



# Foundations of Young Life Ministry I & II

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## **The Message**

### **Giving an Effective Message**

*(Adapted from an article submitted by Dr Chap Clark)*

Young Life has always been noted for its effective communication to young people. From the early pioneers to today's staff and volunteers, there remains a commitment to effective messages targeting youth. But productive communication, especially to a highly diversified and disinterested youth culture, is becoming increasingly more difficult. In order to reach the kids of the '90s and beyond with the truth of the Gospel in a way that they can understand and are drawn to, it is vital that Young Life messages be as clear and relevant as possible.

This article recommends a relatively simple, add water and stir method of preparing and delivering an effective message. This approach has been handed down in one form or another for decades. There is nothing new, but the plea in this approach is for simplicity and a return to the roots of what makes a good talk. The time-honoured speaking traditions in Young Life still provide one of the best possible methods for reaching disinterested kids with the wonder of Jesus Christ.

#### **Method**

##### **Order of preparation:**

- Controlling Thought
- Conclusion
- Body (Scripture)
- Introduction
- Application
- Transitions

This order is useful every time you approach a brief message to any audience where you have one point to convey. A banquet talk, for example, may require the exact same preparation method in order to stay on target and not lose focus.

##### **Components of the Message:**

These are the essential six components of an effective message. See the examples at the end of the proclamation section.

1. Controlling Thought: This is your target statement. When the message is finished and someone is asked, "What did she say?" he should be able to repeat this phrase almost verbatim. Throughout the talk, no matter how lost or nervous you get, as long as you keep this one phrase in mind, you cannot help but communicate clearly.
2. Conclusion: After writing down the thesis statement, the next task is to formulate a conclusive paragraph or summary. The reason I prepare this second is because it provides a framework within which the controlling thought can be couched and delivered. When the thesis is clear, the conclusion will be clear.
3. Body: In almost every talk of this kind, the body represents the Scripture which illustrates the thesis. In most preaching classes, students are taught that the controlling thought flows out of the Scripture. But for a specifically evangelical or informational message, where the controlling thoughts have already been formulated and agreed upon (in Young Life, the Statement of Mission Purpose and Doctrinal Statement), the Bible becomes the tool to illustrate the truth being communicated.

4. **Introduction:** The point of an introduction is to draw the attention of the crowd to the speaker and interest them in what you have to say. Sometimes this is a personal story, current news or school occurrence or an anecdote. It usually has some sort of natural tie to the Scripture (or sometimes the controlling thought). The danger for most speakers is a tendency to spend too much time with an illustration, thus taking away from the point of the talk and diluting the impact and focus on the controlling thought.
5. **Application:** This is one of the most neglected components of Young Life messages. We will communicate life saving truth to students and then leave them without an avenue to implement the information. An effective talk must always have a clear and simple application that can be both understood and carried out. For example, after a talk on the identity of Christ, ask kids to answer the question for themselves, "Who do you say that I am" or challenge them to complete this statement on their own: "I believe Jesus is \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_."
6. **Transitions:** Perhaps the biggest mistake that is made by speakers is the lack of attention given to transition statements. Between every point there must be a sentence or phrase that bridges the gaps between thoughts. It can be smooth (And if you think I was hurting, let's look at a woman who once lost everything she had," and turn to Mark 5:21) or rather abrupt (Enough about school, let's get into some *real* exciting stuff . Last week we saw how Jesus..."). The point is to make sure that each transition makes sense and maintains continuity and flow from point to point, making sure that the thesis statement is the objective.

### **Trouble Shooting: Common Pitfalls to Avoid**

- **Overuse of Illustration:** The point of a talk is to lift up Jesus Christ and not ourselves. We must keep in mind that every illustration is simply a tool to get into the Scripture, which in turn highlights the thesis. If an illustration goes beyond this purpose, it will often overshadow the thesis, which would cause a reaction like: "Great message! I'm not sure what was said, but it was sure funny!"
- **Muddy Conclusion:** Usually caused by lack of adequate preparation, where the most common mistake is to take either our favourite Scripture or illustration and force it into a talk.
- **Lack of Direction or Flow:** Again, often caused by preparing the components out of order, or not thinking through transitions. The key to a smooth flowing message is keeping a clear focus on the thesis and supporting it.
- **Poor Use of Scripture:** Scripture deserves careful attention in our messages. We must make sure that our interpretation is true to the original intent of the passage, and that we are not stretching the text to make it say what it does not intend. Every passage should be thoroughly studied and prayed through before speaking to kids in the name of the Lord.
- **Poor Delivery:** An effective Young Life message can be invalidated by poor delivery. It helps for the speaker to be aware of deficiencies and work on the delivery prior to speaking regularly. Such things as gum chewing, holding the Bible like a shield, speaking in a whisper or monotone and avoiding eye contact will diminish the effectiveness of a message. On the other hand, if the leader is known (and presumably liked) by kids, has a clear and simple message with a specific thesis and application and is willing to share with kids as friends, an unpolished delivery will still make a huge impact on the lives of the students.

