



FOREWORD BY DAVID PLATT

POWER
IN THE
PULPIT

REVISED EDITION

HOW TO PREPARE AND DELIVER
EXPOSITORY SERMONS

JERRY VINES
& JIM SHADDIX

PLAYING THE VOICE

PROPER USE OF THE PREACHING INSTRUMENT

The voice, strained and fatigued, instinctively sought relief in a rhythmical rise and fall. . . . They were commonly zealous and sometimes great men who fell into this fault, and it was often imitated by those who followed them . . . mistaking the obvious fault for the hidden power.

John A. Broadus

Preaching doesn't actually happen until the sermon is delivered to a group of people. We may understand what preaching is, study a text, and write a message based on it, but the sermon isn't finished until it's preached. Now that we've developed a firm grasp of the process for developing an expository sermon, it's time to turn our attention to the actual delivery of the message.

Good sermon delivery doesn't begin with determining what degree of notes to use, how to dress, or even whether or not to move around while you're delivering the message. Good sermon delivery actually begins with a proper understanding and use of the primary physical resource that God has provided for you to be able to preach. God has prepared a marvelous instrument to help you convey His Word to the audience: the voice.

The voice is the quality or tone of sound you produce when you speak.

Some people have referred to the voice as the queen of the instruments. This royal instrument has the clarity of the trumpet, the brilliance of the violin, and the melody of the oboe. The voice is unsurpassed in its ability to express with depth and meaning the intended message of its user. This brilliant instrument is the common property of every person. The words people use every day are colored with the voice's emotional undertones, its energy, and its powers of persuasion. The expression we discussed in the last chapter ultimately will be given wings to fly by means of the voice.

MY WAKE-UP CALL

A Personal Testimony

The words hit me like a laser beam. "You will have to be completely silent for the next two weeks. You have a nodule on the anterior third of your right vocal cord. Surgery is the only way to remove it. I'm not sure when you will be back in the pulpit. Perhaps ninety days or longer."

For several years I had experienced some degree of hoarseness. I had never thought much about it. But for several weeks the hoarseness had become rather pronounced and persistent. I could not finish a sermon without getting so hoarse I could hardly speak above a whisper. In the morning in normal conversation I found myself getting hoarse, so I went to a throat specialist.

I was totally unprepared for what he said. The thought of surgery on my vocal cords frightened me. Would the surgery be effective? How long would I be out of the pulpit?

The days ahead were emotional and traumatic. I really didn't know what to do. A member in my congregation recommended that I contact Dr. Stephen Olford, who had experienced similar difficulties. Dr. Olford gave me the name of a throat specialist in New York City. Dr. Friedrich Brodnitz confirmed that I did have a vocal nodule, but he didn't recommend surgery. He said surgery would remove the nodule only for a while. I needed to correct

the habits that had produced the nodule. If I didn't start speaking differently, another nodule would form. He recommended that I return home and find a competent speech pathologist.

That is exactly what I did. Dr. Sam Faircloth, a speech pathologist in Mobile, Alabama, helped me determine the abuses that had created the nodule in the first place. When those abuses were corrected the nodule disappeared within a matter of weeks—without surgery! From that day until now I have had no recurrence of the problem.

What seemed the worst thing that ever happened to me actually was one of the greatest blessings to come my way. I'm able to preach several times every day without strain. Unless I have a cold or some problem with allergy, I never experience hoarseness. In the course of my recovery from vocal problems, I became very interested in the subject of speech itself. Reading books on speech almost became a hobby for me.

The results of my journey and study make up the material in this chapter. I'm genuinely interested in helping my fellow preachers learn to be more effective in the delivery of their sermons. My primary qualification for sharing this information is that I'm a preacher. I preach many, many times each week. My life is spent either in the pulpit or preparing for the pulpit. The contents of this chapter have been hammered out in my own ministry. To be sure, I don't perfectly demonstrate what sermon delivery ought to be. I'm still in the process of learning.

I did settle one issue, however, during the time I was experiencing my vocal problems. A particular question kept nagging me. If I'm preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit, why, then, is the Holy Spirit abusing His own temple? I discovered some good news. You can express the deepest feelings of your faith and your ministry with power and fervor without abusing your voice. Understanding certain aspects of sermon delivery will enable you to preach with all the fervor of your soul and still maintain a healthy voice.

—*Jerry Vines*

Using the vocal instrument to its maximum capabilities in the preaching event involves learning to play it well. Playing your voice begins with understanding how it works. Then you must master certain skills that enable you to use the voice to its greatest potential. Finally, you must constantly be working toward voice improvement and voice care. The effective practice of sermon delivery begins with learning how to use the preaching instrument well.

UNDERSTANDING THE VOICE

The average person knows little about the vocal mechanism. Such an oversight may be acceptable for persons who aren't professional speakers, but it's neglectful for those who are. Professional speakers—especially preachers—should know something about the nature and function of the vocal mechanism.

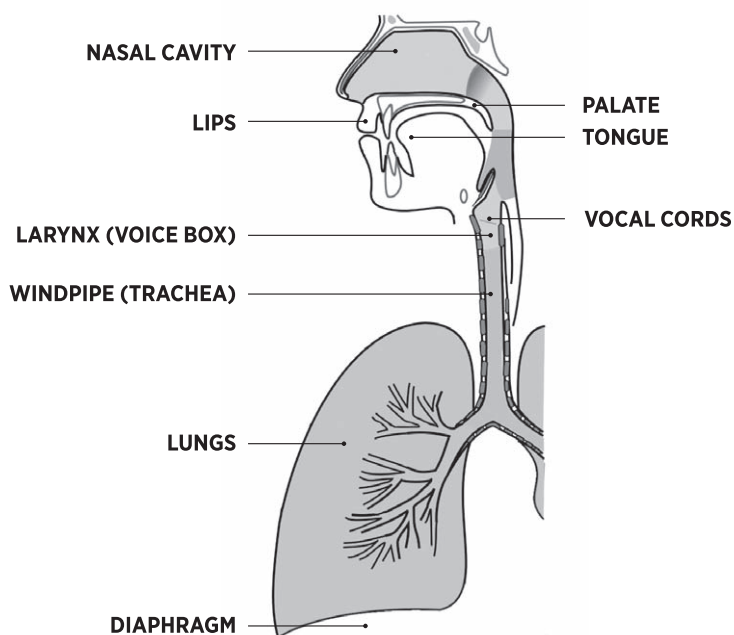
The Nature of the Vocal Mechanism

The man God calls to preach is assigned to communicate the eternal Word of God in his own words. Those words are produced by a complex vocal mechanism. For this reason the preacher's voice may be considered his God-given tool. A great deal of the effectiveness of your message depends on the manner in which you handle that mechanism. In addition, knowing more about the voice will assist you in guarding its health.

