



Editor's Note

Thank you to all who have given feedback about ShopNotes. Your insights and comments are greatly appreciated. And eye-opening!

One reader noted some errors in last issue's article titled "Excellence", eight to be exact! He was right, I counted every one of them—and I even found one he missed! To make use of an acronym from another writer, I would ask that you see this as an EGR moment ("extra grace required"). When the embarrassment settled down, I was chagrined at the irony of an article so titled containing some many examples of less-than excellent writing!

Originally another article was slated for that spot, however at the last minute it was replaced.

Being in a hurry to get the issue mailed out, we did not follow our usual editing procedure, hence the preponderance of errors. Fortunately, they were not of such nature that the meaning was affected. The corrected version is now up on the website.

All this reminds me that our God is not fallible like we humans are; His word is inerrant, He never fails. Furthermore, all of us should be like the Bereans when reading the writings of men. To borrow their sentiment, we should check all teachings against scripture "to see if what Paul [fill in a name of any teacher or writer] said was true" (Acts 17:11).



Practical Ministry

Excellence in Preaching (Part 2)

by Chuck Gianotti

In the last issue we spoke about excellence in the preaching ministry of the church. We dealt with the overall preaching "program" and "speakers" in general. Here we want to consider excellence on the individual speaker's part. While many volumes have been written on the subject, in this short space we just want to prime the pump, so to speak.

In some ways a "message" or "sermon" is like a speech, it conveys the speaker's ideas using the basic conventions of communication. A lack of clarity and reasonable flow to the message can hinder the listener from actually understanding the content of the message. However, the mind of God cannot be confined to patterns or structures that may be sufficient in other venues. In other words, finely crafted oratory is not sufficient for communicating the mind of God.

Consider the following necessary ingredients, and how they relate to the preacher himself and to true spiritual communication of God's truth:

Humility and awe

Peter, the first great preacher of the Christian era (apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, of course), penned the following: "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God..." (1 Peter 4:10-11a, NIV). Notice that preaching is a "grace" from God. On the one hand, this is a gift to the speaker, reflecting God's grace. On the other hand, it is God's gift to His people *through* the speaker. The Lord shows Himself to be abundantly gracious in providing a human mouth piece for His message to us.

From this we can draw two conclusions. First, the opportunity and ability to preach God's word should humble us—it has nothing to do with being better or more worthy than another person.

We did nothing to earn the *right* to the platform. Second, preaching is a *trust* to be faithfully administered. It is the Lord's gift, not ours. We are His spokesman and we dare not forget it. We should not shrink back from it with false humility, nor should we *lord* it over the platform with prideful self-confidence, making it our perch for controlling the Holy Spirit's work among God's people.

God's reputation is at stake, and we need to obediently *and* humbly fulfill this speaking ministry in the same way that the person with the gift of service humbly fulfills his serving ministry. Neither should be set above the other. In fact, Peter uses "service" as his next illustration of faithfulness in ministry: "If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides..." (4:11b).

Did you notice the standard for speaking that Peter gives. We should speak as though we are conveying the "very words" of God. Now, this doesn't mean we pontificate with our own authority—we do not speak infallibly, as some may fancy their ministry. Nor should we speak assertively with our own insecure or insincere interpretations. It is disingenuous to assert a strange view point in the attempts to be unique or authoritative. Remember the story of the old preacher's notes where he had written in the margin by of his sermons transcript: "Weak point: pound the pulpit harder!"

Clearly, we should hold this role of preaching with a sense of humility and awe when speaking to God's people about His truth. We should be overwhelmed with both of these: incredulous humility, because the Lord really does want to use *me*, poor vessel that I am; and motivating, inspiring awe. The Master of the universe does not lightly entrust us with his precious truth. Carefully, we must tread!

At the same time, we must speak confidently

(Continued on page 4)

The opportunity and ability to preach God's word should humble us.

Leadership Principles

Administrative Skills (Part 2)

by Jack Spender

In the previous article we considered one administrative skill that is important for good leadership: the ability to resolve problems in a timely manner. A second crucial skill is the ability to communicate clearly. I was interested to note that the Funk & Wagnal Standard College Dictionary gives as the primary meaning for the term *communicate* as: “to cause others to partake or share in.” The definition we might have expected, “to transmit or exchange knowledge”, is given farther down the list, showing that communication is a much broader word than simply verbalization. In fact, understanding this concept is critical to fellowship in the local church.

