

Omega Course:

Practical Church Planter Training

Manual Five

By

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In cooperation with

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PREACHING

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PREACHING
1
LESSON

Biblical Preaching I

UNDERSTANDING THE MESSAGE

☞ Lesson Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to explain how to compose a message that will be faithful to the intent of the text and communicate the main point of the passage clearly.

☞ Main Points

- A message should identify and communicate the message of the Bible rather than the speaker's own thoughts.
- There are many possible kinds of message structures. The choice is influenced by the text, the audience, and the speaker.

☞ Desired Outcomes

When the content of this lesson has been mastered, each participant should:

- Understand how to use the *subject* and *complement* in order to simplify and clarify the main point of the passage.
- Know the main structural points of a message.
- Know some of the various kinds of messages that can be presented.

INTRODUCTION

Biblical preaching is a divine and human enterprise. In preaching, God speaks to the minds and hearts of people bringing them to faith and maturity in Christ, but He does so through human communicators. The three primary agents in the process are the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, and the preacher. *The preacher's responsibility is to make sure that he is communicating God's message in the power of the Holy Spirit.*

The overall purpose of a biblical message is to persuade people to believe the information presented and act on it. For that to happen, the preacher's objectives are to communicate the truth of the Word in a way that will:

- convince the mind
- awake the imagination
- move the will
- prick the conscience
- touch the emotions

There are three main factors that affect whether or not these objectives will be achieved. They are 1) the message, 2) the audience, and 3) the speaker. The message must accurately reflect what God wants to communicate. The audience must see the relevance of the message to their lives. And the speaker must present the message in such a way that makes it clear and does not detract from it. Each of the lessons in this track will focus on one of these three aspects.

As we consider constructing and delivering a biblical message, we are making several assumptions:

- We want the message to be based on the meaning of God's Word, rather than on our own thoughts, or ideas that we may have heard from others.

- We have used the inductive method to discover the meaning of the passage that we will preach to others.
- We are in a situation where a 'one-way' form of communication such as preaching will be more effective than a 'two-way' method such as leading an inductive Bible study or simply having a conversation about the Lord.
- Some, but not all of the trainees will need to deliver sermons in a normal preaching context. However, principles of good biblical preaching are applicable in many settings: church congregations, youth meetings, women's groups, evangelistic meetings etc. Female as well as male communicators will benefit from them.

Some, but not all, of the trainees will need to deliver sermons in a normal preaching context.

I. INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY—A SOLID BASE

Basing the message on an inductive study of a biblical passage is the best way to ensure that we are presenting God's message and not our own thoughts. Therefore, a prayerful disciplined study of the passage is essential if the preacher is to be certain that he is indeed presenting God's message. Remember that we study the Bible inductively in order to discern the original intent of the author.

In as much as we understand and then preach the original intent of Scripture, then we are preaching the Word of God and not our own ideas. Bible Study Methods Lessons 2-7 in Manual One explain how to do an inductive Bible study. Review the principles of observation, interpretation and application from those lessons.

II. THE MAIN IDEA OF THE MESSAGE

One common thread is woven throughout all of the discussions regarding effective public speaking. An effective speaker constructs his message around a single significant idea. This has been true of classical rhetoricians, modern communication theorists and accomplished preachers. Because our minds seek unity and order, it is essential that we preach in such a way that these characteristics are obvious to our listeners.

We build our sermons around one central idea, and everything that is said should directly or indirectly support that theme.

We build our sermons around one central idea, and everything that is said should directly or indirectly support that theme. Thus it is important to select a passage of Scripture that does have a central idea. If your chosen passage has several central ideas, you probably have material for several sermons instead of just one.

A. Clarify the Main Idea (Theme)

It is often helpful to state the central idea of a passage by identifying two essential elements: the *subject*, and the *complement*. This method is similar to stating the biblical principle in the interpretation stage of the inductive method. However, 'biblical principles' that result from inductive study often tend to be somewhat long or complex. By starting with the principle of the passage, and identifying the *subject* and *complement*, we can often make the main idea shorter and easier to handle in a message, while retaining the meaning of the text.

The *subject* defines the topic or object that the passage talks about. This is normally a person, place, thing, or idea. It can be expressed by a simple noun, and as such, does not usually form a complete thought. The *subject* of a particular passage might be love, discipleship, Jesus, the Church, repentance, etc. In some cases, the *subject* might be a phrase that functions like a noun. Examples of these kinds of subjects are: "Loving God," "forgiving others," "being filled with the Holy Spirit," or "a desire to please the Lord in everything."

The *complement* is a phrase which 'completes' the subject by explaining what the passage is saying 'about the subject.' A *complement* also may not make sense by itself, but when added to a *subject*, it forms a complete thought or idea that makes sense and is easily communicated.

Table 1.1 Subject and Complement

Text:	Subject:	Complement:	Main Idea:
Pr 9:10	The fear of the Lord	. . . is the beginning of wisdom.	The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.
Ro 8:32	God, Who gave us His Son	. . . will give us everything we need.	God, Who gave us His Son, will give us everything we need.
Heb 10:14	Christ's one sacrifice	. . . has made us perfect forever.	Christ's one sacrifice has made us perfect forever.
Ro 1:16	The Gospel	. . . is the power for God for salvation.	The Gospel is the power for God for salvation.
1Co 15:55	Death	. . . has lost its power over the believer.	Death has lost its power over the believer.

