

PART THREE

PRACTICES FOR TEACHING AND PREACHING

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Preparing the Soil

Laying the Groundwork for Spiritually Dynamic Speaking

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus ... I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.

—2 Timothy 4:1–2 (NIV)

BEFORE WE BEGIN EXPLORING the dynamics of teaching and preaching in the context of connecting like Jesus, I want to point out that when Jesus spoke, he did so to a variety of audiences and in a variety of settings. Because we are following Jesus' model for connecting, it's important that we not limit the scope of teaching and preaching to classrooms and congregations. In this and the following chapters, my intent is to demonstrate how dynamic teaching and preaching can be carried out in a variety of contexts, including small groups, classrooms, workshops, and main stages at conferences. That is why you will often notice me referring to teaching and preaching as “speaking” or “giving a talk.”

Why I Am Combining Teaching and Preaching

When Jesus delivered what is called his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), he did a combination of teaching and preaching. He instructed as well as proclaimed, and in so doing Jesus inspired and challenged his listeners. He taught them how to pray (Matthew 6:5–13), he told them they were blessed (Matthew 5:3–12), and he warned them what would happen if they heard his words and didn't put them into practice

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(Matthew 7:24–27). Although it says in Matthew 5:2 and 5:28 that Jesus was teaching when he told the crowd these things, he was preaching too—hence the same *Sermon* on the Mount.

The difference between teaching and preaching is a matter of emphasis. In the context of connecting like Jesus, there should be some instruction in our preaching, and in our teaching there should be some of the proclaiming that happens in preaching. And both should inspire. The main goal of teaching is to help others gain an understanding of a specific body of knowledge. In relation to connecting like Jesus, the purpose of teaching is to help others learn what it means to live for God through the teacher’s imparting specific knowledge about the Kingdom of God. The main goal of a preacher is to proclaim the truth of the Gospel by calling people to make initial decisions to live for Christ or calling those who already claim to follow Christ to live more radically for the Kingdom of God.¹

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Whereas preaching inspires listeners to decision making, teaching is an ongoing process of instruction in how to live out those decisions. That’s why preaching and teaching go hand in hand. As important as preaching is, we need sound teaching in how to daily live for God. Through Christian teaching, those who have made decisions to live for Christ are nurtured into ways of thinking and acting that enable them to become conformed more and more into Christlike persons.

Although I will continue to make certain distinctions between preaching and teaching, it must be said that they have so much in common that most of what I write about one will apply to the other. Consequently, you will find in what you read a constant movement between the two.

Jesus’ Purpose in Preaching and Teaching

There is no doubt when it comes to defining the purpose of Jesus’ teaching and preaching: it was to recruit disciples who would become collaborators with him as he carried out his plan to transform this messed-up world into the Kingdom of God. Jesus was very clear about what he was motivating his listeners to do in response to his teaching and preaching. A critic recently said of me, “He’s just a glorified motivational speaker.” When I was told about this criticism, I responded, “That’s not a criticism. That’s a compliment! Of course I’m a motivational speaker. The impor-

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tant thing is *what* I'm trying to motivate people to do. I'm trying to motivate them to surrender their lives to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and to accept the challenge to give themselves



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over to the will of God. Wasn't Jesus a motivational speaker? Wasn't he trying to motivate people to repent and become disciples who would 'turn the world upside down'?" If Jesus is our model, then modern-day teachers and preachers should zealously endeavor to follow his example.

Although we emphasized Jesus' purpose for connecting with others in Chapter One, I want to reiterate the magnitude of its importance in the context of teaching and preaching. When Jesus preached, his sermons were a call for his listeners to become special agents of God who would join the struggle to bring this Kingdom into being. Jesus' teaching and preaching resulted in others becoming aware of deep spiritual truths about the Kingdom of God. Whether or not people chose to accept what they heard Jesus say depended on their own openness to those truths. As we have been stating throughout the book, what was required of those who would preach and teach about this Kingdom was a kind of connecting with others, spelled out in Jesus' many directives identified throughout the Gospels and reiterated in numerous verses in the epistles. These requisites were, and continue to be, extremely difficult to live out. Although many have heeded Jesus' call and have become part of his revolution, there are still too few who are willing to live out the radical discipleship he required.

