

## **“How to Preach So People Will Listen”**

### **Pastor Terry Hlebo**

#### **Thoughts on Chapter Nine. The Dress of Thought “Biblical Preaching” (The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages) By Haddon W. Robinson**

(HR) Not all preachers write out their sermons, nor do preachers who write out sermons write out every sermon, **but the discipline of preparing a manuscript improves preaching.** Writing scrapes the fungus off our thought, arranges our ideas in order, and underlines the important ideas. *“Writing,” said Francis Bacon, “makes an exact man exact in thought and in speech.”* An expository preacher professing a high view of inspiration should respect the power of words. To affirm that the individual words of Scripture must be God-breathed, but then to ignore our own choice of language smacks of gross inconsistency. Our theology, if not our common sense, should tell us that ideas and words cannot be separated.

**Proverbs 25:11 Like apples of gold in settings of silver Is a word spoken in right circumstances.**

**Our choice of words is called style.** (HR) *Everyone possesses style—be it bland, dull, invigorating, precise—but however we handle or mishandle words becomes our style. Style reflects how we think and how we look at life. Style varies with different speakers, and an individual speaker will alter his or her style for different audiences and different occasions. Addressing a high school class, for instance, may demand a different style from what you use in addressing a Sunday morning congregation. The polished wording used in a baccalaureate sermon would sound completely out of place in a small group Bible study.*

**Your sermon should not be read to a congregation.** Reading usually kills a lively sense of communication. **Neither should you try to memorize your manuscript.** Not only does memorization place a hefty burden on you if you speak several times a week, but an audience senses when you are reading words off the wall of your mind. **Rehearse several times aloud without your manuscript. Make no conscious effort to recall your exact wording. Simply try to get your flow of thought clearly in mind.**

**Strong Transitions: Because transitions carry a heavy burden in spoken communication, they take up more space in a sermon manuscript. Listeners hear your sermon only as a series of sentences. Transitions serve as road signs to point out where the sermon has been and where it is**

going. Transitions, therefore, are longer and more detailed than in writing.

### Three Different Styles of Delivery:

#### **1. A Clear Style: We must be clear.**

A sermon is not deep because it is muddy. Whatever has been thought through can be stated simply and clearly.

For preachers, clarity is a moral matter. It is not merely a question of rhetoric, but a matter of life and death. If we believe that what we preach either draws people to God or keeps them away from Him, then for God's sake and the people's sake, we must be clear.

**A Clear Outline: Zigzag thinking can be straightened out only by outlining your overall thought before working on the details.**

**Short Sentences:** Furthermore, to be clear, keep your sentences short. **Rudolph Flesch**, in *The Art of Plain Talk*, maintains that clarity increases as sentence-length decreases. According to his formula, a clear writer will average about seventeen or eighteen words to a sentence, and will not allow any sentence to wander on over thirty words.

**Simple Sentence Structure:** Keep sentence structures simple. A clearer, more energetic style emerges when you follow the thinking sequence:

**Complicated sentences have an additional disadvantage: they slow the pace of the sermon. Henry Ward Beecher put it, "A switch with leaves on it doesn't tingle."**

**Simple Words:** Simple words also contribute to a clear style.

Theologians and ministers, too, seem to keep themselves in office by resorting to language that bewilders ordinary mortals. Beware of jargon!

**Use a short word unless you find it absolutely necessary to use a longer word.** Long words have paralysis in their tails. 73% of the words in **Psalm 23**, 76% of the words in the **Lord's Prayer**, and 80% of the words in **1 Corinthians 13** are one-syllable words.

**All the big things in life have little names**, such as *life, death, peace, war, dawn, day, night, hope, love, home*. Learn to use small words in a big way.

**Don't overestimate your audience's religious vocabulary. or underestimate their intelligence.**

**2. A Direct and Personal Style** **Speakers will use questions where writers may not. A question invites the listener to think about what the preacher will say next. and often is used in a transition to introduce a major point or a new idea.**

**What about the use of slang? It gets mixed reviews.** **Vibing! Doomer!** When it is used deliberately, slang can capture attention and inject a sense of casualness and informality into the sermon.

**3. A Vivid Style** To get your listeners to experience your message, therefore, you must appeal to their senses. You do this directly through both sight and sound. Your congregation sees your gestures and facial expressions and hears what you say. You also stimulate the senses indirectly through your use of words.

**Your vividness increases when you use specific, concrete details and plenty of them.** Specific details, Instead of ***produce***, say *cabbages, cucumbers, carrots, and oranges*. Rather than ***weapon***, talk about a *heavy lead pipe*. Instead of ***major cities***, *New York, Chicago, Dallas, San Francisco*.

**Metaphors and similes, like lobsters, must be served fresh:**  
**Stale, outdated phases - “Long Story Short” “Knocked it out of the park” “The one two punch” “Been there done that”**

**While we speak the eternal message. it must be in today's words.** Study magazine ads or radio or television commercials for easily understood language that speaks to the inhabitants of our culture.

**How can you shun the sin of boring people?**

**1. Pay attention to your own use of language.** In private conversation, don't shift your mind into neutral, using phrases that idle rather than move. Cultivate fresh comparisons in ordinary conversation and you will find them easier to use when you preach.

**2. Study how others use language.** When writers or speakers shake you

awake, examine how they did it. Because poetry bursts with similes and metaphors, studying verse develops a feel for figurative language.

