

Study Guide

Magnify Your Calling-13 Steps to Better Public Speaking

Be honest. How many times have you heard a church member say something to the effect, “I would like to invite this person to church, but I’m afraid who might be preaching?” Have you ever looked around the congregation during a sermon and noticed someone, whether they be young, middle-aged, or seasoned, with their eyes closed (I’m sure they’re just resting their eyes), staring at their phone, blanked faced, yawning, staring at the floor with their head in their hands, or repeatedly checking the time? Perhaps you have examined the congregation during a joint service or two and, after a few quick calculations, figured the average age of the room is 55 or over. Have you ever thought to yourself during the course of a sermon, “What is this person even talking about,” “I hope the new people aren’t paying attention to this,” or even, “I wish this person would stop talking?”

If the answer to anyone of these questions is yes, then you might be a victim of a chronic ailment in the Church. Namely, poor public presentation, or PPP for short. Now, while I say this somewhat in jest, PPP is no laughing matter. It is real, and it’s a real hinderance to the worship and growth of the Church. Although preaching is only a small fraction of a priesthood member’s responsibility, it represents a vast majority of what the average member might call “church” or “worship.” Think about it. How do most branches within the Restoration worship? I would guess that it consists of two prayers, two hymns, two pieces of special music, an offertory, a call to worship, and a sermon. Or in other words, a hymn sandwich. Now let me ask you this, what part of that hymn sandwich takes up most of the service? The answer of course is the sermon. Thus, when most members hear or use the word “church,” “worship,” or “service,” they immediately think of “preaching.”

Right or wrong, most of us view the words sermon and church as synonyms, which means if the Church is slowly dying, there’s a good chance that our preaching is playing a large role in it’s demise. While it’s important that members develop their own personal relationship with Jesus Christ and become intimately acquainted with the Holy Spirit, most will struggle to do this on their own, or to even plug themselves into the Church, without a positive worship experience that is both encouraging and empowering. People come to things that they enjoy. They engage themselves when they see value. I implore you to examine your own congregation, or even congregations that you’ve been a part of in the past. Is your congregation growing or shrinking? Is it getting younger or older? If it’s growing and getting younger, is it because you’ve seen an influx of newly baptized adult members, or is it because families are leaving one branch to join another? These are important questions to consider. They help us to see the extent of our PPP problem.

It’s true that we need more of the Holy Spirit in our services, but how would you suggest that we accomplish this? Perhaps we just need to pray, fast, and study more. Maybe the members need to exercise greater faith. Possibly we need to pursue holiness and humility to a greater extent than we have in the past. Perhaps we need to love God more, and to love our brothers and sisters as Christ loves us. These suggestions are not wrong. We should do all these things and more, but let me ask you a question. “How do you expect members to do that if they’re not being spiritually fed in church?”

How do you expect to spiritually feed the members if our classes and sermons are boring, don’t make sense, don’t engage, don’t encourage, don’t exhort, don’t have anything to do with what’s going on in their lives, don’t inspire, etc.? Yes, we need the Holy Spirit, but we need to empower the priesthood to live the kind of life that will enable them to walk in the Spirit and to testify of the Lord Jesus Christ with power and authority.

Study Guide

Why do you think people like King Benjamin, Alma, and the sons of Mosiah were able to give such awe-inspiring sermons? It's because "they had the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation, and when they taught, they taught with power and authority, even as with the power and authority of God" (Alma 12:5). How did they do this? It's because they lived the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When they spoke, God carried their words through the Spirit into the hearts of the people [read 2 Nephi 15:1]. For example, read how the people responded to King Benjamin's message from Mosiah 2:1-6:

¹)And now, it came to pass that when King Benjamin had made an end of speaking the words which had been delivered unto him by the angel of the Lord, that he cast his eyes round about on the multitude, and behold they had fallen to the earth, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them; ²)And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth. ³)And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying, O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ, that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified: ⁴)For we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things, who shall come down among the children of men.

⁵)And it came to pass that after they had spoken these words, the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, ⁶)Having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ who should come, according to the words which King Benjamin had spoken unto them.

I hope you see that PPP is a huge issue, and one that directly impacts the spiritual welfare of the saints. It's not something that we can afford to ignore any longer. This Church will die if we don't do something, and what could have a greater impact in the lives of the members than improving our public speaking? Consider this. "When can you influence more people, for good or for bad, than when you're preaching or teaching a large body of saints?" Sermons make up a large proportion of our worship, which means it has an oversized effect on the church. However, if PPP has had a large negative impact on the Church, then that means that the opposite is also true. Positive public speaking could open the door for the Spirit to work in a mighty way in the lives of our people, just as it did for King Benjamin.

Notice that I didn't say astounding, flawless, or superb public speaking. I said *positive* public speaking. Not everyone needs to speak like Arthur Oakman, Henry Schaeffer, or Al Pelletier. We just need to improve upon where we are today, but before we go any further, I don't want anyone to misunderstand me. I know that there is always at least one person in the congregation that stands up and says quite passionately, "We can't do anything without God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit!" Believe me, I know that. I'm not suggesting that we can just make things happen on our own. We need to have the Holy Spirit in order to accomplish anything of worth, but if we can make small changes in the way that we preach or teach by improving our preparation, delivery, and follow-through, I know that God will open the door for His Spirit to work through us in a mighty way.

In this guide, we are going to focus on the three things mentioned in the paragraph above. Namely, (1) how to prepare for a class or sermon, (2) how to improve our delivery, and (3) how to follow-through afterward so that we can continue to progress in our ministry.

