

The Pastor's Research Assistant User Guide

A complete guide to studying, coaching, and building sermons with The Pastor's Research Assistant

Welcome to The Pastor's Research Assistant

The Pastor's Research Assistant is your companion for the work of the study and the pulpit. It is built for pastors who love the text and want to handle it well, but who never have enough hours in the week to read every commentary, trace every word, and weigh every tradition before Sunday comes. The Pastor's Research Assistant gathers the work of many scholars into a single, focused study and delivers it in minutes rather than days.

There are four things The Pastor's Research Assistant does for you, and they fit together as one workflow.

- Deep biblical study: it examines a passage from many scholarly angles at once, the way a room full of specialists might if you could gather them around your desk.
- A step-by-step Sermon Coach: it walks you through building your message one stage at a time, with research support at every step.
- A Sermon Builder: it gives you a flexible editor where your sermon takes shape as movable blocks you can rewrite, reorder, and expand.
- Tools to preach: it helps you carry the finished message into the room, with outlines, slides, a speaker's card, and a podium view for the moment you stand up to speak.

Here is the conviction that shapes everything The Pastor's Research Assistant does: your calling deserves your best hours. So it takes on the gathering, the language work, the historical digging, the research legwork that consumes an evening, and returns that time to you for actual study, theological and prayerful reflection, and the development of the sermon itself. The research informs your judgment. The Coach helps you shape the structure. And the message that emerges carries your voice, your convictions, and your knowledge of the people you serve, because it was formed in the work that only happens between you, the text, and the Lord.

Getting started

Getting into The Pastor's Research Assistant takes only a moment. You create an account, sign in, and you are ready to begin your first study.

Create an account

Start by creating your account. Once it is set up you can begin studying right away.

The 4-day free trial

New users get a free trial so you can see what The Pastor's Research Assistant does before you commit. The key terms are simple and worth knowing up front:

- It lasts 4 days.
- No credit card is required to start.
- You can run up to 4 analyses and do a limited amount of sermon building during the trial.
- It is for one individual: one trial per person and per network.
- It is not available on the Teams plan.

The trial is meant to give one minister a genuine taste of the full workflow, from a first study through the beginnings of a sermon.

Signing in

After your account exists, you simply sign in to return to your work. Everything you create stays waiting for you in your Library and Notes.

The main navigation

Once you are signed in, you move through The Pastor's Research Assistant using the main navigation. Each item is a doorway into one part of the workflow:

- Study: start a new analysis of a passage, subject, or lectionary reading.
- Sermon Coach: build your sermon step by step across ten stages.
- Sermon Builder: shape your sermon in a block editor and expand it with ready-to-preach material.
- Synthesis: combine two or more completed studies into one.
- Library: read, manage, and export your completed studies.
- Notes: keep fragments and observations as you go.
- Learn: the Learning Library, lessons in exegesis, interpretation, and preaching.
- Guide: this user guide.
- Account: manage your plan and profile.

The Study: starting an analysis

The Study is where every piece of work begins. You tell The Pastor's Research Assistant what you want to examine, and it produces a thorough scholarly analysis you can read, export, or carry into the Sermon Coach. There are three ways to start, depending on how you are thinking about your text.

Passage mode

Choose Passage when you already know the text you want to preach or teach. Enter a reference such as Romans 5:1-11, and The Pastor's Research Assistant studies exactly that passage. This is the most direct path: you have the verses, and you want them examined.

Subject mode

Choose Subject when you are working from a theme rather than a fixed text. Enter a subject, such as forgiveness, the kingdom of God, or suffering, and The Pastor's Research Assistant selects the most significant passages on that theme and studies them. This is useful when a topic is on your heart but you have not yet settled on where in Scripture to land.

Lectionary (RCL) mode

Choose Lectionary when you preach from the Revised Common Lectionary. The Pastor's Research Assistant treats the appointed readings as a single unit and studies them together, so you can see how the Old Testament reading, Psalm, Epistle, and Gospel speak to one another for a given Sunday.

What happens after you begin

When you start an analysis, The Pastor's Research Assistant does the work in the background. You do not have to sit and wait, and you do not have to keep the page open the whole time. You can watch the progress as the study comes together, and once it is finished it appears in your Library, ready to read and export. If you want to start another study while one is running, you can.

