

12
ESSENTIAL
SKILLS
for GREAT
PREACHING

SECOND EDITION
REVISED AND EXPANDED

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Sermon Development

- ✓ Skill 7: Balancing Persuasive Elements
- ✓ Skill 8: Exploring Natural Analogies
- ✓ Skill 9: Drawing Pictures, Telling Stories

Skill 9

Drawing Pictures, Telling Stories

It is a miracle. At least it seems to be miraculous to the preacher. He is preaching along, struggling through the apathy like wading in two feet of muddy water. He can see it in the faces of the audience. They are not with him. What he is saying is not interesting to them. Then the miracle occurs. They suddenly look his way. They become very still. Some lean a little to the side to see around the person in the next pew. An older man cups his hand to his ear. Children who have been drawing look up in anticipation.

What has happened? Has the preacher suddenly become a great communicator? In a sense, he has. He has begun to tell a story or vividly describe a scene. And for no other reason than that the communication connection is suddenly complete. Suddenly they are really interested in what he is saying. The attention of the audience is riveted on him.

Not only are word pictures and stories essential to good speech communication, but they are also inherent to the revelation of God in Scripture. Ours is a historical faith. What we believe has been made known in history—in particular events, specific places, the lives and sayings of real people who have encountered God. Our faith has not come to us in philosophical pronouncements, mysteries, secrets, or theological formulas. God has

revealed himself instead through the experiences of ordinary people made extraordinary by his special involvement in their lives.

In the stories and scenes of their lives, we learn who God is and what he is doing. We meet him ourselves in their stories as he awakens our understanding to the meaning of what happened there. Ultimately we come face-to-face with the God of creation in the story of Jesus Christ. In the life of Jesus, we see him as never before. He meets us there, in that “gospel,” that story of the life of one man who was actually God himself.

If the revelation of God comes to us in scenes and stories, the preaching of that revelation should be given to the audience in the same form. This does not mean, of course, that we are storytellers only. We are interpreters as well. We must not only draw the pictures and tell the stories; we must also interpret their meaning for the audience. And we must tell new stories and draw new pictures for this generation. In them they will see the truths of the biblical stories replayed in contemporary places and lives.

In this chapter we will deal with the preacher’s skill at **vividly and imaginatively portraying biblical and contemporary scenes and stories**. The exercise aimed at strengthening this skill is *Scenes and Stories*. This is the third chapter devoted essentially to sermon development. Now we will consider how to use narrative and word pictures to develop sermon ideas.

Story and Plot

A large portion of the Bible is narrative of one kind or another. When you preach a passage that carries a story line, you will want to make sure that story lives again in the sermon. The narrative passages of Scripture are not fairy tales or Disney fantasies. They are actual accounts of historical events. The people and places and happenings are real. Unfortunately, however, many preachers retell these stories in such a manner as to make them seem remote, dull, and hardly believable.

I have heard many a sermon from narrative texts that reported on the story rather than telling the story. Like an autopsy on a dead body, the preacher gives a technical theological analysis of the story. But narrative texts are best preached with the telling of the story along with theological interpretation and application.

Though most Christians would claim to believe the biblical accounts, they may believe them in a different way than they do secular history. These are stories they have heard since childhood. They know them by heart—Adam and Eve, Jonah and the whale, David and Goliath, Daniel in the lion’s den. But they do not seem real in the same way other historical accounts do. I can remember as a boy going to a church camp and hearing for the first time a Bible story told as though it actually happened. It was the story of Naaman and his healing in the river. The preacher described the chariots and the dust they raised as they approached the home of the prophet. I have never forgotten it. I saw it. I was there.

Some preachers may be reluctant to tell biblical stories with such realism. It may seem to be adding to Scripture to tell more than is there. There is no violation of the sacredness of Scripture to retell its stories imaginatively. It may be a violation of biblical intent to tell them in such a way that nobody can believe them. Preachers may fear being thought of as showy by their congregations. They may fear making a fool of themselves. They may not be sure how to draw pictures and tell stories. I can understand each of these concerns. But I think the desire for effective communication overshadows each of them for preaching.

