Transitions & Dialogical Method

Let me review a bit before we start today's lesson. First, application is the main thing to be done in an expository sermon, according to Broadus. We broke down application to four components: instructional specificity, situational specificity, motivation, and enablement. Instructional specificity is about what to do, and situational specificity is about where to do it. Relevant, realistic, and achievable are some key characteristics of the commonsensical applications. A key distinction should be kept in mind when making concrete applications. You need to know the difference between a good idea and a biblical mandate. The church goes to war when you make mandates out of good ideas. Last, you get the terms for instructional specificity from the key terms of the subpoints. If you do not have subpoints, these key terms come from the magnet clause of the main point.

Let me remind you of where we are in the course of preparing a sermon. We have gone over the overall structure of the whole message. We did introduction, proposition, main points, and the components of explanation. We looked at how the subpoints typically divide the explanation component. We talked about illustration and application, and we recognize it gets repeated in another main point or two prior to the conclusion. Let us pray together.

Father, we get to the point now of proclaiming Your Word to each other. We ask for You to give us Your Spirit. We recognize that we can make it very artificial. Certainly there are those in our world who view every church experience as artificial and performance. We can ourselves change that by coming to minister to Your people with Your Word, believing that You are present in Your Word and that You will truly minister even as we speak by Your Spirit. When we say that the Word of God preached still is the Word of God, we think what we come to do, even in devotional times, has heavenly weight. So we ask for You to give us a sense of seriousness as well as joy in what You give us to do. Grant us a sense of privilege, we pray, that we might honor You rightly. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Today we will talk about some of the glue that puts these messages together. The goal this lesson is to understand how sermon components and listener dialogue are knit together through the use of effective transitions and "pulpit dialogue." That is a very fancy way of talking about the glue that holds a sermon together. We have talked about the components: explanation, illustration, application, proposition, main point, subpoints, and conclusion. We have talked about all these pieces; now let us let us talk about what ties them together. This is a lesson on transitions. But they can make messages logical and listenable to people, and that is our goal.

Let us think of the function of transitions before we get into the details. The function of transitions is to make our messages artistically listenable and logically connected. The sermon needs to have some flow to it. If you look at it visually, you already know a lot about how to do this. We have talked about what happens at these different nodes in the double helix. We know we start with a main point statement, and typically at the end of explanation before we get into the illustration we have some sort of summary. We know at the end of the illustration there is another summary that happens. This interpreting statement is also preparation for the application. The proposition said what the rest of the sermon is about. That is one node that comes at the end of the introduction. The main point is a summary that prepares for explanation. Then there is another summary, an illustration, a summary, application, and a transition before the next main point. You can begin to see that this main point will sound a lot like the summary. The summary at the end of the explanation will probably sound a lot like the interpreting statement summary at the end of the illustration. There are these places where there are reflections of main ideas that do two things. They remind us of what has come before, and they prepare for what will follow.

They review and preview. That is what illustrations do. Do not forget the double helix. Each node in whichever order the components appear is a summary of what preceded and a thematic statement of what will follow. Transition is made easier by remembering that what you illustrate or apply is always the last thing you said in the preceding material. Components are tied, therefore, by the parallel concepts and terminology that connect them. Summaries do not only conceptually remind where we have been, but they also terminologically pull the strings together again so that we are ready for what will follow.

Let us think about the nature of transition. The process by which main point components are tied together conveys the more general nature of transitions within and between main points. Main points have transitions within and also between. The basic definition is that transitions demonstrate or develop the relationships of the parts to the whole or the parts to other parts. Transitions may relate the introduction to the body of the message. This is the proposition, which is a form of transition. You are far enough along that I hope you have discovered something else. The proposition is a combination of principle plus application. We said that the key terms of both clauses of the proposition (principle and application) will appear in the introduction. That was a mechanical thing to do. But I hope that you have begun to see that this introduction actually illustrates the relationship of the principle and application. It does not just illustrate the principle or the application. Typically the introduction illustrates how these two things play off of one another. The introduction shows the relationship of the principle and application.

