Referencing in Sermons

Some of your assignments may be sermons rather than essays – mostly in the preaching subjects, but sometimes in Bible subjects, too. What are the referencing requirements for sermons?

Unless your subject outline or assignment instructions state otherwise, **minimum requirement** is as follows. (This is also **best practice** for any sermons you preach in the future, outside of college requirements.)

A sermon is not an essay, so it is **NOT** generally expected that you will footnote every time you use an idea from your research. (In some Bible subjects, essay-style footnoting may still be explicitly asked for in order to demonstrate engagement with scholarship. But it’s not an integral part of the sermon genre.)

If you quote someone’s **EXACT WORDS** in a sermon, you **MUST** acknowledge the source verbally for your audience. You **don’t need** to name the book, just the author’s name. Some examples:

- Short quote: “Mike Frost puts it this way: ‘...’; ‘Spurgeon once said: ‘...’ etc.
- Long story read verbatim from a book/website etc.: “Let me read to you a story that’s told by Philip Yancey in his book, *What’s so amazing about grace?...*”

For college purposes, footnote the quote as per an essay. For your own best practice, continue to do this: you may come back to this sermon five years later and want to know where the quote came from. Obviously, your congregation never sees this!

Keep **VERBATIM QUOTATIONS** to an absolute minimum. Normally, saying an idea in your own words is far better communication practice than quoting someone, unless it’s a particularly brief and powerful way of expressing the idea. Quotations that work well in essays usually fall flat in sermons, because listeners have to make a mental shift from your spoken syntax to an author’s written syntax.

Retelling **STORIES FROM OTHER PEOPLE** in your own words is generally far better than reading them from a book. (The main exception is where the way the author expresses it authentically reveals their emotions in a way that your retelling would not.)

Do not copy and paste **EXEGETICAL EXPLANATIONS** from websites like bible.org (even with attribution). It’s lazy preaching, and demonstrates that you haven’t fully grasped it yourself if you need someone else’s way of explaining it.

If you use **SOMEONE ELSE’S SERMON POINTS**, acknowledge that upfront. For example, you might have found a topical sermon for Father’s Day on “five characteristics of godly Dads.” If you use those points to produce your own Father’s Day sermon, tell your congregation at the start. For college purposes, don’t do this; we’re teaching you to do this for yourself!