In Old Testament times, prophets spoke representing Israel’s God who (unlike the gods of the Canaanites) did not reveal Himself as a figure or shape (KJV - similitude), but as a Voice communicating His word (Deut 4). “Thus saith the LORD....” was their watchword. In the New Testament we learn of the Lord Jesus, God’s communication to man. He was called “the Word” by John the apostle. Jesus taught that man lives by the very words God speaks (Matt. 4:4).

The epistles abound with references not only to the act of speaking and the message conveyed, but to the related idea of fellowship. At the end of the Bible, the heavens are opened and the Lord whose name is called “The Word of God” returns to earth to reign with His people (Rev. 19:13). How important this matter of human words and communication ought to be for Christians!

I would like to mention four areas in which communication skills affect church elders. First, these skills are important in the transfer of truth, as in teaching, preaching, counseling, and a host of other gifts and efforts aimed at edifying people of God. Second, they are essential for building quality relationships through interaction, listening skills and various non-verbal exchanges. Third, communication skills are needed to investigate and clear up problems, both personal and organizational. Finally, these skills are of critical importance for successfully managing or leading a group of people. The assembly of God’s people must be a place where practical fellowship can blossom; an environment where the vision, decisions and goals of the local work can be understood and applied.

Transfer of Truth

Space does not allow us to make a detailed analysis of these four, areas but let’s

think briefly about how they affect the work of elders. Clearly, communication is at the heart of the elder’s work. God’s leaders must be good communicators, as implied by such passages as “apt to teach” (I Tim. 3:2, KJV), or “that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince....” (Titus 1:9).

Charged with feeding God’s flock, elders must promote spiritual health and growth, through positive activities such as preaching and teaching, as well as protecting the flock by restraining those who by their words would do harm (Titus 1:11). Whether delivering messages, chairing meetings, making announcements, or visiting people, elders must be certain that communication is clear, sincere, timely, and edifying. While it is that “the word of God builds the church,” it is also true that good communication is essential to this process.

Quality Relationships

Communication is both an art and a science, and must be worked at continually. Many passages exhort believers to take this

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seriously, as communication forms the basis of relationships, and relationships are nurtured in an atmosphere of honesty and trust. We must be slow to speak (James 1:19), and be certain our speech is always with grace (Col 4:6).

In Eph. 4 and 5, Paul provides a whole list of forms of speech forbidden to Christians as well as those good things that should characterize them. This touches every believer; no one is exempt. Fully half of all spiritual gifts given to the church are utterance or speaking gifts. No wonder Paul equates spiritual maturity with the ability to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:14)!

Nor is this subject limited to speech alone, but includes the larger matter of fellowship, one of those factors prominent in the early church (Acts 2:42). Thus the local church becomes a place for learning the art of communication and sharing together in the good things of God.

An important corollary to this subject is listening. The Lord Jesus cautioned his disciples “Take heed how ye hear [or, listen]” (Luke 8:18). These qualities, when modeled by the leadership of the assembly, will set an example for those younger in the

faith, and should become evident not only in Christian relationships but in healthy marriages and families. In the gathered assembly, in small groups, and in private discourse, all things must be done for edification (I Cor. 14:26).

Problem Resolution

One indispensable part of elder’s work is to address and resolve doctrinal and personal difficulties that threaten the work. In questioning, listening and deciding, careful interaction is essential. Paul writes “And the servant of the Lord must not strive [or argue], but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose him....” (II Timothy 2:24-25).

Prayer, which is really just communication with the Lord, should surround the whole matter. The process may be lengthy and difficult, but once a determination has been made, clear communication with the church is essential to prevent gossip and to advise the believers of actions they should take. The goals are always restoration of those who sin, and protection of the church. The fruit will be a joyful, growing company, as opposed to a discouraged one.

Group Management

Finally, elders must communicate a vision for outreach, discipleship, service and mission. Leadership meetings must allow opportunity for brothers to sharpen one another, and each should welcome suggestions for improvement. Prudent use of those who are more gifted communicators will pay dividends. Of course, not all elders will have the same communication skills, but each should seek to improve his own abilities so that his interactions with others can be clearly understood.

Remember, in dealing with people, we must look beyond what is being said, and try to understand what people *perceive* us to be saying. Feedback is valuable. Don’t be afraid to ask: “What did you gather from our announcement this morning?” or to a single mom “What is our best tool for keeping you informed about leadership decisions?” Humility will keep elders approachable.

Working with people is rewarding, but it’s hard work. Learning good communication skills will make the job easier for the sheep and the shepherds.