- **A wise, old sage** once remarked to me, “Your message is only as good as the breath mints in your pocket.” Not a bad piece of advice as someone approaches you after a talk.

## **Speaking to a Lost Generation**

*(Adapted from a paper submitted by Ray Donatucci)*

When preparing a message at club or camp I ask two questions: "What is the Gospel?" and "Where are the listeners?" Young Life has had a solid focus historically on what the basic content of the Gospel is. On most occasions when we fail to communicate it clearly, it is because we have not taken the time to organise our thoughts into a coherent and biblical whole. The book *Basic Christianity* by John Stott has long been the pattern for our formatting and communicating the Gospel. Young Life's person, need, cross, and appropriation message sequence is patterned after the outline of this book.

As great as this book is, however, I will never forget the last time I tried to use it in Campaigners. As we ploughed through it, I became painfully aware that it was not scratching where they itched. There is nothing wrong with the theology, organisation, illustrations or the believer's prayer in this book. The book is still great, but the generation of high schoolers reading, it has changed dramatically. Unlike previous generations, this group of high schooler' were not only biblically illiterate, but they also came to faith with a unique set of needs. The question, "Where are the listeners?" is of paramount importance.

Perhaps some of my own story will help clarify the point. I grew up in a culture that saw religion, for the most part, as a good thing. We went to church from time to time, attended high schools that were open to letting Young Life leaders onto the campus and lived in a world that held the clergy in high regard. I would not have called myself a Christian, but I knew many Bible stories and, quite frankly, knew that there was a God whom I would need to contend with some day. I cannot recall ever feeling repulsed or hostile toward the things of Christ.

Today, we not only have a generation that is being raised biblically illiterate, but we are also facing a world that is extremely indifferent and even hostile toward Christianity. In the Boulder, CO, area where I work, Young Life leaders are prohibited from being on campus along with drug dealers, Neo-Nazis and Soldier of Fortune mercenaries. What does it say about the world's view of us when we are placed in that kind of company? Christians are seen as intolerant in a culture that places a premium on tolerance and pluralism. God is seen as irrelevant and nonexistent for all the practical issues of life. The scepticism of our day has contaminated most of adolescent culture. This erosion of belief/trust makes it extremely difficult to significantly connect with young people. And once friendships are established, this generation is so busy it is difficult to sustain them.

Although I believe firmly in the reality of sin, when I think of kids today I see them more as being confused and lost than being blatant sinners. As I have reflected on where my high school friends are today, I cannot help but feel for them as Christ felt when He looked down on Jerusalem. His heart was broken and full of compassion. How He longed to gather them to Himself - like a mother hen with her chicks or a shepherd with sheep. Kids don't need condemnation, they need to be found and appreciated. Many are doing the best they can to make sense out of a complex and senseless world. The busier they can remain, the less they have to deal with the fact that they have lost their way.

### **How do we lose our way in this culture?**

1. We can get lost when we find ourselves in a new place with unfamiliar landmarks. Most of us know what it is like getting lost in this situation. We don't know where we are and will sometimes drive even faster trying to find our misplaced destination. Should it surprise us when we watch today's adolescent attempting to negotiate the foreign terrain of physiological changes, materialism, increased racial stress, jobs, self-consciousness, insecurities and the mythological good life by simply living faster and faster? It is essential that they hear that there are friends available for directions, that they are valuable to God and us and life can be fully lived at a slower, simpler pace.
2. We get lost when we lose the people with whom we are travelling. Imagine a young child crying in the middle of a shopping mall. Does she want an ice cream cone? A candy bar? The attempts of the friendly store clerk fail because she wants her parents. So it is with us. Many of us have lost the people we were journeying with and this is painful. Divorce, job relocation, the constant uncertainties of friendship and death produce grief and deep disorientation. In the midst of rapid change and uncertainty, we need to hold up the One who is the same "yesterday, today, and forever."
3. We get lost when our vision becomes obscured. In Colorado, we know what it is like to be snow skiing when a storm comes. In an instant, you find yourself in a whiteout, losing all sense of direction. You may know where you are, but you cannot see where you need to go. Many adolescents live in a similar fogged state. Ambition, lust, anger, money, drugs, prejudice, pain and fear are blinding them. Watching someone play pin the tie on the yuppie may be a fun party game, but it is a tragic way to live. We need to help them see that only in God is our soul at rest.

All of this is to emphasise that some of the presuppositions we make about our audience are not true any more. Most of my training has been intellectual, propositional and logical. The problem is that we are addressing an audience that is living in a visually oriented, illogical, painfully uncertain world. The best of messages will fall on deaf ears if we do not take the time to be an exegete of the culture they live in as well as an exegete of the Book of Life.

