



PREACHING
ROCKET



**SERMONS
THAT STICK:
CRAFTING A
MEMORABLE
BOTTOM LINE**

Summarizing your sermon in a sentence isn't an academic exercise; it's an important part of planting Gospel truth in the hearts of your congregation.

A few years ago, I was leading a preaching workshop for about fifty people at a conference in Atlanta. I began the workshop with a question to the group: What do you remember from any sermon you've ever preached or you've ever heard?

After a few seconds of initial silence, a hand went up. Someone in the room shared a statement, and I wrote it on the whiteboard. A second answer. Then another.

After about five minutes, the whiteboard was filled with sentences and stories people remembered from years past. Some pastors shared quotes from sermons they remembered from their childhood. Others remembered stories told at conferences. A few even remembered key points from their own messages.

As this time came to a close, I walked to the dry erase board and drew a fat line right down the middle. "Look, everything on the left of this line is a story or object lesson," I said. These stories, illustrations, props and object lessons had indeed found their way into the memory of this group of preachers. "Everything on this side of the line," I continued, "is a carefully worded principle." These statements were recited word-for-word, and some of them were more than a decade old.

Every single moment remembered from every sermon fit neatly into one of these two categories. They were really good illustrations or carefully worded principles.

In this module, we're going to talk about the second one. We're going to show you how to create a carefully worded bottom line that people will remember throughout their lives.

Summarizing your sermon in a sentence isn't an academic exercise; it's an important part of planting Gospel truth in the hearts of your congregation.

Will the teenagers sitting in your church service this weekend update their Facebook status with the main idea from your sermon?

On Wednesday, will a guy in his office be able to tell a co-worker what your message was about? Does a busy mom remember anything you said last weekend?

Crafting a memorable bottom line is a way to make those happen. It is one of the most important aspects of sermon preparation.

“If you can’t write your message in a sentence, you can’t say it in an hour,” writes Dianna Boomer.

WHAT IS A BOTTOM LINE?

Before we talk about the how, let’s make sure we understand the what.

What is a bottom line?

- **It’s the one big idea.** On Sunday night, if someone were to ask you what your sermon was about, you could respond with your one big idea.
- **It’s the central theme.** As you study a text for preaching, it’s helpful to discover the central theme of the text. Likewise, your sermon needs a central theme.
- **It’s your sermon in a sentence.** “If you can’t write your message in a sentence, you can’t say it in an hour,” writes Dianna Boomer.
- **It’s a sticky statement.** If you want people to remember and share ideas from your sermon, work hard to create a memorable idea. Good bottom lines are sticky statements, easy to remember and easy to share.

WHY IS A BOTTOM LINE SO IMPORTANT?

1. **Preparation.** J.H. Howett says, “I have a conviction that no sermon is ready for preaching...not ready for writing out, until we can express its theme in a short, pregnant sentence as clear as crystal.” Before you preach a sermon to others, you need to preach it to yourself. And crafting

a good bottom line, and processing it yourself, is a great way to start the preparation process.

2. **Clarity.** Social media has forced us to think in short, compact sentences. Like it or not, we’re living in a sound byte culture. So if you can’t summarize your message on twitter, you’ve got to keep working. It’s too easy for the information in the sermon to outweigh the idea of the sermon. We’ve gotten too good at writing detailed outlines and communicating tons of information, but when it comes to sermon prep, a carefully worded bottom line is just as important as a detailed outline.
3. **Rememberability.** That’s technically not a word, and that red squiggly line on my screen is going to bother me. But I’m letting it slip past the editors, because this fake word communicates one of the heartfelt desires of preachers all over the world. We want people to remember the message! We get depressed when we think about the time, prayer and passion that went into preparing a message and then think how very few people will remember any of it. If you want people to remember your message on Thursday, you need a good bottom line. And once you’ve crafted a great bottom line, you can say it over and over again throughout your sermon. That helps with rememberability.

BOTTOM LINES MATTER

Bottom lines aren't just helpful in sermons – they make a difference in other forms of communication.

Here are two examples:

My oldest daughter was 9 years old when a Miley Cyrus song took over the radio. Before I knew what was happening, she and many of her friends were nodding their head like yeah. Yes, this is a reference to Miley Cyrus in a Preaching Rocket resource!

Do you know that song? Have you hopped on a plane at LAX? Have you put your hands up 'cause they are singing your song? If you don't know the song, then you're probably better off for it. If you do know the song, I apologize for planting the melody in your brain.

But that song is a great example of a hook – a riff, lyric or idea that makes a song appealing and catches the ear of the listener. You remember a song and hum it throughout the day because of a hook. And a hook is a musical example of a good bottom line.

Maybe music isn't your thing or you don't know much about Miley Cyrus. Let's talk about movies.