How much do you know about your vocal mechanism? Do you know the location of the vocal cords? Are your vocal cords suspended vertically or horizontally? Few preachers really know much about the structure and function of the mechanism that produces speech. Even fewer know how to employ it effectively or how to care for it adequately.

Some people believe that too much knowledge about the vocal mechanism may upset the balance that's intuitive in the speaking process. That fear is unfounded. Certainly, we shouldn't allow ourselves to become so occupied with the mechanics of delivery that the tool becomes a hindrance rather than a help. However, any person can use a tool more effectively if he understands how the tool is designed. The baseball pitcher can become even more effective when he learns as much as possible about his pitching arm, the baseball, and the factors that make for good delivery. The same truth applies to the preacher and a working knowledge of his voice.

FIGURE 1

PARTS OF THE VOICE

A working knowledge begins with the basic aspects of the vocal mechanism (see Figure 1). Probably you can name most of the more common body parts involved: nose, throat, voice box, vocal cords, windpipe (trachea), and lungs. You also have a diaphragm, sinuses, and many muscles related to the throat, voice box, and chest cavities. It's interesting that the organs used for speech are the same organs used for breathing. Some evolutionists theorize that speaking came as an incidental result of the function of breathing. Creationists, however, don't share that view. We understand that the faculty for speech is a divinely designed function that makes possible man's communication with his fellow man. Observing the dual functions of speaking and breathing is a fascinating study.

The Function of the Vocal Mechanism

To understand the function of the vocal mechanism, take an imaginary tour through the vocal organs, reviewing Figure 1. As you're sitting quietly reading this book, your mouth is probably closed and you are inhaling

through your nose. When you're more active, including when speaking, air also enters the body through the mouth. The tongue is a part of the mouth, and it's much larger than you might suppose. Don't be offended when someone says that your tongue is the biggest thing in your mouth!

The air moves gently over your tongue down into the throat. In the back of your mouth cavity you also have adenoids. They form a cushion behind your soft palate. On each side of your tongue are tonsils. You may or may not still have them. If infected, the tonsils can become greatly swollen and hinder the free use of the voice.

When air leaves your nose or mouth and goes to the throat, it enters the respiratory tract. The air goes from there into the trachea, or windpipe, then passes into the chest by means of pipelines called bronchi. You have one main bronchus, which divides into three secondary bronchi for each lung. The lungs fill most of your chest. Room is left for your heart and the esophagus. The chest cavity is actually a cage formed by your breastbone, ribs, and the spinal column. When air is pushed from the lungs through the pressure of the diaphragm, the process is called exhalation.

Air leaves the lungs by means of exhalation and passes back through the bronchi and the windpipe until it arrives at the voice box. The proper name for the voice box is the larynx (pronounced lar'ingks). The larynx is a remarkably complex organ. The method of suspension used in its construction anticipates the use of springs in much of our modern technical design. The larynx consists of several muscles and cartilage.

Our primary interest is in the vocal cords. They're actually folds of muscle tissue suspended horizontally in the larynx. The two vocal folds are attached in front of the voice box to the thyroid cartilage. These folds, like wings, meet at the front of the throat. They always touch each other at that point. In the rear of the voice box the folds are connected to muscles that make it possible for them to be opened and closed. Normal folds have a smooth, glistening surface. They're covered above with folds of mucous membrane called false cords or folds.

Sound is produced when the folds are brought together and air pushes through them. Contraction of the muscles in the vocal folds makes them thicker, shorter, or more tense. This tensing of the vocal folds makes speech possible. When air blows through the vocal folds, the resulting sound is called *phonation*. This sound is carried through the throat into the mouth cavity. At this point the sound is amplified by the cavities of the mouth, nose, and throat. The amplification of sound is known as *resonation*. The human voice is unique because its resonating cavities can be altered partly. Only the nose is

a rigid, unalterable structure. The throat, mouth, tongue, and lips all can be changed by muscular action.¹ This action forms the sound that is produced into words. Thus, the process of speech—“voice or voiceless breath, modified by articulation—has occurred.”²

PROTECTING THE VOICE

Playing the vocal instrument demands that the preacher master his voice. Such mastery involves certain skills necessary for proper use, skills to (1) protect the voice, (2) improve voice quality, and (3) integrate your voice. We look first at the skills to protect your voice.

Learning to relax the body and especially the vocal mechanism is crucial in the high-tension work of pastoral ministry. Proper breathing and articulation also are essential for effective speech. Integrating the various factors of good vocal production such as rate, volume, phrasing, and pause is crucial for maximum use of the voice. Mastering each of these skills will help protect your voice and help it become music to your listeners' ears.

The Threat: Tensions for the Preacher

More than ever, adults are facing modern pressures. Although ongoing conveniences have their advantages, they also have brought definite liabilities. Smartphones and emails can follow businesspeople and parents even on their vacation, should they chose to consult their messages. The average person works more hours than ever. Typical Monday through Friday traffic renders expressways anything but express. Pressure to succeed and produce in the twenty-first-century marketplace adds to the level of stress. Those living in this century are vulnerable to high blood pressure and heart attacks. The ulcer has almost become a status symbol.

More and more industries and businesses are recognizing the necessity of proper relaxation on the part of their employees. Overall productivity is increased when organizations assist their personnel in alleviating as much job tension as possible. All across the world a whole lot of emphasis is being placed on proper exercise, stress management, and quality leisure time.

Identifying Preacher Tensions

The preacher isn't immune to the tensions of the times. The average pastor experiences as many or even more tensions than do his people. Certain tensions are common to the territory of the preaching ministry. If you're going

to learn to relax, you must first learn to recognize some of the factors that contribute to your stress. Here are seven, four of which can affect your speaking voice.

First, *normal life stresses are a reality for the preacher*. The preacher isn't exempt from the normal struggles of life as a member of a complex society. He faces the stress of making a living, the pressure of providing adequately for his family, as well as the constant push to succeed in his occupation by leading his church to grow.

Second, *kingdom idealism is a daily struggle*. The man of God studies his New Testament and sees clearly what God expects of the church and the individual. On the other hand, the preacher sees his church as it actually is. More than anyone else he's keenly aware of its shortcomings as well as his own. The level of living he observes in his people too often is far below the biblical standard. Thus the preacher encounters the disparity between the ideal and the real, a pressure point that can create tremendous frustration and anxiety.

Third, *emotional struggle is a challenge*. Preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ is the most vital part of the preacher's life. Deep within are feelings of love, gratitude, and longing for the Lord Jesus and for those who need to know Him. These emotions have to be expressed as we preach.

