

Preaching





The Preacher

I mentioned previously that effective preaching is largely the product of two factors, one divine and the other human. Both are necessary - for 'without man, God will not, and without God, man cannot'. It is the human aspect with which we are dealing primarily in these studies.

PERSONALITY GUIDELINES

An elderly preacher was once asked by a group of young ministers: 'With regard to the human aspect of preaching, what is the most important factor?' His immediate reply was: 'Personality!' 'But tell us', they persisted, 'what is personality?' 'Ah', he said, 'if only I knew!'

Preaching involves communicating divine truth through human personality. The development and proper use of personality is important. Someone has analysed effective public speaking (I refer to public speaking as distinct from preaching) in this manner:

An effective speech is composed of:

- * 50% subject matter
- * 20% psychology of approach and conclusion
- * 20% effective delivery
- * 10% personality

Yet, that 10 percent 'leavens' the whole speech! It can make the difference between a boring talk and a fascinating speech. I've felt it desirable to devote some space to the preacher's personality. The following are some simple guidelines.

Be yourself

Be relaxed, natural and unaffected. One of the most important aids to effective speaking is to be relaxed. Tension creates nervousness. Under tension, the memory does not function well. Speech does not flow fluently. Your nervousness will be communicated to the audience, and they too will feel tense. The best way to relax is to commit your message to God. Do the best you can and leave the results to God.



Try not to copy others

God chose YOU because He wants to use YOU. You have some special features peculiar to you alone, and God has a purpose for them. It is a great mistake to try to copy any other preacher. No matter how effective that person may be, it will not enhance your ministry to try to copy him (1 Samuel 17:38,39). Determine to be yourself, and be the best that you can be!

Be true to yourself

Integrity and honesty are essential for a preacher. You are a channel for God - a mouthpiece for Him to speak to mankind. He wants a vessel which is honest, free from hypocrisy and guile.

Be a clean vessel

It is unlikely that your hearers will rise higher than you. If your life is polluted, you will pollute your hearers. If there is bitterness in your spirit, you will communicate it to your listeners. If you are critical, this will come through your preaching, and your congregation will become critical, too. If you allow yourself to be controlled by negative attitudes, the people will also become negative. You will always reproduce after your kind (Gen 1:12, 21). You have a grave responsibility to *be* the kind of person God wants to reproduce. The fruit of your ministry will be of that variety as well.

Be sincere

Sincerity means to be free from pretence or deceit. It means to be the same person in reality as you are in appearance. Do not try to appear to be in public what you are not in private.



Have a clear purpose and objective

If your life is truly dedicated to becoming an effective minister of God's Word, your personality will be developed to that end. It will take the shape best suited to a communication of truth. Do not allow preaching to be a hobby for you. It is the highest calling of God available to man. If God has called you to declare His glorious truth, devote yourself wholeheartedly to pursue the ultimate development of that calling.

Be wholehearted

Nothing worthwhile is ever achieved by half-hearted people. Nothing of value is ever obtained without cost. Give yourself wholeheartedly to the great task of preaching. Let this goal be uppermost in your mind. Study everything you can on the subject. Let it absorb and motivate you. Make it the most important thing in your life; determine to be, in every way, worthy of the high calling God has put upon you.



PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT IN PREACHING

Naturalness

Be relaxed and be yourself. God wants to use *your* personality as a channel to communicate His Word. That is why He chose and called YOU. Do not be overly critical of yourself. Accept yourself. God has accepted you. No one can be YOU nearly as well as YOU!

Originality

Let your message and the manner in which you present it be your own unique product. God enjoys our uniqueness. Allow Him to express His mind through your life in the special and unique way He has desired.

Simplicity

There is something extremely attractive and appealing about simplicity. Don't try to be overly complicated or profound. You don't have to impress people. You are there to minister to them, not to impress them.

Attractiveness

I'm convinced that the most winsome and attractive personality this world has ever seen is Jesus Christ! The attractiveness of Christ was not primarily in His physical appearance. It was His character and personality which were so appealing (Isa 53:2). *The common people heard Him gladly* (Mark 12:37). The Holy Spirit can develop a similar attractiveness in you!

Spontaneity

Don't develop a religious style which is heavy and unnatural. Let your style of communication flow freely and naturally. Don't let yourself be bound and restricted.



Adaptability

A good preacher must learn to be flexible and to adapt to many different circumstances. You need to be able to discern in each situation what the Holy Spirit is desiring to accomplish. The preacher is a very important key to the accomplishment of that purpose. Try not to be too rigid or orthodox in your mental approach to a preaching occasion. Learn how to wait on God continually in your spirit. The key to success in Christian service is to 'discern the way in which God is moving, and move with Him'.

Dynamic

There is a mysterious dynamic in preaching which is unique to this particular function - a dynamic expression of authority which can be quite awesome to witness. Peter illustrates this awesome dynamic on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). He was transformed on the Day of Pentecost. We see a very different Peter as he stood to preach that morning. There is something glorious to behold about this man as he fearlessly proclaims the Word of God to a vast crowd.

