

Training – Talks – myfishbites.com

The Art of Public Speaking / Giving Talks

I once attended a church with my sister. The guy doing the preaching was around 19–20 years and did a good job. However, I thought to myself, "I hope someone from the church feeds back to him on how he did, encourages him and helps him improve." This got me thinking: this section is designed to share the many lessons about public speaking and giving a talk that I've learned. I hope and pray it is of good value to you personally, and for youth workers feeding back to young people.

We've also prepared a session on evaluation (click 'evaluation' on a menu [or click here](#)). Some help can be found in a word document linked to that section. [Click here to download..](#)

Preparation

We've all heard the stories about youth pastors and famous speakers who we're told like to 'blag it' when they give a talk (make it up as they go along). This is possible. I once knew a youth pastor who was excellent at this – sharing what he knew almost freestyle. But this will only go so far, will not enable you to share fresh insights you've gained from God, and will see you only reaching a limit. There will come a time or times where your lack of preparation will be very evident. A lack of preparation (unless you can't help it through circumstances) does not honour God, who is worthy of our very best.

Some preachers seem to be able to ad-lib and freestyle their talk. This is because of an immense gift, or because of hours put in preparing their talk, so much so that it seems to roll off their tongue without any seeming need for notes. Put bluntly, preparation = a greater chance of success and of people hearing / responding to what you're saying / God is saying through you (depending on your context).

Know Your Subjects

1. Who are you going to be talking to, what are they like?
2. Are they Christians, or a mix of people?
3. What ages are they?
4. What subjects have they covered recently?
5. How do they learn effectively? What doesn't work for them?
6. How long will you be speaking?
7. Are there things that you need to steer away from talking about? For example,

you may believe some theology that the leaders do not. Just be careful.

8. Is there a 'ministry' or 'prayer' time, or 'counsellors'? Do you stay and pray for people, or not? (For example, one well known speaker does the talk and then leaves, with the 'follow-up' in the hands of local trained volunteers).

9. Are you given a prepared subject, or do you choose one? If you choose one, do you need to let them know? Do they even want an outline of your talk in advance?

10. If you are using technology, it is good practice to let people know in advance, maybe even send them what you will be using in advance, with instruction. If you're using a PowerPoint / Keynote presentation, print off the slides and/or your notes, so that the technology person following your talk knows when to change slides / show the DVD etc.

11. Encourage the venue / conference / church, to be in prayer for you before you get there. And when you are there.

Know Your Venue

1. Do you know how to get there? Get a map from online, get key contact people's phone numbers, mobiles, the venue's phone number, address etc.

2. Where about are you speaking within the venue?

3. Who is your key contact? What do they look like?

4. How many people will be there? How large is the venue?

5. What kind of equipment do they have? Projector, laptop, what software, DVD player..?

6. Is the equipment manned by professionals or good people? Or will you be running the equipment?

7. Have they made provision for expenses, accommodation, food and drink?

8. What kind of mic will you be using / do you prefer? A static mic over a stand, a handheld, tie clip, or face mic? They may not have what you want, so be in advance.

Before Preparing For Your Talk

Obviously prayer is key. The Bible tells us to commit our (Godly!) way to God. This must be the start to what you do. Consider kneeling or lying face down before God, or fasting. The message you give must come from on high, anointed with God's Spirit and be ready to speak into people's lives in power, seeing / believing in God's transforming power.

You may feel led to a particular set of verses, or a topic. The times where you don't

feel specifically led, I have found that it's good to talk about something God has been speaking to you about, or something you have been reading / hearing about that you're passionate about.

Preparing Your Talk

Get into the Bible; read other books; talk to wise people around you; read magazines. I often listen to a preacher talking on a topic. For example, I delivered a talk on prophecy. I read around, bought an mp3 download from Derek Prince Ministries and then went from there. The amazing Bible Gateway is an incredible resource, especially the keyword search.

Obviously, you'll need to write your talk, either on computer or handwritten. If you do on computer, make sure that you not only check through on-screen, but also print-off a copy and go through it with a marker pen or two. I used to revise by summarizing my notes smaller and smaller from say 10 sheets of A4 down to a business card with the main pointers.

As you're preparing, clear headings are essential. You need to be communicating to your audience where you are going. Therefore, you need to know this yourself. Don't overcrowd your headings.

You must make a decision as to whether you are going to completely script your talk (as say J John does, although he knows his script inside out), or whether you use a list of prompts / combination of both.

Make sure that you don't keep saying the same words, if you keep saying them, then people will get fed up with you saying the same thing. So when you're saying something, and find certain words are becoming repetitive, try and use different words meaning the same. Go to a Thesaurus and find new words. You'll most likely find words that describe what you need to communicate, more effectively.

If you want to, run your talk by someone you trust who will give you an honest and Godly, encouraging feedback. I once sent a talk to a pastor and his comments back to me were all about limiting the breadth and scope of the talk, trying to constrain it in a negative way. So send it to someone you know, trust and respect.