Remember the story of the Trojan Horse? Greece had laid siege to Troy because Troy had kidnapped Helen of Athens. For 10 years, the Greek army tried to breach the walls of Troy and liberate Helen. Finally, they decided to build a huge wooden horse as a gift to the Trojans. What the army of Troy did not realise was that Greek soldiers were hiding inside the horse. The Trojans accepted this gift as a token of their victory and wheeled the horse through their gate and into their city. You know the story from there. Once beyond Troy's defences, the battle was quickly over.

So it is with communicating to young people. We need to look for Trojan horses that can slip past their defences, allowing the truth of the Gospel to be heard, seen and felt. Approaching the Gospel solely as a series of propositional truths to be understood can be as futile as the 10 years the Greek army sat outside the walls of Troy. Jesus was masterful at using Trojan horses in his use of parables. He would package an eternal truth in an everyday illustration. People would listen to a simple story about a farmer sowing seeds or a man with two sons and would walk away

with the image and the truth it contained. Once it got past their defences, anything might happen.

So it is with this generation. We must find Trojan horses that will break through their callousness and defensiveness, and speak to a generation that, on one hand, seems to have it all, and, on the other, is void of purpose and meaning. We need to feel their need as we prepare messages. As I am planning a message, I focus on an area of need I have observed and think of how the sufficiency of Christ might address it. My hope is to craft a message in such a way that it touches on the silent cries of the human heart yearning for the healing, loving hand of Jesus Christ. Because this generation is visually oriented, I want to express my thoughts in word-pictures as much as possible. I pray that the word of Christ might somehow slip past their defences and set them free.

## **Clarifying our Message for a Post-Modern Audience**

*(Submitted by Rick Beckwith)*

Church growth experts tell us that because Christianity is no longer the norm in our culture, the good news of the Gospel is more challenging to accept. It comes across as a bit foreign to kids' own life experience. Therefore, in communicating Christ in a post-modern culture, it is important that we not assume the audience either knows or accepts the basic tenants of our faith.

In 20 years of working with teenagers as a Young Life leader, I have seen the great value of asking kids probing questions, rather than appearing to merely lecture them on what I think they need to hear. Frequent surveys of our kids have confirmed that we are on track with their needs and interests.

One tool that has complemented our club messages has been the occasional use of apologetics seminars in place of club. Below is a list of questions we typically cover in our club messages. After some, there is another question written in italics that is the topic of an apologetics seminar that coincides with that message.

### **Questions to Explore in Club Messages**

- Is there a Creator behind life? What is the evidence for this (evolution vs. creation debate)?
- Why might God have become a man?
- Is Jesus truly God? Truly man? How is this so? How do we know? Is the Bible reliable?
- What is God like? How do we know this? How can He relate to me? Aren't all religions the same?
- What are God's desires for us?
- Can He meet my needs? If so, how?
- Why don't we experience God's perfect plan for us?
- Why did Jesus die on the cross? How does that affect me today?
- How is the resurrection important to us today? What is the evidence for the resurrection?
- How can/should I respond to Jesus? How do I begin a relationship with Jesus?
- What does it look like to be a follower of Jesus? What does He ask of us? What questions do you have about following Jesus Christ? (*A question and answer night with Campaigners and leaders on a panel is helpful at this point.*)

### **Resources for apologetics for amateurs:**

- *I'm Glad you Asked*, by Ken Boa and Larry Moody
- *A Ready Defense*, by Josh McDowell
- *Handbook of Today's Religions*, by McDowell and Stewart
- *Evolution: Challenge of the Fossil Record*, by Duane Gish



## **Preparation and Presentation**

By Dr Ron Pyle  
Leadership Foundations II

This article is dedicated to the thousands of men and women who dare to stand in the gap between the triune God and people, the focus of His compassion. It is written for Young Life, but the principles described are applicable to every ministry. It is written with specific reference to communicating with today's youth, but the content contained here will have some value for ministry to any age group.

This is not designed to be an exhaustive treatment of the message, neither is it to be a substitute for the reader's own effort. Effective communication is costly in terms of time, as well as emotional, physical and mental energy. I would like this material to be considered a tool chest in which the builder of the message will find some helpful ideas.

The suggestions provided for preparing and presenting the message reflect the recommendations of scholars and teachers of communication; they will undoubtedly be discussed, adapted and expanded by leaders who decide to use them.

Communication of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is one of the highest privileges available to men and women today. Scripture issues a strong mandate to preach the word (2 Timothy 4:2). While most of Christendom is in wide agreement that we ought to communicate, a wide disagreement exists over both what to say and how to say it.

Except where thought necessary, the content of the message itself will not be discussed at length. Rather this will address the question of how we ought to communicate. *This article will discuss two broad concerns facing the Young Life message-giver; preparation and presentation.*

### **PREPARATION**

Preparing yourself first.

