

## **Best PowerPoint Practices for Preaching**

Posted on March 6, 2014 by Kenton Anderson\*

A couple of days ago I posted on the limitations of using PowerPoint as it relates to retention in preaching. That post led to a record number of page views for this website. Clearly, many people are interested in this question of whether and how to use slides in preaching. While my earlier post might have given the impression that there is no use for PowerPoint in preaching, there are obvious benefits to using slides, when they are used well. [powerpointprojector](#)

It has to be emphasized that quality counts when using slides. People are accustomed to seeing high quality graphics and images out in the wild. You do not want to inadvertently signal that your church is backward or inattentive by showing slipshod visuals on the screen. If that is the best that you are capable of, it might be worth asking whether you ought to be showing anything at all. But if you do feel a need to use slides, then here are some of the ways that you might want to go about it.

### **Few Words – Striking Images**

The most effective slides are pleasing to the eye, matching a relevant image or graphic with a minimum of words. The point of the screen is to complement the speaker, not to compete with what the preacher is saying. A well chosen, striking picture can help focus the listener's attention in the direction that the preacher is intending. A phrase or simple sentence will be enough to direct the listener without distracting him or her. Rather than putting a lengthy biblical text or quotation on the screen, it might be more effective to offer just the focal point of the passage, while reading the longer text orally

### **Managing Complexity**

It is hard to handle complex material by means of an oral medium. Listeners have a difficult time processing details on the fly. This is where a slide or two can be very helpful. The point is that the slides actually clarify, which means that they must be laid out in a simple, pleasing, and eye-catching manner. Using an infographic might be helpful. If the preacher can't manage the material with this kind of simplicity, it might be a clue that the preacher is attempting too much for what might be wise through a medium like preaching. Simple charts maps, or quotations are all excellent ways of achieving visual and mental clarity.

### **Going Dark**

Sometimes the best screen is a dark screen. Slides are not essential. It can be powerful to focus attention on a particular quotation or graphic element by having the screen go dark before and after projection. Show the slide as you are speaking about the content of that slide and when you are finished, just let the screen go dark. It is not critical that material is constantly projected. Less active screens, allow the listener to focus on the things that really matter to the preacher. They also take less work to prepare.

### **Title Slide**

One viable approach is to use a single title slide that can be on the screen either at the start of the sermon or throughout. Such a slide could feature the sermon title, the biblical text reference, the sermon theme statement, along with a primary image or collage of images. It's like a cover page for your sermon.

### **Visual Illustrations**

Preachers love to tell stories to illustrate their points. While our word pictures might be great, it can be helpful sometimes to screen a picture that actually shows what the preacher is talking about. When talking about a lesson learned during a mission trip, for example, why not show a picture taken from that trip?

### **Interacting with the Screen**

It is extremely helpful if the preacher interacts directly with what has been projected. For example, when showing a picture, the preacher could refer to it directly, turning to face the screen for a moment, and pointing out something interesting about the image. This helps the preacher visually connect the listener to the things that are being offered, helping to overcome the natural distance between the preacher and the screen.

### **The 10/20/30 Rule**

Guy Kawasaki, has suggested a ten/twenty/thirty rule when dealing with slides. He says we should use no more than 10 slides, no more than 20 minutes, and no less than 30 point fonts. That might be good advice for us.

I understand that this might seem a little daunting. Quality is hard to achieve, and this is something that is very hard to delegate. It may be, as I suggested before, that the best response is to not use slides at all. I continue to contend that the best visual in preaching is the preacher. The preacher embodies and enlivens the sermon. When done well, perhaps nothing else is needed.

*\* ABOUT PREACHING.ORG...*

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