

Voice and Gesture

As we begin lesson 18, I will review some concepts with you. What are some of the advantages of preaching from manuscripts? There are a couple of advantages to preaching from a manuscript, including precision and preparation. What are the advantages of preaching from outlines? The advantages of preaching from outlines include spontaneity and naturalness. There is some preparation with outlines, but probably not as much. Yet we recognize the advantage of naturalness, and we would have to add eye contact as an advantage. The difference between an extended outline and a bare-bones outline is explained in the words themselves. What is a pulpit outline? It is the last variation that you take into the pulpit with you. It is probably not the exegetical outline. It is probably not even the homiletical outline that formed the basis of your manuscript. It is that final form of an outline that you take into the pulpit with you, perhaps marked up, or however it will help you. It is a key in your brain that what you wrote down on paper may not be the best thing to take into the pulpit. You may need to rework it again for the visual effect of what you are taking into the pulpit. That is a natural thing that preachers do. It is not wrong to go through a few permutations before you finalize your pulpit outline.

Let me pray with you.

Heavenly Father, we praise You that You have seen to sanctify the face of Jesus in us and You do that by sanctifying us with Him. We pray, even this day, Father, that You would not only be sanctifying us but glorifying Christ in us by having His Word made more excellent for Your people. Treat us, we pray, Father, as those who are seeking to honor You, as those who are seeking to speak Your truth, as those who are seeking for souls who are marching toward hell to find heaven by the truths of Your Word. We ask for Your blessing and care as we talk about things that are practical and in some ways fun, but we recognize that much hangs in the balance of doing Your work well. Grant Your Spirit to impress upon our minds that which we should hold for the years to come. We ask Your care in this in Jesus' name. Amen.

What we are talking about today is what makes sermon delivery effective in terms of voice and gesture. As I was just praying, I did mean that some of this is just plain fun to talk about. You can take it that way. I am not going to ask you to get every nuance of what is said today. I would rather have you get impressions of what helps us communicate well to people and makes our communication interesting and effective for them.

Nothing I am going to say is more important than this key: energy and enthusiasm with sincerity equals power. There is absolutely nothing more important than being enthusiastic about what you are saying. Have the attitude, "I really believe this is important, and I want to communicate it to you." There is no rule of delivery or rule of presentation that is more important than communicating, "I am really interested in this, and I am really interested in you." When you can communicate that kind of enthusiasm about what you are doing, everything else falls low on the order of importance.

Our manner should conform to our content. You will hear me say this repeatedly. Does manner reflect content? If you are saying something is important, are you showing it by the way you present it? If you are saying, "I really care about you," does your manner reflect that content? The idea is that when our manner conforms to our content naturally, it becomes obvious that our message has had an impact on us. That is what makes it infectious. It is not that I am just trying to impact you. It is also obvious that it has impacted me already. My manner is reflecting that something has impacted me. That is the infectious nature of delivery.

How we speak with naturalness will become much affected by whether or not it has affected me. Naturalness is the key. For this generation, we are way beyond the elocutionist movement of the early twentieth century. There was a right way of saying everything. If you have ever seen an elocutionist's diagrams, they tell you where your feet should be for saying certain words. They tell you what your hand should show for certain words, whether you should have an open or closed hand. They had elaborate detail about exactly how things were being communicated in the post-Victorian era. We are way beyond that and would not accept that.

We are very affected by broadcast styles of delivery. We expect something that is natural in expression. It should not be flat, but it should naturally have manner reflect content appropriate for the personality that is speaking. We also recognize that there are vastly different personalities. In whatever way you say, with your personality, "This is very important," that is how you should communicate. The difficulty you must recognize is that we are not used to being in public situations and feeling comfortable. So we stop being natural. My goal is not to train you in new delivery techniques. My goal is to say, "Be natural." We want to find out what does that so that we can throw away those things that make us artificial.