Mentoring is an exciting opportunity for serving in the local church. This ministry is as old as Christianity itself. The apostle Paul first saw the need centuries ago when he left young Titus on the island of Crete to help the new believers grow in their faith. The surrounding pagan society knew little about the love and freedom of life in Christ. Titus was commissioned to train younger believers in Godly living. These maturing believers would in turn teach and train others.

The biblical word “disciple” describes one who embraces and assists in spreading the teachings of another, particularly, of the Lord Jesus Christ. The word “mentor” is a present day term we use for one who disciples others. This term was first used in Homer’s epic poem the *Odyssey*; it was the name of Odysseus’ friend. Throughout the poem Mentor is portrayed as the counselor, guide, tutor and coach of this young man. Hence the word “mentor” and its meaning. For the sake of this article, I have come up with a combined Christian-focused definition. Mentoring/Discipling is “being a Godly example to another woman, by purposefully teaching and applying God’s Word to her life and modeling Christ-like behavior in all areas of life.”

Many women who come into our fellowships have had few if any godly role models in their lives. I was blessed to have this in a mother who taught me biblical truths and how

to live for Christ. Not all women have had this experience. If your church is growing, there will be women who either have had no church background, have been in a non-Christian religious system or are coming back to the Lord as adults. The command for older women to train the younger women (Titus 2:3-4, NIV) is for you and me as elders’ wife to help these women along in their spiritual walk.

There are three reasons why women should be involved in this important work. First, God commanded it. Second, women have specific needs that men cannot meet. A few weeks ago my husband and I visited a couple from our church that just had a baby. The young mother and I immediately started talking about nursing, childcare and the challenges of motherhood. After a few moments the men were talking too, but not about babies—they were talking about woodworking! Vickie Kraft writes, “Who but another woman can fully understand all the differing aspects of pregnancy and child-bearing, postpartum blues and PMS? The older woman can help the younger woman, encourage her and share her own life experiences in learning how to balance the differing and demanding aspects of managing a home, loving a man and rearing growing children.”

The third reason we are to teach women

is found in Titus 2:5, “... so no one will malign the Word of God.” God is asking us women to live in a way that will not discredit what He says. Our words and actions need to line up so that God’s reputation is held up high. It is important that we have a love and desire for God’s Word. Women can help other women in this. But, it must be a reality in your own life, before you can help another woman.

It was not always this way in my life. About twenty-one years ago, I came to a point of realizing that my bible reading was more a result of habit than of the love of it. Through prayer, God began to give me a hunger and passion for His Word. This is a prayer He *does* answer, for He has given me a real love for the scriptures.

How can this become true in your life? First, pray, then have a plan and have a place. Ask the Lord to give you a real love for His word. Have a plan for what you will read and study each day. Then be consistent in the place that you go to be with God. There is a comfortable chair in our living room; on the table beside it are my Bible, notebook, pen and reading glasses (that is the latest addition unfortunately).

Keep your heart in prayer and your eyes open to Christ because God wants you to be a part of this exciting ministry of mentoring and discipling women.



Leadership Principles

When is it time to step down

How old is too old? The issues is not age, but effectiveness. There comes a time when an elder should consider resigning because of advancing age. Physical limitations, reduced drive for doing things well, living in the past, resistance to positive change, memory loss, declining health can all play a role in leading a man to consider stepping down as a shepherd of God’s people.

This can be a very difficult subject to address among elders. But, an aging brother is often not aware of his diminished capacity and can become defensive or hurt at any suggestion hinting in that direction. After years of being in the role of decision maker, influencer and shepherd of God’s people, an elder with a humble honesty and realistic self-view (Romans 12:3) will demonstrate the grace of voluntarily stepping down as an elder—for the good of the local church.

In my files, I have found notes of unknown origin addressing how one would step down gracefully. (If anyone recognizes the source of some of these ideas, please contact us so proper credit can given.) The writer gives

excellent wisdom for making the transition go smoothly:

How to “let go”

- If you are carrying major responsibilities, begin transferring them to other elders.
- Inform the other elders of your intent to resign at least a year in advance.
- Look for replacement among younger men.
- Begin training a potential elder by inviting him to meetings, taking him on visitation, encouraging him in personal study.
- When the new elder has been presented and endorsed by the church, consider resigning.
- If, in the opinion of the other elders, the leadership would be seriously weakened by your resignation, consider continuing for a limited period.

Effects of resigning

- “Passing the baton” is not a radical change when several leaders have shared

the leadership equally.

- The resigning elder must not spiritual retire.
- The resigning elder must avoid a critical spirit regarding the subsequent leadership.

