

# Great delivery

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In this session we're going to be thinking together about delivery, and that includes how to connect with your audience through your presence on stage, and how to use illustrations, slides, and storytelling to support your message.

## Does it matter?

Firstly though, why does great delivery matter?

It might feel a bit like good delivery is the icing on the cake. A nice to have. But good delivery really matters. It matters because we have something important to say, and we want people to be transformed by it. They won't be transformed if they aren't listening, or if their hearts are hard.

So - delivery matters. How should we approach it?

## 1. Connect

People are informed by talks, but they are changed by connection, with each other and with God. What we do on stage enables that connection to take place. So how do we do our bit to create that buzz of connection?

**Master your nerves** - nervousness cuts us off from others, because we retreat to our self-protective bubble. It makes us take up less space, cling to our notes, we drop our eyes, we speak in a small voice.

**Claim attention** - Most people don't enjoy being centre of attention, and we definitely don't like people thinking we like it. But we need to claim people's attention when we speak. The average attention span is 5 minutes, but for young people that's more like 60 seconds. That makes connecting with our audience challenging when we have half an hour of a very one-sided conversation.

**Mix it up.** If the average attention span is between 60 seconds and 5 minutes, we need to be regularly mixing it up. So, when you're writing and editing your talk, plan that in. It doesn't need to be a big change, it could be as simple as moving from one side of the lectern to the other. Mixing it up is another way of maintaining that connection with your audience. I've still got you - come with me.

## 2. Be understood

My second main point is about making sure you're understood. Because you might have a person's attention, but you can lose it if there are a few too many words they don't understand, or if you race through your material before they've had the chance to absorb what you're saying.

We don't want people to have to work too hard to understand us, and when we might have a range of cultural and educational backgrounds in the room, we want to make sure our key points are well illustrated.

**Illustrations** are when you make a point, and then you present that point again in a different way. A good illustration is simple, but somehow deepens understanding. Not every point will need an illustration, that could get tiring. But try to make sure your most important points have one so that you can be sure that people really understand what you're getting at.

PowerPoint is another tool we use in churches to support our talks. PowerPoint supports your illustrations, and it also helps people to understand your structure. You don't have to use it, but it can be incredibly powerful. It can help to orient your listeners and not get lost in what you're saying. My motto is, use it well, or not at all. I probably use it about 50% of the time. A shonky PowerPoint can impact your credibility, particular among younger audiences.

- Use a free template (slides carnival)
- Use single, full-screen, powerful images (unsplash, pexels) that add value to your points/illustrations
- Use words only to indicate where in the structure of the talk you are (this talk has loads of mini points nested within other points. Without [this], you'd probably get lost!). If you *need* other text (e.g. a Bible passage), make sure it exactly matches what you are saying; it's really hard to listen to and read something different at the same time
- Avoid having too many slides. One or two per main point is enough! Most of my PowerPoints don't even break 10 slides.

### 3. Prepare hearts

Look with me at Hebrews 4. Have a look at verse 7 - there's a quotation there from Psalm 95:

'Today, if you hear his voice,  
do not harden your hearts'

And then, look at verses 12 and 13:

'For the word of God is alive 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. 13 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.'

So the word of God is what brings transformation at the heart level. It cuts right through to the heart. It penetrates to the deepest parts of a soul, all is uncovered and laid bare.

But as it says in verse 7, human beings are capable of hardening their hearts to God. When we preach the word of God, we want that word to find soft hearts. A soft heart receives from Him. And we have a part to play in that.

There are two things I want to talk about in terms of softening hearts today.

#### Storytelling

Storytelling is a core device used by Jesus - stories are disarming; they are easy to listen to, and they can soften us without us expecting it; they move us, and they can even bypass a hard exterior. So - when you have a key point to make, and you're praying that it will make its way deep into a person's heart, it's worth asking yourself, is there a story to tell here?

Consider your own personal testimony. I am a huge fan of self-disclosure, and I'm convinced of its power. This can serve the purpose of connection as well as softening hearts with a story. When we choose to share something vulnerably from the stage, we're no longer a perfect yet distant holy person telling people what to do. We're an authentic, faith-filled leader who's on the journey too.

"Humour breaks down boundaries, it topples our self-importance, it connects people, and because it engages and entertains, it ultimately enlightens."

#### Images

Images soften hearts too: An extreme example of that is in relation to the migrant crisis... I don't know if you remember, but there was this moment where there was a political stalemate and in the press too, where there were two sides and neither side was going to back down. And then came an image. It didn't solve the crisis. But it completely dissolved this hard-hearted stalemate. You will probably

remember it. if you're anything like me you can still see it in your mind. It was a photo of the body of a little boy, Alan Kurdi, washed up on the beach. And suddenly, no one had anything to say. It brought this sense of deep, collective shame. It softened even the hardest hearts.

## Workshop exercise

Imagine you've been asked to preach a sermon about the concept of God's grace. This is the verse you've been given:

'He has saved us and called us to a holy life—**not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.** This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time [...] - 2 *Timothy* 1:9

In pairs or threes, have a go at the following:

1. Discuss possible illustrations that could help to **cement understanding** about the concept of grace.
2. Share ideas for a short story or personal testimony that could help to **engage people's hearts** with the concept of grace.
3. Which illustration and which story do you think would work best, and why?

### **Optional homework...**

1. Work on your own to try and write out what you would say (e.g. one point + story).
2. How would you 'deliver' it? Think about:
  - a. Eye contact
  - b. Energy / Personality
  - c. Tone of voice
  - d. Facial expressions
  - e. Use of pauses / silence
  - f. Body language.
3. If you're feeling brave, 'perform' to a friend or record yourself and share it with them. Did they understand what you were saying? How did it make them feel? How could it be improved?