Jesus was well aware that what he was asking of those who wanted to be his disciples would be so difficult that most who might volunteer would find what was expected of them humanly impossible. In the midst of a society that serves materialistic goals, Jesus asked would-be followers to be disciples who would not even think about pressing toward the consumerist goals of life prescribed by the dominant culture. Instead, he wanted them to seek a lifestyle that did not take into consideration what they would eat and what they would drink (Matthew 6:31–34). The cost of discipleship, Jesus said, would be high. If anyone would join his radical movement, such a person must be ready to give up everything in order to help the poor (Mark 10:20), and be ready to suffer, if need be, for membership in his Kingdom. Other radical requisites he taught and

preached included such new commandments as having his followers abandon the time-honored tradition of the “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” kind of justice, and contrary-wise would return good for whatever evil might be done to them (Matthew 5:38–42).

There can be no Kingdom of God without Kingdom people. A transformed society requires citizens who are themselves transformed. There are those, like the Marxists, who have concentrated only on transforming the institutions of society, believing that a just and equitable political-economic order inevitably would produce good people—that if social justice and economic equality pervaded society’s institutions, something like the Kingdom of God would gradually emerge. These activists, however, usually ignored the need for introducing individuals to the converting work of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. They failed to recognize that unconverted persons can make a hell out of any imagined societal heaven, and that only spiritual transformations through the power of the Holy Spirit can create men and women fit to live in God’s Kingdom. Jesus declared that with the Holy Spirit at work in their lives, his followers could live the radically countercultural lifestyle that he required (Mark 10:27) and be a model for others (John 17:21). Jesus had this dynamic power in his own life. The reason the crowds were amazed at Jesus’ teaching and preaching was that he was empowered by God through being filled with the God’s Spirit (Luke 4:1, 14).

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There are also many who think that all that is needed for the transformation of the world is to proclaim and propagate the Gospel. Ignoring the pleas of those who emphasize programs for social justice, these believers, who embrace an exaggerated belief in individualism, assume that the church should only seek to win converts to Christ. This latter group of Christians assumes that the Kingdom of God will somehow emerge naturally or, as social scientists say, *sui generis* if just enough persons “get saved.”

In reality, both personal evangelism *and* social justice efforts are required, because the Kingdom of God is composed of transformed people living in a transformed society. Consequently, the Kingdom of God requires both personal and social transformations. This is the holistic Gospel that Jesus lived, taught, and preached. Today, he calls his

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teaching and preaching. Before I get into further considerations that apply to both teachers and preachers, there are some distinguishing characteristics of each that need to be highlighted.

followers to do the same. That is why any of us who attempt to speak on behalf of Jesus are to teach and preach the holistic message of Jesus.

Up to this point I have only briefly mentioned the major defining differences between

Teachers: Characteristics and Considerations

In Ephesians 4:14, we read how Paul made it clear that sound teaching is essential if Christians are to mature in their faith so as not to be swayed from sound doctrine. Whether we choose to be or not, all of us are teachers in one way or another, if only informally, in the course of life. Therefore, what we have to say about teaching should have relevance for everyone. Mothers and fathers teach their children. Coworkers in offices and factories teach each other. The young learn from the old, and the old learn from the young. Some of us formally teach, and some of us teach from example—whether we intend to or not. There are, nevertheless, some who appear especially suited to make teaching a more professional vocation. Within the church, there is even reason to believe that becoming a teacher is a special calling from God. The Bible states that God gives a unique *gift* to those who have this calling (Ephesians 4:11).

Highly effective teachers have certain characteristics in common. Good teachers know that there are certain facts and skills that students need to learn and, therefore, that a specific body of knowledge must be covered. They know that effective teaching requires adapting to different learning styles and that asking good questions for reflection and discussion is an essential teaching technique. But highly effective teachers also know that they have to do more. They know that even the best teaching tools do not always inspire students to learn. The best teachers can so mesmerize their students that their students can, at times, even forget to take notes—and still recall what the teacher said. There are some teachers who have such charisma as part of their DNA, but there are others who gain such a capacity to spiritually connect with others as a result of being infused by the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul made a point that

in his teaching, it was the Holy Spirit who enabled him to establish intense connections with those whom he taught. He wrote, “When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:1–5).

Paul claimed that his spiritual dynamism came through prayerfully surrendering to an infilling of the Holy Spirit. Many teachers would love to have the impact that Paul had, but I wonder how many of them, like Paul, are willing to spend extensive time in quiet, as he did. How many teachers are willing to take the time to go through spiritual practices that can lead to the infilling of the Holy Spirit before trying to teach? To those who long to possess Paul’s kind of spiritual connectedness with their students, I say, with biblical backing, prepare yourself for teaching as he did, with spiritual practices like the ones we propose in this book.