If you think about the power of delivery in some of its basic nature, I do not know a better way of saying it than how Benjamin Franklin once responded to George Whitefield. Some of you may know this story. Benjamin Franklin, who was not a believer, encouraged other people to go hear George Whitefield, the great evangelist of the American Revolutionary War times. Somebody once said to Franklin, "Why do you go and listen to Whitefield and tell others to go? You do not believe him." Franklin said, "No, I do not believe him, but he believes what he says." Do you hear that? He believes it? For that reason, Franklin had to listen to him, and he thought others should as well.

What makes something natural? Let me remind you of an example I have given before. What is an example of natural public address? When I was in my high school years, being raised in the South, I went through one of those rites of passage that young men go through that is known as "catfish grabbin'." A few of you may have gone through that technique. Catfish grabbin' is when you do not use a pole, line, hook, or sinker. You go along the reservoirs, where the big dams are in the South, and all the rock that is put there becomes ideal territory for catfish. What you do is you get about chest-high in the water, and you start reaching up into the holes. You start reaching and feeling around in the hole, and when a catfish is in a hole it slimes the hole. So you feel the hole and then you go in and grab him by the gills and then you pull him out. You are not looking for a two- or three-pound fish, of course, but you are looking for a 15 pound fish or a 20 or 40 pound fish. Imagine you have pulled out a 60 pound fish. You throw it in the back of your pickup truck and you do not need gas, but you still pull into the gas station. What you want to do is say, while you are pumping gas, "Hey, look back there in the back of the truck." One of the attendants will say to you, "Wow, how did you get that?" You say, "I was out grabbin'. It was so great. I could tell, just as soon as I got my hand in that hole, that I had something. It was a big hole, and there was slime all around it. As I reached in, I felt his whiskers first, and every whisker was as big as a pencil. I knew this thing was going to be huge. I reached in there, and first he put his mouth around my hand. He began to twist my wedding ring, and I thought I was going to lose my finger. I shoved my hand into his throat, and I began to pull." You then begin to recognize that you have an audience growing. It is not just one person, but other people begin to see what you have. Then you begin to say, "Not only did he grab my hand..." and you begin to raise your voice. "When he began to pull, I did not think I was going to come to the surface again. He was so heavy I was not sure whether he was going to let me go if I did not let him go. So I just kept pulling. I thought I was going to drown! When he finally came out, I said, 'Man, I got the biggest fish I have ever even seen, much less caught!'"

What did you just do? You were certainly enthusiastic about your catch. As you begin to speak to more people, though, you naturally enlarge your conversation. You pick up volume. You expand your gestures. You always fill the room. You fill the context so that you are speaking more loudly for more people. You also gesture more broadly for more people. It is not even something you think about. It just naturally happens.

If you are speaking in a Sunday school class and it is a small room and you have toddlers, what do you naturally do? You narrow your gestures and you drop your voice. If you are in a large auditorium, however, and there are 300 people, what do you automatically do? The most natural thing to do is raise your voice and expand your gestures. If you are in an auditorium with 10,000 people, and some of you in your life may be in that situation, you recognize that you do not merely expand your gestures, but the whole stage becomes part of your gesture. You begin to expand your gestures by moving your body back and forth. You try to fill the context or narrow it naturally.

You would do that as an enlarged conversation. When we are preaching in the natural era that we are in, the most appropriate way to think about things is that we are in an enlarged conversation. It is not drama. That will put people off in this day and age. It is not oratory. It is an enlarged conversation, which keeps it natural.

There are implications of natural public address. First, you already know how to do it. I really cannot teach it to you. You already know how to do it. The idea ought to be to go with what is natural and throw away what is artificial and imposed on you by the nervousness of others looking on. I have teased you before about when you were in high school and they called you up on the stage to get your varsity letter. You had to pull yourself away from the table where you were eating your chicken dinner. You had to actually walk up on the stage. You had to run down the track or field with expertise, but actually walking up on the stage seemed so difficult because everyone was looking at you. You would not even think about it normally. The idea is to stay natural even though people are looking at you. You already know how to do it.

