



## 21 skills of Great Preachers

The one thing most of us would rather do than preach, is hear another great preacher. I mean a "Great" preacher. I've learned plenty from hearing the best preachers, especially in a live setting. For most of my life, when sitting under a great preacher, I've taken dual sets of notes, including content on one list, and a separate set of notes on their communication skills. What have I discovered in these 40 years worth of notes? Here's my summary:

### 1. Content:

All of my "Great Preachers" had something to say. Even as "great communicators," they didn't substitute style for substance.

### 2. Passion:

The best Preachers I've heard had a passion for what they said which seemed to spring from a general spiritual burden for people, which is different from just loving to preach. Messages are easier to love than people.

### 3. Credibility:

Great Preachers practice what they preach -- they live it.' "Great Communicators" might get away with all kinds of private sin, but not truly "Great Preachers." I've had to downgrade some of my "Great Preachers" to "Great Communicators" over the last few decades.

### 4. Prepared:

Great Preachers don't "wing it" -- even if the people couldn't tell. (They can.)

### 5. Notes:

Most Great Preachers limited their use of notes. Thanks to TV, preachers can no longer read to a crowd with their nose buried in their notes.

### 6. Simple:

Great Preachers have a way of bringing high truths down to the bottom shelf, yet without compromising the greatness of truth. In this they are like Jesus.

People don't leave a truly great preacher saying, "Boy He's smart!" They say, "Now I understand!"

### **7. Short:**

While Great Preachers are able to hold your attention in a preaching marathon, most were able to also preach a great sermon in 30 minutes or less. (I don't know about you, but I've discovered that 30 minutes is plenty of time for a preacher to give a sermon, except in the few instances when I myself am the preacher.)

### **8. Convicting:**

People hear God prick their conscience when Great Preachers preach. They give more than a "sermon" or "talk" -- they deliver a "message" from God.

### **9. Self-revealing:**

Great Preachers know how to tell personal stories on themselves. They become real to their listeners. Yet they do this while avoiding the ego-centric self-absorption of many pop preachers who make themselves the subject of the sermon instead of God.

### **10. Confidence:**

Great Preachers don't seem scared. Maybe they are, but they never seem to show it.

### **11. Tone:**

While the great preachers of the past often thundered out salvos like a giant cannons, the Great Preachers of today almost all use a conversational tone of voice. They know that people today don't listen to speakers who shout.

### **12. Story-telling:**

All Great Preachers through history have this trait in common: they are good story tellers. That goes for both telling story illustrations and direct Bible stories.

### **13. Prop:**

I've noticed that some Great Preachers use an object or prop to get their truth across -- usually an ordinary thing like a salt shaker, a packet of yeast, or a glass of water.

### **14. Humor:**

Many Great Preachers are funny, though not all of them. The humorous preachers are able to "get them back" after they've been on a roll, so that the message can stay central, not the humor. Those who can't keep the message central are merely "Great Communicators" or "Christian Humorists," not "Great Preachers."

### **15. Pace:**

Even fast-paced Great Preachers use pauses where you can catch your breath. The listener then can digest their last few bites of truth without bolting the whole meal down undigested. Many Great Preachers follow the traditional Afro-American pace in the poem: "Begin low; Continue slow; Rise up higher; Catch on fire; Sit down in the storm."

### **16. Eyes:**

Great Preachers keep their eyes glued to their audience. Each person in the congregation feels the preacher is "looking right me."

### **17. Fast-on-feet:**

Most Great Preachers are able to work in the surprises in a service like thunder, scratching on the roof, sirens etc.

### **18. Intensity:**

The Great Preachers I've heard varied their intensity -- sometimes they were louder, then they'd get as soft as a whisper, sometimes they'd be so intense that my own stomach would ache, then they'd drop back and adopt a tender or even chuckling style.

### **19. Movement:**

Most Great Preachers I've heard used their bodies to preach along with their words. They seemed to intuitively know that a congregation is getting a full 55% of the communication from their facial gestures and body movement.

### **20. Decision:**

My Great Preachers never gave a message and walked away. They called for my specific and personal decision in response to God's truth. They preached for decision, not for entertainment or education. Perhaps I call them "Great" partially because God changed me under their influence.

### **21. Landing:**

All the really Great Preachers I've heard were able to land their message on the first pass. Most lesser preachers circle the airport several times before bringing it in, or (worse still) do several "touch-and-Go's" before landing. You know, it's a funny thing... I can always see when the other guy should land his sermon, better than knowing when to bring my own message down on the runway.

So what about you?

What would you add to this list describing the skills of the "Great Preachers" you've known?

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