

Steve Brown. *How to Talk So People Will Listen*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014. 240 pages. \$13.99.

Language is one of the most powerful tools we have as human beings to convey what we think, feel, and believe. Words carry power and when they are used correctly they can motivate, inspire, challenge, encourage, cut down, build up, and so much more. But in today's culture there are "so many voices vying for attention—online, on TV, on electronic devices of every kind—it's harder than ever to be heard. But nothing cuts through the static like the spoken word" (back cover). That is what *How to Talk So People Will Listen* by Steve Brown is all about!

Brown originally published this book in 1993. This is a revised and expanded edition that includes helpful suggestions for navigating the shifting landscape of our digital communication age.

Rightfully, Brown begins the book with a chapter on the power of speech, moves into authority and roadblock issues, guides the reader into significant communication shifts, and ends with helpful aids for talking in ways that are inviting and helpful. The structure of the book is well thought out and moves from one concern to the next in a coherent manner.

Dealing with the power of words is imperative for anyone who speaks publicly. Preachers, teachers, leaders, and just about everyone can gain something from reading this book. The power of words means that the speaker must acknowledge the possibility that those words could either bless or destroy (13–17). Words help to define us and set up how people react to the speaker (17–18). The power of words has to be dealt with intentionally.

As homiletics professors, we often see the fear and intimidation factor of public speaking impacting the students we teach. Brown addresses this reality head on. Several things lead to this intimidation for any public speakers. They include: apprehension, hostility, position, expertise, and circumstance (Ch. 2). The logical and simple advice from the author, "Don't let others intimidate you." Easier said than done for many, but great advice nonetheless.

Brown advises speakers to keep things simple, which is helpful for all public and private speaking (58). He also offers advice about the roadblocks that can inhibit communication. These include: not saying what you mean, being insensitive to listeners, sending mixed messages, disregarding listeners' responses, and failing to define terms (Ch. 4). These are important things to note.

Advice for speaking to enhance their communication skills in this new age is the importance of being real, understanding the shifting realities of authority, and the importance of relationships and community (78–86).

Brown offers helpful insights about communication in this new digital and technological age that are critical for preachers, as well. These include: telling a story, avoiding sound bite mentality, providing the listener a takeaway, and avoiding hidden agendas (Ch. 7).

Chapters 8 and 9 provide practical rules for communication that delve into the necessary processes of crafting opportunities to communicate effectively. One of the issues I experienced negatively as a reader was the use of the term "weapon" in relation to winning an argument. That kind of aggressive and militaristic language typically turns me off.

Brown considers chapter ten the most important of the book for those desiring to speak effectively in public. In it, he lays out his main premise. For a speech or other public speaking event to be effective it must have a clear purpose, it must draw listeners into the hearing, it must be well organized, it must tell a story, and it must matter to the listener (161–173).

Paying attention to your intended audience, understanding the subject about which you are speaking, and editing for clarity are insights any preacher or speaker needs to take into consideration (176–183). Moving into presentation and speaking what has been planned comes next and Brown does an admirable job in addressing the realities of public speaking and what the presenter needs to keep in mind regarding the needs of the listeners. Brown utilizes ten commandments for public speaking that are important (Ch. 12).

Some of the narrative insights that Brown provides are extremely helpful to preaching, but the book would be beneficial to anyone who needs practical help for improving their communication skills. The book is clear and coherent in ways that are accessible to the reader. The practical advice is simple to understand. The book is a good resource for anyone who wants to learn about public communications.

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