

How to Teach God's Word

4

Principles of Delivery

In this module, we've been looking at the three parts to effective communication:

- The Messenger
- The Message
- The Method

In the last lesson we started examining the third part – the Method – focusing particularly on the *preparation* of the Message. Now, in this lesson, we will be looking at the *delivery* of the Message.

This aspect of the Method focuses on your speaking skills and the actual communication of the Message to the hearer.

The Dynamics of Communication

The way you speak will depend strongly on the size of the group you are speaking to. Communication dynamics can be divided into three types:

Speaking to a large group

When most people think of teaching God's Word, they think of teaching behind a pulpit. This style of teaching is generally a one-way style of speaking. The size of the group precludes very much interaction (although as we shall see later in this study, there are ways to involve the hearer actively in the message). The speaking style is called *monologue* – the teacher teaches and the congregation listens. This is the style that Jesus used when he preached to the crowds ([Luke 4:1-9](#)).

Speaking to a small group

When you get a group of anywhere between 3 and 20 people, the dynamics of the teaching style should change. With smaller groups, there is more opportunity for interaction – for asking questions, for allowing more participation by the group. The monologue approach is not so effective with small groups. The speaking style most effective is called *dialogue* – the teacher teaches, but also involves the group in the learning process. This is the style that Jesus used when he was teaching at an evening meal ([Luke 7:36-47](#)).

Speaking one-on-one

Most people intuitively understand that speaking to one person is different from speaking to a crowd. Speaking in monologue (where one person does all the speaking and the other person does all the listening) is an extremely ineffective means of communication when speaking to a person one-on-one. Discipleship is a very different style of teaching. It involves sharing your life, not just your words. The operative style of communication for one-on-one situations is what we call *paralogue* – “speaking alongside.” The paralogue style of communication involves a regular interaction between the teacher and the student, drawing lessons from everyday life. It involves dialogue too, but also much more. It involves the sharing of one’s life. This was the style of teaching that Jesus used with his disciples (**Luke 9:46-50**).

In summary, let’s look at these three styles of communication again.

- **Large group** – *monologue*
- **Small group** – *dialogue*
- **One-on-one** – *paralogue*

In this lesson, we will be mainly addressing how you teach a congregation (the monologue approach), although many of the principles still apply to small group Bible studies and to one-on-one discipleship.

The Way We Communicate

The words you use are a significant part of communication, but they are only one part. It is the “total you” who communicates, not just your tongue. Here is a rough breakdown of the importance to communication of the various aspects of who you are:

- Your lifestyle, reputation and perceived authority – 15%
- Your perceived identification with the hearer – 15%
- Your facial expressions, mannerisms and gestures – 20%
- Your tone of voice and emotional intonation – 20%
- Your words – 30%

The words you speak are important. They are the main vehicle through which a message is communicated. But they are supported by all the other aspects of communication. Any of the other aspects listed above can become a block to the effective communication of your words, no matter how well-crafted they may be.

As a teacher of God’s Word – one who is called to *communicate* the truth of God’s Word to others – it’s important to develop a *rounded* communication style. So let’s take a look at each of these five elements of communication.

Your lifestyle, reputation and perceived authority

This is the “ethos” aspect of communication that we looked at in **Lesson 103-01**. Behind you, as a speaker, is the perceived “you.” If a hearer believes that your

lifestyle does not live up to the Word you are bringing, then he will automatically close his ears. It doesn't matter how eloquently you propose the truth from God's Word, it will not break through this initial barrier.

The same applies to aspects of reputation (as a teacher of God's Word) and your perceived authority to teach a congregation. If you have a good reputation as a teacher, then this generally enhances your ability to communicate, since there is an automatic expectation in the heart of the hearer. If you do not yet have an established reputation, don't worry (after all, every teacher has to start sometime, don't they?), but be aware of the potential barriers to communication.

In the area of perceived authority, three things can sometimes present a hurdle to effective communication:

- **Youth** – This is less of a barrier in today's generation, but it can sometimes be a problem with an older audience. Even Timothy had to overcome this particular barrier to communication (read **1 Timothy 4:12**).
- **Gender** – A person's gender can occasionally be a barrier to communication, especially with hearers who might question, for example, the biblical authority of a woman to teach.
- **Education** – Academic qualifications (or more accurately, a lack of them) can be perceived by some Christians to detract from the authority of the speaker. A lack of education, however, did not stop Peter and John from preaching God's Word with remarkable effectiveness (**Acts 4:13**).

