



Resources for Church and
Campus Collegiate
Ministries

HOW TO PREACH SO STUDENTS WILL LISTEN

David Worcester

Lead Pastor Compass Church, San Diego

BE REAL, OR BE IGNORED

Authenticity trumps everything – the more personal, the more powerful. Vulnerability is your secret weapon when communicating to college students.

If students even suspect that you are not being authentic, then they will immediately tune you out. When I tell about a struggle I have faced or I am currently facing, I can see the interest level in the room rise exponentially. Another way to increase the vulnerability level of your meetings is to have students share their stories of how God changed their lives.

BE PASSIONATE, BUT BE YOU

Passionate speakers touch the hearts of young people. I just attended the SEND conference that featured David Platt and Francis Chan. Both are extremely gifted at conveying their passion, but they have very different styles. Chan flails about the stage, barely looking at his notes, and it seems as if he's about to jump off the stage as he talks. Platt, on the other hand, stays behind the podium almost the entire time, but you can feel the intentionality and passion behind every word.

Communicators who have succeeded with college students have all learned to speak with passion, but in their own way. Don't try to be your favorite preacher; if God wanted another one of them he would have given them a twin, like he did with Paul and me. Ha-ha.

If God wanted David Platt to preach to your students every week he would have called him, but he called YOU! Learn from the communicators you admire, but share how God is impacting you, in your own way. Otherwise, why not just show a video every week, which is not a horrible thing to do?

I just attended a two-day preaching training with Chris Brown and Larry Osborn from North Coast Church. They are legit. They used a baseball analogy to make a point to preach in your sweet spot.

Every batter has certain pitches they like to hit. Some like high and outside fast balls, some like to hit curve balls. The great thing about writing your own sermon is that you get to craft your message in a way that is in your sweet spot! You get to throw your own pitch and set yourself up for success. You can even set the ball on a tee. Knowing how you best communicate will allow you to hit the ball out of the park more times than not, or at least get on base! Make sure you are communicating your passion in your way.

John Wesley is credited for saying, "Light yourself on fire with passion and people will come from miles to watch you burn... Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God... such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on Earth." I agree with him.

This resource is available to all collegiate ministries. Please use it for your ministry but not for commercial purposes. We ask that you retain the BCNet header.



TELL STORIES, BUT DON'T FORGET HIS STORY

If you want the audience to pay attention, tell a story. Often, I look out on the crowd and if it feels like I'm losing them, I tell a story and all of a sudden I see eyes again! Stories grab us. There's a reason we binge watch Netflix, because we can't get enough of the stories we love.

We should tell stories of how we are seeking to apply the Bible, but let's not forget to tell the Biblical stories with equal passion.

Take your audience into the scene with you. Immerse them in the world of the biblical story or the passage. Take them on a journey. Andy Stanley says that his goal is to get people into the Scriptures and roll them around in it like a pig in the mud. Get it all over them so it sticks.

In addition to the biblical narrative, we should also tell our personal journey in applying the principles. But, be careful not to make yourself the hero of every story. Tell your failures and your triumphs. Don't edit out the parts of the story that are embarrassing. Ask yourself, "Why am I telling this story - to make my point, or to make people like me?" At the end of the message, what do you want people to remember – your stories or God's story?

CHOOSE CLARITY OVER CLEVERNESS

"It's better to be clear than cute." - Rick Warren

Be careful not to make your message so complex or cute that it gets confusing. I like my points to be the applications that I'm wanting my students to take away. I try to create a sticky statement that they can remember. John Piper says, "Books don't change people, paragraphs do — sometimes sentences."

The apostle Paul asked the Colossians to "Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should." (Colossians 4:4) As preachers, we are called to clearly communicate the gospel. If we are muddying the water by trying to sound smart, shame on us.

Albert Einstein said, "The definition of genius is taking the complex and making it simple... everything should be as simple as possible, but not simpler."

We have been given the task of taking the multi-faceted message of the gospel and communicating it in a way that makes sense to people. Because as pastor Harold Bullock (of Hope Church in Fort Worth) says, "People do what makes sense to them."

Ultimately, when we are teaching the Word to our students, we are modeling for them how they will use the Scripture. As we are fighting for their attention, there is a battle waging for their souls. Let's not be afraid to do the hard work and we will see students saved, raised up to make disciples and reach their world for Christ.

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15)