Preaching the Lenten Texts in **THE PURPLE ZONE**

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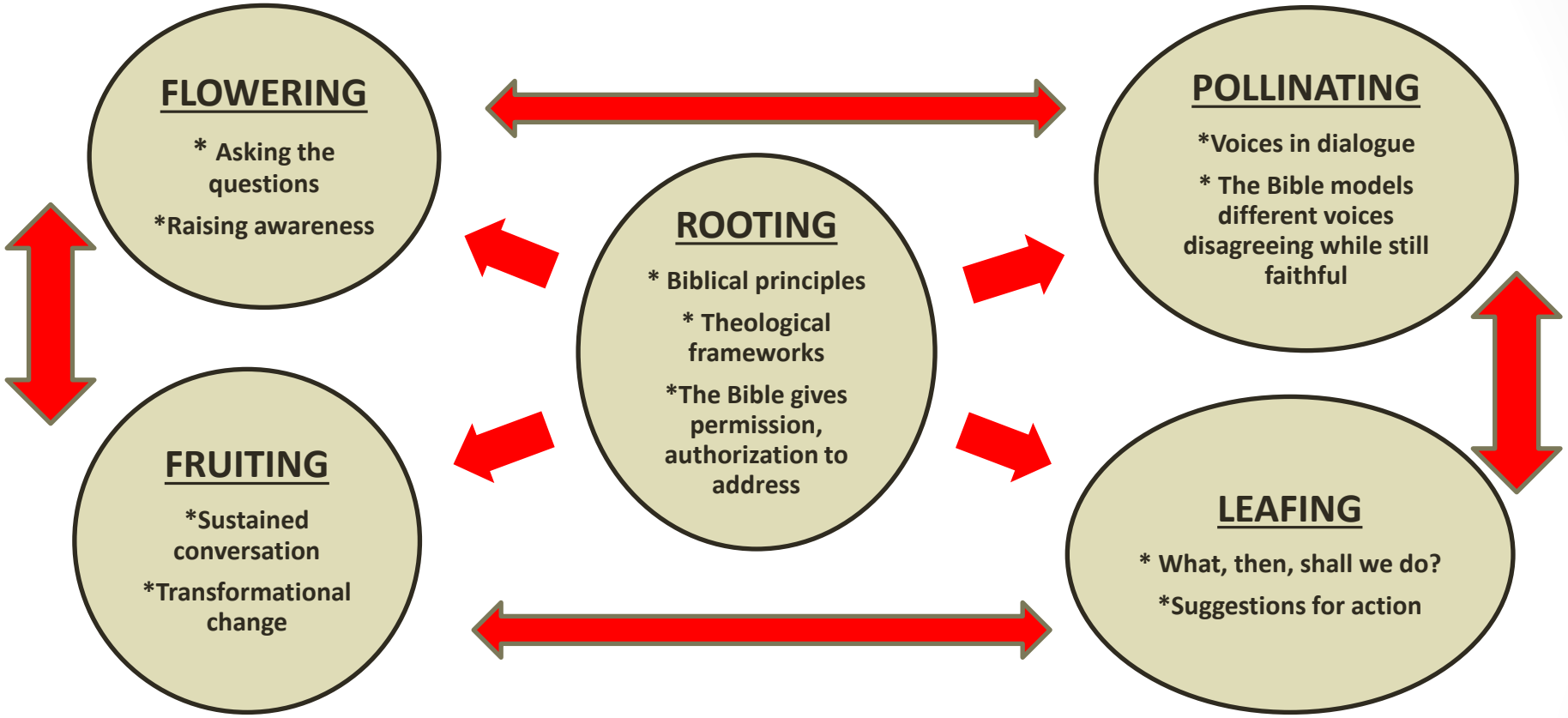
FIVE PATHS TO PROPHETIC PREACHING



From: *Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red-Blue Divide* by Leah D. Schade (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019).