Make sure that you know your topic to your limit. Don't simply re-hash what someone else has said, unless you understand and agree with what they say / have an angle to comment on what they have said.

Be honest enough to admit your limitations, but don't start a talk by saying 'I don't

really know about this' or 'I'm not very good at this' etc. That is almost giving the audience permission to question your words. Speak with authority within what you know.

Preparing To Deliver The Talk

Earlier we mentioned having a marker pen and going through your notes / script. A strong recommendation is not only to read your script, but read it out loud. I go further than this, and actually speak out the talk as if I am actually delivering it to an audience. If you are a natural born actor, then act it out as you would on-stage.

You may want to go one step further and actually watch yourself give the talk, either on camera or in front of a mirror. This will reveal many things to you. It will show where you repeat yourself; where something could be phrased more effectively; your body language and effectiveness at communicating around; any idiosyncracies you have, such as moving backwards and forwards or wafting your hand around etc.

Not especially the amount of times you say, 'erm' or 'uhh'. Listening to one talk, I couldn't help but hear the amount of times I heard the speaker say, 'uhh'. So much so, that I commend on it to a friend. It is off-putting as it means you are hesitating (and potentially disengaging the audience) – and because once people realise you keep saying 'uhh', you run the risk of them hearing the 'uhh' and not your talk!

Once you've assessed yourself (or got someone to watch / listen to you), go back and keep tweaking your script. Then 'deliver' it again, taking note not to do things you noticed that were unhelpful. And so on..

If you have time, it is a good idea to continue practicing your talk until you know it very, very well. When I practice raps, I do them over and over. I record them and play them while I'm working. If I have 5 mins, I practice them again etc.

Believe in what you are saying. The story is told of someone who attended a church for 2 years or so, who was not yet a Christian. One day the pastor challenged him about what he believed and why he always came and sat in the front-row. The man replied that he didn't believe a word the pastor said in his sermons. "Well why do you come?" asked the pastor, reasonably. "Because you believe in what you're saying and I want to hear someone speak who believes in what they say" replied the man. There is a clear lesson here. You can't expect people to be impacted by what you say unless you believe in it yourself.

Remember that you don't want to go over your allotted time, so take a stopwatch or similar to keep an eye on the time. I have found that time flies. I have also noted that a shorter and concise talk is better than a badly prepared one, which never seems to end. Cut yourself short when you feel tempted to go on.

Make sure that you watch your language. Again, this means knowing your audience. Don't use Christianese words unless needed. Be very clear and learn good diction skills. Don't blabber at 100 miles an hour, or use poor diction so people can't pick up what you're saying. Exercise your facial muscles. Consider a warm-up or vocal exercises. Always have a bottle or two of lukewarm water handy and don't be afraid to use it. If you have a strong accent, think about toning it down to a non-local audience. Speak slower than you would normally.

Use the appropriate language to effectively communicate with people. If talking to young people, use their language. Explain big or complex words. If people can't read well, don't give out bits of paper etc.

Think about your pauses and silence. Without being manipulative at all – if you have made a powerful or thought-provoking point, allow a pause or time of silence as people reflect on what you have said. If you use humour, use it sparingly and then bring home a powerful point and pause.

Delivering The Talk - Your Checklist

1. Your notes, clearly marked / your checklist.
2. Your stopwatch.
3. Confidence – believe in yourself because of Christ in you. Posture – stand tall.
4. Think about your appearance – don't wear loud or distracting outfits unless that's your intention – and make sure you're neat and tidy, both on your face and in your clothing. Gents, check your zipper is done up. Ladies, check your make-up, if wearing any. Everyone, blow your nose and think about any distracting hair etc if you're likely to be close-up on camera.
5. Check yourself ever saying anything like 'umm' and 'err'.
6. Eliminate nervous / distracting shuffling, motion or hand movements.
7. Look around the room, continually engaging with all your audience.
8. Language – speak slowly, clearly, be simple, bring in stories, think of your pauses and 'key points'.
9. Movement – move to engage with people and enable effective delivery of points – only!

10. Smile when you start the talk. Be gracious, humble and thank people. Pray to end where appropriate.

Talk Delivery Techniques and Pointers

– What are you going to communicate? Be clear with yourself. If it helps, write it down and then try to summarise it.

– Introduce yourself, who you are, what you do, why you're giving this talk. If God spoke to you then say it. If you feel something passionately and want to communicate it, say that.

– If you are confident, then you can use jokes. Not too many. Not too silly. It helps if it illustrates a point or if it is from your own life. Test it on others. Don't use 'in-jokes' that only you and your mates understand. Don't carry on with too many jokes just because you're getting a laugh. God gets the glory not you.

– Be yourself. Be real. Don't be like the wannabe popstars who copy their favourite artists' style of singing. Do what you can as best as you can. Don't exaggerate. Don't lie and make stuff up. Practice makes perfect. Positively supported / evaluated practice is even better.

– Communicate constantly with your audience. Look them in the eyes, smile and be humorous. Be quiet at times. The use of silence can be extremely effective if used well. Look around the room so everyone feels included. Speak loudly and softly at appropriate times – use vocal dynamics. Lean towards people to make a point.

