

Preaching Clinic for Elders
First Reformed Presbyterian Church (PCA)
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Session #5 – Handling Details — Explanation, Illustration, Application

1. As a general rule, with each move you make in your sermon outline you make some explanation, illustration, and application and then transition into the next move. I repeat; this is a general principle. It is not a rigid rule. See sample outline. Briefly, with more discussion to follow:
 - a. Explanation – Go back to your text and give the explanation of the text needed in the sermon move.
 - b. Illustrative Material – Use illustrative material to shed light on the portion of the text with which you are dealing in the sermon move or to shed light on the point you are making in the sermon move.
 - c. Apply – Apply the point in your sermon text. Do not wait or the end of the sermon. Make application as you go along. Remember you also have a main application for the text as a whole imbedded in your homiletical point.
 - d. Transition – Move on to your next point.
 - e. Again, this is a general rule. You do so as you are able. Exclude all extraneous material, that which does not contribute to your Homiletical Point. You are putting together a module of thought including these elements. They need not be in a rigid order. Remember, “public speaking involves the designing of language in modules of meaning for group consciousness” (Buttrick, 35).
 - f. You know what explanations, illustrations, and applications you need to make and can make only after you have your outline in place.
2. The Directory for the Public Worship of God by the Westminster Assembly and approved in 1645 says, in part, with regard to preaching and the preacher:

“In analyzing his text, he is to regard more the order of the matter than of the words...”

“In raising doctrines from the text, his care ought to be, *First*, That the matter be the truth of God. *Secondly*, That it be a truth contained in or grounded on that text, that the hearers may discern how God teacheth it from thence. *Thirdly*, That he chiefly insist upon those doctrines which are principally intended, and make most for the edification of the hearers.”

“The doctrine is to be expressed in plain terms...”

“The arguments or reasons are to be solid, and, as much as may be, convincing. The illustrations, of what kind soever, ought to be full of light, and as such may convey the the truth into the hearer’s heart with spiritual delight.”

....

“He is not to rest in general doctrine..., but to bring it home to special use, by application to his hearers; which albeit it prove a work of great difficulty to himself, requiring much prudence, zeal, and meditation, and to the natural and corrupt man will be very unpleasant; yet he is to endeavor to perform it in such a manner, that his auditors may feel the word of God to be quick and powerful, and a discernor of the thoughts of the heart; and that , if any unbeliever be present, he may have the secrets of his heart made manifest, and give glory to God (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, Free Presbyterian Publications, 379-380).

3. Discard all details that do not contribute to each move within the sermon and do not contribute to your homiletical point. Preaching is discipline.

4. In each move, always go back to the text and explain the applicable portion of the text. Define terms and concepts. Explain connections within the text. Describe characters, scenes, reactions, expressions. Such explanation leads into illustration.

5. Illustrative Material — Use illustrative material to shed light on something. You bring an abstract concept into the lives of listeners by making them *see* and *feel* the concept. To do so you must come down the abstraction ladder. *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power* by Bryan Chapel is a helpful book.

- a. Use pithy colorful language that evokes images. Be as concrete as possible. Come down the "abstraction ladder."
- b. Illustrate concepts such as *good*, *conscience*, and love as inclination or attitude.
- c. Life-situation illustrative material is the most powerful and arresting. See #5 below.
- d. Think simile.
- e. Get your outline firmly in place. Then you know what illustrative material may be helpful to you. Illustrations do not drive your sermon. The Homiletical point does.

6. Illustrative Material [More] — Practice three things with regard to illustrative material:

- a. Frame the illustrative material – Set it off from preceding material using a reference to time, place, setting, situation, etc. Do not spend time introducing an illustration. Frame it.
- b. State the illustration – Give the illustrative material in as short a compass as possible to get across your point.
- c. Connect the Illustrative material – Specifically and succinctly state how the illustration connects to the point you are making. The simile may come into play more specifically at this point.
- d. A Colorado hike.... Preaching on Hosea in Vietnam....

6. Application – Under each point make an application however brief it may be.

- a. Do not assume people will simply and easily grasp the application. This again involves framing and connecting your application to your sermon move. Such application keeps the congregation engaged.
- b. Illustrative material may be necessary to give life to your application.
- c. Make direct application. Do not hedge. Do not walk around the perimeter. Speak directly to the congregation. Use second person.

7. Transition to the next move. If your outline has good logic and sequence, transitions are built in to your presentation. Such transitions may be a simple statement or perhaps a rhetorical question.