Stories follow certain patterns as they unfold. For a novel we call that pattern the *plot*. This means that the story is told in such a way as to make

Story Outline

Stories ordinarily follow a pattern of five phases. These phases may not be in balance or of equal weight in the story. Some aspects of the account may be only implied. The preacher may use the normal story pattern to analyze his narrative texts and to plan narrative as sermon development.

Phase 1: *Situation*. The setting and background, characters, etc.

Phase 2: *Stress*. The trouble that gives the story its dynamic.

Phase 3: *Search*. The various solutions explored as the story unfolds.

Phase 4: *Solution*. The solution discovered, resolving the stress.

Phase 5: *(New) Situation*. The new circumstances that prevail.

its point or accomplish its purpose. Eugene Lowry has used the idea of a plot to describe a sermon form like a story. He writes, "In whatever type of narrative plot, the event of the story moves from a bind, a felt discrepancy, an itch born of ambiguity, and moves toward the solution, a release from the ambiguous mystery, the scratch that makes it right."² I am not suggesting that you plan your sermon in this form. If you wish to read about how to preach that way, read Lowry and others on narrative preaching. For now I want to point out the pattern he sees in the plot, the movement from a bind to a solution.

Five Phases of a Story

Let's consider how stories normally unfold. Here are five phases you will see in stories: *situation*, *stress*, *search*, *solution*, *(new) situation*. Each story in the Bible can be analyzed according to this pattern. Analyzing a narrative text in this way will help you notice insights into the meaning of the account, outline the writer's structure, and prepare your retelling of the story.

A story begins with the situation. This is the background, circumstances, persons, and so forth, which set the scene for the narrative. In the parable of the good Samaritan, the *situation* is established briefly: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho" (Luke 10:30). We are used to this phase of the story in the classic formula, "Once upon a time." As you analyze biblical

accounts, look for this setting of the scene. If it is understood or presented in an earlier chapter, you will want to check the context for the details.

In using stories in your sermon, do not spend too much time on the situation phase. In a few sentences you can let the audience know the setting of your story. Use only the information relevant to the story. Remember, a story is told with a specific aim in mind. Whatever does not contribute to that goal is not needed. As you set the situation, use specific and concrete information like names, places, and dates. When retelling a biblical account, dig into your research to get at these details.

The second phase of a story is the stress of a problem that arises. This phase creates interest and draws the audience into the struggle. In the good Samaritan parable, Jesus presents the *stress* phase in these words: “And [he] fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went off leaving him half dead” (NASB). This phase of the story demands resolution. It cries out for a satisfaction of this terrible situation. Remember that this story is designed to address the question, “Who is my neighbor?” The condition of the traveler leaves the hearer most curious as to where the drama is going.

In retelling biblical accounts, make sure the *stress* phase is credible. Sometimes biblical stories seem strange to the modern hearer. It is important for the preacher to fill in the information necessary to understand the human struggle involved in the story. Explanation is needed, for instance, to understand why Abraham would take seriously God’s command to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. Otherwise your modern audience may have a hard time relating. Work to make the biblical characters human, as much like us as they really were. Do not labor the stress phase. State it clearly and quickly. It will have its own impact.

A story moves from the stress phase into a search for the solution to the problem. The parable describes the three men who came by and saw the wounded traveler. The *search* phase is explicit here. The priest saw the man and passed by on the other side. The Levite took a look and passed by also. Then Jesus says, “*But* a certain Samaritan . . .” He is here announcing a possible solution with the Samaritan. He came upon him, saw him, and felt compassion. The solution is not presented yet, but the search seems to be over. The *search* is simply that phase in which the possible solutions are explored. Always take some time here to explore alternatives.

Sometimes the search is not spelled out, as in Abraham’s sacrifice. As you retell that story, you might imagine him going over alternative solutions as he traveled to the dreaded mountain of sacrifice. I have pictured him sitting by the fire on the second night while the servants and the boy Isaac slept. He prays for any answer but the one he fears. He watches the boy sleep and remembers God’s promises and the miracle of his birth. Make it live for your hearers.

After the search comes the solution to the trouble at the heart of the story. In the parable we are following, the solution is given in detail as the Samaritan treats the man’s wounds and takes him to an inn for further care. Jesus obviously intends to have his hero go beyond the normal call of duty.

