

**Dr. David Mathewson,
Preaching Old Testament Narratives,
Session 9, Study Guide:
Sermon Delivery**

Abstract:

In this lecture, **Dr. Stephen D. Mathewson** provides practical guidance on the effective **delivery of sermons** based on Old Testament narratives. He strongly advocates for **preaching without notes** to maintain direct eye contact and foster a conversational storytelling atmosphere. To achieve this, he suggests **internalizing the material** through repetitive rehearsal and prayer rather than rote memorization. The session also emphasizes the importance of **physicality**, including the strategic use of stage space, purposeful gestures, and the occasional use of props. Finally, Mathewson highlights **vocal variety** and the power of the pause as essential tools for conveying emotion and allowing the audience to process the message.

Briefing Document:

Sermon Delivery for Old Testament Narratives: Key Insights and Techniques

This briefing document synthesizes the principles of effective sermon delivery for Old Testament narratives based on the instructional sessions by Dr. Stephen D. Mathewson. It focuses on the transition from a written manuscript to a compelling, oral storytelling performance.

Executive Summary

The transition from sermon preparation to delivery requires a shift from the written word to an internalized narrative. The primary objective is to move away from a manuscript to facilitate "eyeball to eyeball" communication with the congregation. Key takeaways include:

- **Internalization over Memorization:** Preachers are encouraged to internalize the "major movements" of a story rather than memorizing a script to maintain a natural, conversational tone.
- **Intentional Presence:** Effective delivery utilizes vocal variety, strategic pausing, and exaggerated physical gestures to help the audience visualize the narrative.
- **Spatial Awareness:** The physical stage should be used as a "map" for the story, with movement being purposeful rather than repetitive.
- **Minimalist Aids:** Notes should be reduced to abbreviated outlines or "one-word triggers" in a Bible's margin to provide freedom and flexibility.

The Philosophy of Note-Free Preaching

A central theme of the source is the benefit of preaching with few or no notes. While a manuscript is essential for the thinking and organization phase, it can become a "security blanket" that hinders direct engagement with the audience.

The Power of Story Memory

The document posits that "a good sermon remembers itself." Just as an individual can recount a significant life event from a decade ago without notes, a preacher who has immersed themselves in a text will naturally retain the essential details.

- **The Goal:** To remember the "big major movements" of the narrative.
- **The Payoff:** Enormous freedom and the ability to maintain consistent eye contact.

Strategies for Reducing Reliance on Notes

- **Organize Well:** A logical structure is inherently easier to remember.
- **Internalize through "Meditation":** Based on Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1:2, meditation involves reading and going over the material repeatedly.
- **Prayer as Preparation:** Preachers should "pray through" their manuscripts, turning major moves into prayer requests for clarity and divine guidance.
- **The Rehearsal Process:** Practice in the actual worship space. Start by reading the manuscript, then set it aside to work through sections using only a brief outline.

Structural and Visual Elements of Delivery

Transitions

Transitions are described as being "worth their weight in gold." Because the preacher has spent hours in the text, they may forget the audience is less familiar with the narrative shifts. Transitions guide the listener from one idea or narrative segment to the next.

Bible and Technology Integration

If a preacher chooses to use their Bible or a tablet during delivery, the following techniques are recommended:

- Write the "big idea" at the top of the page.
- Use one-word triggers in the margins for illustrations or specific word studies.
- **Warning:** Avoid "packing the margins tighter than a German sausage," as this leads to confusion during the sermon.

First-Person Narratives

Preaching as a character (e.g., an elder in the city of Bethlehem for the Book of Ruth) can place the preacher in "storytelling mode."

- **Resource:** The book *It's All in How You Tell It* by Tori and Haddon Robinson is recommended for this style.
- **Costumes and Props:** While there is a theological precedent (Jeremiah and Ezekiel), costumes are generally discouraged as they may suggest "acting" rather than "preaching." Simple props—such as a sword, a banner, or broken pottery—can be effective if they help the audience visualize the scene without becoming a distraction.

