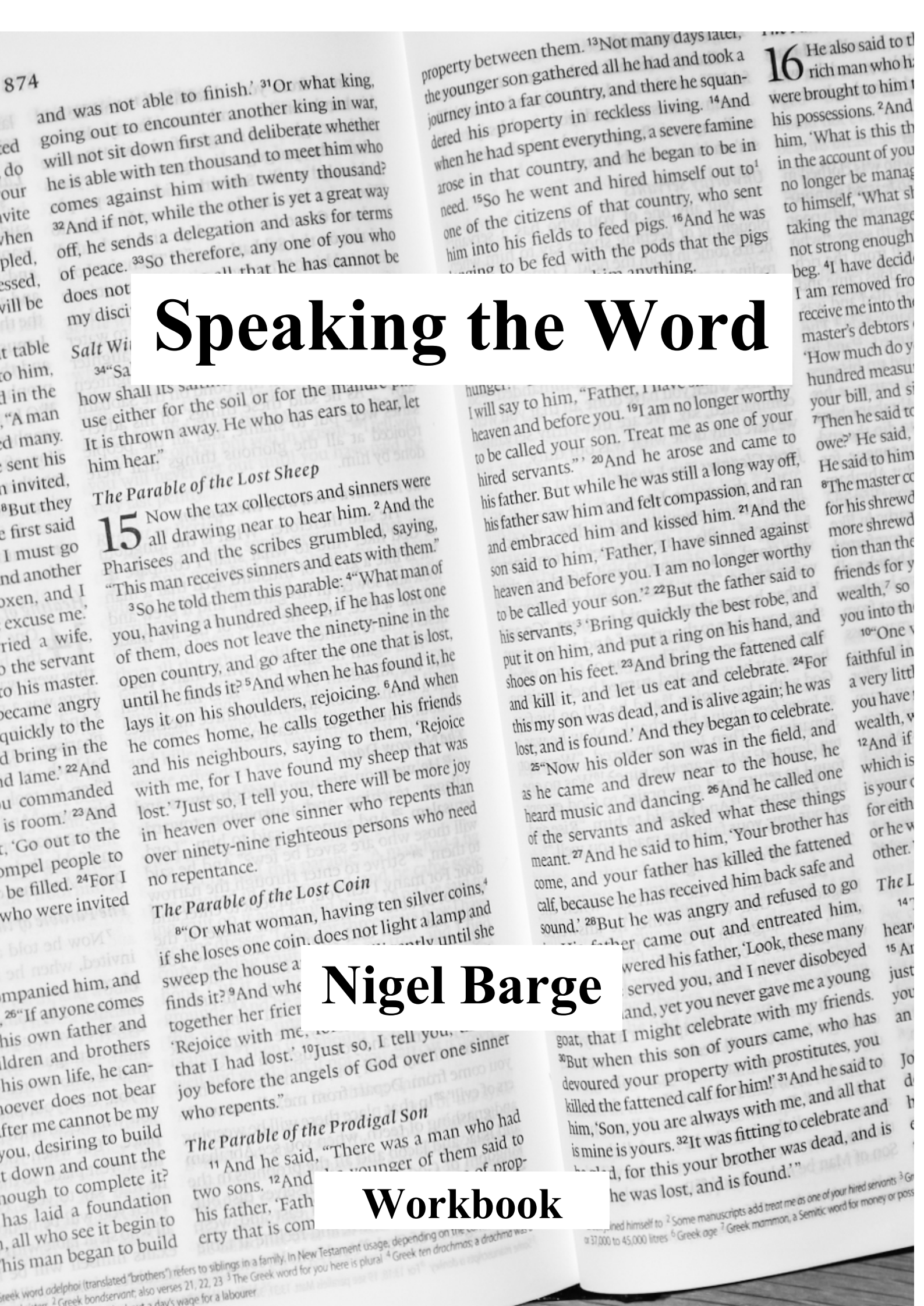


Speaking the Word

Nigel Barge

Workbook

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Preface

The Purpose

The goal of the series is to enable church leaders to encourage and equip all who are involved with sharing the Word at any level –

elders, Sunday School teachers, house group leaders, assistant preachers and the like – to

"handle the word of Truth *correctly*" (2 Timothy 2:15*)*.

There are three parts to it:

1. ***Hearing the Word***

How do you discern what God is saying when you read the Bible?- investigating, understanding, listening and applying it.