These barriers are not insurmountable. If you prepare yourself and your message before the Lord, God is able to penetrate any barrier to bring the living Word to the heart of the hearer.

Your perceived identification with the hearer

When a person sits down to listen to your words, the first thing they are sub-consciously seeking to establish is whether you are a person with whom they can identify. If you are already known to the audience, this is largely already established – you are a friend, a brother or sister in Christ, “one of us.”

But if you are new to the congregation, they are going to assess you within the first minute or so of your message as to whether you are going to “click” with them or not. “First impressions,” as the old saying goes, “count.” This is why the introduction to your message is so important. During your introduction, you are not only introducing the hearer to the Word of God, you are also introducing *yourself* to them. You are providing them a window in on the kind of person that you are. If the hearer is able to say to himself, sub-consciously, “This person is just like me,” then half the task of communication has been successfully completed. The hearer is open to hear what you have to say.

Two things in particular play a crucial role in establishing this perceived identification between the teacher and the congregation:

- **Dress code** – Wearing appropriate attire is important whenever you teach God’s Word. This means you don’t wear thread-bare jeans to a meeting which expects a suit and tie, nor do you wear a suit and tie to a meeting which expects jeans. The rule of thumb is that your clothing should never distract from the message you are to bring.
- **Speaking style** – Your choice of vocabulary should reflect the average vocabulary of your audience. Your aim is not to impress them with how much you know; your aim is to communicate.

Anything that distances you from your hearer needs to be addressed, whether it be issues of dress code, speaking style or choice of words. The more you are able to “connect” with your audience, the more effective your communication will be.

Your facial expressions, mannerisms and gestures

Your face plays a vital role in communication. Very few people look at your shoes when you speak to them; they usually look at your face, straight into your eyes. Although it represents only a small surface area of the body, the face has more muscles directly connected with communication than any other part of the body. The muscles around the mouth and eyes, in particular, control expressions that communicate joy, sadness, anger and surprise. A simple lift of an eyebrow, for example, can communicate a wealth of information to an audience.

Most of us, when we are just learning to teach God’s Word, find speaking before a crowd intimidating. We are all familiar with the experience of “butterflies” in the stomach. When you are nervous, there are two things that tend to freeze: your facial expressions and your hand gestures. Bryan Chapell, in his book *Christ-Centered Preaching*, describes what happens in this way:

“Speaking at our kitchen tables we move our hands when expressing something that excites us. When we do not concentrate on how we are saying particular words our voices move up and down to emphasize different thoughts; voice intensity varies to reflect different degrees of seriousness; and volume naturally rises to reach everyone while modulating so as to overpower no one. Were we secretly to videotape a meal in your home we would discover virtually everyone there possesses this natural facility of so-called kitchen-table expression. Thus, you already have excellent delivery skills.”¹

He then goes on to describe the sudden change that overcomes many inexperienced speakers the moment they get behind a pulpit.

“But something happens when we move from kitchen tables to church pulpits. All those eyes staring at us somehow straightjacket our gestures and paralyze our expressions. We seem to lose the ability to speak naturally when standing in front of others. This means the real challenge of pulpit excellence is not to add something to our delivery that is atypical of us, but to reclaim the naturalness that is most true to us.”²

This recapturing of natural expressions and gestures is what comes with experience. But even if you are new to public speaking, as you prepare your message, ask the Lord for grace to be “naturally spiritual” when you teach his Word.

Your tone of voice and emotional intonation

Nervousness can also freeze the inflection of your voice, resulting in a “monotone” delivery of your message. But when you become “warmed up” and a friendly intimacy develops between you and your audience, the intonation of your voice quickly “unfreezes.”

Imagine yourself in excited, animated conversation with a close friend. You are both seated on a bench beneath a tree, as you describe with great enthusiasm a funny incident that happened on your vacation. Your focus is not on yourself, but rather on the excitement of your story and on your friend, who is listening with a growing smile.

As you are speaking, you soon discover that a crowd has gathered around you, drawn by your animated conversation. The faces you see around you are also familiar – friends, or friends of friends. As the crowd gathers, your focus automatically changes from that one friend to the crowd of friends. You are just as animated, just as natural in your expression, but your voice inflection and volume changes a little, so that everyone can hear you. Your gestures now embrace the crowd, not the single person. You have not suddenly taken on “pulpit mannerisms.” You have not de-naturalized your voice. All that has changed is the dynamics of your conversation – dynamics that now include a group, not just an individual.