Remember that his aim is to answer the question, “Who is my neighbor?” In reality Jesus is changing the question to, “Who is neighbor to those in need?” The solution is more dramatic and surprising because of the racial element; the hero is a hated Samaritan.

The solution is the second turning point in the story. The first, of course, is the stress. Sometimes the solution will be a surprise, as with the Samaritan. Sometimes it will be a return to what was lost or forgotten. In the biblical accounts it often involves the intervention of God himself. The exodus from Egypt involves many stories. Analyze the Red Sea episode with the formula. *Situation*: they are leaving Egypt. *Stress*: the Egyptians again pursue them. *Search*: there seems no escape as they face the sea. *Solution*: God intervenes mightily to open the sea.

The final phase of a story is the (new) situation. The story has come full circle to a resetting of the scene. But it is a new scene, a new situation. The events in the story have changed the circumstances. Nothing is quite the same. For the Red Sea experience, the (new) situation sees the Israelites continue their journey, with the Egyptian army drowned in the sea. The wounded traveler is restored to his health by the care of the Samaritan. The prodigal son returns home and is restored with a grand celebration. Abraham receives Isaac back, having proved God’s faithfulness.

The *(new) situation* is to be sketched quickly. Once the solution is found and applied, the problem is essentially resolved. The (new) situation merely brings a closure that settles and delights the audience. This phase represents the classic statement, “And they all lived happily ever after.” Of course it is possible that the story does not end happily. The parable of the rich fool is resolved with a surprise solution, the announcement of his death. The (new) situation is, “And now who will own what you have prepared?” (Luke 12:20 NASB).

So these are the five phases of a story. As you analyze a biblical narrative, look for these elements. Your retelling of it will be much more effective if you plan for the five phases. Think through contemporary stories as well and plan them with this outline. For practice, think of any testimony from your personal experience about God’s blessing, and plot the story with the five phases.

Language with Appeal

If you are to draw pictures and tell stories effectively, you will need to use certain kinds of language. These words and phrases particularize your concepts. They create in the hearer’s imagination a personal involvement and experience with the truth you are presenting. Generalizations cannot do this. Language that particularizes has some of the following qualities: *figurative*, *descriptive*, *sensate*, *concrete*, and *specific*. Though these categories will overlap in actual use, let’s consider them separately.

Figurative language portrays one thing in terms of another to create a more exact and vivid image. Figurative language helps your hearer understand your ideas by seeing them more clearly. Most figurative language is based on the comparison or association of two things that are essentially different but alike in some key way. Notice how James describes the tongue, “See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity” (NASB). What a vivid way to present the destructive power of speech, represented by so small a member, the tongue.

The most common figures of speech are simile and metaphor. *Similes* make direct and explicit comparisons, usually introduced by *like*, *as*, *as if*, or *as when*. In Psalm 1:3 an extended simile is used: “He will be *like* a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither” (NASB). *Metaphors* present the comparison less directly but just as vividly. Jesus used metaphorical language when he said, “I am the vine, you are the branches” (John 15:5).

Figurative language can be most effective if it is fresh and creative. This will take some thought and planning. Worn out and overused figures become so familiar that their impact is lost. They are nothing more than clichés or hackneyed expressions that no longer carry their original impact. Have you ever heard these? “Flat as a pancake,” “strong as an ox,” “the big gorilla,” “hard as nails,” “sings like a bird,” “we’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.” The hearer probably no longer sees the imagery of these figures.

Descriptive language uses modifiers to add color and precision to the picture. The figurative language we discussed above can be descriptive, of course. But here I am talking about nonfigurative description to add vividness to your narratives. *Adjectives* describe nouns or pronouns; they are descriptions of persons, places, things. *Adverbs* modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. Either of these modifiers can be single words or word groups.

A single word of description can change the scene dramatically. “Paul and Silas were led to the jail.” Now add one word. “Paul and Silas were led, *stumbling*, to the jail.” With one word you see them beaten, weak, and abused. “David moved toward the giant, stopping to pick up several stones as he went.” Try this: “David moved *warily* toward the giant.” What a difference in the scene. You see David as cautious but unafraid, keeping his eyes on his foe, knowing the danger.

