

COMMUNICATING FOR A CHANGE

By Andy Stanley and Lane Jones

SEVEN CONCEPTS THAT WILL EMPOWER YOU TO ENGAGE & IMPACT YOUR AUDIENCE IN A WAY THAT LEAVES THEM WANTING MORE...

1. Before you start to communicate, DETERMINE YOUR GOAL. Why are you communicating?

Our goal should be to teach people how to live a life that reflects the values, principles, and truths of the Bible. In short, the goal is change... wanting people to do something different instead of just thinking about it.

Every communicator I know wants to see lives changed as a result of their preaching and teaching. But too few communicators have developed an approach to communicating that supports their passion. They simply adapted the approach handed down to us from a previous generation.

Several years ago I was talking to one of our communicators right before he was about to go out and deliver his message. I could tell by his body language that he was trying desperately to keep everything straight in his head. He so badly wanted to get it right, to do a good job. That's always a red flag to me. He was about to walk out and do what we've all done so many times. He was about to step on the platform consumed with how well he would perform. So I called him over to the side and gave him a version of the same talk I give myself when I sense that I've become so concerned with my content that I've forgotten my audience, I said...

"How would you communicate this message if your eighteen-year-old son had made up his mind to walk away from everything you have taught him, morally, ethically, and theologically, unless he had a compelling reason not to? What would you say this morning if you knew that was at stake? Because for somebody's son out there this may be his last chance. Now quit worrying about your outline. Go out there and plead your case like your own son's future was at stake."

2. PICK A POINT.

Where are you heading with this message? A sermon is a journey. You start somewhere, you go somewhere, and ultimately you end up somewhere. The question is did you end up where you wanted to go? Take your audience to a place where they discover a truth that will change their lives. When you step up to speak, can you tell me the address you're taking me to? Can you, in a few short words—like 1221 Eleventh Avenue—eliminate all the other possible places my mind can wander over the next thirty minutes? When I get to where you want to take me, will I know I've been there? It's called a ONE POINT MESSAGE. It's just like an address. It's a short, simple statement that summarizes the entire message.

When I say *point* I am referring to one of three things: an application, an insight, or a principle. With this approach, every message should have one central idea, application, insight, or principle that serves as the glue to hold the other parts together. On a more macro level, every message series should as well.

If you give people too much to remember, they won't remember anything. They'll have forgotten all your points before they're out of the church parking lot. Everything you say can be interesting. Heck, everything you say can be life-changing; but if they can't remember it then it won't change a

thing. You've got to narrow the focus of your message to one point. Then everything else in the message supports, illustrates, and helps to make it memorable.

The key to this approach is refusing to stand up and speak until you know the answer to two questions:

- A. What is the one thing I want my audience to know?
- B. What do I want them to do about it?

Your challenge will probably not be *finding* the one point, but *eliminating* the three.

The process of developing a one point message can be broken down as follows:

- A. Dig until you find it.

The reason the *one thing* usually comes late in the game is that sermon preparation is a discovery process. Preparation involves discovering what the text says and what it doesn't say, what we wish it would say, and what we didn't expect it to say.

- B. Build everything around it.
- C. Make it stick.

Craft a single statement or phrase that makes it stick. It needs to be as memorable as possible. This will help you as well as your audience. If it is short and memorable then it will be easier for you to blend it in throughout your message. If it is a well-crafted statement, it will be more obvious to your audience that this is your point... It doesn't need to be cute. It doesn't have to rhyme. But it should be short and memorable. Your statement is your anchor. Here are some examples:

- "Your friends determine the direction and quality of your life."
- "Purity paves the way to intimacy."
- "When you see as God sees, you will do as God says."
- "Everybody spends forever somewhere."
- "Good people don't go to heaven, forgiven people do."
- "Others first."
- "Maximum freedom is found under God's authority."

Is there anything you are so excited about sharing that you can't wait until you get to that part of the message? If not, you aren't ready. You don't have a BURDEN. You may have pages of information and it may all be true, but if you don't have something that people need so badly that you feel compelled to share it, you still have work to do.

3. CREATE A MAP.

A good map will allow you to find the best and most effective course for arriving at your destination. This is not the same as an outline. Outlines are designed to organize thoughts and ideas. They're usually a collection of points related to or loosely related to a topic—each one of those points making an entirely different statement about the topic.

Me-We-God-You-We

With this approach the communicator introduces a dilemma he or she has faced or is currently facing (ME). From there you find a common ground with your audience around the same or a similar dilemma (WE). Then you transition to the text to discover what God says about the tension or the question you have introduced (GOD). Then you challenge your audience to act on what they have just heard (YOU). And finally, you close with several statements about what could happen in your community, your church, or the world, if everybody embraced that particular truth (WE).