B. Decide the Purpose of the Message

Once you have discovered the main idea that the biblical writer was trying to communicate, you have the core around which you will develop your sermon. The next step is to determine the purpose for the sermon. You want the sermon to cause the hearer to believe the message and act upon it. The specific action that you want the hearer to take is your message purpose. You should not try to create this response through your own efforts—that is the job of the Holy Spirit. However, since you have identified the response that you believe the Lord wants from the passage, you should try to structure the message in such a way that it works toward the Lord's purpose.

Figure 1.2 Three Factors in Preaching

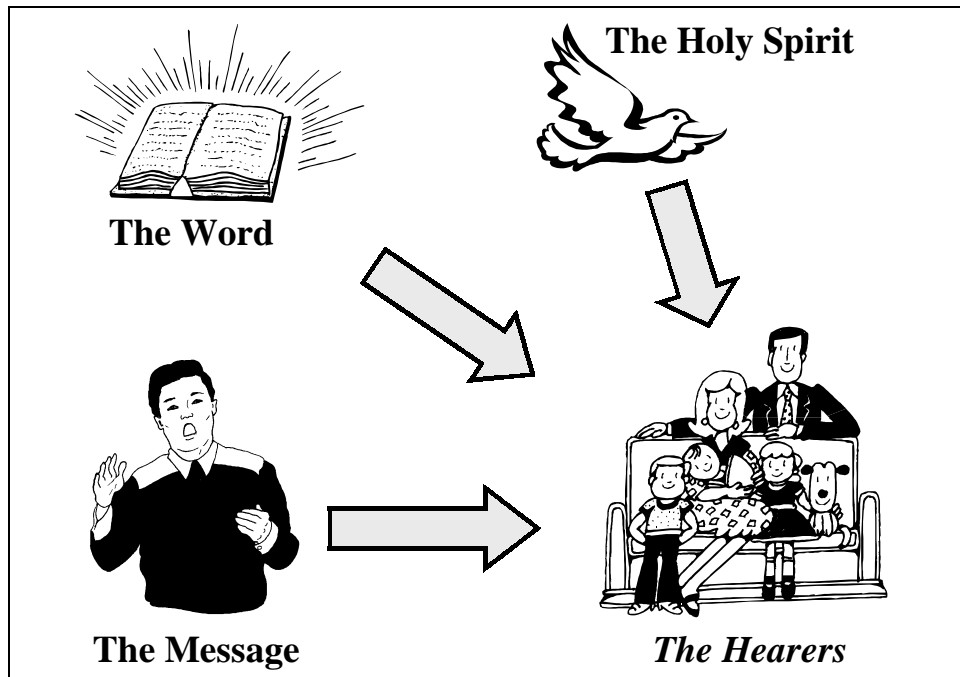


Figure 1.2 illustrates how the Word, the Holy Spirit, and the message should work together to influence the hearer. This is the case only when the preacher is sensitive to both the meaning of the text and to the leading of the Spirit. A speaker that is faithful to prayerfully seek the meaning of the passage should expect that this will happen.

III. STRUCTURE OF THE MESSAGE

A good message, like any public address, will normally be comprised of the several parts. These parts are like building blocks. They are almost always present, although the order or relative importance of each may change. Again, this is closely related to the skill of the preacher. It takes practice to decide how best to arrange them. It is more of an art than a science.

A. The Introduction

A message should have some kind of introduction, whether or not it is labeled as such. If, in the introduction, you don't gain the attention of the audience, and their interest in the message you are presenting, you are really wasting your time preaching. Their bodies may be present with you in the room, but their minds are far away.

The introduction should therefore accomplish three things:

1. *Secure the attention of the audience.*
2. *Present the subject of the sermon.*
3. *Relate the subject of needs felt by the audience.*

The hearers may decide whether to listen to or ignore the speaker in the first few moments of the message. A well thought-out introduction can go a long way toward convincing them that you have something to say, and that it would be worth listening to you. A poor introduction can accomplish the opposite. Good introductions require an understanding of the audience. This will be the subject of the next lesson.

Hearers may decide whether to listen to or ignore the speaker in the first few moments of the message.
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B. The Body

The body of the message is the basic content. During this section, the meaning of the Scripture passage is usually explained, as well as its relevance to the current situation of the hearer. This is where you should help the audience discover the same main point that you found during your inductive study. Since there probably will not be enough time to go through the entire process or to bring out all of your observations, you will need to carefully choose the few that are the most important. Focus on facts that quickly and clearly demonstrate the main point, and that fit the purpose as you understand it.

The body is the heart of the message. It should come from the Word. If the Scriptures are overpowered by illustrations, personal commentary, quoted stories, or anything else, it is not a biblical message. Keep the text central.

C. The Conclusion

The conclusion is the time when you summarize what you have said in the message and call for commitment or response. This does not mean that you will always wait to apply the sermon until the end. You can bring out application at any point. In fact, some preachers feel that an effective message can be structured as follows:

1. Tell them what you are going to tell them = Introduction
2. Tell them = Body
3. Tell them what you have told them = Conclusion

Repetition can be a wonderful learning device if it is presented in an interesting way. However, the message should always end with an explanation of the desired response, whether or not it was introduced earlier in the message. This should be the last thing that they hear, and the most important thing that they take home with them after the message is over.

A conclusion should contain one or more of the following components:

- A summary of the main points.

- An illustration that brings together the main points and the central idea.
- A quotation that accomplishes the same purpose as an illustration.
- A question.
- A prayer.
- Specific directions or an appeal to action

D. The Illustrations

An illustration is designed to shed light or make more understandable an idea, teaching or issue raised in the message. It may be used at any point in the message—the introduction, the body, or the conclusion. It is particularly helpful when you want to give emphasis to a teaching or to explain a difficult passage. But remember: illustrations must contribute to the understanding of the message being presented. Do not include illustrations just for the sake of having an illustration.

