



Course 3, Session 3 Student Notes: Make It Plain

Clear, Not Clever

Big Idea: A confused mind does not buy and does not believe. Make your message so plain that a busy person grasps it instantly and can carry it to someone else.

How to use these notes. These are yours to study on your own, before or after the session. Read each section slowly. Under every principle there is a **Notes** space to write what stands out to you, and a **Reflect** question to answer honestly in writing. Keep your Bible nearby. Take about 30 minutes, and end in prayer. Bring your notes and questions to the group.

Open in Prayer

Before you begin, pray this simple prayer, or your own: "Father, You make Your truth plain enough for a child and deep enough for a scholar. Strip the cleverness and fog from my words. Help me speak with that kind of clarity. Amen."

The Scripture for This Session

Read these slowly, out loud if you can:

- **Habakkuk 2:2**, "And the Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it."
- **1 Corinthians 14:9**, "Except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air."

Reflect: If a stranger had ten seconds and a lot on their mind, would they understand what you do? Be honest about how clear you really are.

The Big Picture

Here is a rule that will improve your marketing more than almost anything else: be clear, not clever. We are tempted, especially the creative among us, to be witty, to use a play on words, to sound impressive. But clever often confuses, and a confused mind does not buy, does not sign up, does not act. It just moves on.

You have learned who you serve and the power of story. Tonight we strip away the clever fog and make the message plain, because a confused person never acts. Clarity is not dumbing down. It is respect. It respects the listener's time and attention, and it is the difference between truth that lands and truth that gets lost. Over this session we will look at four marks of a plain message, then study one verse where God Himself commands plainness. Read each one, write your notes, and answer the reflection.

Principle 1: A Confused Mind Does Not Act.

Picture the person you are speaking to. They are busy. They are distracted. They have a hundred things on their mind and a phone full of notifications. They are not going to study your message like a puzzle. If they cannot understand it almost instantly, they will not work at it. They will just scroll past.

So your message has to be so plain that a tired, busy person gets it in a glance. The goal of your message is not to make people admire how smart you are. It is to make them instantly understand how you can help them. Clarity beats cleverness every single time, because clever earns applause and clear earns action. If they have to think hard to understand what you do, you have already lost them.

Reflect: Where are you hiding behind clever or polished language that actually confuses people?

Notes:

Principle 2: Pass the Ten Year Old Test.

Here is a brutal but useful test. Could a ten year old understand what you do and repeat it back? Jesus spoke to crowds of fishermen and farmers and laborers, ordinary people, in words a child could follow, and the deepest truths in history landed precisely because they were plain. A lost sheep. A father running to his son. A seed in the ground.

If the truths of the Kingdom can be made that plain, your business can be made plain too. When you can say what you do in one sentence a child could repeat, you have done the hard work of thinking clearly, and you have handed the listener a message they can carry to someone else. Plainness is not a lower form of communication. It is the higher discipline of making yourself understood.

Reflect: In one plain sentence a ten year old could repeat, what do you do? Write it, then see if you can cut it in half.

Notes:

Principle 3: Beware the Curse of Knowledge. Cut the Jargon.

Watch out for the curse of knowledge. You are so close to your own work that you have forgotten what it is like not to understand it. You use industry jargon, internal terms, and shorthand that means nothing to an outsider. To you it sounds precise. To your customer it sounds like a foreign language, and a foreign language is just noise.

Strip out the jargon. Say it the way you would explain it to a friend at dinner who knows nothing about your field. The words that feel too simple to you are usually the exact words your customer needs. Remember Paul: unclear words are just speaking into the air. They accomplish nothing. The cure is humility, saying it plainly even when plain feels less impressive, because the point was never to impress. The point was to be understood.

Reflect: What jargon or insider language have you stopped noticing that your customer does not actually understand?

Notes:

Principle 4: End With One Clear Next Step.

Here is the second half of clarity: tell people exactly what to do next. So much marketing describes something nicely and then just trails off, leaving the person thinking, “okay, nice, but what do I do now?” A plain message ends with one clear next step. Call this number. Book here. Reply yes. Come Sunday.

One step, stated plainly. Do not offer five options, because that is just a new kind of confusion. Give one clear action and make it obvious. More options create hesitation. One obvious action gets acted on. When your message is plain and it ends with a single, unmistakable step, you have removed every reason for a willing person to drift away without responding.

Reflect: What is the single next step you want people to take? Is it stated plainly, or buried under choices?

Notes:

The Story: Write the Vision and Make It Plain (Habakkuk 2:2)

Read the verse. The prophet Habakkuk has been wrestling with God, and God answers: “Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.” Sit on every part of that instruction, because it is a complete marketing principle in one verse.

“Write the vision.” First, the message must be captured, put into a clear, fixed form. Not vague, not just floating in your head, but written down and defined. You cannot communicate plainly what you have not first made plain to yourself. “Make it plain.” This is the heart of it. God does not say make it impressive, or clever, or sophisticated. He says make it plain. Plainness is not a compromise, it is the command. “That he may run that readeth it.” Here is the test, and it is stunning. The message should be so clear that a runner, someone moving fast, glancing at it in passing, can grasp it instantly and even carry it to others. That is your busy, distracted customer. The standard is not “a careful reader can eventually figure it out.” The standard is “a person in a hurry gets it at a glance and can pass it on.”

Most marketing fails this test completely. It is clever when it should be clear. It makes the reader stop and puzzle when it should let them grasp and run. Pair it with Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:9: unclear words are just speaking into the air. God’s standard is the runner’s standard, plain enough to catch on the move.

Reflect: Could a runner, someone glancing at your message while moving fast, grasp what you do? Where are you being clever when God is asking you to be plain?

Notes:

Put It Into Practice

1. Write your one plain sentence. Write what you do in one sentence, then ruthlessly cut every jargon word, clever phrase, and unnecessary clause until a child could understand it.

What I do, in one plain sentence (no jargon):

The jargon words I am removing:

The single next step I want people to take:

2. This week’s assignment. Say your one plain sentence to three people who know nothing about your field, and ask each to repeat back what they think you do. Where they get it wrong is exactly where your message is still unclear. Refine it there.

Where they got it wrong (and my fix):

Go Deeper (Optional)

- **Read:** *Made to Stick* by Chip and Dan Heath, and the clarity chapters of *Building a StoryBrand* by Donald Miller.
 - **Listen:** the *Marketing Made Simple* podcast by Donald Miller and J.J. Peterson.
 - **Study:** Habakkuk 2:2; 1 Corinthians 14:9; Matthew 13:31 to 33 (Jesus making truth plain with everyday pictures).
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Close in Prayer

“Father, thank You that You speak plainly enough for a child and deeply enough for the wise. Help me strip away the fog, cut the cleverness, and say what is good so plainly that anyone can grasp it and carry it. Point the people I serve to one clear step, so that the good I carry actually reaches them. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

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