Fourth, *the preacher can abuse his voice*. If a preacher doesn't understand how to use his voice correctly, abuse can create nagging throat problems. This tension is especially a problem for persons brought up in the southern part of the United States, where a distinction often is made between preaching and just talking. The preacher's verse in that part of the woods is "Cry aloud and spare not." No sincere preacher from the South wants to be a dry, lifeless preacher. Many people in that part of our country believe that if you can speak above a whisper on Monday morning, you must have compromised on Sunday! Preaching in the South—and other places where there are similar cultural expectations—is an all-out, heartfelt, top-of-your-voice affair that can place tremendous strain on the throat.

Fifth, *congregational difficulties are a frequent reality that can lead to vocal difficulties*. You may encounter problems with your voice due to a difficult pastorate. Most congregations are pleasant and congenial, but you may find yourself in the midst of a people with unusual spiritual problems. Animosity may exist among the members, or the church staff may be bickering, jealous, and selfish. Preaching in this kind of atmosphere can bring tremendous physical and spiritual tensions on the preacher. Although you may not be aware of it at first, vocal difficulties can arise that stem from the tensions of the pastorate.

Sixth, *adequate church facilities can put strain on your voice*. The church auditorium may be a speaker's nightmare. Many churches don't allocate enough funds for purchasing or operating good sound systems. In some buildings, getting adequate sound is not even an option with a good sound system. Designed for architectural beauty rather than speaking and hearing ease, some facilities simply are acoustically inadequate. In churches with ornate horseshoe balconies with massive pillars, the look may be pleasing but the sound bounces unevenly above and below the overhang. Such poor physical facilities increase the difficulty of being heard, thereby increasing the pastor's tension.

Seventh, *an uptight personality can add subtle tension*. You may protest: *What, me uptight?* You may not be aware of the tension, but any of these first sixth tensions—remember, they are common pressures of the Sunday sermon—can contribute to an uptight demeanor, which in turn will affect one's voice. If you're tense vocally, chances are you are tense in many other ways. Make careful evaluation of the causes of that tension. Take a good look at the circumstances of your life. Honestly face your negative attitudes and unspoken fears. Evaluate your attitude toward the pastorate where you serve. You may need to develop new methods of coping with your personal and pastoral difficulties. Such self-examination may be the first step in learning to speak in a relaxed manner.

Recognizing the Tension

A person's tension makes it difficult to perform adequately. The accountant battles tension headaches. The baseball pitcher struggles with a sore arm. The pianist with stiff fingers can't play well. The artist with tense hands cannot paint as he desires. The preacher is no different. Tension inevitably will force him to grapple with throat problems. When you have undue tension in your life, you can't expect to speak with a clear, consistently pleasant voice.

Many other signs of undue tension may surface in the preacher's life. Excessive tension may be manifest in an uncomfortable nervousness, inadequate breathing habits, a jerky rhythm in speaking, or an unusually fast delivery.³ The preacher who's speaking with ease and in a relaxed condition will indicate the same in the vitality and quality of his speaking voice. Without relaxation the voice can't be well coordinated, free in its function, and vibrant in its expression.

These various tensions mean it is likely your voice will at times—or even regularly—be under stress. So how can you protect this key instrument as you serve as God's messenger?

The Solution: Relaxing

The solution to the pressures that threaten your voice is to master techniques that will loosen your voice constraints and keep your speaking instrument relaxed.

Apply Proper “Muscle Tonus”

Proper relaxation is the first step in developing a well-coordinated voice. The muscles in your face, tongue, jaw, chin, throat, and neck affect the muscles that control your vocal folds. Unless you accomplish muscular freedom, your speaking will be tension bound.⁴ Understand, however, that you don't want total relaxation of all muscles related to speaking. Using the vocal mechanism for speech is an active function of the body. Any action of body muscles is dependent upon some degree of tension. Physiologists call this “muscle tonus.” Every biological function is dependent on a proper balance between tension and relaxation. The vocal mechanism depends on use of the right muscles and the application of a proper degree of muscle tonus.

Friedrich Brodnitz, an authority on the proper use and care of the voice, maintains that most voice troubles result from exaggerated muscle activity. Correcting this problem requires a reduction in the hyperfunction of the muscles that relate to the vocal mechanism.⁵ If the muscles of the throat and mouth become too tense, the vocal mechanism will be cramped. The result will be poor speaking quality. The voice will sound strained because it actually is strained. In addition to a poor, unpleasant sound, vocal health problems inevitably will result. The speaker will tend to place the voice in a wrong pitch and to speak louder in order to overcome the lack of sound produced by such a restricted mechanism.

The muscles of the voice box are in two general groups. Some are located inside the larynx. They directly control the vocal folds. They move the larynx and enable it to function. These muscles are called the *intrinsic muscles*. You need not concern yourself about manipulating them, for merely thinking of speaking alters them to their task. They operate without conscious thought.

The second group of muscles is called the *extrinsic muscles*. They are on the outside of the vocal mechanism, around the throat. If the extrinsic muscles are unduly tense, the intrinsic muscles can't function properly. Our purpose is to relax this outer set of muscles enough to allow the inner muscles to function without being in a cramped position. Stevenson and Diehl summarize the goal: “Speech . . . is not complete relaxation, but tonus. Tonus is that delicate balance of tension and relaxation—neither too much nor too

little—appropriate for what has to be done.”⁶ Individuals who speak publicly on a regular basis must be aware of visible laryngeal strain in the muscles of the throat area.

Learn Proper Techniques

You can eliminate muscle tension before you speak. Appendix 4 offers several exercises that help you to be relaxed when you preach. Familiarize yourself with them and practice them often.

In addition to these exercises, be sure to dress in such a way that is conducive to relaxation. Select a shirt with a loose collar when you preach—even if you do wear a tie on Sunday mornings. Keep in mind that the throat has a tendency to enlarge during the heat of delivery. For this reason, your collar should be as loose as possible.

Read about relaxation. Continue to learn to relax. This practice will facilitate your ability to use every aspect of your vocal mechanism correctly. You also will discover that other facets of vocal mechanics contribute to relaxation. The next two skills, for example, relate the role of good breathing and the place of proper articulation in effective vocal delivery. These two activities are important in maintaining a relaxed throat. Improper breathing and poor articulation greatly increase the tension in one’s voice box.

IMPROVING VOICE SKILLS

Breathing

You can improve your vocal skills while aiming for a relaxed voice by learning proper breathing. Of course, breathing is done unconsciously by our autonomic nervous system, as well as consciously (e.g., when we dive underwater and choose to hold our breath), making it a rather unusual bodily function. In the normal course of our daily activities we don’t consciously tell our bodies to breathe. During most normal conversation we don’t have to instruct our lungs to supply the necessary air. For speaking or preaching, however, breathing must be consciously controlled. The key to a smoothly functioning vocal mechanism is proper breathing.

Understanding Proper Breathing

As soon as we begin to project our voice, we have to be sure we have sufficient breath to complete our sentences without gulping or losing the

final words. In addition, we need to have enough air and control of that air to sustain—and maybe amplify—our voices during the sentence. This air supply has to be taken in and expelled without disturbing our flow of speech. We should gradually propel our breath in a relaxed manner, completing each statement in the most effective way possible.

