



The Church Has Enough Bad Preaching . . .

DON'T WE NEED "GOOD PREACHING"

(Here it is in Five Easy Steps?)

1. **What is Good Preaching?** Let's start with what we're trying to do when we preach; then we can evaluate it. At a practical level there are several potential goals – pastoral counselors often preach to "hang out their shingle." We sometimes preach to teach. Sometimes we preach in an effort to give people an experience of gospel, other times we are trying to seed a conversation.
 - a. Fundamentally though, no matter the purpose of a given sermon, **we are preaching to form the theological mind and heart of a congregation.**
 - b. **"Good Preacher," "Bad Preacher," and the Preacher's Ego** The job is forming the theological mind and heart of a congregation. With that in mind we might ask, **"Am I a "good preacher?"** It's an important question. We ask it a lot, (though rarely out loud). **Trouble is, the answer is different if we're asking to bolster our beaten ego, or asking out of a deep desire to communicate the Gospel to those who need to hear.** (I mention it because ALL PREACHERS have BOTH of those motivations swimming around in their heads – ALL. It's an occupational hazard. We're better off admitting it. That way we can deal with it – or at least try to deal with it. We can also try to deny it, but that gets a little ugly.)
 - c. So, who is a "good preacher" and who is not? **Look at a congregation who has listened to a particular preacher week in and week out for several years. Once you see the impact the preaching has had on them, then (and only then), will you know if their preacher is a "good preacher."**
 - d. **Great Preaching is the Enemy of Good Preaching** All too often a preacher, discouraged that he or she is not thought of as an "excellent preacher," or embarrassed and ashamed, hiding behind forced smiles at the endless short, boring sermon jokes, (which are not jokes), will stop giving preaching what it deserves – a faithful effort. As a result, an otherwise good preacher becomes bad. That is tragic. We already have enough bad preaching in the church! Our goal is "good preaching." "Good preaching" does not require eloquent and fluid oratory, it does not require a sense of humor or a touch of the dramatic. **It requires a clearly communicated message, drawn from and faithful to the Scriptures, a message that brings the Word of God into the lives and hearts of the hearers. You DO NOT have to be a great preacher to do that. You do have to be "good," and while that may require some effort, it is within your grasp. (Read on to get a glimpse at the "how" of it.)**

2. *Good Preaching Requires Work in Five Areas*

Over time we would do well to always have a goal to improve in one or another of these areas in preaching. If you do this, then over time you will become a “good preacher,” (maybe not good enough to assuage your ego, but good enough to faithfully bring the Word of God to your listeners)!

- a. ***Spiritual Development*** If we are to form the theological mind and heart of a congregation, we do so in partnership with the Holy Spirit. Therefore it is essential to engage in spiritual practices, often under the guidance of a Spiritual Director, so that our message is indeed sourced from the Holy Spirit.
- b. ***Engagement with the Biblical Text*** If we are to form the theological mind and heart of a congregation we will need to do so by offering the Word of God, not some other word. That requires a rich engagement with the Scriptures.
- c. ***Developing a Message that is Relevant to Your People*** This gets to the heart of the creative process in preaching. Here we are drawing together our life in prayer, our work with the text, our conversations with saints and sages (alive and dead), and our understanding of both the needs and the worldview of the people in the pews. It has been said that we experience this as a kind of download – almost a “data dump” - from the Holy Spirit.
- d. ***Sermon Form and Language*** Now that we have the message, how do we communicate it? The elements of the sermon need to be arranged in a way that carries the listener along until they have heard, and hopefully even experienced, the gospel. We use different sermon forms to accomplish different purposes – one to convince, another to teach, another to open the heart to a new experience. Language needs to inspire and meet the congregation where they are. There is no point in using the vocabulary of learned scholars in a congregation of migrant workers.
- e. ***Delivery*** I hate to say this to busy preachers, but delivering a sermon takes practice. Yes, it requires us to train our voice, and to use appropriate hand gestures and so on, but more than anything else, you will find that if you have practiced delivering a sermon to the point that you can deliver it naturally, the delivery will go smoothly.