Do things you naturally do. If you were at the lunchroom and I would videotape you, what would you naturally do? You would look people in the eye. If there were five people to whom you were talking, you would raise your voice to talk to all five, not just to one. You would scan them. You would not just look at one person. You would look at different ones. If you gestured, which you would do, you would raise your hands above your sternum and below your eyes. What you would be doing is raising your gestures to a normal conversational line of sight. You would not gesture down low or in front of your face. You would be above the sternum and away from your body. Nobody would teach you to do that. You would naturally do it.

Before we go into all the particulars, I will only say that if you forget everything else I will teach you, here are the basic aspects of delivery and posture. These are some things to think about. What are you going to do? Stand up straight. Look people in the eye. Speak to those at greatest distance from you. When you do those things, the rest takes care of itself.

As we think of those basic features of delivery, what are the basic features? We usually think of two: voice and gesture. Voice and gesture are the basic features of delivery. We usually break gesture down into a few smaller attributes. First is eye contact. Second is hand motion. Third is body motion and posture. Fourth may sound strange, but you can understand it readily, which is facial animation. We break these things down, not in order to get back to the elocutionist movement, trying to think about how to do all of those things correctly, but rather to keep from becoming artificial.

Ralph Lewis, in an important book called *Speech for Persuasive Preaching*, began to identify those things that put off the modern audience. He identified what makes people say, “I do not want to hear anything you have to say.” Listen to some of these, and you will immediately recognize how they put you off as well. What creates distrust of speakers? Lewis suggested traits such as obvious skills, artifice, cleverness, loud haranguing, and persistent aggressiveness—which is very common among young people, particularly angry young men, which we can often be in the pulpit. He also identified ornateness, which is when everything is hearts, trumpets, and flowers. Other problems are too evident use of technical skills, high-flown language, or glib tongues. That last trait refers to the preachers with whom everything is funny. We love to laugh with them, but we do not trust them. It is an interesting dynamic. What does it reflect in you? Humor can be a great gift, and it can be used powerfully. If everything seems to be putting you on stage, however, we will enjoy it, but we will not trust you.

What are key terms in all of these things of voice and gesture? If we are not to create distrust, then our basic terms for voice and gesture are that we want to be appropriate, varied, and purposeful. I want to emphasize the key thought there of purposeful. Although I will tell you what the things are that create barriers that you do not intend, nonetheless there is nothing you can do wrong if it has an appropriate purpose. Well, maybe not nothing, but almost nothing. The reason I say that is because there are exceptions. I have mentioned that you should not grab the horns of the pulpit. The reason I say that is because it usually locks us down and our hands are no longer free. It is a nervous reaction of grabbing something to hang on to. At the same time, if you are too worried about grabbing the horns of the pulpit, you may create a buzzer effect, either in you or in other people. Instead, you should recognize that there might be times when you want to say something that gets the attention of the audience and so you may grab the horns. In that case you do it for a purpose. You are saying, “I really mean this.” There can be a purpose for virtually everything. I will tell you not to sway and not to use chopping motions. If you do not have a purpose for it, then it creates distraction. Yet there can be a purpose for virtually every one of those things. So if something has a purpose, we really cannot do much that is wrong.

Let us think about some of the relative importance of these things. Why do we even talk about delivery? A famous study done by Albert Mehrabian at Yale in the 1940s found that 55% of the message is communicated by facial and physical cues. What are people actually picking up from you? Fifty-five percent of communication is actually facial and physical cues. Thirty-eight percent is through vocal cues. That relates to how something is said. You can tell people you love them, and it can sound either caring or sarcastic. You can use the same words but communicate different messages. Only 7% is communicated by the verbal content, or what is said. In other words, Mehrabian contends that 93% of a message is in the delivery.

