

# Using The Web For Sermon Preparation

By Brett Blair



I remember sitting in front of a little

Macintosh computer in the parsonage office, a small 900 square foot dwelling in rural Tennessee,

trying to figure out what to preach. That was 1993 and the Internet was virtually unknown. Also unknown to me were the skills needed to write a decent sermon, let alone deliver one. Sure, I had three degrees in divinity and New Testament, but could I tell you how to skillfully segue from biblical exposition to a contemporary illustration? Could I tell you how to introduce a sermon in a compelling way and then bring it to a fitting conclusion? I could not. I was as lost as any and worst than most. This went on for six excruciating years before the Internet really took off, and within 24 months, my sermons began to take shape. Why was that? What did the Internet have to do with it?

The answer was quite simple. I was able to read countless sermons that modeled for me how to construct a sermon in three basic parts: (1) a strong opening that delivers a thesis either by an illustration, a compelling biblical narrative, or a personal event that happened that week; (2) an outline that develops that thesis and remains true to the major structural points of the biblical periscope being focused on; and (3) a conclusion that drives home the thesis and that directly asks the congregation to respond to the gospel message.

## *Types of Sermon Websites*

There are basically two kinds of sermon-focused websites. The first I like to call Index Sites. Index Sites contain no sermon content; rather, they point you to sites that do. There are hundreds of these but the two largest are [www.textweek.com](http://www.textweek.com) and “Sermons and Sermon-Lectionary Resources” found at: <http://www.rockies.net/~spirit/sermon.html>.

The second kind of sermon prep site is the Content Site; e.g., [www.sermons.com](http://www.sermons.com). These content sites contain everything from

complete sermons to sermon outlines, sermon illustrations, children’s sermons, commentary, Bible tools, multimedia resources, dramas, lectionary aids, children’s bulletins, and countless other aids. The Content Sites come in two forms: free and commercial. Many of the first sermon prep sites were not from big publishing houses; hence, most of the content was the work of single pastors. Since then, many publishing houses have jumped into the game as well. While some publishers have succeeded, the Internet has been true to form in leveling the playing field, providing entrepreneurial pastors the platform to gain an audience of users.

## *Searching the Web for Sermon Resources*

Whether you use Google or Yahoo, most of us are familiar with the task of searching for viable content on the web. Typing the word “sermons” in Google will provide 12 million hits. Now, if it were physically possible to surf to every one of these pages taking 60 seconds to review each of them, it would take 23 years to complete the task. Since there is a Sunday at the end of each week, there simply isn’t enough time to perform this kind of research. So how do you find the good stuff?

Here are two ways: First, you can narrow your search with the scriptural text; e.g. type “sermon Matthew 5:1-12” into the search box. The number of hits falls from 12 million to 22 thousand. With specificity, you can bring the number of pages down quickly and the relevance of the hits up dramatically. Secondly, just beside Google’s search button, there is an “advanced search” option. With this you can further limit your search, producing even better results.

Finally, if you can narrow the focus of your sermon to one word before you even begin writing, including that word in your search will create the best results of all. For example, say you have decided that you are going to focus on the meaning of happiness, and you Google “sermon Matthew 5:1-12 happiness”. Now your results are fewer than 600 hits and you will get results expressly related to the sermon you wish to write.

## *Searching A Website for Sermon Resources*

Let’s say in the search above, you find a sermon at the following address: [www.trinitynewhaven.org/sermons/2005/0130.html](http://www.trinitynewhaven.org/sermons/2005/0130.html). You decide you like the pastor’s style, and you would like to read more of his or her sermons, but there are no links back to the

home page. How do you find the sermon archive? It's very easy. Notice the forward slashes. On your computer's keyboard, it's the character on the same key as the question mark. In the above address, there is one after ".org", one after "sermon", and one after "2005". Those slashes indicate folders just like the folders on your own computer. If you highlight and delete "/sermons/2005/0130.html" and hit enter, it will take you to the church's home page and from there you can easily navigate to the church's sermon library.

## Paying the Pros

While these methods can help the preacher find related material, most of the time it pays to rely on those who have already done the work for you—this means it's time to pony up some money. Annual memberships to the professional sites range from \$65 to \$99 for basic sermon resources. Here are the biggest and the best: Sermons.com, HomileticsOnline.com, SermonCentral.com, Voicings.com, PreachingToday.com, and DesperatePreacher.com. Even among these, only the first three have advanced search capabilities, and only Sermons.com has high-end academic resources in addition to sermons and illustrations.

What a remarkable world. Web-connected pastors from South Carolina to South Africa can access resources we wouldn't have found ten years ago, even in the Reference Room of a seminary library. And there I was in 1993 in my first charge trying to find something in my myriad of academic books to help me understand how to write a sermon. Don't get me wrong—nothing can replace education. But the theoretical halls of academia don't help much when farmers, elementary school teachers, and union

guys show up on Sunday morning and want to know what God has to say about life in their home town. We need models. Today, once we have a direction from the Bible on what to say, we can instantaneously ask thousands of experienced preachers how they developed that thought. And for that, we are all the wiser. □



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During the month of September, *Circuit Rider* readers will be given free access to Sermons.com. Sermons.com's relationship with Abingdon Press, CSS Publishing, the Biblical Archaeological Society, PowerPointSermons.com, and a roster of widely published authors like Maxie Dunnam and Leonard Sweet make it the leader in sermon and worship resourcing.

You can log on with the username: **circuit**, and the password:  **rider**. If you begin to use the resources in a tangible way, please "pony up" and join.

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