

## DEVELOPING MESSAGES FOR TEENAGERS

Because the essence of any Biblical ministry (including youth ministry) is to teach and preach God's Word, it is important that we learn how to develop messages that will be both truthful and relevant to those that we serve. The following outline is a pattern that can provide additional help for us in the area of preparing and presenting the Bible for the teenagers to whom we minister. Note: This pattern for study is useful no matter what age group of people you are speaking to. Age differences do not change the basic pattern. Remember that the younger the age group is the simpler the outline and illustrations should be.)

### PRINCIPLES FOR MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT

1. **CONTEXT**—When you are studying a particular verse, always look at the verses in the paragraphs before and after the verse being studied.
2. **WORDS**—Verses are made up of groups of words. Look up difficult words in a Bible lexicon, concordance, or dictionary. Words can change their meaning from verse to verse.
3. **AUTHOR**—Accurate Bible study seeks to understand what the human author meant when he wrote the words of a verse. We should not read into a verse something that is not there; by studying the verse or verses (paragraph) carefully, we seek to find what the author wrote and meant.
4. **BACKGROUND**—Study the history, geography, and culture of a passage. Look up unfamiliar items in a Bible dictionary or encyclopedia; many good commentaries will have this type of information, too.
5. **INTERPRET SCRIPTURE BY SCRIPTURE**—Since the Bible is in harmony with itself, look at other parallel passages to help understand what your verses are saying.
6. **LITERAL**—Follow the common or natural use of language. Be careful not to stray away from the literal use of language. Even figures of speech—metaphors, hyperbole, etc.—are based on literal interpretation of language. Beware of interpreting by "codes" or other secret ways of finding truth.
7. **ONLY ONE MEANING**—The author of your verse or verses had a singular intention in his writing. All the verses in a paragraph contain one major meaning, which is then explained by different sentences. Find the one meaning. Understand it well. Then you will be able to develop many true applications of your passage.
8. **CHECK YOUR OPINIONS**—Test your conclusions by asking others who know the Bible what they think. You may ask people like your pastor, spouse, or friend, or ask people through the books that they have written, checking with commentaries.
9. **LITERATURE**—Know what type of literature you are reading, such as narrative, poetry, parable, law, didactic-teaching, etc. Each type, or genre, of literature has certain features that you need to be aware of when you study and interpret it.
10. **THEOLOGY**—God uses human authors to teach truth. We want to discover the truths that the Bible teaches and arrange them in order so that we can effectively teach and preach the truths of God's Word. What does the verse or verses say about God, man, sin, salvation, Israel, Church, Christian growth, future things, separation, holiness, etc.? Think through different topics as you study.

## **PATTERN FOR MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT**

1. PREPARATION—Approaching the Bible demands preparation.
  - a. Physical preparation: desk, notebook, good tools, sleep, etc.
  - b. Spiritual preparation: confession of sin, prayer, etc.
2. OBSERVATION—Diligently search the passage.
  - a. Language: words, sentences, and paragraphs
  - b. Literature: genre and figures of speech
3. INTERPRETATION—What does the author say and mean?
  - a. Questions: ask about the verses
  - b. Answers: search for author's answers
4. CORRELATION—Relate the passage to the rest of the Bible.
  - a. Scripture: what does the rest of the Bible say?
  - b. Theology: how does it relate to what I believe?
5. APPLICATION—Seek to practice the Bible.
  - a. Significance: what ways can I obey?
  - b. Situations: what areas can I obey?

## **PLACES FOR MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT**

1. There are at least six directions to pursue.
  - a. Downward: into the passage
  - b. Upward: to God
  - c. Backward: to earlier parts of the Bible
  - d. Forward: to future expectations
  - e. Inward: to self
  - f. Outward: to others
2. Ask at least six questions when studying a passage.
  - a. Who: people involved
  - b. What: things and events
  - c. Why: action explained
  - d. Where: places involved
  - e. When: time involved
  - f. How: means of accomplishment
3. *Effective Bible Study* by Howard Vos lists seventeen methods for study.
  - a. Inductive: drawing conclusions after considering material
  - b. Synthetic: reading multiple times looking for different items
  - c. Analytical: making distinctions of items found in the passage
  - d. Critical: forming and expressing a judgment
  - e. Biographical: describing someone's life in the Bible
  - f. Historical: studying the background of a passage
  - g. Theological: studying and summarizing truth by topic
  - h. Literary: examining different types of literature
  - i. Rhetorical: examining figures of speech

