HOLY PLACES GUIDE

Faithful Words

A Sermon Preparation Workbook

From attentive reading to clear explanation and thoughtful pastoral care.

THIS JOURNAL BELONGS TO

A thoughtful preparation rhythm

This workbook supports study and reflection; it does not replace your tradition's training, supervision or preaching requirements. Use the pages in sequence or return to a stage as needed.

01 STUDY

Read the text in context. Observe before interpreting. Verify factual claims and record useful sources.

02 SHAPE

Clarify the central message, consider the listeners and build an outline that follows the passage.

03 REVIEW

Check illustrations, applications, pastoral sensitivity and timing. Reflect after delivery and note what you learned.

Choose the passage

Begin with a coherent passage rather than a phrase isolated from its setting. Check any lectionary or series requirements relevant to your community.

DATE _____

I *Passage, translation and occasion*

II *Why this passage, and where does the unit begin and end?*

III *Initial questions to explore before choosing a message*

Observe before explaining

Read the passage repeatedly. Record details that are present in the text before deciding what they mean for today.

DATE _____

I *People, actions, contrasts and repeated words*

II *Questions raised by the wording or structure*

III *Details I might overlook because the passage is familiar*

The literary setting

Consider genre, surrounding paragraphs and the place of the passage within the book. Let the text's form shape how you explain it.

DATE _____

I *Genre, immediate context and movement of the book*

II *Connections to what comes before and after*

III *How the context changes my initial reading*

Historical questions to verify

Distinguish established context from debated reconstruction. Check reliable sources and record where a historical claim comes from.

DATE _____

I *Questions about setting, audience and cultural background*

II *Sources consulted and what they actually support*

III *Uncertainties to acknowledge or claims to omit*

Words with care

Compare reliable translations and consult appropriate language resources. Avoid building an argument on an unverified word origin or a meaning that does not fit the sentence.

DATE _____

I *Word or phrase, verse and translations compared*

II *Lexical resources, context and findings*

III *What the evidence supports; what it does not establish*

Trace the movement

Outline the passage's own progression before imposing a sermon structure. Notice changes in speaker, scene, argument or tone.

DATE _____

I *The passage in sections*

II *How each section connects to the next*

III *The central tension, question or movement*

The central message

State the passage's main claim as clearly as you can. Check whether your proposed message arises from the whole unit.

DATE _____

I *The main claim in one sentence*

II *Textual details that support it*

III *A tempting theme that the passage does not actually support*

Know the congregation

Consider different ages, experiences and circumstances without assuming that everyone shares the same situation. Protect private pastoral information.

DATE _____

I *Who may hear this message, including newcomers?*

II *Likely questions, pressures and differences in experience*

III *Language or assumptions that could exclude or misrepresent*

Set a responsible aim

Name what you hope listeners will understand or consider. Avoid promising an emotional response or a life outcome that the text does not guarantee.

DATE _____

I *What I hope listeners understand*

II *A fitting invitation to reflection or action*

III *Limits, qualifications and outcomes I cannot promise*

Build the outline

Organize the sermon around the passage and a clear line of thought. Each section should serve the central message.

DATE _____

I *Opening and central question*

II *Main movements with supporting verses*

III *Transition toward response and conclusion*

Open with purpose

Create an opening that helps listeners attend to the passage. A story or question should serve the message rather than overshadow it.

DATE _____

I *Opening words or a brief scene*

II *Why this opening belongs with this passage*

III *A clear transition into the biblical text*

Explain and support

Separate direct quotation, paraphrase and interpretation. Use supporting passages in context and verify every reference.

DATE _____

I *Key explanation and textual evidence*

II *Supporting passages and their relevant context*

III *Places where a qualification or different interpretation matters*

Choose illustrations carefully

Check facts and sources. Obtain permission when needed, protect privacy and do not present an invented story as a real event.

DATE _____

I *Illustration and the point it serves*

II *Source, factual checks and permission or privacy needs*

III *What to shorten, anonymize or leave out*

Invite practical response

Offer applications that follow from the passage and acknowledge different capacities and circumstances. A concrete invitation is more useful than vague pressure.

DATE _____

I *Possible responses for different listeners*

II *One achievable practice or question*

III *What might require support, time or a different approach?*

Review pastoral sensitivity

Read from the perspective of someone grieving, ill, isolated or unsafe. Avoid blame, simplistic promises and instructions that could discourage necessary help.

DATE _____

I *Phrases that could be heard as blame or a guarantee*

II *Needed context, boundaries or encouragement to seek support*

III *Revisions that preserve the message with greater care*

Conclude with clarity

Return to the central message. Let the conclusion gather the sermon rather than introduce an unrelated new argument.

DATE _____

I *The message to leave with listeners*

II *A clear, proportionate invitation*

III *Closing prayer or final words*

Rehearse aloud

Time an actual reading. Notice long sentences, unclear transitions and places where a listener needs a pause.

DATE _____

I *Actual duration, target duration and cuts*

II *Words, references and transitions to clarify*

III *Pacing, pauses and practical delivery notes*

Reflect after preaching

Review with humility. Feedback is one source of learning, not a complete measure of the sermon's effect.

DATE _____

I *What was clear, and what needs improvement?*

II *Feedback, questions and pastoral follow-up*

III *One lesson to carry into the next preparation*