**3. Read aloud.** Reading aloud does two things for you. First, your vocabulary will increase. Second, as you read aloud a style better than your own, new patterns of speech and creative wording will be etched on your mind.

---

## **Chapter Ten. How to Preach So People Will Listen**

**Most books on preaching say a great deal about the development of the sermon but little about its delivery.**

The effectiveness of our sermons depends on two factors: what we say and how we say it. Both are important.

**In order of significance, the ingredients making up the sermon are thought, arrangement, language, voice, and gesture.**

**The writer of Proverbs underscored the power of nonverbal communication when he observed, Proverbs 6:12-14**

**1. Our nonverbal language has strategic importance in public speaking.** In fact, our actions may often be more expressive than our words.

**2. Both research and experience agree that if nonverbal messages contradict the verbal, listeners will more likely believe the silent language.**

**3. Observation about effective delivery is that it begins with desires.** Having something to say to a congregation that you want them to understand and live by provides an essential stimulus for effective delivery.

**When we concentrate on ideas, with the desire to make listeners understand and accept them, strong delivery comes naturally.**

**Saying that pulpit delivery resembles conversation, however, does not mean that our ordinary ways of speaking are necessarily our best ways.**

**What are some nonverbal factors in delivery to which we should give our attention?**

**Grooming and Dress** When the apostle Paul declared that he would **1 Corinthians 9:22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I**

**have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some.** Paul established a basic strategy for Christian communication. Because grooming and dress make a difference in how listeners respond to us, they should make a difference to us as well.

**A fundamental rule of grooming and dress is that they should fit the audience, the situation, and the speaker.**

**A program of regular exercise and proper diet can trim off excess pounds that sometimes hinder communication.**

**Good grooming also includes the use of deodorants, toothpaste, and breath fresheners.**

**While we may dress to be comfortable, clothes should make others comfortable with us as well.**

**As a general rule, a public speaker will dress one notch higher than the audience. A woman speaker, for example, may wear a skirt while women in the audience wear slacks or jeans. A male speaker may wear a tie when men in the audience are wearing sport shirts. In most Sunday services, a suit for a man or a woman is appropriate.**

**Movement and Gestures** God designed the human body to move. If your congregation wants to look at a statue, they can go to a museum.

**1. Sometimes you need to move.** You give up a great advantage if you stand almost motionless before your people and become little more than a talking head that refuses to let your body interact with the message. **In fact, when we speak in public, we need to make our gestures larger, more forceful, and deliberate.**

**2. Content should motivate movement also means that some speakers should move less.**

**Gestures maintain interest and hold attention.**

**Gestures also help listeners experience what we feel as they identify with us.**

**4 characteristics of expressive gestures:**

**1. Spontaneous Gestures** Your gestures should develop from within you as the outgrowth of conviction and feeling. While you can practice gestures, do not plan them.

**2. Definite Gestures** your gestures should also be definite. When you make a gesture, make it. A halfhearted gesture communicates nothing positive.

**3. Varied Gestures** Your gestures should be varied. Repetition of a single gesture, even a spontaneous and forceful one, calls attention to itself and irritates the audience.

**4. Properly Timed Gestures** your gestures should be properly timed. A good gesture either accompanies or precedes the word or phrase that carries most of your meaning.

**Eye Contact** Eye contact probably ranks as the single most effective means of nonverbal communication at your disposal. Eyes communicate. They supply feedback to you, and at the same time, hold your audience's attention.

**Vocal Delivery** Speech consists of more than words and sentences. Your voice conveys ideas and feelings apart from words.

**Speakers, on the other hand, emphasize what they say in only four ways—by a variety in pitch, punch, progress, and pause. The use of these or a combination of them becomes the punctuation of speech. It is a variety of these elements that makes delivery interesting.**

**Pitch** Pitch involves the movement of the voice up and down the scale, in different registers, with various inflections. Sometimes changes in pitch are called *melody*.

**Monopitch** **drones us to sleep or wears upon us like a child pounding on the same note on the piano.**

**Punch** Variations in punch or loudness can achieve both interest and emphasis. A change in volume communicates the relative importance of ideas.

**In past centuries, preachers had to shout in order to be heard. Today, with effective public address systems, shouting is no longer necessary, or even desirable.**

**Progress** You can achieve emphasis through changing the progress or rate of your delivery.

Some speakers have gained a bad reputation for speaking too rapidly, but their problem may be that they fail to vary their rate.

**Pause** *"By your silence," said Rudyard Kipling, "you shall speak."* Skilled speakers recognize that pauses serve as commas, semicolons, periods, and exclamation points. Pauses are the major punctuation marks of speech. Pauses are "thoughtful silences."

**Rehearsal** Rehearse your sermon before you deliver it. Put aside your notes and go through it from memory. Rehearsal tests the structure of your message.

**Rehearsing also improves delivery.** Professional actors and actresses would not think of going before an audience without first going over their material orally—usually many times—to be sure that it comes to them easily. **While preachers are more than actors, they should not be less. Effective delivery must be practiced because you cannot think about delivery much as you speak.**

**Feedback** Effective speakers look for feedback. They will listen to audio files of their sermons, or better still, watch videotapes. It is best to do this several days after you preach when the experience has grown cold. People who know you're interested in their reaction will be kind and gentle.

**Conclusion:** Be yourself. Don't try and be someone else. We are all unique persons that God wants to shine through.