- ME – Orientation – Example: “Sometimes I find myself wondering how to respond to situations in my marriage.”
- WE – Identification – Example: “I imagine you have found yourself in situations where you weren’t sure what to do either.”

Don’t transition from WE to the next section until you feel like you have created a tension that your audience is dying for you to resolve. In other words, assume no interest. Focus on the question you are intending to answer until you are confident your audience wants it answered.

- GOD – Illumination – Example: “The Bible teaches that we are to submit to one another; put the desires and needs of our spouse ahead of our own needs and desires.”

You can transition to this section by saying something like:

“God must have known we would struggle with this because Jesus addressed this very issue one afternoon on His way to...”

“The good news is we are not the first people to struggle with this. The people in Jesus’ day did as well. Turn with me to...”

Engage the audience with the text. Don’t just read it. Don’t explain it to death. Engage the audience with it. Take them with you. Make this part of the journey. Make it so fascinating that they are actually tempted to go home and read it on their own. This isn’t easy, but it is worth the effort.

- YOU – Application – Example: “Next time you aren’t sure what to say or do, ask yourself this question, ‘How can I put the needs and desires of my spouse ahead of my own in this moment?’”

This is where we answer the questions “So what?” and “Now what?”

Think through the following questions during your time of study:

- How does this apply to me? To my family relationships? To my relationships in the community of faith? To my relationships with those outside the faith? To the marketplace?
- How does this apply to teenagers and college students? Singles? Newly weds? Parents? Empty nesters?
- How does this apply to believers? Nonbelievers? I often address unbelievers at this point in the message. If there is an application for them, I make it... When a message does not apply to an unbeliever, I let them know that as well. In fact, I usually let them know up front. I often say something to the effect of, “If you are not

a believer, you are off the hook today. Just sit back and relax... In fact, today's message may give you another reason to put off becoming a follower of Christ."

- WE – Inspiration – Example: "Imagine what would happen in our community if all of us began to model that kind of mutual submission before our friends and neighbors."

This final component of the message is an opportunity for you to rejoin your audience as you did in the beginning of the message when you circled up around your shared frailty, questions, misgivings, or temptations. WE is really about vision casting... It is the point in the message when you paint a verbal picture of what could be and should be

4. INTERNALIZE THE MESSAGE.

You see, knowing your destination and then having a good map are just preparation for the journey. Before I ever headed off cross-country, I had to make certain I knew how to get there.

I learned that I didn't want to step up in front of that crowd until I was ready. I had to LOAD UP to say something... I'm talking about internalizing a message until it's a part of you and you own it. In the old days, preachers called it their "burden." It's a message that comes from inside you, and then you stand up and deliver it (p. 52).

Most preachers I've watched don't act like anything is dependent on them knowing where they're going... How can you expect your listener to care enough to remember what you're saying when you can't... When you stand up and speak without notes and without having to read your sermon, you're saying, 'This is so important that it's a part of me—and I think you should make it a part of you, too.'

5. ENGAGE THE AUDIENCE.

As a communicator, you can know exactly where you're going, but if you head off in a cloud of dust and leave your audience behind, it won't matter if you get there or not. You have to *engage* your listeners and make certain they're with you. This is the first WE section on the message map... When I'm preaching, I have to engage with my audience on an emotional level and then I know they're on board with me.

Not too long ago I was visiting a church with some friends. As I sat there trying to pay attention, I noticed that I was not alone in my struggle... When the service concluded we went to lunch. There were about twelve of us. After lunch we hung out until late in the afternoon. Not once did anybody mention the sermon. It was as if it never happened. Now, I'm sure nobody noticed this but me. But it bothered me so much that I still think about it. This pastor spent hours preparing a sermon, presented it, and it made such little impact that a group of Christians walked out and never made a single comment about what they just experienced.

Presentation trumps information when it comes to engaging the audience. Another way to state the same principle is: *Attention and retention is determined by presentation, not information.* Presentation matters. A lot.

You have to connect with your audience around a real need in their lives. Something they *feel*. You have to raise in them an awareness of a past, present, or future need in their lives that makes them want to listen to you and follow you to the answer.

We take the life-changing truth and make very sure we apply it to lives that are ready to be changed. It's just that we may have to remind them that they *want* to change... We remind them of the tension they already feel. The tension of trying to be the kind of husbands or wives or parents they're supposed to be. I challenge them to look at the weaknesses in their lives and ask the question, 'Then what do I do about it?' If I can get them there, then I'm halfway home. Once I get them wanting to know the answer, then I know I have them until the end of the message. I've secured my cargo and I don't have to worry about losing it.