This is what speaking before a crowd means. It is not about becoming like Billy Graham, or even like a Bible teacher that you respect. It is about the ordinary “you,” speaking with a controlled excitement about God’s Word and what it means for each and every person who is listening to you.

Effective communication always involves two inseparable things:

- The communication of information
- The communication of emotion

When anointed by the Holy Spirit, these two aspects of communication combine to bring revelation. Dry information about God’s Word, unflavored by emotion, does not communicate well and rarely results in a genuine revelation in that Word. Genuine emotion is contagious. If you are excited about God’s Word, that excitement will be passed on to your audience. If your words could be described as an arrow, then the conviction behind your message is like the bowstring which sends the arrow flying toward its target.

Your words

Lastly, but by no means least, your words play a crucial role in communicating God’s Word. Your words can captivate and tintillate the imagination of the hearer,

drawing them step by step along a path toward a revelation in God’s Word. As long as the core of your message – that point of revelation given by the Holy Spirit – is clear in your mind, God can help you to craft words that will be like arrows, piercing the heart of the hearer.

Handling Nervousness

One of the hardest barriers to overcome for anyone new to public speaking is nervousness. Ever felt the “butterflies” in your stomach? Ever felt scared or nervous, intimidated by the crowd you are speaking to? Ever felt like you were a “grasshopper” in the eyes of your audience? (**Numbers 13:33**). Well, you’re in good company. Did you know that even Moses had a problem with nervousness?

Read Exodus 3:10

Moses described himself as “slow of speech and tongue.” There is even an indication that he may have stuttered. And note his words to God:

“O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past *nor since you have spoken to your servant...*”

“Even meeting with you, Lord,” Moses is saying, “has not changed my speaking ability one iota!” This may sound like humility, but it was really arrogance of the highest order! For the answer to nervousness and lack of eloquence is spending time in the presence of God, drawing upon his anointing to speak and to teach.

Note the Lord’s response to Moses’ declaration of inadequacy in **Exodus 4:11**:

“Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.”

Moses was not the only great man chronicled in the Bible who had to face the problem of fear. Joshua also needed constant encouragement to face his fears.

Read Joshua 1:6-9

The advice that God gave Joshua was:

“Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”

God’s advice to you remains the same. Spend time in God’s Word: Meditate on it, absorb it and obey it. There is no better way to overcome nervousness than to know the Word of God thoroughly.

Read 2 Timothy 1:7

Why would Paul say to Timothy that “God has not given us a spirit of timidity,” unless Timothy had a problem with timidity? (see **1 Corinthians 16:10**). Note Paul’s answer to Timothy’s problem with fear: God had given Timothy “a spirit of

love, of power and of self-discipline.” And you have the same Holy Spirit living in your life, giving you:

- **Love** – the *motivation* that overcomes fear (**1 John 4:18**)
- **Power** – the *momentum* that overcomes fear (**Acts 1:8; 4:33**)
- **Self-discipline** – the *mindset* that overcomes fear (**Isaiah 26:3**)

Even Paul was accused of being “timid” (**2 Corinthians 10:1**) and confessed to “conflicts on the outside, fears within” (**2 Corinthians 7:5**). He often experienced “weakness and fear, with much trembling” (**1 Corinthians 2:3**). Yet it was in the midst of this weakness and fear that Paul experienced the power of God.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

The fact that you feel weak does not disqualify you from teaching God’s Word. If anything, it qualifies you, for it is in your weakness that God reveals his own grace and strength (note also **2 Corinthians 13:4; Isaiah 40:29-31**). The Holy Spirit has been given to you to energize a boldness in your witness, and he also energizes a boldness to teach his Word. In the power of God’s Spirit, even the weakling can say, “I am strong” (**Joel 3:10**).

Would you like a practical hint to handle those butterflies and steady the shaking hand? This hint is nothing new (we’ve already looked at it during our study of the Gospel), but it can make a major difference for you. It encapsulates everything that Moses, Joshua, Timothy and Paul discovered about how to handle the fear and trembling. And what is this secret?

Change your focus!

When you are nervous or intimidated by an audience, the focus naturally gravitates toward yourself. You have become “self-conscious.” But the art of effective speaking includes the ability to shift from a focus on yourself to a focus outside yourself. This new focus includes three things:

- A focus on the Lord
- A focus on the excitement of your message
- A focus on the hearer

These three points of focus are complimentary. And when you are focused on working *with the Lord* to deliver *the excitement of his message to the people*, you switch from being *self-conscious* to being *hearer-conscious*.