Unit 1: Preparation

When most people hear the word class or sermon, they might immediately think of the delivery, but it's critical for us to understand that public speaking first begins with preparation. How could the Lord call the people to come to the marriage unless He first made it ready (Matthew 22:1-4)? The same principle applies to us. How can we call

Study Guide

the people to come to Jesus Christ unless we have done so ourselves? If we are to assist and guide our people to a closer walk with God, then we must have a personal relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Thus, we're going to take a look at five simple steps that will prepare us for a better, more positive, public speaking experience. An experience that will have the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of our people through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Before we start however, it's important to note that these steps don't need to be done in any particular order. While they do follow a natural progression, they're meant to be more of a guideline rather than a hard-fast rule. With that being said, let's dive in!

Step 1. Living your Calling

I've often been amazed, and even shocked, when reading Apostle Paul's letters as he comes across so boldly and so forward. He appears so keen to expound upon his experiences and character traits that he almost seems prideful. For example, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, saying, "But by the grace of God I am what I am; and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; for I labored more abundantly than they all [meaning all of the apostles], yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10). Paul even wrote in that same letter, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Wow, what a thing to say. How would you feel if a priesthood member stood up at the pulpit today and declared to the people, "You ought to follow me, and live as I do?" Or perhaps, "My life is an example for you all to follow." Of course, Paul wasn't suggesting that people should literally follow him, but that they should follow him inasmuch as he followed Christ, but still, that's a very bold thing to say! However, while this might come across to us as audacious, I'm not so sure that it did to the people in Paul's day. Why? Namely because Paul truly followed Christ. He counted everything "but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having my own righteousness," (Philippians 3:8-9).

Now, contrast Paul's example with Corianton, who, when traveling with Alma II and others to share the Gospel with the Zoramites, left his ministry in order to chase after the harlot Isabel. Alma II later tells his son, "Behold, O my son, how great iniquity ye brought upon the Zoramites: for when they saw your conduct, they would not believe in my words...Therefore I command you, my son, in the fear of God, that you refrain from your iniquities; that ye turn to the Lord with all your mind, might and strength; that ye lead away the hearts of no more, to do wickedly;" (Alma 19:17 and 19). While this is obviously an extreme example, I believe it solidifies what I'm trying to say. If we desire to be effective in our public speaking, then we must live the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our own lives and examine ourselves.

Most of us already know that we need to live out our calling as priesthood. In fact, there are several scriptures that tell us just that, such as Jacob 1:18-20, Sec 83:21a, and Ezekiel 34 just to name a few, but the examples of Paul and Corianton above help us to see why we should do so. Do we want to have the effectiveness of Paul or of the effectiveness Corianton? If it's Paul, then we need to strive to follow Christ so that the Lord can work through us and so that others can follow that example.

Step 2. Spend Time with God

I know what you're thinking. After reading the section above, you probably thought something to the effect, "Okay, those are some great points, and I definitely agree, but I wish he would've told me how exactly to strive to follow Christ." Ironically, this is a pitfall that we as priesthood often fall into, meaning that we might give a nice message

Study Guide

about why people should or shouldn't do something, or even a message that instructs them about who God is, but then we fail to tell the people HOW to do it or HOW to implement it into their life. Well, I would like to break that mold by pointing to step number two in our process of preparation, which is to spend time with God in prayer, fasting, and study.

Study, prayer, and fasting are essential in our walk with Jesus Christ, as well as for our life in His Kingdom. Through study we learn about God, through prayer we commune with God, and through fasting we come to know God. These three principles are not merely good habits of behavior, but they are the keys to the Spirit of Revelation and the Spirit of Prophecy [read Alma 12:1-5]. If you would like a little more direction on these three principles then I would point you to the guide on studying, prayer, and fasting located in the footnotes.¹ In the interim, I would like to point out one of the defining flaws to PPP, which is that we don't have much to say, but we still take more than 30-minutes to say it.

Classes and sermons are not a place for us to share what we "think" or "feel" might be interesting for others to hear. They are not a placeholder for us to just fill the time. They are a place for ministry. A time for us to assist the spiritual welfare of our people. A people who are broken and hurting, a people who long for the Spirit, even if they don't always recognize it themselves. Therefore, instead of asking something like, "What could I share," when provided the opportunity to preach or to teach, ask in it's place, "What is on God's heart?" "What does God want to say to the people?" "What does God want the people to learn?" In order to find the answers to these questions, one must spend time with God. I know for me personally, if I'm not in God's word every day, and if I'm not participating in administrations, cottage meetings, classes, services, etc., then I will not have the inspiration of the Holy Spirit necessary to bring the message that God wants me to share.

Tip

As you spend time in study, prayer, and fasting, be sure to write down the things that God teaches you through His Spirit, either on your phone, computer, or a piece of paper (whatever is easiest for you). I personally enjoy using applications like Dropbox, Google Drive, or Microsoft's OneDrive, as they allow me to basically access my inspired writings from anywhere. Inspired writings form a good foundation for a passionate message because you had to put forth effort to acquire them.

Step 3. Organize your Thoughts

If I were to diagnose our PPP issue, I would say that one of the biggest underlying causes is the fact that our classes and sermons don't always flow well. If the congregation is expending all of their brain power trying to figure out what exactly we are trying to say, then they will most likely tune us out altogether. For example, have you ever sat through a sermon where the speaker tried to give three or four different jumbled messages? Do you remember anything from those sorts of messages? Were you able to engage in the worship? Did you feel distracted or disoriented? Did you feel nothing at all? The truth is it doesn't matter how much of the Spirit we experience during our preparation, if our thoughts aren't organized during our delivery, then the end result will be PPP.

