

Garlock, JohnKeys To Better Preaching

7. What Must I Aim For?

This chapter lays out the four goals every speaker—preacher included—should aim for, in order of difficulty: to be interesting, clear, convincing, and to produce action. Each goal depends on reaching the ones before it. The chapter then shows techniques for each, examines the ethics of persuasion, and studies Jesus at the well and the listener's own weaknesses.

Key takeaways

- The four aims are sequential: you must be interesting before clear, clear before convincing, convincing before producing action.
- Techniques exist for each aim—novelty, drama, and humor to interest; right words and illustrations to clarify; enthusiasm, repetition, and logic to convince; suggested small steps to produce action.
- Communication techniques are amoral—they work for good or ill—so a preacher must know them, but never be dishonest or treat the end as justifying the means.

- Jesus with the Samaritan woman (John 4) models four steps: capture attention (surprise), connect with her interest (water), stimulate desire (living water), invite action (fetch her husband).
- Assume five listener weaknesses and answer each: boredom (start a fire), self-interest (build a bridge), lack of imagination (open windows with illustrations), weak memory (offer a basket—a clear outline), and uncertainty of action (plant a signpost).
- Structure a sermon accordingly: bridge-building and fire-lighting up front, signpost-planting at the close, windows and a basket in between.

Passages worth keeping

“Techniques of themselves are not necessarily moral or immoral—they are amoral. And they work—whether for good or bad.”

The chapter's ethical hinge: methods are tools; the preacher's honesty is what makes their use right.

How it connects

The chapter frames sound communication technique not as manipulation but as taking human nature seriously—the same realism Jesus and Paul showed when they met people where they actually were.

Scripture referenced

- **John 4** -- Jesus at the well—model of interesting, clear, convincing, action-producing communication
- **John 8:7** -- 'let him cast a stone'—cited as Jesus using excellent psychology
- **Acts 23:6** -- Paul calling himself a Pharisee to a divided crowd—keen psychological insight