

SECTION 32

Sermon Delivery

The Delicate Art of Sermon Delivery *(How to make the right pitch)*

“Here is no doubt about this; effective speaking involves action; and that is why I stress that the whole person must be involved in preaching.”

-D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

“The most effective preaching comes from those who embody the things they are saying.”

-John Stott quoting John Poulton

“Sermon delivery is an important aspect of the preacher’s work. At this point many preachers fail. They may gather excellent material for their sermons. The sermon itself may be well organized and skillfully done. Yet when the preacher opens his mouth in the pulpit, the sermon dies. There is no positive, enthusiastic response. This must be corrected. The preacher must not only prepare his sermons well, he must also deliver them well.”

-Jerry Vines

Introduction:

Being a good communicator has never been more important than it is today. Preachers were once the best show in town, but that day has long passed away. Today we compete against a world of audio-video technology that is exciting, attractive and first class. If we say what we say badly, we will not be heard. That is reality. That is fact. This is the world in which we find ourselves.

Those whose livelihood comes from the world of communication are quick to give suggestions, and some of their ideas are worth our consideration.

Editors at *Briefings Publishing Group* admonish us to:

1. **Send Clear Signals**-videotape yourself and watch professionals.
2. **Plan Your Message**-outline what you have to say and give a one sentence overview of the content followed by a logical presentation.
3. **Criticize in Private**-get constructive feedback. Communicate effectively with your team.

In *The Executive's Guide to Successful Presentations* we are told we can “speak with confidence and power.” The following suggestions as to how are noted:

1. Prepare thoroughly.
 - Practice pronouncing difficult words.
 - Double-check your facts and statistics.
 - Ask yourself, “Can I shorten the presentation?” If so, cut the material that isn’t vital.
2. Help yourself relax.
 - Take gradual steps to get over stage fright. *How:* Practice giving a speech to an empty room.
 - Tape your presentation twice. First, make an audiotape and listen for any grammar or pronunciation errors. Then, if possible, videotape yourself to watch for any annoying gestures that might distract your audience.
 - Find out what motivates your listeners.
 - Learn about the jobs and careers of audience members.
3. Think positively.
 - Remind yourself that the audience wants you to succeed.
 - Keep in mind that audiences rarely notice the visible signs of anxiety.
 - Review the presentation in your mind and visualize yourself giving a successful speech.
 - Be yourself.

Patricia Haddock, author of *Leadership Skills for Women*, also has some thoughts on keys to effective communication. She believes communicating a sense of personal power comes from a belief that you can reach your goals in your own way. You communicate a sense of personal power by developing these traits:

1. **Authority:** Authority is inner confidence—a trust in your skills and abilities. It comes from the inside, from an attitude of “I can do that. I deserve success.”
2. **Assertiveness:** Assertive behavior is active, direct, and honest. It communicates an impression of self-respect and respect for others.
3. **Accessibility:** The powerful person is a master networker.
4. **Image:** You communicate power through your image. Stand tall and walk proudly, remembering that you have value as a person.
5. **Communication habits:** Take deep breaths to project a firm voice. Avoid slang, jargon, and vocal hesitations that can hinder effective communication. Use only the body movements and gestures necessary to make your point, no more.

Bryan Chapell reminds us a sermon can have good content, yet still be lacking in style that is most effective in getting the words from a printed page to the hearts of the hearers. Furthermore, every preacher has a style that influences the choice of words he makes to convey the truths of the sermon. Chapell contributes to our analysis by noting three issues which we outline as follows:

1. Marks of Poor Style
 - Verbosity
 - Lack of clarity
 - Circumlocution-saying many words, but never what you intended to say
 - Lack of dramatic quality
 - Absence of flow and rhythm
2. Ingredients of Good Style
 - Clarity of speech
 - Vividness in style
 - Simple words
 - Specific words
 - Freshness of expression
 - Degree of beauty
3. Ways to Enhance Sermon Style
 - Pay attention to your own way of preaching
 - Study the style of others
 - The young preacher might try to write at least one sermon per week

Gleaning from both the secular and religious world of communication, and from those cited above, what goes into effective sermon delivery in a new millennium?

I. Principles for Effective Sermon Delivery

1. Evaluate your style (individually and with help).
2. Rework the message jettisoning useless words and repetitious sentences, replacing them with fresh, powerful words and sentences.
3. Check for good progress and flow.
4. Traffic in good word use (Ecclesiastes 12:9,10).

5. Evaluate your content by letting someone read your manuscript and make comments that may improve the message.
6. Write for the ear.
7. Aim for clarity.
 - a. Develop a clear outline.
 - b. Keep sentences short.
 - c. Keep sentences simple.
 - d. Use simple words.
8. Repeat the main idea without always using the exact same words.
9. Use key words (sometimes repetitiously).
10. Think personally of your audience.
11. Be positive and upbeat (when appropriate).
12. Don't be eye-glued to your notes.
 - a. It hinders eye contact.
 - b. It can decrease the vitality of the speaker.
13. Do not apologize (for anything).
14. Latch on to friendly, attractive faces.
15. Stay steady.
16. **KNOW** your stuff.
17. Remember the power of the eyes and face (see "Face It" by Deborah Blum in *Psychology Today*, Sept/Oct 1998, pgs. 32-70).
18. Say what you say with passion and be real.
19. Be natural, be yourself (avoid the copy-cat mistake).
20. Be neat, clean and appropriately dressed for the occasion.

II. Transitions: an essential ingredient

Transitions are crucial to good sermon delivery because they allow you to move "seamlessly" from one part of the message to another. John Broadus says, "Transitions may be formally defined as both the act and means of moving from one part of the sermon to another, from one division to another, and from one idea to another" (Broadus, 120).

- A. What do good transitions contribute to a message?
 1. They aid the flow and progress of the message.
 2. They help your audience follow the progress of your message, eliminating confusion.
 3. They help keep the audience's attention.
 4. They tie the components of the sermon together.
 5. They signal the listener that a change or movement is taking place.

B. Types of transitions

1. Knitting statements

a. A knitting statement reaches back into previous comments or thoughts, points toward what is next, and pulls the two together.

b. Examples

(1) “Not only ... But also”

(2) “If ... is true, then ... is true”

2. Dialogical questions

Example: “If we can’t get to God by good works, how can we get to God?”

3. Connecting numbers

This is the simple use of numbers to show a transition. “First, let’s look at...” Later say, “Second of all, I want you to see...”

4. Connecting words (Now, then, therefore)

5. Connecting phrases

a. “In addition to”

b. “On the other hand”

6. Summarization

7. Rhetorical devices

a. The pause

b. Change of pitch or volume

c. Change of posture or body position

8. Inferential transitions

There is some type of connection from one thought to another. “*Therefore since* Jesus loves us so *much, then* we ought to love one another.”

9. Disjunctive transitions

This transition contrasts two points or sets them apart.

Lynda Paulson, author of *The Executive Persuader*, explains that “Transitions are handles people use to pull bits of information and ideas together. Always take care to give your audience plenty of handles they can use to connect your points.” Paulson offers this list of transitions that she finds most useful:

- We’ve seen how ... now, let’s focus on....”
- Let’s have a look at....”
- Moving on to....”
- Which raises the logical question....”
- If that’s true, then....”

- Right now, you're probably wondering..."
- We've seen the big picture, now let's look at some of the details of..."
- Looking at it another way..."

(*Communicator*, June 1999, pg. 3)

III. The Value of Visual Aids

Adding strong visuals to a presentation can help hold an audience's attention and make your points more forcefully. This is essential in our visually oriented culture. How do you create compelling visuals?

- Assign each visual a single task.
- Be bold and spare with type.
- Proofread carefully.
- Create titles that grab the viewer.
- Stick to horizontals.
- Watch those bells and whistles.
- Show Biblical text.
- List major points.

(Adapted from Ray Anthony, "Talking to the Top: Executives Guide to Career-Making Presentations," in *The Communicator*, Jan. 1999, p. 8).

IV. Some Concluding Thoughts

A layman from Dallas named Fred Smith encourages those of us who speak in public to not "overlook six fundamentals of clear communication:"

- Establish a friendly atmosphere.
- Encourage participation not just observation.
- Ensure your believability.
- Make your voice inconspicuous.
- Use gestures effectively.
- Remember your limited knowledge.

("How to Be Heard" in *Leadership*)

Earl Comfort addresses the importance of the pulpit and "Church Growth." Believing the pulpit to be a decisive factor, he challenges preachers of the Word to cultivate 7 essential qualities of pulpit proclamation:

- Preaching must be biblical.
- Preaching must be understandable.

- Preaching must be warm.
- Preaching must be positive.
- Preaching must be practical.
- Preaching must be exemplary.
- Preaching must be exciting.

("Is the Pulpit Still a Factor in Church Growth?" in *Bib Sac* 140, Jan-Mar 1983, pgs. 64-70)

Appendix

Mastering the Art of Communication

by

Michelle Fairfield Poley

(adapted from Skill Path Publications)

Cardinal Rule of Effective Communication: “It is always the sender’s responsibility to make a particular communication as clear as possible for the receiver.”

I. What do good communicators do?

- Is a good listener.
- Involves the listener.
- Injects humor.
- Uses clear body knowledge.
- Is enthusiastic.
- Doesn’t talk down to the listener.
- Builds rapport.

II. What are the six keys to clarity in communication?

- Always use the simplest word available.

Wordy

a large number of
a majority of
a sufficient number
at this time
by the time that
called attention to the fact
due to the fact that
exactly alike
except in a small number of cases
for the purpose of
for the reason that
in accordance with
in addition to
inasmuch as
in the event that
in view of the fact that

Better

many
most
enough
now
when
reminded
because
identical
usually
for/to
because
by/under
also/besides
because/since/as
should
considering

Better

it would appear that	it seems
make a purchase	buy
make contact with	meet
on behalf of	for
on two different occasions	twice
pertaining to	about
pursuant to	following
since the time when	since
subsequent to	after/following
there is no doubt that	doubtless/no doubt
until such time as	until
within the realm of possibility	possible/possibly
with regard to	about

- Avoid indefinite words.
- Isolate your most important ideas into separate statements.
- Follow the rules-within reason.
- Refine your nonverbal skills.
- Check in with the receiver periodically.

III. What are the four keys to effectively positioning your message?

- Think of every communication as an opportunity to *sell* yourself to the receiver.
- Remember that most receivers are bombarded with communication.
- Understand the receiver's needs and point of view.
- Choose your words carefully. Avoid those that trigger negative reactions.

IV. What are the key rules of grammar that business communicators are generally licensed to bend in the interest of *clear* communication?

- It's okay to end sentences with prepositions.
- It's okay to split infinitives.
- It's okay to begin sentences with conjunctions.
- It's okay to reuse words.
- It's okay to use simple contractions.
- It's okay to use personal pronouns.

- V. What are seven keys for developing a truly powerful vocabulary?**
- Establish a personal vocabulary goal.
 - Read with a highlighter.
 - Keep a running list of the words you are learning.
 - Invest the time to learn Latin and Greek root words.
 - Use your developing vocabulary often.
 - Listen closely to others who have a powerful vocabulary.
 - Be yourself.
- VI. What are six keys to body language that you must master if you hope to become a master of communication?**
- Facial expression
 - Posture or stance
 - Gestures and movements
 - Eye contact
 - Territorial space
 - Touch
- VII. What are five keys to confidence/relaxation?**
- Breathe.
 - Practice your timing.
 - Practice all your important communication exchanges beforehand, when possible.
 - Take a time out if necessary.
 - Note your progress.
- VIII. What are the eight keys to responsible assertiveness?**
- Do your homework.
 - Start with the evidence procedure.
 - Use the word think instead of feel.
 - Mention feelings, if it's appropriate.
 - Describe, in objective ways, what you want.
 - Ask for the receiver's feedback.
 - Negotiate, if necessary.
 - Maintain goodwill with the other person, apart from your current exchange.