

Cutting-edge communication

Some things can be said only in a sermon.

Some educators are fond of saying that preaching is the weakest form of communication. They conclude that dialogue is better. Small groups are better. Anything is better than preaching.

Don't believe it. Some things can be said more effectively in a sermon than in any other form of communication.

Appealing to heart and mind. Have you ever seen a discussion group that really speaks to both heart and mind? I've never seen it done well. You tend to get groups that express emotions but have no substance, or Bible studies structured around a lecture and intellectual discussion.

Rarely have I left a small group thinking, *Tonight the Spirit of God was powerfully manifest among us by his truth through his Word.* I may have been edified and had good fellowship; I do not deny the importance of small groups and relationships in the church. But they

cannot do what preaching at its best can do—appeal to the heart and mind simultaneously.

Building evidence. It is difficult in a small group to pile up evidences. A good preacher brings the listener to a glorious theme—the evidences for the Resurrection, for example, or the importance of justification. The preacher can bring point after point; the evidence builds.

You can't get that effect through an inductive Bible study. The facilitator says, "And what's your opinion?" or "What do you see in this text?" Discussion has its place, but it cannot take the place of powerful preaching.

Opening eternity. Preaching opens up the horizons of eternity. Preaching holds up the Word as a mirror, which makes us squirm.

How could a Bible study leader possibly say in a group of eight people seated in a living room, "This passage condemns the lust that is in our congregation. I have been in your homes and seen *Playboy* magazine"?

I often preach to university groups, and sometimes I have declared on the basis of the Scriptures, "I know why you won't come to Christ. It's because you're sleeping with your girlfriend." I couldn't say that in a group of eight! There is a power in this kind of placarded message that cannot be duplicated.

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