Have you seen the movie Aliens? It was released in 1986 and was directed by Ridley Scott. When the movie was being pitched to Hollywood producers – the people holding the money – they had difficulty following the plot and understanding the concept. To help them understand, Scott came up with an analogy.

It's like Jaws in outer space.

Suddenly, the movie producers knew what the movie was like. They had a frame of reference. They understood. One carefully worded bottom line provided clarity. Rumor has it that the producers were even more convinced when Scott turned the "S" in Aliens into a dollar sign and talked about potential sequels.

The movie went on to win seven Academy Awards, including a best actress award for Sigourney Weaver and a best director award for Scott.

You don't need pencils or paints to create a picture. You can create a word picture.

HOW TO WRITE A BOTTOM LINE

By now, you know that bottom lines are important. You're convinced they can help people remember the message and impact their lives. Now, here's a formula for crafting a memorable bottom line.

If you want to create a good bottom line, you've got to P-R-E-A-C-H.

P = PICTURE

You've heard a picture is worth a thousand words. It's true. But you don't need pencils or paints to create a picture. You can create a word picture.

One example of a word picture is a metaphor, a literary figure of speech that compares one thing to another. When William Shakespeare said, "All the world is a stage," he was using a metaphor. But that word picture helped him paint a picture of how the world really works. But rather than tell you what a word picture is, let me give you an example.

Sheep need a shepherd.

That's a word picture with double meaning. Like real sheep need a real shepherd, Christians need the loving guidance and protection of God.

Throughout the Bible, Jesus is called the Good Shepherd and his followers are referred to as sheep. Dig into how shepherds work and what sheep do, and this word picture takes on even more meaning.

One of the reasons the Bible is so interesting is because of the continued use of word pictures.

When Steve Jobs introduced the original iPod in 2001, he could have talked incessantly about its size, features and functions. In fact, he did include a lot of that information in his keynote presentation.

But the phrase Jobs used to hit it home was, "a thousand songs in your pocket." That word picture helped the audience (in the room and around the world) understand the power and potential influence of the iPod. When the New York Times reported the product launch the next day, they used that phrase.

Steve Jobs knew the power of a carefully worded statement, and chose a word picture to make the point memorable.

Rhyme is a powerful tool for creating bottom lines in sermons. They work well because they are memorable.

R = RHYME

Children's book authors know that rhyming makes stories more engaging. You don't have to be Dr. Seuss to know that rhyming makes stories more memorable. In elementary school, we learn important principles through rhyme. It's I before E except after C. Even though that's not always true (weird, I know), we remember it because it rhymes. There's a good chance you know the year Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean blue.

As you get older, we realize rhyming still has value. In high school and college, rhyming can be an effective memorization tool. How many people memorized seemingly useless content for a test by creating some unique rhyming phrase?

Rhyme is a powerful tool for creating bottom lines in sermons. They work well because they are memorable.

At Northpoint Community Church, Andy Stanley recently preached a series on the meaning of the word Christian. In the third week of that series, Andy was talking about Christians judging people outside the faith. His principle was pulled from 1 Corinthians 5:12, which is an important verse on the subject.

As Andy moved toward the conclusion of his sermon, he explained how he was looking for a phrase to sum up his teaching for the day. He warned people that the statement he was about to share was churchy and hearkened people back to their experience in church as a child, giving them permission to say Amen or grunt in approval. It was funny.

His bottom line: Judge the believin', not the heathen.

That's a funny example of a bottom line, but it's memorable. Not only did it get a good laugh, it perfectly summed up the point of the message.

Here are some other examples of good bottom lines that utilize rhyme.

- Who you know is how you grow.
- When you change your position, you change your condition.

As you're working to craft a memorable bottom line, look for phrases that rhyme to make your statement more memorable, tweetable and impactful.

Hint: Use a rhyming dictionary like rhymezone.com to search for rhyming words.

This technique helps turn ordinary sentences into memorable statements.

E = ECHO

On January 20, 1961, President John F. Kennedy gave a 14-minute inaugural address in Washington, D.C. after he took the oath of office and became the 35th President of the United States. In that speech, he delivered one of the most famous lines in American political history when he said...

“Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.”

President Kennedy implored the use of echo in that statement, repeating an important word or phrase. This technique helps turn ordinary sentences into memorable statements. This rhetorical device, a favorite of politicians, can help you craft a great bottom line. Here are two other examples:

The purpose of work is to show God is at work.

Here, the word work is repeated. It's a simple statement, but it's packed with meaning. In the context of a sermon on our Christian duty in the workplace, this single statement sums up an entire sermon quite well.

Forgiven people forgive.

Here, the word is slightly changed, but it's still a great use of echo. This three-word statement is a powerful bottom line in a sermon on forgiveness, perhaps a message built on Matthew 18:22 when Jesus tells Peter to forgive people seventy times seven.

As you're working to summarize your sermon in a sentence or create a bottom line statement people will remember, try using echo to make your point.

