

## Using Your Sermon to Get to the Heart

by Pastor David Bulger

Communicating God's message is more than simply stating truths or explaining theological/doctrinal statements. Effective sermons are ones that reach listeners' *hearts*, leading to their transformation.



1. **Know your audience.** Your job is to connect the content with your listeners – so you must know both. To connect with your unique listeners, your message must be relevant and have the potential for immediate application. Who are “your people”? How can they act on what you’ve shared when they get home? What difference will your message make in their lives and those around them?
2. **Leave room for God – it’s His message.** Pray for God’s presence in the hearts and minds of listeners during the message. Then, give space and time for Him to show up. Pace your delivery in such a way that there are pauses where listeners can hear God in the midst of the message and the service.
3. **Engage your listeners.** During the message: ask reflective questions; invite listeners to share thoughts and feelings (if not during the service, then organize time after the service); provide them with paper and encourage them to draw, doodle or take notes; and, encourage them to dream about the things they’re hearing. Most importantly, speak from your heart to engage your learners’ hearts.
4. **Tell stories.** Tell stories. Tell stories. Listeners’ hearts will connect with the stories of people in the Bible, with your personal stories and those of others (especially about people they know). Stories are remembered long after theological statements, because they tap into the heart; just ask Jesus!
5. **Be creative in how you communicate.** There’s no limit to the number of creative ways that the message can be communicated. Consider video clips, music, drama, poetry, testimonies, visual art and more. The arts can help tap into the heart and how listeners *feel* about the message being shared. Plus, consider your language: certain words and phrases carry emotional baggage.
6. **Use visuals.** Consider projecting photos and other images on a PowerPoint or overhead – who says it has to be words?! Use metaphor to represent a complex topic or idea, and then explore the visual image as you preach. Use objects and props to make a point or demonstrate a concept. Sometimes “seeing *is* believing”.

7. **Use multiple voices.** Invite an 'expert' to share for five minutes in the middle of a message; conduct a question and answer time; read scripture through role-playing or different voices; or, read the same Scripture passage multiple times by different people. Tone, rhythms and volume of voices can help listeners hear differently and more deeply.
8. **Use the 'what if'.** Invite listeners to enter into stories by having them imagine themselves *in* the situations (biblical or otherwise). Encourage them to consider how they would respond if they were in someone else's shoes: "How might it feel to be walking up that mountain...?" "How would you feel if someone did that to you...?" "How do you think Jesus felt hearing this?"
9. **Share 'apps'.** Make room during, at the end, or after the service, to share applications, insights or questions. Give listeners the opportunity to briefly chat with one another, sharing ideas on what to do with or about the message content. Encourage ongoing related conversation as they transition to depart the service.
10. **Honor listeners with your ending.** Design smooth transitions from the sermon to the next service element (or exit). Carefully consider what service elements, if any, should follow the sermon. Whatever happens last in the service will be what is remembered – immediately and perhaps longer.

#### What other tips do you have for getting to the heart of listeners?

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