

Proclaiming the Faith | Preparing a Talk on Faith

The Lord said to him: "Who gives one person speech? Who makes another mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will assist you in speaking and teach you what you are to say. - Exodus 4:11-12

There are many ways to prepare a talk on faith, but some things are non-negotiable and must be included:



PRAYER

A talk on faith must include prayer; otherwise, it is a talk that does not include God. It is essential that you give God a chance to guide your talk throughout your preparation process. The Holy Spirit is especially helpful in prayers of guidance, clarity, and peace.



UNDERSTAND YOUR ROLE

Typically, your talk will fit into the theme of a ministry event. It is vital to pinpoint the role your presentation will fulfill. Consider the length of time allotted, time of day, what precedes or follows your talk, and what your talk should accomplish. What is the purpose or objective for your talk?



PREPARATION TIME

Take your time. A good talk isn't something that can be written in 15 minutes, or even a couple of hours. It requires thought, discussion, prayer, research, scratching things out, exploring going through it over and over, and then coming back to it again later. Practice in the chapel or in the mirror. Memorize it. Time yourself. Never just wing it. The more time you spend with your talk, the more natural and engaging it will be when you present. Take the challenge to spend 10+ hours preparing.



QUESTION

God speaks in many ways; seek His voice! Ask God for guidance in prayer, search for inspiration in Scripture, and learn about Church teaching online. Listen to music, read a book on the topic, and start a discussion with friends. Request the counsel of a mentor or peer for advice, editing, or practice. The best talks have the input of many other sources.



ORGANIZATION

Be sure to have a theme for your talk and a clear path from start to finish. Set benchmarks ("I'm going to tell you about this and then move to that.") and include obvious transitions. Erase from your talk what does not relate to the central theme. Reinforce the theme by drawing connections to it from each part of your talk. Keep the main thing the main thing.



STORY

Relate to the audience with examples from your own life. God has sculpted your life into a beautiful, living story of his love. Dive deep into your experiences, emotions, and thoughts, and let God reveal your story for the sake of others. Be honest and don't try to appear perfect. Instead, focus on being yourself and explaining how God acts upon your story.



SACRIFICE

Speaking on faith is an act of sacrifice. You must let go of the talk you think is impressive but fails to reach the audience. You must be honest about where you are hiding in the talk and find courage to be boldly vulnerable. You must suffer with your audience, and journey with them instead of preaching at them. You must give the audience a part of yourself and your story. You must realize that you are an instrument for God; it is His song you must echo. You must not be afraid of fitting in. Giving a talk on faith is one time to be totally fearless.

Proclaiming the Faith | Organizing a Talk on Faith

But how shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe unless they have heard of him? And how can they hear unless there is someone to preach? - Romans 10:14

This sample talk outline will give you some insights as to how a clearly organized talk might look:

INTRODUCTION



BEGIN IN PRAYER

Pray in a traditional or creative way with your audience.

TELL WHO YOU ARE & WHAT YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT

Share your name and some introductory notes about yourself. Concisely and clearly let your audience know a bit about what to expect.

ESTABLISH ETHOS

A synonym for "ethos" might be "credentials." Why should the audience listen to you? Find a way to share your experience or just relate to the audience to demonstrate you understand them.

SET YOUR THEME

Perhaps the punch line or moral of a story, the key line of a Scripture verse, or a phrase you will repeat several times can function as your theme. Your theme should answer the question, "What do I want my audience to remember?"

BODY



ILLUSTRATE THE THEME

Spend your time explaining the theme in multiple, creative ways.

INCLUDE JESUS

Through Scripture, tradition, prayer, or history, be sure that the center of our faith is central to your talk.

MAKE CLEAR TRANSITIONS

When you move from one idea or topic to another, make this change explicit with a comment like, "Although this is how I once thought of the Bible, I now have a different point of view."

TELL YOUR STORY

Bring your own life experiences into the fold. A series of short anecdotes woven in or a personal account of one significant story are often the components of a talk that leave a lasting impact. Be open; if you hope that your audience will be open to God's spirit working in their lives, then you certainly must be as well.

REPEAT THE THEME

Keep returning to the central message throughout your talk. Each point should flow out of this main point.

CONCLUSION



CAREFULLY CRAFT YOUR ENDING

Your last words should be your best. Don't leave this section to chance.

CALL TO ACTION

Leave your audience with a charge to do more or be better. Leave them with a memorable, motivational message that completes your theme.

OFFER TIME TO REFLECT

With prayer, activity, music, or media, allow your words to be digested by the audience before concluding your presentation.

Lord, you will open my lips; and my mouth will proclaim your praise. / For you do not desire sacrifice or I would give it; a burnt offering you would not accept. / My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit; a contrite, humbled heart, O God, you will not scorn. - Psalms 51:17-19

More than 400 years ago, St. Ignatius of Loyola encouraged prayer-filled mindfulness through a technique of prayerful reflection called the Daily Examen. This Examen adaptation will aid you in praying for your talk:



SPACE FOR PRAYER

Find a chapel, park bench, or comforting area to pray. Set yourself up to avoid distraction. Breathe, be still, and be open. Ask God to be with you, and be willing to listen.

ROOM FOR MORE

These may be difficult questions, but they come from a daily prayer routine. Do not worry about perfect responses, but do revisit these questions more than once.

BECOME AWARE OF GOD'S PRESENCE.

Let God know that you have set aside time for Him and are inviting Him in. Come, Holy Spirit!

Where am I with you, God? How are you a part of my life right now?

LOOK AT YOUR LIFE WITH GRATITUDE.

Name the many delights & joys of your life right now. Recall John 17:10, "All that I have is yours."

What are the things and people for which I am most grateful? What gifts have I shared?

ASK FOR HELP.

Be not afraid! Admit your weaknesses and faults to God and He will show mercy. Ask for help and healing.

Where have I fallen short in my faith & life? Where I have not done enough?

FOCUS ON A MESSAGE.

God has led you to this speaking role for a reason. Ask Him what He wants you to share and how you can serve.

What messages has God given me recently? What message does He want others to hear?

LOOK TO THE FUTURE.

Respond to your prayer. Ask God what His desire is for you to do next. Pray for peace, hope, and understanding.

Where do we go from here, God? How will I use my gifts to prepare for this talk?

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands, concerns the Word of life—for the life was made visible; we have seen it and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was made visible to us. - 1 John 1:1-2

As you prepare your talk, consider the advice, testimony, and thoughts of experienced speakers on faith:



Prayer is a good, humble start. To admit to God that I need his help and inspiration is an excellent antidote for someone who was just given the privileged role of publicly speaking about his faith.

I want to have **God** included throughout.

I am very concerned with my **audience**. No matter their age, I take them seriously. I have to believe that they have it in them to be saints. I always ask for wisdom & humility in considering the audience, as I've fallen into the trap of just writing a talk that I'm impressed with rather than what the audience needs to hear from God.

A talk is a **work of art** in its own right, and every artist needs to express themselves wholly. This means remembering details and being real about the situation. Be embarrassing. Share feelings even if they aren't orthodox or perfect. Be yourself.

If I'm going to ask my audience to reexamine their lives, then I need to offer a **model** of that to them. I need to do what I'm hoping they'll do.

Using **Scripture** is like "giving" something to your audience to take home with them.

Make them laugh; make them think; make them feel. I want to do all of those things because those are the things that can **open** me up and allow God to enter.

I **listen** for God's voice. Listening for God's voice is perhaps one of the two most difficult things to do when planning. I must actively listen to music, participate in my community, be alert in silence and be mindful in all I see and do. Somewhere, somehow, sometimes obviously and sometimes in a faith whisper, God will speak. I must then listen. Then, I pray.

The **Spirit** will surround you and will flow through you and to you during a talk. This happens even if you do not feel Him. Always know that and always believe that.

After writing, I put the talk together again from scratch. For me, it is very freeing and refreshing to **rethink** the big picture in this way. I often don't quite hit the bull's-eye when I first aim at the target.

Let yourself be **vulnerable**. Think about all the talks you've ever heard. Which ones made the biggest impact on you? Why were those so memorable? I can almost guarantee that the person giving these

Hook; **create controversy**; solve it. That's my thought process.

Find a **mentor** to help through the talk process. A mentor helped me realize what an important and powerful task giving a talk is at a retreat, and he really helped me grow in my understanding of Christ and of myself.

Don't cross your fingers and hope for the best—take the time to **practice**. Read it silently and aloud. Try to memorize it and time yourself. Get comfortable hearing the words out loud, especially if you are sharing a difficult story.

impactful talks shared their deeply personal experiences and struggles with you, and that those were the points you could best connect with. Opening yourself up as a speaker gives your audience permission to open themselves up, whether it's in their small groups, with their family or friends, or with God.

Every talk that I give includes an honest charge to see God better. Every talk is an opportunity to **get real** and wriggle God into those tight spaces.

I give my talk to God. I usually give the talk in **adoration** or before the tabernacle.

When it is time for the Spirit to break out, it can overwhelm you. Spend time in prayer and get to know the Spirit. It helps to have a relationship with the Spirit by whose Love we are sealed. And when the Spirit breaks down your walls, just enjoy being in His **presence**.

When God speaks, I pray again and I **surrender** myself to the will of the Holy Spirit asking that the Spirit of the living God guide my words and my speech. I ask God to make me bold.

Overall, I find that giving a talk on faith is a thrilling enterprise. It **challenges** me to grow in my own faith in order to give a persuasive presentation. I value so highly that someone would give me that space to deliver a message, and my best talks happen when I most let God shine through me.

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where this despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.
- Prayer of Saint Francis

As a mentor for a speaker, there are several ways you can promote a prayerful, polished message:

PRAYER

Include the speaker you are mentoring in your prayers! While your speaker may be seeking guidance and clarity, your prayers may be more about forming connections. Ask God to use you as the instrument of His mercy that surrenders itself in order to fine-tune your speaker's message.



ACCOUNTABILITY

Your most important task as a mentor is to hold your speaker accountable to her talk preparation. Has there been sufficient prayer, preparation time, and focus on the main point? Do not be afraid to set deadlines and keep them. Be up front with these expectations at the beginning of the process. Be sure to mentor within the framework set by the retreat leader or youth minister.



MEET IN PERSON

When possible, meet in person with your speaker. Have a discussion not just about the content of a talk, but on the challenges and progress of the process. If the speaker you are meeting is a youth, be sure to meet in a public space and inform parents of your meetings. Also, find times and spaces that are convenient for your speaker, as your aim is not to add more work to their plate. Try meeting before or after their usual Mass time.



MODEL EXPECTATIONS

Do not ask your speaker to put together the perfect talk. Instead, walk with him or her through the process and be willing to share your own experiences. Only ask for preparation steps that you are willing to take in your own talk preparation. Be sure to share about how you have prayed for their talk. Be the talk mentor you wish you had.



HUMBLE DIRECTION

In guiding a person through a talk, it is good to adopt the practice of excellent tutors who "never pick up the pencil." It is vital to ask questions, challenge, and nudge without turning the talk into your own. Meet your speaker where he or she is at in their faith story and be cautious that your words don't manipulate. Trust that their story is the one that needs to be shared.



ENCOURAGEMENT

Though you may be called on to edit a draft, critique a practice talk, or challenge a speaker to go deeper, it is certainly important to offer affirmation for the positive qualities of a talk as well. Don't neglect words of praise and encouragement!



BE A MINISTER

Although you have the objective of leading your speaker to a great talk on faith, you also are acting as a minister to the faith. Share the Gospel of Jesus through your discussions and help your speaker understand and articulate his or her story as an experience of God. Your speaker's end game is to be fully prepared for a terrific talk; yours is to form a disciple.