For a while we told ourselves just to get the terms in there. But we were really forcing ourselves to make a relationship between these clauses. We really illustrate the relationship of the principle and application in the introduction. That means, in a sense, even the introduction was glue. It got principle and application tied together conceptually by the illustration that was being used. The introduction is tied to the body of the sermon by transition. The proposition is tied to the first main point, often with a question. That is another way that we use transition. We talked about the concept of interrogating the proposition. We make a strong statement, "Because Christ is our salvation we should proclaim Him. How do we go about doing that? How do we proclaim Him? Because He is our salvation, we proclaim Him to difficult people." Often we ask a question after the proposition as the form of getting into the first main point. We will also use transitions to relate main points to each other, and we will use transitions to tie the components of main points to each other. We will use transitions to tie the body of the message to the conclusion. We look at all the parts and see that transitions hook these things together. We use transitions because careful transitions help the listener follow the speaker's thought throughout the progress of the message.

Now let us talk about how transitions are used. Transitions may review where we have been and preview where we are going. These are the main functions of illustrations: review and preview. Transitions may relate an immediate matter to the overall theme, which we will call "tiebacks." I tie back where I am immediately to the overall purpose and flow of the message. A transition may also interest the listener in a new thought or the relationship between thoughts. This is more the preview side of transitions, which we will call "billboards." Billboards point out what is ahead. A tieback goes back to what was before. It reminds us of what things were overall. But a billboard tells us what is ahead.

Last, a transition can be any combination of the above. As you begin to put together a sermon, you will begin to see something. If you look at it in the abstract, you will see that you have a main point statement that goes right into explanation. In your outline, you will have a main point immediately followed by your first subpoint. But that is not the way we talk. There will typically be a sentence or two of transition before you get to the first subpoint. It will say, "Why am I dealing with that? How do we begin to understand how this will unfold?" We do not just preach like an encyclopedia, saying, "The

population of Brazil is… The chief main product is… The gross national product is…" We do not do that; we speak in narrative. After we state a main point, we can expound on it. We might say, "Now that we know we need to present Christ, we can see that we need to present Him to all kinds of difficult people. We will face them in various situations. We need to see the kind of people Paul faced. For instance, look at…" I just said about three sentences before I got to the first subpoint. As a result, do not rush into subpoints after statement of the main point. Tell what you mean by the main point, and explain how you support it with subpoints. Why are they ordered so? What causes us to consider the matter this way? The audience cannot see your outline, so transitions keep tying components back to the central idea.

A typical mark of sermon excellence is consistent use of tiebacks. These are transitions at the end of each major component of thought that tie that thought back to the sermon's main idea, particularly the fallen condition focus (FCF). As you begin working on your sermons, one of the things I have cautioned you about is to look at your applications and see if they tie back to the FCF. It is very easy when you are in the flow of a message to begin to talk about how this must apply somewhere but what you are saying does not relate to what you said was the burden of the message. As you have gotten to the main thing to be done (application), does it relate to what you said was going to be the burden of the sermon? Is there a conceptual or transitional tieback that reminds the listener that you are still talking about what you said you would do?

There are different types of transitions. The first major type is dialogical transitions. Dialogical transitions ask out loud the questions listeners would ask if they could. "Do you want to know what that means? It means…" I just asked a question out loud. For example, you could use the who, what, when, where, why, and how questions. You may have heard a preacher say in a sermon, "I have talked to you about the fact that God knows tomorrow. How are we going to apply that to our lives?" Ask the question out loud. People almost never tire of that question, "How will we apply this?" You could do that practically every sermon, and people would be just fine. You can ask about explanation, "How do we know this is true? If this will not work, what will? What plan does God offer for this? What comes next?" Asking questions like this is the mindset to assume in creating all transitions. Whether you voice the question or not, you learn to hear the question in the mind of the listener and answer it. If you listen as the listener would listen to your message, you have some advantages. If you ask questions that are in their heads, it gets their attention. You will make their heads come up, "I was wondering about that." It also makes you more credible, because it shows that you as a preacher are in their heads. You think about what they are concerned about. It is a very strong identification point if you go along and say, "I know what you are thinking. If He knows tomorrow, why is tomorrow so scary to me?" "That is exactly what I was thinking!" If you actually ask their objections or doubts, it shows that you are not afraid of their objections and doubts. It is a strong credit to you—"You live where I live, and you are willing to ask what I am thinking." Asking questions out loud also makes the listener hungry for an answer.

