

Homiletics Workshop

Part 2: KEY ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE TEACHINGS

Introduction

Last week, we explored how to create a teaching from your text. This week, we explore other key elements that go into effective teachings. I have arranged these elements chronologically: before, during, and after your teaching.

Before

Start as early as possible. Avoid procrastination! Otherwise, you open the door to a vicious circle of anxiety, decreased concentration, more anxiety, etc.

- Identify the main thought and answer the other three questions as soon as possible! Then focus on creating your teaching outline around these, coming up with illustrations, examples, etc. Do this partly by periods of sit-down study, and partly by ruminating on these things during your normal activities. Make a note of insights, examples, illustrations, etc. when you get them, or you may forget them!
- Beware of getting focused on detailed interpretive questions, commentaries, word studies, etc. that distract you from the above. Write these questions down. You may be able to answer some of them in your prep; others may need to wait until after your teaching.
- New teachers should ask for their assignments at least one month in advance.

Bathe your disciplined preparation in prayer. You are trying to do something that is not humanly possible: rescue people from Satan's domain to God's kingdom, wake up Christians who spiritually asleep, equip and encourage healthy Christians, etc. So on the one hand, admit your complete inadequacy for the job—but on the other hand, boldly claim the provision of God's Spirit to enable you to impart His life to others (see these elements in Lk. 11:5-13). Pray for:

- **ILLUMINATION:** that God will give you insight into His truth, build a burden within you, show you how to arrange the teaching, give you application, apply the gospel, etc. I think of how, as a 4-year-old, my mother took my hand to help me as I tried to write my letters. I concentrated and exerted effort—but my mother was there to help me. God will help us in the same way if we ask Him!
- **YOUR AUDIENCE:** that God will draw hungry people (Christians and non-Christians) to the meeting, and that his Spirit will convict, convert, awaken, and encourage them. Pray also that God will use this teaching far beyond the teaching itself, through a “ripple effect” of changed lives, conversations, etc.—not because you are great, but because God is great and He wants His name to be glorified!
- **UTTERANCE:** that God will anoint you as you teach (see more below).

Anticipate and prayerfully resist Satan's attacks. If you teach the Bible in the power of the Spirit, you will draw the fire of Satan and his demons—not because you are great, but because they hate the power of God's Word to liberate their captives. Thus, these attacks are Satan's “back-handed compliments,” and you should rejoice that you have

been counted worthy to suffer for Jesus' sake (Acts 5:41). You should pray for protection, but God has not promised to shield you from all attack—so learn how to overcome these attacks through in faith in Jesus (1 Jn. 5:4,5)!

- Satan will accuse *you* (“You can’t teach;” “You don’t understand this passage;” “You’re going to blow it;” “You are disqualified because of your sin/fear;” etc.). Frankly admit your unworthiness (1 Cor. 15:8-10) and inadequacy (2 Cor. 3:5,6a), but then boldly take your stand under God’s grace. What does this look like? Consider praying along these lines:

“I am not performing for their verdict of approval. I already have Your verdict of approval through Christ’s perfect performance, and this teaching cannot affect Your verdict at all. Thank You for Your approval! Now help me teach *from* Your approval *for* Your glory and for their good. “

“I am not teaching alone. Your Spirit is with me and will help me. As I “jump off the cliff” by opening my mouth, Your Spirit will catch me, remind me, guide me, empower me—so that people will have their eyes lifted up to see past me to You, and to be changed by You. Thank You for Your Spirit’s help!”

- Satan will accuse *God’s Word* (“They already know this;” “This doesn’t make sense;” “This is irrelevant/stupid;” etc.). Reject these insidious lies, and by faith affirm the power of his Word. What does this look like? Consider praying along these lines:

“I am not teaching my opinion or some cultural fad. I am teaching Your Word, and it is utterly true, reliable, arresting and probing (Heb. 4:12,13; LUTHER’S “LEGS” & “HANDS”), and effectual (Isa. 55:10,11). Thank You for what Your Word will accomplish!”

- Satan will accuse *your audience* (“They don’t care;” “They aren’t interested in Christ,” etc.). God has the power to draw the lost, humble the proud, enlighten the blind, etc. After all, he got through to you! Remember past incidents when teachings have powerfully impacted people. Think especially of those in your audience who evidence current responsiveness to God. Then plead on their behalf.
- Ask people to pray for you, and ask people to pray *with* you—especially when you feel oppressed, confused, intimidated, etc.

Teaching preparation check-list:

- **“Am I bringing both ‘heat’ and ‘light?’”** The “heat” is passion, which comes from burden, antitheses and application. The “light” is clarity, which comes from focus on the main truth, illustration, and clear thought-development. “Light” without “heat” is often boring, impersonal, or abstract; “heat” without “light” is often confusing and/or manipulative. Identify which you tend to lack and work to improve this.
- **“Am I speaking both as a fellow-learner/sinner and as God’s spokes-person?”** Somehow, you must communicate that you know you have much to learn and are a very sinful person. This genuine humility helps people to admit their own need and draw near *with you* to the throne of God’s grace (Heb. 4:16). But you must also

boldly proclaim God’s Word and unambiguously call on people to respond to it. This genuine authority helps people to see the urgent importance of their immediate repentance, trust, and obedience. Humility without authority sounds like (and may be!) merely sentimental empathy; authority without humility sounds like (and may be!) self-righteous accusation of the brethren.