I suggest that those who would be teachers in a classroom set aside time as part of their class preparation to go to what the Celtic Christians called “a thin place” and, in surrender of self, plead with God to be filled with the Holy Spirit. You could go, as the Bible says, “into a closet,” if not literally at least figuratively, to pray. Before teaching, spend a few minutes in spiritual solitude, simply praying, “Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me.” Then *wait* in silence for an infilling of the Spirit that can offer the kind of spiritual renewal that, at times, can send you into a teaching situation *soaring like an eagle* (Isaiah 40:31). I also suggest you pray for students by name, whether by naming them as a group or by focusing in on a few. Through praying for your students, you can become a channel of blessing for them. I guarantee that such praying will help you feel more connected to them.

There are some teachers who serve in one particular Pentecostal college I know of who go into their classrooms hours before the students arrive, and pray that the Holy Spirit permeate the rooms. When the students arrive, these teachers want them to enter sacred space. They hope that their students will feel the presence of God even before the lessons of the day begin.

If you are a schoolteacher, a college professor, or a trainer in a business seminar, you ought to realize that there will be those “sitting under you” at times who really don’t want to be there. If getting them to learn is really important to you (and it should be), then being spiritually

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empowered to enliven them should be a primary concern. Whether the topic is overtly Christian or not, if you are a follower of Christ, then what you teach should be worthy of spiritual empowerment, no matter the subject. If it is not, you may want to reconsider what you are teaching and why. Teaching is not only a matter of covering a certain amount of material. If we want to connect like Jesus, then any teaching we do



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will not only convey information but also contribute to helping others gain an understanding of the meaning of their lives. This requires that we be so spiritually alive that there will be an enlivening power flowing over and under the words we speak, making learning a spiritual experience.

Preachers: Characteristics and Considerations

These days there are some who fail to recognize the miraculous effects that preaching can have. They are reluctant to acknowledge the validity of the declaration of the Apostle Paul, who said, “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe” (1 Corinthians 1:21). When empowered by the Holy Spirit, preaching becomes a force that can bring about historically significant societal changes as well as initiate radical alterations in the lives of individuals.

Jesus’ preaching was of two types: pastoral and prophetic. He used both of these distinct kinds of preaching to bring about individual as well as societal change. It has been said that the pastor comforts the troubled, whereas the prophet troubles the comfortable. As pastor, Jesus shepherded his followers, caring for them and deeply ministering to their hurting souls. As such he was a reconciling agent, gently bringing people into a sense of being comforted and in harmony with God and others. In contrast, as a prophet in the tradition of the ancient Hebrew prophets and his forerunner, John the Baptist, Jesus preached against those who hindered the advancement of the Kingdom of God. I hold up both kinds of Jesus’ preaching as models to be imitated, and in this chapter and the next suggest how your preaching can incorporate both of these ways of helping bring God’s will to earth as it is in heaven.

The Preacher as Pastor

There are preachers who believe that most, if not all, preaching is to be of the pastoral kind. Harry Emerson Fosdick, the avowed liberal preacher at the great Riverside Church in New York City, was one such preacher. He believed that a sermon should address “every kind of personal difficulty and problem flesh is heir to”; that “A sermon was meant to meet such needs; it should be personal counseling on a group scale.”²

There *is* a time for pastoral preaching, and I hope that the suggestions toward the end of the chapter can help you connect with your audience in the vein of a caring and compassionate pastoral preacher—when that is how the Holy Spirit wants you to speak. I also hope that you will be alert to the possibility that there may be times when you are called to be prophetic in your speaking. Because much of the kind of preaching that goes on today already is pastoral, I will spend more time in this chapter focusing on the second kind of preaching Jesus did: prophetic.

The Preacher as Prophet

Jesus said, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country” (Luke 4:24). His words certainly ring true for many, if not most, preachers who try to be prophetic. It is especially difficult for those who have congregations that prefer only to be shepherded. It is, however, possible to be both pastoral and prophetic—if we can establish personal connections with our listeners.

During the height of the Vietnam War, Rev. William Sloan Coffin, the well-known chaplain at Yale University, preached a sermon denouncing the war, utilizing scathing language. In the congregation was a military officer who writhed in anger during the entire sermon. On the way out of church, the officer, with great intensity, said to Coffin, “It was all that I could do to keep my seat while you preached. I wanted to get up and stomp out, march up the center aisle, and turn back simply to shout at the top of my lungs, ‘bull***t!’”

Coffin responded, “Why didn’t you?”

The officer answered, “Because the night my wife died, you sat at her bedside all night long, holding her hand and praying with her up until the moment of her death.”

I tell this story to emphasize that when possible, the work of a prophet should be connected to pastoral care. Even when we don’t know our listeners, we can still connect with them by showing compassion—the prophets who are given a “fair hearing” are most often those who

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prophesy with tears in their eyes because they know the hurts of the people to whom they are delivering their prophetic messages.