You and the Hearer

Anytime you speak before a congregation, you are exercising a unique relationship with them. Many speakers think that this relationship is simply one of: I’m speaking, they’re listening. But there is more to it than this.

Even when you use the monologue style of communication, the hearer interacts with you while you speak. If you are truly communicating, the audience will con-

duct an internal dialogue with you. They will either agree with you or disagree with you. They will question your statements. They will ask what it really means for them on a practical level.

This is positive. If they stop asking these questions, it means they have stopped listening. For this reason, it is valuable for you to both be aware of this internal dialogue, and to actually guide it along.

You can do this by posing questions to the audience. Don't just tell the congregation what God's Word says. Let them discover it for themselves. This personal discovery process is, after all, what revelation in God's Word is all about.

Let's look at a practical example.

Read Ephesians 3:14-19

Imagine you are teaching on this verse. Now you can approach it one of two ways:

- Telling the congregation what you have discovered
- Leading the congregation through the same process of discovery you went through

As you can see, the second way is much more hearer-targeted. You are cooperating far more with the Holy Spirit's own style of teaching.

If you use the "telling" approach, you might say something like this:

"Paul begins **verse 14** off with the statement: 'For this reason, I bow before the Father...' You'll note that he starts off in verse one in exactly the same way: 'For this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus...' As Paul is writing to the Ephesians, he in fact intended to launch straight into the meaning of **verse 14** back in **verse 1**, but he digressed in **verses 2-13**, explaining to the Ephesians why he was 'a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles.' If we want to understand the 'reason' Paul was bowing before the Father, we need to look at **Ephesians 2:19-22**. *This* is the reason that Paul bows before the Father..."

If, however, you use the "leading" approach, you might say something like this:

"Paul begins **verse 14** off with the statement: 'For this reason, I bow before the Father...' What is this 'reason' that Paul is talking about? What is the reason that is so powerful that it sends Paul to his knees before the Father?"

"Now if you had just walked up to a conversation where someone had said, 'For this reason, I'm going to go and speak with my doctor,' you'd know that you had just missed something important. You'd want to backtrack, 'rewind the tape,' so to speak, to find out *what* reason was sending your friend to see the doctor.

"Well, that's what we're going to do right now. We're going to 'rewind the tape' and find out exactly what reason is compelling Paul to kneel before the

Father. Now you might think that by just looking back a verse or two, you'll discover the reason. But if you look back at **verse 1**, you'll discover that Paul is saying almost the same thing as he does in **verse 14**. He says: 'For this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus...' He, in fact, intended to launch straight into the meaning of **verse 14** back in **verse 1**, but he digressed in **verses 2-13**, explaining to the Ephesians why he was 'a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles.' (How many of us have ever got distracted momentarily in the middle of what we were saying? Yes?)

If we want to understand the 'reason' Paul was bowing before the Father, we need to look at **Ephesians 2:19-22**. *This is the reason that Paul bows before the Father...*"

Which of these two approaches do you think is the better method of communication? The first approach simply *told* the congregation the truth in this passage. The second approach took the congregation by the hand and led them backwards to discover *for themselves* the truth in that passage.

You'll notice that the second approach employed two techniques – the asking of questions and the use of an illustration. The combination of these two techniques served to whet the appetite of the hearer. The audience is no longer just being informed of some truth in God's Word; they are now wanting to find out for themselves what that truth is.

When you teach God's Word, it is important to involve the hearer in the process of discovery. You do this in the two ways we gave in the example above:

- By asking questions which make the hearer think through the problem for himself or herself
- By giving an illustration which invites the hearer right into the middle of the problem or question

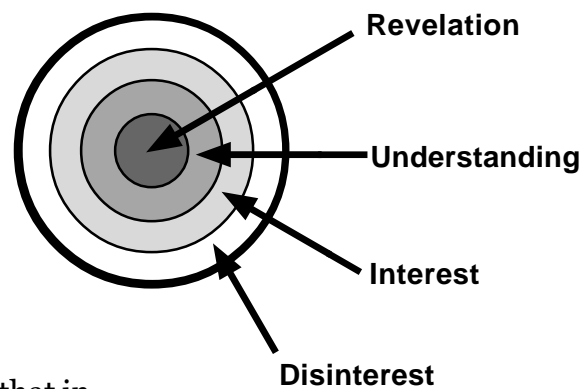
Do you remember the archery illustration we gave in **Lesson 103-03**? Let's look at the archery target again, this time from the perspective of the process of personal discovery.