- j. Geographical: looking at different places and travel
- k. Sociological: observing society and its habits
- l. Political: observing governments and war
- m. Cultural: looking at religion, music, science, and art
- n. Scientific: studying physical, mental, and moral sciences
- o. Philosophical: using logic and consistency
- p. Psychological: studying motivation for behavior
- q. Devotional: enjoying and applying

### **PRIORITIES FOR MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT**

1. The Sovereignty of God is the absolute starting place for all the "reality" of existence and its interpretation. God is absolute, infinite, perfect, and holy. Therefore, He establishes both His revelation (the Bible) and man's responsibility to Him in everything.
2. The Inerrancy of Scripture displays God's sovereignty ensuring the perfection of the Bible.
  - a. Authority: It has the right and power to enforce views.
  - b. Priority: It stands supreme above all other views.
  - c. Spirituality: It requires holiness as a standard.
  - d. Clarity: It reveals God through the "faith" of one seeking Him.
  - e. Necessity: It reveals man's need for God.
3. Any Bible study and message delivery that departs from these two foundational truths is always wrong to the degree that it departs from them. As ministers of the Gospel, our messages must always be God-centered and Bible-centered.

### **PREREQUISITES FOR MESSAGE PREPARATION**

1. BIBLE—The Scriptures must be the cornerstone of all our messages. Keep it central to all of your message preparation and delivery.
2. HOLY SPIRIT—The third person of the Trinity is the divine author of the Bible. Constantly rely upon Him to understand what He has revealed.
3. NEW BIRTH—Unsaved people can understand some things about the Bible such as language and history. Yet the absence of faith ensures that they will go astray concerning the true, spiritual meaning of the Bible. Be especially careful when you borrow "truths" from someone who is not or may not be saved.
4. OBEDIENCE—The amount of Bible study is not as important as the attitude of Bible study. Christian obedience opens up the Bible and the hearts of those to whom we minister.
5. METHODS—Appropriate methods of Bible study and delivery involve commitment to diligent study, use of proper tools, and the development of good patterns of Bible study and application.

**PROJECTS FOR MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT**

1. INTRODUCTION—When you are teaching or preaching from books of the Bible—either working directly or indirectly through a book, or picking just one passage from a book—find out some of the following information:
  - a. Authorship: who wrote the book
  - b. Recipients: who received the book
  - c. Places: where was it written and received
  - d. Date: when was it written
  - e. Occasion: what is the main problem addressed in the book
  - f. Purpose: what is the main solution to the problem
  - g. Similarities to other Bible books
  - h. Importance for today
  
2. CONTEXT—The biggest problem in message preparation and delivery is the ignoring of the context in which particular words or verses are explained without considering other verses and books of the Bible.
  - a. Words: a word in light of the other words around it
  - b. Phrase: group of words together
  - c. Clause: group of words together with a subject and a verb
  - d. Sentence: group of clauses together
  - e. Verse: group of sentences together
  - f. Paragraph: group of verses together (Note: Most lessons and messages should be developed and proclaimed on this level because it constitutes a complete unit of thought.)
  - g. Chapter: group of paragraphs
  - h. Book: group of chapters (such as the book of Ephesians)
  - i. Testament: group of books (either Old or New Testament)
  - j. Bible: collection of two Testaments (This is the broadest context by which to consider everything.)
  
3. TRUTH—As you study the context of a particular verse or verses, find the meaning which is given in the Bible. Discover the truths that God has given and make them declarations unto your teenagers. Truth is not optional; it is essential. Show the teenagers that they are accountable to God for their lives. There are several things to consider.
  - a. Possible interpretations—As you study a passage, you will find that even Christians do not agree on the meanings of certain verses. Make sure that you carefully study, evaluate your evidence for your view, and consult others, such as your pastor, to see what they think.
  - b. Parallel passages—Find other passages in the Bible that teach the same truth. If you cannot find another parallel passage, this may indicate that you have misunderstood your passage. Use parallel passages to support what you are saying.
  - c. Progressive theology—Remember that God did not deliver the Bible all at one time! Know when your passage was written and how it fits into God's work in history at that time. Be careful about applying Old Testament law to a New Testament Christian. Moral principles may transcend the Testaments, yet some things have changed.
  