Even when prophets speak with compassion, that does not guarantee a fair hearing. During the 1950s and 1960s, preachers who spoke against the racism inherent in members of their congregations could quickly be without pulpits, or worse. In today's troubled world, even suggesting that loving justice be extended to certain people, such as homosexuals, is likely to elicit strong negative reactions, if not a movement to remove the pastor from the pulpit. But being fired might not be the worst that can happen to prophetic preachers.

In some oppressive totalitarian states, preachers who preach prophetically are put to death. Such was the fate of Oscar Romero, the archbishop of El Salvador, who dared to speak out against the ruling dictator of his country whose oppression tyrannized the poor. As long as he brought comforting pastoral sermons to the people in his diocese, he was praised by his nation's political leaders. But when he began to speak out on behalf of the poor and against those who oppressed them, he was persecuted. As long as he pastored the people, he was affirmed by the ruling "principalities and powers," but when he became prophetic and condemned the government-sponsored death squads that systematically silenced opposition voices, he became a target for assassination. It was said of him, "When he fed the poor, they called him a saint, but when he began to ask *why* the people were poor, they called him a communist and set out to kill him." That's what they did to Oscar Romero. They shot him in the back one Sunday morning as he was facing the altar while celebrating mass.

John Perkins, one of the prophetic voices of the African American community and the convener and organizer of the large and significant Christian Community Development Association, tells about a white preacher friend of his who, during the 1950s, endeavored to preach for social justice for black people. They didn't kill his white friend. Instead, they so humiliated, harassed, and persecuted him that he ended up taking his own life. There's more than one way to destroy a prophet! Such reactions to the prophetic preacher should not surprise us, considering that Jesus said, "They will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name" (Luke 21:12). He also warned his followers that their fate might be the same as his, because "the servant is not greater than the master" (John 15:18).

Sometimes, when a pastor feels an urgent need to have a prophetic word given to the congregation, he or she will invite in some "outside"

speaker to do the job. That way, if people go ballistic over being challenged to change, the pastor can say, “Well, you’ll have to aim your complaints at that outside speaker. I would never talk to you that way!” Sometimes, as Shakespeare once said, “discretion is the better part of valor.” But then what is sometimes called discretion just might be another name for cowardice.

At a recent clergy conference, I delivered a strong prophetic message condemning the affluent consumerist lifestyles of some middle-class Christians, coming on strong against those who live with relative indifference to the plight of the poor. Following my sermon, several of the pastors who were present said to me, “I could never get away with talking that way in my church.” It’s likely that they were telling the truth.

The Integrity of a Prophet

Walter Brueggemann, in his book *The Prophetic Imagination*, provides important insights into what integrity requires of anyone who would speak like a prophet. Among his or her primary attributes, according to Brueggemann, is that the prophet identifies with the people. The true prophet does not simply point an accusing finger and declare, “*You* have violated God’s will!” Rather, the godly prophet recognizes his or her solidarity with the people and makes it clear that he or she stands with them as together they face up to the judgments of God.³ For example, in scripture we read how the prophet Jeremiah, like all true prophets, wept over the people of Israel because he knew that their fate would be his fate as well. He knew that if they, as a result of their unfaithfulness, were defeated by their enemies and carried into captivity, he too would share in their destiny and be carried into captivity with them. The prophet always empathizes with the sufferings that the people will endure because of their unfaithfulness. Not to weep with people is to fail to be the kind of prophet God calls you to be.

The story is told of a church that secured a new preacher, and the word spread around town about how well he preached. The church members were abuzz about what an improvement he was over their former preacher, and how much more attention they gave to his sermons. When the town cynic asked what made this new preacher so much better than his predecessor, he was told, “The old preacher told us that we’re all sinners, and that if we didn’t repent, we’d burn in hell forever!”

This cynic then asked, “And what does this new one say?”

The answer was, “That we’re all sinners, and that if we don’t repent, we’ll burn in hell forever!”

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When the cynic responded that he didn't see any difference between the two of them, he was told, "This new preacher says it with tears in his eyes." The true prophet weeps!

If you are going to be prophetic, be sure to include yourself among those who are under God's judgment. Be sure to talk about *our* sin rather than *your* sin, and what is wrong with *us* instead of what is wrong with *you*. Pointing a finger at the congregation and declaring, "You're sinning!" or "You're failing God!" suggests that you are above their faults. It implies that somehow you are vastly superior. Such finger pointing might drive people to despair and get them to the altar, but a prophet who identifies with those to whom he or she is speaking is likely to do things differently. Let it be known that you yourself have flaws and that even if you have not fallen short and failed God in the same way as those in your audience, you too are in need of God's mercy because of failures in your own life. At best, you should make it clear that you are not holding yourself up as an example of what it means to be all that

God expects a Christian to be, but rather that you are inviting them to join you as you travel on the path of repentance. Weeping with them about shared unfaithfulness is a practice that comes from imitating biblical prophets, and it in no way will diminish your credibility.