Use descriptive language carefully. Flowery language designed to impress or appeal to emotion is best avoided. Choose words and phrases that exactly capture the scene you want to present. Your work as a word crafter is involved here. Never settle for the almost right word to say what you want to say. One of the marks of novice writers and speakers is an overuse of adjectives and adverbs. Use description sparingly. As we noted above, one word will color a whole scene, so do not use more where it is not necessary.

Sensate language identifies qualities particularly perceived by the senses. As you describe a scene, always survey it for what the senses would pick up in it. What are the sights? What sounds would be heard? What are the odors that one would notice? How would objects feel to the touch? What about

tastes? Then, of course, there is that sixth sense, the emotional. It is often represented as a visceral sense as emotions are physically perceived.

A survey of the scene with the senses in mind will allow you to describe it much more realistically. Consider, for instance, the Philippian jail where Paul and Silas were imprisoned that night. They had been severely beaten. Then they were placed in the inner dungeon, a maximum security cell. What did they see? Maybe nothing but the dense darkness. What did they hear? A drip of water. A rat scurrying across the floor. The moans and curses of other prisoners. What did they feel? The stocks about their ankles. The throbbing pain of their bloody backs. The coldness and dampness. What did they smell? The stench of human waste. The musty, stale air.

Can you describe that scene? With just the right sensate language, you can help your audience experience that cell with Paul and Silas. They will never forget the Philippian jail because they have been there in their imagination. You may also describe how the two men felt at the time—angry, discouraged, tired, and so forth. But be careful in describing emotions not to overdo it. Just telling what they did in that dungeon will reveal their attitudes about the situation.

Concrete language brings ideas and principles down to earth for clarity and understanding. *Concrete* means “those things which can be perceived by the senses as actual and particular.” The opposite is *abstract*, which means “conceptual, transcendent.” Abstract words identify qualities, ideas, and concepts, like *love, honesty, wisdom, sincerity, authority, weakness*. Concrete things, perceived by the senses, are like *roast beef, apple pie, yeast rolls*, all concrete expressions of the abstract idea *nourishment*.

Sermons present abstract ideas in the sermon idea and division statements. As we have said, all sermon development involves particularizing these general ideas. One way to particularize is to use concrete language. You may talk for some time about love. But a few concrete examples of love will really bring it home to your audience: “She always could tell when he had a particularly hard day.” “He never forgot the anniversary of their first date.” “They listened patiently while he shouted at them angrily.”

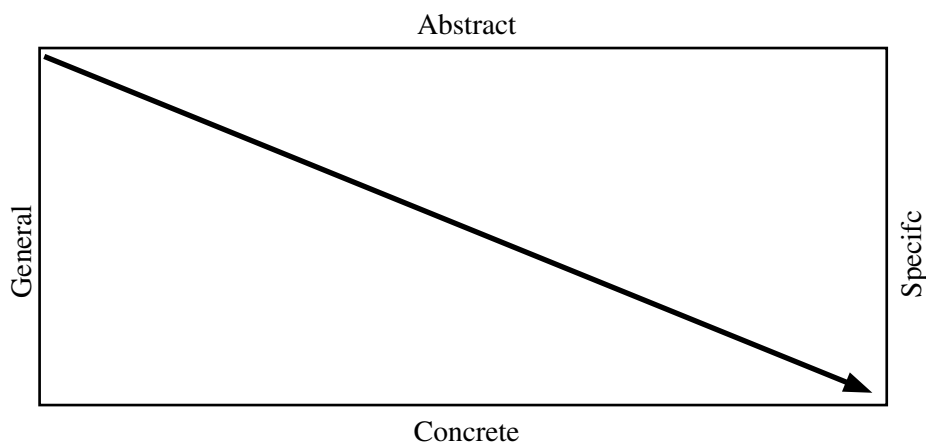
There are many levels along the way from abstract to concrete. Your aim is to recognize when you need to use *abstract* language and when *concrete* is needed. Good communication calls for both, used in the right balance and at the appropriate times. Similar to the *abstract/concrete* distinction in words is the *general/specific* difference. Notice the diagram below for some clarification.