Phrases that are remembered have a better chance of making an impact.

A = ALLITERATION

I grew up in a Southern Baptist Church where I'm fairly certain alliteration was the 11th commandment. Sermon outlines routinely went like this:

1. The Precedence for Alliteration
2. The Purpose of Alliteration
3. The Practices of Alliteration
4. The Props for Alliteration
5. The Preparation for Alliteration
6. The Perils of Alliteration

I still have notebooks filled with sermon outlines, where the main points, sub points and sub sub points were alliterated. It was either outstanding or overkill. I'm still not sure.

Alliteration is the repetition of an initial consonant sound. It comes from a Latin term meaning, "putting letters together" (i.e. bright blue bikes). It is a powerful technique for crafting memorable statements. Some of the most famous statements in history, politics and literature employ alliteration. Statements like:

- Nature's first green is gold, Her hardest hue to hold. Her early leaf's a flower; But only so an hour. – Robert Frost
- My style is public negotiations for parity, rather than private negotiations for position. -Jesse Jackson
- Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

One of my favorite uses of alliteration comes from the realm of advertising. We all know that DiGiorno pizza is the best frozen pizza to buy because their slogan is so memorable.

It's not delivery; it's DiGiorno.

You probably don't know the slogan of any other frozen pizza, but you remember that one. Why? Because alliteration is a great technique for creating memorable statements. It's easy to overuse, but it's powerful when you use it appropriately.

In a sermon on finances with Matthew 16:26 as the key verse (What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?) an alliterated bottom line might be:

Your soul is more important than your stuff.

Repeat that phrase several times throughout the message, and weeks later, there's a good chance it will be remembered. And phrases that are remembered have a better chance of making an impact.

Some pastors use alliteration to help organize the flow of their outline, and while this may make it easier to follow, most people don't remember outlines. Go ahead and use alliteration in your outline, but try working it into a memorable, one-sentence statement.

A hook that will draw people into your message or solidify it in their minds and hearts.

C = CONTRAST

Contrasting two ideas is another good technique for crafting a solid and memorable bottom line. Alfred used contrast when he told Bruce Wayne, “The night is darkest just before dawn.” But the technique isn’t just helpful for Batman scripts; contrast is used throughout the Bible.

- Dark and light (John 1:5)
- Righteous and unrighteous (Psalm 1)
- Death and life (John 5:24)
- First and last (Matthew 20:16)
- Rich and poor (Luke 16:14-31)
- Pharisees and tax collectors (Luke 18:9-14)

In an Easter sermon on the resurrection, one pastor encouraged his congregation with this bottom line:

It is finished, but it's not over.

Here, the crucifixion (it is finished) and resurrection (it's not over) encouraged people that God is still at work in their lives.

If you work some of these things into your sermon's bottom line, and work hard to craft a memorable statement, you'll be left with the final part of our acronym.

H = HOOK

Like all good songwriters and musicians, if you work hard on your statement, it can become a hook that will draw people into your message or solidify it in their minds and hearts.

I'll resist the urge to build another paragraph on the music of Miley Cyrus or Party in the USA, but you've got to admit...people putting their hands up and nodding their heads like yeah would not be the worst thing that could happen in your church service.

Aim for a hook with your bottom line!

BOTTOM LINE BASICS

Now that you know HOW to use a few techniques to craft a memorable bottom line, let's talk about a few ways to make your methods even more powerful.

First, in some cases, you may be able to combine one or two of these techniques into one statement. In some cases, you might even be able to use three. But don't feel like you have to work all of these into one statement. Start with one and go from there.

Secondly, you might find it natural to fall back on one particular technique. For example, many pastors are comfortable using alliteration or rhyme, but have to work hard to use contrast or word pictures. Sometimes, it's good to go with what comes naturally, but at other times, keep pressing and try a different technique.

Third, get people to help craft your statement. If you don't have a large staff, a teaching team, or a creative team, you can still send a short email to several friends, fellow pastors, or church members and ask their advice on turning your statement into something a little more memorable. Just send a few people the working statement and ask them to provide feedback. Asking people to read your whole sermon or to help with sermon prep might seem overwhelming, but most people would be happy to think on a simple statement for you.

Finally, Preaching Rocket members have access to a members-only forum where you can post your bottom lines and get feedback from other communicators. This is a simple way to get help from a community of other pastors.

SELECTED BOTTOM LINES

I have a page in my Moleskin notebook for writing down good bottom lines. In conclusion, here are a select few:

- There's no win in comparison. (rhyme)
- Your soul is more important than your stuff. (alliteration)
- Would you rather die FROM something or FOR something? (contrast and alliteration)
- Celebrate what God has given others and leverage what God has given you. (echo and contrast)
- Sin has a "gotcha." (picture)
- The purpose of prayer is to surrender our will, not impose it. (contrast)