

The Skills of Preaching

Communicating Compassion

Preaching at its most basic level communicates the spirit of the preacher. People will discern your true feelings and motivation for occupying the pulpit (and their time). Jesus was motivated to preach by compassion.

(Mark 6:34 NKJV) "And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things."

Compassion is a feeling of sincere concern and caring for a person's condition. It manifests in us as God's love, and fills us with strong motivations when we see suffering or need.

COMPASSION +

GOD'S PRESENCE
brings
ANOINTING
infused with
LOVE

+ CONTENT

It is the sword of the Spirit. Use it well in the pulpit!

Content

Content is the information you prepare and present. By itself, it has little power to impact or convict your audience. People certainly need the information you have for them, but they need much more!

Content, when added to your compassion, brings life to your message. It communicates the love of God to your hearers, and attracts people to the One behind the words.

Here is how it looks in diagrammatical form.

The Holy Spirit alone has the power to bring the anointing to bear, and to energize your words into the transforming power that moves mountains. He is the Agent of change. Do not leave home without Him!

The Value of Presentation

As ministers of the Word, we are blessed with the joy of the pulpit experience. However, we are easily caught up in our own gift. The purpose in the presentation is to communicate. A good presenter will pay constant attention to his or her voice (enunciation and articulation), gestures, stance, movements and the like. Each of these factors adds to the usability of the sermon, or become huge distractions to the listeners. Failure to be concerned about the ease of communication of your sermon is a sign of ignorance or lack of caring.

Presentation Techniques

1. Voice Projection

- Avoid speaking in a monotone.
- Be aware of the relationship between your microphone and your mouth. Speak from within and use the microphone. It will amplify your voice.
- Speak at an understandable pace.
- Project your voice with varieties of volume, depending on how you want to affect your listeners. Let your voice work with your context. You do not have to holler at people, but at the appropriate times, you certainly can shout! If you continually yell, abusing your vocal chords, you will often lose your voice and possibly even damage it permanently.
- Enunciate! Pronounce words carefully. If you have a deep accent, there is no substitute for practicing good phonics to get your words to be more understandable. Nobody enjoys listening to someone whose accent is so distracting as to be unintelligible.
 1. Diction (the way your words sound) is something you can improve.
 2. Articulation (the way you put your words together to form a thought) must be skillful. Otherwise, you will confuse your audience. Spend time in study, concerning how best to articulate your key thoughts!
- Take the time to be sure you have a correct understanding of the words you use. Many words sound similar but have greatly different meanings. Improper use of a word is not only a distraction, but also it can become a stumbling block to the listener! Simplify your language.
- Speak to the first row. Speak to the person on the right and on the left! Do not forget the choir! Above all, speak to the last row of listeners!
- Pace your words and space your sentences. Use silence to divide ideas or to give room for your audience to think about what you have said.
- Control the length of your message.

2. Personal Quirks

The list of personal quirks is as varied as the people who stand in the pulpit. A sampling of these includes:

- Continually pacing from side to side as you preach
- Repeatedly pushing your glasses back up on the bridge of your nose
- Clearing your voice over and over
- Using poor speech patterns such as repetitive phrases that are outside the context of your message (things as simple and annoying as “uh” between thoughts or after each sentence.) Can you think of others that you have heard used?
- Looking at your watch
- Finger pointing during the sermon
- Excessive hand movement while you speak

3. Bad Ideas

- Talking too long
- Making it too complicated (more points than necessary)
- Preaching multiple subjects within a single sermon (Keep it to one significant subject.)
- Skimming the Scripture reading because you are in a hurry to get to what you want to say (The power is always in the Scriptures.)
- Winging it (No preparation, no prayer)
- Preaching any subject without making Christ central to it
- Having notes that fall all over the pulpit, that spill onto the floor, that look to be the size of the morning newspaper
- Jokes that have nothing to do with the subject matter
- Telling things about people that expose or embarrass them

4. Body Language

Every movement you make translates into a signal to your listeners. Fifty five percent of your message is in your facial movements. Gestures such as scratching, frowning or pursing the lips send signals (in some cases, signals that you are unsure of what you are saying).