#### **The Prepared Heart**

You're probably familiar with the part of Psalm 51:10-12 which says, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." We often hear the words recited or we sing them ourselves. What we may not be as familiar with are the words which follow the more frequently read sections. In verse 13, the Psalmist writes, "Then I will teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners will be converted to Thee."

Whenever we read Scripture we do well to pay attention to connective words such as "therefore," "so that," "in order to" and "then." In this example, the ideas of God creating a clean heart and individuals engaging the lost are clearly linked. What's more, the word then implies the priority of the first event happening (a cleansed heart) before the second event (teaching transgressors) can occur.

Paul's letter to the Philippians indicates that the Gospel can be declared in the absence of a clean heart and even that God may use the efforts of the deceitful and vain.

“It’s true that some here preach Christ because with me out of the way, they think they’ll step right into the spotlight. But the others do it with the best heart in. -he world. One group is motivated by pure love, knowing that I am here defending the message, wanting to help. The others, now that I’m out of the picture, are merely greedy, hoping to get something out of it for themselves. Their motive is bad. They see me as their competition, and so the worse it goes for me, the better they think for them. So how am I to respond? I’ve decided that I really don’t care about their motives, whether mixed, bad, or indifferent. Every time one of them opens his mouth, Christ is proclaimed, so I just cheer them on!”  
Philippians 1:15-18, *The Message*.

The point, however, is not what God can do in spite of us. Rather our responsibility is to be the most useful tool for God. How then can we prepare our hearts?

The first step in preparing our hearts is to be continually renewed in the commitment of our whole selves to God. One of the problems often encountered by Christians is that we lose a sense of the process of relationship with Christ. Our decision to follow Jesus is in one sense a singular decision in time, just as marriage is a one-time decision on the wedding day. In a broader sense, however, what sustains a marriage is the daily commitment to follow through on the promises to love, honor and cherish.

What makes Christians great is not the isolated instances when God uses them in any extraordinary way, but rather the daily process by which they are prepared for the great things by being faithful in the small things.

The Olympic distance runner crosses the finish line amidst cheers and adoration and some people shout, “That’s for me!” What has been forgotten are the long, lonely and often painful hours of training during which no crowds fill the stadium and the sound of shoes pounding the track replaces the deafening roar of the fans.

The Christian life is not necessarily painful and lonely, but Christian greatness is usually forged by the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives when no one is around. The prepared heart comes out of the daily and often unnoticed ways that we are obedient, thus putting ourselves aside involves not just our hearts, but our minds also.

### **The Prepared Mind**

Indeed we are fearfully and wonderfully made. God has blessed each of us with a brain, which is more intricate and powerful than even the most sophisticated computers. Most of the time the problem is not an issue of the power of the brain, but rather effective use of it. There are some specific ways in which we can use the mental power God has given us.

At least part of the mind’s preparedness has to do with attentiveness. Too much of the time we go through life being passively acted upon by people, events, the media and other influences. By being purposeful and active, we look beneath the surface. For example, even watching TV becomes an active endeavor. We might ask ourselves, “How is this approach to life indicative of the world around me?”, “What would Christ’s response to these attitudes be?”, “How does God fit into this

situation?” Of course, having attentive and active minds extends beyond watching TV.

Living attentively, in part, means asking God for eyes that see people and events the way He sees them. Living attentively will involve a recognition of how ideas are connected to God and the Gospel of Christ. Recognizing previously unnoticed connections is the essence of creativity.

Flashes of brilliance are rare for most of us. When the flashes come, it is more often because we have disciplined our minds to be receptive. Such discipline involves preparing our hearts and minds before God. Louis Pasteur said, “Chance only visits the prepared mind.”

Part of preparing our minds is learning to be quiet. I sometimes wonder if God is trying to get a message through to my inattentive ears. A. W. Tozer says it this way, “God has been waiting to manifest Himself to us till such time as our voice and activity have subsided enough for Him to make Himself heard and felt by us.”

Some of the most precious memories of my college days are of frequently sitting down with Sam Adams, my area director, to brainstorm about message ideas. Sam is so gifted in the area of messages that he provided the lion’s share of the quality ideas, but I can hardly explain the thrill I felt when on rare occasions I would have an idea or perspective that was new to both of us!

Creativity is a great gift from God, but we shouldn’t limit our messages to ideas which are uniquely our own. If we did, most of us would have precious little to say! However, a caution should be noted, if we use the ideas of others they should be adapted both in us and for us. Ideas are adopted in us by making sure that the content is part of our lives before we proclaim it to others. Ideas are adopted for us by communicating the content in such a way that it fits our style and thus becomes our own.

As a means of stimulating ideas, a notebook in which thoughts are recorded may be helpful.

Below are some of the considerations, which could be important as we think about particular Scripture passages during message preparation.