There are three main types of illustrations for use in preaching: biblical illustrations, non-biblical illustrations, and object lessons.

1. Biblical Illustrations

The Bible is full of wonderful, clear illustrations. Sometimes we can find a modern illustration that serves as well or better, but often we cannot. Who can improve on the parable of the lost sheep, or the examples of the lilies of the field, or the man who built his house on the sand? When these illustrations speak clearly, we should use them. Examples of biblical illustrations include:

- The lives of persons mentioned in the passage. For example see Philippians 2:19-30.
- Cross-references. A concordance will help you to find other biblical passages that deal with the same subject and may help explain it. The principle here is to use Scripture to interpret Scripture.
- Biblical stories. Many stories from the Old Testament are helpful to explain principles mentioned in the New Testament. For example, the life of Jonah is an excellent illustration of the principle that God requires our complete obedience.
- Maps. A map of an area where the action is taking place is often helpful to understand the biblical passage.
- Information gained from the context. The material just before and after Ephesians 5:15-21 helps us to understand the concept of being filled with the Spirit.

2. Non-Biblical Illustrations

Do not be afraid to use illustrations that do not come from the Scriptures, as long as they effectively make the same point. Many times, these illustrations will connect more deeply with your audience. This is especially true when the audience is not particularly familiar with the Bible. In such cases, the meaning of many passages or examples would be lost on them, and it is better to choose something they understand. Non-biblical illustrations include:

- Current events. Biblical truths are timeless. However, they are often understood better when a current event illustrates them. Often articles in newspapers and magazines are very useful.
- Observations of everyday life.
- Personal experiences. Personal experiences are often the most powerful illustrations; however, be careful not to always make yourself the hero.
- Illustrations from nature. The picture of a seagull at peace, standing on a rock with waves crashing around it, is a beautiful illustration of the Christian standing on his rock, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Historical backgrounds. It is important to know about the immoral life of the city of Ephesus to understand fully the concerns of Paul in the Ephesians chapter 5.

3. *Object Lessons*

Object lessons are an effective tool in communication because they are based on the principle that learning a new concept is made easier when a bridge is made between the known and the unknown. An object that is common to the experience of the learners is shown and described. Then a comparison is made between it and the new concept that is being presented. The object is not exactly like the concept being introduced, rather in some way it is like it. The learner will then understand some aspect of the new truth and be ready to appreciate other aspects.

One great advantage of object lessons is that they are very effective in securing the attention of the learner. Christ often used object lessons in his teaching ministry. All of nature for Him reflected truths about God. Some of the object lessons He used are as follows:

- Physical water and living water (Jn 4:7-15, the woman at the well)
- A child and simplicity of faith (Mt 19:13-15)
- The feeding of the five thousand and "the bread of life" (Jn 6)

Some other ideas for object lessons that we might use are:

- A road map (Jn 14:6)
- A glass of milk (1Pe 2:2, Heb 5:12,13)
- A bar of soap (1Jn 1:9)
- A glass of water and loaf of bread (Jn 4, 6)
- A candle or flashlight (Jn 8:12)
- A door or gate (Jn 10:1-10)
- The picture of a sheep or a real one (Isa 53:6; Ps 23)
- A sword (Heb 4:12)
- A piece of money and a wrapped present (Ro 6:23)
- A cassette player unplugged—unconnected to the source of our spiritual power we can do nothing (Jn 15:5)

IV. TYPES OF MESSAGES

There are many kinds of messages. A good speaker should be able to use several of them as the need arises. They are like tools in the hands of a craftsman. Each is appropriate for a particular situation and task. The preacher, like the craftsman, needs to know when and where each one might be most effectively used. The forms listed below are not exhaustive. The variations are too numerous to list. Also, a message might effectively combine more than one form.

A. **Didactic**

This kind of message basically presents facts. It is typically used to explain doctrine. It is very effective when the main purpose of the message is to *inform*. It can help to bring about a change in *understanding*. Many of the New Testament epistles are didactic in style. They tend to emphasize logic and reason.

B. **Devotional**

A devotional message focuses more on spiritual response than on facts or knowledge. If the didactic message is aimed more for the 'head,' the devotional message is aimed for the 'heart' of the hearer. This kind of message emphasizes the emotions, and often includes very emotional illustrations. Psalms is a good example of a devotional book.

C. Narrative

Narrative messages are built upon one or more stories. These stories might or might not be biblical. The truth of the Word is woven into the story. The story serves as the framework that helps the hearer organize and understand the truth being taught. Such messages can be very memorable. In fact, care must be exercised so that the story does not overwhelm the truth of the Word, and become the authority. The historical books of the Bible are narrative.

D. Interrogative

While many messages focus on providing answers, an interrogative style can also be very effective. Often, preachers answer questions that no one is asking, and the interest is therefore low. If the speaker can clearly articulate relevant questions that are of concern to the audience, they can become more involved in the message. Rather than being passive 'hearers,' they can begin to anticipate and seek answers to the questions raised by the message. When they discover the answers in the Word through the message, the effect can be very positive.

E. Circular or Linear

The majority of sermons in the West are linear in development, and therefore many of the texts on preaching emphasize outlining or systematically developing a sermon. In many countries, however, a circular type of message is better understood. Linear messages deal with one point, and move on to the next. Circular reasoning, by contrast, repeatedly revisits the same point from a different angle or approach. The two types might be compared to viewing art in a museum. Moving progressively from painting to painting would be a linear approach. But walking around an interesting statue and viewing it from several different perspectives would be a circular approach. Both types have value, depending on the subject under consideration and the interest of the audience.