I clearly recall some of the times when I was privileged to hear Billy Graham. What power and authority were released through the preaching of that man! It is a combination of the power of God and the cooperation of man.



VITAL EQUIPMENT

I would like to speak to you now about three things which are vital to effective preaching:

VISION, VOCABULARY AND VOICE!

Vision

Every preacher needs a vision. By this I mean a concept of what his ministry can achieve in God. You could say it is a dream of what you can ultimately be for God and the function you can fulfil to His glory. Every preacher needs such a vision to motivate him.

Vocabulary

A preacher's vocabulary is composed of the number of words he knows. A preacher without words is a tradesman without tools. As a preacher, you must be interested in words. Try to read widely, for reading good literature will enrich your vocabulary. Whenever you encounter a word you are not familiar with, investigate it. Build up your vocabulary; you will become more fluent as you do. People will listen to you with much more interest, if you can adequately communicate your topic.

Voice

Surely the voice is a preacher's greatest natural asset. Therefore, you should endeavour to take good care of it. You should always be aware of your voice and seek to improve your use of it.



PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC SPEAKING

Here are a few principles about which a public speaker should be mindful:

Breathing

Correct breathing is extremely important for a speaker.

- * Practice breathing through your nose.
- * Breathe deeply right to the bottom of your lungs.
- * Practice filling your chest and lungs with air.
- * Hold it and then breathe out slowly. Control the expiration.
- * Let the air come right up from the bottom of your lungs, through your larynx (voice box) and hit the roof of your mouth. The roof of your mouth should act as a sounding board. When you bounce your voice off your palate, it will gain extra resonance. Learning to do this correctly will strengthen your vocal chords.

Articulation

An articulate person speaks very clearly. He is easy to understand. He pronounces his words well. Every preacher should aim to become adept in this skill. He ought to be easy to listen to. It should not impose strain to listen to him; it should be a pleasure.

Inflection

Inflection in speech has to do with the pitch of your voice. The human voice has a very wide range of tones. If you speak at the same pitch and on the same tone all the time, your voice can sound very boring. You must develop the ability to modulate your voice. Develop a variety of pitch.

Speed of delivery

Some people tend to speak at the same rate all the time. This, too, can become rather boring. You should endeavour to vary the speed at which you speak. Most of your message will be delivered at a moderate rate which is easy to listen to. From time to time, however, you should quicken or slow down the pace to give variety and added emphasis to your presentation.



Volume

This is another factor of importance. Varying the volume of your voice can give added emphasis to a point you wish to make. The major part of your message should be delivered at a conversational volume. This ensures that it is loud enough for all to hear, yet not so loud that it assaults the ears of your audience.

Endeavour to begin your message at conversational volume. Only turn the volume right up when you have a special point to emphasise strongly. If you occasionally drop the volume, this will also serve to give special emphasis. Your congregation will give special attention when you drop the volume. They will endeavour to hang on to every word.

Pausing

This can also give added emphasis to some point you make. Some preachers are frightened of quiet spots. Their delivery pours forth like a river, without any pause. This can be difficult for people to absorb. Don't race through your message, keeping up a fast tempo and hardly pausing for breath. Your congregation needs time to think and consider what you have said. This helps to really absorb the truth of your message. You need to inform the mind as well as stir the emotions. The mind can absorb things only at a steady rate. If you preach too quickly without suitable pauses, you will leave your hearers behind.

Repetition

A certain amount of repetition can be good. It helps to emphasise your point and fix it in the minds of your listeners. This is the kind of emphasis which you purposely give. You are aware that you are doing it, and have a good reason for doing so. Try to present the same point in a variety of ways. You want the truth you are sharing to become part of the thinking and action of the people. In order to accomplish this, the mind needs an adequate exposure to truth and must be convinced.



SIMPLE TIPS FOR PREACHERS

Be yourself!

Don't try to project some image that is insincere. Being yourself is the only way to be completely relaxed. If you try to imitate some other preacher, this will be communicated to your audience. They will sense the artificiality of your preaching. Be the very best that you can be, but always be natural and be yourself.

Forget yourself!

Self-consciousness can be a real hindrance in public speaking. It may produce hesitancy and uncertainty. It can severely restrict your flow of speech. Your actions and demeanour will also be restricted. You should prepare yourself as thoroughly as possible in every necessary way.

- * Let your study of the subject be adequate.
- * Let your notes be comprehensive and clear.
- * Be 'prayed up' and filled with the Spirit.
- * Be filled with the word of truth you intend to share.

Pay attention to every area of preparation you are aware of; but when you stand to speak, forget about yourself. Be completely absorbed in what you have to share. Be aware of your audience rather than of yourself. You are a channel for God's Word to flow through. Just seek to be utterly yielded to Him, aware only of God and the people to whom you are speaking on His behalf.