If you've followed the first two steps, then I imagine by now God has given you some direction. Once you have that direction, it's time to flesh out your thoughts and start to organize them in a way that makes sense. A positive public speaking experience will have a definite beginning, middle, and end. Moreover, each segment will include a transition to the next one. In other words, if you started with point A and were trying to get to point C, would a reasonable person be able to follow your thought pattern without fully developing point B? We can get into trouble

¹ Study, Prayer, and Fasting

Study Guide

when we either focus on just one or two of the segments, when we neglect the transitions, or when we do both. In order to overcome these issues, I recommend sitting down and asking God what are the main points that He wants the people to come away with by the time your class or sermon are over. To do this, I encourage you to follow the rule of three.

Decades of research have found that the human mind is only capable of remembering three to seven items in short-term or “working” memory.² People think in patterns, and three is the lowest number of units that can establish a pattern. The rule of three makes a class or sermon more effective because the people are not only more likely to recall the message, but they are also more likely to apply it in their lives. We can find the rule of three throughout the scriptures, just think about it, “study, prayer, and fasting,” “faith, hope, and charity,” “the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,” etc. The rule of three offers structure, simplification, and persuasion to act. So, when you’re praying about what the primary takeaways of your message are, keep it simple and stick to three.

Tip

Ultimately as priesthood, we are called to pastor, warn, expound, exhort, preach, teach, and invite all to come to Christ [read Section 17:8-11]. To be truly effective in our ministry, we must learn how to organize our thoughts in such a way that we can both study a specific topic in scripture, but also present it effectively to others. The following are a few questions you can use to learn about a specific topic and then build a class, study, or sermon from what you learn.

1. **What is it?** Define and or explain the topic or issue at hand.
2. **Why does it matter?** Why should people care, how does it impact them and the Kingdom?
3. **How can it be applied?** How might someone accomplish this in practical terms?

One thing that has always helped me during my preparation, is to go for a walk and use that time to speak with God as if He were right next to me. Essentially, I give God my sermon while simultaneously allowing Him to adjust and shape my thoughts. Although this particular exercise might not work for everyone, I do recommend that you write down the thoughts that God gives you in an outline format. This will allow you to step back and see the entire picture of your message, from beginning to end.

From here, begin to order your thoughts in a manner that allows the message to flow freely. Be careful however, don’t fall into the trap of writing down every single word. I used to type out my entire sermons when I first started preaching. While I often would feel the Spirit in my preparation, I found that more often than not, I became bound to what I wrote down. I was so afraid that I wouldn’t say every single point that I would actually memorize my sermons, so that when I delivered them, I sounded very mechanical and dry. It’s important to write down some of the thoughts, but we don’t want to go so overboard that we prevent the Holy Ghost from being able to work with us. Both as we prepare and as we ultimately deliver the message.

Step 4. Infuse Stories

The most powerful person in the world is a storyteller. If you don’t believe me, then just look to Jesus. What was Jesus’ primary method of preaching and teaching? It was parables, or in other words, stories. Jesus was quite literally a master at telling stories, and He told a lot of them. Jesus told more than sixty parables. Why? Because stories impact us. They touch our hearts, stimulate our minds, and inspire us to respond. Stories are memorable, they facilitate understanding because they make abstract ideas more relatable and concrete. If a listener cannot

² Carmine Gallo, *The Storyteller’s Secret*, Pg. 114

Study Guide

relate to an idea or is not enticed to appreciate the message, then it will be very difficult for them to remember the concept and thereby unlikely to act on the information.³

Consider the author of the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Matthew and John were the only ones of the four to witness Jesus's ministry for themselves, and even then, they didn't start writing their gospel accounts until decades after the events took place. How do you think these men were able to remember and depict the life and ministry of Jesus Christ? The answer is simple, it's because Jesus told a lot of stories, and stories stay within our memory, especially when they are infused with the power of the Holy Ghost. I still remember sermons that I heard years ago because they were coupled with powerful stories. What about you? Are there any sermons that stand out to you? Why? Was there a story involved? My hunch is absolutely!

Stories don't just help us to remember things, they also have a way of softening our hearts and compelling us to act. Take for example King David and the prophet Nathan. When David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then murdered her husband, Uriah, by sending him to the frontlines of a dangerous battle in order to cover up his affair, Nathan didn't barge in and tell David that he was a wicked man. Instead, Nathan used a story concerning a rich man and a poor man and how the rich man took from the poor man's flock even though he already had a large flock himself. David was so furious after hearing the story that he demanded Nathan tell him who the rich man was so that he could punch him. To which Nathan so famously replied, "Thou art the man" (2 Samuel 12:7). David was so convicted by Nathan's story that he exclaimed, "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Samuel 12:13). He went on to chronicle his sin and his sincere desire to repent in one of the most beautiful passages of scripture available to us today, Psalms 51.

I hope you see by now how critical it is to fuse stories into our classes and sermons. Peter Guber, CEO of Mandalay Entertainment Group, said one time, "Listeners are rarely hooked if they don't sense some compelling challenge in the beginning. They won't stay engaged if they're not excited by the struggle in the middle. And they won't remember or act on the story unless they feel galvanized by its final resolution." Just as Jesus taught the apostles and as Nathan convicted David, we too can inspire our people to follow Christ and encourage them seek first His Kingdom. We simply need to include stories and testimonies in our messages.

Tip

If you've ever listened to Arthur Oakman, you might have thought, "Wow, now that is the ministry of an apostle! What powerful testimonies!" However, if you pay attention to his sermons, you will notice that brother Oakman didn't just use his own testimonies, he often used the testimonies of others. I imagine that there are some priesthood members who feel that they don't have many stories or testimonies to share, and if that is you, that's perfectly okay. While it's good to share your own experiences, it's important to realize that you don't have to just use your own. I encourage you to collect the testimonies of others, with their permission of course, as well as stories from history and from the scriptures.