Effects of not resigning

- Tends to limit development of younger men into elders.
- Tends to stifle the vision and enthusiasm of younger men.
- Tends to stifle constructive changes.

What is the threshold of effectiveness? Who sets the criterion? These are all difficult questions to answer. Passages in life are always difficult and seldom come with easy answers. Just as rounding out the 12 disciples by selecting a replacement for Judas required utmost dependence upon God, so also with an aging elder, a wisdom greater than that of Solomon is needed—the very wisdom of God Himself. As it should be. Indeed, seeking that wisdom is second nature to the godly elder accustomed to his own limitation and God’s infinite wisdom.



Excellence (cont. from p. 1)

with the real sense that God is communicating through us. We are simply the instrument, the message is His!

Focus

Peter continues his discussion with a clear goal for the exercise of our gifts: "... that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen" (4:11c). Preaching is not about you, the speaker. Nor is about me, when I speak. It's all about God!

The ego with which we men struggle so vainly is both strong and fragile. It is strong to assert itself for praise and attention, but fragile to become hurt by people's comments or lack thereof. If you are struggling with either of those, the message for you is simple: Get over it! The sooner this is dealt with, the sooner you become a tool in the hands of a holy, communicating God. The church needs men who can get this right, who have learned to be humble before God and speak confidently before others. It needs men who speak the very words of God, men whose goal is truly to focus the listener's attention on Christ.

Sincerity

The Lord, speaking through Paul, put it another way: "Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God" (2 Cor 2:17). As Paul preached and taught, it was like the Lord Jesus Christ was sitting in the front pew. Talk about an incentive for integrity of speech! It is so easy to embellish a story or misquote a statistic to prove a point or to tell anecdotes that make the preacher himself look like a super saint. Paul was ever mindful of the Divine ear as he spoke to people.

Notice, also, that he wasn't in the preaching "business" for his own benefit. Of course, the motivation for preaching should never be

financial gain. But, Paul speaks to a broader perspective, namely that the man of God does not preach the word for his own benefit! It is not a showcase for someone to "make a name for himself." The goal is, as John the Baptist puts it, "He must increase and I must decrease." (John 3:3)

Messing up on this point is easy to do. An insincere attitude can not be easily hidden. Peter writes similar thoughts to elders in 1 Peter 5:2. Our motive should first, last and foremost be entirely: all for His glory!

Power

True power in preaching comes with the reality of changed lives, where people become increasingly dependent upon God: "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Cor 2:4-5).

Clearly, Paul could communicate quite eloquently as demonstrated in his writings. See, for example, 1 Corinthians 13 for a most eloquent statement on love, or the book of Romans for a masterful, tightly reasoned case for "justification". However articulate and polished he may have been, Paul makes it clear that his message did not *depend* on rhetoric or finely crafted oratory. There was a spiritual power that gave force and effectiveness to the message, far beyond the conventions of humanly crafted speech.

He explains why this was so—namely, that his listeners would not become dependent upon human ability in communication, but upon the Spirit working through that communication. The sum and substance of his message was centered on the "wisdom" that came from God, that which can only be revealed by the Spirit (1 Cor 2:6-10).

How can a preacher bring the power of

power of the Holy Spirit to his message? It is already there, provided the message is from God. In a very real sense, the preacher must simply move his fleshly attitude out of the way, so the Spirit can "have at the people." God's word is powerful, not because of great oratory, but because of the work of His Spirit using a clean He has chosen. He brings conviction and encouragement to people lives. That is power!

In conclusion, excellence in preaching must include: humility, awe, focus, sincerity and power of the Holy Spirit.



From the Q-File

Alexander Dumas wrote of the Roman carnival of years gone by. When the grand finale came, every participant would light a candle called a moccoletto. A moccoletto is lit by bringing it up to another source of light—this is the only way. While protecting his own moccoletto, each would set out to extinguish everyone else's. The revelry carries through the evening as innumerable creative methods of putting out other's candles are attempted and executed.

Dumas comments, "The same is true of moccoletto as of life: mankind has so far found only one way of transmitting it, which he owes to God. But he has found a thousand ways to extinguish it—and here the Devil has surely given him some little help."¹

The world wants to snuff out the light and life of Christians in the world. Elders must ensure the local church is a place where Christians come to be encouraged and built up, rather than discouraged and snuffed out.

¹Alexander Dumas, *Count of Monte Cristo*, (Penguin Books: New York, NY), trans. 1996, p. 355.

ELDERS' SHOPNOTES

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Feedback & comments are welcomed along with suggestions for future articles.

"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers ..." 1 Peter 5:2a NIV