Correct breathing is closely related to speaking with relaxation. Breathing correctly greatly relieves muscle tension in the throat. If a speaker doesn't have an ample supply of air, he'll find himself squeezing for air at the throat. This effort can do great damage to his voice.

Many writers minimize the importance of breathing. For example, Adams says, "Breathing is not a problem at all for most speakers. Shoulder raising habits and exercises in so-called diaphragmatic breathing are useless in improving one's breathing for speech. In the first place, all breathing is diaphragmatic."⁷ His approach is somewhat simplistic, however. The large number of preachers who encounter voice difficulties causes one to question his conclusion. Failure to breathe properly creates several problems for the speaker. A sufficient supply of air is essential to achieve the necessary volume. Proper breathing will also permit a person to speak at length without undue fatigue or an aching throat.⁸

Actually, there are two kinds of breathing that are very different from one another. We need to breathe one way for our physical, biological needs and another way for speech. Reviewing the operation of the respiratory system assists in understanding proper breathing for speech.

Respiration provides the power source for speaking. The lungs themselves provide no power of movement but respond to changes that are made in the size of the chest cavity. During inhalation the muscles of the chest lift the ribs upward and outward away from the lungs. During this motion, the diaphragm moves downward from its dome-shaped position. The result of this action is a rush of air from the nose down the windpipe through the bronchi to the lungs. When exhalation occurs, the diaphragm returns to its dome shape. The rib muscles relax themselves, and the rib cage returns downward and inward as air is thrust from the lungs.⁹

Breathing for speaking can be accomplished in two different ways. The diaphragm divides the chest cavity into two main sections, the clavicle area and the abdominal area. The clavicle area is the upper chest. Breathing may be accomplished by pressure from the clavicle area. This process is similar to the breathing of an athlete during competition. The upper chest is expanded in a relatively short and quick period of time. Such breathing places pressure upon the entire throat area. Tension is created in the throat as well as the voice

box. Prolonged speaking using clavicular breathing will give one a constricted tone, a weary sounding throat, and a hoarse voice.¹⁰ Vocal difficulties inevitably will result from such breathing.

The best breathing for speaking is abdominal breathing. The earlier writers and voice teachers referred to this as diaphragmatic breathing. That term is somewhat misleading, because all breathing essentially is diaphragmatic. All breathing is not abdominal, however. During expiration, the abdominal muscles should do the work. The slow relaxation of the diaphragm ensures smooth control of expiration, but the conscious control of the abdominal muscles makes this possible. In correct breathing for speaking, we must consciously be aware of the action of our abdominal muscles.

You can easily tell if your breathing is clavicular or abdominal. Place your hand upon your upper chest. Inhale and quote John 3:16. If your upper chest expands when you inhale, you are breathing incorrectly. Then place your hand upon your abdomen, inhale, and quote John 3:16. If your abdominal muscles expand, you are breathing correctly. Undue tension in your throat as you exhale also will alert you to improper breathing. If your voice is breathy, weak, or has a harsh quality, you likely are breathing incorrectly.

Be aware that breathing abdominally doesn't mean you must always take long, deep breaths. Such deep breathing can cause unnecessary tension in your throat just as much as clavicular breathing. You only need to breathe deeply enough to maintain a sufficient amount of air for good speaking and good support. The amount of air that remains in your lungs after you exhale is residual air. The maximum amount of air you can exhale as you speak is the vital capacity available for speaking. You should breathe only deeply enough to complete your sentence with good support and emphasis.

Practicing Proper Breathing

If you have been breathing incorrectly, begin immediately to change your method of breathing for speaking. The new method will seem unnatural to you for a while. As you learn to breathe more deeply utilizing the abdominal muscles, you may even experience some dizziness. That dizziness will mean that you haven't been utilizing your full lung capacity. Dizziness will disappear after a few days.

You can establish new breathing habits by means of good breathing exercises. The exercises in Appendix 5 are designed to assist you in controlled breathing for speaking and in maintaining an adequate reserve supply of air. They will train you to get the most economical use of breath as you speak.

Breathing correctly will help you maintain a good, strong vocal mechanism and will support the other vocal delivery skills discussed below. Don't expect to be able to breathe correctly after going over these exercises a few times. Very often good breathing habits must be developed over a long period of time. Practice the drills in Appendix 5 in your study. Practice them while you drive your car (once you get over any dizziness!). Practice them as you walk on the sidewalk. Use the method of proper breathing when you read aloud from printed material. However and whenever you do it, you will replace poor habits with good habits only by practice. These exercises should be practiced daily until proper breathing for speaking is as natural to you as normal breathing is for living.

One of the best ways to improve breathing habits is to observe close-up good speakers who have adequate vocal power and breath control. Notice the expansion of the lower chest cavity as they inhale. Notice also that the chest cavity decreases gradually and slowly so that a reserve of breath is constantly maintained, providing good support of the vocal tone. Also notice that the well-coordinated speaker seems to have a reserve of breath that enables him to release air when he feels the need for emphasis.

Good posture is also necessary to proper breathing. Stand erect as you practice proper breathing. The concentration of muscle tension should be at your belt line rather than your throat. Practice inhaling quickly and unobtrusively.¹¹ One of the primary purposes in learning to breathe correctly is to enable you to replenish your air supply quickly, without disturbing your flow of words. Learn to take your deepest breaths between sentences. Along the way you might want to take little "reacup" breaths as well.

Learning to breathe correctly may be somewhat frustrating at the beginning, so be sure to practice outside the pulpit. Don't try to change your method of breathing during your sermon next Sunday! You have enough to think about while you preach without being burdened with altering breathing habits. The process will be like learning to change gears in a car. The experience is a jerky, frustrating one. During your sermon isn't the best time to learn to breathe correctly. Instead, practice during informal conversation as well as through drill work. As your breathing improves, the process will become as natural as shifting into high gear on the open road.

Articulating

The process of producing sound for speaking is composed of four facets: breathing, phonating, resonating, and articulating. We have discussed

the importance of proper breathing in producing adequate breath support for speaking. Phonation has to do with the actual producing of the sound as the breath passes through the vocal folds. Resonation is concerned with the alteration of the sound by the cavities of the mouth, throat, and nose. Both phonation and resonation are complex physiological functions. Problems in these areas are the concern of a medical specialist. Due to the complexities involved, this book can't treat adequately all of the factors involved in the two processes. Some preachers may very well have difficulties in either producing or amplifying sound. If you have trouble in these areas, consult a good speech pathologist or throat specialist. For the most part, phonation and resonation can't consciously be improved through the procedures recommended here.

