

## ALTERNATIVES TO MONOLOGUE

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Why offer alternatives to monologue preaching from behind pulpits? After all, monologue is the only style that many Christians know. Few realize that the Word of God sets forth very different styles of teaching that have proven to be consistently more effective.

The monologue sermon as a regular feature of Christian worship may have risen in the fourth century with **John Chrysostom** (347-407 AD), a bishop at Constantinople. The Roman imperial court instituted worship limited to chapels led by paid clergymen. Since then, the sermon, as a form of monologue, preached by paid specialists, has mostly replaced New Testament practices for teaching believers.

Eloquent and persuasive preachers of monologue sermons have often swayed audiences and nations, and God has used His Word to win and edify many with such messages. However, where churches and cells reproduce in great numbers — as is the case in many lands today — few are able to preach well by monologue. Most who try to preach monologues communicate poorly, set an example that others cannot easily follow, and fail to make disciples

Both the New Testament and church planting movements offer very effective alternatives to the monologue. As mentors of emerging leaders of new congregations, we should be able to train others in these alternatives. First, let us consider some of the weaknesses of the monologue sermon.

### Five *Weakness* of Monologue

**Monologues can make believers become “hearers only”** (Jam 1:22). Where older believers judge worship by the quality of preaching, they are easily led to imagine that merely listening to good preaching pleases God. New believers who join such preaching churches soon fall into the same error.

**Young men who preach often prove full of pride** (1 Tim 3:6). Traditional seminaries and Bible institutes encourage young men to seek leadership of existing congregations, teaching them to prepare monologue sermons. Many such young men become full of themselves; they enjoy standing before others, expounding their theologies and scolding others for their ideas.

**Most monologues bore those who hear them.** Although older believers believe it is their duty to listen to monologues, few can remember what they heard and even fewer apply the message to their lives. Younger folks round the globe today do not accept to listen to monologues. After attending preaching services a few times, younger folks stop coming and may seem to have fallen away. Most of these that the writers have observed have not rejected the gospel but refuse dogmatic, one-way communication.

**Monologues prove a weak form of communication.** Where there is little or no interaction between teachers and learners, their messages usually prove irrelevant and little learning happens. Thus, monologues often create little understanding, seldom persuade, stifle change, and foster a passive approach to the Bible and to Christian truth.

**Monologues are hard for new leaders to do well.** Most new leaders of new congregations and cell groups have insufficient skill, maturity, experience and knowledge to preach good sermons as monologues. Without a good understanding of the Bible, many new leaders tend to preach against bad habits and about their own need of more money. Other new leaders who feel incompetent and are unwilling to preach sermons resist starting and leading new congregations.

## *Five Alternatives to Monologue*

If there is a key to good communication, it is to remain involved with people's lives, keep the flow of communication going in both directions between teachers and learners, using many forms of expression.\* Several alternatives to an exclusive use of monologue can be gleaned from both the New Testament and reproductive church movements.

**Dialogue.** (Acts 17:2; 20:7; 17:11; 24:25) The apostles preferred to “dialogue” with both seekers and believers, both individuals and groups. Dialogue, conversations with a purpose, allow a teacher to answer folk's questions, allay their fears, inform their ignorance, appeal to their conscience, and help them choose what they will do. Believers are to teach and instruct “one another” (Col. 3:16; Rom 15:14).

Dialogue is easier to do in small groups than in big congregations. Since most folks already know how to dialogue with their friends and relatives, doing so is a superior way to share about Jesus and the way of life that He calls everyone to follow.

**Gifts of the Spirit.** (1 Cor 12:7; 14:24-26) A primary task of those who shepherd flocks is to ensure that all the believers have time and opportunity to serve one another. In doing so, their gifts of the Spirit will “manifest” and many will be helped and strengthened. In fact, as all the believers share one with another, even unsaved folks who listen to them will see their own need and turn to Jesus. Gifts of the Spirit manifest more readily in small groups where believers see each other face-to-face and have freedom to speak one to another.

**Demonstrations of power.** (1 Cor 2:1-5; 1 Thes 1:4-6) The reality and truth of the Word of God are learned more from experience than by listening to logical discourses. One of the main tasks of those who shepherd flocks is to ensure that all the believers have time and opportunity to pray for one another, and to show love within their worship. As they do so, the Holy Spirit will work many miracles of healing and deliverance.

**Drama and role play.** Drama and story-telling remain universally appealing to all classes of society, and are a preferred leaning style in many of the more neglected societies. Men and women, young and old, can act out Bible stories that illustrate every major doctrine of Christianity. So doing also allows children to participate actively in worship.

Brief role plays, presented with little preparation and without costumes, can prove both entertaining and evocative. A skit, followed by reading a Bible text, can open up discussion and help folks to apply truth to their lives and work. Furthermore, even the newest believers can participate.

**Questions and answers.** Folks have genuine questions and issues for which they seek help and answers. If we cannot answer a question, then let us admit so and promise to find answers.

### **Mentoring Resources**

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\* See Smith, Donald K., *Creating Understanding: A handbook for Christian communication across cultural landscapes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992). 382 pp. ISBN 0-780310531210.