

A LETTER FROM DR. SEAN LUCAS

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My dear Friends:

Last time, I talked about how I go about planning my preaching. Today, I thought it might be interesting for you to know how I go from text to sermon in a given week. My week is set up around Wednesday—that is the day when everything related to the worship booklet needs to be ready to go to the printer. I do my initial worship planning on Monday and then meet with James Brown and Jennifer Velázquez on Tuesday—so the only thing lacking from the booklet is my sermon outline, which I’m committed to providing. I think having that outline in there helps with listening and understanding—both for you and your children. I really emphasize those “key words” in the outline as we work our way through the text; and so, hopefully it helps you see how my sermon relates to text. And too, those key words should help your children with their listening because they can follow along with the outline.

Because Wednesday is the key day each week, everything backs up from there. This week’s text is Psalm 122. I read that passage in two different English versions on Sunday evening (usually, NIV and ESV; this week it was NRSV and ESV). I read two different versions to see how translators dealt with the Hebrew; sometimes there are significant translation differences, which clue me in to the problem areas in the texts. I also look for key words that are repeated or other patterns in the passage; this week there were two repetitions or patterns: “peace” in verses 6-9; and “the house of the Lord” in verses 1 and 9. I try to pay attention to natural breaks in a passage; with a psalm, it is important to notice the stanzas (How many? Where are the breaks? Where are the “pauses” [Selah]).

All of this rolls around in my head until I can come up with an outline. For me, the single most important part of the process is coming up with a clear outline that is tied to the text. And the outline will be tied to a big idea in the text. So, this week the big idea is “loving God’s place”—and you see that in the psalm as the writer speaks of gladness (1-2), goodness (3-5), and grace (6-9). I tend to alliterate those main points, not so much for the listener as for myself; it is easier for me to remember those “hooks” if they have the same first letter or the same sound pattern. If I get lost while I’m speaking, I can make my way back to the key word and reorient.

Also, sometime Monday and Tuesday, I try to read commentaries. I like to do that after I have an outline; it doesn’t always work out that way. Generally, when I start a series, I’ll have four or five commentaries with a range of theological perspectives and different balances of exegetical versus homiletical focus. As I go along, though, I tend to narrow down to two commentaries that consistently provide the best insight to me. I’m usually looking for people who will tell me things about the text that I can’t glean on my own by reading the text, looking at cross-references, or reading study Bible notes.

By Wednesday morning, I’m ready to sit down and write my Sunday morning sermon. Generally, I try to write 1800 words. I tend to write 1-3 sentence paragraphs—and those paragraphs tend to function almost like PowerPoint for me. Many of you have noticed that while I preach, I don’t really look down, but I turn pages. That’s because my 5x8 pages really function like bullet points to keep me on track and to remind me if I lose my place. After doing this through the years, this has been something that seems to work pretty well for me.

I’ll write one more explanation next week about what happens from Wednesday to Sunday. Again, I hope this helps you appreciate what goes into the preaching task each week as we declare the good news of Jesus at IPC.

In the grip of God’s grace,



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