**In the Brainstorming.** Just write all ideas that come to your mind, never mind any order; ideas will come rapidly.

**In the Questions.** Who, why, to whom, when, what, how, where? Answer all of these questions and you will have the basic facts well in hand.

**Word Studies.** Use a dictionary and concordance to discover what you can about the key words and ideas in the passage.

**Objections.** Write down all points of conflict or objection. Can you solve them? Play the skeptic, try to provide alternate explanations for passages of Scripture.

**Perspectives.** View comments from Christ’s and people’s perspective. Write down what you feel was the attitude of the various people involved in a passage.

**Experiences.** Write down experiences of your own personal life which relate to the passage. These experiences can be useful as examples and illustrations.

### **Credibility: How the Messenger Affects the Message**

People decide what to believe on the basis not just of what is said, but also who says it. The effect of the communicator upon the message has been studied for over 2,000 years. The specific recommendations which follow are based on research in psychology and other fields in the past 20 years. Because research on this subject has been so pervasive, there have been many different approaches toward identifying what factors constitute speaker credibility.

Linda and Dick Heun provide a description of credibility which does a good job of summarizing most of the frequently cited components of speaker credibility. The description offered by Heun and Heun identifies four key factors and eight subfactors as affecting speaker credibility:

- Competence - included expertise and composure
- Trustworthiness - includes safety and benefits
- Character - includes similarity and sociability
- Dynamism - includes extroversion and non-verbal activity

Competence refers to how qualified an audience thinks you are to talk on a particular topic. The most important part of competence is expertise. This may cause many Young Life leaders to feel unqualified. However, one doesn't have to be an expert in theology or possess a seminary degree to give solid Young Life messages.

Keep in mind that listeners are sensitive to what we have called competence. For example, when you refer to specific information (even if it is in an illustration), research your facts to make sure you're correct. Careful research should be a constant part of your message preparation. The sense of competence ought to be a natural by-product of the prepared message.

A second factor in competence is composure. One of the ways that audiences decide upon the competence of a speaker is by the perception of composure. Typically, speakers lacking composure are seen as less competent than speakers who are composed.

The perception of composure rather than composure itself is important in this case. Nervousness is a natural and almost universal experience to public speakers. While the anxiety of speaking may not be completely overcome in all instances, we can be more effective if we attempt to appear composed.

Another major factor of speaker credibility is trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is a component of credibility that is based on the listeners' perception of the safety and benefits of the message for them. Closely associated to trustworthiness is the issue of honesty. The sad reality of our world is that religious deception is rampant. Adolescents (not to mention parents) will be constantly evaluating to see if Young Life is an aboveboard group.

Young Life leaders can demonstrate trustworthiness by non-defensively encouraging questions. In dealing with spiritually curious teens, the leader should nurture the

question asking process. Trustworthiness can also be promoted if we avoid pressuring people to make decisions. We need to be committed to the preservation of free choice. A choice, however, is only free when the chooser clearly sees the options. This is where the concerns of the safety and benefits of our message come in.

Is the Gospel of Jesus Christ safe? The answer is both yes and no. Yes, the greatest safety imaginable is in being personally related to the most powerful being in the universe. The answer is also no, the Gospel carries with it implications for one's entire life. Subjecting one's selfish desires to the will of another is not safe - it is radical.

You may be familiar with the section of "The Chronicles of Narnia" in *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* in which the children are about to meet Aslan (the Christ Symbol) for the first time. The Beavers are leading the children who, after learning that Aslan is a great lion, are understandably scared. C.S. Lewis describes the ensuing discussion in this way:

"Ooh!" said Susan, "I'd thought he was a man. Is he quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"That you will, dearie, and no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver, "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're braver than most or else just silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver. "Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

A similar tension exists regarding benefits. The Gospel of Christ brings the greatest benefits imaginable. However, we should be cautious of the so-called Santa Claus gospel in which converts are enticed by the lure of incredible benefits, but are not informed of the attendant costs. Again, to foster a truly free choice we must present the options with all the clarity possible. There is risk amidst the safety and cost within the benefits.

The third component of credibility is character. Two important personality qualities upon which the audience bases its perception are similarity and sociability. Being similar to the teenage audience does not mean being like them in every respect. Adolescents have an uncanny way of spotting ponies.

The similarities you share with teens will emerge in the time you spend doing contact work. The rapport that is built by sharing experiences is invaluable in the speaking situation. If you have proven with your life that you legitimately care about teens, they will sense it in your message even if you aren't the most gifted speaker. The similarity you share is of hopes, concerns, fears and joys - the overwhelming sense that teens will have which declares, "he or she knows me."

Sociability, being seen as friendly, is also a function of relationships. Because Young Life is predicated on relationships, sociability should be a matter of course. There are at least two ways sociability can be expressed in the message.

The first is through the use of personal pronouns and first names. Whenever you refer to teens by name, the context should be absolutely positive. If you have any question about how a comment will be received, don't say it.