Specific language refers to individual members of a larger class of things. The opposite term, *general*, refers to all members of a class or group. There is some overlapping in our discussion of general and specific with abstract and concrete. To distinguish them, think of *abstract* and *concrete* as referring to the degree to which something can be perceived with the senses. Think of *general* and *specific* in terms of the degree of individuality of something.

Weapon is general. *Sword* is more specific. *Two-edged sword* is even more specific. You can see that *weapon* is a large class of things, while *two-edged sword* is a specific, individual weapon. Use the most specific term you can

in drawing pictures and telling stories. One word will call up an entire segment of the scene when it is a specific word. When Martha spoke to Jesus about Mary helping her with the chores, Luke says, “She rebuked him.” This is much more specific than “she spoke to him.” *Speak* is general, while *whispered, yelled, rebuked, whined, or growled* are all specific.

The goal in using *concrete* and *specific* language is to come “down to earth,” as the diagram indicates. To the left is the broad category of things, the *general*. To the right are the individual things, the *specific*. For words and phrases that speak to the imagination, move to the right. The upper line represents *abstract* ideas, the lower line *concrete* objects, actions, and such. Again, move down for more concrete language. So overall you want to move to the right and downward for more particular and vivid pictures.



Word Pictures Jesus Used

Let’s look at some of Jesus’ analogies. As we do, think about how you would enlarge on his word picture to help your people see the idea in their minds. Also think of how you could plan similar analogies from your experience. Some of Jesus’ word pictures are stories. Look at the list of major parables below. For now we will concentrate on the briefer analogies that do not tell a story.

Jesus’ word pictures came from the many different aspects of life the people knew. When you plan word pictures for your messages, think about these life experiences.

Household affairs. Normal life around the home provided Jesus with many familiar word pictures: a lamp giving light (Matt. 6:22–23); sewing unshrunk cloth on an old garment (Matt. 9:16); new wine in old wineskins (Matt. 9:17); a strong man guarding his house (Matt. 12:26); pet dogs (Matt. 15:26–27); straining out a gnat (Matt. 23:24); hen and chicks (Matt. 23:37); the eye of a needle (Luke 18:25); sifting wheat (Luke 22:31).

Eating and drinking. Everyone understands eating and drinking, so Jesus used this picture often: man shall not live by bread alone (Matt. 4:4); hungry

and thirsty (Matt. 5:6); the children's food (Matt. 15:26); the leaven of bread (Matt. 16:6,11–12); drinking the cup (Matt. 20:22–23); taste (Mark 9:1); a drink of water (John 4:13–15); seasoning (Mark 9:46); food that perishes (John 6:27); bread of life (John 6:32–35); eating and drinking (John 6:52–59).

Farming. Jesus used many word pictures from farming: gathering fruit (Matt. 7:16–20); abundant harvest (Matt. 9:37–38); a yoke for oxen (Matt. 11:29); trees and fruit (Matt. 12:33); lack of laborers for the harvest (Luke 10:2); one sows and another reaps (John 4:35–38); how a seed germinates (John 12:24); grapevine and branches (John 15:1–8).

Shepherd and sheep. One of the richest and most familiar sources of word pictures was sheep and sheep herding: wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:6); the lost sheep of Israel (Matt. 10:6); sheep among wolves (Matt. 10:16); the sheepfold, doorkeeper, and shepherd (John 10:1); the sheep following the shepherd (John 10:4–5); voice of the shepherd (John 10:3,27); thief, hireling, and shepherd (John 10:10–14); feeding and tending sheep (John 21:15–17).

Light and darkness. Men commonly experience light and darkness in the day and night. They could understand Jesus' use of this experience: the light in you (Matt. 6:23); light reveals what is in the darkness (Luke 12:2–3); light, walking in darkness (John 8:12); stumbling in the night (John 11:9–10); make the most of daylight (John 12:35–36); a light, living in darkness (John 12:46).

Natural world. God's creation provided a good source for Jesus' analogies: birds of the air (Matt. 6:26); flowers of the field (Matt. 6:28–29); grass of the field (Matt. 6:30); dogs and swine (Matt. 7:6); foxes and birds (Matt. 8:20); wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Matt. 10:16); sparrows (Matt. 10:29–31); a reed in the wilderness (Matt. 11:7); predicting weather (Matt. 16:2–3); serpents and vipers (Matt. 23:33); lightning flashing (Matt. 24:27); an eagle at a carcass (Matt. 24:28); the sun, moon, and stars (Matt. 24:29); clouds (Matt. 24:30); wind (John 3:8).

