# 1

# RESEARCH YOUR PRESENTATION

Homework is at least 80 percent of the speaking assignment.

A little boy in Sunday School was concentrating on his drawing during the activity time when the teacher suddenly stood over his shoulder. There on the big sheet of paper was a picture of two stick figures. One figure, with outstretched hands, was standing by a brown-colored truck with large letters on the side: "U-P-S." Another figure was in the driver's seat, handing a package out the window.

"Timmy, that's an interesting picture," the teacher said, "but what does that have to do with today's lesson?" Without looking up, Timmy continued to draw and answered, "It's God delivering the Ten Commandments to Moses."

Speaking isn't just about the delivery. Obviously little Timmy hadn't done his homework. Homework is at least 80 percent of the speaking assignment. Unlike that term paper in high school, doing research for your speaking assignment involves more than collecting the thoughts of others and recording them on 3-by-5 note cards. (Where were the environmentalists when you needed them? Just think of all the trees that gave their life so those students could impress their teachers with note cards! Now they collect URL addresses!)

Researching your speaking assignment is a bit more holistic. It includes factors other than collecting the wit and wisdom of living or dead celebrities and putting them on paper or in a file folder. It includes

#### 1. Motive

Why are you making your presentation?

If you are a vocational minister, you're probably fulfilling your pastoral agreement: no speak, no check. Every other speaker may fall into the volunteered, recruited, or appointed categories. Whatever the assignment, as a Christian speaker, you are a spokesperson for the Kingdom. You are the messenger of God's truth. Your speaking is having an eternal influence.

Your motives must come from the truth you present. Jesus said, "For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34). Check your motive:

- Am I seeking to promote self or am I seeking to exalt Jesus Christ?
- Am I seeking to impress others more than I am seeking to impress Jesus Christ?
- Can I speak with a heart of love for the audience?
- How will I show God's eternal purpose in my speaking?
- Will I depend on my own skills rather than on the Holy Spirit's anointing?

Dale Carnegie said, "Be more concerned with your character than with your reputation."<sup>2</sup>

# 2. Topic

Whether you are preaching a Christmas message to a packed church auditorium or speaking to a small group in your community, your topic is important. Among other things, it may have been the thing that drew your audience in the first place.

There is a classic story about the preacher who announced he was preaching on the Top 20 Sins. One good ol' boy from the community said to his buddy, "I think I'm going to that service just to make sure I haven't missed any of 'em!" If that preacher had simply announced he was speaking about sin, the adventurer might not have been as interested. He would have just assumed—and rightly so—that the preacher was against it.

Here are some things about the topic that you can't miss when you speak in public:

• Make sure it is focused. Most audiences can handle only one subject at a time. Try to avoid side trips and detours.

Building your presentation from intro to main points to transitions to conclusion should keep you on the speaking straight and narrow.

- Make sure it fits. Trying on a topic before you wear it in public will make for a more comfortable experience for the audience, and for you. For example, if your audience knows that you are not mechanically minded, choosing the topic "How to Change Your Transmission Without Breaking a Sweat" probably won't wear that well. Ed Foreman said, "Talk about what you know about and you'll never have anything to worry about."
- Make sure it is relevant. Touch the audience where it lives. A 20-minute speech on the virtues of eight-track recording tapes probably won't draw a huge crowd. Make sure your topic links to the knowledge, experience, and need of the audience.
- Make sure it has a good title. "Topic" and "title" lean on each other for support. Of the books that I have written, one stands out as a favorite. It isn't a favorite just because of the content—or because it has been a best-selling book. It is a favorite because of the title: God Has Never Failed Me, but He's Sure Scared Me to Death a Few Times. The title should be eyecatching and thought-provoking.

#### 3. Material

I heard of a preacher who could thrill an audience simply by saying the word "Mesopotamia." Now there had to be some public speaking skills there, but if you weren't a big fan of the word "Mesopotamia," you probably wouldn't get a lot out of the message. Choosing the right material is a key to reaching your audience.

