

TEN THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN SPEAKING TO YOUNG ADULTS

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Preaching and teaching young adults is an honor. It's an incredible opportunity to help them process their faith and develop into spiritually mature people. It can also be terrifying! Most of us are normal people without a lot of training in public speaking or preaching.

Don't be intimidated by the thought of having to get up and talk about God to people. Feeling inadequate and doubting your ability is normal. Don't worry—you can do this!

As you prepare your lessons and messages, here are some basic things to remember.

1. Be consistent.

This has more to do with you are than what you say. It's a basic principle of all leadership. Be what you are talking about! You don't have to be perfect, just consistent. Your life will communicate more than your words. Even though it is a twist of Scripture, "Be a doer of the word, not just a speaker only." Let your words match your life.

2. Be simple.

The average young adult doesn't care about complex theologies or deep issues. Most are trying to get through their week. People need clear practical handles to hang ideas on. Even though most young adults are college age, we can forget that much of the US population is not college educated. For those of us with theological training, we can accidentally get sidetracked by issues others aren't struggling with. Don't forget that in your crowd there is a Kris, whose stepdad was abusing her, Sharon who wasn't sure about Jesus, and Jason who just found out his daughter might not be his daughter after all. I'm sure my discussion of atonement theories was fascinating, but I may have missed my real assignment. Sure, young adults loved to talk about deep issues, but don't overcomplicate things when preaching.

3. Be truth based.

Focus your teaching on the Bible and the story of Jesus. You need to be with opinion in your teaching. Authoritative preaching and teaching need to come from a source. Don't just provide an option for people to choose. Your role is to train them for service in the body of Christ. James, Paul, Peter, and even Jesus gave specific commands on life and kingdom living. When you're speaking, don't just present your ideas and thoughts. Give them the Word of God. Bible-based and Jesus-centered teaching is the best way to teach.

4. Be inviting.

Invite people to experience, feel, see, taste, and smell what is happening. Narrative preaching (storytelling) is a great way to get people into the story of the Living Word. Give people a chance to collaborate and participate in what you are saying. Make the learning moment more than a moment. It's a journey forward from the teaching moment. Don't just give an esoteric statement of doctrine. Invite them to engage with and

even embrace the truth. Robert Smith calls this kind of preaching, "Doctrine That Dances." It's participatory, engaging truth presented in a way that invites people to join.

5. Be a guide.

Guide people's adventure of following Jesus. A guide doesn't tell you what to experience but shows how to prepare for the experience. Real life is hard. Real life presents real questions. Real questions need answers, not just a story that leaves them with more questions. Allow your preaching to have real applications that speak to their real lives.

6. Be compassionate.

They will know we are Christians by our love (John 13:35). It is our primary assignment and way of communicating. Preach on sin and a fallen culture all while giving place to compassion or sorrow. If the sinfulness of your young adults causes more anger than tears, check your heart. When you talk about evil in the world, do you weep? Be compassionate and patient with people. Point out the truth but also grab people by the hand to help them walk the path of grace to redemption.

7. Be personal.

I've abandoned the "we as Christians" line for "you and I." Why? Because it's more personal. I learned this from a mentor-coach and a couple of leading business communicators. "We" might not do anything, but "you" have to do something. Yes, call the whole church to action, but it's stronger if you call a person to respond. Be willing to be vulnerable and personal.

8. Be short.

From this list, you see I'm struggling with this one. This is the classic mistake of young communicators—they talk way too long. In our TikTok culture, young adults tend to mentally scroll while you're talking. Don't go so long that you lose people. Make the point, get to the point, stick with the point, and then call for a response.

9. Be interesting.

I hate boring preaching. How can we take the greatest story ever told and make it boring? How can we take the greatest truth of all time and make it so that no one wants to hear it? If people make Jesus boring . . . if they make the life of Christ boring . . . if they make life with Christ boring, I think they need to stop preaching. Say things worth listening to in a way that makes people want to listen!

10. Be repetitive

Consistently communicate the same truths and principles in as many different ways as possible. Don't just reuse sermons, but recycle and reenergize the truths of the Bible. Remember many of your young adults aren't there every week or only participate seasonally. Don't be afraid to preach on the same topics and the same areas until you feel you've gotten through to people. The ones who are there consistently will appreciate when they've heard it more than once. They'll sense they are growing and learning, and that they can communicate the truths to others, too.