

# Effective Teaching at CTK

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**Effective teaching is a critical success factor for the mission and vision of Christ the King Community Church.**

*Critical Success Factor:* While we are building our ministry around worship, small groups, and outreach, there is no denying the importance of the teaching role at our worship centers. We may not grow a church with strong teaching, but we cannot grow a church without strong teaching.

Note: We prefer the language of "teaching," "discussion," or "talk" to "sermon," which has built in negative connotations. For example....

"Who is doing the teaching this weekend?"

"In our discussion this morning, we are talking about Abraham."

"I want to talk with you today about how to have a friendly relationship with God."

*Effective Teaching:* In our context, effective teaching is teaching that is Bible-based, relevant, balanced, interesting, and Spirit-controlled.

## 1. Bible-based

Though we employ different types of teaching, we want to maintain a high level of biblical content:

<u>Type</u>	<u>Biblical Content</u>
Expository	A single passage is the basis of your main and sub points.
Textual	A single passage is the basis for your main points, with sub points developed out of various passages.
Topical	Various passages are the basis for your main and sub points.

There is no one "type" of message development that is more "right" than another type (Jesus' preference was evidently topical). But it takes more care to keep Biblical content in a topical message. The more expository or textual a message is, the more care must be taken to ensure relevant and interesting content.

Question: Someone comes up to you after you have delivered a topical message with adequate Biblical content and says dogmatically, "I believe expository preaching - right from the Bible - is the only way!" What do you say?

Since at CTK we do a fair amount of topical teaching, I make it a practice to regularly say toward the beginning of a message, "If you brought your Bible with you, please turn with me to....." This sends a message that the truth we are going to share is coming from the Bible. If I'm giving a highly topical teaching, I especially try to abide by this, even if I'm just asking them to turn with me to the first of many passages that we will cite.

I try to always have the biblical text on the overhead, even though I am encouraging people to follow along in the Bible. This also makes a point, and may be the only time that a person actually "reads" the Bible in their week. The word of God is intrinsically powerful, and I believe that many times people are impacted by those words, even if they are not impacted by mine.

## **2. Relevant**

As a teacher in the twenty-first century, you are standing between two worlds; the biblical world, and the contemporary world. A teacher's job is to translate Biblical truth in a form that people today can understand and apply it. Relevance is the answer to the question, "so what?"

To remain relevant, I try to outline in plain language, in whole sentences as much as possible (whole sentences also make a message flow easier). For instance, instead of "The need for acceptance" as a point, I prefer....

"One of the greatest fears that keep people from Christians, the church and God is that they won't be accepted."

This statement bridges the gap between the Biblical world (a call to acceptance) and the present day. As I elaborate on this point then, I first expand on the contemporary world before I move into the biblical world.

One of the fastest ways to achieve relevance is to pour the truth through your own personality. Then you are asking people to make a connection with you, instead of the Bible. By saying, "I grew up in a church where the basic idea was that we all had our stuff together" I am asking the audience to travel a very short distance. They can relate. Now I'm ready to bring the truth of the first century into the picture.

Relevance is also achieved by referencing things that are going on today. I try to blend in stuff about my family (my kids, sports, Kristyn's work, etc.), stuff that's in the news (Afghanistan, stock market, children abductions, etc.), community events (parades, construction projects, etc.), and personal experiences outside of church (I try to stay away from church stuff that makes it sound like church is the only world I'm in).

Question: How do you stay relevant in your preaching?
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### 3. Balanced

It is a challenge to speak to the same audience week after week and have fresh content. A complaint that can arise from people who have to listen to the same person week after week is, "He's always talking about the same thing." We can tend to "fall in love" with certain topics or themes. To hedge against this tendency, I try to rotate messages from four different categories....

<b>Message Type</b>	<b>Speaking to</b>	<b>Goal: Christ-like...</b>
1. Theology	Mind	Thoughts
2. Recovery	Emotions	Feelings
3. Ministry	Body	Behaviors
4. Devotion	Spirit	Beliefs

When I finish a series in one of the categories, I then move toward one of the two categories I have not addressed recently. For example, if my last series was "Beating the Blues" (recovery), and I am now finishing up "Contagious Christianity" (ministry), I would be looking to do a series that is either recovery-oriented, or devotional.

I find that rotating these different emphases provides for a balanced diet, narrows down my preaching focus, and keeps me from getting in a rut. I occasionally share about this process so that people know there is a "method to my madness."

### 4. Interesting

The difference between a good message and great message can often be summed up in one word: stories. If you hear a good teacher, you've probably heard a good story teller.

Jesus knew the value of a good story. If the Biblical content is the outline of the picture you are painting, anecdotes and stories provide color to the picture. Color is so important in my estimation that I use the "thickness of the file" to guide my sermon selection. In fact, if someone were to ask me to speak on a particular topic, the first thing I would do is go to the file and see if I have anything interesting on that topic. If not, I would be inclined to deny the invitation.