There are three main stages in the discovery process:

- Interest
- Understanding
- Revelation

As you teach God's Word, your goal is to lead the hearer from interest to understanding to revelation.

It is at the beginning of your message that interest is successfully secured or not. If you fail to secure interest, then the arrow of your message has missed the target. Once a hearer is



disinterested in the message, it is very difficult to recapture his interest. And disinterest is the ultimate barrier to communication.

The best way to secure interest is by whetting the hearer's appetite for the issue posed in Scripture. And the best way to whet the hearer's appetite is by asking them questions and by leading them by the hand through the discovery process.

Feedback From the Congregation

If you are to guide the congregation through this process of discovery, then it is absolutely vital to have feedback from the congregation. Without this feedback, it is difficult to gauge exactly where your hearers are in the three step scale of interest, understanding and revelation.

Here are some of the telltale signals that you can pick up from a congregation:*

- **Interest** – They keep eye contact with you. Likewise, disinterest will show in loss of eye contact, fidgeting and, in the worst of cases, snoring.
- **Understanding** – There may be nods or other signals of affirmation.
- **Revelation** – There is an obvious excitement as “the lights turn on.” Some people may also be literally “on the edges of their seats.”

The importance of keeping eye contact with your hearers cannot be overemphasized, both for reasons of feedback and communication. Some speakers find it difficult to keep eye contact with their audience, looking instead up at the ceiling, at the door behind the people, or even at their notes. But for powerful communication to take place, you must not “hide” yourself from the congregation. You must look at them, engage them with your eyes.

Beyond the Written Code

Although people who are experienced in public speaking have learned techniques that help them communicate to a large group – techniques such as using the dramatic pause (which allows the congregation to think over what you have just said), projecting your voice (which makes sure the people at the back of the congregation hear you clearly), varying your voice's intensity and tone (so that it is not monotonous), and developing a good microphone manner (such as keeping the microphone close to your mouth even when you turn). All these rules of public speaking, however, can become quite a daunting “written code” that you must learn and follow.

Do you remember **Romans 7:6**? Well, guess what! It also applies to public speaking! If you try to follow a rigid written code of public speaking, it will only cause

* The feedback you get from a congregation is very dependent upon cultural responses and religious tradition. The signals we give in this lesson are based on a more Anglo-Saxon-type culture. In many Asian congregations, for example, the congregational feedback would be more subdued, whereas in African and Afro-American congregations, the feedback would be much more pronounced. There is also a great different between, for example, conservative and Pentecostal/Charismatic congregations.

you to focus more on your self. But in the “new way of the Spirit” (which we will be looking at more closely in the next lesson), your focus is on God’s Spirit, the excitement of the message you are bringing, and on the people who are hearing the message.

Bryan Chapell writes:

“...no set of delivery dos and don’ts supersedes the power of caring deeply about what you say. Let earnestness be your eloquence. Preaching that is all polish and no fire shines reputations but does not melt hearts. Even if the words you say barely trip over the lip of the pulpit, if you speak with the sincerity of a burdened spirit, others will listen. You communicate this authenticity when your manner reflects your content. Let your heart show in your work. Showing genuine enthusiasm for what you deeply believe is the only unbreakable rule of great delivery.”³

Certain skills that are important to develop (and will develop in time), but your focus should never be on techniques. If it is, you are essentially no different from those in the entertainment industry, who use showmanship to manipulate the emotions of the audience to good effect. Bryan Chapell goes on to say:

“When delivery techniques (skilled or unskilled) dominate a sermon’s impressions listeners tend to reject the message. Listeners remember the *delivery* of poor speakers, they remember the *content* of good speakers. We communicate messages best when our delivery is transparent. Neither showy oratory nor a staid presentation accomplishes this goal. Both draw attention to themselves. The technique of someone who stands like a statue and speaks in a monotone intrudes on the content of the message no less than the flim-flam of the showman who dances across a stage.”⁴

Read 2 Corinthians 4:2

This was Paul’s declared approach to teaching God’s Word. He didn’t manipulate the congregation’s emotions, nor did he use showman tactics in getting people to respond (note **1 Corinthians 2:3-4**). Instead, he “[set] forth the truth plainly...”

The Word of God has power in itself to bring transformation to a person’s life. As a messenger prepared by God, with a message revealed by his Spirit, God will train you, step by step, to be “a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (**2 Timothy 2:15**).

¹ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), p.314.

² Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), p.314.

³ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), p.315.

⁴ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), p.315.