(NB 'Hearing the Word' applies to everyone - those reading the Bible for themselves as well as those preparing to share a Word with others.)

2. ***Preparing the Word***

Having discerned the Word, how do you prepare to share it with others? - introducing, exposing, illustrating, applying, and concluding.

3. ***Speaking the Word***

Having prepared the Word, how do you communicate it to others?

The Preparation

People who come to this part of the course have already been through 'Hearing the Word' and 'Preparing the Word'.

Using the principles learned, they have been asked to prepare a talk on the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-31), lasting around 3-5 minutes, to an audience of their choice – Youth Group, The Guild, Bible Study Group, Children's or all-age Talk etc.

The material

The material is arranged into –

*a) A Leader's Guide – a full copy (with directions and example answers in **italics**).*

b) A workbook with space to write answers.

SPEAKING in Public

Whenever we use the human voice to communicate to a group, however large or small, we need to make sure people can actually hear us.

The great Greek orator, Demosthenes, used to go to the seashore, fill his mouth with pebbles, then try to project his voice over the sound of the waves!

Amplification can make quiet speech louder, but it can't make indistinct speech clearer. Besides, it may not be available where you are speaking.

For instance, when we read the Bible aloud in church it needs to be:

1. Audible
   Loud enough for the furthest away and the deafest to hear, but without straining the voice.

2. Clear
   Words correctly pronounced, enunciated distinctly.

3. Slow
   Giving people time to assimilate what they are hearing.

4. Accurate
   To ensure this, take time to read the passage aloud in private several times before going public. That way you won't be 'surprised' by difficult words you hadn't noticed!

5. Expressive
   Ideally, hearers who cannot *see* the speaker should not be able to tell from the voice whether they are reading or just speaking. (Those who record stories being read are good role models.)

6. Normal
   Read in your usual voice - No affectations!

Task 1

Groups

Arrange yourself into groups of 3 or 4.

Each person reads **Psalm 23** aloud, as if a large building.

The others circle silently a mark for each reader, using these 6 categories.

(1 = poor, 5 = excellent):

Reader	A	B	C	D
1. Volume	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
2. Clarity	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
3. Speed	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
4. Accuracy	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
5. Expression	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
6. Voice	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Totals				

When all in the group have read, tell each other the grades given, then discuss – in a gentle manner! This is meant to be a learning experience for everyone.

We will come back to several of these elements during the course.

READING in Public

To achieve the audibility needed, a person used to reading silently needs to be aware of a number of features that merit extra attention when reading aloud:

1. Emphasis

If . we . hear . some - one . read-ing . in . a . mono - tone, we quickly lose interest. In almost every normal spoken sentence, there is a stress on one or two words and a change of pitch. The goal of a person reading in public is to emphasise the *correct* words so as to express the author's meaning.

Don Paterson, professor of poetry at St Andrews University[1], compared two readers of Shakespeare's Sonnet 18, 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?'

Starting with a great 20th Century actor, he said

"… Sir John Gielgud reads it with wonderful resonance, but clearly has no understanding of what it means…. David Tennant, on the other hand, clearly understands every word he is reading."

Listen to them on YouTube[2]

The placing of the emphasis affects the meaning of the sentence.
By changing the stress on various words in a sentence,
we can change the meaning communicated.

Try Task 2, to see this in practice.

---

[1] Speaking on "In our Time" with Melvyn Bragg on BBC Radio 4, 2/6/2021 'Shakespeare's Sonnets' at 27'16". (Still available on BBC iPlayer, Oct 2026)

[2] *youtube.com/Sonnet 18 narrated by Sir John Gielgud*
youtube.com/Sonnet 18 narrated by David Tennant

Task 2

On your own **(3 mins)**

Look at the sentence below: Following the two examples given, write down the implied meaning of the sentence when the reader emphasises one of the remaining four words:

"Very often we do aspire to being better people"

1 Very often – i.e. not just occasionally

2 we – i.e. maybe no one else does – but we do

Try some yourself:

3 do – i.e.

4 aspire – i.e.

5 being – i.e.

6 better – i.e.

Groups Discuss your answers with your group **(3 mins)**

All together **(3 mins)**

So, by changing the emphasis on certain words, the meaning of the sentence alters.