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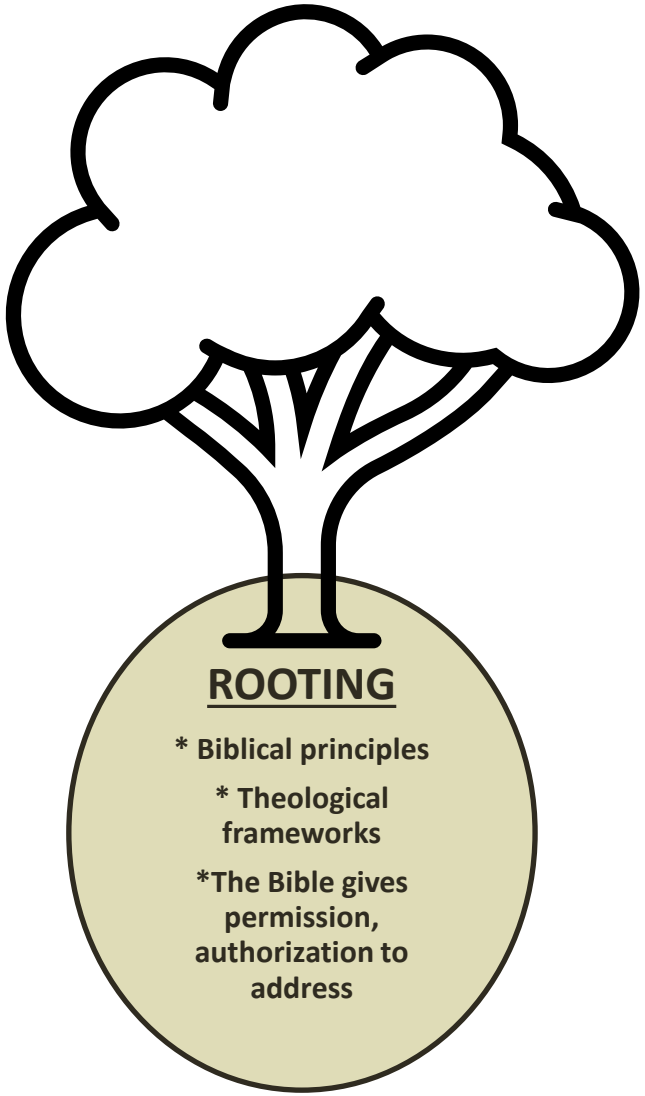
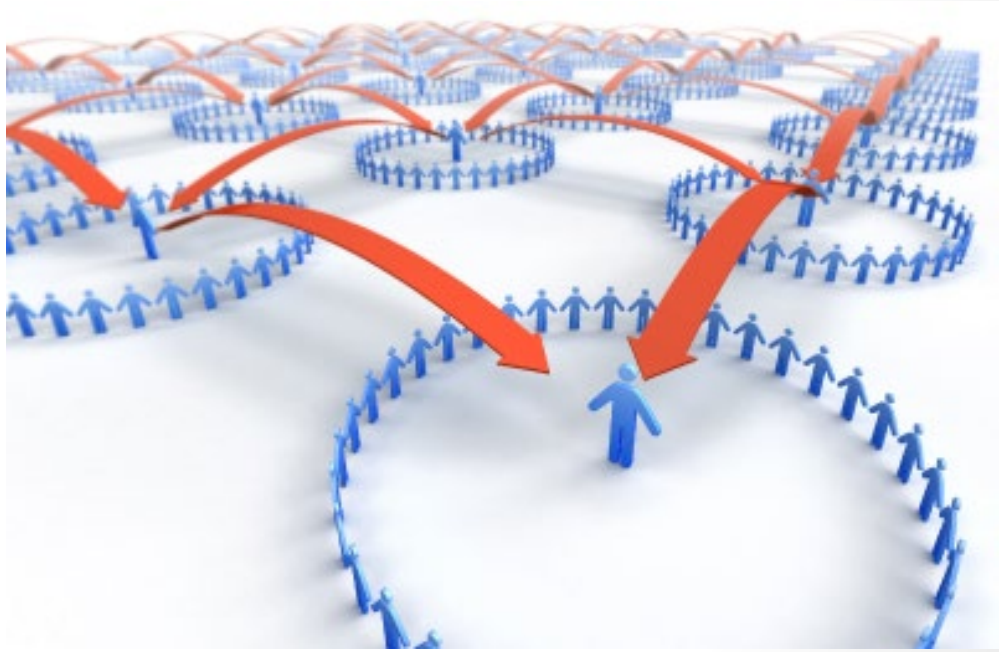

ROOTING
* Biblical principles
* Theological frameworks
*The Bible gives permission, authorization to address

A "Rooting" Sermon

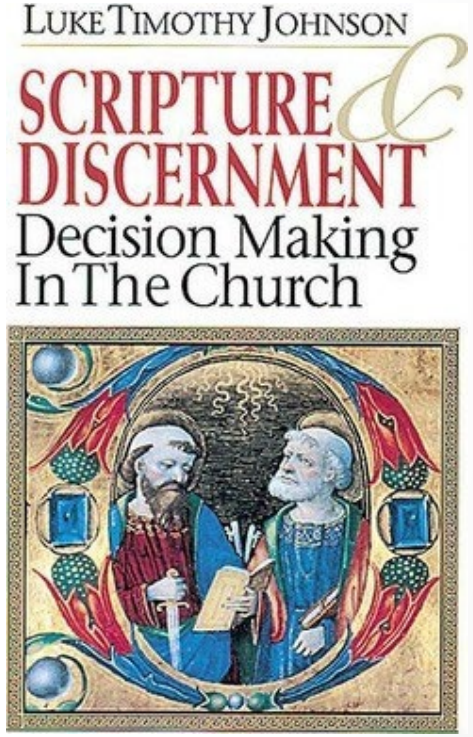
- **Makes the case for why it is not only acceptable, but necessary, for ministers to preach about contemporary justice issues and for churches to discuss them.**

- **This sermon helps congregations understand that dialogue about important – even controversial – issues is grounded in the witness of scripture.**



Where do we find community deliberation in the Bible?

- Moses appointing elders (after Jethro's sage advice) – Exodus Chapter 18
- Phineas and the Israelites deliberating and avoiding a war – Joshua Chapter 22
- Ezra-Nehemiah rebuilding the temple, restoring community and worship after returning from exile
- The Acts of the Apostles – difficulties, debates, discernment and decisions about the early church
  - Highly recommended: *Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in the Church* by Luke Timothy Johnson (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983)



Interpreting Scripture and Preaching Through a "Dialogical Lens"

1. Point out the dialogical aspects of the passage.

- In broad terms, describe how this passage of the Bible is an instance of conversation, dialogue, or some other kind of interchange.
- Who is the (presumed) author, and who was the intended audience?
- What were the social, cultural, and political forces either in the background or directly present in the passage?
- What other books or authors in the Bible are implicitly in conversation with this text or author?
- If the story is a narrative, who are the characters? Who speaks? Who is in the background? Who is in the scene but silent?

2. Determine what's at stake.

- What is the presenting issue?
- What are the fears or concerns of the author, the audience, or the characters?
  - What are they afraid of losing?
  - What or who is threatening to them?
- What are the overt or underlying tensions or conflicts?

3. Identify the values.

- **The deeper ideals and principles that underlie a character's actions or writer's intentions.**
- **What is important to them? What do they cherish and hold dear?**
- **What is their "best self" that could emerge?**

3. Identify the values.

- **Find the overlap – and the gaps.**
- **What desires, fears, and values do the characters or figures share? In other words, where are points of commonality among or between them?**
- **At the same time, where are there vast differences? What are the things the dialogue partners are unlikely to agree upon?**

4. Explain how God, Jesus, and/or the Holy Spirit is active.

- What is God doing in the midst of this interchange?
- Is God's action explicit, implicit, or apparently absent?
- How is the larger community wrestling with or expressing their faith in God?