Articulation, however, is a skill that can and must be mastered by the preacher. The preacher who wants to communicate the Word of God effectively will be concerned about this facet. If he fails to articulate his words properly, the ability of the congregation to understand what he's saying will be greatly diminished. One congregation complained about its preacher: "For six days a week he is invisible, and on the seventh he is inaudible." Take pains to ensure that those who listen to you can understand what you're saying. Learning to articulate properly will significantly improve your sermon delivery.

Understanding Articulation

Articulation is the process of forming the sounds that characterize connected speech. The air that vibrates in the mouth and nose is modified by the tongue, the lower jaw, the lips, and the hard and soft palates.¹² This process transfers mere sound into speech sounds. Articulation is synonymous with enunciation, but should not be confused with pronunciation. Pronunciation has to do with the correctness of the sounds and accents in spoken words. Articulation, on the other hand, has to do with the shaping of those sounds by the lips, teeth, tongue, and hard and soft palates.¹³

Articulation is a key ingredient in achieving maximum relaxation during sermon delivery. Actually, proper breathing and proper articulation work together. As we've already seen, adequate breath support prepares the vocal mechanism to function in a relaxed manner. Likewise, articulating words properly will enable you to speak with a minimum of tension in the extrinsic muscles.

Three basic speech elements are related to articulation: vowels, diphthongs, and consonants. Vowels are sounds formed in the resonating cavities as air flows through the mouth. For our purposes, think primarily in terms of the letters A, E, I, O, U. The vowels give color to the sounds of speech.

Diphthongs are sounds produced by a combination of two vowel sounds occurring in the same syllable and blending continuously from one to the other without interruption.¹⁴

The consonants might be regarded as the bones of speech. Whether you say “Good morning!” to the paper carrier or “Good night” to your wife, you can’t communicate by means of vowel sounds alone. Hardly any sounds are expressed without using consonants as well as vowels. Actually, without consonants there would be no speech. The correct articulation of the consonants does more to assist in adequate vocal communication than any other factor.

Consonants are produced in three zones of articulation. The first zone is found between the lower lip and the upper front teeth. Consonants in this group are: P, B, W, WH, F, V, and M. The second zone is found between the front teeth, the tip of the tongue, and the hard palate behind the teeth. This group includes: T, D, TH, R, S, SH, ZH, Y, and N. The third zone is formed by the back of the tongue and the soft palate. Included in this group are these consonants: K, G, and NG.¹⁵

Sometimes consonants are explained in terms of the positions of the articulators as they are produced. Those consonants produced by the action of the lips are called *labials*. The labials also are divided into two groups according to the vocal mechanisms used to produce each one:

THE LIPS ALONE

W as in wind
WH as in which
M as in meat
P as in pork
B as in bee

THE LIPS AND THE TEETH

F as in father
V as in very

Consonants produced by the tongue primarily are called *linguals*. The linguals are divided into four groups, according to the vocal mechanisms used to produce each one:¹⁶

THE BODY OF THE TONGUE AND THE HARD PALATE

S as in so
Z as in zebra
SH as in show
N as in no
L as in lip
R as in row

THE TIP OF THE TONGUE AND THE HARD PALATE

T as in tip

D as in do

N as in no

L as in lip

THE TONGUE AND THE TEETH

TH as in thick or that

THE TONGUE AND THE SOFT PALATE

C as in cat

K as in king

G as in get

NG as in sing

Y as in yes

Improving Articulation

The preacher can improve his articulation in several ways. For example, stop your reading for a minute and say each of the letters in the three consonant groups discussed above. As you say them, notice where each sound is produced. This practice will help you learn to place each consonant in its proper position for good articulation. Notice that the tongue, jaw, lips, and hard and soft palates assume different positions in relation to each other as the consonants are produced.

One of the biggest needs in articulation is to develop greater flexibility in the tongue, lips, and jaw. Laziness in any of these areas will greatly hinder proper articulation. Diehl and Stevenson provide several helpful suggestions for eliminating stiffness in the articulators. First, purse your lips and move them in all possible directions. Next, draw the lips back and forth and then purse them. Stick your tongue out as far as you can. Touch your lower lip and upper lip with the tongue. Move the tongue from side to side. Then rotate the tongue tip slowly around your lips from left to right. Rotate the tongue tip from right to left. Touch the tongue tip to the center of the upper lip, the lower lip, then each corner of your mouth. Lift the tongue tip to the hard palate, then slowly relax it until it is flat in the mouth.¹⁷

Perhaps you've noticed that chewing is a function quite similar to speaking. The same muscles used for speaking are used in chewing. Maybe you've

also noticed that you can speak and chew at the same time. Though talking with your mouth full is not considered good etiquette, chewing and speaking at the same time can be helpful in developing flexibility in the articulators.

Try this exercise sometime. Imagine you have your mouth filled with food. Then begin to chew like a savage. As you chew with exaggerated movements of the mouth, tongue, and teeth, slowly begin to add speech. This exercise will do wonders in correcting stiffness in your articulators. The approach was popular among German speech therapists in correcting vocal disorders. Although the method hasn't gained wide acceptance in the United States, it can be helpful in relaxing the lips, mouth, and tongue.

A helpful mental exercise for improving articulation in sermon delivery is to imagine you're plucking words off your lips as you might pluck the notes off a guitar string. Voice teachers sometimes refer to this practice as "placing the tone." In the strictest sense, waves of sound can't be directed or placed. However, psychologically there seems to be some advantage to this approach. To think in terms of the words being plucked from the lips has a tendency to relax the throat muscles. This relaxation enables the vocal mechanism to function with a minimum of constriction.

Additional drills to help you practice articulation can be found in selected books on speech communication and public speaking.¹⁸ Spend some time each day going over a few of these drills. As you practice them, overexaggerate the motions of your articulating organs. Think about what sounds you're forming. Again, don't work on articulation during the delivery of a sermon. You might become so involved in proper articulation that you overarticulate. This extreme can be as detrimental to your delivery as poor articulation. Gradually work on this area of speech production, but don't feel frustrated or fret as you practice at this approach. It takes time to change bad habits.

INTEGRATING THE VOICE

As you've studied the mechanical aspects of delivery, you may have experienced a common apprehension. Perhaps you know a preacher who studied speech with the result that his sermon delivery actually was made worse rather than better.

All of us are anxious to convey the gospel truth with the fervor and excitement deeply embedded in our souls, and vocal training doesn't have to hinder that result. Rather, attention to the mechanical aspects of delivery can assist the preacher in making his delivery more powerful. His sermons still

can be on fire. As he preaches, the thunder can clap and the lightning can crack. For this end to be realized, though, the vocal variables have to be used properly. When the preacher uses the vocal variables correctly, his sermon delivery will be lively and dynamic. Such employment of the vocal variables is called *integration*.