Imagine that sentence being used in the context of a New Year sermon on the theme, 'Making resolutions'. The preacher might be making the point: 'Lots of people make resolutions. There is a general desire to improve or better ourselves. Therefore, why not make the best resolution - to follow Jesus whole-heartedly?'

Given *that* context, which word should be emphasised?...

2. Reading Scripture

The people alive when the Scriptures were written mostly experienced them as they were *read aloud* to them.

Today, the reading of the Word is the primary act in all we do when we gather in the Lord's name. It is the centre of any talk given on the Bible and never merely a platform from which to start. It is our authority for speaking; so we must give it pride of place.

In one sense, one of the purest forms of preaching is simply reading the Word of God aloud, adding information which would have been known by the original hearers, though not explicit in the passage itself.

This is the Word of God. We must treat it as such! 'All Scripture is God breathed…..' (2 Timothy 3:16). So don't hurry or miss out bits you consider are 'irrelevant'! It is the most important thing we do!

As we saw in Task 2, context matters. In any sentence in the Bible, we need to understand its meaning in its **context** to be able to read it well.

Task 3

In Psalm 23, David, the King, is threatened on all sides by his enemies. This former shepherd boy acknowledges that, despite the appearance of circumstances, the Lord is in total control. God is the one who cares for, provides for, and looks after him.

With that context in mind –

Task 3 continued

On your own (3 mins)

Underline the word(s) you would emphasise in each sentence from Psalm 23 (English Standard version)

The Lord is my shepherd

I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters;

He restores my soul

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil

For you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life

And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. **Ps 23 ESV**

In Groups 3 mins

Read through Psalm 23 again one by one. This time emphasising the words you have chosen to underline.

After each one completes the reading, the others fill in the following assessment <u>of expression,</u> and then share your scoring with one another, giving comments where appropriate.

(1 is poor, 5 is excellent)

Reader	A	B	C	D
Expression	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

Task 3 continued

All together

Now read the whole Psalm aloud together as laid out below, emphasising the words in capitals.
Compare your choices of emphasis above with this one:

The Lord is my SHEPHERD;
I shall not WANT.
He makes me lie down in GREEN pastures.
He leads me beside -STILL waters.
He RESTORES my soul.
He leads me in paths of RIGHTEOUSNESS for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of DEATH,
I will fear no evil;
For you are with me; your ROD and your STAFF, they comfort m.;
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my ENEMIES;
You anoint my head with OIL;
my cup OVERFLOWS.
Surely GOODNESS and MERCY shall follow me all the days of my life'
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord FOREVER.

Leader** explains the emphases by giving an **expanded paraphrase

3. Reading the punctuation

Punctuation in a sentence helps the reader first to understand a passage and then to convey its meaning.

Look at the following incident -

> **'A panda walks into a café. He orders a sandwich, eats it, then draws a gun and fires two shots in the air.**
>
> **"Why?!" asks the confused waiter, as the panda makes towards the exit. The panda produces a badly punctuated Wildlife Manual and tosses it over his shoulder.**
>
> **"I'm a panda," he says at the door. "Look it up."**
>
> **The waiter, rather shaken, turns to the relevant entry in the manual and, sure enough, finds an explanation.**
>
> **"*Panda. Large black-and-white bear-like mammal, native to China. Eats, shoots and leaves.*"'**
>
> *(From* Lynne Truss: Eats, Shoots and Leaves: The zero tolerance approach to Punctuation © Lynne Truss 2003, Profile Books Ltd)

The joke turns on the possible meanings of the final sentence. The author intended "shoots" and "leaves" as *nouns*, objects of the single verb, "eats", *i.e*. pandas are vegetarian: they consume the leaves and the shoots of young plants (99% bamboo).

Inserting a comma, however, gives the mistaken impression that the last sentence contains three *verbs*, listing in sequence the panda's conduct: it eats, then it shoots, and finally it leaves. Hilarious misunderstanding, all from an unnecessary comma.

A full stop in your passage, or a comma, an exclamation mark, a question mark, a semi-colon, a colon, inverted commas etc should be apparent to the hearer *by the way you read*.

Task 4

On your own **2 mins**

Here is some text without punctuation. Look at it closely then try to punctuate it so that it makes sense when read aloud.

I where he had had had had had had had had had had had his approval *(That's 11 consecutive 'had's !)*

All together
Without punctuation, it may be impossible to make sense of this!