Do you believe it? I would not! There is much that is powerfully being said here. Yet Mehrabian’s study has not only been quoted many times, but it has also been questioned many times. I think that Haddon Robinson said it best in his book *Biblical Preaching*. Rather than saying it is always this way, Robinson said that research and experience agree that if nonverbal messages contradict the verbal, then the nonverbal will be believed. I do agree with that. If the nonverbal manner does not reflect content, then I will believe your manner. Yet what if they conform? What if manner and content conform? What will I believe? I will believe the content as well. I will not just hear 7%. I will hear much more of what you say when manner reflects content. Robinson said, “A pastor’s words may insist, ‘This is important,’ but if his voice sounds flat and expressionless and his body stands limp, the congregation will not believe him.” Why do we talk about delivery? It is not going to be as important as content, but if it contradicts the content, then we undercut what we are trying to say.

What are some basic features of delivery? In voice, you already know the basic rubric. We try to fill the room by speaking to those at greatest distance from you conversationally. That is a different thing from blasting. You are trying to speak to those at greatest distance from you conversationally. The old line of Spurgeon was "Fill the room, but speak to one." I like that statement. It was said of Spurgeon, "He spoke to 1000 as though he was speaking to one person." So you try to fill the room with volume but still speak conversationally.

Some aspects of volume are that we should avoid being too soft. That is obvious. You do not want to drop your voice so that people cannot hear you. Why? That would not be natural. It would not be natural to speak so that people could not hear you. You also want to avoid being too loud. Sometimes when people think about preaching, they are remembering a preacher from their youth who was very loud and bombastic. It may have been great for that generation. It may have been very appropriate for that generation. It typically does not work well in this generation. There are all kinds of cultural variables of which we need to be aware. Yet typically it does not work to blast away at people, particularly early in a message.

For young men in this culture, your greatest danger will be drop-offs. Those are drop-offs at the ends of sentences. We sometimes have that notion that although we are speaking to those at greatest distance, we try to emphasize what we are saying by dropping off and swallowing the last words of a sentence. It is something that we need to learn as preachers that in order to be natural in an enlarged conversation you must push out the ends of sentences. Push it out instead of dropping it off. As young people, we are enculturated in this culture to try not to offend in conversation. In order to emphasize something we really mean, we either raise our voice in frequency or we drop it in volume. Instead we must keep the volume up so that people can hear. I do it to this day, and people come up to me after services and say, "I could not hear the ends of sentences." I know better, and I have to keep reminding myself so that people can hear.

Variety is another essential feature of voice. There are three basic types of monotone. One is low and slow. Another, which is more typical of young men in this culture, is high and fast. It is the machine gun that never stops. You think, "I have so much to say that I want to get my entire systematic theology course into this one message." Then you are off to the races from the very beginning. There are not pauses, and what ultimately happens is there is no variation in delivery. The content can be great, but there is so much so fast that it is just a blur coming at people. There is no variation, and with no variation it is boring. Even if it is coming hard, aggressive, and fast, which is more typical of men in this culture, without variation it is just another form of monotone. Not for many of you, but for a few, is the third type of monotone, which is rhythmic. It is when I get in the habit of saying everything in a rhythm. You will encounter people who get into a rhythm and they cannot break it. It is another form of monotone. For most of us, high and fast is the thing to be aware of. We do not know how to take a breath or a pause because we are scared of the silence. We need to learn to say, "I really mean it." Then pause and take a breath. Then continue saying, "And that is why I am talking to you." A pause is very effective, and it adds variety. So the types of monotone are low and slow, high and fast, and rhythmic.

I do want to emphasize the importance of pausing when it comes to variety. There are two ways that we underline what we are saying in oral address. One is by changing the volume. The other is by silence. If you want to underline something, then stop talking. If you stop talking, people will look up. They will wonder why you have stopped. If you want to emphasize something, be courageous enough to come to a full stop, and people will know that you are either about to say something very important or you just did. If we do not pause, then the blur says none of it is very important. So variation is by volume and pause.

You will recognize that the great speakers, in even one sermon, will do everything from a whisper to a shout and everything in between. Yet it will be appropriate for the content. It will not just be drama. That will put us off. If they are saying things appropriate for the content, however, great variation is warranted and usually very powerful.