5. Recognize what the dialogue is teaching us.

- **What is this exchange, dialogue, or conversation teaching us about what it means to be church in the midst of contentious public issues?**
- **What can we learn about being faithful people who engage the conflicts and sin of the world, while maintaining the commitment to grace, hope, and love?**
- **What can we determine about who God is, what God does, and what God intends for us based on this interchange and dialogue in the passage?**

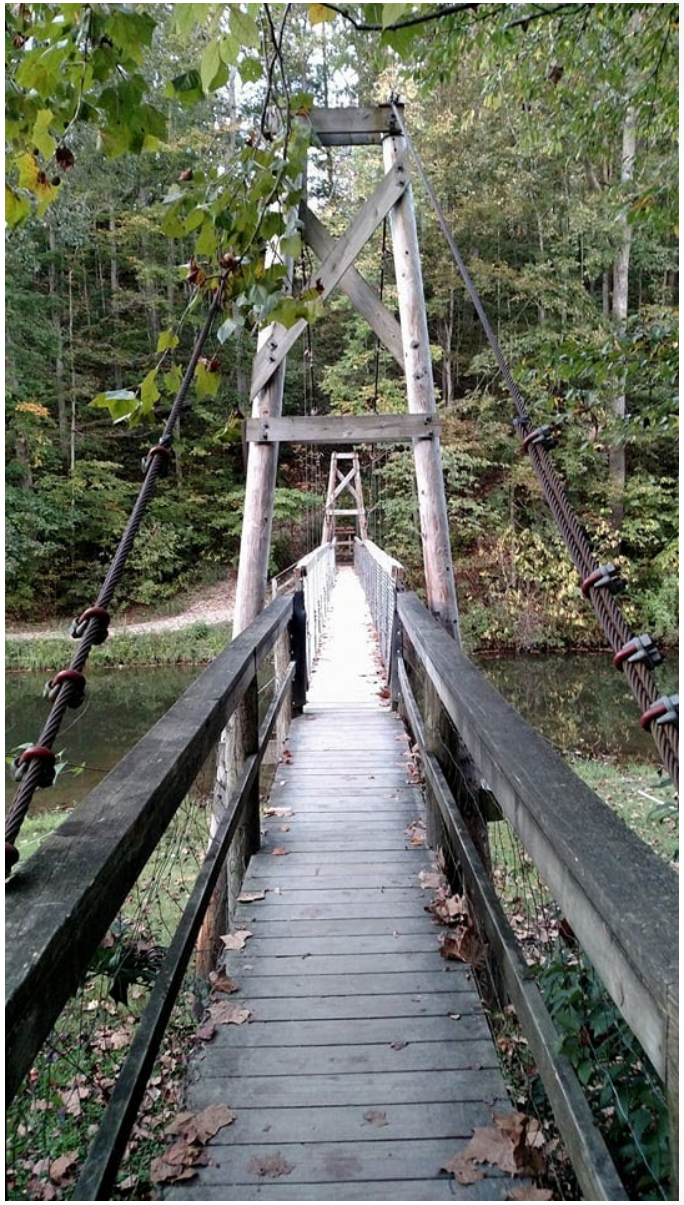
6. Suggest possible next steps.

- **What are next steps we might take based on what this biblical passage models for us?**
- **Are we sensing God's invitation to engage public concerns?**
- **Are we being invited into dialogue with each other, with this passage, and with God about specific justice issues?**

6. Suggest possible next steps.

- **Are we learning what *not to do* based on what we see in this text?**
- **Are there common values we share that can be the basis for our response to a societal matter?**
- **What kind of church shall we be, knowing what the Bible models for us, and knowing what challenges our community is facing?**

This initial “rooting” sermon makes the case that we are permitted, authorized, encouraged, and even urged to preach about public issues because Scripture has already opened the conversation for us – we need only to step into it.



Let's try it!

Applying the Dialogical Lens to a scriptural passage

1. **Point out the dialogical aspects of the passage.**
2. **Determine what is at stake.**
3. **Identify the values.**
4. **Explain how God, Jesus, and/or the Holy Spirit is active.**
5. **Recognize what the dialogue is teaching us.**
6. **Suggest possible next steps.**

Luke 4:1-14

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit
in the wilderness, 2where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate
nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished.
3The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command this stone to
become a loaf of bread.’ 4Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “One does not live
by bread alone.” ’

5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of
the world. 6And the devil said to him, ‘To you I will give their glory and all this
authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. 7If
you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.’ 8Jesus answered him, ‘It is
written,

“Worship the Lord your God,

and serve only him.” ’

Luke 4:1-14

9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10for it is written,

“He will command his angels concerning you,

to protect you”,

11and

“On their hands they will bear you up,

so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.” ’

12Jesus answered him, ‘It is said, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” ’
13When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

[Suggest extending to these two verses:]

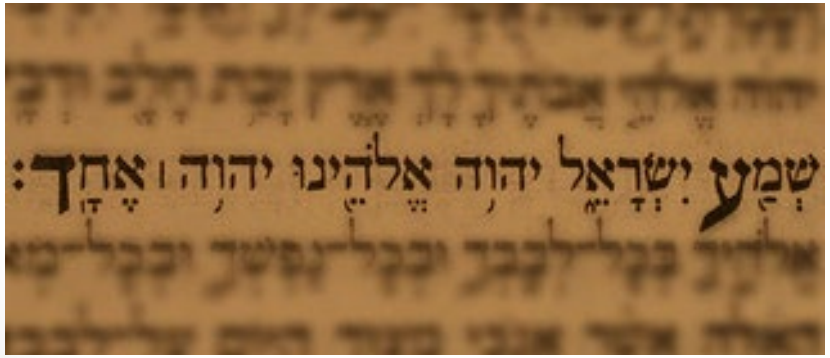
14 Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. 15 He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

1. Point out the dialogical aspects of the passage.

a. Presumed author, and intended audience?

b. Social, cultural, and political forces either in the background or directly present in the passage?

