



## 4 Non-Negotiables When Speaking to College Students

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I love communicating to college students. It's rare to find a more attentive, engaged, and moldable group of people than an auditorium full of young men and women at university. It makes sense when you think about it.

College students are bombarded, some for the very first time in their lives, with freedom. They have to set their own alarms, prioritize their own time, and make the bulk of their own choices about how they spend their resources for the very first time. So when you find yourself sitting in a room full of college students with the Bible at the center, it's because those students want to be there, not because they have to be there.

What's more, these students who want to be there are also at a pivotal time in their lives. These are the days when they decide upon their careers, their spouses, and their financial expenditures. These are days that set the pace for the next several decades. For all those reasons, it's a great opportunity to communicate truth, but also an incredible responsibility. From my view, that also makes environments like these a bit unique. Here, then, are four non-negotiables when speaking to college students:

### 1. Clarity over cleverness

It's so easy to get enamored with our own cleverness. And in so doing, we can come up with all kinds of clever ways to try and explain things in the Bible through use of illustration. This is especially tempting when communicating to college students, who have access to so many entertaining things at every moment of their days. But there is a danger here for us. The danger is that we might end up obscuring what the Bible says with our own cleverness. In the end, as we think through illustrations, it's a wise thing to ask whether we are trusting, through the use of our clever rhetoric, if we are trusting in our own ability to communicate more than the power of God's Word.

### 2. Faithful over funny

Humor is a powerful thing. I think Jesus used humor from time to time in His own teaching. I mean, it's funny to think about a person walking around with a plank sticking out of his head all the while he's looking for splinters in someone else's. So humor is a gift, and a tool that we can use to help communicate. But we should also be careful here, because we can easily keep a bag of our "go to" stories that we know will solicit a laugh from students, and then look for a way to bend the true content of the message in order to work them in.

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### **3. Adoration over admiration**

Everyone likes to be liked. I certainly do. But the danger when we communicate and communicate effectively is that people might leave a conversation or a class or a church service with us dazzled at our rhetoric and yet never brought humbly to the God we represent. If that happens, then we have garnered admiration from another, but we haven't led that other to adoration of Jesus Christ.

### **4. Reality over rhythm**

College students are hungry. They are searching out truth for themselves rather than accepting the version of truth that they've grown up with. Because of this, we must make doubly sure that what we are communicating is real. Authentic. Even messy. And we should be willing to sacrifice some of our rhetorical polish on the altar of authenticity.

Everybody likes a good "rhythm" when they are listening to a presentation. That kind of polish makes it an easy listen, even an entertaining one. But we should be careful that we don't spend so much time polishing our delivery that we lose the authenticity within the message.

It's a great privilege to speak into the lives of students, friends. Let's be careful that we steward it well.