When it comes to telling a story, it's good to follow the classic storytelling structure, which follows a definitive arc. It begins with an action, event, or fact, then moves into a transformation, and concludes with a lesson learned that can help others draw closer to Jesus Christ. Simply put, the structure is (1) trigger event, (2) transformation, (3) lesson learned. Try to build your stories and testimonies with this arc in mind so that you can be the most effective. I'm sure we've all been to a prayer service where someone stood up and then proceeded to give a 15-minute testimony that could have been said in just a few minutes. This is often because they were trying to share every

³ *The Storyteller's Secret*, pg. 186.

Study Guide

detail of their experience. While those details are important for them, they are not necessary for everyone to hear. In fact, they unfortunately take away from the message. If we don't structure our testimonies, then people will most likely tune us out and thereby miss the opportunity to receive ministry.

Step 5. Meditate

As you seek to live your calling as a priesthood member and as you spend time with God, you will find the Lord directing you in what He wants you to share with the people. He will give you thoughts, testimonies, and stories. After you flesh out these leadings and put them down on paper (or perhaps on a phone or computer), the final step in the process of preparation is to meditate upon your class or sermon up until the day you give it. Meditation is critical in the process for it allows us to invite the Holy Spirit into our heart, mind, and soul so that God can guide, teach, purify, and transform us from within.⁴ Meditation has a way of bringing us into harmony with God so that we can resonate with His divine love.

The book of Matthew records at least five separate occasions where Jesus went up to a mountain to be apart from the world. To be alone. I imagine He spent this time in prayer, fasting, and meditation so that He could draw strength from His Heavenly Father. As we read in Psalms, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he *meditate* day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper" (Psalms 1:1-3).

Meditation doesn't just prosper us, it helps others as well. In Paul's first letter to Timothy, he counsels Timothy to be example to the body of Christ in word, life, charity, spirit, faith, and purity. Paul admonishes him to give heed to reading, exhortation, and doctrine, and to remember the gift of priesthood. Finally, Paul writes, "*Meditate* upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that they profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, *and them that hear thee*" (1 Timothy 4:15-16). God is inviting us to meditate upon our calling as priesthood, which is to stand in the stead of Christ and to minister to His children. Meditation will not only prosper us, but as Paul wrote, "to them that hear thee."

Again, you might be thinking after reading these two passages of scripture, "Okay, I get it. I know meditation is important. But how do I do it?" The answer is quite simple, we only have to look to the scientific principle of resonance to find the answer. Resonance is a phenomenon where the vibration of an external force causes a second object of resonant frequency to oscillate at a higher amplitude. For example, if you struck one tuning fork and brought it close to a second one of the same frequency, the second tuning fork will start to resonate. Three things must happen however in order for this phenomenon to take place. First, the tuning forks must be in close proximity to one another. Second, the second tuning fork must be still. If it is already vibrating before the first tuning fork comes close to it, then it will not resonate. Third, the second tuning fork must have the same exact frequency as the first, or again, it will not resonate.

These same three steps work with in our relationship with God. If you desire to meditate upon God that you might receive His Spirit and be transformed, then you must first draw near to Him through prayer, study, fasting, singing, even just thinking upon Him. Next, you must take time to be still. Stillness might not always mean the same for everyone, but in general, find a place where you can be alone with God, just as Jesus did when He went up into the mountain. Finally, seek to attune yourself with God through repentance and yielding your heart to God. Allow Him

⁴ <https://www.gotquestions.org/meditate-on-Gods-Word.html>

Study Guide

to speak into your heart, mind, and soul. Don't just hear His voice, but listen and hearken. If we will do these three simple steps, then we too will resonate with the power of God, and as we do so the Lord will fine tune our class or sermon.

Tip

I used to go down to a small branch in Tennessee with a group of saints from Independence to provide ministry twice a year. I very clearly remember one service in particular, but not necessarily in a good way. I was asked to give a couple sermons that time, and after one of them I asked a dear sister what she thought of the message. Up until this point, everyone had told me good things about the sermon, but I knew that this sister, would tell me her honest opinion. She said, "There was too much Andrew." Her words struck chord within me as soon as she said it. I knew instantly that she was right. I was polished and I spoke well, but I didn't allow God to work in me. It was all Andrew. I was devastated by the truth of her short and simple statement. From that moment forward, I decided that I would always pray leading up to a class, sermon, or service that I wouldn't show up, but that God would show up instead. I would encourage you to do the same. Pray that you don't show up, but that God will show up in your place.

Second, be careful not to over practice your sermon. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that you need to remember every single thing that you learned while preparing for your sermon. Sometimes, God gives you insights that are only meant for you. You don't need to share everything that you learn. God knows what you need to say in that specific moment, for that specific congregation that has gathered on that specific day. Don't worry so much about what words you should use or how you should say every line. You've already done a lot of preparation, and you are continuing to meditate upon the service.

I know it can be scary sometimes, but don't over practice or over plan. Allow God some space to move within you in the very moment of delivery. For example, have you ever been a part of a service where the preacher gave a smooth and yet very mechanical sermon? It's because they either memorized their sermon or spent so much time going over it, that all their passion was removed from the message. They basically sucked the Spirit right out of their delivery. Don't try to remember everything. Trust that God loves you, that He called you, and that He won't abandon you in the moment you need Him most. God will provide!