Physical and Vocal Dynamics

Use of the Stage and Pulpit

The physical environment should be free from clutter to allow for movement.

- **The "Coward's Castle":** The source cites Charles Spurgeon and Ray Steadman in suggesting that a pulpit can sometimes act as a barrier. Moving in front of the pulpit can improve communication.
- **Purposeful Movement:** Preachers should avoid pacing. Movement should be from "Point A to Point B," remaining stationary once the destination is reached.
- **Spatial Mapping:** The stage can be used to represent locations (e.g., Moab on one side, Israel on the other) or characters in a dialogue. Preachers must remember that the congregation sees the "map" backward.

Vocal Variety and Silence

Vocal tools are essential for conveying the emotion of the characters and the narrator's key statements.

- **The Three Variables:**
 1. **Pitch:** Varying between higher and lower tones.
 2. **Volume:** Shifting between loud and soft (noting that soft speech must still be projected to the back row).
 3. **Rate:** Speeding up or slowing down for effect.
- **The Power of the Pause:** Silence allows the audience to "take an emotional breath" and process the story. A well-placed pause of a few seconds before a key line can be more powerful than verbal language.

Gestures and Eye Contact

- **Exaggeration:** Communicators often feel they are more dramatic than they actually appear. Gestures and vocal contrasts should be slightly exaggerated to ensure they register with the audience.
- **Storytelling Gestures:** Narratives lend themselves to physical actions, such as "tossing wheat," "drawing a bowstring," or "shielding the sun."
- **Eye Contact:** Haddon Robinson's principle is emphasized: a congregation will rarely listen intently to a speaker who does not look at them. Preachers should look individuals in the eye rather than looking over their heads.

Element	Technique	Objective
Vocal	Vary pitch, volume, and rate	Convey character emotion
Physical	Purposeful mapping of the stage	Enhance visual communication
Silence	Strategic two-second pauses	Provide "emotional breath" for listeners
Gestures	Large, exaggerated actions	Aid audience visualization
Focus	Direct eye contact	Ensure listener engagement

Conclusion

The goal of sermon delivery is for the Old Testament story to "arrive at its destination." By prioritizing internalization, purposeful movement, and vocal variety, the preacher ensures that the audience is not only "wowed" by the story but also clearly receives the intended message.

Study Guide:

Study Guide: Sermon Delivery in Old Testament Narratives

This study guide focuses on the principles and techniques of sermon delivery as presented by Dr. Stephen D. Mathewson. It explores the transition from a polished manuscript to the actual presentation, emphasizing the importance of storytelling, internalization, and physical communication to effectively convey the message of Old Testament narrative texts.

Part 1: Short-Answer Quiz

Instructions: Answer the following ten questions in 2–3 sentences, based on the principles provided in the source context.

1. What is the primary reason Dr. Mathewson encourages preachers to leave their manuscripts or extensive notes behind?

2. How does the concept "a good sermon remembers itself" influence sermon preparation?
 3. What is the distinction between internalizing a sermon and memorizing a manuscript?
 4. According to the text, what role does prayer play in the manuscript development process?
 5. How can a preacher use their Bible as a tool for delivery without relying on a full manuscript?
 6. What are the theological and practical considerations regarding the use of costumes in first-person narrative preaching?
 7. What is the "less is more" philosophy regarding the use of props, and what is the potential risk of using them?
 8. Describe the recommended approach to physical movement on the stage or platform.
 9. What are the three specific elements of vocal variety that a storyteller should utilize?
 10. Why is the "language of silence" through pausing considered a powerful tool for communication?
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Part 2: Quiz Answer Key

1. The primary reason to leave notes behind is to facilitate "eyeball to eyeball" preaching, which fosters a deeper connection with the audience. Manuscripts can become a "security blanket" that prevents a preacher from being fully engaged and conversational with their listeners.
2. This concept suggests that if a sermon is well-organized and structured around major movements, the details will naturally follow. Preachers should focus on remembering the big transitions and narrative flow rather than stressing over every specific word or detail.