Starting with a Bible text or passage automatically puts you on good ground. But even there, you'll want to make sure your audience is familiar with the text or passage. Biblical illiteracy is a sweeping problem in our church culture.

It's wise not to assume that everyone knows the story of Daniel in the lions' den. Often it takes only the introduction to a familiar Bible narrative, and the blank stares of the audience, to know everyone's not sailing on the same sea. When preparing your material, you'll want to keep some important things in mind:

• It must be biblically and theologically sound. For example, if you're doing a series of messages on the Book of Revelation, you'll want to make sure you read (and quote from) commentaries by theologians who are recognized by your denomination.

- It must be familiar to the audience. You will have only a few seconds to make a connection with your audience. If you start with the unfamiliar—and stay there, you'll be speaking to yourself, and perhaps your spouse.
- It must be varied in content. Your job as a public speaker is to present a buffet, not just an appetizer. When you prepare your material, you will want to think of a variety of ways you can communicate truths, including illustrations and objects—"doors and windows," ways that it can be applied.
- It must have a good beginning and a good ending. Planning your introduction and conclusion up front will save you a lot of time in making the connection and the application. I once heard a speaker say that the first and last 30 seconds are crucial to your presentation.
- It must have a logical path. Your audience likely won't be holding a GPS in their hands. You'll need to show them how to transition from Point A to Point B. And you will need to give them a place to rest along the way. The last thing you want said of your presentation is "Huh?"

#### 4. Environment

You'll also need to do your homework on the speaking environment. If at all possible, do a walk-through of the location in which you are speaking. Make some mental notes—if not written:

- How is the lighting? Is the stage or presentation area well lit? If not, you will have to do some walking around to make a visible connection to the audience. Where are the light switches? You may need to ask someone to "get the lights" during your PowerPoint presentation. Like you, he or she may be new to the area.
- What is the seating configuration? Is it circular, semicircular, or front-to-back? The configuration will determine what

techniques you will use in making eye contact with the audience, or in projecting your message to the back row.

- How is the room temperature? Of course, the temperature will change according to the wishes of the building engineer—or the whims of that "one in every crowd"—but getting a feel for the temperature of the room, and the obvious ventilation, will give you a better idea of the extremes you may have to deal with.
- Where are the "facilities"? Just in case you need to make a quick trip in between the announcements, the offering, or the roll call, it would be wise to know you won't have to walk a half mile to the restroom.
- Who is in charge? Meeting and greeting your host or hostess in advance of your presentation is a plus. That meeting will tell you a lot about the event audience—and give you an opportunity to ask questions about media, lighting, and time constraints.

#### 5. Media

Planning for multimedia presentations *in advance* will be as helpful to you as it will to the staff that will be assisting you.

- **Know your media.** Find out if you need to bring a data projector, for instance. Is there a pull-down screen, a rear-view projection screen, or a plain wall that could be used as a screen?
- **Know your technician.** In case you are fortunate to have an assistant, try to connect with that person before the event. Tell him or her the kind of media you will be using and then ask about his or her experience with that media.
- **Know your material.** Make sure your presentation is in logical and sequential order.
- **Know your options.** Remember, you're in "sales" not "management." You can't control the weather; you can only talk about it. A sudden thunderstorm may change your presentation. What is your plan B? Is there emergency lighting? Are there other media—such as a flip chart or white board—available in case of equipment malfunction?

• **Know your limits.** Don't "over-media." The Master didn't have video clips, but He got His point across, even when He was standing in a boat on the Sea of Galilee. Use media familiar to you when you communicate your message.

#### Tile Folder

## PowerPoint Tips

If you will be making a PowerPoint presentation, save the graphics for last. Write an outline first. Then roughly storyboard the presentation on several blank pieces of paper. Believe me, this is a huge time saver. Talk the storyboard out loud and make sure it flows and makes sense before preparing the PowerPoint slides. Do not get carried away with PowerPoint graphics, colors, or animation. Use them only if they enhance your message.

