



worldoutreach
SCHOOL OF LEADERSHIP

SERIES FIVE

MODULE SIX: PREACHING SKILLS



Outline Session 1-4

1. Preaching skills (Part one)
2. Preaching skills (Part two)
3. Preaching skills (Part three)
4. Preaching skills (Part four) and non-verbal communication skills

SESSION ONE: PREACHING SKILLS (PART ONE)

Preaching is more than communicating, but communication is a must to have effective preaching.

Our sermons may be methodically and meticulously constructed, but if they're not delivered in an effective manner, true communication will be restricted.

So, how can preachers develop greater skills to develop more effective communication?

1. Prepare the message well and have good sermon notes

A basic step in effectively communicating through preaching is investing adequate time in preparing the message and crafting good sermon notes. The skill of sermon construction, which is technically known as homiletics, takes time to develop.

Foundational steps for how to prepare a message:

- Start by clarifying in your heart and mind what passage or theme from Scripture the Lord has specifically laid upon your heart
- Clarify in a short statement or sentence what the key thought (big idea) of the message is going to be
- Take time to study the text or theme
- Develop a sermon outline with structure and points which unfolds the key thought (big idea)
- Add content to the points with an explanation of the point, an illustration(s) and applications
- As a last step, add a compelling introduction and clear conclusion

2. Overcome speech difficulties

Sadly, many preachers develop **poor speaking habits** in the early years of their lives. These speech problems may have come through imitation, poor education or unfortunate comprehension. As with all difficulties, they can be overcome by discipline, exercise and a determined attitude and action.

Some of these poor speaking habits may be:

- Breathing problems
- Idiosyncrasies
- Body language
- Repetitive words
- Bad pronunciation

3. Rehearse the sermon before preaching

Speak the sermon aloud to yourself as a 'trial run'. Rehearsing the sermon helps in the following ways:

- Builds confidence
- Reveals weaknesses in your notes
- Gives you time to correct (or even rewrite) parts of the sermon

- Helps you to think the sermon through.
- Assists spontaneity in speaking

4. Careful selection of Illustrations

Part of the communication skill of a preacher is to plan and prepare illustrations which reinforce and drive home the truth. The purpose of illustrations is to illustrate the spiritual truth embedded within a main point. Stories stick!

There is an Arabic saying that goes: “He is the best speaker who can turn the ear into an eye.”

Illustrations:

- Aid memory
- Stir emotion
- Create need
- Hold attention
- Establish rapport between the speaker and his hearer

W.E. Sangster (1900 – 1960), *The Craft of Sermon Construction*, wrote seven reasons why preachers should use illustrations:

- They make the message clear
- They ease the congregation as they rest mentally for a moment or two
- They make the truth impressive
- They make preaching interesting
- They make sermons remembered
- They help to persuade people
- They make repetition possible with weariness

A few working rules on illustrations:

- Limit the number – work on quality not quantity
- Plan your illustrations
- Start with an illustration to highlight the real-life application of your topic

CH Spurgeon is reported to have taught ministers that: “There should never be a point without an illustration, or an illustration without a point.”

5. Develop story telling skills

This point follows naturally from illustrations’. Storytelling is as much an art as preaching itself. Learn to tell stories effectively and to paint pictures with words and the tone of your voice. Examples are Jesus (Luke 18:1) and Nathan (2 Samuel 12:1-13).

A technique in story telling is to **memorise** them. Collect stories, categorise them and always be on the lookout for new ones.

SESSION TWO: PREACHING SKILLS (PART TWO)

This session continues our look at 20 principles for effective communication.

6. Humour

Another effective speaking technique is the use of humour.

Humour disarms, relaxes the atmosphere, makes your listeners more receptive, has a medicinal effect (see Prov. 17:22), brings welcome relief if content is deep or heavy, dissolves conscious or unconscious barriers, and enhances communication.

Remember Paul's words to Titus in 2:7.

7. Establish rapport with people

The first few minutes are crucial as the congregation sums up' the preacher. Someone aptly said: 'There are no second chances at first impressions'.

Your opening remarks are important not just to gain attention, but to *retain* attention. Therefore plan (rehearse and memorise) your first few minutes (wherever possible).

Part of establishing rapport is to dress appropriately. The best policy is to dress for your *context*. Because preachers are up front, please give attention to your grooming.