Unit 2: Delivery

One of the biggest public speaking mistakes I've ever made was when I tried to copy Arthur Oakman. I loved listening to his old sermons. I would listen to them over and over again. And why wouldn't I? He spoke with such confidence, power, and authority. He spoke *to* the people, not *at* the people. He spoke without notes. He spoke without filling his 60-minute sermons with 55-minutes of scripture reading. There is so much that I admired about his sermons, and though I have never met the man, Oakman was my mentor, and I wanted to imitate his preaching style. The problem was, as I'm sure you have already noticed, I wasn't Arthur Oakman. No one is. When you try to copy someone, it has a tendency to come across as empty and unauthentic. Have you ever tried to copy someone? I don't recommend it.

While it's good to admire someone's style and try to incorporate some of it into your own, it's a really bad idea to try and be like them when you speak. We each need to find our own style of speaking that mixes well with our personalities and gifts. God has made each of us for a unique purpose and that purpose isn't to be like another man, it's to be like Jesus Christ. The next five steps are not meant to dictate a particular style of preaching or

Study Guide

teaching. They're meant to provide a few simple ways that we can grow in our ability to deliver the message that God has placed on our heart.

I'm sure that we have all witnessed sermons where the idea and preparation behind them were excellent, but because the delivery was poor, the people didn't listen to what the preacher had to say, which is a real shame. Instead, it turned into another PPP experience. Yes, we absolutely need the Holy Spirit, but how can we foster an environment where the people can really be open to the Spirit if they are too busy being hung up on how the message was delivered. Have you ever sat in on a class where you couldn't hear a word the teacher said because you were so distracted by how poor their delivery was? I imagine most of us would say yes.

We all have room to improve, just look at Enoch. When God first called Enoch, he couldn't speak very well. However, God saw past Enoch's limitations. He saw his future, not his past or present. The Lord knew that Enoch would one day be known as "a wild man" (Genesis 6:40) due to his powerful preaching, and one who would change the course of rivers and cause the earth to tremble. Perhaps we can't speak like Enoch, Nephi, Moroni, Joseph Smith, or even Arthur Oakman, but we can all speak better! Let's dive in.

Step 6. The Secret Power of Stories

We've done all our preparation. Now it's time for the big event, the delivery. Let's kick this off by revisiting the concept of stories. As we've already discussed, stories and testimonies are powerful. They help engage and inspire the congregation. However, there is another huge benefit to stories that we haven't mentioned yet. Sort of like a secret power. Stories are powerful because you don't need notes in order to deliver them. You can share them with passion, especially if it's a personal experience or a story that really motivates you. The greatest public speaking experiences are the ones where the speaker isn't reading their message, and they aren't just reading a bunch of scripture either.

Let's take Jesus and Apostle Paul for example. Do you think Jesus had pages of notes with Him during the sermon on the mount, or when He was engaging with the Pharisees and Sadducees, or even when He was teaching His disciples? Do you think He read scripture after scripture after scripture after scripture to them? Do you think Paul used notes when he was arrested by Roman soldiers in Jerusalem and then was allowed to preach to the mob on top of the stairs leading into the castle? Do you think he had a scripture reading followed by a piece of special music? Of course not! Jesus, Paul, and countless others we read about in the scriptures rarely, if ever, had their sermon written out. They spoke as they were moved by the power of the Holy Ghost (read Section 68:1c), and while I know they *quoted* from scripture, they rarely, if ever, read directly from the scriptures. Sure, some of that was natural talent, but a lot of it was learned over the course of time and practice.

I once analyzed and studied every sermon that I could find in the Book of Mormon. I defined a sermon as "a public speech made to an assembly of people." Using this definition, I was able to find twenty-five distinct sermons and then break them down by asking the same ten questions. Almost every single one of them began with some sort of background on who the speaker was, and while many would summarize concepts found in the scriptures, none of them actually read scripture during their message. I strongly recommend that we do the same.

Tip

Our people are coming to church to hear the bread of life opened unto them. They're coming to hear about the greatness of God, His promises, His desire and love for us, and how we can best love Him back. They're coming to find answers. They're coming to find ministry. Any one of us can go and read the scriptures on our own time. That's not why the people are coming to the service. They want to hear from you. They want to glean from your

Study Guide

experiences, testimonies, and insight. Remember, a sermon doesn't have to be full of scripture readings in order to be full of the scriptures. The principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ should be the foundation for everything we say. But the way we say, and the way we deliver it, it makes all the difference. I would refrain from reading more than three scripture passages in a single-sermon. If you have more than that that you want to share, then summarize the others. Only read the most important ones.

However, I would also caution you on filling all your time with just stories, which connects back to the third step in the preparation process. Every story that you use needs to flow together with the main objective of your message that God has led you to. Don't give several mini-sermons just because you found a couple different stories that you liked and you weren't sure which one to eliminate. This will only confuse, distract, and ultimately frustrate the congregation, as they won't be able to follow your thought pattern.

Step 7. Connect, Inspire, Transform

Inspiration is critical in a positive public speaking experience, without it, there's very little point to speak at all. Paul quipped that the world viewed preaching as foolishness, and yet he never stopped preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:17-25). Why? Because what better way is there to share the good news than to preach the Gospel to a large body of people? Preaching is only foolishness when the people aren't inspired to draw closer to God and Jesus Christ. So how do we inspire the people? The answer is twofold, the preacher needs to connect with the people, and the people need to connect with what the preacher is saying (Section 50:5-6).