If you are going to be prophetic, be sure to include yourself among those who are under God's judgment.



When speaking to the failure of Christians to embrace the radical lifestyle that Jesus spelled out, I have used myself as the example of that failure. Explaining how Jesus called his disciples to respond to the needs of the poor without worrying about their own financial security, I have described how I myself have failed to live out Christ's directives. I admit how I have put away far too much money in 401(k)s for my retirement. As the stock market fell and my retirement nest egg showed signs of disappearing, I have confessed that this caused me to panic because I had put my trust in Mammon and not been completely willing to live by faith. I let it be known that although I have claimed to have trust in God, I haven't been willing to go along with Jesus, who said, "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?'" For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things" (Matthew 6:31-32).

In my prophetic sermon, I go on to hold myself up as a foolish man, likening myself to the man whom Jesus described in Luke 12:16–20:

The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, “What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?” Then he said, “I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’” But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”

“I feel like I’m that man,” I say. “I’m not saying that I failed to tithe. What I am saying is that I have had too much left over after my tithe was paid up. I could have done so much more as a steward of God’s wealth, rather than put so much away to secure my well-being in my old age.”

Because the audience can identify with me, rather than becoming defensive (as we can tend to do when under condemnation), they are more open to examining themselves in the light of Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount.

This kind of prophetic preaching doesn’t always have a happy ending. Sometimes there are hardened people out there who are just waiting for the preacher to show some vulnerability so that they can justify their attacks. There is evil in everyone, and sometimes that evil will express itself in efforts to destroy the preacher. Jesus warned his followers that there would be religious people who would think that they were doing God’s will as they set out to destroy the servant of God.

There is also warning when it comes to listening to prophets: be on guard against “pretend prophets”! They are the preachers who can be harsh in what they say, without fear of recrimination, because their condemnation is aimed at people who aren’t “assumed” to be present in the congregation. A case in point is the preacher who makes strong declarations against gays and lesbians, assuming either that they aren’t present or, if they are, that they’re “in the closet” and won’t protest. Such a preacher is a pretend prophet. Pretend prophets want to sound as though they are taking risks in what they are saying, when in reality there are no risks being taken at all, at least not by them.

In the end, a true prophet passionately and compassionately declares God’s truth about the Kingdom of God, no matter the consequence. Better the consequences than compromising his or her message to avoid conflicts.

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Offering Hope and a Future Vision

The prophet, according to Walter Brueggemann, has still another sacred responsibility in addition to weeping with the people as confessions are made of unfaithfulness to God's will. The prophet must also clearly provide a new vision of the future. A prophetic message should be marked with hope, promising that with repentance come new possibilities because "where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18, KJV). When Zechariah pronounced God's judgment on the people of Israel for not showing "true justice, mercy and compassion to one another," he then went on to give the people a vision of the way things would be when they allowed their hearts to be broken by the things that break the heart of God. He described to them a peaceful and joyful vision of the future that gave them hope. He wrote, "Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets" (Zechariah 8:4-5).

There is little question that prophetic preaching will, at times, offend people. But as William Brosend, of the School of Theology in Sewanee, Tennessee, says, "Worry less about offending the people and more about offending the Gospel."⁴ May we never be accused of offending the Gospel. And may we do all we can to care for our audiences in ways that help them see that we truly want God's best for their lives and for the world. To that end, the following section focuses on three crucial elements that help us connect with our audiences whether we are teaching, pastoring, or prophesying.

Three Essential Elements for Teaching and Preaching

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle is considered an expert in principles for effectively connecting with an audience. Aristotle had much to say on the topic of rhetoric, which he defined as the "faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion."⁵ Because so much of teaching and preaching involves persuasion, it's a good idea to look at what Aristotle considered to be three essential elements of rhetoric: *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*.