Hearing too many of those short sermon jokes that aren't jokes? (What makes them think it is OK to say that? It's not; it's wrong.) ***I'm a Preaching Coach. If I can help you become a "good preacher," I'd like to. First conversation always free*** and never comes with pressure so get in touch if you're curious about whether I might be able to help.

REV. SAMUEL G. ALEXANDER

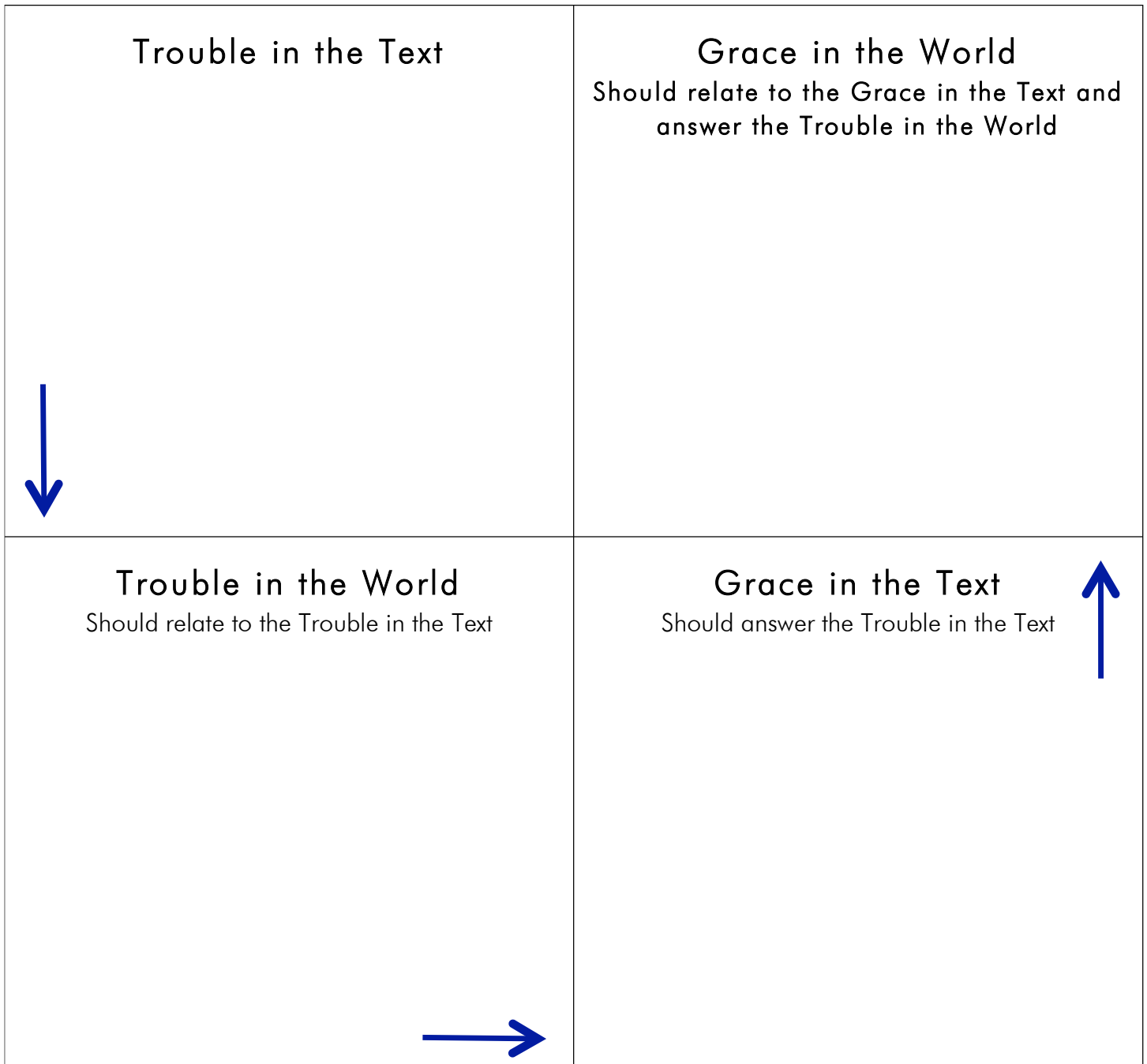
238 Ridgeway Avenue, Fairfax, California, 94930