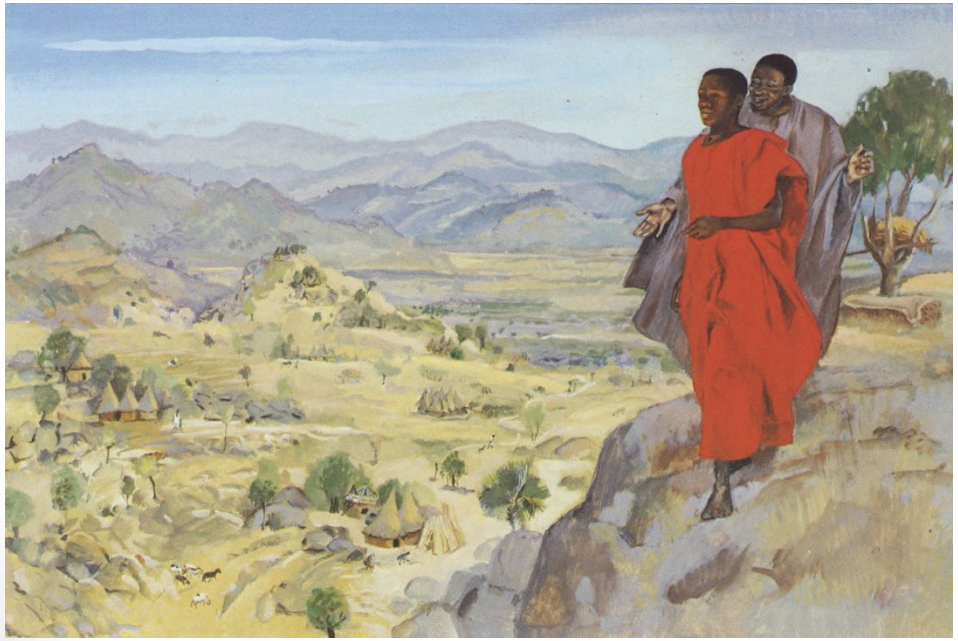
c. Other books or authors in the Bible implicitly in conversation with this text or author?



a. Luke is the author. Original audience is Gentile Christians in the early church
b. Luke's church is experiencing some level of persecution. They are living in as outsiders in their communities (because of following Christ) and in relationship to the Jewish church. Also note that Luke's church would have experienced the fall of the Temple.
c. Jesus (and thus Luke) references the Tanach when quoting verses to counter the temptations: Ex. 23:25; Deuteronomy Ch. 6.

1. Point out the dialogical aspects of the passage.

d. Characters? Who speaks? Who is in the background? Who is in the scene but silent?



a. Characters:

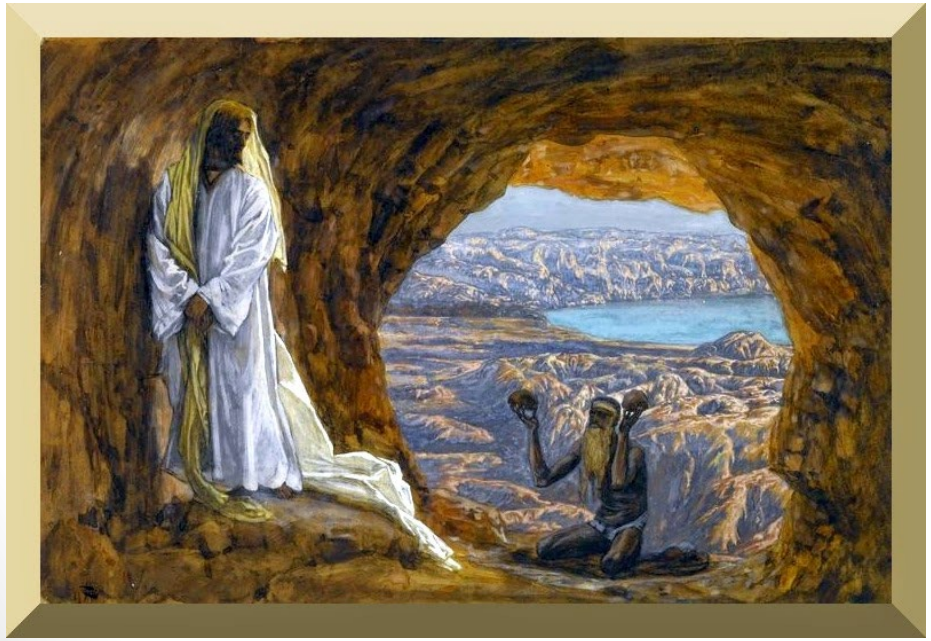
- Jesus – coming straight from the baptismal waters: vulnerable, hungry, alone, weak
- Holy Spirit – don't overlook the work of the Spirit here: filling Jesus, leading him into the wilderness.
- Devil – not necessarily "evil" here, but functions as the tester.

2. Determine what's at stake

A. Presenting issue? What does each of them want?

B. Fears or concerns of the author, the audience, or the characters? What are they afraid of losing? What or who is threatening to them?

C. Overt or underlying tensions or conflicts?



1. Jesus – Is he who he thinks he is? (Implications for Luke's church – is the one we are worshiping strong enough to sustain us?)
2. Holy Spirit – Ushers Jesus in, presumably remains within Jesus, but does not show up again until v. 14.
3. Devil - In his role as tester, he is tasked to find out: Is Jesus up to the task? Is he strong enough to bear the weight he must carry?

