

“How to Write A Killer Bottom Line” (For Your Next Talk)

So how exactly do you write a great talk, sermon or message? Everybody has their own method, but there is one practice that will make every talk better.

Write a killer bottom line.

A bottom line is the main point of your talk summed up in a single, memorable sentence. It's extremely difficult to come up with an accurate, memorable bottom line, but so worth it.

Crafting a great bottom line will:

- a. Make you a better **thinker**.
- b. Help you **understand** your talk more deeply.
- c. Force you to **simplify** complex subjects.
- d. Make your talk more **memorable** for your audience.

So, how do you do it?

Here's the general process. It may not work for everyone and, sure, not every bottom line will be killer. But if you keep at it, your potential to write a few increases.

1. Start With A General Idea.

When thinking about a series or talk, try to come up with a ‘general ballpark’ for it. For example, I’m thinking about a sermon series for next year on moral relativism. Right now, that’s all I know. Other times, if I’m preaching, I won’t start with an idea but with a text that I want to teach. That was the case in the last year with both Esther and Psalm 101. I didn’t know where I wanted to take them, but I knew I wanted to preach them. So start with a subject.

2. Expand Your Research And Thinking.

I keep an Evernote file for sermon ideas and bottom line ideas. And when I get to the series development or talk development stage, I create a file that I can easily come back to on any device I’m on with random thoughts, scripture, articles, pictures, videos or anything else that I can use to expand my thinking and research on the subject. I try to collect far more ideas and angles than I can possibly use.

3. Let It Simmer.

This is key. Louie Giglio says that writing a sermon or talk is like having a baby. It starts with conception (an idea) and then moves through gestation, delivery and presentation. He said the problem with most preachers is they sit down at the keyboard on Friday or Saturday and say “I need to have a baby”.

Great sermons don't work that way. Neither does pregnancy. I agree with Louie. If you're a last minute writer, change immediately by starting a week out, or two weeks out. Then move to collecting ideas a few months out. There are some series I've done that I've been thinking about for 2-3 years.

4. Make your first attempt.

At some point you have to ship. So usually a month before the series is 'due' I take my first crack at bottom lines. Don't get discouraged. The first attempts are often terrible. That's okay. Just go back to step 3 and let it simmer some more, and then go back the next week and have another go at it. Personally, I can't write the outline for the talk until I have the bottom line so I often start with the bottom line.

5. CREAM It.

Rework your bottom line using the tools in the CREAM acrostic.

C – CONTRAST

Combine two contrasting ideas – the past and the future, the light and the dark, the rich and the poor, truth and lies, laughter and sorrow.

R – RHYME

This is one of the oldest memory tricks in the book, which is why you remember one of Benjamin Franklin's quotes: "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." The bottom line for Andy Stanley's Comparison Trap series was simply "There's no win in comparison". *Sticky*.

E – ECHO

Repeating a word or phrase is a powerful way to help people remember. A few years ago when I preached on burnout I used this bottom line: "If you don't take the Sabbath the Sabbath will take you" (That's a paraphrase of 2 Chronicles 36 by the way. Great bottom lines help people understand scriptural principles better, which is kind of the goal, isn't it?)

A – ALLITERATION

Alliteration may be overused by preachers, but don't entirely abandon this technique – it's powerful. "Your boldest moments are your best moments" is memorable because of the double b. Simple but it works.

M – METAPHOR

Metaphors engage people's imagination, and when that happens, people remember more. The Bible is actually full of metaphors (like a ring in a pig's snout). "When grace and truth collide, your ability to make an impact soars" uses metaphor to show potential.

6. Test it with a team.

I almost always bring my bottom lines to our team before finalizing them. Extra input either tweaks them so they become better or finds better options. It also tells you whether you're resonating or not.

7. Build the rest of the message and series from there.

Once I have my bottom line created, I go back and produce everything else—a series summary, weekly summary (a short paragraph about each week's message), small group question and everything else that goes into a series. Then that goes to our creative team anywhere from 2-6 weeks before a series begins for them to finish the design work and get everything into print and online.

The powerful thing about creating a killer bottom line is that you will often hear people repeat them years after a message is delivered.

What helps you write a great bottom line?

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