8. Speak as if to a single person (from Douglas Kruger from his book, *50 Ways to Become a Better Speaker*)

Once you have established 'rapport', seek to engage with people as if you are speaking with them personally. How?

- By using singular pronouns (such as 'you' and 'me') rather than the plural wherever possible
- Ask 'open' questions that cause people to do personal reflection
- Tell stories or use illustrations that people can identify with and are familiar with

9. Use simple language

To be an effective communicator, it is important to use everyday language which connects and communicates with the general demographic in the congregation.

3 general rules can be applied to this point:

- Don't use theological language or terminology to seek to impress your hearers
- Avoid Christian jargon (Christianese)
- Avoid colloquialisms, difficult words or idioms which are irrelevant or incomprehensible

10. Eye contact

Another technique for communication is to maintain eye contact with the congregation (if that's appropriate in your culture). Eyes communicate.

Eye contact helps communication in two ways:

- Eyes supply information
- Eye contact also holds an audience's attention

11. Duration of sermon

To communicate effectively with a congregation, a preacher should determine the appropriate length of the sermon.

There is no hard and fast rule for how long a sermon should be but here are two guiding principles:

- Context - who you are speaking to
- Content - how long it will take to communicate what God has placed in your heart

12. Modulation

Another speaking skill is to modulate your voice. 'Modulation' has been described as the act of the voice passing from one tone to another. The objective is to make your voice as interesting, persuasive and compelling as possible.

This happens when you intentionally suit or modify your voice to:

- The subject you're speaking on
- The context

13. Articulation

A further speaking skill is 'articulation', which means pronouncing (enunciating) each word clearly and correctly.

SESSION THREE: PREACHING SKILLS (PART THREE)

This session continues an examination of 20 principles for effective communication through preaching.

14. Rate of utterance

A fourteenth skill in effective speaking is to *intentionally* develop different speaking speeds for effect. Therefore, *plan* the speed of different sections of your sermon to enhance the particular emphasis you are seeking to make. At times, slow, deliberate expression is an effective technique, whereas, at other times, it could be faster and more authoritative and demonstrative.

15. Volume / Intensity / Force

As with the rate of speaking, varying your volume, intensity and force is a great technique for marking the essential points or transitions in the sermon.

16. Pause

An often overlooked and undervalued speaking skill is the use of a 'pause'.

A pause, as the word suggests, is a deliberate break in the flow of your preaching used to build anticipation or effect.

The technique is to build up your pace, pitch and volume as you deliver a key sentence, then stop speaking (pause) while maintaining eye contact with your audience. After a few moments of silence have elapsed, launch into your next line.

Pauses are effective after an open question, a series of clauses, a very personal illustration, a pertinent point or just before you utter a significant word or phrase.

17. Posture / Stance / Gestures (body language)

Our communication as preachers is not just with our voice. Non-verbal communication is a very powerful tool to convey our message. People listen to the preacher's voice, but they also *watch* the preacher's 'body' language.

Posture, stance and gestures need to be *planned*. Learn the *art* of using gestures. Use your stance and gestures to emphasise key points.

John Wesley once said to preachers: "Take care of anything awkward or affected either in your gesture, phrase or pronunciation."

Body language taboos:

- Don't put your hands in your pockets (it conveys arrogance, disinterest or disrespect)
- Don't pace up and down, but take deliberate intentional steps
- Don't rock in the pulpit
- Don't stay in the same place for the whole sermon (unless there's no choice)

18. Be accessible and approachable (after you've preached)

An eighteenth key for effective communication is to be accessible, available and approachable after you've preached. Being accessible demonstrates that you want to identify with people, and it helps people to 'relate' to you.

19. Study the lives and ministries of effective preachers

As the old adage goes: 'Some things are *taught* and some things are *caught*.' You can learn a lot from seasoned, successful and effective preachers. As you study their lives – their ministry development, style and context – you'll find yourself learning invaluable lessons which you can apply to your own ministry.

SESSION FOUR: PREACHING SKILLS (PART FOUR)

Now to number 20, and some non-verbal communication skills.