Choosing a translation

You choose the translation for your study. This matters both for how you read the analysis and for what appears when you export it, so pick the version you actually preach and teach from.

The Pastor's Research Assistant can print the full passage text within your study and your exported documents for the translations below. Some are in the public domain; the NASB 2020 and NIV are reproduced under license, so they print in full as well. These are:

- NASB 2020 (licensed)
- NIV (licensed)
- KJV (public domain)
- ASV (public domain)
- WEB, World English Bible (public domain)
- BSB, Berean Standard Bible (public domain)

Other translations (for example ESV, NKJV, and NRSV) are under copyright and are not licensed for full reproduction in The Pastor's Research Assistant. For those, The Pastor's Research Assistant references the text by citation rather than printing it in full. The analysis still engages the passage thoroughly; it simply points you to the verses by reference instead of printing the whole copyrighted text. If you want the full Scripture text printed in your study and exports, choose one of the translations listed above.

The 21 research agents

Behind every The Pastor's Research Assistant study is a panel of research agents. Each agent is a distinct scholarly specialty that examines the passage through its own trained eyes, the way a particular professor or commentator would. One agent watches the original languages; another watches the historical world behind the text; another watches the witness of the early church, and so on. Together they give you the breadth of a seminary faculty focused on your single passage.

A few agents are active by default so that every study has a solid scholarly core. Beyond those, you choose. You can add agents to suit your text and your audience: reach for the historical and grammatical work on a dense epistle, bring in Soul Care and Practical Theology for a pastoral series, or add a tradition-specific agent when you want a particular theological voice at the table. Here are all 21:

- **Linguistic:** studies the original Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic, including key words and their range of meaning.
- **Historical-Cultural:** reconstructs the historical setting, customs, and cultural world behind the passage.
- **Grammatical:** parses the syntax and grammar to show how the sentences actually work and what that implies.
- **Synthesis:** draws the other agents together into a unified, coherent reading of the passage.
- **Church Fathers:** brings the interpretations of the early church and the patristic writers to bear.
- **Socio-Rhetorical:** examines the social setting alongside the rhetoric and persuasive shape of the text.
- **Charismatic:** reads with attention to the Spirit, the gifts, and renewal-movement concerns.
- **Reformed:** interprets within the Reformed theological tradition.
- **Remonstrant (Arminian):** interprets within the Arminian theological tradition.
- **New Testament Use of the Old Testament:** traces how New Testament writers quote, echo, and fulfill the Old Testament.
- **Second Temple Judaism:** situates the passage in the Jewish world between the testaments.
- **Theology of Prayer:** draws out what the passage teaches and models about prayer.
- **Missiology:** reads with an eye to mission, evangelism, and the church's sending.
- **Feminist and Gender:** examines questions of gender, women, and power in the text and its reception.
- **Jewish Interpretation:** brings Jewish readings and the rabbinic tradition into the conversation.
- **Global Hermeneutics:** reads the passage through the perspectives of the world church beyond the West.
- **Ethics:** surfaces the moral and ethical claims and implications of the text.
- **Canonical-Narrative:** reads the passage within the larger story arc of the whole canon.
- **Practical Theology:** connects the text to the lived practice of ministry and the church.
- **Soul Care:** attends to the pastoral, formational, and healing dimensions of the passage.
- **Sacramental Theology:** explores the passage in relation to the sacraments and the church's worship.

The 18 hermeneutical lenses

Where agents are the specialists who do the looking, lenses shape how the passage is read. A lens is an interpretive frame, a set of questions and commitments through which the text is viewed. The same verse looks different through a Christological lens than through a Covenant Theology lens, and seeing it both ways enriches your understanding. You select the lenses that fit the passage and the message you intend to bring.