In our circles, it is not so common that preachers ask questions, pause, and wait for the answer. I preach in a lot of Presbyterian circles, so sometimes I pause, and people will give me the answer. Then they will look embarrassed as though they were not supposed to do that. Actually, the more I have preached in those churches, the more people begin responding. And I want them to respond. I want that feedback and dialogue. It means that now we are engaged together. You are thinking what I am thinking; I am thinking what you are thinking. We are exploring the Scriptures together. Part of the reason I do that is because I love to feel like I connect with people. If I can get people thinking, and if I know I am thinking what they are thinking, it really enhances credibility. It involves the listener; it shows I am interested in them. All those things come by asking questions out loud.

Let me give some hints for using dialogical transitions. The best explanation answers, "How do we know this means what I just said?" For example, "I just said, 'God knows tomorrow.' How do I know that is what this text means? Look at the text. It says…" Then I will begin to analyze and answer my own question. The best application answers the question "How do we apply this truth?" I think you can ask that question every Sunday. The best illustration answers "How can we see this better in our own experience?" We typically do not say that, though. We do not actually ask, "How can I illustrate this?" It removes the listener; you do something to him rather than involve him. "How can we apply" is a question that engages the listener, but "How do I illustrate" disengages the listener. An important place to learn an analytical question is immediately after the proposition. A good question after the proposition sets up the reasoning for the main points. That is called interrogating the proposition. You can do this after a main point statement, too. That is an analytical question response that sets up your subpoints.

Another form of transition is logical connection. This is a result of the dialogical process once you have thought about what your statement leads to. But you do not ask the question out loud. The basic form of a logical connection is not only but also. "Not only is this true, but also this is true." In saying, "not only," I reviewed, and in saying, "but also," I previewed. Review and preview can take a lot of different forms. The basic Latin formulation is "not only, but also," and a lot of Western thought proceeds along this way. For example, "If this is true, then these are the implications." I did not say "not only, but also," but it is the same impact. If this is true (review), then these are the implications (preview). "Our understanding is not complete until we also consider…" That is another form of "not only, but also." It can get much longer, too. "God is loving, but that is not enough to warrant our trust. Good intentions do not make everything work out all right. That is why Paul continues his argument by saying that God is sovereign. God does not just desire what is good; He accomplishes it. Because God is sovereign, we must trust Him." The main point comes at the end of that statement, but there are about four sentences that say, "not only, but also."

Another form of transition is encyclopedic or numeric format. This is the most inartistic and elementary, but it is not wrong. If I say, "And second…" I imply that there has been a first point. Now we are ready for the next point. It is not very artistic, but it is very clear. To say that it is not artistic is not to say that it is bad or wrong. Many times in the sermon we will say, "First… second… third." The place where we typically get in trouble is if we say "first" too often. "First I want you to know…" then after I say "first" about the main point, I might say "first" about the first subpoint. Then I say it again about the first subpoint in the next main point. I have all these firsts going on in the sermon. I need to use those numbers sparingly. At the same time, it certainly will work. There are various forms of numerating things. "The next thing we see…" The word "next" is a form of doing a numeric change in transition. "My second point is…" Let me caution you here that we do not say in sermons "A…B…C" to indicate subpoints. "First I want you to understand that God knows tomorrow. A—Even if we do not, B—even if our friends…" We do not say A, B, C in normal conversation. Even the words "Finally" or "in conclusion" indicate numeric change. We have already learned that they can cause watch breaks. We recognize that they also cause hope occasionally! If you need them, it is a way of saying, "Now we have gotten to the end." It is a form of numeric break.