We want to speak with volume, variety, and third, with intensity. Intensity reflects the seriousness of what you are saying. It also reflects concern for the listener. When I am trying to be intense about something, particularly in preaching, I recognize that I am creating a tension. I want to show great seriousness for the subject. That is intensity. I also want to show compassion for the listener. That is a different kind of intensity. If I am only showing seriousness for the subject, then ultimately I will come across as harsh. Thus I have to, with concern for the subject, show care for the listener. That is something related to our attitude that is going to be reflected in the intensity of our words. Richard Baxter made the famous statement, "I want to speak as a dying man to dying men." He was that concerned about it. We recognize that his statement has lasted because it showed concern for the subject and for the listeners as well.

Physical preparation is also important. There are three quick rubrics for this point: fitness, food, and nerves. How do we get prepared to speak in a way that helps us? Two weeks ago I spoke eight times in one weekend, and I will tell you that I just got tired. I get tired. When that happens, I recognize that it takes more and more energy for me to speak with the energy that is required. Not sleeping much at night can be a problem. Our voice stops working. We lose the ability to speak with great variety, simply because our throat, our vocal mechanism, is itself tired. So being physically fit and rested are part of good delivery.

The issue of food is one of the fun and funny parts of this lesson. What does milk do to you if you drink milk or eat milk products just before you speak? It creates phlegm. You will end up clearing your throat repeatedly. What does caffeine do to you if you drink it just before you speak? It dries you out. It gives you cotton-mouth, as do many antihistamine products. The old idea about tea and honey is actually silly, because the tea will contradict what the honey is supposed to accomplish. Yet people try to get something warm and lubricating so that they can speak. If you have many caffeine and milk products before you speak, it may cause problems for most of you. It is something to be aware of if you have not thought about it. We have different personalities and physiques, but I find that either too much or too little food before you speak causes problems.

We know enough about the way the body works to know that if you have low protein and low sugar before you speak, you are going to have problems. Having some protein and some carbohydrates before you speak will be good. On the other hand, if you fill up, your system will slow down. I usually do not like to eat much before I speak. People often try to feed you before you speak, and I may take a bite or two, but I want to regulate my intake more. I do not want to be silly, so I do not want to create superstitions about what I eat, but I do want to heed basic science and biology. Some proteins, some carbohydrates, and some sugars will be good, and you want to have some liquid in you. Otherwise you will get cotton-mouth, and you will slow down because you do not have enough protein or water to keep you going. Too much or too little is bad. Salt products can dry you out. It may be silly, but you probably do not want to drink much soda before you speak. What will you do if you drink soda? You will burp. Our generation drinks a lot of soda, but we are not used to public speaking. If you drink much soda before you speak, you will be uncomfortable, or you will lose your discomfort in an embarrassing way. Our culture is very accustomed to speakers having a cup of water with them. Personally, I rarely use one, unless I am ill. It is nice if you have a cold or something to have a cup of water. I think most people excuse it if you pause for a moment to take a sip.

We have talked about fitness and food. What everyone is afraid of is their nerves. How do I deal with nervousness? This may sound strange, but you actually want to be nervous. You do not want to be incapacitated in your nervousness, but the best speakers turn their nerves into energy. They want that sense of the heart thumping. They want the sense of their palms being a little sweaty. What happens to people who are not accustomed to public speaking is they let their nerves throw them. They say, “Oh no, my palms are sweaty! My heart is pumping!” They begin to think something is wrong. If you think about it, however, if there are going to be 50 or 100 people listening to you, why would you not be nervous? It is the most natural thing in the world. It is natural to be nervous. If it also gets me a little energetic, why would I not want it?