The Grammatical-Historical lens is always active, because sound interpretation begins with what the words meant in their original setting. Here are all 18 lenses:

- Grammatical-Historical (always active): reads the text for its plain meaning in its original grammatical and historical context.
- Cosmic Conflict: reads the passage within the larger struggle between God and the powers of evil.
- Biblical-Theological: traces the passage's themes across the unfolding storyline of Scripture.
- Canonical: interprets the passage in light of the shape and order of the whole canon.
- Christological: reads the passage as it points to and is fulfilled in Christ.
- Covenant Theology: interprets the passage through the framework of God's covenants.
- New Creation: reads with an eye to renewal, resurrection, and the world made new.
- Typological: traces patterns and types that anticipate later fulfillment.
- Narrative: attends to the passage as story, with plot, character, and movement.
- Sociological: examines the social structures and dynamics at work in and behind the text.
- Intertextual: follows the echoes and connections between this passage and others.
- Speech-Act: reads the text as words that do things, not only words that describe.
- Christus Victor: reads salvation as Christ's triumph over sin, death, and the powers.
- Spiritual Formation: draws out how the passage forms character and shapes the life with God.
- Moral and Ethical: focuses on the ethical vision and obligations the passage sets forth.
- Cultural Engagement: reads the passage in conversation with contemporary culture.
- Reception History: how this passage has been read across church history, from the patristic era through the present.
- Conditional Immortality / ECT: reads final human destiny, the nature of the soul, and the character of judgment, presenting eternal conscious torment and conditional immortality faithfully side by side.

Output formats

One study can be rendered as many different output types, and you pick the form you actually need. The same careful work on a passage can become a full scholarly exegesis for your own preparation, a children's lesson for Sunday school, or a podcast script, depending on what you ask for. The formats are grouped by purpose.

Study & Preparation

- Full Exegesis: the complete, in-depth scholarly analysis of the passage.
- Sermon Essentials: an accessible exegesis that gives you what you most need to preach the text well.
- Preaching Outline: a structured outline ready to shape into a sermon.
- Pastoral Commentary: commentary written with the pastor and the congregation in view.
- Word Study: a focused study of the key words in the passage.
- Canonical Reference: the passage set in relation to the wider canon.
- Series Outline: a plan for preaching the passage or theme as a sermon series.

Devotional

- Devotional: a warm, reflective reading for personal or shared devotion.
- Lectio Divina Guide: a guide for praying the passage through the practice of lectio divina.

Teaching & Care

- Bible Study: material to lead a group study of the passage.
- Leader Guide: notes and guidance for the person leading the study.
- Children's Lesson: the passage taught at a level children can grasp.
- Youth Lesson: the passage taught for a youth audience.
- Catechism Lesson: the passage shaped into catechetical instruction.
- Worship Order: a service order built around the passage.
- Pastoral Care: the passage applied to the work of caring for people.

Academic

- Academic White Paper: a rigorous scholarly treatment in paper form.
- Lecture 45 minutes: a lecture sized for a 45-minute teaching slot.
- Lecture 90 minutes: a fuller lecture sized for a 90-minute session.

Media

- Podcast or Video script: the study shaped into a script for audio or video.
- Newsletter: the study written up for a church newsletter or email.

Reading and exporting your study

Your Library holds all of your completed studies. It is the home base you return to: every analysis you finish lands here and waits for you, so nothing you produce is ever lost in the moment.

To read a study, simply open it from the Library. You can return to it as often as you like, read it on screen, and use it as the foundation for your sermon.

When you want to take a study out of The Pastor's Research Assistant, you can export it. Three formats are available:

- Word, for documents you want to keep editing.
- PDF, for clean reading and printing.
- PowerPoint, for presentation and teaching.

Your exports include Scripture in the translation you chose for the study, so what you carry out matches the version you preach and teach from.

The Sermon Coach

The Sermon Coach is where The Pastor's Research Assistant becomes a partner in the craft of preaching. It walks you through building your sermon across ten stages, offering scholarly support at each step. It asks the right questions, brings the relevant research to your fingertips, and helps you order your own decisions, so the sermon that emerges carries your big idea, your structure, and your words.

Here are the ten stages, in order:

- 1 The Text: settle on the passage you will preach and ground yourself in it.
- 2 Exegetical Foundation: draw on the study so you preach from solid interpretation, not impressions.
- 3 The Big Idea: distill the one central, governing idea of your sermon.
- 4 Sermon Type: decide what kind of sermon this will be.
- 5 Structure: lay out the bones, the movements or points your sermon will follow.
- 6 Point Development: flesh out each point with content, support, and application.
- 7 Introduction: craft an opening that draws people in and sets up the message.
- 8 Conclusion: shape an ending that lands the message and calls for a response.
- 9 Full Manuscript: pull it all together into a complete manuscript.
- 10 Review and Refine: step back, evaluate the whole, and polish it before you preach.