3. Identify the values

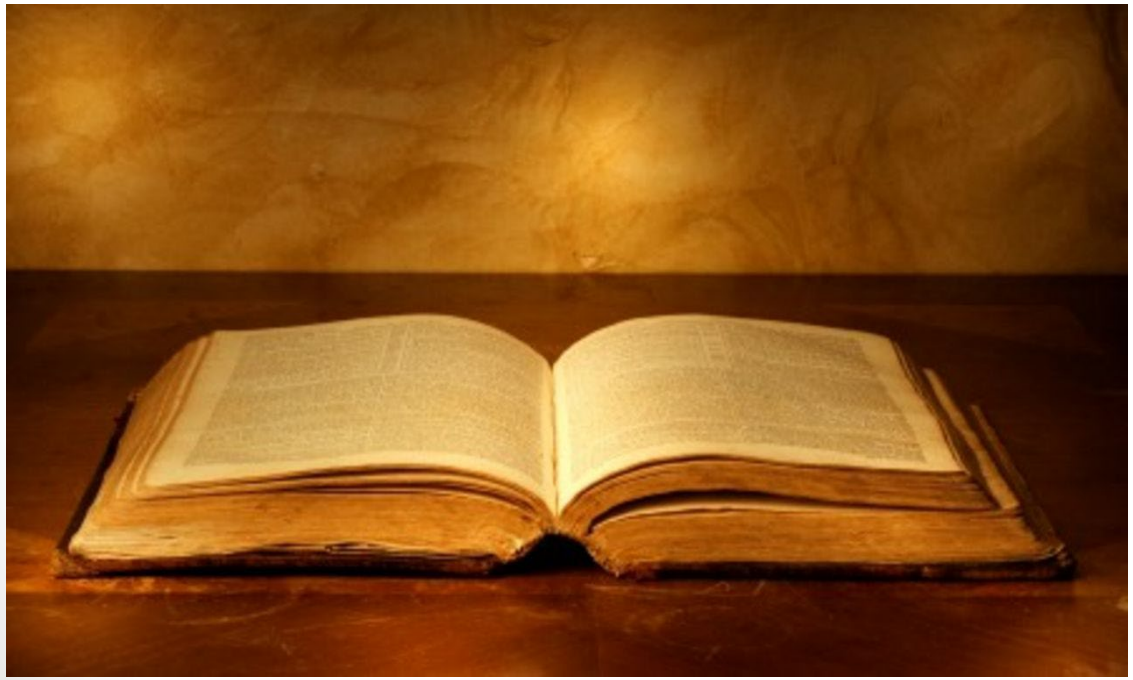
A. What is important to author/audience/characters?

What do they cherish and hold dear?

a. Why did Luke's church need to hear the temptation story? Luke is writing for the Christians in the Greco-Roman area of the Roman Empire. These people were Gentiles and had worshipped many different gods. Christians were the minority and struggled in their efforts to leave their former practices behind and worship the one true God.

3. Identify the values

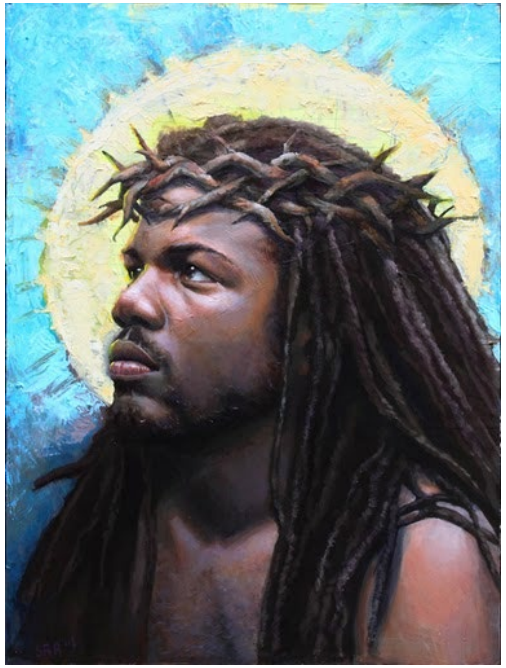
B. What is their “best self” that could emerge?



The story of how the Devil tempted Jesus and how Jesus was able to resist would be an encouraging message for the Luke’s church. Knowing the Word of God was a source of strength for Jesus, they could find the same strength and resist the temptation to fall back on their former gods.

3. Identify the values

C. Where do values overlap, points of commonality? What desires, fears, and values do the characters or figures share?



C. There are two things they can all agree on:

1) Jesus is the Son of God.

2) Scripture is authoritative.

But what does that mean?

For our church . . .

For our faith . . .

For the way we choose to interpret Christ and Scripture?

3. Identify the values

D. Where are there gaps? What are the things the dialogue partners are unlikely to agree upon?

d. While both Jesus and the devil quote scripture, they each use it in different ways – and those ways will never align because they serve different purposes.

* The devil uses scripture as a *wedge* to come between Jesus and God.

* Jesus uses scripture as a lifeline to keep him connected to God – especially at a time when he feels most alone and tempted.

4. Explain how God, Jesus, and/or the Holy Spirit is active.

A. What is God doing in the midst of this interchange?

B. Is God's action explicit, implicit, or apparently absent?

This passage demonstrates that the Spirit never leaves Jesus.

The Spirit descends on Jesus at his baptism, ushers him into the wilderness (the place of temptation), but does not show up again until v. 14.

Jesus knows the word of God – the Scriptures. God's presence is implicit in those passages.

4. Explain how God, Jesus, and/or the Holy Spirit is active.

C. How is the larger community wrestling with or expressing their faith in God?

c. This passages a vital Christological question for Luke's church: who is Jesus? Why should we believe in him, follow him, when there are so many other gods to follow?

Note, also, the authority of the Hebrew scriptures which would have been important for the Gentile Christians to grasp. Theirs is not a church completely separated from the Jewish faith but intimately linked to it. (And so is ours.)

5. Recognize what the dialogue is teaching us.

A. What is this exchange, dialogue, or conversation teaching us about what it means to be church in the midst of contentious public issues?

Is the church's role to be the embodiment of the Spirit in the wilderness to those who are facing the same kinds of temptations Jesus faced?

As we begin our Lenten journey, how will deal with those who try to use Scripture to separate us from God? (E.g., prosperity gospel, white Christian nationalism)

The question is: to whom and to what do we ascribe authority as we make decisions about our daily needs (bread), our loyalties (worship), and our power (pinnacle of the temple).

5. Recognize what the dialogue is teaching us.

B. What can we learn about being faithful people who engage the conflicts and sin of the world, while maintaining the commitment to grace, hope, and love?

It must have been very difficult for Luke's readers to deal with Roman occupation and maintain their faith in God, through Jesus.

Luke's readers see that Jesus, who resists the devil's temptations, is worthy of their worship and devotion.

This story tells them they can follow Jesus trusting that his power can help them endure, resist, and defeat temptations that might cause them to abandon their faith. So can we.

As the Holy Spirit was with Jesus, so the Holy Spirit is also working in them. As with us.

5. Recognize what the dialogue is teaching us.

C. What can we determine about who God is, what God does, and what God intends for us based on this interchange and dialogue in the passage?