I can tell you, even though this is not where most of you are in life, I do a lot of public speaking in many different places, and there are times when I am sitting on a stage in front of a couple hundred people and I will think to myself, “I am not nervous.” That is a problem. It means I have either taken it too far or I am too tired. If I am not a little nervous, then I believe I am not feeling the importance of it. I need to pray about it because I have become either too tired or too lackadaisical. I actually want some nerves. Professional speakers do a process of what they call “lifting.” They try to pull away from themselves and ask themselves objectively, “Where are you? Are you nervous? How nervous are you? Is it controllable, or is it not?” There are people who can be too nervous. Some of the best preachers I know still throw up every Sunday morning, because they are nervous. That may sound bad, but they are accustomed to knowing it is their personality. It is their system. It is how they are wired. They would be concerned if there was nothing going on in their system.

What if you think you are too nervous? You may actually believe you are incapacitated. You may be so nervous that you think you will mess up your words. You may not be able to think straight. Here are some quick ideas for you. First, simply walk around. Know the biology. There is adrenaline running through your system, so get rid of some of it. Get up and walk around. Walk around the church a time or two. For many of us, when we get nervous it means we should just go out and talk to people. Go interact a little and get some of the adrenaline out of your system by being in conversation with people. It is not about being afraid of the nerves. Recognize who you are and that nervousness is natural. Use it accordingly. Another idea is to talk to the Holy Spirit. Say, “Lord, settle me down.” Pray that God would give you the quietness of heart and the quickness of mind to do that task that He calls you to do. Prayer is also one of the ways to settle yourself. What I want is for you to not be scared that you are nervous. It is natural and actually quite helpful for the best speakers; as long as it does not throw you off that you are nervous. It is natural to be nervous.

Next we will consider some features of gesture. The basic rubric is that we want to gesture concepts, not words. If I begin to gesture words, I will create chopping motions. You will begin to gesture every word. That is not what we want to do. We want to gesture whole sentences. If you were haranguing people, you would gesture with each word. Instead you want to use gestures that fit the whole sentence. If you can think of it that way, it will not be a matter of doing it right or wrong. You will simply try to communicate a whole concept, and gestures will naturally take over.

How do we do it naturally? First, remember that the primary tool of gesture is the eyes. There are two reasons for that. First, if we do not look at people, then they will assume certain things. They will assume we do not know what we are going to say, and therefore we are unprepared. They will assume that we are too focused on what we are going to say, and therefore we do not care about them. We are disengaged from them. Finally, they will assume we are arrogant. If you do not look at people, they will assume you are arrogant.

It is important that we emphasize that you must look at people and not just toward them. You need to actually engage eyes. Many people just look at peoples' foreheads because they are nervous. They will look at foreheads or look just off to the side. They will not engage. If we do that, it communicates fear or arrogance. You must look at people in the eye. There is another reason you do that. What are you gauging when you speak? Why do you look at people when you talk? You are getting response. It is your thermostat for how things are happening. It is not only asking how the people are speaking to you, but it is also asking how the Holy Spirit is informing you as you speak. As much as we will put into preparing the message, you cannot fully prepare for the speaking event of preaching. It is a redemptive event in itself. One of the reasons we want to be looking at people is to engage what the Spirit is doing in them. You are asking the audience, "Are you being torn apart? Are you calloused? Are you hardened up? Are you comforted? Did I say something disquieting that I need to reflect on right now because I did not mean to be disquieting to you? What did I say that upset you that way?" You cannot plan the event on paper with everything that will happen in the preaching event itself. If you are thinking, "The Spirit is here. Christ is in my words. There are the people of God, receiving the bread of life, and what are they communicating to me about what is going on?" Even as I am speaking, I am turning up the volume, turning down the intensity, increasing the love, and repeating what I said in a better way. There are all kinds of dynamics by which I am responding to what the Spirit is now doing in this place.

