



## **4. PREPARING YOUR TALK**

### **The Message of The Walk to Emmaus**

The talks given during The Walk to Emmaus event are the principal vehicle that communicates the message of the weekend. The talks are the thread that weaves through chapel times, posters, discussions, and personal contacts.

Your talk joyfully proclaims the good news of Jesus' saving action; you present it in a manner that will draw persons closer to Christ. You are to proclaim it with conviction! Therefore, it is essential and presumed that you are living the doctrine you will present.

Your talk bears witness to your experience of the truths you proclaim. You can witness only to what you know to be true in your own life. Therefore, remember:

What is not studied is not known, and what is not known cannot be communicated;  
what is not lived is not experienced, and what is not experienced cannot be shared.

You have been asked to give a particular talk following prayerful consideration by the Team Selection Committee. However, you may feel uncomfortable with the topic of the talk or feel unable to prepare it effectively. If this is the case, don't hesitate to say so. For example, if study of the scriptures isn't your strong suit or you aren't familiar with the broad spectrum of Christian literature and authors, don't agree to give the GROW THROUGH STUDY talk. It might turn out to be an uninspired, academic dissertation on the principles of study. The text of a talk—your complete, personal possession of a talk—is based on prayer, study, knowledge, and experience.

Your talk is one element in The Walk to Emmaus weekend. While important to the progression of the Walk, your talk is not your only responsibility or even your major responsibility. Your talk is also one element of a carefully designed short course in Christian living. Consider the fifteen talks of The Walk to Emmaus as one talk, of which you present just one part. You may refer to a previous talk in order to reinforce a point that you are making (such as, "Yesterday, Mary said such and such about worship"), but your talk must fit the progression of and be synchronized with the other talks. Your talk will include all the major points in the outline and only those points.

Your talk's success depends on your availability as an instrument of the Holy Spirit in its preparation.

## Points to Remember

1. Each talk intends to accomplish two things:
  - a. To present clearly a part of the short course in Christianity;
  - b. To inspire the pilgrims to take action on what is presented.
2. Your talk is not being given simply to present some good and useful ideas. Its purpose is to say things that must be said.
3. Your talk employs language that is clear, concise, simple, and within the grasp of all present. It must be attuned to all the listeners, from the least educated or spiritually immature person to those who have a firm grasp on Jesus' hand. It's difficult to find this middle ground. However, remember that you want to move your audience along. So, your talk must be just enough ahead to move them on to something they have not experienced or thought before. A well-balanced talk will have something for everyone.
4. Each talk leads in a definite direction. Be aware of this direction at all times. Each talk progresses from low key on the first day to a high key on the third day. Keep your talk in the proper perspective with those before and after it. Give the pilgrims a clear road to follow without thrusting them up to a high point before they are ready.

The entire team takes responsibility to see that each talk fits the pattern with regard to the progression in intensity or strength.

### BODY OF CHRIST

*Sunday*

### DISCIPLESHIP

*Saturday*

### LIFE OF PIETY

*Friday*

5. The purpose of your personal witness is illustrate a point in the talk, not glorify the speaker. Personal witness will take less than one-third of the total talk time.

## Preparing Your Talk

Here are some basic principles or guidelines to follow when preparing a talk.

1. Begin now—don't put it off until the last minute.
2. *The Walk to Emmaus Outlines* for the talks will be used. You do not make up your own talk. You present only the points as outlined, but in your own words and as you have experienced them. Read and reflect on the outline and the language of the talk you are to give. Become familiar with the flow and intent of the thoughts in the outline. Check the scripture references in their context to the principal message of the talk.

3. You will serve the purpose of The Walk to Emmaus and make a positive contribution by remaining faithful to the outline provided and comprehending it well. If you do, the presentation will also be clearly understood by the pilgrims.
4. It is important that you have a good grasp of the subject as you prepare your talk. Use your talk outline and the description of the three days. Know how your talk builds The Walk to Emmaus; know its relationship to the other talks.
5. The talk is you. It is your work and your words. But follow the outline and resolve any difficulties that arise with your Lay Director or Spiritual Director. Witness talks are first-person experiences, not detached observations. You will find yourself living that which you are preparing; examine your own life in light of the subject. Use this examination constructively for the needs of your talk.
6. Pray that the Holy Spirit reveals the manner in which you can best witness to the truths your talk communicates. Have your family and reunion group pray with you, that this would be the talk God would have you deliver, the talk where God's message will go out on your words.
7. Your talk must not exceed the time assigned. Each talk is to be no more than 20–25 minutes. The one exception to this is the MEANS OF GRACE talk, which is allotted 35–40 minutes.
8. Make your own outline. Note the manner in which you hope to make the points in the outline and the personal witness you might use.
9. Keep in mind that an effective talk depends on its
  - objective—the main points of the outline
  - style—the manner in which it is to be given
  - situation—how it relates to the other talks, especially the one before and after it
  - environment—the general feeling of the pilgrims at the time it is given
  - technique—how the material is presented
10. If you need help, ask a Spiritual Director or experienced leader to assist you. (The Lay Director can suggest someone.) Notes from previous weekends or former speakers are good resources.
11. Don't confuse the talk with too many details and examples. Remember, the main points must stand out. Use examples with care, bringing to bear only those that explain a point.
12. Work on your own notes for some time. Don't be in a hurry to complete them too early. Plan the visual aids you will use.
13. Keep in mind that the pilgrims will be taking notes, so give them time. Build in "repeats" of important points. Plan to incorporate key points in your visual aids.