CONCLUSION

God's Word is "living and active" (Heb 4:12). Biblical preaching is clearly communicating the Word of God in such a way that its power will transform all who hear. The preacher has a great responsibility to make sure that he communicates God's message and not his own ideas. Understanding God's Word through careful and prayerful study is the first step in preparing a sermon. Be sure to take the time necessary to study and understand God's Word when you preach it.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION, REVIEW AND APPLICATION

- Think about one of the best preachers you have heard. What characteristics of their preaching style or content made it effective? How did people respond to their preaching?
- Why should sermons be based on inductive Bible study?
- What is the function of biblical preaching? Are there different forms to accomplish this function?

ACTION PLAN

- Choose one of the Gospels, and as you read through it, make a list of the illustrations or object lessons you see used.
- Pick a room in your apartment or house and look around in it for things that might be object lessons of spiritual truth. Be creative. Examine even simple things might be able to powerfully illustrate difficult biblical concepts.

PREACHING
2
LESSON

Biblical Preaching II

UNDERSTANDING THE AUDIENCE

☞ Lesson Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to emphasize the importance of understanding the target audience during the preparation of the message.

☞ Main Points

- Jesus, Peter, and Paul adapted their messages to their audiences.
- When hearers discover truth in the text for themselves, it is more powerful and memorable than when they are simply told.
- A good message will demonstrate the 'common ground' that the biblical characters and the modern audience share.

☞ Desired Outcomes

When the content of this lesson has been mastered, each participant should:

- Understand how the New Testament preachers varied their messages according to the audience.
- Be committed to helping the audience discover the meaning of the passage being preached to them.

INTRODUCTION

In the Bible study methods section of this material, we emphasized the importance of discovering the meaning of the text, rather than reading our thoughts and ideas into it. However, in the application stage, we stressed that it is important to compare the biblical context with our context in order to understand what we should do. When the inductive method is used for personal study, we can assume that we know our context. When used in a small group Bible study, we also expect each of the participants to be aware of their own context, and to be able to make a reasonable application to their own lives.

When we develop an inductive study into a sermon or message, we should not assume that we understand the audience. Rather, significant time in message preparation should be devoted to thinking about who will be listening to the message, and what their needs might be. In a long-term, stable church situation, this is somewhat easier, as a pastor normally learns about his people over time. In a church planting situation, there should be a constant stream of new contacts who are invited to hear the Word, and about whom we may know little. In a large-group evangelistic meeting, we may know almost nothing about the majority of the audience. It takes effort to research the general needs of the typical person in our target audience, and even more so to learn about the personal needs of each one who attends. The benefit, however, is a much more effective sermon or message.

Significant time in message preparation should be devoted to thinking about who will be listening to the message.

I. NEW TESTAMENT PREACHING

As we look at the preaching in the New Testament, we see that they did not simply preach the same thing on every occasion. Rather, they adjusted their message according to the needs and spiritual level of the audience.

A. The Preaching of Jesus

Jesus is perhaps the best example of a master communicator that the world has ever seen. He, being God, had much deeper insight into the needs of His audience than we can possibly hope to have. But the principle of adjusting the message to meet the need still applies. Consider how differently Jesus spoke to the Pharisees than to His disciples. For the Pharisees who refused to hear, He delivered stern warnings of judgment (Mt 23). For the disciples, His messages were much more inviting and encouraging (Jn 14).

Jesus also delivered His messages at an understandable level. To the woman at the well, He spoke of water (Jn 4). But to Nicodemus the Pharisee, He introduced the topic of the new birth from above (Jn 3). In Matthew 13:10-15, Jesus explained to His disciples that He actually preached to the multitudes in parables *so that they would not understand* truth that they were not willing to obey. However, He fully explained everything to His disciples (Mk 4:33-34).

B. The Preaching of Peter

Peter learned from the Master Preacher—Jesus. He also was careful to adjust the message to the audience. One comparison should help illustrate this fact. Consider the difference in the sermons Peter preached to the Jewish crowd at Pentecost, and to the Gentiles in Cornelius' home. With the Jewish crowd, he immediately began to quote the Old Testament prophet Joel (Acts 2:17-21). They would have been very familiar with that passage, and valued the Old Testament Scriptures. In his brief sermon, he managed to work in two other quotations from the Psalms of David. Clearly, this sermon was understandable to the Jews, and it led to great repentance.

Peter's address to the Gentiles in Cornelius' home was very different. There are no quotations from the Old Testament. Instead, Peter began with an explanation of how God is not partial, but accepts men from every nation (Acts 10:34-35). This would strike a responsive chord with this group who had long been looked down upon by the Jews. Having won their attention, Peter then quickly shifts to the ministry and death of Christ. Again, the results were dramatic.

C. The Preaching of Paul

Table 2.1 compares the sermons that Paul delivered to various groups during his church planting ministry in the Book of Acts.

Table 2.1 Paul's Sermons

Text	Audience	Introduction	Message
Acts 13:16-41	Unbelieving Jews in Pisidian Antioch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Old History of Israel with Old Testament quotations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for repentance • Christ
Acts 17:22-31	Unbelieving Gentiles in Athens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their local altars 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Omnipresence of God • The resurrection of Christ
Acts 20:18-35	Elders of the Ephesian Church in Miletus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul's life among them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul's desire to serve • Their responsibility to the flock
Acts 22:1-21	Unbelieving Jewish Mob in Jerusalem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul's background as Pharisee and persecutor of the Church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul's conversion (testimony) • Paul's mission to the Gentiles
Acts 26:2-23	Unbelieving Jewish King Herod Agrippa at Caesarea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Praise for Agrippa • Paul's past life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul's past life • Paul's conversion • Forgiveness through Christ

This comparison highlights several facts.