The human body. We experience everything through our bodies. Jesus used this familiar source of analogies: an offending eye (Matt. 5:29); a hand causing sin (Matt. 5:30); a good or bad eye (Matt. 6:22–23); bodily stature (Matt. 6:27); a speck in the eye (Matt. 7:1–5); health and illness (Matt. 9:12); sight and blindness (Matt. 9:39–41); hairs of your head (Matt. 10:30); hand or foot (Matt. 18:8); dead men's bones (Matt. 23:27); body and blood (Matt. 26:26–28).

Besides these aspects of life, Jesus used others as well. He used figurative speech about servants and masters (Matt. 6:24). He talked about family life (Matt. 7:9–10), children (Matt. 11:16–17), wedding customs (Matt. 9:15), military life (Matt. 10:34), politics (Matt. 12:25), robbers and thieves (Matt. 12:29), doors and keys (Matt. 16:19; Luke 13:24–25).

It is difficult to separate these word pictures from the more elaborate parables Jesus told. In the following list look at those parables. They tell a story while the figures I have cited here are mostly passing analogies.

Major Parables of Jesus

Lamp under Basket—Matthew 5:14–16	Growing Seed—Mark 4:26–29
Wise and Foolish Builders—Matthew 7:24–27	Watchful Servants—Mark 13:33–37
Sower—Matthew 13:3–9,18–22	Moneylender—Luke 7:41–43
Wheat and Tares—Matthew 13:24–30,36–43	Good Samaritan—Luke 10:30–37
Mustard Seed—Matthew 13:31–32	Friend in Need—Luke 11:5–8
Pearl of Great Price—Matthew 13:45–46	Rich Fool—Luke 12:16–31
Dragnet—Matthew 13:47–50	Unfruitful Fig Tree—Luke 13:5–9
Lost Sheep—Matthew 18:10–14	Lowest Seat—Luke 14:7–14
Unforgiving Servant—Matthew 18:21–25	Great Banquet—Luke 14:16–24
Workers in the Vineyard—Matthew 20:1–16	Building Tower—Luke 14:27–30
Two Sons—Matthew 21:28–32	King to War—Luke 14:31–33
Wicked Vinedressers—Matthew 21:33–40	Lost Coin—Luke 15:8–10
Wedding Feast—Matthew 22:2–14	Lost Son—Luke 15:11–32
Fig Tree—Matthew 24:32–33	Shrewd Manager—Luke 16:1–8
Faithful and Evil Servants—Matthew 24:45–51	Rich Man and Lazarus—Luke 16:19–31
Wise and Foolish Virgins—Matthew 25:1–13	Master and Servant—Luke 17:7–10
Talents—Matthew 25:14–30	Persistent Widow—Luke 18:2–8
Sheep and Goats—Matthew 25:31–46	Pharisee and Tax Collector—Luke 18:10–14

Presenting Scenes and Stories

There is tremendous communication power in scenes and stories. Plan to use them in your sermon not only in the retelling of biblical accounts but in contemporary illustrations as well. Before we work on the exercise of this skill, consider six guidelines for making the most effective use of word pictures and stories.

Distinguish between the inner story and the outer story. In every word picture you draw and story you tell, two different realms are involved. The *outer story* or the *outer scene* is the objective events and circumstances in the situation. They include whatever action takes place, whatever dialogue is included. The *inner story*, on the other hand, is the interpretation and response taking place within the actors in the story. The inner story may include the purposes of God that are not apparent in the objective facts. Give most of your attention to the outer story. Only present the inner story as it is necessary to understand what is taking place. You may speculate about the inner responses in biblical accounts, but do so carefully.

Report the scene or tell the story as if you are an eyewitness. This does not mean you refer to yourself. It means you tell what would be seen by any eyewitness. Remember, you are a reporter. Notice the details—names, places, times, events. Describe what you see. To do this, you will have to place yourself there in the situation. For contemporary scenes and stories, try to get the specifics down so you do not sound like your story is only rumor. The details will add greatly to your presentation.