There are a few more types of transition, one of which is the parallel statement. Look for the review and the preview in this example. "It may sound insensitive to emphasize that God is the object of our faith until you remember the Scripture also teaches we are the object of God's affection." This uses parallel words to review and preview. There are also transitions that are pictorial or illustrative. Even the phrase, "The flip side of the coin is…" is a form of illustrative transition. We look at one side of the coin; now we will look at the other side. I told you earlier in the course about the guy whose sermon was the crash investigation approach. Think about what he said, "Already we determined the point of impact. Next we

need to determine if it was pilot error or mechanical error. Is it something he did or something someone else did?" That goes through the illustration as a form of transition. The illustrative progress also shows the transition of thought.

Sometimes illustrations themselves can be great transitions, making us see relationships between points. These transitions say, "In the same way…" We have not talked about this yet. This actually takes the illustration and drops it down between points. This works especially well in a two-point message where there is tension or balance. It shows in an illustrative form how you need the flip side and the tension. Sometimes the illustration shows the relationship between main points. It is not just what one main point is about, but sometimes the illustration shows the relationship between main points. I did that in a sermon I gave here earlier in the semester. I talked about a student named Mark Talbot who, in 1992, was killed here. I mentioned his wife, Mary, who did part of the devotional memorial service here. She talked about Mark and his son going to see Jesus. It was the end of her world but the beginning of heaven. That was what I talked about in that sermon—you have to come to the end of this world before heaven opens to you. I used an illustrative transition to talk about both main points together. It was the hinge between those two main points. Sometimes illustrations can work that way as well.

We have talked about tiebacks a couple of times. Tieback illustrations relate a matter just covered to the central idea first introduced. For example, "We have talked about Christ being our high priest because it relates directly to our understanding of why we are not rejected simply because we sin." The FCF of this message is that we fear that we are rejected because we sin. Probably at the end of a main point, the preacher ties back to the FCF. "This is why we talked about this…" because it relates to the burden of the message. It is particularly important to keep relating each main point to the FCF since this keeps us developing a message rather than simply describing a text. That sounds strange, but our job is not merely to describe the text but to develop the message as it relates to the burden of the Holy Spirit for the text. I do not just say something else to note. I point out how what I note relates to the purpose of the sermon, which hopefully is the purpose of the passage as well.

Another major category of transitions is billboards. We just talked about tiebacks, which review what is said and connect it to the major theme. A very common pattern that is powerful is the use of billboards. Billboards are crystallized statements of key terms following main point (or subpoint) statements in the order they will appear. We state key terms in the order they will appear in what we are about to talk about. Billboards typically occur right after the proposition in which they use the key terms of the magnet clauses of the main points to say what is coming. Another key place for billboards is right after the main point that uses key terms of the subpoints. Let me give you an example. The proposition is "Because God will judge sin, we must proclaim His Word in every situation. Paul tells Timothy plainly, 'I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead and is appearing in His kingdom, everything we do is before God and the Lord Jesus Christ.' In light of this divine oversight, let us encourage each other to proclaim the Word of God, to rescue the needy, to defend the truth, and to fulfill our duty." You can see key terms: rescue the needy, defend the truth, and fulfill our duty. These will reappear in the main points. The first main point is "Because God will judge sin, we must proclaim His Word to rescue the needy." We know "defend the truth and fulfill our duty" are coming. They will be in the magnet clauses of the main points that are to come. A billboard is just what it says. I drive down the sermon highway, and I have a billboard that says what is ahead. I use the key terms in the billboard. It is knit together with the terms that will become familiar to the ear. I say what is ahead and use key terms of what is ahead in the main points to organize the thought of the message.

There are some times that you want to use billboards, but at other points they will not serve you.