4. ILLUSTRATION—Good illustrations explain the truths that you are presenting to your audience. Here are some principles to remember.
  - a. Make sure that your illustrations explain the truth. Do not let them be the primary teacher of truth. Illustrations should always be secondary to the truth you declare.
  - b. Make sure that your illustrations truly teach the truth you are declaring. If the story does not fit the message, do not use it.
  - c. Make sure that your illustrations are not too long.

- d. Have a variety of illustrations in your lesson.
    - 1) Bible and current stories
    - 2) Personal and non-personal
    - 3) Good and evil
    - 4) Short and long
    - 5) Stories, poems, quotes, etc.
    - 6) Serious and humorous
  - e. Make sure that your illustrations are spaced apart in the message. A good pattern involves one illustration for the introduction, each main point (usually two to five), and the conclusion.
  - f. Make sure that your illustrations are accurate. If you do not remember details accurately, leave them out.
  - g. Make sure that your illustrations are age appropriate. Use illustrations that your audience can identify with, but make sure that all your illustrations do not cater to one person or group of people. If you are speaking to a mixed audience, mix your illustrations so that you have at least one illustration for each age group present.
  - h. You can find illustrations from many different sources.
    - 1) Personal life: past, present, and future
    - 2) Family and friends (Do not embarrass them.)
    - 3) History: past events and their lessons; especially major events in history such as wars, writings, projects (building, painting, traveling)
    - 4) Media: television, newspaper, and the internet
    - 5) Current events: important events taking place now
    - 6) Bible (Make sure not to forget this resource.)
    - 7) Books (Read on a variety of topics.)
  - i. Most of the time we find illustrations well before we use them in a message. Photocopy or write down the illustration and store it for future use. Make a separate illustration file or incorporate it into your present filing system, which you should have, even if it is simple.
5. APPLICATION—It is here that we teach our audience how to use the truths that we have declared and illustrated. There are several things to remember about application.
- a. Make sure that declared truths are clear; clear truth allows for clear application of truth.
  - b. Demonstrate the relevance of the truths to your audience. What differences does it make in their life to follow or not follow what you say?
  - c. Make your applications specific. Especially with children and teenagers, give them some how-to-do-this illustrations.
  - d. Your applications should carry more strength as your message progresses.
  - e. Do not give too many applications in one message. Usually two to five applications is all people can handle at one time. For younger children, only use one to two applications.
  - f. Always link application of a passage with obedience. This will give you a gauge to evaluate whether the truths you declare are getting across.
  - g. When appropriate, show your audience how you have already applied these truths to your life. You model before your audience what you expect of them!
6. COMMUNICATION—The actual structure and delivery of your message.
- a. Try to structure your message (outline) to follow the structure of your passage (sentences). Your main points should come from the main sentences in your passage, while your subordinate points should come from details in the sentences.
  - b. Teaching:
    - 1) Focus on the past, understanding the passage as given.
    - 2) Focus on detail, accuracy.
    - 3) Focus on Biblical terms.

- 4) Speak mostly in the third person—he, she, it, they.
  - 5) An introduction and conclusion are not necessary.
  - 6) Using extensive sub-points is fine.
- c. Preaching:
- 1) Focus on the present—application.
  - 2) Focus on delivery—clarity.
  - 3) Use some contemporary terms to explain Bible terms.
  - 4) Speak mostly in the second person—you.
  - 5) Add introduction, conclusion, and illustrations near the end of preparation.
  - 6) Focus on your main points, avoiding extensive use of sub-points.
  - 7) Remember the following principles about teaching and preaching.
    - a) Usually develop your teaching outline before your preaching outline.
    - b) Good teaching prepares for good preaching.
    - c) Make teaching and preaching complementary, not competitive.
    - d) Give evidence from your passage that your message is God's truth.
    - e) Enjoy the presentation of your labor. Know that it really makes a difference.