- First, we see a marked difference between Paul's message to the believing elders from Ephesus and everyone else. Paul talked to them about commitment and their responsibility to serve the Lord by caring for the flock. To the other groups, however, Paul focused on the need for repentance and on Christ—that is, on the Gospel.
- Second, Paul often used his personal testimony with both kinds of groups. Sharing his personal spiritual journey was a high priority for Paul no matter to whom he was speaking.
- Third, Paul made every effort to identify with the particular target group and to gain their interest in listening to his message. This extended as far as using the false idols in Athens as a sermon illustration.

II. AIMING FOR YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

All too often, preachers deliver their messages with little thought to their audiences. How often have you heard someone preach a 'hellfire and brimstone' message of repentance for salvation to a church group that does not include a single known unbeliever? At the other extreme, preachers often spend large amounts of time preaching messages on Christian morals and living to unbelievers who are not ready for anything more than the Gospel.

All too often,
preachers deliver
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audiences.

If our preaching is to resemble that in the New Testament, we need to pay attention to the characteristics of the audience, and deliver messages that are appropriate to them, and understandable. There are many characteristics that we should consider.

A. Important Characteristics of the Audience

The audience characteristics that might be important vary greatly from group to group. The list below is only partial. Time and experience will help you know what questions to ask.

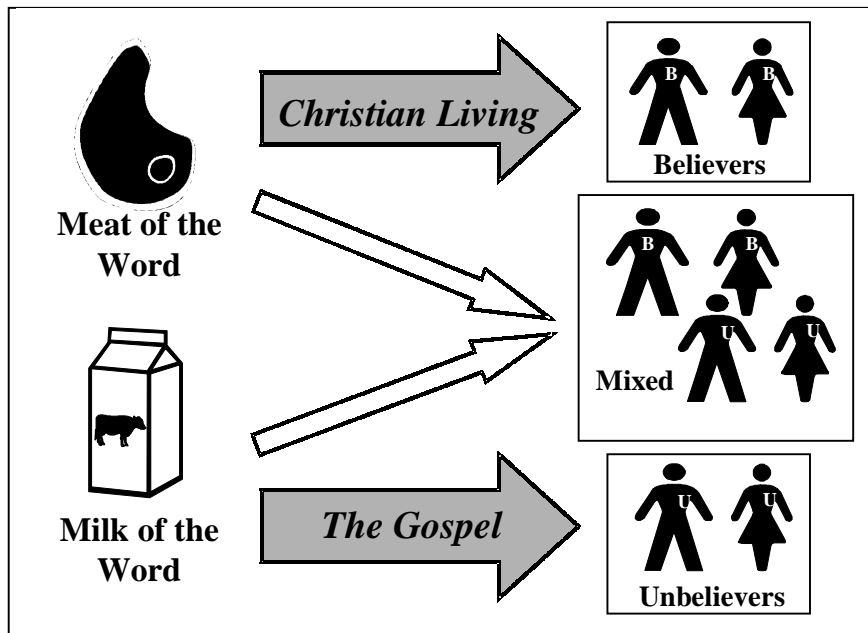
- Age – Older and younger people look at life very differently, and tend to listen to different kinds of messages. It is important to adjust both the content and the delivery of the message accordingly.
- Spiritual Level – People need to have content that matches their level of spiritual maturity, and helps them move on to a higher level. We should not waste complicated truths on unbelievers (Mt 7:6). Nor should we belabor basic truths with those who should be growing (Heb 6:1-3).
- Education – It is important not to speak in either too complex or too simple a manner. Often, the educational level of the audience gives us an idea of the proper level.
- Interests – If you want to get the attention of a group, talk about things that interest them. This is possible only if you know what their interests are.
- Ethnic Background – People of different ethnic backgrounds see things through the eyes of their own worldviews, which might differ from that of the speaker. It is important to know what those differences are.
- Religious Background – Religious tradition runs very deep, and we cannot ignore it. Something that means one thing to us may be taken in an entirely different way by a person looking through the grid of another religion.
- Family Status – Single people, married couples, divorced or widowed people, and grandparents have very different needs that match their family situations. We need to make sure our message meets those needs.
- Employment – Profession or job status also influences our needs and interests.
- Gender – Men and women often look at the same things in very different ways. Who comprises your audience?

B. What the Audience Needs

It can be dangerous to generalize, but we can gain some understanding as we refer back to the example of the sermons of the Apostle Paul. He preached the Gospel to unbelievers, but commitment to believers. This seems simple, but is often overlooked. Some spiritual truths are harder to understand than others. The unsaved person can understand only the Gospel as the Holy Spirit convicts him. The "meat" of the Scripture is wasted on him. In the same way, far too many believers are fed a constant diet of "milk" and therefore remain weak and unprepared for ministry. Figure 2.2 illustrated the fact that each group needs a proper 'diet' of the Word that is right for them.

From the figure, it is clear that the Gospel is for the unbelievers, and the truths of about commitment and Christian living are for the mature believers. When the audience is mixed, the message should also reflect that diversity.

Figure 2.2 A Proper Diet



It might also be noted that when a person trusts Christ, he or she is not immediately and automatically ready for difficult spiritual truth. There is a normal period of growth for the new believer where they continue to need to have the Gospel reinforced and explained, but when they learn and grow, they should begin to include more 'meat' and less 'milk' in their diet. Therefore, when you plan your message, you will also need to consider not only the ratio of believers to unbelievers, but also whether the audience is closer to the 'meat' or 'milk' stage.