Because you make the choices at each stage, the Coach keeps you in the driver's seat. It is the difference between being handed a sermon and being helped to write one well.

The Sermon Builder

The Sermon Builder is a block editor where your sermon takes physical shape on the page. When your work arrives here, it comes as a set of movable blocks: a Title, a Big Idea, an Introduction, each Point, and a Conclusion. You can drag blocks to reorder them and rewrite any of them in your own voice, so the structure stays fluid until you are happy with it.

Start with a sermon form

When you begin a new sermon in the Builder, you can choose a form to start from, and The Pastor's Research Assistant lays out that form's structure as a set of labeled, empty blocks with brief guidance in each. The structure is the assistant's; the message is yours. Pick the shape that fits your text and your aim, or start Blank and build your own:

- Expository: verse-driven, with points drawn from the text.
- Narrative (Lowry's Loop): a plot that moves from tension through reversal to good news.
- Inductive: begin with the particulars and let the claim emerge near the end.
- Four Pages: trouble and grace, in the text and in our world.
- Christ-Centered: name the fallen condition, open the text, point to Christ, call for response.
- Problem and Solution: name a real problem, then bring the Scripture's answer to bear.
- ME-WE-GOD-YOU-WE: a bridge from your story to common ground, to the text, to application, to a shared vision.
- Blank: empty sections to build your own structure.

A sermon brought over from the Sermon Coach keeps the structure you built there, so you only choose a form when you start fresh in the Builder.

Blocks that write themselves

Some blocks do real work for you once you name them. Name a block "Illustration" and The Pastor's Research Assistant writes full, ready-to-preach illustrations: biblical, historical, and contemporary, so you have living material rather than a vague suggestion to find a story later. Name a block "Conclusion" and The Pastor's Research Assistant drafts ways to land the message and bring it home.

What you can generate

From the Builder you can also generate the supporting pieces a preacher needs:

- A detailed outline of the sermon.
- Presentation slides for projecting on screen.
- A speaker's card to preach from.

Your support, close at hand

While you build, your supporting material lives in side drawers, within reach but out of the way. There you will find your Notes, your past analyses, and an on-demand whole-sermon review that looks over the entire message and offers feedback whenever you ask for it.

Podium mode

Podium mode turns a tablet or phone into your pulpit. When the moment comes to preach, you no longer need loose pages; your message is right there on the screen, formatted for the room.

In Podium mode you can:

- Scroll through your outline or your full manuscript as you preach.
- Slide out a margin tab to reveal your speaker's notes when you want them.
- Watch a running timer so you stay on pace.
- Switch between day mode and night mode to suit the lighting where you stand.

It is designed to be calm and uncluttered, so the device serves you and then gets out of the way.

Synthesis

Synthesis lets you take two or more of your completed studies and bring them together. Sometimes a message is not contained in a single passage: it spans several texts, or it draws a few subjects into one thread. Synthesis is built for exactly those times.

You can use it in two ways:

- Combine your studies into one unified study, which you can then carry into the Sermon Coach as a single foundation.
- Summarize your studies into one tight digest, when you want the essence of several studies in a compact form.

This is especially helpful for a sermon or series that moves across multiple passages or themes, letting you weave separate pieces of study into one coherent whole.

Notes

Notes is a place to keep the fragments and observations that come to you while you study. A turn of phrase, an illustration you do not want to lose, a connection you noticed, a question to chase down later: jot it in Notes and it is held safely until you need it.

What makes Notes more than a scratch pad is that your notes are ready to drop into a sermon. As you build, you can reach for the pieces you saved and place them where they belong, so the good thoughts you had on Tuesday make it into the message on Sunday.

Finding a note: search and hashtags

A search box sits at the top of the Notes page. Type any word and it pulls up every note whose title, body, or passage contains it, so even a large collection is searchable in a keystroke.