20. Depend upon the Holy Spirit in every facet of your preaching

Even well-prepared sermon needs the one indispensable factor which makes it a life-changing message – that is the anointing and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

The empowering of the Spirit for preaching is seen in a number of ways:

- The Spirit empowers the preacher to communicate the message (Acts 2:14-37)
- The Spirit can bring immediate, spontaneous inspiration (revelation) to the preacher that may not have been covered in the research, study or preparation (Acts 2:14-21; note v. 16)
- The Spirit takes the audible words of the preacher and inaudibly applies them to the hearts and lives of the hearers (Acts 2:37)
- The Spirit uses the preacher's words to encourage (strengthen), teach (instruct), rebuke, correct (2 Tim. 3:16), convict of sin (Acts 2:37), bring understanding, reveal Jesus and minister to lives
- The Spirit brings people to Christ through preaching as he convicts, convinces and converts (Acts 2:37, 41; 8:36-37; Rom. 10:17)

Cultivate a dependence on the Holy Spirit in all the facets of preaching, such as:

- In the preparation of the message
- In preparing your heart prior to speaking
- In preaching the sermon itself
- In believing God to touch the lives of people through your message
- In presenting Jesus to people as you share the Gospel

There are a number of ways you can open your life to the empowering of the Spirit while you speak:

- By fostering an *intimate relationship* with the Person of the Holy Spirit
- By seeking for the Spirit's *empowerment* every time you preach
- By being open to the Spirit inspiring you to say things spontaneously and not being bound by your notes

In short, prepare as if it all depends on you, but preach as if it all depends on God.

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Aside from your verbal communication and body language, there are other non-verbal communication tools and skills which will enhance your preaching.

1. PowerPoints

PowerPoints serve as a visual medium to enhance your preaching and body language and are most commonly used:

- To display the Scripture references
- To display the main points of the sermon
- To display pictures which illustrate your anecdotes or stories

2. Clips

A second communication tool is to play a short video clip during the message. The idea is to use the clip at a strategic point to illustrate one of the main points, or as part of the introduction or conclusion. A clip can enhance your message.

3. Props

A third communication skill is the use of 'props'. Choose props which will enhance your message and potentially leave a memory in your listeners' minds.

4. Drama

A fourth tool which could be employed is the use of a short drama. A well-written, well-executed (acted) and well-timed drama weaved into the message can, once again, enhance the main theme of your message. Aside from being entertaining, a drama can also convey a clear message in a relevant and engaging way.

CATALOGUING

1. Messages (Sermons)

A practical point in regard to your sermon notes after it has been preached is to catalogue it for future reference.

Develop a 'filing' system for your messages. Some preachers file them in one of the following formats:

- Series – filed with the other messages in a particular series (e.g. beatitudes, love)
- Topics (A-Z) – filed in their relevant alphabetical topic (e.g. prayer, growth)
- Books of the Bible – filed under the book in which the text is found (e.g. Colossians)

2. Illustrations

A second practical point is to also catalogue the illustrations you have used (or will use).

Here are some practical ideas:

- Record when and where you used the particular story or illustration
- Develop an A-Z 'filing' system for your illustrations (e.g. A = angels, B = beatitudes)
- Read books, magazines or articles as well as listen to the news and current affairs looking for illustrations
- Photocopy or record the story, illustration or statistic for future reference or use
- Categorise the reference on top of the page (e.g. perseverance)
- File it in the appropriate topic in your filing system

- Record personal stories, experiences or lessons as illustrations or anecdotes for future use As mentioned, lessons from 'real life' are the most powerful in identifying with hearers.
- Identify and refer to websites which provide illustrations or purchase books which categorise illustrations.

3. Develop a topical index

A third (and often neglected and underrated) practical point is to develop a topic index.

Develop an A-Z 'filing' system for Bible (and related) topics. Some examples may be:

- Names of people in Scripture (e.g. Abraham – Zechariah)
- Places (e.g. Ai-Zion)
- Theological topics (e.g. angels – worship)
- Christian qualities (e.g. acceptance – unity)

4. Structure and develop your personal library

A fourth practical point is to build up your personal library of Christian resources.

Some foundational resources for Bible study and the preparation of sermons would be:

- Lexicon
- Concordances
- Word-Study Books
- Bible Dictionaries and Encyclopaedias
- Commentaries on both Old and New Testaments

REFERENCES IN THIS MODULE:

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W.E. Sangster, **THE CRAFT OF SERMON CONSTRUCTION**, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972.