III. HELPING THE AUDIENCE TO DISCOVER

No matter where on the scale of growth your audience might be, your preaching will be more powerful and memorable if it opens the Word to them and causes them to discover truth in it. It is not enough for them to simply learn from *you*, or to hear the things that *you* say. They must interact with the Scriptures themselves. In this way, biblical preaching resembles the emphasis on discovery that we saw when we studied the inductive method of Bible study.

Your audience must interact with the Scriptures themselves.

Imagine that someone sends you a letter, and you go to the post office to receive it. However, instead of giving you the letter to read, the postal clerk opens it, reads it silently, and then tells you approximately what it said. Would you be satisfied? Would you not feel a need to read the letter for yourself? This is

essentially what preachers often do. They study the Word privately, and then stand up and summarize for others what they remember from it. It is infinitely better when the preacher opens the Bible for us, and leads us through our own study of the truths contained in it.

Why should we bother to preach? Why not just give them the Bible and let them read it? Because many things in the Scriptures are difficult to understand. (Even Peter thought so in 2Pe 3:15-16.) Someone needs to help explain the complicated issues, and to show how to apply the truths to their lives. Biblical preaching can help to explain the similarities between the biblical context and the modern context of the audience. It takes skill and sensitivity to know when we need to help them discover, without becoming an obstacle between them and the Bible. To accomplish this requires that we take time to get to know the audience well, and adjust our message to meet their needs.

The preacher is to help build a bridge between the audience and the Word so that they can discover it.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION, REVIEW AND APPLICATION

- What do you think about the way Paul handled the issue of idols in the Acts 17 passage? How would you have presented that message in the same situation?
- What is the best way to 'balance the diet' in a message to a mixed group?
- What things do you think are 'meat' and what things are 'milk'?

ACTION PLAN

- Read back through the list of characteristics in Section II.A. and then evaluate the group to whom you minister. Write a short statement to summarize each point as it relates to your group. Are there any other important characteristics that you need to add to the list to adequately describe you audience? What do you still need to learn about them in order to preach in a way that effectively meets their needs?
- Next, evaluate one of the messages that you have preached recently, or have prepared to preach soon. Does it fit this group? Why or why not? How could you improve it to make it more relevant, interesting, and applicable?

PREACHING
3
LESSON

Biblical Preaching III

UNDERSTANDING YOURSELF

☞ Lesson Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to help the trainee improve his personal preparation and presentation in order to increase the effectiveness of the message.

☞ Main Points

- The life, testimony, and style of the preacher can enhance or detract from the message.
- Voice, mannerisms, and dress can be controlled and improved through effort and practice.

☞ Desired Outcomes

When the content of this lesson has been mastered, each participant should:

- Understand the need for personal spiritual preparation for preaching.
- Be able to better control his or her voice and mannerisms during preaching.
- Be aware of techniques for more effective reading of the Word.

INTRODUCTION

We have discussed the fact that an understanding of the structure of the message and an understanding of the audience are key to effective biblical preaching. The third factor is the speaker. Figure 3.1 illustrates how the words of the speaker can either help to clarify and explain the message of the Word to the hearers, or it can detract from it.

The speaker affects our reception of the message on at least two levels. First, whenever a person speaks to us on any subject, we unconsciously filter their words through our opinion of that person. If we consider the person to be reliable, intelligent, trustworthy, etc., what they say will be more acceptable to us. If, on the other hand, we distrust or dislike the speaker, we will tend to ignore or discount the value of the message. The same happens with a sermon.

There is a second way that the speaker affects the message. Even if a person whom we like and trust is speaking, we might miss the content of the message if they are doing something that is distracting, or if their 'body-language' contradicts what they say. Perhaps they are telling us about something that happened, but they seem distracted. We will naturally wonder what they are really thinking about rather than focusing on what they are saying. Perhaps we notice a bug crawling up their sleeve, and completely miss what they are saying. *What we see* can override *what we hear*. Again, the same is true in preaching.

What we see can
override what we
hear.

In this lesson, we will discuss several of the important areas that concern the speaker. Perhaps the most important issues are the speaker's spiritual state, emotional state, and physical appearance. We will look at each of these in turn.

I. SPIRITUAL ISSUES

Preaching is a spiritual activity. We depend on the Holy Spirit to take the words that we say and apply them to the hearts of the listeners. In order for us to have the confidence that this will happen, we need to take a close look at our spiritual lives.