For grouping, use hashtags. Write a #hashtag anywhere in a note (for example #prayer, #grace, or #romans8) and that note is tagged. Type a #hashtag into the search box to see only the notes that carry it, or combine a tag with words to narrow further; for example, #faith healing finds notes tagged #faith that also mention healing.

Every hashtag you have used is gathered into a clickable index of chips beneath the search box, each showing how many notes carry it. Click a chip to filter to those notes, click it again to remove it, and combine several to narrow. A #tag inside a note is clickable too, and a live count shows how many notes match.

To tag a note, simply include #word when you write or edit it; there is no separate tagging step, and your tags are indexed the moment you save.

The Preaching Calendar

The Preaching Calendar gives you a full year to plan every Sunday. Follow the Revised Common Lectionary or keep a traditional calendar for your own series, read it as a list or a month grid, and write a plan for any day. It is free to view and print, and signing in saves your plan to your account so it loads on any device.

Lectionary or Traditional

Choose Lectionary to follow the Revised Common Lectionary (Year A, B, and C), with the first reading, psalm, epistle, and gospel shown for every Sunday. Choose Traditional for a plain calendar year when you preach your own series. Easter and the other holy days are marked for you in both.

List or month grid

The List view shows the year season by season, or month by month, and opens at the current week. The Month grid shows one month at a time as a wall calendar. Use the Jump to controls to move to any date, or to any lectionary Year, without scrolling.

Planning a day

Click any day to open it. Write the sermon title, the pericope or passage(s), and the subject, and add formatted notes with bold, italic, underline, and lists. A color bar on each day lets you code your series and themes. Signed in, everything saves automatically.

Adding a sermon from the Coach or Builder

From both the Sermon Coach and the Sermon Builder, the Add to preaching calendar button lets you pick a date and place that sermon's title, passage, and theme onto that Sunday, so your study, your sermon, and your plan stay in one place.

Printing and the church-year wheel

Use Print this calendar to print what you see, filled in or blank to complete by hand. On the lectionary view you can also download the church-year wheel, a visual of the seasons sized to the year.

The Sermon Series Planner

The Sermon Series Planner is one organized workspace for planning a whole preaching series: lay out each week's text, do the full study behind every message, and place the series on your Preaching Calendar. Open it from Series on the menu, or start one from a finished Series Outline.

The arc

The arc is the through-line of the series: the way the weeks connect and build, from the opening Sunday to the one that brings it home. A strong arc makes a series feel like one unfolding message rather than a set of unrelated sermons.

Name the series and its scope

Give the series a title and a scripture scope (a book, or a theme such as faith or the parables of Luke), and, if you like, a big idea, a color, and a status. The color marks the series on its cards here and on each of its Sundays in your Preaching Calendar.

Choose your agents and lenses

Before you draft, choose the exegetical agents and hermeneutical lenses you want your research assistant to apply. Nothing is pre-selected; the study reflects the tools you choose. Each option explains itself in plain language. Pick more for greater breadth, or a focused few for a particular emphasis.

Draft the arc, or lay it out yourself

Press Draft the arc and your research assistant surveys the subject across the whole canon and proposes a week-by-week arc, each week standing on its own real passage, which you are free to edit. Or add and order the weeks yourself, giving each a passage, a focus, and a Sunday.

Study each sermon in full

When a week is ready, Study this text gives that sermon a complete exegesis and a preaching outline, the same depth as a standalone study. You only study the weeks you choose to open.

Put the series on your calendar

Give the weeks dates, or Schedule the Sundays from a start date, then Populate the Preaching Calendar to place the whole series on the calendar in one click.

What it uses

Drafting the arc uses one analysis. Fully studying a sermon, a complete exegesis plus a preaching outline, uses two more, and only when you choose to study that week. Nothing is generated for weeks you do not open.

The Learning Library

The Learning Library is where The Pastor's Research Assistant helps you grow as the one who handles the text. While the rest of The Pastor's Research Assistant does the gathering for you, the Learning Library teaches the craft itself, in plain language, so you can keep deepening as an interpreter and preacher week by week. You will find it inside the app under Learn, and it is included with your plan.