415 • 302 • 0677

sam@gracecomesfirst.net

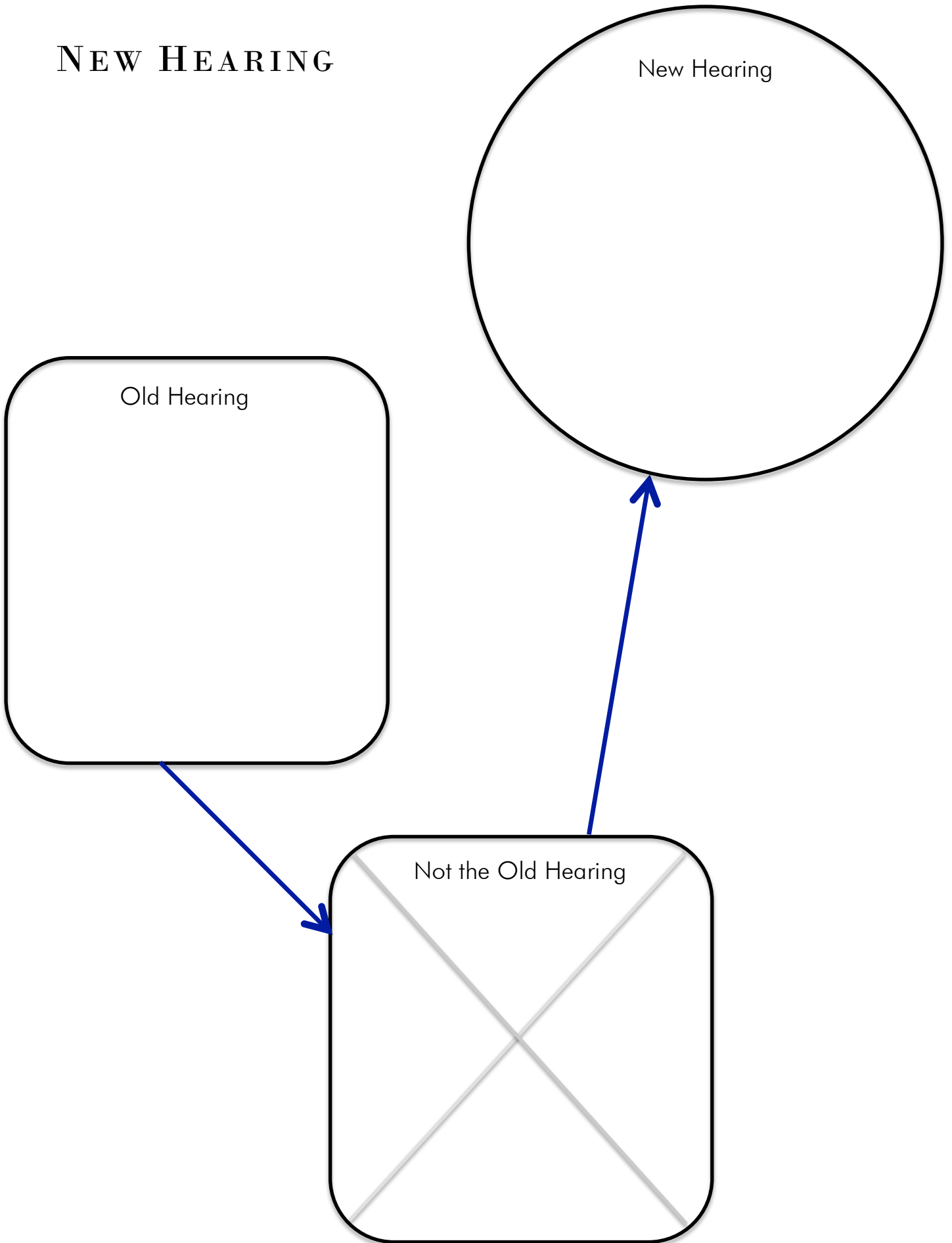
www.gracecomesfirst.net

FOUR PAGES

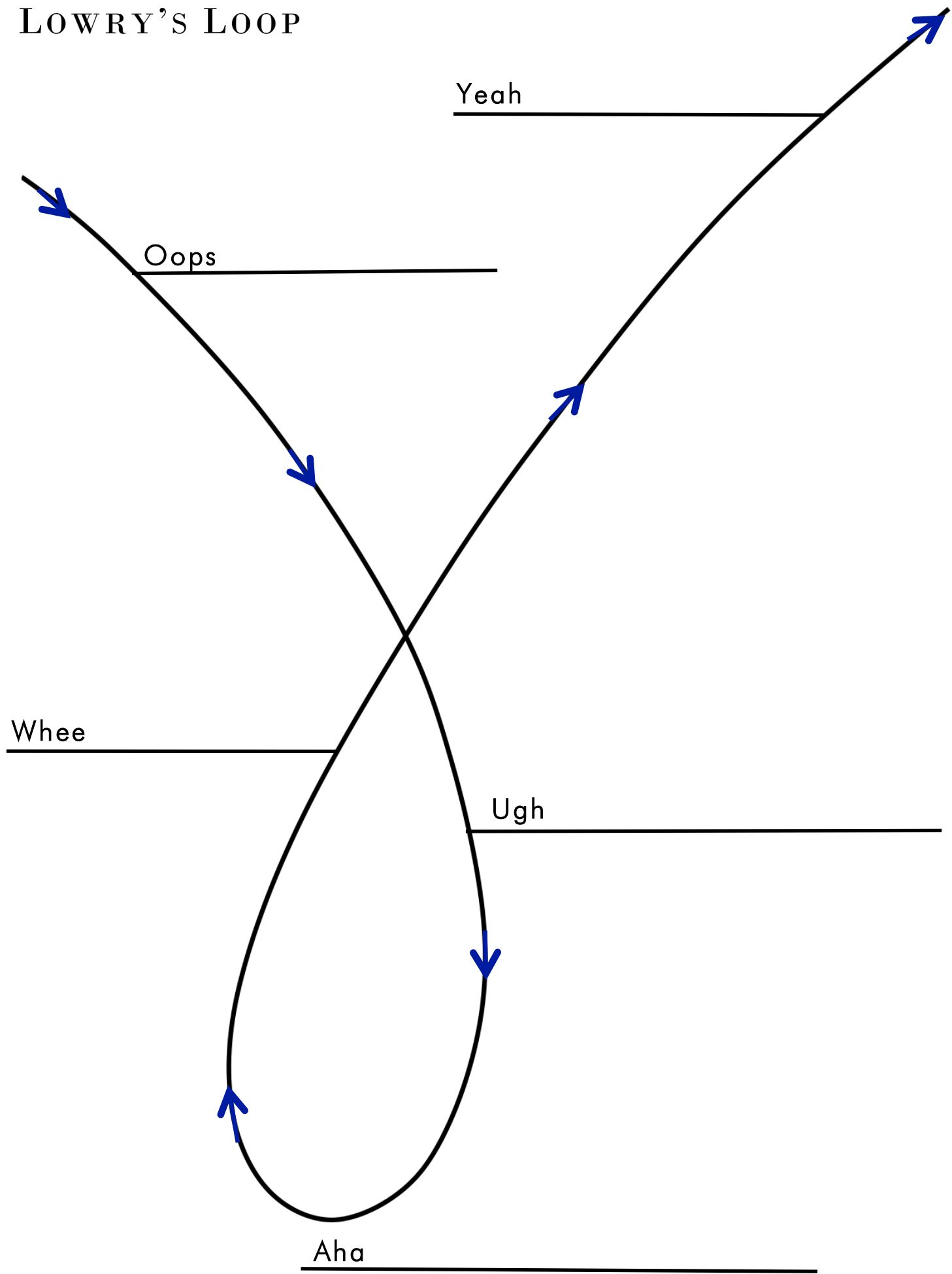


The “Pages” do not have to be in this order. They could, for instance, be in this order: Trouble in the World, Trouble in the Text, Grace in the Text, Grace in the World. This arrangement has the disadvantage of spending a good deal of time “in the world of the text,” and so might best be used for shorter homilies.