Ethos: Appealing Through Character

Aristotle's first prescription for good speaking is *ethos* (Greek for "character"). By *ethos* he meant that the credibility of the communicator is a

prime factor in whether or not what is said will persuade an audience to believe or act differently. In Acts 11:22–24, we read about Barnabas, of whom it was said, “for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were brought to the Lord.” That Barnabas was effective as a preacher was highly contingent, as these verses suggest, on the kind of person he was. People want to know about the character of the preacher or teacher who asks that his or her spoken words be taken as credible. There are preachers and teachers who protest that they don’t want their personal lives to be constantly under surveillance. They complain that they resent living in a “fishbowl.” If you don’t want to live in a fishbowl, you shouldn’t try to be a communicator of Gospel truth. We must always be aware that there is potential to live contrary to what we teach and preach. Without a lifestyle that evidences the values and principles we advocate, however, we will have little hope of having in-depth soul connections with others. Every listener, whether in a church congregation or in a classroom, is always asking, “Why should I listen to what that person has to say?” If no one in your audience cares about your character, then you are not talking to those who are ready to be changed by what you have to say.

We are told in Matthew 7:28 that after Jesus finished speaking, “the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had *authority*, and not as their teachers of the law” (emphasis mine). Pilate, Herod, and the Pharisees all had power, but they did not have authority. Authority has to be earned through a life lived with authenticity and integrity. In teaching the things of God, there must be, according to one master teacher, *the hermeneutics of testimony*. What you *are* must be an incarnation of what you say. This was so with Jesus, and it must be so for anyone who seeks to connect in any way that comes near to approximating the way Jesus connected.

*What you are must be an
incarnation of what you
say.*

A young Dominican doctor I knew, who had all the credentials to set up a lucrative medical practice, chose to forgo the “good life” American style and return to his homeland to serve the poor. Two days each week he would earn money by practicing medicine and doing surgical work for rich people. He would make a lot of money that way. Then he would take the money that he earned serving the rich and use it to buy medicines. At least three days a week he would take that medicine to the slums of Santo Domingo and give to the poor the care they needed but

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could not afford. He would serve the poor without pay and give away medicine to those who had no means to buy it.

Each day, when this talented young doctor finished his work in the slums of Santo Domingo, he would climb on top of his pickup truck and call people to gather around to hear him preach the Gospel. People came, listened, and even responded to his invitation to accept Christ—because he spoke as one having authority.

Consider that when Mother Teresa spoke, people listened to her, even though her actual delivery was anything but dynamic. She spoke as one having authority—even more authority than the pope! It was authority she earned on the streets of Calcutta by serving the poor.

Closer to the here and now is the rise to international fame of my friend and former student, Shane Claiborne. This young advocate of radical Christianity asks his listeners to do nothing more and nothing less than what Jesus asked of them. Shane calls a generation of young people to a simple life of sacrifice on behalf of the poor and needy of the world. But lots of people teach and preach that message, so why does he draw such huge crowds when he is speaking? The answer lies in his credibility. Shane lives out the lifestyle prescribed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. He actually *does* give away his money to the poor. He lives in a rundown neighborhood in house that was purchased for next to nothing. His clothing amounts to little more than what is on his back, and they are clothes that he made himself with the help of his mother. It is no secret that he earns what some would call “big bucks” as a speaker, then turns that money over to the intentional community with whom he lives, called the Simple Way. This community then uses that money to meet the needs of the people who live around them in their slum neighborhood. It is no wonder that one young Christian told me, “I listen to him because he’s the real thing. He doesn’t just talk the talk; he walks the walk.” The consistency between what Shane says and what he does earns him credibility, and that’s what makes him into somebody who connects with his listeners. T. S. Eliot once wrote that “between the idea and the reality falls the shadow.” May we strive to live so close to the idea that there is little to no room for a shadow.

Pathos: Appealing to Emotions

Have you ever been convinced of something not by fact but by hearing a gut-wrenching story? As we saw in the previous chapter, stories can do much to convince others to change how they believe and act.

That's the power of *pathos* (Greek for "suffering" or "experience"), which is what Aristotle saw as appealing to the emotions or sympathies of the audience. Many people respond to messages by feeling the pain of what a speaker is describing and making decisions based on those feelings. Because stories that generate pathos are included in the previous and next chapters, what I want to mention here is the importance of speakers' bringing a radiant spiritual vitality to their emotional appeals that will help these appeals more deeply connect to their audience. Without such a personal dynamic, any speaking, no matter how good the emotional appeal is, can fall flat.

The most important way to gain inspiration for pathos is to ask the Holy Spirit to infuse you with the kind of spiritual energy that will cause you to be an open vessel for the Spirit's work in your life. To be open to the Spirit, you need to become a "cleansed lens," through which the Spirit can flow to others undeterred. If you are a "dirty lens," then the power of the Spirit flowing through you will have diminished effectiveness. One of the best ways to become a cleansed lens for the Holy Spirit is to commit to praying the prayer of examen in the manner Mary described in Chapter Three.