Understanding Integration

The vocal aspects of delivery, built on the foundational elements of good breathing and proper articulation, must be integrated correctly if sermon delivery is to be effective. At this point, most delivery problems that plague preachers become apparent. Eight particular variables are especially important and demand keen integration if the message is to have maximum impact. These variables should be considered as four couplets based upon the relationship between each pair: rate and pace, volume and stress, pitch and inflection, and phrasing and pause. Practical guidance regarding how to integrate these in actual delivery will be discussed in chapter 10. For now, here's an introduction to each variable.

- *Rate and Pace.* Rate has to do with the speed with which we speak. The speech rate may be measured by the number of words spoken divided by the minutes that elapse during the speaking. Each person has his or her own rate of speaking. Acceptable rates normally vary between 120 and 160 words per minute. *Pace* is related to rate of speaking and gives the sermon a sense of movement. Some people refer to this movement as fluency.
- *Volume and Stress.* Volume is the amount of sound you use to say what you say. Volume is essential because, if the preacher can't be heard, then nothing else matters. *Stress* may be considered the intensity or the force we use—the emphasis on the words that count in what we're saying.¹⁹ Certain ideas in every sentence are primary. Other ideas take a more subordinate place. Failure to distinguish properly between the important and the unimportant causes our speech to lack emphasis and clear meaning.²⁰
- *Pitch and Inflection.* *Pitch* has to do with the movement of the voice up and down the scale in different registers with various inflections. Essentially, this quality is the melody of your voice.²¹ Proper use of pitch is a vital factor in increasing the attractiveness of sermon delivery. *Inflection* is a change of pitch within a syllable or word. By means of inflection the preacher may express a question, convey sarcasm, express conviction, or

suggest doubt. Good inflection greatly enhances the understandability and the interest of what the preacher says.

- *Phrases and Pauses.* We actually speak our sentences in a series of words organized into units of thought. We group both words and sentences by thoughts. These word groups are called *phrases*. A phrase might be described as a continuous utterance bound by pauses. Phrases aid us in expressing what we want to say, and they aid the listener in understanding what we say. Phrasing is one of the most important tools of the preacher. *Pauses* are the punctuation marks of speech. They are the commas, periods, and exclamation points of our language. Robert King defined pauses as momentary silences that communicate meaning.²²

Certain exercises will help you improve your integration of the vocal variables in preparation for sermon delivery. One of the most helpful exercises is to read Scripture aloud. In addition to their obvious spiritual value, reading the Psalms is an excellent way to develop proper breathing, phrasing, pitch change, and rate. Take a short psalm. Study its content. Determine how to phrase it well. Mark where your pauses will be. Determine where you need to change your pitch. Ask yourself where you should speed up or slow down your delivery. The Psalms lend themselves quite well to this kind of drill.

The text of First Samuel is particularly helpful for developing proper integration of rate, phrasing, and inflection. Read several of the chapters. Again, be sure each of the vocal variables reflects the meaning of the text. Luke is a good portion of Scripture to use in improving pitch, inflection, phrasing, and pause. As you read the gospel narrative, take note of its descriptive dialogue. These kinds of exercises will help you master phrasing and pause, as well as increase your ability to speed up or slow down your rate of speaking.

HELPING YOUR VOICE

The subjects considered thus far have given some basic information needed to point you toward improvement in sermon delivery, at least as far as your voice is concerned. Actually, every person called to the ministry should avail himself of every opportunity for special training in the areas of voice and speech. In a perfect world, all ministerial students would be required to take a couple of courses in voice as part of their preparation for the ministry. If such training isn't possible for you, however, make an effort on your own to train the voice God has given you.

Obviously, some preachers are blessed with voices of finer quality than others. Nothing can be done about the size or texture of the vocal folds. Wise is the preacher who doesn't try to speak in a deeper voice than his optimum pitch allows. Wiser is the preacher who uses the voice God has given him to the fullest level of efficiency. Even if you never become a master of all aspects of sermon delivery, with hard work you can improve your delivery considerably over a period of years by giving attention to your voice. The following five suggestions are offered to help you improve your voice.

1. Study Voice Production

Study carefully the basic processes involved in voice production. Reread the previous sections on vocal skills and use them as a starting point for increasing your understanding of the principles of voice production. Learn all you can about your voice, an effort that will help you be a better communicator. A study of the vocal mechanism will help you discover any vocal problems you may have. By making this discovery, you will be able to reduce or remedy those problems on your own, or you will realize the need to consult an expert. Good throat specialists and speech pathologists are available in most areas.

2. Evaluate Your Voice

A personal study of your own voice can be productive. Such a study is easier for preachers today than ever before, thanks to ongoing technological advances. Do whatever you can to have your sermons recorded. While filming is helpful for evaluating all aspects of delivery, playing back an audio recording actually is more functional for evaluating. Audio alone forces you to focus on the voice. Additionally, with audio alone you can do your evaluation in more places, such as in the car as you drive, thanks to compact disc, Bluetooth, smartphone, and podcast technologies.

Be prepared for a surprise when you first hear yourself speak! You probably won't sound on a recording as you sound to yourself while you're preaching. When you listen to yourself on a recording, you're hearing how you sound to the ears of others. When you are actually preaching, you're hearing the sound of your voice through the bones and nerves of your mouth and head. You'll notice a major difference. Don't let yourself become discouraged. You're probably not as bad as you may sound to yourself. And you may not be as good as you sound to yourself, either!

Listen to every sermon you preach. As you listen, pay attention to the various aspects of delivery. Ask yourself, *How could I have said that better?* Stop

the recording and rephrase it aloud. Some preachers find it helpful to have a little chart listing all the vocal variables mentioned earlier. Listen to your sermon, keeping the variables in mind. Rate yourself on each one.

For instance, is your volume too loud or too low? Does your delivery demonstrate good variety in volume? What about your rate? Are you speaking too fast or too slow? Do you vary your rate enough to avoid monotony? Do you stay in the same pitch too long? Is your inflection consistent with what you're saying? What about your phrasing? Are your words grouped together well? Do you utilize pause in order to breathe correctly and to help prepare yourself for what you want to say next? The purpose here isn't to evaluate the content of your sermon. Rather, you're concerned about how the content was delivered. Constantly ask yourself, *How could I have said this better?*

You will be surprised how much this analysis can help to improve your delivery. If you don't listen to yourself constantly, you'll tend to lapse into poor vocal habits. Doing a week-by-week evaluation of your sermon delivery is vital. The time spent in the effort will richly repay you in the improvement of your preaching. The importance of all these variables during actual delivery will be underscored in chapter 10.

3. Study Effective Speakers

Another step in improving your voice is to study the delivery of good public speakers. Wiersbe writes, "There is both a science and an art to preaching, and you need to learn both. . . . The art of preaching is something you learn from a successful preacher, a role model."²³ He adds: "In one sense preaching is not taught—it is caught. Happy is that student who somewhere meets a teacher or preacher who lights a fire in his soul."²⁴

Select several preachers you consider to be superior in sermon delivery. Study their delivery. Listen to them, not for what they say but for how they say what they say. Learn from them. Be careful not to imitate their styles, but glean from them helpful ideas about how to improve your own delivery.

