

Clarity (Step 6b)

Adapted significantly from a handout by Dr. Don Sunukjian, Dallas Theological Seminary

I. The Problem: The “Point of No Return”

- A. Need for Clarity: There are differences between manuscripting a sermon and writing a research paper (cf. p. 81). This is because sermons present material *orally* whereas papers present it in a *written* format. In other words, listening and reading are completely different ways of learning.
- B. Illustration 1: Suppose you’re reading a book and sense you missed an important concept noted earlier (e.g., chapter or paragraph title, definition of a key word or concept, etc.). Since the entire book is in front of you, you simply need to retrace your steps to look back at the previous sentence, paragraph, page, etc. (A glance ahead also shows paragraph length or topic sentence.)

This scenario is completely different when you’re *listening*. Suppose you miss the speaker’s key point because it is poorly stated, or because you were thinking about what you’ll eat for lunch, or for any other reason (the reason doesn’t matter). If you miss a key idea then *you missed it*—it’s gone! You can’t interrupt the speaker for clarification, and if you ask the person next to you, then *two* people lose more of what’s being said! This is especially true when the preacher first announces his text, so always state the text at least three times, and only *after* first stating the point of the text. Otherwise everyone will miss your key point while trying to find the right verse in their Bibles!

- C. Illustration 2: Note the linear problem on page 28, step 6, point b. You *see* your message in outline form, meaning you see the *whole* at a glance. However, your listeners only *hear* the message, and this can happen only a *part* at a time!

II. The Solution: Be clear by saying the right words in the right order

- A. Clarity Throughout the Sermon: Make your introduction subject flow to each MP right to the MI.
- B. Clarity in the Introduction of the Sermon
1. Every time you want to emphasize a key sentence in your message, you must either repeat it or restate it (immediately say the same thing in different words). This applies to a subject, main idea, main point, significant sub-point, preview, review, or transition. See page 69 for practice.
 2. Make the focus or direction of the message clear at the end of the introduction.
 - a. Does the introduction end with a crisp statement of the *main idea* (thus becoming a deductive sermon)? If so, which developmental question(s) will you raise about the idea?
 - b. Does the introduction end by raising only the *subject*, most helpfully as a relevant question (an inductive sermon)? If so, a developmental question will already be in the listeners’ minds—they will think, “What does it mean?” or “What is the answer to the question?”
 3. Share the background or context of your text in the introduction *before* you announce the passage or state the first main point. Otherwise, you will either disappoint the listener by not providing the answer to your own question, or you will confuse him by stating a point that is unclear without the background. Why frustrate your listener needlessly by forcing him to sort through your ambiguous statement? Instead, follow this sequence:

Introduction

1. Develop a contemporary *problem or need* that raises the “subject” or “question.”
2. Bring up the *background/context* to show the same problem or need existed in biblical times. Give only essential background (only as much as is interesting).
3. Announce the *text* that will give the “complement” or “answer.”

C. Clarity in the **Body** of the Sermon

Use these five tools to clearly lead your listeners through your content:

1. **Repetition** says the same thing *immediately* in the *same* words. Note these examples:
 - a. “First Corinthians 7:10 says that God prohibits divorce. God prohibits divorce.”
 - b. “Let’s see John’s point in Revelation 1:7. Revelation 1:7. Now at Revelation 1:7...”
2. **Restatement** says the same thing *immediately* in *different* words. Note these examples:
 - a. “The next point in 1 Corinthians 7:10 is that God prohibits divorce. Permanent separation from a living spouse is not allowed by the Lord.”
 - b. “Let’s see John’s point in Revelation 1:7. The 7th verse of the Apocalypse, chapter 1. Now that we’re at John’s vision in Revelation, chapter 1, verse 7, note that it says...”
3. **Transitions** are sentences that *advance the flow of thought* from one major point to the next. Here are some of the more common types:
 - a. *Rhetorical Questions* ask questions which you don’t expect anyone to answer but they still help listeners with your flow of thought (e.g., “Why is it important to speak to non-Christians graciously and tactfully?”).
 - b. *Flashbacks* review what you already said as a basis for what you’re about to say in your next main point (e.g., “We’ve already seen in verses 1-4 that genuine worship acknowledges vows made to God. Now let’s see how those vows apply in verse 5.”).
 - c. *Incomplete Ideas* help the transition state the subject and the MP give a short complement. This involves only a connecting phrase to bridge to the next point (e.g., “The second reason to witness is because...”). The following MPII then could be “God commands it.”
4. **Key words** need to be repeated throughout the message to be clearly grasped by the listener. Therefore, as you develop a subpoint, use the same key words that were in the statement of the larger, superior point. Instead of using a pronoun which has the larger point as its referent, use the actual key words of the larger point. For example, don’t say, “A second way that we can do *this* (pronoun) is by not teasing them.” Say instead, “A second way that we can *avoid provoking our children to anger* is by not teasing them.”
5. **Deductive development** is generally clearer than inductive. While a sermon’s overall development will usually be inductive, each individual point probably should be deductively developed. So...
 - a. Preview the conclusion of the point *before* you begin the explanation of it.
 - b. Tell the audience the point of the verse/passage *before* you read it.
 - c. In rare cases, when you feel the need to develop the MP inductively, put it in parentheses on your outline (see p. 48 top, MPI ; p. 49 top, MPI; and p. 62, point D).

D. Clarity in the **Conclusion** of the Sermon

1. Stating the **Main Idea** at the end of the message can add much clarity, even in a deductive message where the main idea has already been stated in the introduction.
 2. Reviewing the **Main Points** in a non-mechanical way also reinforces the message.
- E. Use **Movement**. Make your gestures backwards to appear left to right to listeners.

Restatement Exercises

Directions

Read the first (“S”) statement below and then decide if the second (“R”) statement restates it (i.e., says the same thing in different words). If it does, tick “yes” and if it does not, tick “no” and explain why it does not in the Problems column.

Statements	Yes	No	Problems with “R”
<p>1 S: God shows his grace by protecting His own people.</p> <p>R: God shows his grace to those who belong to Him.</p>			
<p>2 S: To do greater things for God, the Israelites had to trust in God’s continuous providence.</p> <p>R: He had done this many times to them and He would continue to do so.</p>			
<p>3 S: We should demonstrate our faith by obeying God’s ways of help unquestioningly.</p> <p>R: Israelites showed their faith by obeying God’s unorthodox strategies.</p>			
<p>4 S: If you love God, you will obey Him.</p> <p>R: Obedience and love for God go together.</p>			
<p>5 S: Prayer should be the Christian’s highest priority.</p> <p>R: Your communication with God must come before everything else.</p>			