Sometimes you will want to notify others of what is ahead, but other times you will not want to give that information away. If the listener knows what is ahead, he or she may not go down that highway. There can be issues that you know that if you say it too early people will not listen to what you need to tell them. So you may build the case before you state its conclusion. There can be strategies to veil impact. This is a strategy and not ignorance to what is coming! There can be a reason to veil intention to give greater impact. We talked in a previous lesson about how the Bible sometimes veils where it is going as the strategy is built. But most of the time, it helps people to know where we are going. That way they have some orientation in what we are doing. We use billboards to help the preacher clarify his own thought. Billboards also help listeners see the plan of the message.

Let me give some hints for using billboards. We tell the congregation what we will say, then we say it, and then we remind them that we said what we said we would say. We signal, tell, and remind. A billboard signals what you will say. The explanation says it. The tieback reminds them what you said and ties it to the whole. Something to observe is that if I use a billboard after the proposition, it will use the key terms of the magnet clauses of the main points. It will sound very similar to the summary and the conclusion. The concise summary in the conclusion has the key terms of the magnet clauses of the main points. The billboard may sound a great deal like the concise summary in the conclusion. In doing that, it knits the sermon together so that it can be well followed. The reasoning now comes together. I said what I was going to talk about, I talked about it, and now I conclude with a reminder of those terms. You can see that I discussed what I said we would discuss. It has a sense of cohesion and professional planning. This was not just a thrown together thing. You knew where you were going, and you brought me there. You planned it well, you exegeted the Scriptures, and you showed me what they meant. You knew what you wanted to accomplish, and you did it. Using those key terms at both phases, early and late, accomplishes that.

Let me give some final hints on transitions. Verse references are usually stated immediately after the principle statement of the main point or subpoint that needs to be proven—state, place, prove. State a main point, place where it is in the text, and identify the verse. As a caution, try not to say, "Look with me at verses 8-13. What they mean is…" No one can look at those verses in the few seconds that you gave them. Try not to do that unless you will stop and read all of those verses. Usually when we state and place, we say, "Look with me at verse 13. Right in the middle of the verse it says…" and then I read it. Read the portion of the verse that applies to what you are saying. Do not just read the number.

There are some exceptions to this. Expositional main point or subpoint statements usually have a text reference immediately following them. But when expounding a narrative or developing an idea based on context or genre, you may simply have to identify the event, textual feature, or aspect of the context that proves your point. I might say, "And Goliath fell down. Look with me in verse 14. It say, 'Goliath fell down…'" They already knew Goliath fell down. It may be enough to refer to the narrative portion that everyone already knows. If I need the precise wording of the narrative, "David said, 'You come with sword, javelin, and spear. I come in the name of the Lord.'" I might want to say, "Look at verse 13," where he says that." But it may be that there are events that everyone knows that we do not need to refer to by verse in long narratives. The second hint is that context may not have a verse. I may say, "Paul is in prison when he writes this, and still he speaks with great hope." I cannot say, "Look with me at verse 3. It says he is in prison." That is the context of the writing of the letter. That may be part of a subpoint where I have to refer to context rather than cite a verse. Most of the time I will actually cite the verse and read the portion that applies to it. That is the transition between the statement and the explanation itself. When you read the verse or the portion of the verse, it supports what your explanation will say.

Let me make another reminder about retention hierarchy. The part that will be most remembered out of a

sermon is the illustrations. Then applications are remembered. They will not remember transitions at all! But we bother with them because the retention hierarchy is flawed. The thing that is more remembered than any sermon component is the *ethos* of the speaker. *Ethos* is credibility and compassion. Transitions serve toward that end. I can logically see how this is connected, and you care enough about me to glue it together. When it is not glued together, people do not just think you do not think well. They think you do not care well. When we use transitions to knit this thing together, we ultimately build not only understanding of our sermon but we also tell people that they can understand what we say, and we care enough about them to word it in a way that can be understood. These are not difficult concepts. They are plain and matter of fact. But it will help us to think of how people listen to what we say.

Let me review quickly. Some basic functions of transitions are to review and preview. A dialogical transition is a question asked out loud in the body of the sermon. The key wording beaconing behind a logical connection transition is “not only, but also.” A billboard is the use of key words to preview. These could be the key words of following subpoints or main points.