

Learner-Sensitive Preaching: Enhancing the Clarity and Relevance of Sermons for an Emerging Generation

Overview:

Biblical preaching inherently focuses on the text preached—and this is right and good. Preaching to an emerging generation influenced by a secular society must give increased attention to how the message is heard by its sermon hearers. This means that preachers must understand the learning needs of adults and the cultural factors influencing them in order to employ a homiletic methodology sufficient for Christian formation.

Statements Expressing the Problem:

Preaching that appeals only to those within the walls of that church is preaching to a too narrowly defined context of hearers. Biblical preaching should reach into the marketplace of ideas. Its influence should be felt in the community. Failing to understand adult learning needs and the cultural factors influencing them results in a homiletic that is inadequate for reaching an emerging generation and discipling them into full maturity.

The vast majority of preaching is oral/auditory. The effectiveness of this format when used exclusively may be questioned in any generation, but it is especially suspect in our secular reality. Practitioner David Fisher, states, "Traditional preaching-- logical, linear, rational and monological discourse-- does not work well in the land of 'Babel' (a land gutted with words).

The mere giving of information is not enough. It is the work of preachers to work hard at giving the propositions meaning and application in as persuasive a way as possible. While they are utterly dependent upon the Spirit of God for life change, this reality does not negate their responsibility to diligently study and apply the best of available resources to motivate Christlikeness. These resources include tools that appeal to more than just the mind, but to the imaginations and emotions of the hearers as well.

Too often, preachers fail to motivate sermon hearers to engage with the content being preached. The preacher is declaring the virtues of first century admonitions while the hearers are conflicted with the crises they are experiencing in twenty first century life.

Statements Expressing the Proposed Solution:

It is the purpose of these lectures to enhance the clarity and relevance of messages by teaching church communicators three things: an understanding of the core learning needs of adults, an awareness of the cultural factors that are shaping these learning needs, and what is needed to preach effectively to this generation of disciples. Preachers with these insights and skills will better serve the congregation they are called to lead. In addition, the principles taught are equally

applicable to any environment in a faith community. They are grounded in Christian education philosophy, reliable rhetorical theory, and a biblical and theologically grounded methodology.

On a Personal Note:

The seed of these lectures began over twenty years ago during my Bible College days. I was privileged to take a class on the teaching methods of Christ that broadened my view of discipleship methods beyond what I had previously experienced or imagined. A study of the gospels revealed the teachings of Jesus to be engaging, full of metaphors and visuals. With an undergraduate degree in Christian education, I used the creative methods to which I had been exposed in a variety of church discipleship environments. It was during Seminary that I was captured by the principles of developing and the delivery of biblical preaching.

As a pastor in a church attempting to reach the unchurched, the idea of merging the multi-sensory teaching methods of Christian education with the homiletic design of biblical preaching was birthed. There are churches who have been using the arts and technology as a way to raise interest in the sermon's subject or to press the big idea home at the sermon's end. But, this concept was different, for it proposed the use of the arts, technology and other interactive teaching methods as a part of the sermon itself. The potential for this idea seemed certain to gain the audience's attention and enhance the sermon's clarity and relevance. And, for an emerging generation raised on the music and images of MTV culture, it couldn't hurt. Clear and relevant homiletic methodology will do well to adopt a multi-sensory approach. Learner-sensitive preachers will ask how a sermon's message can be seen and not just heard.

The conclusion for preachers who desire to enhance their sermon's impact for an emerging generation should be obvious-- they must use methods that are sensitive to learning preferences when preparing and delivering their sermon. The oral/aural format that is the homiletical standard is not sufficient for capturing the attention of and communicating God's truth to an increasingly post-modern, media-saturated culture. I believe that employing creative teaching tools that employ multi-sensory ministry can enhance the clarity and relevance of a preacher's message, thus increasing spiritual transformation in adults. These tools take into consideration the learning styles of adults. These tools engage the mind and imagination. The purpose of these lectures is to give preachers a new perspective on the potential of messages to change lives in this generation and the practical steps to get it done.

Brief Bio

Rod likes to think that if he'd had better coaching he could have played in the NBA and brags that he has a wicked hook shot that sometimes goes in. Other than his love of basketball, he is passionate about equipping pastors, church leaders, and campus ministers with theological and practical resources. He is the director of the "Theological Education Initiative," a Christian Study Center serving the theologically under-resourced in Central Missouri. He is a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary and earned a doctor of ministry degree from Talbot School of Theology.

He is an adjunct instructor in preaching at both A.W. Tozer and Bethel Theological Seminaries. He publishes regularly in Preaching Magazine. He is married to Julie and they are anticipating their first grandchild in December, 2016.

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