NEW HEARING

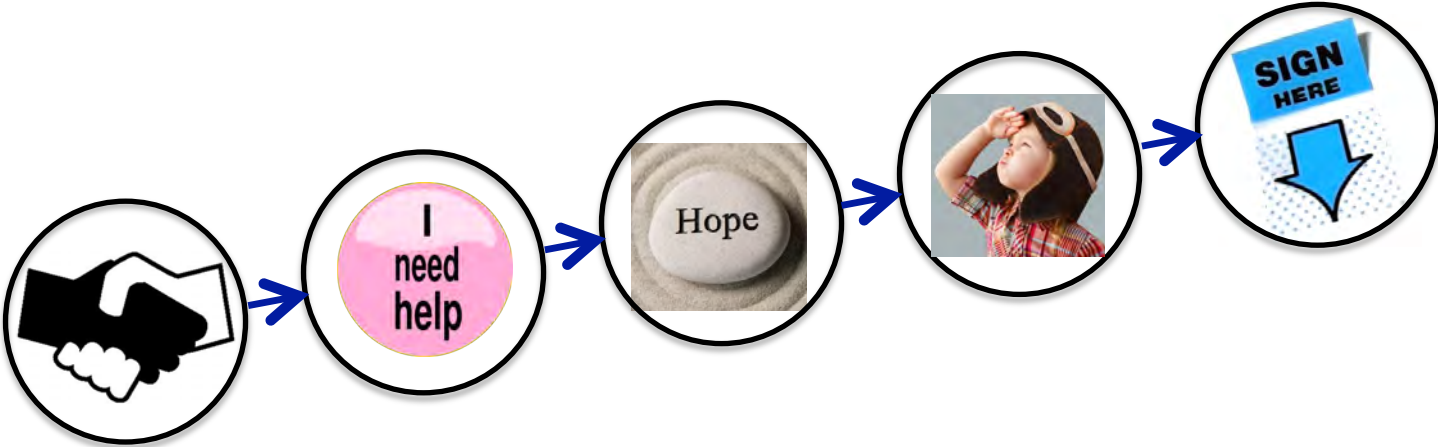


LOWRY'S LOOP



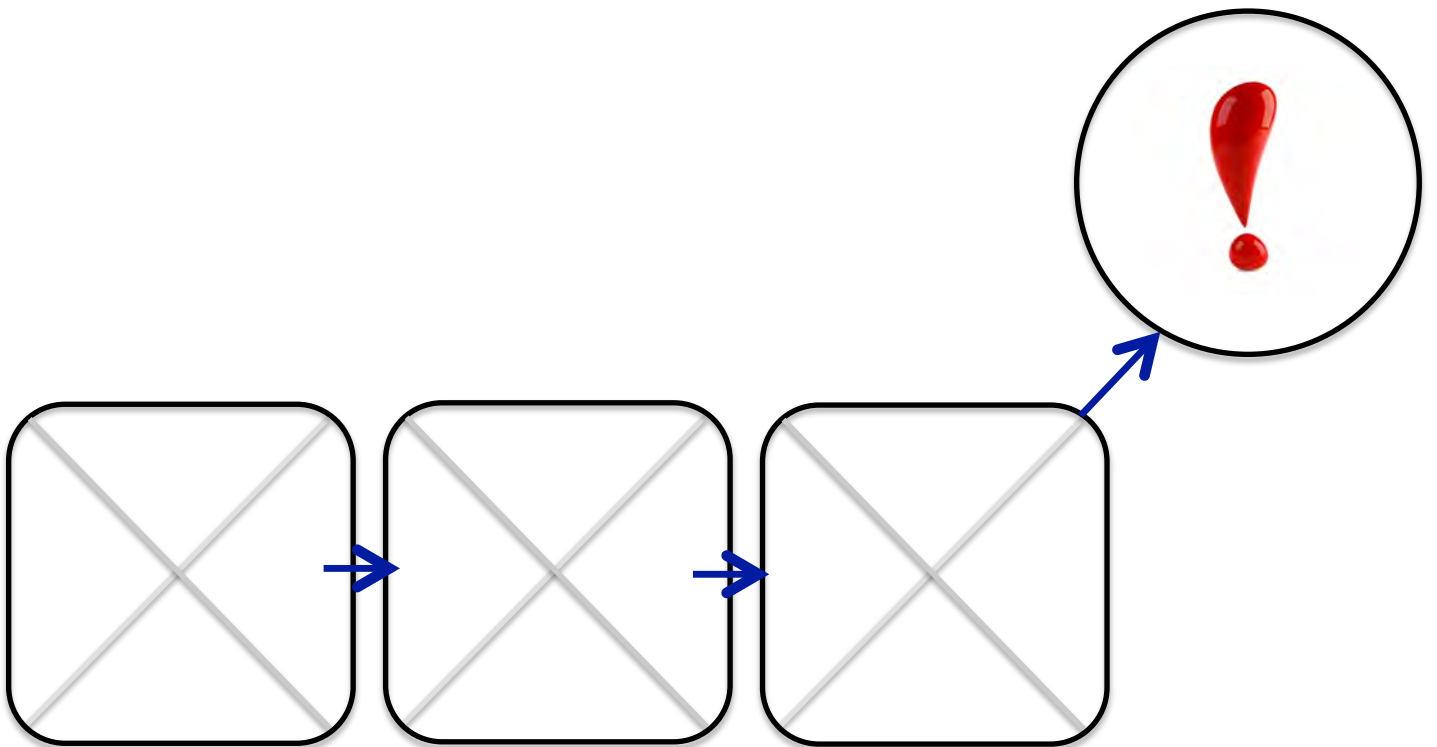
MONROE'S MOTIVATED SEQUENCE