Our world and Luke's world are not that different. We still see evil in the wielding of power in our political, social, and economic lives by those who have their own agendas and stand to profit by lording it over those who do not have such resources.

Grounding ourselves in Scripture, caring for the vulnerable, honoring our neighbors, protecting the weak, restoring dignity, and sustaining the Beloved Community are the antidote to the current reality in which we live.

6. Suggest possible next steps

A. Next steps we might take based on what this biblical passage models for us?

B. Public concerns God is inviting us to engage? Are we being invited into dialogue with each other, with this passage, and with God about specific justice issues?

a. How might the church accompany those in the wilderness:
b. Can we be a church that engages the difficult but necessary conversations about what it means to be living in a moral/ethical paradigm that rewards greed, privilege, and taking unfair advantage over others? What does this mean for our society, our economy, our families and communities?

How might we (the church) function as a place that invites dialogue about these issues – the brutality of our economic system and the realities of race, wealth, and privilege?

6. Suggest possible next steps

C. Are we learning what not to do based on what we see in this text?

D. Common values we share that can be the basis for our response to a societal matter?

c. Do not weaponize Scripture (as the devil did).

d. Defiant non-compliance with the systems that seek to take advantage of people when they are at their weakest, hungriest, most desperate. This is what Jesus did. This is what Jesus models for us.

6. Suggest possible next steps

E. What kind of church shall we be, knowing what the Bible models for us, and knowing what challenges our community is facing?

- What is one thing we could do to be a Spirit-filled church in the wilderness meeting people where they are vulnerable?
- How can we model basic decency, compassion, caring, honoring our neighbors, protecting the weak, and ministering to those who have decided to step away from this abusive, corrupt, and racist system?

Ultimately, there is a power that is greater than selfishness (stones into bread), more life-giving than idolatry (worshiping satan), and more effective than violence (thrown ourselves off the pinnacle).

It is the power of generosity, curiosity, creativity, joy, acceptance, and peace. It is found in the leading of the Spirit, the Holy Scripture, and the embodiment of Christ.

Your turn!

Applying the Dialogical Lens to upcoming passages

Groups 1 - 5
March 13 (2nd Sunday in Lent):
Luke 13:31-35 (Jesus, Mother Hen v. Herod the Fox)

Groups 6-10
March 20 (3rd Sunday in Lent):
Luke 13:1-9 (Parable of the Compost)

Groups 11-15
March 27 (4th Sunday in Lent):
Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32 (The Prodigal Father)

Groups 16-20
April 3 (5th Sunday in Lent):
John 12:1-8 (Mary Anoints Jesus)

SERMON-DIALOGUE-SERMON PROCESS FLOWCHART

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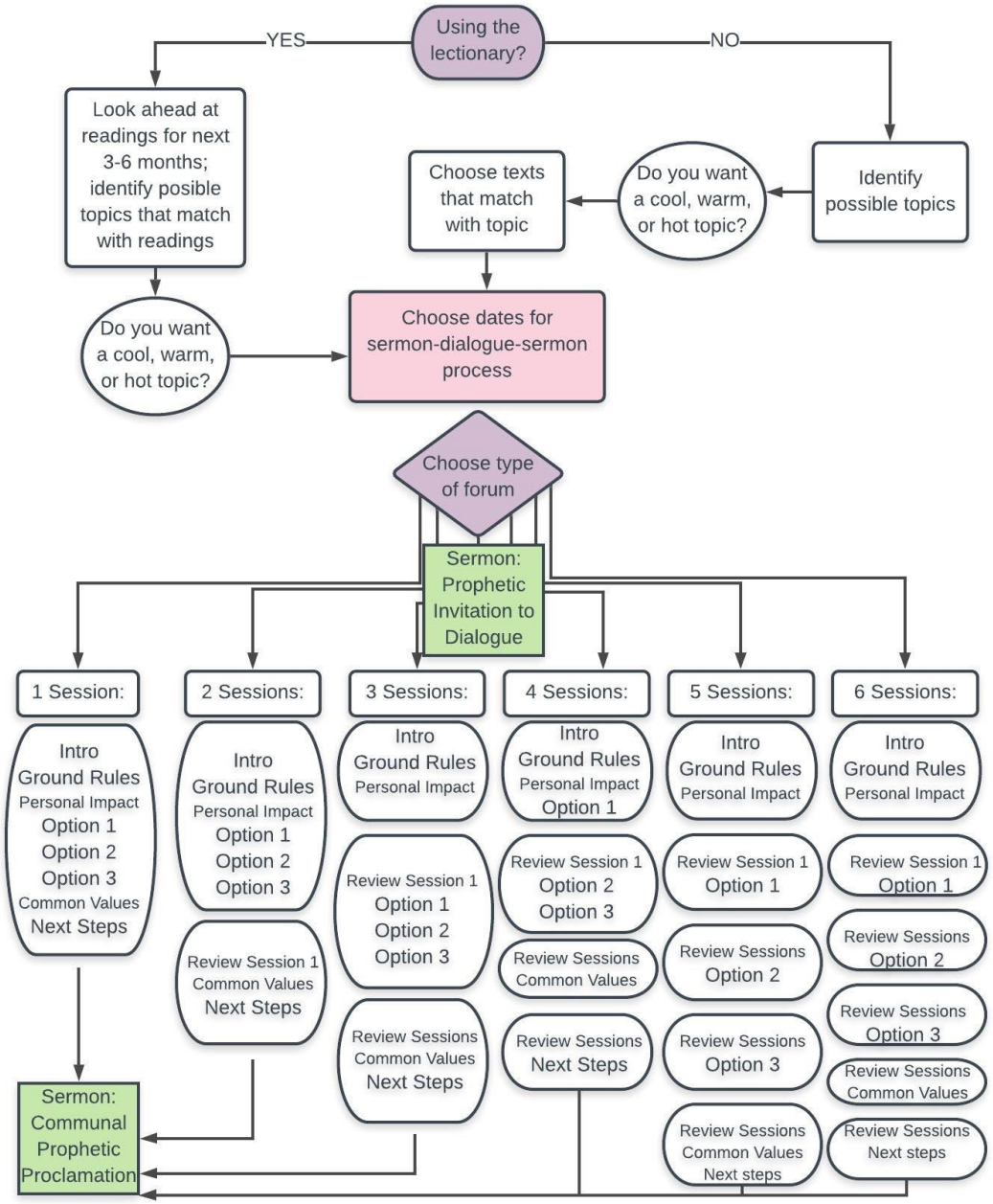