As we mentioned previously, if a person cannot relate or connect to the message, then it will be very difficult for them to engage with the speaker and unlikely for them to put the message into action. How then do we connect with the congregation? We start by being authentic and vulnerable with them. If we're not willing to share anything about ourselves, I doubt the people will really become engaged. Inspiring speakers tell personal stories, especially ones of tremendous hardship, to get the congregation involved. They'll pour their hearts out and touch on the more difficult moments in their life because they know people can relate to that. Grab the congregation's attention by sharing a personal experience, or one that most people can relate to in their daily lives, then tell a story around that struggle that will ultimately teach them how to conquer it through Christ. This will inspire the people to listen, motivate them to remember the message, and encourage them to transform their lives.

Tip

The best messages contain some sort of redemption story. Don't be afraid to share how Christ has redeemed you in your own life. Make it easy for the people to connect with what you're saying. If you start off with something too disconnected from their daily lives, they'll miss your message. Consider Aristotle's three keys of persuasion: emotion, logic, and character. Most speakers believe they can win their listeners by using logic alone (i.e., data, facts, figures, scriptures) and ignoring the emotional aspect (i.e., stories). However, if you want to connect with the people then you need to build trust with them. You need to build a deeper relationship with them. Once you've connected with the people, then you can preach, teach, expound, and exhort them to follow Christ.

Lastly, don't be monotone in your message. Inspiring speakers are passionate about the content they share. Passion leads to energy, enthusiasm, and excitement. Without these things it becomes very difficult to hold the people's attention. Moreover, it's important to understand that monotone doesn't just refer to the inflexion in our voice, it also refers to Aristotle's three keys of persuasion. In other words, don't deliver a class or sermon that only focuses on logic or emotion, you need to include all three to some extent to keep the people listening and engaged. If possible, shoot for 65% emotion, 25% logic, and 10% character.

Study Guide

Step 8. Body Language and Eye Contact Matter

Alma and Amulek's sermons to the Zoramites in Alma 16 are absolutely astounding. Can you imagine what it would have been like to be there in person to hear them speak? Or to hear Abinadi preach to King Noah and his priests, or to listen to King Benjamin when he stood upon the tower? Or even Nephi when he spoke to his brothers? What power! What authority! What inspiration! What do you picture in your mind when you think about listening to them? Do you see them standing there with their heads facing down toward their feet? Do you see them with their eyes on their notes the whole time rather than looking up at the people? Do you see them looking down as they fumble with their notes and then repeatedly saying, "I'm sorry, I have so many notes up here?" Or saying, "I'm sorry, I'm not really good at this?"

The answer is most definitely not! They had no need to do those things because they had confidence and trust that not only was God with them, but that He had specifically called them for this end. Brothers, no matter what your gifts and talents may or may not be, God has called you to this mission. He needs your voice, and He wants you to speak in humility and yet in boldness. He wants you to speak in confidence that He will be right there by your side.

I've been in services where the speaker hardly, if ever, looked up at the congregation. There is virtually no way that the people can connect with you if you don't look them in the eye. Don't worry about your notes. Don't let that become a crutch that keeps your eyes looking downward. Stand tall, look up, and if you are comfortable enough with it, step away from the pulpit. The pulpit is a physical barrier between the preacher and the congregation. While it has some benefits, it is quite literally a hinderance to connecting with the people. First and foremost, however, trust in God. As we've discussed previously, God will not leave you at the pulpit by yourself if you will give Him room and space to work within you.

Tip

If you're anything like me, you're usually a little rocky when you first start your class or sermon. Those first couple minutes can be brutal sometimes. One thing I would strongly recommend is getting familiar with the congregation before you ever stand up to share. Look for those individuals who you know will smile at you and nod their head in agreement whenever you're talking. Every congregation has them, and what a blessing they are! They will help you build up your confidence early on in the message, so that eventually you can start to look around at the rest of the congregation. Another tip, if you're super nervous about looking at people, start your class or sermon by picking a spot in the back of the room and then keep your eyes on it. Most people won't even be able to tell that you're not looking at them. However, I caution against doing this the entire time. It's only meant to help you get out the gate, once you get your confidence up, start looking around. This will be important to the next step in our delivery, speaking to the people.

Step 9. Speak to the People

Imagine that you're sitting down with a youth between the ages of seven and ten. Now imagine them telling you that they've never really read the scriptures before, but that they would like to start. What book of scripture would you recommend that they read first? The Bible or the Book of Mormon? Isaiah or Mosiah? I'm pretty confident that you would recommend the Book of Mormon over the Bible and I'm a hundred percent certain that you would choose Mosiah over Isaiah. Why? Because one is plain and simple, and the other isn't. Because one is easy to understand, while the other is infinitely more complex. Now consider this question in the context of a class or sermon. Are your messages simple or complex?

Study Guide

The Book of Mormon explains that God delights in plainness, “for after this manner [meaning the manner of plainness] doth the Lord God work among the children of men. For the Lord God giveth light unto the understanding: for He speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding” (2 Nephi 13:4-5). And why wouldn’t He? If we couldn’t understand Him, then why would God even bother to speak at all? As brother Paul testified as he addressed the gift of speaking in tongues, saying in essence, “I would rather speak just five words that people could understand than ten thousand words in another language” (read 1 Corinthians 14:1-19).

Great preachers and teachers are almost always great simplifiers, just look at Jesus. When the scribes asked Him, “Which is the first commandment of all?” Jesus didn’t give them a doctoral dissertation on the commandments. Instead, He summarized the entire law into just two commandments based on one word, “love.” Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. And love your neighbor as yourself (read Mark 12:33-39). Anyone can understand that message, even a child.

How many classes or sermons have you sat through, where after the first few minutes you asked yourself, “What in the world are they talking about?” It’s not very enjoyable is it? If that’s how you’re feeling, imagine how other members might be feeling, or even non-members. In any given class or sermon, there will be a wide range in the peoples’ understanding of God and the scriptures. If you want to speak to the people in a way that will truly be impactful, then don’t speak at them or over them. Remember that complexity is always your enemy. Anyone can make something complicated, but it takes a lot of courage and hard work to make something simple.