What do you do if you see mixed reactions? Pay attention to those you trust. That is part of knowing the people. You know which people are good to use for a barometer and those who are not. Sometimes you can become aware that one who is normally a bad barometer is reacting, and that is something you need to pay attention to. What do you do if you see that there has been a reaction that is more intense or different than you intended? What do you do if you see that someone has been offended by what you said or hurt by what you said and you did not mean for it to happen that way? If you recognize in the moment how it occurred, then you can deal with it. I have done it many times at different levels. I have said something and seen people physically flinch when they heard it. I knew that they heard me in a way I did not mean. They read something into it. What I do is I go back and say, "What I mean is..." In that moment I will go back and acknowledge that the person was hurt in a way I did not intend. Other things will happen as well. Sometimes you will say things that people will find very humorous or even obscene, even though you did not mean it that way. Words can have double entendres even when you did not mean them to be offensive. Sometimes you have to just ignore it and keep going. Other times you have to say, "I did not mean it that way." Consider what will happen if your head is buried in your notes. You will not pick up on any of that. There is prudential judgment, pastoring, that is going on while you are preaching. I have said it before, and I mean it more than I am able to underline in this moment, but preaching itself is a redemptive event. If you believe that, then you will be very sensitive to what the Spirit is doing in the occasion. You cannot do that if you do not look at people. So the primary aspect of gesture is the eyes.

Another tool of gesture includes facial animation. How do we make our faces move? How do you make sure that people see the effect of the message on you? What is the best thing you can do to break up the flatness and somberness of your face? You just smile. I used to have to write it in my notes. I was so intense that people would ask me, "Why are you mad all the time?" I had to write in my notes, "Smile." I love the way Spurgeon teased young men to try to get them to do that. He said, "When you speak of heaven, let your face light up and be radiated with a heavenly gleam. Let your eyes shine with reflected glory. And when you speak of hell, well then your everyday face will do." He was saying that you are not speaking of hell all the time. So when you talk about joy, please look like it.

I have talked some about hands already, but let us talk quickly about them. What do you do with your hands? Keep them above the sternum and away from the body. Watch speakers who are very comfortable and those who are not. People who are uncomfortable in public address, even when they raise their hands, will keep their elbows in close to their body. It is signaling they are scared. People who are very comfortable will allow their elbows to come away from their body. Their gestures are above the sternum and away from the body. That is the natural thing to do. We keep our hands in a conversational line of sight. To keep our hands free, if we do not want them hanging at our side, we let them rest on the front of the pulpit. They are ready to gesture, and you will not even think about it. Your hands naturally do what they are saying. If you grasp and hold on to the pulpit with your hands, that undoes their readiness. You want them available for use. I have mentioned before having hands in the pockets. If you have your hands in your pockets, it signals that the situation is informal and you are at ease. The trouble with having your hands in your pockets is that they stop working for you. When people who are scared and nervous put their hands in their pockets, they start gesturing with their shoulders. Otherwise they stand like statues. It is very common for men in this culture today to have one hand in the pocket, one hand on the pulpit, and crossed legs. That locks you down. It keeps you from being affected by the dynamic of speaking. It can be effective to put one hand in your pocket if you want to communicate you are being casual or informal. It can have a purpose. Yet being locked down is not what you want.

Body motion is another element of gesture. Do not be afraid to move. There is much discussion about this. Some people are very concerned if you move outside the area of the pulpit because in their church, in their culture, the pulpit communicates the authority of the Word. Thus they do not like you to move away from the pulpit. Others in our culture, particularly the younger generation, want you to move away from the pulpit because they want the identification factor. What is right? Exegete the congregation. Exegete the culture. Make prudent and pastoral decisions. If I had my personal choice, I would not have pulpits. I recognize, however, that would not work in most congregations I go to. If they have pulpits that signal their respect for the Word, even though I would rather connect with people, I respect and honor their concern.

There are some standard rules for all gestures. You want to be free and frequent. I keep my hands free and typically gesture frequently. I would not advise you to actually do this, but the rule of thumb for public speaking is that two gestures for every sentence is the way to train. That does not mean you do it in every sentence. Men in this culture tend to stop moving. So if you are just practicing, the way to train is to use two gestures for every sentence. That will give you the habit of movement.