The following Rules of Gesture (box below) were written by John Wesley in 1749. They are his opinions about proper preaching gestures. They make an interesting study, but certainly are not guidelines for today.¹

“1. Never clap your hands, nor thump the pulpit. 2. Use the right hand most, and when you use the left let it be only to accompany the other. 3. The right hand may be gently applied to the breast, when you speak of your own faculties, heart or conscience. 4. You must begin your actions with your speech, and end it when you make an ending of speaking. 5. The hands should seldom be lifted up higher than the eyes, nor let down lower than the breast. 6. Your eyes should have your hands in view, so that they you speak to may see your eyes, your mouth, and your hands all moving in concert with each other, and expressing the same thing. 7. Seldom stretch out your arms sideways, more than half a foot from the trunk of your body. 8. Your hands are not to be in perpetual motion. This the ancients call’d “the babbling of the hands.”

Taken from John Wesley’s writings, *Jour.*, Feb 23, 1749.”

Painting a Verbal Rendering

Speaking to an audience in ways that get and keep their attention is not an automatic thing. Giving them something they want to take home is often even more difficult. When your sermon goes home with people, it has gone beyond entertainment and has entered into their minds and hearts. The most impressive way words can have this kind of effect, is if they paint a picture that the listeners cannot get out of their thinking. Your preaching should have key points that pop up long after the majority of the message is forgotten.

The use of drama, music, action and illustration are underused in and around the pulpit. They can contribute a powerfully to your sermon. In many cases, when they incorporate the Word, they are more effective than your words. Learn to use these techniques. Take a chance. People will get to participate and appreciate the format. More, importantly, God will use it to get His message across!

Paint it!

When an artist picks up a brush, he or she uses certain skills to paint a picture. You can apply these same skills to your speaking.

¹ Demaray, Donald, Introduction to Homiletics, Baker, 1990, P.164 (Citing John Wesley’s Journal – August 10, 1775.)

Questions to Ask Yourself

- 1. Do you have a vision of the complete canvass as you work on portions of it?**
- 2. Do you struggle too long over the same area of your message, trying to make it perfect, or do you have the practiced ability to create what you want with one sweep of the verbal brush? Either can be necessary. Neither is always the way!**
- 3. Is there vibrant color in your canvas? In other words, do you weave picturesque phrases and interesting illustrations into your sermon?**
- 4. Is the picture your words paint pleasant to the eye? Or... is it dark, gloomy and offensive?**
- 5. Is the picture simple enough to be understood, or do you get so complicated or abstract that you lose your audience?**
- 6. Are some of the images you paint with your words poorly defined or grossly exaggerated?**

Sermon Types

Topical Sermon

A topical sermon comes from and expands on an idea (a topic). It may come in response to an experience you had, to a situation you encountered or through study. This sermon has its points constructed around the topic, with supporting Scripture and illustrations added to it.

Biographical Sermon

This sermon revolves around the life of some person. The preacher tells a story about some portion of this person's life. It is a sermon that shows its purpose by the principle character's reaction to circumstances. The points generally follow the flow of his or her life and Scripture is woven into it.

Textual Sermon

This technique takes a word from the Bible, or a phrase (such as the word "grace" or the expression "filled with the Spirit), and constructs a sermon based on that word. The structure of the sermon may take on a variety of other sermon formats, but always returns to the word or phrase in question.

Contextual Sermon

This sermon takes a literary unit (a book, chapter or paragraph) and finds its way, as the preacher proceeds through the context, focusing on certain texts.

Illustrative Sermon

This sermon either employs visual aids, or simply uses story telling and example. Its purpose and principle points become clear through either story telling or the use of action. The illustrated sermon can also take the form of drama, dialogue, or other demonstration.

Special Occasion Sermon

There are many times when the occasion will create demand for a sermon. Examples of this would be, building dedications, graduations, funerals, etc. These sermons find their purpose in, and are tailored to the event.