Some individuals in secular fields also can help you improve your delivery. Many of today's television news anchors and commentators are well trained in the use of their voices. Some of the great political leaders of the past and present also are worthy examples. Listen to the speeches of Winston Churchill, Martin Luther King Jr., and Ronald Reagan. Learn from them. Great speeches of history are available on digital recordings and over the Internet for careful auditory analysis.

4. Establish a Program of Self-Improvement

Still another method to improve your voice is to begin a regular program of self-improvement. Numerous resources on voice improvement offer plans to follow, but you probably should develop your own plan. Certain ingredients in any program of sermon delivery should be followed. Study the vocal aspects of delivery one by one. Spend some time on the matters of volume and stress. Work for a while on rate and pace. Then spend some time working on phrasing and pause. Later, study the use of pitch and inflection. Work on proper breathing and correct articulation. Try to isolate any problems you may have in these areas. Locate whatever problems may be apparent. Work on one aspect of vocal delivery at a time.

A good way to improve your sermon delivery is to read aloud. By reading aloud you can check yourself on how well you're using the various mechanical aspects of speech. In addition, you can check to see if you're breathing properly, and you can work on your rate of delivery. Don't read only prose. Reading good poetry is sometimes an excellent drill for practice in vocal delivery.

As noted previously, reading certain sections of Scripture can be helpful. But don't neglect the reading of printed sermons. The sermons of Charles Spurgeon, R. G. Lee, and more recent expositors, such as Charles Swindoll, Warren Wiersbe, David Jeremiah, and Alistair Begg, are especially helpful. Try reading some of their sermons aloud. As you read them, practice all the aspects of delivery.

5. Practice Your Plan

Whatever plan you come up with, be sure to put it into action. After you plan your program, practice your plan. Then practice it some more.

Again, a word of caution must be noted. Remember that your efforts for improving vocal delivery should be done outside the pulpit. You'll make a grave error if you try consciously to implement your growing knowledge of the vocal mechanism as you preach. The results will be disastrous. You'll find yourself involved in mental gymnastics. The preacher who preaches without notes particularly has enough mental activity as it is! To carry to the pulpit the added load of thinking about all the aspects of sermon delivery is more than the normal mind can bear. Jay Adams counsels:

Such thoughts must not be allowed to come to mind during the delivery of the sermon itself. It is self-defeating for a preacher to think about the

delivery he is using when preaching. Where proper practice takes place you will soon find new habits begin to bleed over into one's speech.²⁵

Do your practicing outside the pulpit. Through reading out loud and the use of the exercises discussed earlier, you'll correct poor habits and develop proper habits of speech. Then put these new habits to work in your daily conversations. Through much practice the improvements will carry over into your pulpit delivery.

Sometimes a sympathetic friend can assist you, someone who genuinely is interested in helping you improve your delivery. If your wife is able to work with you in this manner, she may be a great help as well. But be sure to avoid trouble in the pastor's home! If your wife can help you without you getting your feelings hurt, don't hesitate to let her do so. If she can't, then look elsewhere. Just make sure that it's someone with whom you are comfortable, allowing them to point out flaws that you don't notice in your sermon delivery.

Be sure to keep practicing until improvement comes. Don't expect to have a brand-new speaking voice overnight. Many very gifted singers remain students of voice throughout their lifetimes. The preacher should look at improving his sermon delivery as a lifelong enterprise. Vocal improvements don't come easily, just as you don't correct faulty speech patterns in a few sessions. Work on improving your delivery weekly. Practice until good vocal habits become second nature to you.

Don't become obsessed with sermon delivery, however. Despite its importance, delivery is only one aspect of your preaching assignment. To focus unduly on your sermon delivery actually can create problems for you during the preaching of your sermons. Bacon says:

The quality of the vocal instrument is important because flexibility of the instrument increases the range of things it can encompass. Nevertheless, experience has shown that too narrow a focus on such matters often produces an interpreter more concerned with his instrument than with his music.²⁶

The preacher can become so interested in his voice that he fails adequately to convey his message. Your voice is a tool, not an altar.

You only have one voice. God has given it to you. Use that one voice to the fullest extent of its capabilities. Don't be satisfied to allow your voice to be less than it can be by proper training and practice. Make your vocal instrument a help in communicating the Word of God, not a hindrance.

CARING FOR THE VOICE

Delivering a sermon is rigorous physical activity. Some have estimated that one hour of speaking is the same as six hours of manual labor. Virtually the whole body is involved in delivering a sermon. According to Stevenson and Diehl, speaking loudly the single letter *b* requires at least ninety-five different muscles.²⁷ The weariness the preacher feels after a long day of speaking testifies to the tremendous physical exertion involved.

Today's pastor carries a speaking load much heavier than his predecessors. Rapid growth, limited space, and the high cost of land and new construction are all factors that cause many pastors to preach multiple messages in a full church during the course of a week or a weekend. More and more churches are having multiple worship gatherings, and some are simulcast to multiple church campuses. And luncheons, special ministry meetings, teaching activities, community groups, and so on can fill the average pastor's week with even more speaking responsibilities. All of these events make it important for the preacher to know how to adequately care for his voice.

Recognizing Vocal Disorders

Rigorous weekly speaking schedules cause most pastors to abuse their voices and, therefore, suffer from a variety of vocal disorders. A sore throat may be the preacher's constant companion. Strain of the voice, allergies, and changes in temperature all work against the preacher's throat. In addition, he may suffer hoarseness and chronic problems with his throat because of failure to use his voice properly. Many preachers can barely speak above a whisper on Monday morning. This reality is too common to be amusing.

Some vocal disorders are even more serious in nature. The pastor may suffer from chronic laryngitis. There may be varying degrees of hoarseness, huskiness, and throat fatigue on a weekly basis. These disorders can greatly hinder him in fulfilling his various speaking assignments. Bowed vocal folds can become a problem. Instead of remaining straight, the edges of the folds curve because of incorrect muscular function.

A still more serious problem the preacher may develop is the vocal nodule. Along with vocal polyps and contact ulcers, vocal nodules are among the most common voice disorders experienced by preachers. Vocal nodules are usually caused by incorrect use of the voice, although they sometimes are caused by allergies. The preacher should see the nodule as an extremely important danger signal.

Sometimes the nodule will disappear with a few days of voice rest. In more severe cases, some have recommended surgery. According to the experts in the field, however, surgery is not the best answer. The original cause of the nodules has to be remedied. (Recall Dr. Vine's "Personal Testimony," page 284–85.) The only adequate way to deal with vocal nodules is a radical correction of all mistakes in the use of the voice.²⁸ If you have a vocal nodule, immediately consult a throat specialist who works in cooperation with a qualified voice therapist. In fact, if you have a persistent voice problem, especially without associated medical problems, see your doctor as soon as possible even if your health care plan doesn't cover it. Your voice is too valuable to your ministry for you to ignore warning signs.