Your use of personal pronouns is important in this area. “We” and “I” are usually appropriate in speaking as a fellow-learner. “You” is most appropriate in speaking as God’s spokesperson.

One way of communicating as a fellow-learner is usually using examples from your own life that are your mistakes and sins rather than of your victories.

- **“Am I speaking both seriously and with joy and humor?”**

Speak with appropriate seriousness and passion when arguing against contemporary antitheses, challenging people to respond, etc. But genuine joy in the Lord attracts people to his goodness, and appropriate humor provides emotional relief and communicates that God is fun as well as serious. Do not substitute humor for refutation (e.g., mocking the opposing view).

- **“Am I intelligible to non-Christians and new Christians?”** Keep them in mind in every part of your teaching preparation. This discipline will help them to understand God’s Word, and it models this kind of communication to older Christians.

Avoid saying things like “I’m sure you all know that . . .” or “This refers, of course, to . . .” These assumptions of knowledge intimidate most biblically uninformed people and impede the learning process.

Avoid undefined “Christianese”—Christian jargon or biblical terms with which new people are unfamiliar. Either define the terms, or use other terms that describe the concepts. Give people who are sensitized to this problem the “green light” to tell you when you do this.

Keep your teaching notes to a minimum! If you aren’t sufficiently prepared, your notes won’t help you. If, however, you are prepared, excessive notes can still hurt you because they distract you from connecting with your audience. The most notes can do is jog your memory if you blank out. So prepare well—and then “jump off the cliff” and trust God to remind and lead you.

- Take steps toward fewer notes. Maybe go to 8.5 by 11 inch sheet, one side only. Then go to half this size. Then stick your notes in the back of your Bible or under your butt. Etc.
- Try teaching without notes on your second teaching in this class. You are in a safe environment, and this may really help you gain confidence that you can do this.

During

Verbal and non-verbal communication:

- *Voice*: Effective speech is *varied* in volume, rate, and tone. And read the passage this way!
- *Eyes*: Make direct eye-contact with many individuals in your audience. This is essential for drawing people into what you're saying, and for "reading" your audience to respond to misunderstanding, resistance, etc.
- *Face*: Much of what we communicate emotionally is transmitted through facial gestures. Think about people who are emotional. How does their emotional state affect their faces?
- *Body Language*: When people are absorbed in what they are saying, you can tell from their body language. Give yourself the freedom to be physically expressive!
- NOTE: If you are inexperienced in public speaking, you will probably need to push yourself in the above areas. When you feel you are "over the top," you are probably almost animated enough!
- NOTE: *Practice* all of these things in normal conversations. This will make you a better teacher, and you'll be a more interesting conversationalist as well!

Be careful about turning to other passages. Don't plan on turning to other passages unless they are crucial to your teaching, because this disrupts flow and causes confusion for new listeners.

- When turning to another passage, tell your audience how to find it and allow time for them to find the passage before you read it.
- Don't say, "You don't need to turn there." This arouses needless suspicion. Simply quote or paraphrase the passage with reference, or have someone else ready to read the passage.

Trim verbal "fat."

- Ruthlessly edit information that does not illuminate, reinforce or apply your main truth!
- Avoid "uh's" and "you knows."
- Avoid excessive redundancy. Some repetition is necessary for emphasis and thought-development, but too much will cause boredom and/or irritation in your hearers.
- Don't narrate what you went through as you prepared your teaching: "So I wondered what this word was in the Greek . . ." Tell your audience what you discovered, *not* what you went through in the process.
- Don't tell people how exciting this point is. Be excited and persuade them so that they get excited about it.

After

Guide people to prayer as the high point of the meeting. This should never be an afterthought or formality! End early enough that people have energy for this. Urge people who have been touched by God to respond to him *now*—whether silently or

aloud. Encourage people who feel led to pray aloud to do so, explaining that God may use them to powerfully affect others. Don't quench the Spirit by saying, "Let's have two or three people pray," or by saying "Amen" at the first silent spot.

Immediately after prayer, look for opportunities to interact with individuals. Some may have been struck by your teaching and want to talk about it.

Commit your teaching to God. No matter how well or poorly you think you did, offer it up to God as an imperfect sacrifice, affirm that he is well-pleased with this expression of your love for him (Rom. 12:1)—and then move on to what God has next for you.

At least periodically, record your teaching and listen to it a day or two later. This can be painful, but it may help you improve more quickly than anything else! Be careful about over-reacting to what you hear—you probably weren't as bad (or as good) as you think!

Solicit feedback, especially from experienced teachers. Ask them for both positive and critical observations. Model the ethic of receiving and giving feedback—this is crucial for high quality teaching in your group. Giving feedback to other teachers will help you improve as a teacher, because it drills into you the essential elements of a good teaching.

Instructions for next week

Know your room assignment, and show up on time! Bring your video camera or ensure you can use another student's camera.