A. Be Yourself

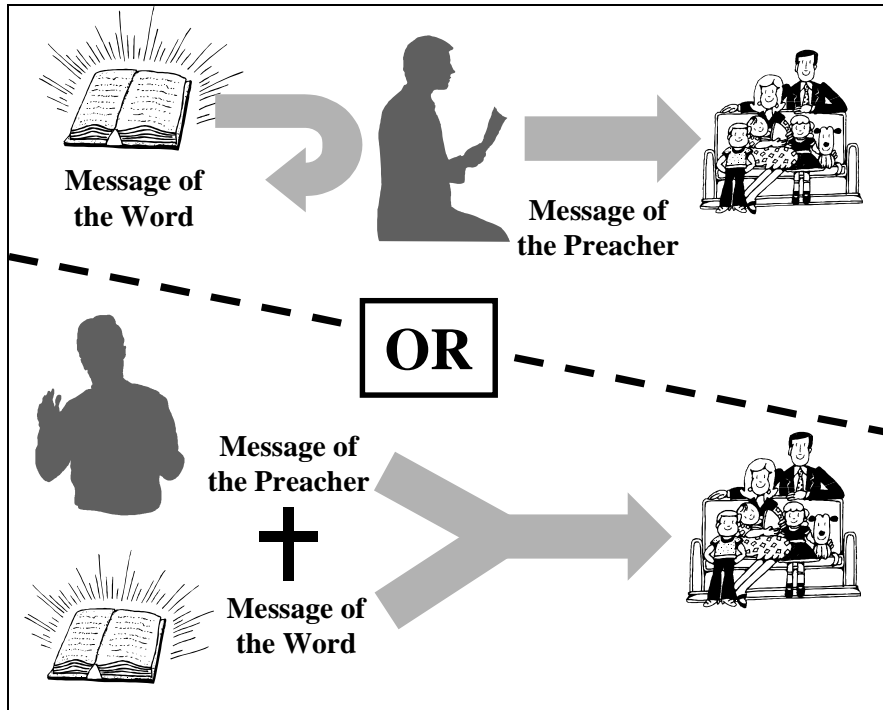
People can often quickly spot a 'fake.' And yet, even well-meaning preachers often have a 'personality change' when they stand before others to speak or preach. Their voice and vocabulary may change drastically. In the worst case, they may take on somewhat of a 'holy air' that is intended to convince others that they should listen, but has the opposite effect if it is not a true reflection of the spiritual life of the speaker.

In reality, God made each of us in unique ways so that we can serve Him as He desires. This was a difficult truth for Moses. In Exodus 4:10-12, he explained how his slow speech would hinder the message to the Israelites in captivity in Egypt. God rebuked Moses. He had formed Moses exactly how He wanted him to be—slow speech included. When we think that we need to be someone else, or act differently than the Lord made us in order to communicate His message, we do Him a serious disservice.

God made each of us in unique ways so that we can serve Him as He desires.

This, of course, does not mean that we should not try to improve our speaking skills or grow in relation to the Lord. We should. What we are saying is that as we continually grow, we should not pretend that we are farther along than we are. It is important that the audience see that we are sinners, saved by grace, as they are. We should be models of spiritual growth, not perfection.

Figure 3.1 Helping or Hindering the Message?



B. Pay Attention to Your Walk with the Lord

Paul counseled Timothy that his own growth and walk would affect his ministry (1Ti 4:16), and it would seem to be a valid principle for everyone who desires to preach the Word of God. One of the most amazing challenges in the New Testament is found in Acts 4:13. In that passage, Peter and John are standing before the highest-ranking and most educated religious authorities of their day. Despite the fact that they are uneducated fishermen, they exuded confidence in their message. Why? Because they had spent time with Jesus. Even the unbelieving members of the Sanhedrin recognized this fact.

The intent of this passage is not to speak against education and training. The Apostle Paul was also mightily used by God, and he had the highest religious training possible. Rather, the point of

the passage is that *even the uneducated* can be used powerfully if they have a vibrant spiritual walk. It does not matter how much background and training you have. God can use you at any level if you focus on staying close to Him. This is the most important factor in true biblical preaching.

II. EMOTIONAL ISSUES

Preachers, or potential speakers, tend to suffer from one of two emotional extremes. Some think that they will not be able to do a good job, and are controlled by fear. This can be so serious that they might refuse to speak, even when they have important things to say. The other extreme is to be so sure of our abilities that we fall into pride.

Preachers, or potential speakers, tend to suffer from one of two emotional extremes

A. Fear of Speaking in Public

Some fear is good. It is a normal emotion that God gave us for a purpose. A proper amount of fear can:

- sharpen our senses
- motivate us to do our best
- make us realize our dependence on God

Even experienced preachers often feel "butterflies" in their stomach, or some uncertainty before they speak. Representing the King of Kings is an awesome task, for which none of us is truly worthy. When we remember this fact, it helps us to avoid pride or dependence on our own abilities.

1. *Causes of Fear*

There are many causes of fear. The most common include the following:

- Fear of failure. We are often afraid that we are going to do something dumb, and people will laugh at us.
- Fear of the unknown. We are going to speak to a number of people and we have never done that before.
- Fear of rejection. Will they accept me?
- Fear of hostility. How will they react to what I am going to say?
- Fear of failure. This might happen when we have not properly prepared.

2. *Controlling the Fear*

There are a number of things that we can do to help control or conquer unhealthy amounts of fear.

- Give the message to God, Who is with you and caring for you.
- Do everything for the Lord. We want His approval, rather than that of other people.
- Remember that your message is very important, it is the Word of God. Concentrate on your message and how much the hearers need that message.
- Do your study well; know the message that you are going to present.

3. *Controlling the Tension That Comes From Fear*

There are a few physical exercises that you can do each time you prepare to speak that will help to reduce any fear-related tension that you may feel.

- Before you get up to speak, relax. Put yourself in a relaxing position and concentrate on allowing the muscles of your neck, back, legs and arms to relax.
- Control your breathing. Before speaking, breathe deeply to fill your lungs with fresh air. Do this several times. During the sermon, pause regularly, allow yourself to breathe deeply. Do not speak rapidly.

B. Pride

The opposite of fear is pride. Pride is a common sinful attitude—especially among those involved in public ministry and speaking. Paul warns Timothy that young Christians can easily fall into this trap if we exalt them to too high a position in the church too quickly (1Ti 3:6). However, almost any believer can give examples of more experienced Christian leaders who have suffered the same defeat.

Those who allow themselves to be controlled by pride forget that true spiritual growth comes only through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the hearer. A capable, proud speaker might be interesting, entertaining, or enjoyable to listen to. People might flock to hear him or her speak. However, he does not have the ability to cause true spiritual growth. As far as the kingdom of God is concerned, their sermons or messages are a waste of time at best, and sin at worst.