Tip

After you start to build-up confidence in the beginning of your message by looking for those individuals who will encourage you with a smile and a head nod, be sure to start looking around at the rest of the room. It’s important to gauge how they’re responding to you and your class or sermon. If their eyes looked glazed over, then perhaps you need to try and simplify the message. The best way to do this is by using analogies. Analogies are a secret weapon. They will enable you to teach an otherwise abstract idea in a way that relates to people’s everyday life.

If you examine the congregation and they appear distracted or bored, then perhaps you’re not connecting with them. In this situation, it’s best to interject a story or personal testimony that will capture the audience’s attention. Also, don’t be afraid to use humor. The brain doesn’t pay attention to boring things, nor will it stick around for stories if it’s mentally checked out. Humor can actually enhance people’s learning. If you’re thinking, “Oh no, I’m not really that funny,” or, “I don’t really know any jokes,” or even, “I don’t think jokes are appropriate in church.” The nice thing about humor is that you don’t need to tell a joke to get a laugh. Good public speakers know how to have fun while telling their message.

Step 10. Action Items

Finally, but certainly not least, leave the people with some practical action items. Don’t just tell people something they already know. Don’t just give them new information on a subject, tell them how to implement it into their lives!

The difference between a good public speaking experience and a great one is very, very small. The priesthood are called to preach, teach, expound, and exhort the people to come unto Christ. While a good public speaking experience will include all four of these principles, a great one will include these four plus one more, and that is “how.” How can the people apply what they’ve learned from your message in a practical way? Think about it. How many sermons have you heard where the preacher gave a fantastic message, but after it was over, you forgot all about it? How many inspiring sermons have you heard and yet you still struggle with the same sins and temptations

Study Guide

as you did before? How many times have you sat through a service, but you were unchanged after it was all said and done?

If we really stop and consider these questions honestly, I imagine many people could relate. Why? Because the preacher or teacher preached, taught, expounded, and exhorted, but they didn't tell anyone how to actually do it. In other words, they didn't give the congregation any action items or even a challenge that was actually reasonable. How many classes or sermons have you listened to where the main theme was basically, "You need to love more," "You need to be more like Christ," "You need to pursue holiness," or even, "You need to stop sinning?" How helpful were those messages to you? I don't think there's a single person in the Church today who doesn't know they need to do all of these things. It isn't a question of knowledge, it's a question of application!

If you want to improve your messages immediately, then do this one simple thing. Include practical action items, because without them, we're really not helping them to further their relationship with Christ. Instead, we're simply giving a message.

Tip

Hopefully by now, you're intimately familiar with the main points that you want the people to take away from your class or sermon. I also hope you took time study out these points by asking the following three questions. (We posed these as part of our third step in the process of preparation.)

1. **What is it?** Define and or explain the topic or issue at hand.
2. **Why does it matter?** Why should people care, how does it impact them and the Kingdom?
3. **How can it be applied?** How might someone accomplish this in practical terms?

As you finalize your preparation, it's critical that you really flesh out the last question above. Take time in prayer and meditation to consider how someone might apply this in their life. Are there principles or steps involved? Do you have life experiences or stories that could help someone understand how to do this? As God begins to reveal the answer to you, take time once again to organize your thoughts using the rule of three. In other words, don't make the action items difficult or lengthy.

For example, say you want to exhort the people to purify their lives. Don't just tell them how important it is to be holy, give them a real-life example on how to become more holy. Perhaps you could tell them to take a walk through their home and ask God if there's anything in here that would offend Him. If God reveals something to them, you could then counsel them to pray to the Father and ask Him for the strength to remove the item from their house. You could take this one step further by providing a testimony of how you did this in your own life. Please do not give practical steps that you haven't taken, or attempted to take, in your own life. Don't be a hypocrite. One of the first thoughts that will pop into the people's mind when you touch on a difficult subject is this, "What about you! What are you doing?" Don't give them ammunition. Be sure to test your action items yourself. Don't be that salesman who has never tried out his own product. The people will be able to tell if you're a hypocrite or not.

Unit 3: Follow-through

After exerting a lot of energy to prepare your message, and even more to deliver it, now it's time to finally relax, sit back, and enjoy yourself by engaging in some type of entertainment. You've earned it. WRONG! Dead wrong! This is a snare laid by the enemy. Please, do not fall into that trap. If you do, it will take days, if not weeks, or even months, to get back out of it again. Satan wants you to pause and pat yourself on the back for a job well done. Though this is tempting, the truth is that there is still much work to be done. We're going to discuss just three more

Study Guide

steps to a better public speaking experience by briefly touching on a few follow-up items that will keep you on the old, old path.

Step 11. Don't Relax

First and foremost, don't listen to that voice that encourages you to pause, relax, take a load off, and enjoy yourself. Trust me, that voice is not your friend, it's your enemy. And that enemy wants to kill your spiritual momentum. If he succeeds, then there's a strong probability that you won't grow in your ministry, and thereby you won't be able to help others to follow Jesus. Craig Groeschel, the founder and senior pastor of Life Church, once explained that, "Creating momentum is like launching a rocket. You'll use a disproportionate amount of energy to get off the ground, but once you overcome gravity, you can maintain your momentum with minimal effort." You have most likely gained some momentum during your preparation, don't let it go. It's very difficult to get back.