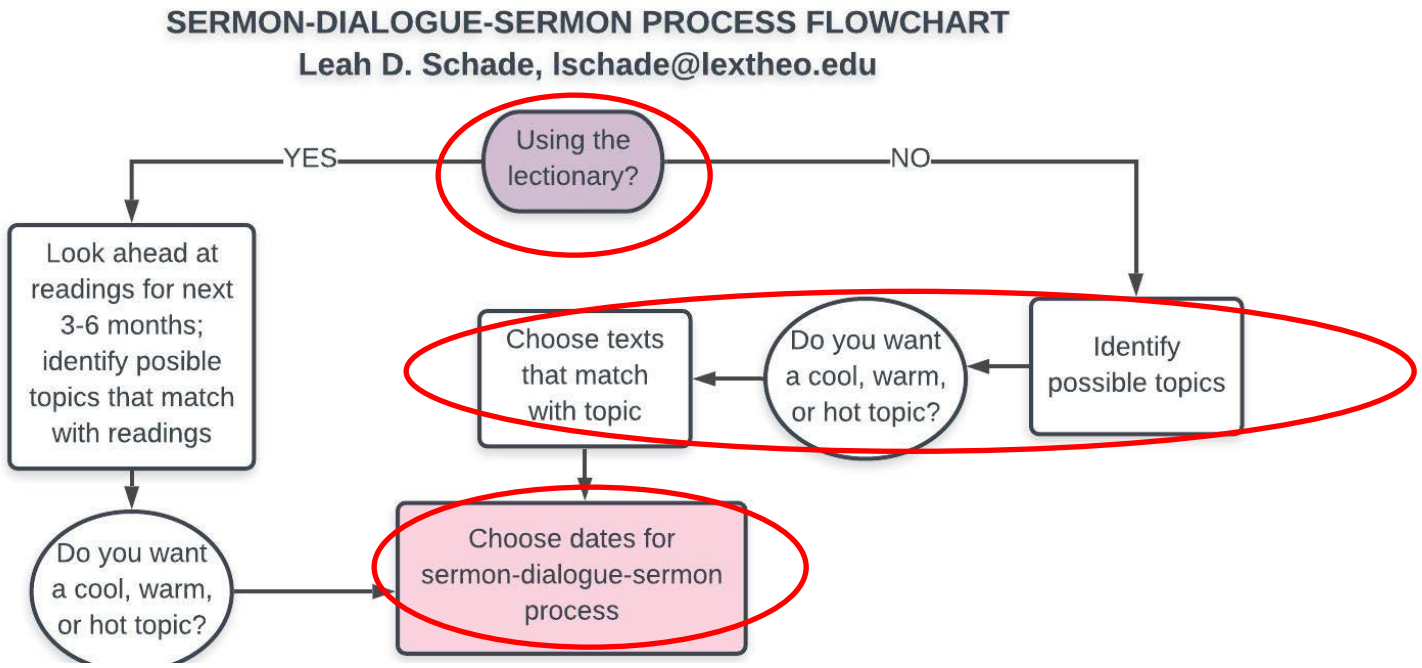
SERMON-DIALOGUE-SERMON PROCESS FLOWCHART
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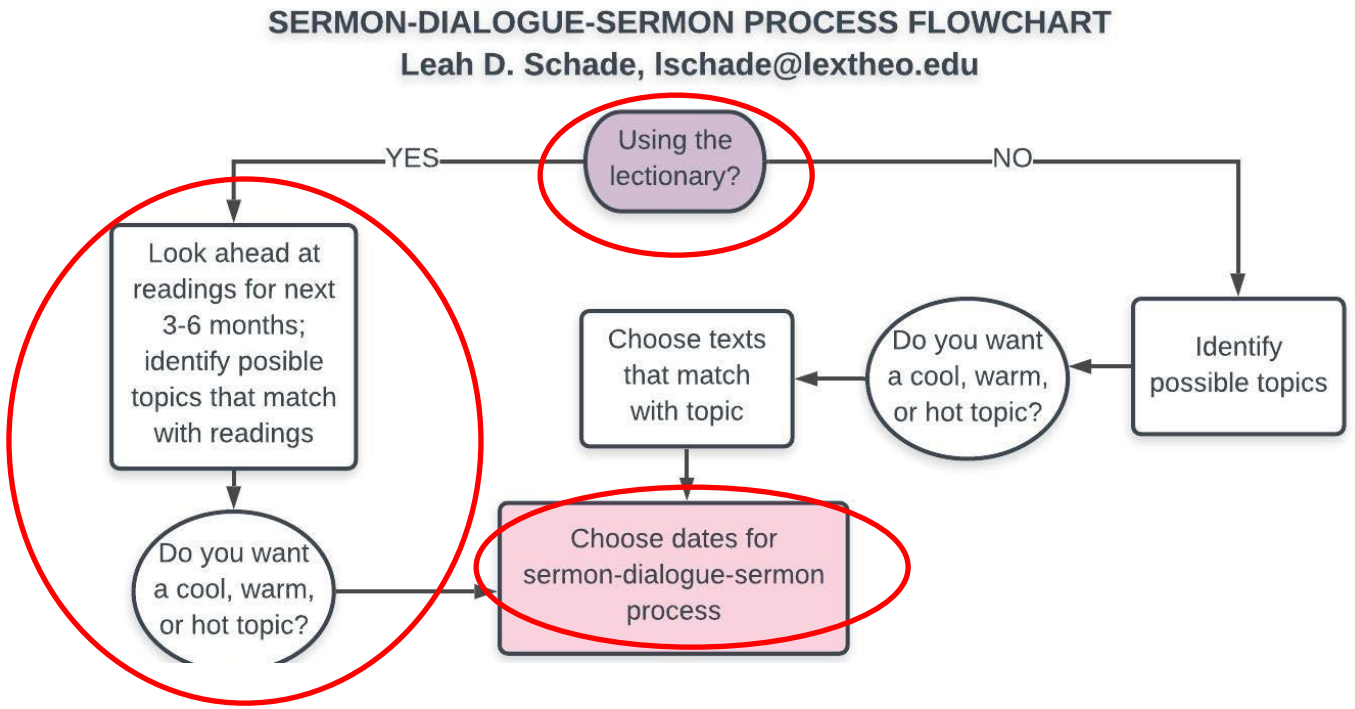
Using the lectionary?
YES
NO
Look ahead at readings for next 3-6 months; identify posible topics that match with readings
Do you want a cool, warm, or hot topic?
Choose dates for sermon-dialogue-sermon process
Choose texts that match with topic
Do you want a cool, warm, or hot topic?
Identify possible topics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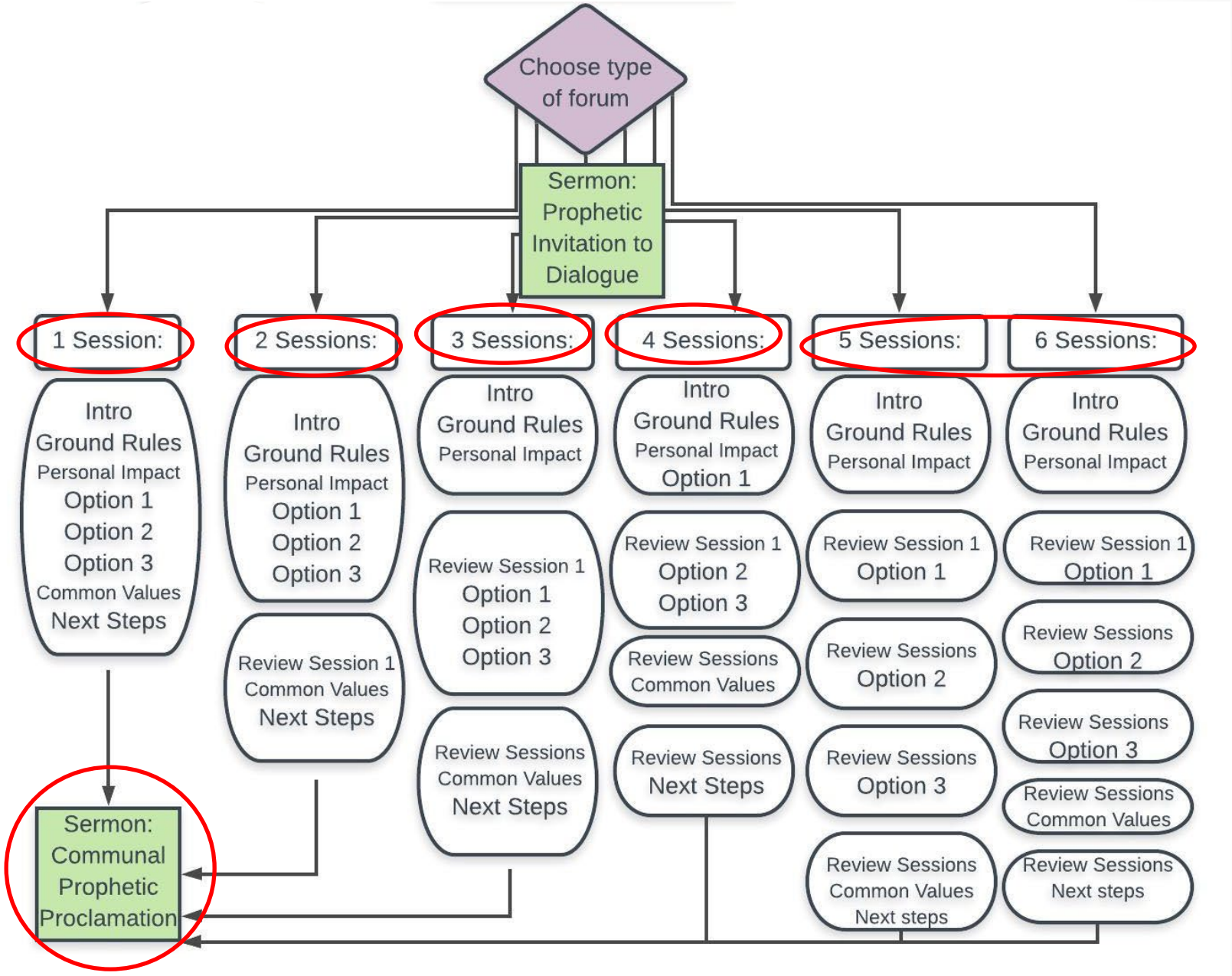
Choose type of forum
Sermon: Prophetic Invitation to Dialogue
1 Session:
Intro
Ground Rules
Personal Impact
Option 1
Option 2
Option 3
Common Values
Next Steps
Sermon: Communal Prophetic Proclamation
2 Sessions:
Intro
Ground Rules
Personal Impact
Option 1
Option 2
Option 3
Review Session 1
Common Values
Next Steps
3 Sessions:
Intro
Ground Rules
Personal Impact
Review Session 1
Option 1
Option 2
Option 3
Review Sessions
Common Values
Next Steps
4 Sessions:
Intro
Ground Rules
Personal Impact
Option 1
Review Session 1
Option 2
Option 3
Review Sessions
Common Values
Review Sessions
Next Steps
5 Sessions:
Intro
Ground Rules
Personal Impact
Review Session 1
Option 1
Review Sessions
Option 2
Review Sessions
Option 3
Review Sessions
Common Values
Next steps
6 Sessions:
Intro
Ground Rules
Personal Impact
Review Session 1
Option 1
Review Sessions
Option 2
Review Sessions
Option 3
Review Sessions
Common Values
Review Sessions
Next steps