of the Message of God. The Bible speaks about people who do this. For example, those who teach others to ignore the commands about holiness (2 Peter 2:3, Revelation 2:14).

We should not add our own ideas to what God has said, nor should we leave out teaching that God has given us (see Deuteronomy 12:32, Revelation 22:18). We need to clearly and simply teach God's message, as God wants it to be spoken.

The Speakers

The speakers in an ecclesia teach and practice the word of God. This is particularly done by elders. They are praised for this, *"The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching"* (1 Timothy 5:17).

We also read in Hebrews, *"Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith"* (Hebrews 13:7).

It is not just older brothers who are to give Bible talks. The apostle Paul taught young men like Timothy to give them, *"Command and teach these things. Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching"* (1 Timothy 4:11-13).

Even though he was a young man, Timothy made sure that he did read, preach, and teach the Word of God.

Paul gave the same advice to Titus, *"You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance"* (Titus 2:1-2).

As a young man he was still able to teach those older than him from Scripture. He was also able to teach older women (Titus 2:3) and young men (Titus 2:6). Like Timothy, he was not to be despised for doing this (Titus 2:15).

Just as Paul passed on the role of teaching to others like Timothy and Titus, Paul instructed Timothy to pass the role of teaching to others as well; *"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others"* (2 Timothy 2:2).

It is vital that the work of teaching God's message is passed on to others. If this does not happen, then the ecclesias will become weak and it will be hard for those seeking the gospel to find it.

Brothers who are capable of faithfully teaching God's word should use this ability and take on a teaching role. In Romans 12:6-8 we read, *"We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully."*

Although we do not have the Holy Spirit gifts today we do all have abilities which are given to us by God and we need to use them in His service.

However, not everyone should be a teacher as James tells us, *"Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly"* (James 3:1).

A teacher has a responsibility not only to teach the right teaching but also to live by that teaching. If he does not, then he will be judged more harshly by God. For example, a drunkard would not make a good teacher, because no one would take him seriously as he is clearly not living in keeping with Bible teaching.

Another reason for someone not to be a teacher is if they do not understand what they are teaching about. This is explained in the letter to the Hebrews, *"In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!"* (Hebrews 5:12).

So, clearly there were brothers who should have been ready to be teachers, but still needed to be taught key Bible teaching themselves.

Sisters should not give Bible talks in the ecclesia. We are given this teaching in 1 Corinthians 14:34, *"Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says"*.

This advice was given even though women were able to speak by the gift of the Holy Spirit. This gift was to be controlled and women were not to use this gift in the ecclesia.

The same advice is given to Timothy when speaking about how to run ecclesias, *"A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet"* (1 Timothy 2:11-12).

You do not need to be a great speaker to give a good Bible Talk!

Jesus sent his disciples to teach the message of God, yet none of them were trained speakers. Many disciples were people like fishermen, who were not educated and were not used to talking in front of people.

We are told, "*When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus*" (Acts 4:13).

God's speakers were not necessarily good speakers.

The apostle Paul said, "*I may indeed be untrained as a speaker*" (2 Corinthians 11:6). Concerning Paul, it was said, "*His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing*" (2 Corinthians 10:10).

The word for 'speaking amounts to nothing' means that his speaking was 'despised'. Paul was a timid speaker (2 Corinthians 10:1).

Another of God's great speakers was poor at speaking. This was Moses. Moses said, "*I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue*" (Exodus 4:10).

God does not choose only speakers who are good at speaking. He chooses faithful speakers. God wants brothers to speak His Word faithfully.

A brother does not need to be good at speaking. God works through weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9) and this weakness includes those who are weak at speaking.

Giving a Bible Talk in the Ecclesia

The purpose of giving a Bible talk within the ecclesia is given in 1 Corinthians 14:3, "*the one who prophesies speaks to the people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort.*"

Although today we do not have the Holy Spirit gift of prophesy, we do speak God's word from the Bible and the purpose is the same. We must strengthen, encourage, and comfort our brothers and sisters by our Bible talk.

We will look at each of these aspects in turn.

Strengthening (Building)

The Greek word here for 'strengthening' really means 'building'. Sometimes the translators use the word 'edifying'. We give Bible talks to build each other up.