True spiritual growth comes only through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the hearer.

III. PHYSICAL ISSUES

Although preaching is a spiritual activity, good public speaking skills can make messages easier to listen to. Public speaking is a learned skill. Some people have a natural talent for public speaking, but by learning some helpful techniques, anyone can be an effective public speaker. Preaching is a special form of public speaking. It is publicly proclaiming God's word to others. It is important that the preacher's mannerisms or voice control not distract people's attention from the sermon.

There are a number of public speaking techniques that are helpful for the preacher. By implementing these helps, and through solid preparation and practice, you can preach effectively so that your people will grow in understanding of God's word and in obedience and deepening relationship to God.

A. Voice Control

A speaker will be much easier to listen to if he knows how to control his voice and adapt it to the acoustics of the room in which he is speaking.

1. *Characteristics of the Voice*

a. Volume

- Change the volume of your voice to follow the emotion and meaning of your message.

b. Tone

- Choose a tone that is neither strong nor weak.
- It is good to record your voice on a tape recorder and listen to it. You are able to change your voice to make it have a more agreeable tone.
- Do not speak in a monotone. Vary the tones of your voice

c. Articulation

- When you speak in public, you should open your mouth wide enough to sufficiently articulate the words.

d. Pace or speed

- You should speak neither very rapidly nor very slowly.
- Nervousness often leads us to speak rapidly. Practice giving the message in the quiet of your room and work on the speed of delivery.
- Your pace or speed must be adapted to the audience. They must be able to follow you and understand you without difficulty.
- Use pauses creatively, as you would do in normal conversation.

2. *Adapt Your Voice to the Acoustics of the Room*

In order to make sure that everyone in the room is able to hear you, you need to speak to the last person in the room. This is particularly important if you do not have a public address system. If the acoustics in the room are poor, you can adjust to it by the following means:

- Speak more slowly.
- Construct short phrases, and pausing between them.
- Pronounce your words carefully.
- Vary the tone.
- Accompany your words with more body movements.
- Use a low tone of voice.

B. **Appearance**

The physical appearance of the speaker is also important. When you speak, you should consider the following areas.

1. *Dress*

First impressions are important. You do not want to overdress or underdress. You do not want to call attention to yourself, but to God. Therefore, dress in a way that's appropriate for the group to whom you are ministering.

2. *Posture*

The audience sees us before it hears us. The manner in which we walk to the pulpit is already communicating something to the audience. When you walk to the pulpit, you want people to know that you have a message to them from God. It is an important message. Therefore, carry your head erect, and your body with dignity.

When you are in front of a group, keep your hands out of your pockets, and do not cling onto the podium with them. Allow your hands to be free for natural gestures as you communicate. Avoid the following positions:

- **Military** - The body is erect and rigid with the hands placed behind the back. This transmits hardness and tension.
- **Languid** - Avoid putting all of your weight on one foot with your shoulders slouched over. This communicates laziness and lack of interest.
- **Priestly** - With this position, we're trying to look extremely holy. Rigidly erect with our hands held in praying position.
- **The lion** - Here the preacher paces from one side to the other in the pulpit as a lion does in its cage.

Allow your posture to adapt itself to the emotion of the message. You are speaking to the audience with your voice and with your body. Allow your body to change naturally with your voice. Your body and voice then will work together in communication, rather than against each other.

3. *Gestures*

When you talk to friends, you use gestures with your head, with your shoulders, with your arms, with your legs, with your face. All of your body is used. When giving a sermon, you want to be as natural as you are when you are talking with your friends.

- A gesture should be genuine and natural. It should accompany the message as it would accompany a conversation with a friend.
- It is not necessary to smile all the time. In fact, that would be false, because some of your message may be about the need to repent. Your facial expression should accompany the normal emotion of your message.

- When giving an illustration about the life of an individual, or something that the individual has said, it is appropriate to imitate the tone of the voice, the gestures, and the facial features of the individual that you are imitating. In other words, it is appropriate to act out scenes from the Bible or everyday life.
- Maintain eye contact with the audience. You want them to know that you are interested in them personally. You can do that best by maintaining eye contact with them. You also want to know if they are responding to your message. You only know that by reading their eyes.

C. Interpretive Reading

Before you read a biblical passage to an audience, you need to understand the teaching about that message. You should understand first what the author is trying to communicate, so that you can be God's tool in communicating it effectively.

- Read the passage carefully, at least three times.
- Note the punctuation.
- Study the vocabulary. If there are any words that you do not know, look them up in the dictionary.
- Note the theme of the passage as well as its teaching. Also note how that theme is developed.
- Note the purpose that the author had in including this passage in a biblical narrative. In order to do that, it is important to look at the context.
- If there are people mentioned in the passage, note their characteristics.
- If the passage is a biblical story, accompany in your reading the development of the story from its introduction, development, climax and conclusion. Try to capture the emotion of the story in your own voice as it is developed.

You are reading God's word, so read it with conviction and enthusiasm.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION, REVIEW AND APPLICATION

- Think of an effective preacher whom you know. What are elements of his speaking style which make him effective? Describe the use of his voice and body language.
- What are two helpful ideas you gained from this lesson to enhance your own preaching effectiveness?

ACTION PLAN

Have a friend use a tape recorder (or video camera, if you have access to one) to record you as you present a message. Then as you review the tape, evaluate your use of voice according to the parameters given in this lesson. If you use video, study your appearance and body language as well. If you simply have a tape recorder, ask that your friend who is taping watch these things and evaluate you.