

Developing Depth in Ministry

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Do you ever wonder if people get anything out of your messages? Is it making a difference? Are people applying these life changing truths to their lives? What you do in a weekly gathering is very dangerous. I'm not talking about "changing the world for Jesus" dangerous, although, if that happens...great. However, I'm talking about a consistent gathering where there is no real effort to apply the information. That is dangerous. Can you sense when your audience is becoming numb to the power of God? What do you do? Do you just keep on meeting and keep on preaching hoping for a different result? Isn't that the definition of insanity?

According to Lifeway Research, following community, the second most important desire among young adults is participation in a small-group meeting to discuss life application of Scripture in a deep way. They don't want pat answers when the Bible is communicated, yet they want to explore the complexities of scripture regarding foundational Christian truths. Christianity used to be a set of facts that were meant to be proven, but young adults have an increased desire to examine the mysteries of faith by pondering a lot of difficult questions. They understand that faith isn't about having a pat answer, but rather about a journey with many challenges and struggles.

You may ask, "how do I prepare a deep Bible study?" Perhaps, you're like me and you haven't attended 12 years of seminary while accruing 3 masters degrees and 2 doctorates all in Theology. However, a deep Bible study isn't necessarily about how much information you have, but about how you learn the information followed by how you communicate it. You don't have to have a quota of 5 Greek words and 3 Hebrew words every time to teach/preach affectively. What you teach should be a reflection of what you are learning and what the Holy Spirit is placing on your heart. How do you get there? Jim Johnston in his book, "Context" lays out seven ideas of how to prepare a message:

1. Read the text.
2. Question the text.
What does it mean? What do you understand? What do you not understand? Don't worry about answering the questions just yet, just raise them.
3. Learn the text.
This is where you try and answer some of those questions. Use commentaries or online resources like biblegateway.com, studylight.org, and crosswalk.com to understand the complete context and makeup of the passage.
4. Find the text's "3 a.m. statement."
You always want the audience to leave with one key point of the passage. Jim Johnston calls this the "3 a.m. statement" because if someone woke you up at 3 a.m. the night before you're going to teach and asked, "What is your teaching about?" you would be able to answer him in one, short, easy-to-remember sentence.
5. Personally reflect on the text.
Simply ask, "What does this mean for me?" "What is this asking me to do?" This is where you deeply encounter the text before you try and help others do the same.
6. Develop your notes.
This can be done in many ways. Some prefer an outline while others prefer bullet points. I suggest constructing your notes in a way that best fits your communication style. In my experience, young adults prefer narrative teaching to bullet point teaching. They also want and

need self-examining questions to ponder throughout the teaching. As you develop your notes, write out questions that engage one's spirit, intellect, and emotion.

7. Make it relevant.

This is where you place your encounter with scripture to where other people are on their journey. The illustrations and rhetoric used in the presentation should relate to your audience. For example, if you are speaking to a bunch of college students, use an illustration that starts out by saying, "imagine you are walking through your campus..." Also, always remember to apply the information to where your audience is. People want to know how the Bible should affect their life. Leave the listeners with a practical way to respond.

I recently sat down with a team from a local ministry to help plan out the 2010 message calendar. We prayed and then strategized about what the people in our ministry needed to hear. Our attempt was to focus the content around the external makeup of our community while including components of discipleship, evangelism, community, worship, and serving. Also, we understand that most of the people in our ministry are not new to church, so it's important for us to bring new angles to scripture. If you're having a difficult time coming up with original ideas for messages, start with the Bible. The Bible is relevant to everyone. Pick out topics directly from scripture to discuss. Also, get to you know your community. Attempt to answer the questions that people are asking. If your material is addressing issues that no one is facing, then you are on the wrong track.

Origins – The origin of creation, covenant, Christ, and the church