In my view, a story (or some kind of interesting stuff: quotation, statistics, etc.) should accompany every major point. Minor points, especially lists, may not need color (they may prove to be color themselves), although a little color never hurts. Sometimes a great story or analogy can be so powerful that it ends up

being the organizing structure of the message. In any case I like to begin with something interesting, continue with something interesting and conclude with something interesting, if at all possible.

For a message with three main points, this means at least 5 points of color....

1. Introduction to the Topic	Color
2. Point 1	"
3. Point 2	"
4. Point 3	"
5. Conclusion	"

Where do you find this stuff? Anywhere and everywhere. Anytime you find yourself going, "Hmmm....that's interesting" you have just stumbled across something colorful. If this doesn't happen often enough, here's some places to look:

- Books. I find that the more I am reading, the better my messages are. Writers are just people who have spent a lot of time thinking and researching a particular topic. They are doing the work for you. Topical preaching can especially benefit from a good book.

I have some favorite authors that I find interesting: Swindoll, Hybels, Covey, Maxwell, Lucado. Put all of these guys to work for you.

As I read a book (or any magazine) I write a topic in the margin of anything I find interesting. Then I have a volunteer photocopy those pages and file them accordingly. Over time I have collected 4 large filing cabinets full of stuff this way. The investment pays off. There are dozens of topics I can speak on colorfully.

- Newspaper and Periodicals. I subscribe to USA Today to stay current on pop culture. A weekly magazine (e.g. Time, People) may achieve the same thing for you. I also subscribe to Leadership, Readers Digest, Wired, and Fast Company magazines. Papers and magazines have this advantage over books: very recent content. As fast as our society is moving, I don't think you could stay current without subscribing to some good periodicals.

- Life. Keep an eye open for things that are unusual. "Different" usually is interesting. So is "touching." And "ironic." Let people tell you stories. I keep a file near my desk called "stories" and put notes in there of interesting things I encounter as I'm going through life.

- Sermon Services. Last, and not least, are web sites and subscription services where you can find other's transcripts, illustrations and "sermon starters." A couple of the better ones are [sermonsplus.com](http://sermonsplus.com) and [preachingtoday.com](http://preachingtoday.com). These sites have literally thousands of illustrations that are searchable by text or topic, and can be a big help.

I see the dangers of relying too much on this kind of "canned" assistance being:

- a. Laziness. If not careful we can have someone else doing all the work for us, instead of just relying on them to jump start the creative process, or supplement our work.
- b. Familiarity. Stock illustrations are in broad circulation, so there is a greater likelihood that your audience will either have already heard it from someone else, or will in the future.

Having said that, a great illustration is a great illustration, no matter where you find it. So don't let where you found it keep you from using it.

Question: What sources have you found for interesting stuff?
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One factor that cannot be denied to keep a message interesting is the length of it. There is no right or wrong amount of time here. Someone who is very interesting may get away with an hour-long message. But for average people like us, we find there are diminishing returns after 30 minutes, unless it is an "epic" message. The one-hour time limit we have put on our services puts an automatic limit on message length, which most people appreciate.

I have found the difference between a 40 minute message and a 30 minute message (with similar impact) is 10 more hours of preparation. The more time you have to craft your talk, the less extraneous stuff you'll leave in. Some of the most powerful messages I've ever heard were 20 minutes long.

"Flow" is also a consideration in keeping a message moving. I like to "leave a wake" as I move through the material. I deliberately script my transitional statements to keep me pushing forward. I try to not give more than a page of script (3-5 minutes) to any given point before I move on.

## **5. Spirit-controlled**

People often speak of anointing. There is something to that. But I like to ask for the genius of the Holy Spirit when I am preparing a message, not just when I am delivering it. To me, the talk that has "God's finger prints" all over it, begins to get that way during the week.

Prayer is indispensable to a powerful message. If you are wondering whether to spend 20 minutes looking for an illustration on the internet, or praying over the message, choose prayer.

Prayer is not only needed when you are ready to deliver a message, but when you are....

1. Choosing the text
2. Creating the outline
3. Crafting the message
4. Rehearsing the delivery

In other words you need prayer from beginning to end. Spiritual ends require spiritual means.

There is a mysterious, uncontrollable aspect to speaking. Sometimes God just shows up. And that's what we want him to do. All we want to do is put ourselves in a position with the cup turned up, so that we catch everything he has for us. Then we want to be a vessel for His truth and His life to flow through.

As they say, "If He can get it through us, He can get it to us."

Question: Have you ever had a message where the impact of the message clearly transcended the quality of the teaching? Tell us about it.
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