Another way speakers can become infused with spiritual vitality is to join a support group of three or four persons who meet regularly for intimate sharing of life's experiences and for prayer. In Matthew 18:20, you read that where two or three come together in the name of Christ, the Holy Spirit will be there, connecting them with each other and making them one. Something quite wonderful can happen in such a gathering. Jesus himself, in his humanity, gained spiritual sustenance through such a support group composed of Peter, James, and John. He regularly met with the three of them and found in them energy for the tasks that were part of his mission. I believe that any teacher or preacher should seek to be so energized from intimate friends.

It's important to note that even though pathos is an important element in speaking, not everyone is persuaded by emotions. Although almost everyone responds to certain stories, there are some people who would prefer being spoken to more directly. It may be because they have a learning style conducive to more direct, logical reasoning, or are leery, for whatever reason, of being emotionally manipulated (or both). It's important, however, to remember that we can't know the personality or learning styles of each person in our audiences. If we do know something about the preferences of the majority of our audience, then it's a good idea to tailor most of our appeals to those preferences. But because we

won't always know, appealing to both logic and emotions is a good rule of thumb.

Logos: Appealing Through Logic

Finally, there is *logos*, which according to Aristotle is persuading through the use of reason. Good teaching requires that both preacher and teacher have rational points and insights. If what you say does not make sense, you will lose credibility fast, even if you make strong emotional appeals. Study is essential if you are to offer reasonable insights for those who listen to you. There are credible sources available for almost any subject matter you present. When researching those sources, you may want to know that as valid as common rationales or explanations may be, novel or fresh ways of looking at issues are known to be especially convincing. If you can say something in a way that makes sense *and* causes your listeners to say, "I've never thought of it like that before," you have gone a long way in influencing your audience. *Lectio divina*, the practice of praying the scriptures that both Mary and I have been highlighting throughout the book, can give you compelling new insights into Jesus' life that you can share with others.

LECTIO DIVINA AS A SOURCE OF LOGOS Over the past few decades, there has been a growing appreciation of *lectio divina* as a source of *logos*. Brilliant insights into the meanings of scripture and revelatory perspectives on the Gospel are forthcoming from listening to what the usually uneducated people who live in poverty and oppressions have to say from their experiences with *lectio divina*. For those of us who have been socialized to listen to and read brilliant scholars as means of gaining an understanding of theological truths, this idea is strange and perhaps difficult to accept because we have been acculturated to assume that truth always comes from the "top down." We have come to believe that there are academics in seminaries and universities with earned degrees in biblical studies, philosophy, and theology whose job it is to teach the clergy. The clergy, in turn, are to take what they learned from academic scholars back to their people, who are waiting to be taught.

But God's truth also comes from the bottom up. People whom the world might consider to be "nothing" when it comes to being sources of truth may be those through whom God chooses to reveal some of the deepest and most relevant truths of scripture. As the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:19–21, "For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.' Where

is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe.”

Some people working in our mission organization, the Evangelical Association for the Promotion of Education, have seen truth come from the bottom

up through utilizing lectio divina in their missionary work in Haiti. This program, developed by Kent Annan, a staff member of Haiti Partners, one of our affiliate ministries, makes lectio divina an integral part of the education processes among the Haitian peasants they work with in churches and communities throughout the country.⁶ Kent works with a Haitian team to arrange for small groups to gather together and reflect on scripture read aloud. It sounds simple, but it’s powerful. One of the places this happens is in literacy centers, where people are eager to use their new reading skills. Often the first book the newly literate want to read is the Bible.

Kent invites someone to read a few verses of scripture in the Creole language out loud. Then the group members are instructed to close their eyes and bow their heads, and in silence wait for the Spirit of God to speak to them. As a moment passes, the stillness often becomes electrified with the presence of the Holy Spirit. Little by little, on more occasions than can be cited, something of God moves among the participants. Those who are there become aware of the biblical truth that wherever two or three are gathered together in God’s name, God is there in the midst of them.

After a period of silence, the participants are invited to lift their heads, open their eyes, and one by one explain what the Spirit told them about what those verses mean for their lives. From peasants with no formal education, wonderful truths are often articulated. Messages that are relevant to the participants are heard. Blessings of God fall upon everyone, and they know that God has been with them. It is a simple process in which many profound things can take place: some develop their new



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reading skills; children and adults become more confident speaking in a group; church leaders experience the value of mutual learning in a community of faith; church gardens and community development projects, as well as new collaborations among different denominations, have been started out of the bond formed in these groups; and most important, at the root of it all, people learn in silence how to listen to what the Spirit would teach them from the scripture that they have just read.