Don't develop a 'religious voice' when you are preaching

Some preachers do this, and it is most disconcerting. This conveys a sense of insincerity. It also sets him apart from his congregation. This makes it difficult for them to identify with him. Practice preaching in a normal voice - the same voice, accent and tone that you use every day in the normal communications of life. This conveys a sense of reality and sincerity.



Do not speak too softly

Make sure that everyone in your audience can hear you clearly. Don't make them strain to hear your every word. If necessary, ask the crowd; 'Can everybody hear me clearly?' It is pointless to proceed with your message if part of your audience cannot hear well enough to follow you. This would be wasting your time and theirs.

Do Not Shout

Endeavour to speak with a normal conversational tone and volume, which may have to be increased somewhat according to the size of the crowd and whether or not you have the use of an amplifying system.

Remember to vary the speed and pitch of your delivery to avoid monotony

This will give a sense of normality to your speech

Get the audience to accept you

Win their confidence. If they do not accept you, they probably will not accept your message either!

Dress Appropriately

Your appearance should never detract from your ability to communicate with your audience. Ideally, you should dress rather modestly, in a manner which is not likely to offend anyone. What is the point of antagonising your audience by your manner of dress? Your aim is to win and influence your listeners. Your clothing should not draw undue attention to you. Your dress should not be offensive to the culture of your audience.



Learn to stand properly

On most occasions it is proper to stand when addressing an audience. You should stand firmly on both feet, giving yourself a good solid stance. Stand upright, facing your audience. Avoid leaning on anything. Standing upright will help your breathing. It will also engender a feeling of quiet confidence as you face your audience.

Learn to move naturally

Your body conveys a message as well as your voice. The key to proper movement is to let it be natural. Avoid unnecessary physical gesticulations. If you are verbally describing something, it is natural to also convey the idea with your hands. Let such descriptions come naturally and spontaneously. You can emphasise a point very forcibly with your hands.

Establish and maintain eye contact with your audience

Your eyes convey a message too! Don't stare into space or above the heads of the listeners. Look directly at the people you are addressing. Let your glance rove around the congregation, so that everyone feels that you are speaking to *them*.

Remember that facial expressions are important too!

The look on your face conveys a message very eloquently. Avoid any extreme facial expressions unless you are emphasising some particular point. Above all, let your facial expressions be natural, and let them be appropriate to your theme and topic. Be happy and confident, unless your subject is a sad or serious one. Ultimately, only God can accomplish what you are seeking to attain through your preaching. Let your confidence be placed firmly in Him. Understand that the only really worthwhile development in your preaching abilities is that which God accomplishes.



THE PREACHER'S COMPLETE SKILLS GUIDE

God works in many ways besides a sermon, but many of us started following Jesus through a sermon. God used it to touch our heart. Christ brought us from death to life, or from sin to repentance, or from ignorance to truth. What made the difference? The power of the Holy Spirit worked through the humble, bold, loving act of someone opening God's Word to us (Rom. 10:17).

Prepare your soul

Preaching always comes through a preacher's heart and life first. The first step is not to illustrate or apply the text for others. The first step is to live the texts that we preach.

Plan your preaching

At some point you have to determine how you will preach through God's Word. Haphazard or poorly planned preaching schedules cannot convey "the full counsel of God."

Get the big idea

Sermons are most effective and memorable when they revolve around one central, big idea - an idea drawn from a specific biblical text.

Organise your sermon

As preaching professor Dr. Joel Gregory says, 'At some point, the preacher must bring 'order' to the sermon out of the 'chaos' of the material'.

Find the big story

Every biblical text belongs in the larger story of God's story of redemption in and through Jesus Christ. This chapter explores how to connect your sermon to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Illustrate your sermon



As Bryan Chapell argues, ‘

illustrations do more than adorn thought or clarify what is difficult to understand ... [They] persuade, stimulate involvement, touch the heart, stir the will, and result in decisions’. Here are some practical ways to illustrate effectively:

Apply the Message

Every sermon should answer the following simple question: ‘So what?’ In other words: Who will be listening to the sermon and how can you help them live what the text says?

Deliver and evaluate your sermon

Every sermon should be delivered with passion and clarity. We should also have a way to evaluate our preaching so we can keep growing as preachers.

Plan special topics

Finally, we also noticed that preachers need some special resources and inspiration to preach during those high-pressured big days, like Christmas, Easter, Holy Week, Mother’s Day, and so forth.

But always remember that every time we stand up to preach we don’t make anything happen. In Paul’s marvellously simple and liberating words, *God gives the growth* (1 Cor. 3:6). Or as the master preacher Haddon Robinson, liked to say, ‘Of course, we will not give God that which costs us nothing ... Yet in the final analysis there are no great preachers. There’s only a great Christ who does startling things when we place ourselves and our preaching in His hands’.



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