The second standard rule beyond being free and frequent is to expand or narrow gestures for the context. In a small Sunday school room you will narrow your gesture. In a large auditorium you will expand your gesture.

Common faults for all gestures include repetitive motions. Chopping, swaying, bouncing, or rocking back and forth is quite distracting. If someone notices it, then they cannot avoid seeing you do it. Once I have picked up that you are swaying, I cannot stop noticing that you are swaying. It becomes very distracting. All forms of clasping gestures are common faults. That includes holding your hands in front of or behind you. For men in this culture, it could be holding or twisting your wedding ring. Other faults are inadvertent gestures, which include touching your face or your hair. That is why we videotape sermons in class. It only takes one time of counting how many times you have licked your lips in one paragraph for you to realize you should stop doing it.

General rules for delivery are that we want to be as purposeful and as natural as possible. Those are the basic rules. We want to be as purposeful and as natural as possible. If it is purposeful, you will feel that

your manner and content are coming together. You can do things that even seem quite odd for public speakers. If you are trying to communicate something with it, however, then it can serve you well. Yet you also want to be natural. We are in an era when people expect us to be real, authentic, and personable. I usually speak more sedately in chapel sermons. Sometimes my students will say to me that I am much more animated in other places. I confess that is true. The seminary is an academic setting, and people tend to be more constrained. When I am out at churches in other places, I typically know that people are expecting more animation. I do not think about it. I am just reacting to what I know the context requires. I think you will do the same. As I look at 20 years of teaching guys to preach, my greatest concern for most guys who are trained in an academic setting is to help them become more natural in their animation. I want them to be more animated and enthusiastic. In seminary settings, we typically produce very scholarly messages. When you begin to pastor people, you begin to reach far more for their heart. The head does not get ignored, but we typically ignore or at least minimize the heart in academic settings and go after the head. When you are in a pastoral setting, you invert that. You do not ignore the head, but the heart becomes your greater concern.

I had the sad experience of following a man in the pulpit who had been there for 50 years. In the last 15 or 20 years, he wept in every sermon. Fifteen years later, the people laughed about it. It was too emotive. To show the feeling of deep emotion, including the ability to weep, is one thing. To not be able to control it, however, or even to seem to be manipulating by it is something else. To know one's own personality is key. If I know that something is going to be tender, then I want to prepare myself emotionally for it.

Earlier this fall I did a funeral sermon for a man who had been my worship leader for about 10 years. I could not stop crying. I felt bad about it, but I could not stop crying during the sermon. I loved him greatly. I do not remember ever being in a sermon in which that happened. I have wept at many funerals at which I preached, but that one touched me so deeply it was hard for me to stay in control. I recognized that I had to keep going. What I wanted to communicate was great care for the person but also the hope of the Gospel at the same time. That was very painful for me. Yet I wanted to say that even in my tears I know where this man is. I rejoiced in that even though I deeply grieved in the moment. I wanted to show both.

I wanted to show authenticity. That may sound like I am planning it. I do not even want to plan to be authentic. I just want to preach my heart. That is all I want to do. When I am doing that, there will sometimes be tears. Yet there will not always be tears. For those who are more sensitive of spirit, if you know there will be tears too often, then you have to prepare for that. You have to be aware that you cannot do it all the time.

As far as when to sit, stand, or kneel, I have sometimes sat when I preached, but then I had a broken leg. If you want to look back to the synagogue practice and make that normative, it would say stand when you read the Word and sit when you comment on it. Yet I do not know many people who do that. I do know people in very contemporary churches who take a stool up on the stage. They will never wear a coat and tie. They very much want to communicate informality. For those persons I would say that sitting occasionally and then standing up to make a point is something they are doing with some sense of what they are trying to communicate about identification. I return to the idea of knowing your people and knowing what you are accomplishing. To sit is going to communicate that you are not being very formal in the moment. If that is what you want to communicate, then it is fine to do it. Yet to say that you are being formal and serious and then to sit down will not communicate that in this culture.