Remember that spiritual momentum is your greatest ally as a priesthood member, and the lack of it is your greatest enemy. Satan will stop at nothing to halt you in your tracks. If you want to avoid this trap and continue your spiritual growth, then I strongly recommend that you schedule a priesthood visit, meeting, class, or some other type of spiritual event, immediately following your class or sermon. Staying active will help you avoid that letdown that inevitably comes following your service. Please recognize that Satan is most likely to attack when you're either preparing for a message, or right after you deliver it. Be prepared and stay on guard! "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

Step 12. Review your Message

I'm going to be bold here. If you want to continue to grow in your ministry and your ability to deliver a message, then you need to go back and watch or listen to your classes and sermons. My guess is that you're probably shrinking at the very thought of what I've just suggested, but I promise you it will make a difference. As Scientist, mathematician, and physicist, Lord Kelvin, once said, "If you can't measure it, you can't improve it." And how do you expect to improve your delivery if you don't measure where you are? Remember, this isn't a time to lambast yourself, this is a time to genuinely improve your public speaking abilities. Be honest with yourself, but not overly critical and judgmental, as that will have the opposite effect.

As you listen, be sure to notice how your message flowed. Did it make sense? Was it interesting? How many stories did you include? Was it monotone? Did you have passion? Etc. Then consider how you prepared for that particular message and ask if there was anything that you could have done differently in your preparation to improve your delivery. I know this might seem like a tall order, and most priesthood members hate the idea of listening to themselves, but this isn't about you, it's about the ministry we are providing to our people. They deserve the best that we can be in Christ.

Step 13. Embrace Constructive Criticism

If you thought I was bold in step two, then I'm really going to take it up a notch in step three, and encourage you to seek out criticism. Not just any sort of criticism however, constructive criticism. You could do this by either approaching someone you respect and admire before you ever give your message, or by doing this after the fact. But in general, ask this person, or perhaps *persons*, to evaluate your message and provide you honest, yet kind, feedback on how you could improve.

Most of us don't intentionally seek out constructive criticism, but it might be the most fruitful step you can take, not just to strengthen your public speaking abilities, but to grow your ministry as a whole. As we read in Proverbs, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful... Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man

Study Guide

sharpeneth the countenance of his friend” (Proverbs 27:6, 17). In other words, seek out those friends who will not only sharpen your abilities as a speaker, but who will also sharpen your abilities as a priesthood member. A friend in this case could be a man, woman, or child. Each bring a different perspective to the table. Remember, we’re not only preaching to adults, but also to our youth.

Conclusion

As we have already discussed, poor public presentation, or PP, is a huge issue impacting the Church, and one that directly effects the spiritual condition of the saints. It’s not something that we can afford to ignore any longer. Sermons make a large proportion of our worship, which means it has an oversized effect on the church. If we don’t improve our public speaking, our Church will continue to die. However, positive public speaking could open the door for the Spirit to work in a mighty way in the lives of our people.

Remember that I didn’t say flawless public speaking, I said *positive* public speaking. Not everyone needs to speak like Arthur Oakman, Henry Schaeffer, or Al Pelletier. We just need to make small changes in the way that we preach or teach by improving our preparation, delivery, and follow-through. I know that God will pour out His Spirit upon us in a mighty way as we seek to grow in our ability to serve His people.

In this guide, we focused on the three things. Namely, (1) how to prepare for a class or sermon, (2) how to improve our delivery, and (3) how to follow-through afterward so that we can continue to progress in our ministry. Below is a summary of the 13-steps that we discussed to better public speaking.

Part 1: Preparation

1. **Living your Calling.** First, you have start living out your calling. When I received my first speaking assignment, I was given at least three months to prepare. That rarely happens out in the field.
2. **Spend Time with God.** Spend time in prayer, fasting, and study. Classes and sermons aren’t there for you to tell the people what you want to say, they are there for you to learn what God wants you to tell the people.
3. **Organize your Thoughts.** Once you have direction through the first two steps, now it’s time to flesh out your thoughts and to organize them in a way that makes sense. What are the big takeaways that you want the people to have and go from there.
4. **Infuse Stories.** Stories are powerful. Jesus used them throughout His ministry on earth. Think how you might interweave stories and testimonies into your class or sermon.
5. **Meditate.** Finally, mediate on your class or sermon and allow God to adjust it, but be careful not to over practice. Don’t try to remember everything. Trust that God will show up in the moment.

Part 2: Delivery

1. **The Secret Power of Stories.** Let’s kickstart our discussion on delivery by revisiting the importance of stories. Stories are a secret weapon. They allow you to speak without needing your notes. Moreover, stories allow you to share with passion. Don’t read your sermon. Don’t just read scripture either.
2. **Connect, Inspire, Transform.** Start your message by connecting with the people, be willing to be authentic and vulnerable. People don’t get inspired if they’re not engaged, and they won’t engage with you unless you connect with them.

Study Guide

3. **Body language and eye contact.** Don't stare at your notes, don't come unorganized. Look people in the eye. Find those who are nodding their heads to help boost your confidence early. Then start looking to others.
4. **Speak to the People.** Make sure you're not speaking at people, speak to them. Read your audience. Don't go over their heads. Simplify your message and talk plainly.
5. **Action Items.** Finally, but certainly not least, leave the people with some practical action items. Don't just tell people something they already know. Don't just give them new information on a subject, tell them how to implement it into their lives!

Part 3: Follow-through

1. **Don't Relax.** Make sure you have a priesthood visit, meeting, class, or some spiritual event scheduled after your sermon or class. We tend to let down after we provide ministry which can be dangerous. Also know that you might find yourself being attacked before you give your sermon or class. This is normal.
2. **Review your Message.** Watch/listen to your sermon
3. **Embrace Constructive Criticism.** Ask someone in advance to help critic your message in love.