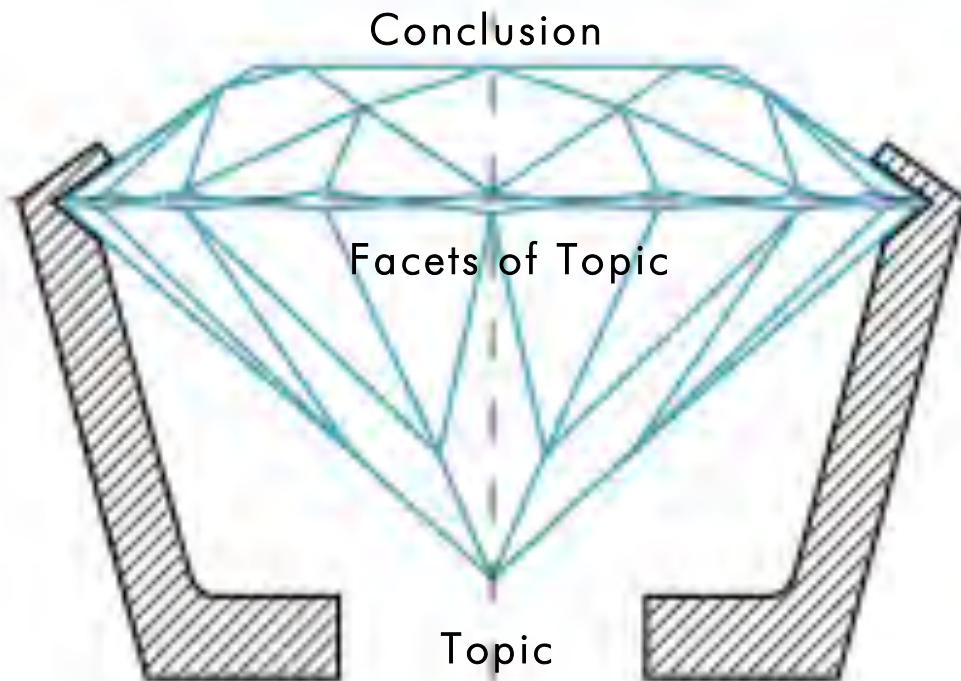
1. Establish Commonality
2. Describe the Need
3. Make Your Offer of Gospel
4. Get Them to Visualize the Offer
5. Call for Commitment