14. If you naturally speak in a humorous manner, allow that to come through in your talk. However, feel no need to find a joke just for the sake of a light remark—strained humor strains the understanding of the listener.
15. Talks will be written out in manuscript form, not presented from outlines. This ensures that the preview talk will match the weekend talk. Type talks out in double- or triple-spaced format. Keep the talk in a ring binder or in an orderly stack. Mark your key words; punctuate your talk properly, and follow the punctuation when you give your talk.
16. Keep your vocabulary simple and avoid specialized terms that are hard to pronounce. They also are hard to hear. Employ terms that you define in the course of your talk. Stay away from terms or expressions that require a definition that becomes a side remark to your talk. Speak in your own words and, except when directly quoting an author, avoid paraphrasing words from something you have read.
17. In structuring sentences and paragraphs, a good general rule is that you should be able to speak a sentence without pausing for breath in the middle. If the talk requires a longer sentence, build in natural pauses for emphasis and for breathing. Keep your paragraphs on one subject; don't jumble thoughts around in one paragraph. This focus will help your delivery and the understanding of the pilgrims.
18. Refer to previous talks: who (his/her name) said what (in what talk) and when (yesterday, this morning), such as, "Do you remember what Don said in the LIFE OF PIETY talk last night about . . . ?" Build on it in your talk.
19. What "power phrase" can you implement? What do you want the pilgrims to remember? What can they "grab onto" for the activities and discussion that follow each talk?
20. Helpful information about handouts is provided in Appendix D.

## **The Use of Scripture**

The New Testament is the primary source of the message of The Walk to Emmaus. Use it! An excessive citing of scripture will detract from the naturalness of your talk and may appear phony. Limit your scripture references to two or three and write them out in your manuscript so that you do not have to flip back and forth through your Bible. Be sure you understand the proper context of the scriptures that you choose. Check with a Spiritual Director if in doubt.

## **Personal Witness**

Balancing personal witness and the message of the talk is difficult. Remember, the message is essential; personal witness only illustrates or amplifies a point. It serves to describe what you have just told them. Be careful not to glorify yourself or your relationship with Jesus, or to overdo the Holy Spirit's movement in your life.

Do not use your personal witness to trigger an emotional response in the pilgrims. There will be tears on a weekend, but let them result from the Holy Spirit's working in the pilgrims. Attempting to manipulate emotions from the lectern shifts the pilgrims' focus *to* you and *away* from the message of the talk. No one denies that tears will occur. The point here is this: don't build an emotional experience into a talk only for effect.

*Never use personal witness to point out another's transgression, especially not a family member.* Keep in mind that we are all one family, and the talk is not the place to air dirty laundry. This principle is to be strictly adhered to, even if the point to be made is valid and relevant to the message. Find another example of personal witness.

### **Personal Rehearsal of Your Talk**

1. Complete the talk and read it aloud to yourself. Mark obvious errors on the copy as you read. Identify problems for a rewrite. Do the thoughts hold together? Is there a smooth transition from one thought to another? Does it sound right?
2. Rewrite and rewrite. Use wide spacing; underlining; margin notes; highlighters to indicate key words, pauses, repeats.
3. Read your talk aloud until it's so familiar you can speak from key words.
4. Now, give the talk aloud. Give it as though you were delivering it to the pilgrims. Have something to serve as a lectern as you practice. Stand up to practice. Remember what the conference room looks like, where the pilgrims are sitting, and give your talk to them. Be natural—role-play—employ all the gestures and animation you would use. Become comfortable with your words, gestures, and audience in the quiet of your own home. Some team members tape their practice, then listen to the tape while following the manuscript, marking the poorly delivered or poorly thought-out parts for correction.
5. Time your talk so it does not exceed the allotted time. Time it as you rehearse it aloud in your home.
6. Correct errors and weak spots.
7. Now, give it again and again according to steps 4 and 5 above. Your talk will be pretty polished by the time you review it for the team. The team members expect to know and have the right to know exactly what you intend to say on the weekend. Knowing the content of your talk is essential in critiquing the talk. Remember, talks are the work of the whole team.

### **Offering Your Talk to the Team**

1. Prepare a final draft of your text in manuscript form. Never use an outline to give your talk. This will ensure that the talk you give at the team critique will be that same talk you present on the weekend.