Leader gives the Context:

Now listen to this being read by someone who *does* know the meaning.
(Leader reads from a punctuated version.)

On your own
Listen again to it being read slowly and, as it is being read, try to punctuate the sentence in your Workbook.

i where he had had had had had had had had had had had his approval

All together
Leader reads out the sentence again, announcing the punctuation: -

The Preacher's Bee Hive

(With thanks to Rev Andrew Anderson)



When presenting the Word of God in any context, there are some do's and don'ts –

1. Preparation

a) Bee prayerful

As we prepare to minister God's Word, the question at the front of our minds should not be about *ourselves* – 'How will *I* get a talk together' – but about *God:* 'What does God want to say to me and through me?' We need to start here and keep that question before us throughout.

b) Bee thorough.

The task of ministering God's word to others demands the very best we can give. Reliance on the *in*spiration of the Holy Spirit in the pulpit is not an excuse to skip the *'per*spiration*'* needed in the study to understand the Bible and construct a talk.

c) Bee modest

We do not preach 'ourselves' (2 Cor 4:5). So there must be nothing to draw peoples' attention to ourselves, lest it distract them from hearing his Word. This includes clothing and actions. (More on this at p17-18)

d) Bee ready

When called upon to speak, ensure there is nothing left to do other than speak!

2. Presentation

a) Bee heard.

'…hear the word I speak' (Ezekiel 33.7).

Whatever is said, however good its content or compelling its delivery, it will count for nothing if it cannot be easily heard. Many venues have very poor acoustics. If there is a public address system, use it: the

microphone may well also feed an induction loop, which is hugely helpful to those with appropriate hearing aids. Try everything out before the congregation arrives, to find a suitable setting, so no one is distracted by straining to hear.

Speak slowly enough for people to assimilate what is being said. Whether reading or preaching, you already know and understand the words you will say before you say them. A listener at a distance, on the other hand, needs time for the word to reach them, then to hear it, recognise it, grasp the meaning of the word and the sentence, all of which take longer than in close-up conversation.

We also tend to speak faster when we are nervous.

b) Bee interesting.

It was said of Jesus that the people 'listened to him with delight' (Mark 12.37). – He certainly never bored people!

When He spoke:

i. The content was Biblical, and God-centred.
ii. The presentation was visual – using items in nature around Him or engaging his hearers' imaginations.

We won't be boring if we follow His example!

c) Bee enthusiastic

If *you* are bored – there's a good chance your *audience* will be too!

d) Bee brief

It is best to stop speaking before your congregation stop listening! To go on too long is counterproductive. The actual time will vary from place to place, person to person and subject to subject.

e) Bee engaging

When addressing people, it is important to *acknowledge* them. This is generally done by making eye contact. Eye contact underlines the personal nature of the communication: I am speaking to you!

f) Bee animated

Movement is good as long as it is appropriate to what is being said, and doesn't distract. Beware of the 'windmill syndrome' *ie* wild, random arm movements that are insignificant and distract the hearer's attention.

g) Bee urgent.

'Today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts' (Ps 95:7,8; Heb 4:7).

At some point, we need to convey the urgency of the Gospel and its appeal. Human beings need to make a decision. God's Word requires a response, and our hope is that its hearers will leave motivated by God to change. There is a real sense in which the time is short, indeed the time for our decision is now!

h) Bee expectant

"The Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." (Hebrews 4:12,13)

It is not our talk that will change hearts and lives; it is the Word of God. However faltering our efforts, if God has called us to speak His Word, we must believe and trust he is able to communicate with others through us.

i) Bee alert.

After Paul's sermon in Athens, some of his listeners told him,

'We want to hear you again on this subject' (Acts 17.32).

The reaction to a sermon can be very varied: from polite but sincere appreciation to (outright) disagreement with what's been said. We need to be sensitive and alert to the impact of our words, always aware we could have done better, and humble and eager enough to learn to improve.

Just sometimes, we become aware as we are reading the Scriptures that someone is listening with particularly close attention. Keep reading, but immediately pray silently with another part of your brain for the Holy Spirit to make the words come alive in that listener.

Being prayerfully alert to God's Holy Spirit should characterise *all* our preparation, delivery and obedient living out of the Word of God.

3. Action in illustration

Sometimes, when speaking to a smaller group, there is opportunity to use your movement to help communicate a point that you ae making, visually.