3. Internalization involves going over the material repeatedly to understand the "big idea" and major moves so they come out naturally and conversationally. Memorization is discouraged because it often results in a delivery that feels artificial or stiff, which hinders effective storytelling.
4. Preachers are encouraged to turn the major moves of the sermon into prayer requests, asking for clarity and guidance in communication. Prayer is seen as a vital substitute for a lack of study, ensuring that the preacher is spiritually prepared to deliver the message.
5. A preacher can write the "big idea" at the top of the Bible page and use one-word "triggers" or an abbreviated outline in the margins. These triggers serve as mental cues for specific illustrations or words without cluttering the page or causing confusion.
6. Theologically, figures like Jeremiah and Ezekiel used props and costumes, suggesting there is no biblical prohibition against them. Practically, however, costumes may make a preacher look like they are "acting" rather than preaching, potentially distracting from the stance of a preacher.
7. While props like a sword or a piece of pottery can help an audience visualize a scene, they can also take on a "life of their own." The risk is that the audience may remember a "cool prop" while completely forgetting the actual message of the sermon.
8. Preachers should avoid pacing back and forth, which is visually distracting. Instead, they should use "designated spots" to represent different locations (like Israel vs. Moab) or different characters (like Saul vs. Samuel) to help the audience visualize the narrative's geography and dialogue.
9. Vocal variety consists of varying the pitch (higher or lower), the volume (louder or softer), and the rate (faster or slower). These elements should be used in combination to convey the specific emotions of characters or the importance of key narrator statements.
10. Pausing allows the audience to take an "emotional breath" and process what has just been said. It can be used strategically to accent a key line or to give listeners time to participate and think through the story.

Part 3: Essay Questions

Instructions: The following questions are designed for deeper reflection and discussion. Responses should synthesize multiple concepts from the source context.

1. Compare and contrast the communication advantages of "eyeball to eyeball" preaching with the risks associated with the "coward's castle" (the pulpit).
2. Analyze the effectiveness of first-person narrative preaching. How does assuming the role of a biblical character change the preacher's "storytelling mode," and what are the specific pitfalls to avoid?
3. Discuss the importance of transitions in narrative preaching. Why are they described as being "worth their weight in gold" for an audience that hasn't spent hours studying the text?
4. Evaluate the use of physical gestures in sermon delivery. How can a preacher use their body to help an audience "visualize" scenes like a threshing floor or a battle, and why must these gestures be exaggerated?
5. Explain the concept of the "audience's perspective" regarding stage movement and maps. Why must a preacher remember that the congregation sees everything backward?

Part 4: Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
Big Idea	The central theme or primary message of a passage, often written at the top of a preacher's Bible page as a guiding anchor.
Coward's Castle	A colloquial term (attributed to Charles Spurgeon) for a pulpit, suggesting it can act as a barrier that hides the preacher from the congregation.
Designated Spots	Specific areas on the stage assigned to represent different locations or characters to provide a visual map for the audience.

Eyeball to Eyeball	A style of preaching characterized by direct eye contact and conversational engagement with the listeners, facilitated by minimal or no notes.
First-Person Narrative Sermon	A sermon delivered from the perspective of a character within the biblical text to enhance storytelling.
Internalization	The process of deeply absorbing the sermon material and structure through repetition and meditation rather than rote memorization.
Meditate	Derived from biblical contexts (Joshua 1:8, Psalm 1:2), meaning to read or go over something repeatedly to internalize its meaning.
Pitch	The highness or lowness of a preacher's voice, used as part of vocal variety to convey emotion.
Rate	The speed at which a preacher speaks; varying the rate helps maintain audience interest and emphasizes specific points.
Transitions	Critical verbal bridges used to guide listeners from one idea or narrative movement to the next, helping them follow the story's flow.
Triggers	One-word notes or brief cues written in the margins of a Bible to remind the preacher of specific points, illustrations, or words.
Vocal Variety	The practice of varying pitch, volume, and rate to keep the delivery engaging and to reflect the narrative's emotional shifts.