Understanding Causes of Vocal Problems

When voice problems appear, they are usually caused by one or more of three bad speaking habits:

- *Inappropriate Force.* Too much muscular force or force in the wrong places of vocal production may create problems. Preaching with too much volume over a sustained period of time may cause serious vocal problems. Abrupt onset of forced speech also is abusive to the voice.
- *Wrong Pitch.* Some voice disturbances come about because of wrong pitch. During the stress and excitement of sermon delivery, the muscles near the vocal folds may tense unduly. The voice becomes constricted, throaty, and harsh. This activity causes the pitch to go up. Under the influence of such prolonged nervous tension, this constriction focuses on the vocal folds, causing the folds themselves to be extremely tight and to bang together in an abusive manner.
- *Incorrect Breathing.* When the breath is not used as an adequate support for speaking, smooth coordination of the vocal mechanism is impossible. Failure to breathe correctly—and thereby maintain a sufficient supply of air during speaking—places too much tension on the muscles of the throat and voice box. The aim of adequate abdominal breathing is to expend a minimum of air for a maximum of vocal effort. When this kind of abdominal breathing doesn't occur, voice problems may result.

Ensuring Good Vocal Hygiene

Your voice is a delicate, highly complex instrument. If your voice isn't in good condition, you can't use it to maximum benefit. Take every step necessary to ensure good vocal hygiene. More than a dozen suggestions will help you develop such a program:

1. *Be sensitive to weather and climate.* On humid days the air we inhale is warm. Enough moisture is in such air to keep our vocal mechanism in good condition. The dry, cool winter days are most dangerous for the voice. Some preachers are often involved in traveling from place to place on preaching assignments. In a day's time a preacher may move from one climate to an entirely different one. Such transitions can play havoc with the voice. If you are traveling, try to allow for a day of rest before you are to speak. This interlude will give your vocal mechanism time to adjust to the new atmosphere.
2. *Give attention to clothing.* Some people feel that dressing heavily helps avoid catching colds. Actually, the opposite frequently occurs. Wear sufficient clothing to keep warm but not so much that you begin to perspire. Avoid tight collars or neckties.
3. *Regulate the temperature in your house.* The home is an important factor in your vocal health. Ensure that your home is properly heated. Also, be careful to have proper ventilation. A stuffy, overheated home can cause problems for the voice.
4. *Develop good nutritional habits.* Organize your eating around a diet of fresh vegetables, salads, whole grain bread, fruit, and dairy products. Avoid consuming milk or other dairy products just before you preach. These items have a tendency to accumulate mucus in the throat. Sweets also create mucus. The mucous membranes do better with a diet that contains few starches. In addition, be careful about the times you eat. Don't eat a heavy meal before you preach. You may ruin a good sermon because you're so full you can't speak properly.
5. *Drink plenty of water.* Since the vocal cords are membranes, they need moisture. Six to eight glasses of water are recommended daily.

Water is especially essential when taking decongestants or fighting vocal problems.

6. *Get plenty of rest.* Go to bed early the night before you preach. If at all possible, pastors should take their day off on Saturday. A day of relaxation and rest before your main preaching day is highly desirable.
7. *Exercise regularly.* A good exercise program can be helpful to your voice. Good muscle tone will be beneficial to the entire process of speaking. A body in good shape will assist you in preaching in a healthier manner.
8. *Give proper attention to ailments.* Numerous remedies have been suggested for sore and tired throats. Many doctors question the healing value of throat lozenges. Lozenges that contain eucalyptus may even be a hindrance, since the cool effect of the eucalyptus may create the impression that the throat is better than it is. The only value of throat lozenges for sure is that they stimulate the flow of saliva.
9. *The best remedy for a sore, tired throat is to inhale steam in the shower.* Get the water as hot as you can bear. Fill the bathroom with steam. With mouth wide open, breathe in the steam through your mouth and nose. This practice will have a soothing, healing effect on your throat.
10. *Treat colds with rest.* Rest your body so that it has time to fight the infection attacking your vocal organs. If you must preach even though you experience vocal problems, go as easy as you can.
11. *Avoid using your voice excessively before and after you preach.* Conserve your vocal strength. Don't feel you have to sing above all the congregation during the singing portions of your worship gatherings. Use the singing times to warm your vocal mechanism, not to wear it out. After the gathering, you can do great damage to your voice by talking loudly and laughing uncontrollably. Your voice is already tired. To talk excessively after preaching merely places undue strain upon it. Keep your tones as subdued as possible.
12. *Use your voice as often as possible.* When you are free of vocal ailments (recall the warning in suggestion 10), you can speak regularly, even

night after night. Many full-time evangelists have done so, and few of them ever experience voice problems. Spurgeon maintained the importance of frequent speaking: “Gentlemen, twice a week preaching is very dangerous, but I have found five or six times healthy, and even twelve or fourteen not excessive.”²⁹

13. *Limit caffeine intake.* Preachers generally love their coffee. Although you don’t necessarily need to give up drinking coffee, you should limit caffeine consumption prior to speaking. In addition to coffee, avoid caffeine products, including tea, soft drinks, and chocolate. Caffeine dries out the vocal cords, as do citrus products such as lemons, oranges, and grapefruit.
14. *Ensure quality acoustics.* If it’s within your power to do so, by all means seek to have adequate sound reinforcement where you’re preaching. The building in which you preach can be a problem for your voice. As we’ve already noted, many buildings are designed for architectural beauty rather than for sight and sound. Poor acoustics can be devastating to the preacher’s voice.
15. *Use quality sound equipment and personnel.* The sound system can help or hurt the voice. Make every effort to have an adequate sound system. Churches today have no excuse for shackling their preachers with poor sound reinforcement. Good sound equipment can mitigate some of the problems of poor acoustics, and a good microphone can be a tremendous help in keeping the voice from being abused. The sound technician can make or break the preacher. He can emphasize the lower or higher frequencies of the preacher’s voice. He can completely change the way the preacher sounds. If a sound system and its operators are good, the preacher is given support during his speaking. If they’re poor, the preacher finds himself battling the microphone. More will be said about sound reinforcement in the final chapter.


One final suggestion. Ahem . . . *minimize throat clearing.* Clearing the throat is almost reflexive when one is experiencing mucus buildup or a tickling sensation. But throat clearing is very abusive to the vocal cords and doesn’t assist in relieving discomfort. It also is distracting for the audience. Avoid the temptation, for any attempt to clear the throat is counterproductive. Instead, drink water, or suck on a hard candy to control saliva buildup.

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