Expository teaching of the Bible is all about prayer, a hunger to know what Scripture really says, and plenty of study. For adequate preparation, certain tools are necessary.

**The Tools of the Expositor’s Trade**

- **A computer**

- **A core library, including**
  
  A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament, by Bullinger
  Theological Workbook of the Old Testament, by Harris, Archer and Waltke
  All current translations
  Commentaries

- **A commitment to weekly study**

- **A commitment to a long range study and preaching plan**

- **A commitment to inductive study**

The *word* is the smallest unit of study, so word meanings are central to inductive study. Word relationships are an important area of study as well, because we use words together in phrases and sentences. The context is a larger circle of study, as we relate our words and their relationships with the section of Scripture that precedes and follows. The setting is the largest circle in view, providing a broader understanding of the words and sentences by relating them to the cultural, social, and historical setting of the documents.

- **A commitment like Ezra’s (Ezra 7:10)**

A prepared heart was his preparation, and he was careful to follow a process of studying, observing, and teaching the word.
- A study form and a process card

- Paper

The Process Outlined

As I prepare a specific message from the beginning to delivery, I think in terms of 15 steps of the interpreter's process. We will overview the process first, and then we will spend more time on those steps that need further instruction and practice.

First, select the passage.

This is one of the most difficult parts of the process. The expositor will select at least a paragraph for his or her study. Most often it will be part of the continuing study of a whole book.

Second, pray for illumination from the Spirit.

He is the author of 2 Peter 1:20, and has come to lead us into truth as we pray for guidance (Jn. 14:25-26). So pray at the beginning of your study; pray as you study; and pray when you come to a difficult passage and can't understand what it means (Psalm 119:18). We should remember that we are not alone when we are endeavoring to come to the meaning and application of a text. The Holy Spirit will lead us into truth (John 14:26), as we pray for His guidance.

Third, read the passage many times!

Read better and faster Read it as a whole Read it as if it was the first time Read repeatedly Read out loud, slowly, and with feeling Read with imagination Read inquisitively and thoughtfully
Fourth, get an overview of the book (or extended passage) by use of the horizontal/vertical chart.

This is a big picture that shows us the entire book on one page. It will keep us from isolating the passage from its context, and help to deduce the context, structure, atmosphere, and purpose of the book.

You will divide an 8-1/2" by 11" page by the number of chapters in the book or sections, and then assign a title to each chapter. Then divide up each chapter by paragraphs and give a title to each of these as well.

Fifth, do a mechanical outline.

When the specific passage of Scripture has been chosen, a mechanical outline of it will help to see clearly how the words are arranged together, and how they relate to each other. When people first see this method it seems difficult, or just so much busy work, but this outline will in many cases be the key to unlocking a passage.

What is a mechanical outline? It is, essentially, formulating a vertical rendering of a passage, and the indenting of all modifiers within each sentence under the statements they modify. It is to be written in the first column of our interpretation worksheet.

Sixth, mark the mechanical outline with primary words-P/Ws.

After the mechanical outline is completed, we can pull out our magnifying glass and seek to look at individual words.

Note: The individual words of a verse are often like hinges on a door.
We look for:

- Key words--ones that need further study
- Important connectives--these are signposts and bridges
- Repeated words--these often indicate an important thought
- Verbs and tenses--these indicate the action of a subject
- Adjectives and adverbs--these provide us with additional information about nouns and pronouns

We will locate these in the mechanical outline by the various symbols listed in the Interpreter's Checklist. It's like an investigator looking for clues.

Seventh, mark the mechanical outline with the principles of composition--P/Cs.

These observations will help us to begin to see the flow of the passage and the author's intent.

- comparisons and contrast
- reasons/results/purpose
- lists
- conditions
- questions
- illustrations
- figures of speech
- atmosphere

This kind of investigation may not initially seem to be getting you anywhere, but eventually these observations will come together as you formulate an outline.

These last two steps have helped you to see the important items in the text. If as you are marking the P/Ws and P/Cs you make an important observation about the text, feel free to make a quick note of that in the third column. You can come back to it later.
Eighth, do word studies.

Most of us working through this process have some knowledge of biblical languages, and can get in touch with the definitions of some of the key words.

Most who do word studies for the first time spend too much time on this phase, but experience will teach them to be more selective and work faster.

Ninth, do a simple outline in the second column of the interpretation worksheet.

This will enable you to get a preliminary look at the structure of a passage. The simple outline should be developed with the following guidelines in mind:

- It is to be derived directly from the text, not imposed upon the text.
- It should reflect what the text is actually saying, not what we perceive as its application.
- It should be very brief, because it is simply to give the general direction of the passage.
- It should follow standard outlining procedures.
- It is not written in concrete.

Tenth, begin questioning the text with the Primary Questions (P/Qs).

We move to the third column of the Interpreter’s Checklist. These questions are addressed to the passage and its setting. Information gathered to this point through the P/Ws and P/Cs will help us in coming up with some of the answers. We must remember that teaching the Scripture often involves answering the questions that are present in the minds of our hearers as well.
Keep these guidelines in mind as you ask questions:

- Take time to ask all the questions and seek as many answers as possible, but don’t get hung up if you don’t immediately have an answer. Some will come only from other resources and commentaries.
- If you need more space to answer the question, use the back of your worksheet.
- If you find one question that needs extensive study, write the question at the top of a separate page, and answer it as concisely as you can.
- As you are answering questions, begin to relate your answer to the simple outline in the second column. You might even draw an arrow from the question and answer to its corresponding point in the outline. This will help you when you come to your expanded outline.
- You can also begin to consult selected resources, but don’t use commentaries yet unless you must.

Eleventh, question the text with the Interpreter’s Questions—I/Qs.

The historical question: This deals with the cultural, historical and geographical setting of the passage. Note each.

The tactical question: What tactics is the author using? How does one idea lead to the next?

The theological question: What is being taught about the nature of God, man, sin, Christian faith, etc.?

The contemporary question: How does this apply to our day in a general way?

The personal question: How do we apply what the author said to our personal needs, families, etc.?
Twelfth, isolate the dominant thought.

As you study the text, begin to jot down ideas or sentences that would capsulize the main thought of the passage. The dominant thought is the one you want your hearers to remember most. If you can reduce your study to one thought, the passage will more likely be retained and applied.

Thirteenth, do an expanded outline.

This is often the most exciting and difficult step in the process. You have all this material before you, and now you want to synthesize it.

What will be included in this outline?

- Salient information gathered in the questioning of the text
- All the information applicable from the word studies
- Principles that have been derived from the study of the passage
- All the applications of the text

Fourteenth, consult other resources.

Commentaries are very helpful

- to verify that your findings are correct, and to keep you from errors in interpretation
- to adjust and add to your conclusions and interpretations
- to answer difficult questions about the text, i.e., word meanings, cultural and historical setting, etc.
- to add supportive material and illustrations to your findings
The consultation may include reading through the better commentaries and books on the passage; listening to other teachers' messages on the passage; and consulting your files for pertinent information. You will note any view that is helpful in elaborating on--or is a correction of--what you have seen. Finally, you can note any helpful illustrations found in the commentaries.

Fifteenth, alter the outline accordingly.

Not all the material gathered will be needed, so be careful about inundating your hearers with too much material. Therefore, avoid extensive treatment of the peripheral--focus on the key elements.