What is most wonderful in the practice of *lectio divina* is that you can go back to the same passage of scripture time and time again and it will always be fresh. What is more, the Holy Spirit might teach you new things each and every time you read the same passage of scripture. The Bible becomes a vehicle through which God speaks to the situation in which the person who practices *lectio divina* finds himself or herself. In different situations, the same scripture will teach you different things. The best kind of teaching and preaching often comes out of practicing *lectio divina*. Here in the United States, professional Bible scholars have been increasingly making it a practice to meet regularly with deeply committed Christian laypersons with the express purpose of learning what these ordinary people have learned from scripture. Also, there are some preachers who, before delivering their sermons on Sunday, will meet with members of their congregation in order to glean from them perspectives on the messages that they are preparing.

We believe, from our own observations and from what we read in scripture, that Christian communicators can have access, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to deep insights that will aid them in connecting with others. The Holy Spirit, who Jesus promised would lead us into truth (John 16:13), blows unpredictably on persons irrespective of educational status or intellectual capability. In short, because the Holy Spirit is a teacher, Christian communicators have a unique source for the *logos* of their messages.

THE ROLE OF APOLOGETICS IN LOGOS Providing rational arguments that intellectually legitimate Christian doctrine is something that can help Christians who want to connect with those whom Friedrich Schleiermacher, the nineteenth-century theological apologist, called Christianity's "cultured despisers."⁷ There are, however, those who say that people cannot be argued into the Kingdom of God, and that apologetics is a waste of time and energy. There might be some truth in that assertion, but I believe that if the Holy Spirit has prepared a person to hear and accept the Gospel, an apologetic presentation of Christian doctrine can be quite effective. At the same time, any intellectual presentation of Christian

truth without the Holy Spirit's creating spiritual connections with those being addressed will fail to win converts. As has been accomplished by the likes of Ravi Zacharias through his book *Can Man Live Without God?* and Josh McDowell through his book *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, when the Holy Spirit is at work in and through an apology of the Gospel, many can be led to accept Christ. When rational argument, bolstered by scientific evidence, is mobilized to make a case for the validity of the Gospel, and the Holy Spirit is operative, connections can be made that result in transformed lives. *A Case for Christianity*, written by the famous literary genius C. S. Lewis, is an apologetic that many claim led them into the Christian faith.

Rational arguments can help those who have intellectual qualms regarding the truths of scripture to become more open to messages of the Gospel. In this sense, they can be very much a part of what has been called "pre-evangelism." It is the work of the Holy Spirit to convert persons to Christ, but there is little questioning of the fact that good apologetics can lead some people to be more open to the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

There is a second purpose for apologetics that deserves consideration by those of us who try to justify the use of rational and scientific arguments as part of logos. That second purpose is that such arguments can bolster the faith of those who already believe the Gospel.

Recently, Francis Collins, the scientist who led the team that decoded the genome, wrote a book titled *The Language of God*. That book, given the prestige of the author and the soundness of his arguments, has provided great encouragement to students of biology who have too often been ridiculed by antitheists as being naïve believers who hold to their convictions in spite of scientific evidence to the contrary. Collins, while not overwhelming the ideologies of agnostics and atheists, certainly demonstrated that there is solid scientific ground on which Christians could stand in making their case. Collins's apologetics have increased the boldness of many Christians who had been seriously challenged by aggressive atheists such as Richard Dawkins, who makes the case against God in his book *The God Delusion*.

The Templeton Foundation, established by Sir John Templeton, the billionaire Christian philanthropist, has published a massive array of books with apologetic themes. Many of these books show that the discoveries of cosmologists since Albert Einstein often harmonize with biblical descriptions of creation and, at the very least, make theism a respectable intellectual option. These books, produced by some of the most reputable scientists of our day, demonstrate that although theism

cannot be proven, science certainly makes room for believers within the context of the contemporary marketplace of ideas and scientific findings. Like all good apologetics, although not necessarily proving the existence of God and the validity of the Gospel, the Templeton publications certainly make it easier for those enmeshed in a scientific worldview to maintain their convictions and to ward off the attacks of Christianity's opponents.

These are just a few examples of how apologetics can be used to make believers more secure in their faith. In short, rational and scientific knowledge can add much to the logos of those who preach and teach the truths of scripture.

Understanding the role that logos, as well as ethos and pathos, plays in effective speaking is foundational for our teaching and preaching. The foundation will crack and crumble, however, if we don't recognize that it is the Holy Spirit who infuses those elements with power from "on high." It is our job, then, to build on that foundation by incorporating certain skills into our teaching and preaching, which is the subject of the next two chapters. As you will see, it is the work of the Holy Spirit, combined with effective speaking skills, that can empower us to speak with authority as Jesus did. Without that dynamic combination, you and I cannot connect with people the way God wants us to.