Devotional Sermon

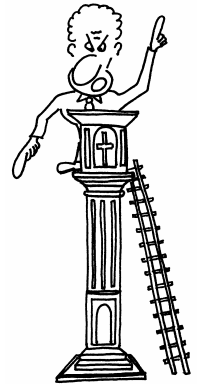
The purpose of the devotional sermon is to lead people into a meaningful, emotional experience with God. This may be preached at any time, but is seen often in corporate prayer meetings. The purpose of the sermon is to draw people closer to God. It always asks the audience to (1) draw nearer) and (2) see and appreciate His divine attributes (i.e., holiness, love, grace, etc.)

Interactive Sermon

This sermon is useful in small groups and is essentially “didactic.” It teaches. It may have a variety of styles, but is designed to draw answers from the listeners at strategic places in the message. As with regular sermons, there is still an introduction, body and conclusion, with a challenge at the end. The questions occur in the body and are designed to draw people to discover the points for themselves. The questions are not the points, but bring forth the points. The preacher preaches from Scripture and interrupts the sermon with questions. The listeners actually make the points with their answers (They do not ask questions, but respond with answers). The sermon becomes an act of group discovery. The preacher has to be skilled and flexible for this sermon to work. Many times, it ends up going where the preacher does not expect it.

Principles for Preaching

1. **Never** reveal, uncover, embarrass or show people in a negative way. You ought to be revealing principles that encourage, instruct and edify.
2. **Always** speak to the person with the simplest outlook and least education. Do not exclude any of your hearers from the message.
3. **Never** entertain for entertainment's sake.
4. **Always** include the Word in what you say and be sure to give it first place.
5. **Never** preach to please man.
6. **Always** preach to please God.
7. **Never** preach in ways that drive people away from God.
8. **Always** preach with the purpose of bringing people closer to God.
9. **Never** be afraid of oversimplifying. You can be very effective with a one-point sermon. Repetition can be a very useful and effective technique.
10. **Sometimes** you need to say the same thing more than once, keeping it in forefront of your listeners' thoughts.
11. **Always** show yourself friendly. Do not get wrapped up in yourself before and after the sermon. You are a sheep with a bell. Christ is the shepherd!
12. **Always** give God the glory. Your flesh will ask you to keep the glory for yourself.
13. **Always** maintain flexibility and a good sense of humor.
14. **Never** take yourself too seriously.
15. **Always** take God seriously. Show Him reverence in the pulpit.



Sermon Composition

Your sermon presentation rises and falls with many elements, including those we have already written about. However, its ultimate success or failure will depend on the content of the message you present. There is no substitute for preparation. Even when the Spirit of God moves you to change your sermon at the last minute or in the midst of the service, you ought to still be preaching out of the abundance of your own personal study habits. Always be ready “in season and out.” Prepare yourself to present a solid context regardless of circumstances. Preaching “off the top of your head” will most likely go over the tops of your listeners’ heads. Preaching from the depth of responsible study will allow you to change gears as necessary and still produce fruitful sermons.

1. Introduction to the Sermon

You will only have a couple minutes to capture your listeners' attention. You must not only get their attention, but you must present them with your purpose and the theme of your message. Only then will they know and become interested in where you want to take them. If you do not accomplish this, the next hour will be quite painful for all. However, if you are able to get them on board, it will be a fruitful time for all.

There is no single way to start that is better than another. You may choose from a variety of attention-gathering techniques. Somewhere and somehow in the first couple minutes you should tell your audience where you are going. Here are some, but certainly not all the ways you can begin.

- **You simply announce your purpose.**
- **You begin with a reading from Scripture. Perhaps at other times, delaying the Scripture reading until after your opening remarks will be appropriate.**
- **Stories and illustrations make good introductions.**
- **Reveal immediately, with a show of emotion, how you think or how the subject affected you personally. This is a great way to get people interested. You show your imperfect humanity and your audience is pleased to see you are at their level. They can relate!**
- **Skits and songs are effective ways of starting.**

Warning: Avoid “trick” phrases or things that sound canned.

Whatever you choose to do first, show that you are reachable and not aloof. Be sure that your opening efforts will create some interest in the audience. Do not beat around the bush. Get to the point within the first couple minutes. Do not leave the audience hanging, trying to figure out where you are going. Suspense works to a point, but after that people lose interest. Brevity is a good idea. Let them know where you are going and then get going!