For many adolescents, the teen years are an uncertain time of groping, and sometimes battling, for a healthy self-image. In the midst of the battle, teens need an ally to build them up, not an enemy to tear away another piece of the often fragile structure of self-esteem.

The second way to express sociability is humour. Here again, only refer to particular students if you do so in an undeniably positive way. Your best bet is to poke fun at yourself. Using humour about yourself is non-threatening to the audience and also allows you to be vulnerable.

The final component of credibility is dynamism. Dynamism refers to your physical activity while delivering the message, which reflects your interest and involvement in the topic. It is based on your extroversion and non-verbal activity as a speaker. In the Gospel of Jesus Christ we have the privilege of declaring the best news ever. The fact that the Gospel ought to be the most exciting and engaging message ever heard caused Jim Rayburn to say, "It's a sin to bore a kid with the Gospel."

Some people are naturally more animated than others and enthusiasm should not be faked. Dynamism can have a negative impact if it is perceived as overdone or fabricated. However, we have a responsibility to give the message its fullest expression. We can do this by using a style of delivery which is varied and helps the audience visualize the story being told. Describing your own emotions also contributes to the sense of extroversion. Non-verbally, dynamism is shown by using eye contact, gestures and body movement to enhance the speech. Both delivery and non-verbal behaviors will be discussed later in this article.

In regard to speaker credibility, strong advice comes not just from current research but also from St. Augustine who encourages us to be living examples of the message we speak. He knew that whenever a discrepancy existed between what we say and what we do, people will believe what we do. Therefore he wrote:

"For there are numbers who seek an excuse for their own evil lives in comparing the teaching with the conduct of their instructors, and who say in their hearts, or even go a little further, and say with their lips: Why do you not do yourself what you bid me do?' And thus they cease to listen with submission to a man who does not listen to himself, and in despising the preacher, they learn to despise the word that is preached. Wherefore the apostle, writing to Timothy, after telling him, 'Let no man despise thy youth,' adds immediately the course by which he would avoid contempt: 'Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversations, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.'"

## **AUDIENCE ANALYSIS AND ADAPTATION**

## **Scratching Where They Itch**

The Young Life message is not a one-person performance. The speaker, the message, the occasion and the audience are all combined to form the event we call the message. The way the message is prepared and delivered must take into account those who are to receive it. The process of considering the receivers as well as the entire setting in which the message occurs is what is meant by audience analysis.

## **Paul: A Biblical Example of Audience Analysis**

One of the most striking examples of audience analysis is found in the book of Acts (17:16-31), where Paul is addressing the Athenians on Mars Hill. In Athens at the time, a blend of superstitious idolatry and enlightened philosophy existed.

Paul's speech was delivered before the philosophers, Epicureans, who thought it unnecessary to seek God and who had no fear of His judgments and Stoics, who worshiped many gods. The language Paul used was adapted to the audience. He even referred to a pagan poem by the Greek poet Aratus (see vs. 28).

Adapting the message to the audience doesn't mean compromising your beliefs to secure a response. Rather, it means allowing your message the best chance of being received. Because of the Holy Spirit living in us, we have a means of finding the "right" things to say. Colossians 4:6 says, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person."

We have the immeasurable gift of the Holy Spirit, but God still wants us to use our heads. Adopting an attitude which says, "What's the difference, the Holy Spirit will do it so why should I be concerned?" is irresponsible. What we know about audience is a supplement to, not a substitute for, the Holy Spirit. We need to learn to hear and obey the Holy Spirit; but we also need to use our minds to learn what we can about our audience.

## **Discovering Teen Attitudes Toward the Gospel**

The audience analysis we engage in is designed to inform us of audience attitudes, beliefs, values and motivations. If we can discover information about the orientation of attitudes, we will be better able to make the message applicable to our audience. The following are ways of gathering helpful information about an audience.

First, spend time with audience members. In the process of regular contact work, you will likely learn about the attitudes of individuals. If the individuals you get to know are representative of the broader audience, you may have discovered important information.

Second, observe characteristics of your audience. Many specific characteristics may provide indications of audience attitudes. Some of these characteristics are:

- Age
- Sex
- Religious background
- Racial, ethnic, cultural factors
- Economic/social factors
- Group membership
- Geography

All of these characteristics may not be applicable or helpful, however, some may be informative. For example, those involved in Young Life's urban ministry have learned how to make the Gospel of Jesus Christ immediate and applicable to various ethnic groups such as Blacks, Hispanics, Chinese, Filipinos and others. The Gospel doesn't change, only its expression.

Analysis based on characteristics of the audience necessarily involves generalizations. For example, a generalization may be made that high school seniors are concerned about things like moving away from home and applying for colleges and jobs. While not all high school seniors will conform to a generalization, an examination of audience characteristics can be helpful.

