

# 10 Principles for Better Oral Communication

by Wayne McDill

Let me suggest some of the principles you can follow as guidelines for planning the design of your sermons. If you will keep these suggestions in mind, your design will come closer to the goal of making real communication contact.

## **1. Design a dynamic format rather than a static one.**

Dynamic means forceful, alive, moving. Static means set, complete, still. Plan your sermon design to be moving and alive as you interact with your audience. Do not plan everything you will say down to the last word and then present what was already complete in the study. Remember that a sermon is an oral presentation that does not come into existence until it is preached.

## **2. Keep your outline clear and simple.**

Writing your sermon idea and division statements for the ear will make a difference in the way you word them. Make sure your main ideas are clear in concept and wording. What you write may look good on paper. But read these statements aloud.

- How do they sound?
- Are they immediately understandable?
- Is there a rhythm and symmetry to their wording?
- Do they roll off the tongue without a stutter?

## **3. Oral design should be oriented to time rather than space.**

The amount of weight you give to a particular section will depend on the time you spend with it. To state your bridging sentences, and read your text and your division statements will take only two or three minutes. The rest of a half-hour sermon is support material or development.

Written notes may be misleading when you jot down only a word or two to indicate a long illustration, argument, or application. Take care to orient your design to time rather than space, planning carefully but remaining flexible.

## **4. Emphasize main ideas by placement and reiteration.**

Remember that the audience can tell a statement is a main idea only by how you say it. They don't see the bold print or underlining. Place your division statements in prominent positions, first and last in a section. What you say first and last is remembered. As you repeat your division statements in the same words, the hearer will grasp their significance. Also announce and number them, using your key word.

## **5. Use carefully worded transitions as you move through the presentation.**

If you begin with a natural analogy, make the point clear as it relates to your sermon idea. This will smooth the way to your next segment. Plan a transition from the need element into the introduction of the text. Use the bridging sentences and let the transition sentence with the key word usher your audience into the divisions.

Wrap up each division with a restatement of previous points and an introduction of the next one. Think of transitions like a handoff in football. If they are not done well, you will probably drop the ball.

## **6. Plan carefully for a combination of inductive and deductive movement.**

Remember that inductive thinking begins with particulars. Start the sermon inductively by talking about something familiar to the audience that parallels your subject and gets their attention. From there you will move toward the main idea of the sermon. The movement is the

key - from particular to general. Use deductive movement when you give the division statement and then move to particulars of development.

### **7. Use language best suited to the ear, not the eye.**

Choose words that may be easily understood in passing. You only get one opportunity to say something. Even though you repeat main ideas, keep them simple and direct. Avoid vocabulary beyond the audience's understanding. Use "people talk" but not poor grammar or pronunciation. Do not assume people know what historical references or even biblical references mean. Explain them. Do not use technical theological terms without defining them. Use language for the ear.

### **8. Plan the introductory segments carefully.**

What we call the sermon introduction is as important as anything you do to communicate effectively. Unfortunately, most preachers just stand up and wander into their subject.

There are five purposes of the introduction...

- To arrest the attention of the hearer;
- To awaken interest in your subject;
- To introduce your subject;
- To introduce the text; and
- To make a smooth transition into the body of the sermon.

Each of these aims calls for careful planning. The introduction is so important because it is the beginning. If you do not get off to a good start with real communication contact, you may never achieve it.

### **9. Plan the closing segments of the design carefully.**

What we usually call the conclusion is as important as the introduction. In the motivated sequence outline, the conclusion will include the visualization and action steps. This is development that returns to your sermon idea. For the visualization step use illustration and application to picture the experience of the sermon idea for the hearer. The action step calls for the specific changes that are needed to apply the sermon idea. This step leads into a time of prayer, reflection, or invitation to allow the hearer to respond to the message.

### **10. Plan the whole design from the audience's point of view.**

Try to get beyond the narrow focus on your expository material and how to organize it. Think of the audience.

- Who will be there?
- How do they think?
- What do they understand?
- What do they need to know?

If you do not communicate your material effectively, it is of no value to your hearer.

#### **CHECKSHEET: Oral Design**

- I have planned a dynamic rather than a static format.
- I have kept my outline simple in wording and concept.
- I have oriented my design to time rather than space.
- I have emphasized main ideas by placement and reiteration.
- I have planned careful transitions at shift points.
- I have used appropriate inductive and deductive movement.
- I have used language for the ear, not the eye.
- I have carefully planned the introductory segments.
- I have carefully planned the concluding segments.
- I have planned the whole design from the audience's view.