2. Body of the Sermon

“Let all things be done decently and in order.”

(1 Corinthians 14:40 NKJV)

Structure is key to the success of the sermon. The body of your message will be the place where most of the information you desire to present will be located. You will have a number of points to present, supported by sub-points. Each of us has individual ways of gathering and organizing our information. You can consult a good book or talk to people about how to format or outline your points. The issue is not the form of your outline, but whether you have a

logical progression of ideas, that leads the listeners to the conclusion, and where they will be challenged to change.

It is good to begin the body of the sermon with a restatement of your purpose. Let people know why you are going to take them where you are taking them. If possible, clearly define the topic and relate it to your purpose. If the listeners know what you want to speak to them about (and why), they can make a quality decision to follow you, as you speak.

Now choose your points.

- Do not try to write a sermon as if it was a random trip through a maze in which your listeners encounter the points.
- The points ought to arise out of your thoughts, as you reflect on your purpose, topic and the Scriptures for the sermon.
- Do not be afraid to re-order your sermon points after you see how they fit together (Example: Point 2 might really fit better as point 3.).

Next, gather all of your supporting material and begin to build your sermon, point by point.

- Check carefully to verify that what you have chosen firmly supports your purpose and topic. Be aware that Scriptures poorly exegeted, and illustrations poorly chosen, can be off the mark. Be careful with them!
- Try to balance the length of each point so it is not disproportional to the others. The sermon will flow better if you do not spend too much time on one point, at the expense of the others. They all should have fairly equal weight to them. Of course the final point gives you the opportunity for a punch-line, in which you can drive home the sum of all the information you have given. Then proceed to your conclusion, in which you will challenge your listeners to action.
- Move with your points toward the fulfillment of your purpose. Do not lose track of your purpose or topic along the way.
- Maintain unity and continuity as you progress through your points. Keep the main thought as a thread that is woven throughout.

3. Conclusion

There are many rules to a good ending. There are also many opportunities that will fall outside of the rules. **Stay flexible!** Understanding the rules and opportunities is a key to achieving your purpose for a particular sermon. Here are some of rules for a good ending.

Use of a Summary of your Points

This is not a rule that must be followed every time you construct a sermon. It is usually a good idea to remind your listeners of your points. However, doing so often slows down the momentum that you have worked so hard to get. You can elect to do without a final summary when you sense the Spirit wants your message to fall heavily on your listeners, or perhaps He, Himself wants to do the same. Stop when He says stop!

Being Judgmental or Moralizing

Avoid the temptation to point fingers or speak without grace as your sermon approaches its climax. Your emotions can get the best of you and you can easily lose a measure of control. When you lose control, you refuse to let the Holy Spirit keep control through you. You are no longer a yielded vessel. You will not see God move as He could have.

When you appear judgmental, people back off. They cease to be teachable. They recoil from your attitudes and close the book on change. Your sermon loses its punch. Preach with conviction but hold back the condemnation!

Common Errors

There are three common errors found in preaching conclusions.

Stopping Too Soon

If you stop too soon, it will be like damming a river before it gets to the fields that need its nourishment. Complete the message and be sensitive that the ending is where all the purpose takes effect. Follow through! Often you will not know what God wants of you until you finish the words He has given you.

Stopping Too Late

Stopping too late has essentially the same effect as stopping too soon. When you stop too late, you have missed the point at which the Spirit wanted to move. As in stopping too soon, you will not see your purpose take effect. The point of impact will be lost. The challenge will go by the wayside. The anointing will lift. You can stop too late because you are enjoying hearing yourself speak. You can stop too late because you are listening so hard to yourself or trying so hard to squeeze in every one of your subpoints, that you miss God saying, "STOP!"

Forcing in New Subject Matter

This is a common mistake. We often feel like we left something out and then we try to force it in. Trust God and do not be sidetracked! There are times when our own preaching causes us to discover things in the process, that could be better said at another time. Save them for that time.

People only have a certain comfort zone, in which they can sit and listen. When you stretch out the conclusion, you will take them from the blessing of listening to you to the curse of sore backsides. Avoid this at all costs!