Paul mentions the need to 'build' the ecclesia four times in 1 Corinthians 14 (v3, 5, 12, 26). In the latter verse he says, "*Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.*"

Building the ecclesia is general advice for everyone in the ecclesia.

As it says in Romans, "*Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification*" (Romans 14:19) and "*Each of us should please our neighbours for their good to build them up*" (Romans 15:2).

This is what the ecclesia does – it serves each other to build everyone up. This is what a Bible talk also does.

Ephesians puts the need to build up the ecclesia like this, "*Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work*" (Ephesians 4:15-16).

Those who work by doing a Bible talk must build the ecclesia up and help it grow. The ecclesia is God's building (1 Corinthians 3:9). We must not pull it down. Unfortunately, this is easily done with words.

Paul speaks about the need to be careful about what we say, "*If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain*" (1 Timothy 6:3-5).

If we do this, then we are destroying God's building and we will have to answer to God.

We must be careful to build only using what is in the Bible. Paul warns us, "*By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. **But each one***"

should build with care. *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved – even though only as one escaping through the flames”* (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

When we give a Bible talk, we must ensure that it builds up the listeners.

Encouraging (Exhortation)

The second reason we speak to the ecclesia is to encourage the brothers and sisters. The meaning of the Greek word is 'to appeal'. It is used like this in 2 Corinthians 8:4; *"they urgently pleaded with us"* and 1 Thessalonians 2:3, *"For our appeal"*. Some versions translate the word as 'exhortation'.

An exhortation is an appeal to the brothers and sisters. It is usually a positive thing to hear (Acts 15:31), and provides people with encouragement or comfort. The exhortation must also be endured (Hebrews 13:22). Therefore an exhortation is an appeal which is basically positive and must be carefully listened to.

We need to understand what the Bible means by 'exhortation'.

God gives us exhortation in the Bible. *"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement (or exhortation) they provide we might have hope. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement (or exhortation) give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Romans 15:4-6).

The Bible is essentially an encouraging and comforting message. We must faithfully pass on this encouragement and comfort in our Bible talks. Scripture also warns us to keep in the right way, and we must faithfully pass on this warning too.

An example of an exhortation is given in Acts 13. Paul was invited to speak in a synagogue with the words, *"Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement (or exhortation) for the people, please speak"* (Acts 13:15). The apostle Paul then gave an exhortation.

This exhortation was a reminder of events and people in the Bible along with relevant quotations from the Bible. It was basically an encouraging message about the forgiveness of sins through Jesus (v 38-39). It also warned them about having the right response (v 40-41). The message was faithful and was received positively. In fact, they invited Paul to speak again the next week (v42).

An exhortation is therefore a balance between positive speaking, but with some warning. Paul spoke about this balance to Titus, *"These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you"* (Titus 2:15). This balance had previously been mentioned for elders, *"He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it"* (Titus 1:9).

This balance comes from Scripture itself which provides teaching for building up and for correction (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The exhortation of Acts 13 is like the first public talk given by Peter in Acts 2. Peter also spoke about events and people and quoted from the Bible. His talk focused on the life and work of Jesus. It ended with an appeal and an encouragement for the listeners to repent of their sins.

Both the talks in Acts 2 and Acts 13 were to non-believers. However, the principle of exhortation is the same even when given to believers. It is about giving a positive faithful message from the Bible.

An example of an exhortation to believers is found in Hebrews, *"And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement (or exhortation) that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son""* (Hebrews 12:5-6).

Here we have a positive message that we are sons, and we are loved. But there is also the teaching that God will discipline us for our ultimate good (this continues until verse 11).

When we give a Bible talk, we must ensure that we primarily encourage our listeners. We must appeal to the listeners using the words of Scripture. We must balance this encouragement with any appropriate words of advice and warning. It is often very uncomfortable for people to hear the words of warning, but we must do it for the sake of helping them. Uncomfortable warnings must always be balanced with comfort.

Comfort

We should also ensure that our message provides comfort. The word 'exhortation' also includes the meaning of comfort and highlights the importance of Bible talks providing comfort.

Paul emphasises this, "*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God*" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). When we give a Bible talk, we must provide comfort to our listeners.

Summary of what a Bible talk should contain

A Bible talk should primarily be an appeal which builds up, encourages, and comforts the listeners. It does this by teaching about people and events in the Bible and using quotations from the Bible to support the teaching. It should have a positive and faithful message. It should include any appropriate words of advice and warning for those who want to live a faithful Christian life.

The Breaking of Bread Exhortation

The Breaking of Bread service is usually accompanied by a Bible talk. We have an example of this in the Acts of the Apostles, "*On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight*" (Acts 20:7).

We learn that as a general practice, the first believers, "*devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer*" (Acts 2:42).

We follow this practice today by combining all these activities in the Breaking of Bread service. This means there is a Bible talk which gives the Bible teaching at the Breaking of Bread service.

The Bible talk may concentrate on Jesus completely, but it must always include something about Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. This is often done by ending the talk with the link to Jesus. This allows the listeners to focus on the meaning of breaking bread and drinking wine.

The Bible teaching that accompanies the breaking of bread service is often called '**the** exhortation'. Although, as we have learnt, the word 'exhortation' can be applied to other Bible talks including speaking to non-believers about the gospel.

Usually, a single person gives the exhortation before the Breaking of Bread. However, this is not essential. Early Christians also had the practice of having two or three give talks, "*Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said*" (1 Corinthians 14:29).

Two or three speaking has the advantage of giving the audience a variety of styles and Bible messages, as well as looking at different parts of the Bible's message. It also makes it easier for a new person to start giving exhortations, since they are not the only one to be heard and the talk will be shorter. Each ecclesia should decide what works best for its members.

How to Prepare an Exhortation

Start with a prayer. Ask God to help you faithfully present His message to His people.

The key part is choosing the Bible passage or theme. Choose a subject that allows you to find words that build up, encourage, or find words of comfort. You may need to look at several passages in order to find one where you are able to do this.

Once you have found a suitable passage, read it several times, and think about the words and phrases in detail. Think about the context in the chapter or book and how this helps understand the passage.

Make a note of the things you think of. Some of these initial thoughts will lead to further insights and will be useful in the talk. Other thoughts may take you in the wrong direction and these may not be useful for the talk.

A key part of any talk is organising the thoughts so that the message will be based on what God is saying in the passage and so that the words will build up, encourage and provide comfort. Also think about any stories, quotes or visual aids which will help your points stick in your audience's memory.

There is no right or wrong way to prepare an exhortation. What follows is a suggested structure and then several ways to follow that structure.

A suggested structure is as follows:

1. Introduce theme
2. Main Bible verse(s) to illustrate the theme. General theme.
3. Point one and verse(s) to illustrate

4. Point two and verse(s) to illustrate
5. Point three and verse(s) to illustrate
6. Point four and verse(s) to illustrate
7. Point five and verse(s) to illustrate
8. Summary and conclusion (Main points to remember)

It will be rare for a theme to fit exactly into this structure. There are only 3 quotations from the Bible in Acts 2 although the whole exhortation is on the Bible. In Acts 13 there were only 4 quotations. We recommend you change the structure of the talk to fit the theme. If there are two or three speakers in a session, then the number of points can be reduced and the talk will be shorter.

In all cases, the speaker must ask themselves the question, "Have I faithfully presented God's message to God's people?" We must ensure that we have done this, so that God is pleased with what we have prepared.

There are many different ways in which an exhortation can be put together. Here we will look at just three ways:

- 1) Picking a theme and talking about it.
- 2) Picking a Bible passage and talking about it.
- 3) Speaking from the readings for the day.

There are many other ways of putting an exhortation together. You will learn what best works for you.

Example exhortation on the theme of 'Mercy'

Here is an example of an exhortation on the theme of mercy:

1. Explain what mercy is.
2. God is merciful (Luke 6:36). We must be like God.
3. God was merciful to Lot and his family (Genesis 19:16). Explain how.
4. God was merciful to David when he sinned (Psalm 51:1). Explain how.
5. We must be merciful to each other (Matthew 5:7). If not, we are like Pharisees (Matthew 23:23).
6. Jesus was merciful (Hebrews 2:17). Give examples.
7. Mercy triumphs (James 2:13). Rejoice in God's mercy!
8. Mercy is important for all believers. The breaking of bread service reminds us of God's mercy to us through Jesus.

Example exhortation on a Bible passage

An exhortation could be based on thinking about a passage of the Bible. This could be an event, a teaching or even a character. Here is an example from the blind beggar of Jericho in Luke 18:35-43.

1. Describe the event and what the outcome is.
2. It is a short passage, so the whole passage can be read.
3. The blind beggar knows his need. He needs healing. But even sighted people can be blind (John 9). There are two types of blindness. Explain. Which is worst spiritually?
4. The beggar knows that Jesus is the son of David. This means that he knows and believes in the promises to David (Luke 1:32). Explain this.
5. He shows his faith in front of all by shouting, despite what others think.
6. It is faith that saves (Ephesians 2:8) and heals the beggar. How do we show our faith? Do we see things spiritually? We must not be blind. Read 2 Peter 1:5-9.
7. Jesus came to save all people, even blind beggars. He cares for all (1 Timothy 2:4).
8. Jesus saves us from our sins through faith. He was on his way to Jerusalem to be the sacrifice for our sins. We remember his sacrifice in the bread and wine.

Example exhortation from the Readings

The daily readings from the Bible Companion can help us identify chapters to speak about. Look at the three portions of readings for the day and select a chapter to talk about or a theme from all three of the readings. Here is an example just using Luke 15.

1. Who are the lost? They are those who are lost to God. What should our attitude be to the 'lost'? Let us see what the Bible says.
2. Luke 15 contains 3 parables about the lost.
3. The Lost Sheep (v 3-7). Describe.
4. The Lost Coin (v 8-10). Describe.
5. The Lost Son (v 11-32). Describe. What features are common to all three examples?
6. What is the attitude of the angels in heaven to the lost being found? Rejoicing.
7. What should be our attitude to the lost being found? Rejoicing.

8. Should we look for the lost? Yes. God wants all people to turn from their wrong ways and turn to the right way. This is the theme of repentance throughout the Bible from the prophets of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The death of the wicked is sad, because there is no longer an opportunity for them to repent (Ezekiel 18:23).
9. In some sense, we were all lost (Isaiah 53:6), but in Christ we have been found. We can rejoice and celebrate this in the Breaking of Bread.

When preparing an exhortation, it helps to be able to find verses elsewhere in the Bible relevant to the topic. The best way of doing this is by becoming familiar with the Bible and being able to link themes together in your mind.

Regular Bible reading, such as reading the daily portions from the Bible Companion, is one way to do this, and themes can often be seen in these daily portions.

Make use of the cross references in your Bible if they are there. Another way of finding the relevant Bible verses is to use a concordance or dictionary.

You can find examples of short exhortations based on the daily readings for every day of the year at:

bibleeastfrica.com

A library of structures for exhortations based around themes will be added to this website at regular intervals

The Bible Study Class

The purpose of the Bible Study Class is to help the ecclesia grow into Christ through learning about the Scriptures. This is what the ecclesia is trying to do. As it says in Ephesians, *"so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ"* (Ephesians 4:12-13).

Attaining the standard of Christ is the work of a lifetime and the Bible Class is one way to assist this. The ecclesia should have the wisdom to know that it should learn more. As it says in Proverbs 9:9, *"Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still; teach the righteous and they will add to their learning."*

The Bible Study Class is also an exhortation, a positive appeal from God's message to the brothers and sisters. Unlike the exhortation in the Breaking of Bread service, it does not need to bring the listeners to thinking about the sacrifice of Jesus.

The Bible Study Class may look at a theme, a character or a particular chapter of the Bible. Often the Bible Study Class will choose to study a book of the Bible and go through a chapter a week.

Good topics for the Bible Study Class are one of the Gospels, or Genesis, or James, or Philipians. The ecclesia can decide for itself what topics to follow for its Bible Study Class.

The key to giving a good Bible Study talk is the same as for a Breaking of Bread exhortation – prayer, planning and preparation.

This talk will strengthen, encourage and comfort the listeners and include rebuke/warning where necessary. Again think about stories, quotes or visual aids which will help your points to stick in the audience's memory.

Preaching

The purpose of preaching is to declare the message of God to those who do not yet know it. The word for 'preaching' means to 'appeal' or 'publicly announce'. When we preach we are announcing God's message to the people around us.

Jesus and his disciples announced the Good News of the Kingdom of God. God wants all people to be saved and to hear this message. For this to happen, someone needs to speak God's message.

Paul tells us, *"How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"* (Romans 10:14-15). God considers it a beautiful thing to take His message to the world.

When we tell others the good news from God, we are working for God; *"And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us"* (2 Corinthians 5:19-20). We become co-workers with God, *"As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain"* (2 Corinthians 6:1).

Paul, who was the main preacher to the Gentiles, advised, *"Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction"* (2 Timothy 4:2).

A preacher or teacher must live by the standards he is preaching about. By doing this he shows that he can be trusted and people will be more likely to listen. As Paul advises, *"In everything set an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us"* (Titus 2:7-8).

The preacher must make sure that he lives as a Christian as Paul taught the teachers in Romans 2:21-22, *"you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?"*

Paul understood he needed to listen to his own warning. He said, *"Therefore I do not run like someone aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize"* (1 Corinthians 9:26-27)

What should we preach?

We recommend a preacher starts with the gospel that Jesus preached. This is the gospel of the Kingdom of God. God's Kingdom is the answer to the world's problems.

We also recommend a preacher teaches about repentance, the forgiveness of sins through Jesus and about baptism.

These topics were all part of the message of the first preaching talk given by Peter in Acts 2. Other topics can be added later.

Just as when preparing an exhortation, the preacher should plan a preaching talk. He should pray before planning this talk. He should decide which verses he wants to use. He should prove what he is saying by using the Bible.

It is good to get one of the listeners to read the verses out loud to everyone, so the audience can know that it is really the words from the Bible that are being spoken. The number of verses chosen can be set based on the length of the topic or the time available.

Here is a suggestion of how to preach about the topic of the Kingdom of God:

1. The Kingdom of God was the message of John the Baptist: Matthew 3:2.
2. The Kingdom of God was the message of Jesus: Matthew 4:23.
3. Jesus sent his disciples with the same message: Matthew 10:7.
4. When Jesus rose from the dead, he still had the same message: Acts 1:3.
5. The kingdom message was based on the Old Testament and the promise to David: Luke 1:30-33.
6. The promise to David was about Jesus: 1 Chronicles 17:7-14. This kingdom would be on earth and the promised King would reign forever.
7. Get the listeners to explain what is wrong with the world today. If possible write these down one side of a blackboard or on a large sheet of paper. Help them understand that man is not able to solve these problems (war, famine, disease, death, injustice, disability, disasters, bad weather, ignorance, etc). This is what man's kingdom is like. God's Kingdom is quite different.
8. Look at the pictures of God's Kingdom in Isaiah 2:1-4, 11:1-9, 35, 65:17-25 and write what is learned against the relevant problem on the list.
9. Compare the two kingdoms. Ask the listeners whether they would like to be in God's Kingdom.
10. The message of the Kingdom, taught by Jesus, spoke of repenting of sin and being baptised. This can be the topic of another talk.
11. Consider setting another time to talk about the questions of when and where will the kingdom of God will be. If there is time these can be included in the Kingdom topic.

The preacher should be prepared to take questions from the audience. Ideally he should be able to answer these questions immediately. For example, he should know the verses people use to prove that the dead go to heaven and be able to explain why these are misunderstandings. If he does not know the answer, he should say he will find out the answer for them and make sure he tells them at a later date.

The important thing is that the preaching occurs and that the people hear the word of God. There are so many people in the world that need the gospel message. As Jesus said, "*The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field*" (Luke 10:2).

If you would like further help with preaching you can access the Preachers Handbook at:
bibleeastfrica.com

Things to consider when giving a Bible Talk

Some general points which apply to all types of talks.

1. Know the listeners

The speaker needs to speak to the listeners in a way that they can understand the Gospel. There is no point in teaching new people complex topics.

The speaker needs to make sure they speak at a level the audience can understand. When we are preaching the gospel to a new audience, we should make it easy to understand.

We can judge whether they are understanding by looking at their facial expressions and asking them questions. If they are not understanding, we must make the talk simpler. If they already understand the topic, then we can adjust our content and include additional points.

2. We must not promote ourselves

A Bible talk is not an opportunity to tell the audience how good we are or how clever we are. God wants us to promote His name and the name of Jesus and not our own name; "*For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake*" (2 Corinthians 4:5).

False teachers are the ones who talk about themselves; "*These people are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage*" (Jude 1:16).

We must not be like this. Speaking should not be a performance which promotes ourselves (2 Kings 5:11). Speaking should be done because we love God and without expecting payment or praise (Titus 1:11, 1 Corinthians 9:18).

If we must boast, then there are only two things we can boast about. The first is that we know Jesus, *"Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord"* (2 Corinthians 10:17). The second is in our weaknesses, as Paul did, *"If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness"* (2 Corinthians 11:30). If we are to talk about ourselves, then we should talk about our weaknesses.

3. We must speak with humility and gentleness

Instead of boasting, we must speak with humility and gentleness. This is what Paul did, *"By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you – I, Paul, who am "timid" when face to face with you, but "bold" toward you when away"* (2 Corinthians 10:1).

Our message is more likely to be listened to if we speak with humility.

Gentleness should be a feature of the way we give our message. Peter says, *"But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect"* (1 Peter 3:15). Paul agrees, *"always to be gentle toward everyone"* (Titus 3:2).

We must be gentle even with those who argue with our message, *"Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth"* (2 Timothy 2:23-25).

If we are not gentle, then we will promote arguments and quarrels which is not what God wants.

4. Fear of speaking

It is only natural to be afraid of speaking in front of other people. Even the apostle Paul feared (1 Corinthians 2:3) and had to be encouraged to speak at times (Acts 18:9, Philippians 1:14).

We must encourage those who are timid, so that they are not afraid of speaking (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

The present writer was one who was afraid of speaking when he was younger. He worried about it for many weeks in advance. On the day of the talk, he would have shaking hands, sweaty

hands, a dry mouth, shallow breathing, and a quiet and shaky voice. This attitude changed when he stopped concentrating on himself and started thinking about other people.

The aim of a Bible talk is not to make the speaker nervous. It is to help the listeners. We are trying to do a good service. In the same way, the listener can be grateful for the faithful words that they receive and encourage the speaker.

We should pray for help with our speaking. We can speak because of the help we receive, "*I can do all this through him who gives me strength*" (Philippians 4:13) and God works through our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:10).

5. Encouraging new speakers

The ecclesia should encourage capable brothers to speak. This is an important work that is needed if the ecclesia is to function as a place of spiritual growth. They do not have to be elders, but they do need to be able to pass the Bible Message on to others faithfully.

The more brothers who can give talks, the more variety of topics and spiritual words there will be. Having a number of brothers able to speak stops just one brother or only a few brothers from having to prepare talks every week.

A new speaker should be given short talks to do until they have become more confident. They can do this when another speaker or two are also giving short talks. More experienced speakers should encourage and help the new speaker.

It is important to realise that each speaker will have his own personal style. We should not try and make a speaker become something they are not.

One way a new speaker can start is to write down what he is to say in full. He can then read what he has written. Once he has gained in confidence, he can try to speak from short notes rather than reading from a full written script. This allows him to look at his audience, gauge their response and then adapt the presentation to suit the listeners.

Final Encouragement

Speaking God's word is a great work. It is one of the most important activities that can be done in the ecclesia. It allows the word of God to be presented to the people so that God's word can be in them too. It can give the hope of eternal life to those who are not yet followers of Jesus. It can build up, encourage, and comfort the brothers and sisters who are already in the faith. Brothers should be willing to do this important work and the ecclesia should encourage brothers to do this work.

A brother does not need to be good at speaking to speak God's word. What he does need to do is to speak God's word faithfully in the way that God wants it spoken.

May God be with those who give talks to pass on the gospel message and to strengthen, encourage, comfort and admonish their brothers and sisters in Christ.

***Each of you should use whatever gift
you received to serve others,
as faithful stewards of God's grace
in its various forms.***

***If anyone speaks, they should do so
as one who speaks the very words of God.***

***If anyone serves, they should do so
with the strength that God provides
so that in all things***

God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

***To him be the glory and the power
for ever and ever.***

Amen

(1 Peter 4:10-11)



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