-Elise Bauer<sup>3</sup>

#### Tile Folder

#### Handouts

Have handouts ready and give them out at the appropriate time. Tell audience ahead of time that you will be giving out an outline of your presentation so that they will not waste time taking unnecessary notes during your presentation.<sup>4</sup>

# 6. Technique

Whether you're choosing bagels or making a speech, variety is a good thing. A dull speaker can turn an exciting subject into a marathon. Learn methods for keeping audience attention.

"Go to school" on some of your favorite speakers. What techniques do they use? How do they deliver their main thoughts? What introductions and conclusions do they use? If it works, work it!

There are some generic techniques that will help you make a positive impression on your audience—and help you get your message across:

• **Use gestures.** Sometimes the best way to get your point across is to point. In his prime, there wasn't a public speaker any better at using gestures than Dr. Billy Graham. His hands and arms were constantly in motion. They emphasized a point, expressed a geographical area, drew attention

to the Bible, and reached out to the audience. Gestures help your audience focus on your presentation. Statues don't communicate; people communicate. I remember watching traffic police in South Africa. I was amazed at how they communicated without saying a word. Just the motion of their arms gave direction.

- Move around. Body movement has the same effect as hand gestures. It can be used to emphasize a point, refocus the audience, and create a sense of intimacy. For example, moving toward the audience suggests a more personal communication. In fact, moving from the stage to the front row of the audience often helps to break down the "geographical wall" between the speaker and the listener.
- **Use media.** Often an application of truth can be conveyed secondhand. You've seen how ventriloquists can say things through a dummy that they could never say themselves. The puppet is communicating the message. PowerPoint slides or video or audio clips can be used to reinforce a point or make an application. Jesus was adept at using inanimate objects to teach eternal truths. Vineyards, lilies, mustard seeds, mountains, and trees were the media of His day—and worked effectively to teach spiritual truths.
- **Use the pause.** A "pregnant pause" can give birth to effective communication. Without "laboring" the subject, let me say that a pause during your presentation is a dynamic technique. First, it will give importance to what has just been said. Second, it will give the audience a chance to breathe and reflect. Third, it will give a sense of credibility and authority to the speaker.
- Vary the tone of voice. Actors communicate not only with body movement but also with the pitch and volume of their voice. Vary the tone of voice according to the message. Use louder volumes to emphasize a point. Use softer volumes to draw listener attention. Change the tone of your voice to avoid a "monotone" delivery.
- **Use quotes and illustrations.** I learned storytelling from the best. It was an art form where I grew up. Mountaineers in West Virginia didn't have cable TV; they *were* cable TV! The

drama, suspense, and humor in the stories I heard as a child made me fall in love with the art of using quotes and illustrations as bridges to reach people.

Every presentation is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. There will never be another moment like the one you will have when you speak. The audience will never be the same, the atmosphere will be totally different, and the weather will have changed. You have this moment. You are the steward of this time. So use it wisely and be prepared.

#### Tile Folder

## Meaningful Pauses

Leaving a moment of silence between sentences can be a powerful public speaking tool. Pausing after an important point or before answering a question will help to hold the audience's attention. A pause can also give you time to formulate your next statement.<sup>5</sup>

# Tile Folder

#### Gestures

Good gestures help underline what is said.

- Elbow movement gives strength to gestures.
- Wrist movement conveys precision.
- Hands contain power and control.6

## Tile Folder

## **Choosing Quotations**

Support your message with quotations and testimonials. Here are some tips:

- Make sure the person quoted has high visibility and credibility.
- Choose a quotation from someone who is politically "safe."
- Avoid trite or overused quotations.
- Keep the quotation in context—don't add or delete for convenience' sake.
- Choose quotations that are both factual and emotional.
- Choose quotations based on their strength, relevance, and impact.