– Put a lot of life into it, there's nothing worse than a speaker who mumbles or is constantly reflective. It gets very boring, especially for young people. Your voice is a creative tool, not a dull and dry monotone.

– Think of people who you feel are good communicators. Why are they good communicators? One Bible speaker once said you know when you understand something because you're able to simply communicate it to others. If you don't understand what you're saying, few people will.

– Use stories, illustrations, props to add to your talk. If you are comfortable using video clips, PowerPoint, other visual programmes then use them. Control them yourself or get someone to do this. Make sure they are cued up, that the sound is working and at the right level, and that anyone helping knows the timings etc.

- Time yourself. Many a youth work talk falls flat because it goes on too long. Be efficient in use of words and time. Be precise. Short and sharp.
- Having said this, be open to the situation. Be open to the Holy Spirit. See below.
- If you're giving your testimony, talk about what God did for you and what God is currently doing. Share from personal experience lessons you've learned, where you are on your spiritual journey.
- Practicalities - do you need Bibles, pens, paper. Make sure you have it with you.
- What will you do for discipline strategies? (Calmly tell them to be quiet, ask them to leave, stop and stare at them until they are quiet etc.)
- Don't worry too much. Do your best, work hard and God will reward your efforts. God loves to see you at work for him, especially when you're humble, have said sorry for sins, obedient, committed and passionate about him!
- Sit down together afterwards and evaluate what you did. You may do this verbally or write it down. It may be helpful to have a leader there to give encouraging feedback. Learn from your efforts - both good and bad.
- You do not have to shout to make your point, so don't just do it. Some preachers use this to enforce a point. Some, because they have no good point to make. Don't be deficient and make up for it by shouting, esp if you have a weak or gravelly voice. Use your voice well.
- Many preachers get the audience to repeat back something they say. This can be useful but don't over-use this or simply do it because the 'big' named preachers do it. The over-use of this will be tiring for people and a bit monotonous.
- Your job is not to control or manipulate people. You are simply an 'up -front' clay pot, that the master potter is using to shape you and his other people. I have seen one or two preachers talk about how 'they' have done this and that. It's very interesting, but use this humbly and to encourage people towards God. The speaker, Derek Prince, was very humble and graceful in saying what God had used him to do. Do likewise. It is not about you. To be honest, I'm not impressed by what people say they've done. I'm only impressed at how God uses people like you and me. It's his glory and fame, not yours.

– Make sure you know your topic as well as you can. If you do not understand what you are saying, how will others?

A Spiritual Help Guide

1. Pray before. Get together and pray – there is power when people meet together (Mt 18.19–20) Get down on your knees. Commit it to God (Proverbs 3). Seek God passionately. What does he want you to say. Be open.
2. Agree with each other before God. Humble yourselves before God. ‘God, we need you.’ (Psalm 25.9) Submit to each other – let others have their way too – but not at the cost of basic Bible truths!
3. Think about what you want to talk about – God may have put something on your mind or in your heart. Other times it may be down to you. That’s cool. Ask God directly. James 1.5–6 says ask God for wisdom. John 14.16 says the Spirit is our helper, so use his infinitely wise help!
4. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you so you can give glory and big up Jesus. Remember it's not about you but God and his Kingdom. Read Matthew 7.7–12 (addressed to the disciples)
5. Be open to God, even on the night. The Holy Spirit may guide you to do something different – or differently. 1 Thess 5.19 encourages us not to hold back the Holy Spirit.
6. Take a check on your lifestyle and sins. Psalm 139.23 says search me God and show me if there’s anything wrong in me. Be open to God. He will use you but cannot use you to your full potential if you are actively and willfully sinning. Forgive others.
7. You should make your spiritual life a priority. If you are praying regularly, confessing your sins, asking God to grow you in your faith, obeying God, worshipping him, reading the Bible with expectancy then it will help. This also includes regularly being at church or home group.
8. Be creative and innovative if you want to – the very first spiritual gift is found in Exodus 31.3 where Bezalel was given the Spirit of God to do all kinds of creative things. God is a very creative God (he created the world) and we’re made in his image!

9. You are unique with unique skills, gifts and passion for specific things in God's Kingdom. Don't be afraid to let your light shine so that others can see Christ in you (Matthew 5.14–16)

10. What you say will have an impact – God's Word always does. (Isaiah 55.11 says so). Matthew 5.13 says we are to be like salt and light – your life and the talks you give should be aiming for change and an impact in people's lives including yours.

11. Be aware – when telling other people about something, God may give you an experience of it before or after to add to the effect of what you say.

12. Get people praying for you, before, during and after. God's Word and the Spirit of God can be given extra power by the prayers of Godly people. You may also need God's protection.

13. Remember that it is right to be encouraged by people but it's about God getting the glory and not you. Don't be discouraged. Sometimes you don't see how God works. All you can do is ask God, be open to and obey God, be faithful and leave the rest to him!

14. You don't always have to have experienced something personally to make use of it. But it can help people relate.