2. Come to the team meeting with a fully completed talk and posters or visual aids.
3. At the completion of your talk preview, the team members will critique your talk and delivery. You may think an idea, story, or thought is wonderful, but the team may believe it is inappropriate. When this happens, defer to the team's suggestions and change what you have prepared, remembering that you are only a part of one message for that weekend. The team members may offer suggestions to add or remove material to keep within the time limits for each talk.
4. Visual aids are just that—aids to enhance the message. The visual aids are not the message, nor should they overwhelm the message or the audience. Keep them simple and to the point. There are many effective visual aids, such as posters and overhead projector slides. PowerPoint may be used if appropriate to the audience. It is not proper for every speaker to use PowerPoint.



## 5. PRESENTING YOUR TALK

### Introduction

Few persons on the weekend, with the exception of the clergy, are what could be termed “professional” speakers. God can, and will, use you if you simply place yourself into God’s capable hands and desire to serve in this capacity. Just a few minutes before you enter the conference room to present your talk, you will have been prayed for. Part of that prayer will ask that the Holy Spirit use you to communicate God’s truths. God hears these prayers and will be with you as you speak to the pilgrims.

The following prayer may assist you in the process.

Dear Lord, help me as I give this talk. Quiet my spirit, still my apprehension, and instead of the fear I feel, give me your inner peace as I am about to share this talk with the people in the conference room. Help me to be myself, nothing more, nothing less—simply your child, willing to be used by you. Help me to sense your presence as I stand before this group, sharing the message that you have given me. I pray that this group may be moved closer to you as I share. Help me to stand in the shadow of your cross, and may they see only you.

In the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

### Step into Your Talk

The easiest way to overcome a feeling of hesitation or uneasiness is to give your talk. Be at peace with yourself and present your witness. Sincerity and lack of pretense will overcome many of the defects you think you have.

You do not have to be a great public speaker if your talk is clear, audible, well-paced, and interesting. Just make the best use of your God-given talents.

Let your personality contribute to the talk. Be yourself, use your own vocabulary, and let the talk reflect the uniqueness of your personality and your walk with Jesus.

Concentrate on the pilgrims, not yourself. Poise will come naturally.

Stand straight with your weight evenly distributed, and face the pilgrims. Don’t twist or fidget. Let your feet move a bit. When giving a personal witness, you don’t need to use notes.

Don't drape yourself over the lectern; it distracts the pilgrims' attention from the talk. Stay behind the lectern. If you move around, the audience begins to focus on your movement rather than your words. Your movement will diminish the sound quality if you are using a microphone, and persons in various parts of the room will not hear you.

Stiffness is just as bad. You are not an eighth grader reciting for the first time without feeling for the subject or your audience. Rigidity reflects your uncertainty. Take a deep breath, look at your audience, and speak. Concentrate on your talk and you will forget your uneasiness. Remember, you are there to minister to the pilgrims.

## **Keep the Attention of Your Audience**

You have the edge as the speaker because you know your talk and the direction it takes. The talk outline you received provides a road map that leads in the intended direction as you use your visual aids in conjunction with the talk.

Be natural, and let the talk flow. An important aspect of public speaking involves making eye contact with those to whom you are speaking. Move your eyes from one side of the room to the other, and speak to the individuals sitting at the tables, one person at a time. It is often said, "Your eyes are the windows to your soul." Making eye contact with the pilgrims gives you a glimpse into their souls and they into yours.

### **Techniques for Keeping Attention**

- Emphasize special points that are important.
- Repeat key points.
- Pause—use the Paul Harvey technique of "Now listen closely" to draw them in.
- If you lose your place, relax, find where you need to be, and then carry on.

When you give your talk, remove it from the binder to create a stack of loose sheets lying flat on the lectern. As you finish one page, simply slide it to the side, moving on to the next page. This approach gives the appearance of a polished talk and speaker.

Dress in good taste. You are not there to draw attention to yourself but to draw the pilgrims closer to God.

Finish your talk with a joyful and emphatic "De Colores!" Leave the lectern and your talk notes. An Assistant Lay Director will return the talk to you. Immediately exit the conference room and return to the chapel for a prayer of thanksgiving for what the Holy Spirit accomplished through your talk. Do not return to your table until the discussion and poster about your talk is completed.



## **Problems to Avoid**

1. Talking too long

Maintaining the integrity and discipline of the weekend requires exact timing on talks. One fruit of the Spirit is self-control, so don't blame the Holy Spirit if you "get on a roll" and can't quit (this may turn out to be ego).

2. Nervous actions

The jingle of coins, keys, or jewelry detracts from your words and your message. Keep your hands out of your pockets, and beware of excessive jewelry.

3. Lack of eye contact

A fixed stare, looking at the floor, and blank eyes that see no one can distract or annoy. Pacing, walking around, and playing with the microphone cord will draw more attention than will your message.

## **Last but Not Least**

Please do not study your talk during The Walk to Emmaus weekend, except for a brief review immediately prior to your presentation.

Remember, your strength is in the Lord.

Trust God for grace and guidance.

Make your Prayer Chapel visit timely and meaningful.

If you have any requests, tell one of the Assistant Lay Directors.