The conclusion is a great opportunity for some legitimate emotion. Encourage people with passion. Let it get all over them! Encourage people. Challenge them to commit. Be persuasive. Be confident. Provide your listeners with an atmosphere of assurance. Let them know you believe in what you have said.

Post-Sermon Ministry (Altar Ministry)

Keep the main thing the main thing. Call the lost to Christ. Then consider where the Holy Spirit wants to take it. As you do this, be sensitive to the variety of methods God might call you to use.

- Do not simply rely on a canned altar call. It gets real old, real fast, and may not be the way God wants you to do it at that particular time. However, do not abandon tried and true techniques simply for the sake of variety. Be led by the Spirit!**
- Do listen to God at this critical point in your sermon presentation. Rely on the Holy Spirit. He is the one who is drawing people to the altar. He will direct your next move.**
- Stay sensitive. By the time you get to altar ministry, you should have great expectation that God is about to move... and He will do it through you! This expectation will be fulfilled, as you stay sensitive to His Spirit. You will gain a progressively increasing feel for God's presence and power. Remember that God wants to move among His people far more than you do. Just cooperate!**

Praying for the Group

Often, because of time constraints or the size of your audience, you will find it difficult to pray for individuals. At times like these use alternative methods. Here are a few.

- **Group Responsive Confession or Commitment**

Ask the group to repeat a confession or commitment that gives them a personal stake in what you have preached.

- **Group Ministry to Each Other**

Ask the people to turn to, and pray for each other. Set forth some rules as you do. For example, ask those who will be praying to stretch their hands out but not to touch those they do not know. Request all contact to be male-to-male and female-to-female (especially when strangers pray for each other).

- **Praying On Behalf of Your Listeners**

You may end the sermon with an impassioned plea to God on behalf of those who just heard your conclusion. **Just be careful not to make a sermon or a summary out of your prayer.** You already did that! Pray your purpose. Show your love.

Praying for Individuals

Prayer for individuals can be for specific issues relating to the sermon, or for reasons that are as diverse as the people listening. If you invite people to come to the altar, be sure to ask what they need prayer for. **Do not get into a counseling session or lengthy discussion.** Pray for everyone, but encourage those who want to make a dialogue out of it to arrange another time for counseling.

- **Look before you pray.**

If you are in a charismatic service, give yourself room for the person being prayed for to be “slain in the Spirit.”

Work with male ushers or church workers who know how to “catch.”

- **Keep your eyes open so you keep control of the situation.** People do strange things when they are being prayed for, and you will not know all the people you encounter at the altar. It bears repeating. **Keep your eyes open!**
- **Pray Scripture.** There is power in the Word.

Laying on of Hands

1. **If you don't have compassion, wait until you do!** Then pray. Sometimes we have to remind ourselves that it is not a show, but real people with real needs who are coming to God.

2. Be careful **who** you lay hands on. It is wise to ask God where to direct you, who to touch and who not to touch. You can pray for some people and not touch them.
3. When you lay hands on someone, be gentle. Never push them. Give God room and He will do what's necessary. You are not there to see how many you can force down. It is the anointing that does it. Outward signs of being touched are never the issue.
4. Try to discern who to go to first. If you pray for the hard cases first, it generally has the effect of diminishing the anointing. God will show you the most receptive people, if you take your time. Then the anointing will build.
5. If you are married, it usually works better to have your spouse either praying with you, or praying alongside of you, as she or he prays for others.
6. Be careful **where** you touch people! Use common sense. **Never embrace or stroke people of the opposite sex while praying.**
7. Expect the power of God to manifest.
8. When Satan manifests, take authority. Take command!
9. Expect the unexpected.

The Biblical Pattern for Preaching, in its Simplest Form

(1 Corinthians 2:1-5 NKJV) "And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. {2} For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. {3} I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. {4} And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, {5} that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

Sample Sermon Organizer

Date _____ Title _____
Theme or Purpose Statement of the Sermon:
Major Point 1. _____
Subpoint 1.
Subpoint 2.
.....
Major Point 2. _____
Subpoint 1.
Subpoint 2.
.....
Concluding Challenge to Listeners: