



HOW TO PREPARE, CRITIQUE AND GIVE A TALK



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How to Prepare, Critique, and Give a Talk

When working a 4th Day team, you may be asked to give one of the ten talks or *Rollos* given by the laity, or you may be asked to prepare one of the backup talks. After an initial reaction of some flattery, you may be hit with fear or at least uncertainty, but remember that the rector or rectora has spent much time in prayer before asking you to take on this task. You really have nothing to worry about if you will but follow two guidelines. First, do everything prayerfully. Second, proceed with humility and discipline.

The title of this talk is "How to prepare, Critique, and Give a Talk." So this talk is for everybody. Even if you have not been asked to prepare a talk or backup, you will probably be asked to critique several talks at the first team meeting.

Lay Talk Workbook

Whether you have been asked to give a talk, prepare a backup talk, or are simply a member of the team that will critique talks at the first team meeting (and this is just about every team member), your first task is to study the outlines of the talks in the **Lay Talk Workbook**. Note that I said "talks" (plural), not "talk." You cannot understand any single talk in the 4th Day weekend without understanding all of them. The talks at 4th Day are much like pieces to a jigsaw puzzle: in order to understand how any particular part fits, you must study the whole. Each part fits together with the others to produce a beautiful whole, but in order for the whole to be complete, each part must be there, and each part must be of a particular design. If any part is changed, it won't fit properly, and the final picture cannot be fully appreciated. Now I do not want what I have just said to be intimidating. It is not necessary for you to be an expert on 4th Day to prepare and give a talk or to critique a talk. You will have plenty of materials provided to you that will outline just what each talk should say and the style in which it should be given. The point I wish to make is that it is necessary to study these materials, especially the **Lay Talk Workbook**,



and remain faithful to the guidelines set forth. You do not have to be an expert on 4th Day -- you also do not have to be an expert or professional public speaker. The talks at 4th Day are not meant to be professional quality talks -- they are meant to be given by ordinary men and women who are living the life in grace and sharing this with their new friends on the weekend. Each talk is to be given in the speaker's own words. The talk outlines give you the theme and major ideas which need to be conveyed. Develop that theme in your own way. Rely on the **Lay Talk Workbook** to show you **want to say**; rely on the **Holy Spirit** to guide you in **how to say it**.

As you develop your talk, there are several things to keep in mind:

Begin with prayer

First, begin with prayer! I cannot over emphasize this first step. First, last and always, pray! Pray about your subject, and then begin to read and study all the available material. While you are studying and digesting the material, try and put yourself in the Pilgrims' place. How can you best phrase your talk to have them hear and understand the message? Pray that you will be given the right words.

Lay Talk Workbook

Second, as already stated, make sure that you include all the **major** points that are indicated in the **Lay Talk Workbook**. You should not follow the outline word for word -- if you do, your talk will be dry, mechanical, and probably too long. You need to cover the points in the outline, but in your own words, organized in an interesting way. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you.

Follow the outline

Third, do not change the talk to include ideas that are not in the outline. The 4th Day weekend is not a presentation of everything that is good about Christianity; but rather a presentation of a particular method for living the Christian life.



Be specific

Fourth, be specific rather than general. Use stories, comparisons, and examples to make the point. Remember how Jesus taught his disciples. He did not give them carefully logical speeches or philosophical discussions. Instead, he used parables and examples to help his followers listen and understand. He also used repetition. If we want our listeners to identify with and understand our message, we need to use stories, examples, and repetition as well. But a caution is in order here -- because examples make a point so powerfully, we have to be careful to use the right ones. A speaker can make one point with what he or she says, and then quite unintentionally makes a different point through the example used. Since your listeners will probably remember your examples much more vividly than your ideas, you need to choose examples that really make the point clearly. Another caution -- be careful that you do not jump ahead of your talk in the examples you choose. For example, in the Laity talk on Friday only use examples of ordinary lay activity, such as ushering, or serving on the vestry, save examples of apostolic action for the talk on Saturday.

Use appropriate bible quotations

Fifth, except in the Ideal talk use Bible quotations where appropriate. Bible quotations, like examples, can powerfully make your idea clear and memorable. But don't overdo it, this is not a sermon or Sunday school class -- when you do use Bible quotations, keep them brief and don't dwell on chapter and verse. (Note: You are not expected to use all the scripture references in the **Lay Talk Workbook** outline in your talk.)

Coordinate with other speakers

Finally, coordinate with other speakers any examples that will be common to more than one talk. For example, if the person giving the Piety talk refers to the "three-legged stool," then all other talks should use this rather than a "tripod" or some other image. When referring to another talk, always clarify it by using the name of the speaker as well



as the talk. For example, "This morning, in the talk on Study, Joan said..." Do not give personal opinions, but you may use personal examples. If the examples are personal, use "I", if they are someone else's experience, use "he" or "she". Above all, be honest. And remember, examples are used to make the point clear, not to share our personal feelings. There is only one Piety talk!

Practice your talk

After your talk is written, read it aloud slowly, just as you would at the weekend. (Hint: Most people tend to read a talk too fast. Experienced speakers have found that when they **feel** they are speaking too slowly they probably are speaking just right.) If possible, read it to someone else -- your spouse, perhaps, or your group. Does it sound right? Are the points clear and complete? Are you repeating important points and allowing sufficient time to write them down? Time your talk -- it should be between 15 and 20 minutes long, **no more!** (Exception: the Piety talk may be between 20 and 30 minutes.) Correct and polish your talk as required, and practice reading it many times, but do not memorize it.

Team members critique the talks

Team members at the first team retreat critique the talks. (The writer's reunion group critiques backup talks.) Admittedly, this is intimidating, but it is invaluable. Your fellow team members will constructively criticize your talk -- its strengths and its weaknesses -- but it is all done out of love and should strengthen your confidence in your talk on the weekend.

Critique team makeup

Ideally, at least three team members will critique each talk, and one of these will have given that talk at a previous weekend while another will have prepared the backup talk. During the critique, the speaker gives the talk exactly as it will be given at the 4th Day weekend, including opening prayer and pauses for writing things down. But before



beginning, take some time to review the outline for the talk and note the key ideas and points that are to be included. Also decide who will time the talk. Everyone should take notes on their reaction to the talk, and everyone should "write this down" when told to do so.

Suggestions and ideas

After the speaker is finished, take a few minutes without talking for each one of the critiquers to think about his or her reaction and write down some suggestions for changes. Then each listener should share his or her reactions -- be loving, but also be honest. Were all the key points of the talk included and clearly presented? Just as important, were points made that should not be in this particular talk? Did the examples used serve to make the ideas of the talk clear and interesting? Was the tone and style of the talk appropriate for its place in the weekend? How was the speaker's delivery? Was there good eye contact? Were there sufficient pauses to write down the key ideas? Was the delivery slow enough? Are there any other reactions? Share these with one another and the speaker. Make positive suggestions for improving the talk and delivery. It may be that the talk should be changed somewhat and recritiqued at the second team retreat. Don't take this in a negative way. We are all working together in a Christian community to do the best that we can for Christ.

Chapel Prayers

On the weekend, just before the talk is to be given, the speaker will meet in the chapel with the rector or rectora, one of the Spiritual Advisors, and a member of the setup for an altar visit to pray for the talk, the speaker, and the Pilgrims. When the speaker, rector, and spiritual director leave for the Rollo room, that member of Setup remains in prayer at the Blessed Sacrament for the entire time of the Rollo. If you are giving a talk you can be assured that all will go well. Jesus is head of the weekend. You have given yourself to him and he will use you to get his message across to the Pilgrims