Task 5

On your own **2 mins**

How might these sentences be enhanced by an action as they are read?

He drew his coat in against the cold

She pointed into the far distance

The difference was so minute it was unnoticeable

He shielded his eyes from the glare

It was perfectly spherical

Groups

Share your thoughts with others in your group 3 mins

All together 3 mins

Distractions

Clerical gear (Geneva gown and cassock) at the time of its inception was the normal style of academic clothing. The distinctive feature from the Reformation onwards was that for preachers, it was black, not colourful, and functional, not loaded with supposedly priestly connotations formerly given to it. The rationale was that nothing should distract the congregation from concentrating on the Word of God as it was preached.

To some populations today, the gown itself *is* the distraction!

Hudson Taylor, unlike other missionaries in China during the 19th Century, dressed like the people he was trying to reach, in a coolie hat and fastened his hair in a plait. The equivalent in the UK today might be (for men) a grey suit and a plain tie. Others might say even the tie is obsolete!

In sharing the Word, we must be careful that our dress, demeanour and mannerisms do not distract from the Word of God.

Here are some things which might distract:

1) Florid ties

A startling series of neck ties might give rise to 'I wonder what he will be wearing today'.

2) Repeated words

Some public speakers are prone to using words without any actual meaning. *eg* 'you know', 'like', 'err'.

> *Donald Dewar, a famous Scottish politician, was known for repeating 'Em, err, eh' in almost every sentence, until with the advent of digital recording, kind journalists edited them out before broadcast!*

When nervous, *e.g.* speaking in an unscripted debate, people often use 'fillers' like, *'It seems to me,'* while thinking of the next thing to say. With effective preparation and notes, such 'fillers' should be unnecessary.

3) Habits

e.g. If someone regularly and randomly pulls his earlobe, or moves from a lectern to the open stage and back.

4) Different voice

Sometimes when speaking to a gathering about the Bible we may be tempted to use another, more 'religious' voice. For some, it may give an air of seeming reverence; for others it may be a distraction from what you are trying to communicate. It could imply God is not interested in our everyday affairs, or our routine concerns are not 'holy' enough for God.

5) Random hand movements

You might notice this on television where someone reporting on an incident is randomly moving their hands. Unless it helps to convey their meaning, it distracts the viewer's attention from the reporter's message.

So, enure your movements actually enhance what you are trying to say and add to the communication.

Practice

Task 6

We are now going to give the short talk on Luke 15:11-31 that we prepared for the start of the 'Preparing the Word' Course and have no doubt refined in the light of all we learnt there.

On your own Gather your thoughts 3 mins

Group Each in group give short talk. 20 mins

After each talk, fill in the following assessment ***of the delivery*** and then share your scoring with one another giving comments where appropriate.

(1 = poor, 5 = excellent):

Reader	A	B	C	D
1. Volume	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
2. Clarity	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
3. Speed	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
4. Accuracy	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
5. Expression	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
6. Voice	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Totals				

Then consider the following questions all together 10 mins

a) What did you learn from this experience?

b) What did you feel you all tended to do well?

c) What did you feel were the most common faults?

d) What do you have to work on, or do differently next time?

Resources

Commentaries

When preparing, help may be drawn from what others have written. Resist the temptation to start there, though, because once you open the commentaries it is hard to think for yourself!

There are a number of 'one volume' Bible commentaries. These give background and comment on every book in the Bible.
e.g. **The New Bible Commentary** Revised, Inter Varsity Press (IVP).

There are sets of commentaries on individual books in the Bible.
e.g. **The Bible Speaks today** IVP
The Daily Study Bible St Andrew's Press
Focus on the Bible Christian Focus

Don Carson's '**For the Love of God'** gives a simple, brief, trustworthy exposition of passages of the Bible in the Daily Bible reading scheme by Robert Murray McCheyne. His two volumes cover half the Bible. This is a gold mine! It is an education for the hungry church member and an invaluable resource for the conscientious preacher of God's Word.

Dictionaries

These explain important words in the Bible like people, places etc. Eg
The New Bible Dictionary IVP

Concordances

In a *printed* concordance, thousands of Bible words from *one* translation are arranged in alphabetical order and their location provided.

If you can remember a particular word from a verse, the concordance will help you to find where it comes in the Bible.

An *on-line* concordance, however, lets you see the verse in context in *different* translations, one after the other, e.g. www.blueletterbible.org

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