Third, keep in touch with the music teens listen to, movies they see and materials they read. What is read, seen and heard can have a profound impact on attitudes. You don't have to enjoy alternative rock, view R-rated movies or make a regular diet of Seventeen magazine, but a familiarity with what teens are reading, seeing and hearing can lend some insight into the orientation of the audience.

Becoming familiar with the beliefs and attitudes your audience holds toward God is an important part of situational analysis. Because the Young Life leader ought to be in constant contact with adolescents, many typical attitudes toward God and Jesus should be familiar.

My association with Young Life has been personally enriching. I was a classic example of being raised in Young Life; I have been a club member, Campaigner, volunteer leader and an area director. As a freshman I began to attend the Young Life club at my high school. I was impressed by the warmth of the atmosphere, the quality of the fun and (not least of all) by the engaging presentation of the Gospel. I didn't realize at the time that in my area director and his gentle yet direct application of the message, I was being introduced to what is surely one of the highest privileges in this life.

I have not yet come to grasp completely the mystery of the fact that the eternal God of the universe would entrust His message to us. Yet I know that God has chosen ordinary people like ourselves to carry the most extraordinary message in the history of the world.



## Effective Message Sequencing

### Leadership Foundations II

Following a message sequence ensures that we will touch upon the entire Gospel over a given period of time. A sequence is important because it provides a sense of direction. One obvious problem in following a sequence is that some students will drop in on club only occasionally during the year. This is where audience analysis comes in; as part of the introductory portion of each message, enough necessary background information should be given so that no one is lost.

As you begin to prepare for the club year, it may be helpful to make a calendar which displays the message sequence. Some leadership teams have spent an entire day planning the messages, song leading, guitar playing, skit assignments, announcement assignments and even lining up homes to meet in for an entire semester. Such planning seems like a lot of work, but it saves time in the long run.

The Young Life message sequence has proven over the years to be a helpful guide for structuring a flow of messages. Here is a brief description of the sequence:

**Introduction to Club:** What is Young Life? What will we be doing in the meetings? What will we be talking about? Why?

**God's Character:** Is there a God? If there is a God, what is He like?

**The Person of Jesus Christ:** The claims and credentials of Jesus.

**Human Need (Sin):** What is sin? How does sin affect relationships between us and God? Between us and each other? Between us and ourselves?

**The Work of Christ:** (cross and resurrection) What is the meaning of what Jesus did by dying on the cross and rising from the dead?

**Appropriation:** Why should we be committed to Jesus Christ? What does such commitment involve?

**The Christian Life:** What is it like to be in a relationship with Christ? What are the implications of our faith in a hurting world?

## How to Do Exegesis

by Les Comee  
Leadership Foundations II

Exegesis is the effort of God's people to listen to the Word of God. The term comes from a Greek word meaning, "to lead out" - thus to lead out of the text its meaning not only for the original readers but also for contemporary readers.

The ancient word should be given freedom to speak in its own unique historical situation and at the same time to cross the centuries and cultures to speak in a relevant way today.

Exegesis usually involves studying a unit of material three to five verses in length but may vary.

Read the passage for a first impression.

Read the context of the passage (i.e., the material surrounding it).

What is the context of the work from which your passage is drawn in terms of (1) its cultural setting; (2) its historical setting (i.e., who wrote it, under what circumstances, what was his purpose in writing it), and (3) the major ideas of the book.

What seems to be the basic ideas in your passage? How are they connected? What is difficult to understand?

Using all available translations, note differences in words or phrases. What words or phrases are not easily understandable and need definition? Do a word study of key words in the passage. Look up phrases or ideas that are not clear in study helps.

What does your passage say to the whole book and what does the whole book say to your smaller passage? Consider your passage in light of the whole New Testament. Write the passage in your own words.

What was the specific purpose of this passage written to the first audience? Does the historical situation of that audience help determine the meaning of your passage? What seems to be the main theological ideas?

Write your own understanding of the passage i.e., your longer translation as you understand it, incorporating the major ideas of what you have learned.

Show the relevance of the passage for our day. What difficulties may be encountered in communicating the meaning of the passage to a Christian today, to a non-Christian? To what present-day situations does the passage speak?

Give a brief outline of how a message could be drawn from this passage.

**Tools for study:** A variety of Bible translations, a concordance, Bible dictionaries, commentaries and New Testament theologies.

## Ten Points on Message Preparation

by Pat Goodman  
Leadership Foundations II

**Win yourself to Christ every day.** The Christ you know is the Christ you will share with others. Are you growing in your understanding of Him? Do you truly want others to know Him? Are you moved by what you want to share? (Matthew 4:19, 22:37-39, Acts 4:19)

**Pray well, prepare well.**

**Saturate yourself in the passage(s) you will be speaking from.** Look up words you do not understand; imagine living in the Gospel passage; look for one to two points the Lord would have you share. Use the Bible in your talks, read what the Bible says and treat it with respect!