NOT THIS, NOT THIS, THIS

1. Not This
2. Not This
3. Not This
4. This!





1. Establishing the Topic

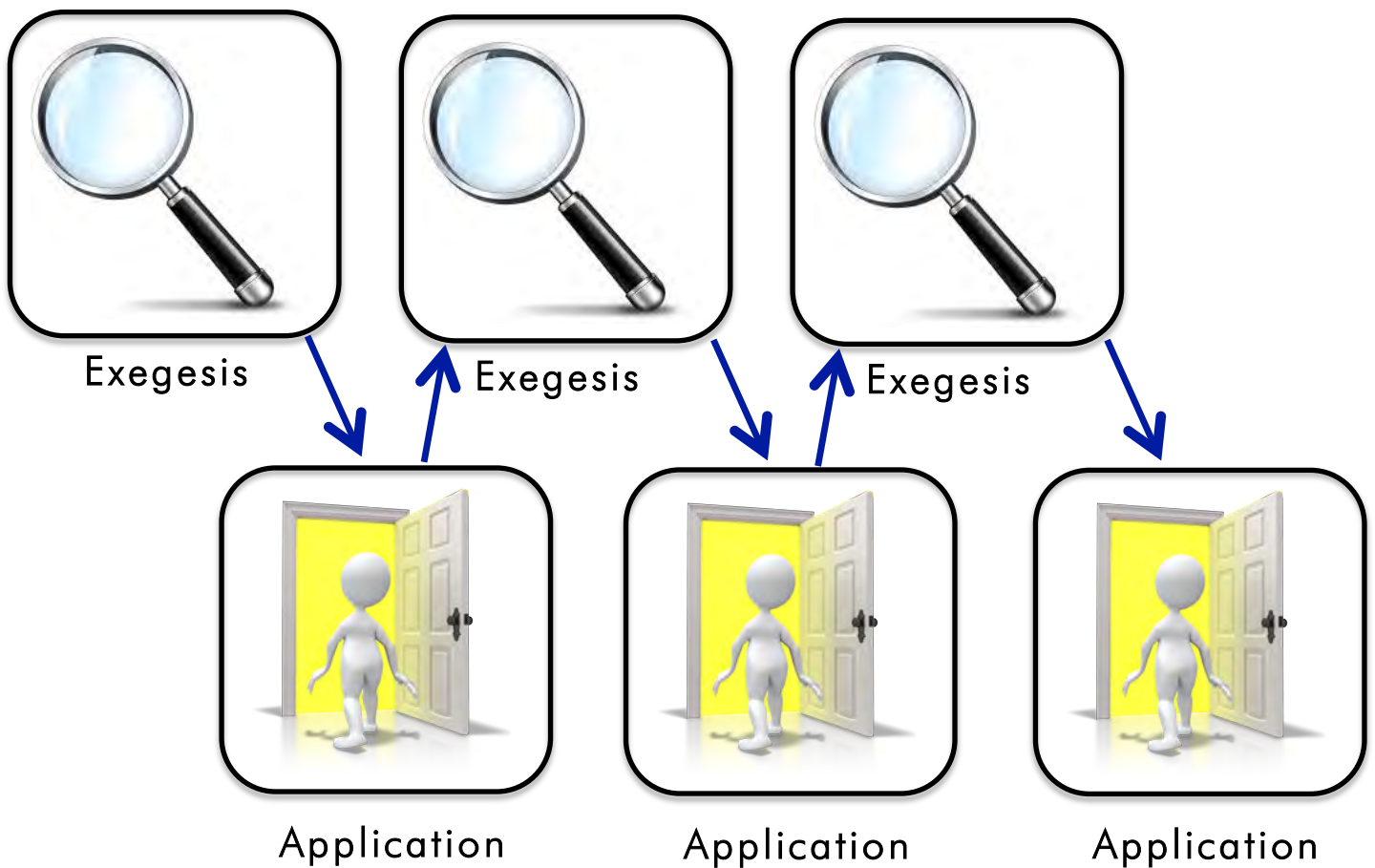
2 - 4. The Facets of the Topic

When I preach a sermon like this I sometimes literally hold up my hand as if holding a large stone and turn it to indicate when we are shifting to a new "facet" of the topic at hand.