### **PRINCIPLES FOR TEENAGERS**

1. Teenagers know what they like, but they do not know what they need. Care for your teens. Consider their ideas and tastes, yet do not cater to them. You are to please God, not man (or teens).
2. Keep the teens focused on the primary truth that you are communicating. Every main point and every sub-point should build the case for the primary truth you are declaring.
3. Show the teens that Biblical truth is primarily a matter of relationship and not just rules to follow. Give them a relationship with God, and they will have reasons for the rules. Tell them why you believe what you believe. It is not enough to tell them something and then just expect them to obey. Tell them why from the Bible. Give evidence for your views. Be transparent and honest.
4. Be passionate when you communicate God's Word. This does not mean that you have to be loud or out of your personality; it does mean that the teens know that you believe what you are saying to them. **APATHY AND A LACK OF PREPARATION IN MESSAGES WILL SERIOUSLY HURT YOUR TEENS.** If you are serious with God's Word, they will be too.
5. Do not be a perfectionist. Work for excellence in everything that you do. When you have realistically done all that you can do, have a certain satisfaction in your labor as it is. Balance all of your life with your message development and delivery time.

### **TOOLS FOR MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT**

1. Bible Study—The best are by Hendricks, Sterrett, Zuck, and McQuilkin.
  - a. Anders, Max. *30 Days to Understanding the Bible*.
  - b. Berkhof, Louis. *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*.
  - c. Hendricks, Howard. *Living By the Book*.
  - d. Jensen, Irving. *Independent Bible Study*.
  - e. McQuilkin, Robertson. *Understanding and Applying the Bible*.
  - f. Sterrett, T. Norton. *How to Understand Your Bible*.
  - g. Traina, Robert. *Methodical Bible Study*.

- h. Virkler, Henry. *Hermeneutics*.
  - i. Vos, Howard. *Effective Bible Study*.
  - j. Zuck, Roy. *Basic Bible Interpretation*.
2. Reference tools—These include short commentaries, dictionaries, and encyclopedias.
- a. *\*Commentaries for Biblical Expositors* by Jim Rosscup. This book provides an outstanding evaluation of different commentaries on every book in the Bible. Do not spend a lot of money on commentaries until you have obtained and consulted this book.
  - b. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* edited by Walter Elwell. This volume is part of a reference set that includes other volumes such as *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* and *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (2 volumes). The set now has about seven or eight volumes and is in my estimation the best introductory reference set available.
  - c. *Wilmington's Guide to the Bible* by H. L. Wilmington. This is an outstanding commentary on the entire Bible and a systematic treatment of the different doctrines in the Bible. I highly recommend it for message preparation and for personal devotions.
  - d. *\*The Bible Knowledge Commentary* edited by John Walvoord and Roy Zuck. This is a two-volume commentary set that has set the standard for such works. Other than a couple of New Testament commentaries by Zane Hodges, such as Hebrews and 1 John, this set is outstanding.
  - e. *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* edited by J. D. Douglas. This is an excellent tool for looking up people and events in Church history and is very useful for background information and illustrations.
  - f. *\*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* is still a standard for word studies. It is fairly inexpensive.
  - g. *Encyclopedia of Biblical and Christian Ethics* edited by R. K. Harrison. Books on ethics are very helpful for illustrations and for applications of truth. Contemporary subjects encourage the application of the Bible to today's society.
  - h. *The Bible Almanac* edited by Packer, Tenny, and White. Books like this one are filled with background material concerning customs and practices of the Bible. This is an excellent source for illustrations.
  - i. There are many other reference tools that are quite helpful. Usually reference tools are a bit more expensive than other books, yet their value makes them a great investment that you will use on a regular basis if you are preparing and delivering messages.

\* Every family should have this in their home library.

CONCLUSION—A teenager's great need for the Bible more than his need for our opinions places a premium upon the development and delivery of Biblical truth. With all the valuable things that we do with our youth, let us not forget that God and the Bible must be central to who we are and what we do. Time and effort spent in this area is not in vain; rather, it will be the source of great blessing as we demonstrate our dependence upon God and His Word to bring about the positive changes in our teens that we so earnestly desire to see.