It is organized as thirty-five lessons across three disciplines, the three skills that stand behind every faithful sermon:

- Exegesis: drawing the meaning out of the text the author actually wrote, including observation, words, genre, context, and the careful use of commentaries.
- Hermeneutics: interpreting faithfully, including the grammatical-historical method, bridging the gap from the ancient text to today, seeing Christ rightly, and avoiding the common pitfalls.
- Homiletics: turning study into a sermon, including finding the Big Idea, structure, illustration and application, the narrative arc, building a series, and honest self-critique.

Tiered from foundations to advanced

Each discipline is arranged in three tiers, so you can begin wherever you are and grow from there. Foundations covers the essentials in plain terms. Developing builds on them with more skill and nuance. Advanced takes up the harder questions and the finer judgments. You are free to read in any order, but the tiers give you a natural path.

Built to teach, not merely summarize

Every lesson is written to teach the skill, not only to describe it. Each one includes a worked example on a real passage, so you see the technique applied rather than only explained, a key takeaway to carry with you, and a short exercise to try on your own text this week. No Greek, Hebrew, or seminary background is assumed.

Plans, allowances, and fair use

The Pastor's Research Assistant offers three plans so you can choose the one that fits how much you study and preach.

- Premier: \$49 per month, with 40 analyses.
- Advanced: \$79 per month, with 60 analyses.
- Teams: \$199 per month, with 180 analyses shared across up to 5 seats.

What counts as an analysis

An analysis is one generated study, output, or synthesis. Only completed analyses count toward your allowance; if one fails, it does not count against you.

How allowances work

Your allowance resets each billing cycle. Unused analyses do not roll over from one cycle to the next, so each month begins fresh with your plan's full allowance.

Fair use

Accounts are personal and intended for individual ministry use. On the Teams plan, the shared allowance is meant for the seats on that one team.

The free trial

The free trial gives new users a way to try The Pastor's Research Assistant first. The key terms again: it lasts 4 days, requires no credit card, allows up to 4 analyses and a limited amount of sermon building, is for one individual with one trial per person and per network, and is not available on the Teams plan.

If you reach your allowance

Running out before the cycle ends does not stop your work. If you reach your allowance, you can upgrade your plan and continue right where you left off.

Your account

You manage your plan and your profile from the Account page. It is the place to handle the practical side of your subscription.

From Account you can:

- See your plan type, so you always know which plan you are on.
- Use the upgrade option to move to a higher plan when you need more.
- Manage your profile details.

Your login and security are managed separately, so signing in and protecting your account are handled in their own dedicated place.

Tips for the best results

The Pastor's Research Assistant rewards a little intentionality. A few habits will help you get the most from every study and every sermon.

- Choose agents and lenses that fit the passage and the audience. A dense theological text, a narrative, and a pastoral topic each call for a different mix; pick the voices that serve this text and these people.
- Start from a clear passage or subject. The sharper your starting point, the more focused and useful the study will be.
- Use the Sermon Coach to keep the sermon in your own voice. Let it guide and support you stage by stage rather than handing you finished words.
- Revisit and edit everything The Pastor's Research Assistant offers. Treat its output as raw material for your judgment, not as a final answer. Rework it until it is truly yours.
- Save useful pieces to Notes as you go. The good thought you have now is easy to lose; capture it so it makes it into the sermon.

Frequently asked questions

What counts as an analysis?

An analysis is one generated study, output, or synthesis. Only completed analyses count toward your allowance; a failed one does not count against you.

Does The Pastor's Research Assistant write the sermon for me?

The sermon is yours. The Sermon Coach walks you through ten stages with scholarly support at each one, so the structure, the words, the convictions, and your knowledge of the people you serve are all your own. It carries the research and the heavy lifting, and returns your best hours to the praying, the shaping, and the speaking that only you can do.

How does the free trial work?

The free trial lasts 4 days and requires no credit card. It allows up to 4 analyses and a limited amount of sermon building. It is for one individual, with one trial per person and per network, and it is not available on the Teams plan.

Is my work private?

Yes. Your content is private to your account. It is not shared, and it is not used to train AI systems.

Can I cancel anytime?

Yes. Plans are monthly, and you can cancel anytime from your account.