Do the research necessary for getting the information you need. Biblical narratives have historical settings that may not be familiar to you. Who are these people—Amalekites, Philistines, Moabites? What were their origins, culture, and religion? Find out. Where is this place, and what is the terrain like? Details like these will make your sermon alive with interest. As you tell contemporary stories, go to the trouble to find out the details. You cannot use concrete and specific language if you do not know the particulars.

Keep your presentation simple in language. Clarity calls for simplicity. Avoid elaborate terminology. A sure sign of inexperience is the attempted use of impressive vocabulary. Do not try to be dramatic. Let the drama of the scene or story come through. Do not try to manipulate the response of the audience. There is emotional impact built into stories and word pictures. You need not try to create an emotional response. Avoid technical terms unless you explain them. Use people talk.

Use language that particularizes the scene for the hearer. The use of language that particularizes will keep the scenes and stories interesting and

CHECKSHEET: Scenes and Stories

- I am distinguishing between the inner story and the outer story.
- I am reporting as an eyewitness to the events.
- I have carefully researched the setting for details I need.
- I have kept my presentation simple in language.
- I have used language that particularizes the scene.
- I am presenting the scenes and stories with flair.

vivid. This requires using figurative language with similes and metaphors. Descriptive language is needed with careful use of adjectives and adverbs. Use sensate language that can evoke experience of the scene. Use concrete language as opposed to abstract. Use specific language rather than general.

Present scenes and stories with enough flair to compel attention. Let me balance the call for simplicity above by urging you to put something into your presentation of scenes and stories. Do not let inhibitions keep you from telling the story or sketching the scene with some drama. Notice how parents tell stories to their children. They do not use a monotone voice and listless expression. A story or word picture calls for vitality and involvement in the presentation.

Completing the Exercise

The exercise, *Scenes and Stories*, is designed to strengthen your skills in drawing pictures and telling stories. In order to practice this skill, we will analyze and retell a biblical story. The exercise form helps with your analysis and the planning of your presentation.

Step 1. Read the biblical narrative or scene over several times, perhaps using several translations. Watch for details as you read. Discern the theological purpose.

Step 2. Note the descriptive details of the scene and jot them down on the form. Look for figures, descriptions, sensate language, concrete and specific details. Relax, close your eyes, and walk through the scene in your imagination.

Step 3. Look for the dynamics of the situation and note them as well. Here you are watching for characters, relationships, motives, changes, divine involvement, incongruities, and surprises.

Step 4. Sketch the story by using the five phases: *situation*, *stress*, *search*, *solution*, and *(new) situation*. Jot down features of the story under each section.

Step 5. Make notes for your presentation, filling in where the text account gives little or no information. Add descriptive details. Use the five phases to plan your presentation.

Study Questions

1. Why does a scene or story seem magical in a sermon?
2. Explain five qualities of language needed for scenes and stories.
3. What phases do stories usually follow?
4. Why is research necessary to scenes and stories?
5. What are the *outer story* and the *inner story*?

Scenes and Stories

The purpose of this exercise is to develop skill at vividly and imaginatively portraying biblical and contemporary scenes and stories.

Text:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure sermon ideas are clear and well worded. • Tell the biblical story with imagination and realism. • Recognize the usual phases of a narrative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use language that appeals best to imagination. • Tell the story as would an eyewitness. • Look for vivid imagery and narrative in the text.
<p>This assignment involves the retelling of a selected biblical narrative in such a way as to use imaginative and vivid language and narration. Complete the exercise with the following steps:</p>	
<p>1. Read the selected biblical narrative over several times in different translations. Note here the theological purpose of the story as best you can discern it.</p>	
<p>2. Notice the kinds of language used in the text you are studying:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Figurative language • Descriptive language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensate language • Concrete language • Specific language
<p>3. Analyze the dynamics of the situation and note them here.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting • Characters • Relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue • Motives • Divine involvement • Surprises
<p>4. Sketch the story by using the five phases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Situation • Stress • Search • Solution • (New) Situation 	
<p>5. Fill in from background research and imagination the phases of the story not described in the text.</p>	