**Understand words before you speak about them** (i.e. sin, redemption, belief, depravity, reconciliation, etc). It is critical to communicate these truths in understandable terms.

**Keep 2 Corinthians 4:5, 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, Romans 1:16, Acts 4:13-22, 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 in mind.**

**Learn from everyone you ever hear communicate** (you can even learn things not to do).

**A few nuts and bolts:** It's a privilege to share with others ... appreciate your audience. Talk "with" people and not "at" them. Use names when/where appropriate. Be intent on your message, not just on your delivery. Don't work too hard at being funny. Humour will come as you are yourself.

Use illustrations from your own life as much as possible. They have power. Keep a growing folder of illustrations organized by subject matter. Utilize stories and questions like Jesus did. Periodically tape (audio/video) yourself for critique.

**Use visual illustrations whenever possible,** without trying to be too clever. Work with the gifts God has given you. Pictures have a way of leaving impressions on our minds.

**Example Outline:** (approximately a 10-13 minute club message)

- Big Idea: Write in one to two sentences that summarize your main point.
- Introduction: Create interest, get their attention through a question, personal story or illustration.
- Transition: Move to the main point of your talk by a statement or question.
- Body: Get into the Scripture, develop it and make it come alive.
- Conclusion: Apply the Scripture to their lives (needs). Give them one thing to believe, and one thing to do (ex: As you are laying in bed tonight think about this ... ).

**Enjoy yourself** and cherish the opportunity the Lord has given you with humility.

**Resources:**

- Foundations of the Christian Faith, by James Montgomery Boice
- Who Is This Jesus 21 by Michael Green
- Gentle Persuasion, by Joe Aldrich

## **Creating A Message / Club Talk**

Leadership Foundations II

### **Step 1: Purpose Statement**

Write out the one point you want to get across in one sentence. This is the key biblical truth in a statement that is supported by your Scripture. Write this first!

### **Step 2: Conclusion**

Restate your purpose statement with final remarks and questions for reflection. Give your audience one thing to remember and something to think about.

### **Step 3: Scripture**

Read the passage, outline, paraphrase, tell a story and paint a picture with your words. The audience needs to feel like they are there in your passage. Research the passage for key facts and truths. (i.e. What does “the Word” mean in John 1? How long does wine take to ferment in actuality, John 2?)

### **Step 4: Illustration**

Use a personal story or an illustration to help communicate your purpose statement and illustrate your Scripture.

### **Step 5: Transition**

Interface the illustration and Scripture to clearly communicate the message behind the purpose statement.

### **Step 6: Introduction**

Get the attention of your audience. Interest them and lead them to the message. Use visual aids, startling statements, questions, key facts, surveys, drama and songs.

### **Notes**

- Memorize the outline, purpose statement and conclusion. Don't memorize the message word for word.
- Share your heart and your passion for the message.
- Repeat the purpose statement several times in your talk.
- Know your audience and your Scripture.

## **HOW TO BUILD A TALK**

What is my main point? This is central to the talk.

Prepare the body

- How do I develop my main point?
- What feelings are involved?
- What facts are involved?

How do I illustrate my point?

How will I introduce my point? This should catch their attention.

How will I move from one point or one phase to another? Transitions.

Say the talk out loud.

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## Club Talk Checklist

### Leadership Foundations II

- Is your goal clear and specific?
- Have you fixed your audience or readers in mind?
- Are you coming to them as a know-it-all or as a fellow human?
- Have you gleaned enough material so that you can incarnate your message, telling it in terms of people (if possible)?
- Are you setting aside adequate time to organize your ideas and to find just the right words to express them? Especially enough time if your assignment is brief?
- Is your first sentence short?
- Is your first sentence interesting?
- Does it begin with "There is," or "There was," or "It is" or "It was?" If so, change it.
- Is the first paragraph interesting?
- Have you used strong, descriptive verbs? Do "is" and "was" appear time and again?
- How many "haves" and "has... choke the pages? Have you overworked "this," "that," "these" and "those?" Especially "this."
- Is there an obvious antecedent for every pronoun?
- Are your clauses parallel?
- Have you used present tense wherever possible?
- Have you served as eyes, ears and nose for your hearer, telling him or her what happened in concrete (raw) terms?
- How many words can you eliminate from the account without destroying its thought or power?
- Will the finished message fit well in its context?
- Would you yourself like to hear this talk?

From *Words on Target*, by Sue Nichols.

### Things that weaken a talk

- Christian words
- Poor transition from thought to thought
- No Scripture
- Too much reading or reliance on notes
- "Uhs" or other nervous habits
- Too many points
- Unorganized - no train of thought, confusion, lack of preparation
- Bible too large
- Distractions
- Inappropriate illustrations, kids can't relate
- Too long or too short - 10 to 20 minutes
- Under- or overdeveloped story