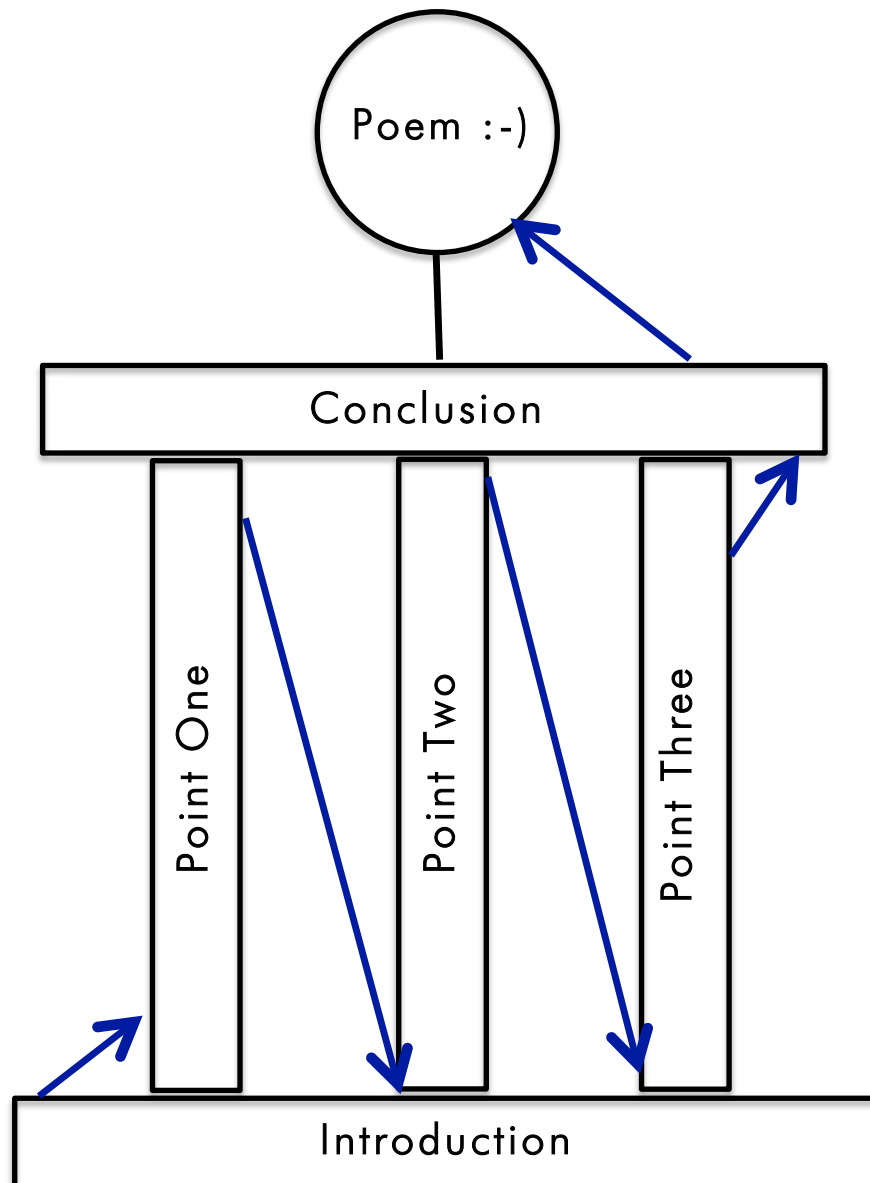
PURITAN PLAIN STYLE



VERSE BY VERSE



THREE POINTS AND A POEM OR THE TROPHY SERMON



This sermon form can also be called, "The Three Tell'ums"

1. In the introduction you tell them what you are planning to tell them.
2. During the three points, you tell them you have to say.
3. In the conclusion, you tell them what you told them.

Great teaching sermon form when appropriate.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allen, Jr. O. Wesley, *Determining the Form, Elements of Preaching Series*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2008. This is a small but excellent book. Allen takes one text and shows how he would preach that text in a variety of different forms.

Allen, Ronald J., *Patterns of Preaching, A Sermon Sampler*, Chalice Press, St. Louis, MO, 1998. A very good book with many forms of preaching in it, perhaps too many.