I usually write my introductions last. Often, I rewrite my introduction on Saturday night. It is not unusual for my introduction to take up three-quarters of a page in my typical three-page outline. It is the one section of my messages I always practice out loud. My assumption is, if I don't capture the audience's attention in the first five minutes, all is lost. Here are three pairs of questions I recommend you refer to as you develop your introductions:

- A. What is the question I am answering? What can I do to get my audience to want to know the answer to that question?
- B. What is the tension this message will resolve? What can I do to make the audience feel that tension?
- C. What mystery does this message solve? What can I do to make the audience want a solution?

TIPS FOR ENGAGING PEOPLE WHILE NAVIGATING THROUGH THE TEXT:

- Have the audience turn to one passage and one passage only. You may throw a couple of others up on the screen, but don't expect your audience to be able to follow you as you gallop through the Bible. Pick a central text and teach it. It is better for people to understand one verse than to have turned to four verses.
- Don't read long sections without comment. Comment along the way. Even in narratives, don't read the entire story and then begin your sermon. Lead people through the text.
- Highlight and explain odd words or phrases. Think of yourself as a navigator or tour guide. Point things out as you go... but keep moving!
- Voice your frustration or skepticism about the text. If it frustrates you, it is frustrating someone in your audience. If it sounds unreasonable or impractical to you, you are not alone. Whenever you can say what your audience is thinking, your audience will consider you believable and approachable:
 - o "That's just hard to believe, isn't it?"
 - o "If God would allow me to erase a verse, this might be it."
 - o "Obviously, Jesus has never met your boss."
 - o "If I was one of the disciples, I might have walked at that point."
- Help the audience anticipate the main point of the text.
 - o "Okay, get ready, here it is..."
 - o "Then he drops the bomb."
- Deliberately read the text wrong, inserting a word that means the opposite and then pause to let it sink in.
 - o "As it is written, it is more blessed to receive than to give."
 - o "Husbands, love your wives in the same manner that they love you."
 - o "For by *consistency* you are saved."
- Have the audience read certain words out loud for emphasis.
- Summarize the text with a well-crafted statement. Remember, you have promised to address the tension, felt need, question, issue, whatever it is you established up front. Make sure your time in the text actually does that. A pre-prepared and memorized summary statement will insure that you don't accidentally leave the text without making it clear why you were in the text to begin with. That happens frequently in sermons. We

- think we've made it clear because we've been discussing the text for ten minutes. But covering the text is no guarantee that we've clearly communicated the point of the text.
- "Paul's point is that since Christ forgave us, we are to forgive one another."
 - "Joseph simply did what anyone in His circumstances would do who was confident that God was with him."
 - "When Peter acted on his faith, he recognized who Christ was."
 - Resist the urge to share everything you have learned in your research... If it doesn't facilitate the journey, cut it. After all, you've still got YOU and WE to cover. And the last thing you want to do is rush through your conclusion. A hard landing leaves the passengers feeling a bit uneasy. The same is true of a rushed conclusion to a message.

You need to become an observer of people and situations. Whenever I stand up in front of a crowd, I'm constantly looking for ways to connect with them. It could be the weather that day or something in the news, or even a funny hat that some lady is wearing. Anything that can help me make that first connection. When it's your regular crowd, you're already connected so you can move right to the issue.

Make ME into WE. Your goal is to connect. Your job is to look at the truth of Scripture from every point of view: the believer and the unbeliever, men and women, young and old. Once you've done that, you can ask and answer the questions that your audience is asking. Then you've connected.

Take it slow in the turns... People are following us. Sometimes they're following us on purpose to get somewhere, and sometimes they just happen to be behind us on the road. Either way, these folks have no idea when we're about to turn or change directions. It's up to us to stay aware of that. As a communicator, you're the only one in the room who knows in advance where you're going on the journey. You're the leader and everyone looks to you for the signals. When you come to a transition you have the option of taking an abrupt turn or of giving your listeners verbal and nonverbal clues that a transition is coming. You want to carefully craft a transition statement to get you from one section of your map to another.

For example, if I'm moving from the WE section to the GOD section, I may say something like, 'Isn't it great to know that even though we all face this issue, God's Word has something to say about it?'

This also applies to the entire worship service. I can't tell you how many services I've been to where the music, the announcements, the message, and the other elements seem disjointed. A little attention to transitional statements or music that's chosen because of what came before or after can make the service feel more like a moment to be experienced, instead of various moments to be endured.

6. FIND YOUR VOICE

7. FIND SOME TRACTION

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU'RE STUCK?

- Pray!
- I go through a list of questions that help me evaluate if I'm on the right path for the journey and then for helping me get started again...

A. What do they need to know?	INFORMATION
B. Why do they need to know it?	MOTIVATION
C. What do they need to do?	APPLICATION

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------|
| D. Why do they need to do it? | INSPIRATION |
| E. How can I help them remember? | REITERATION |

After you spend the time you need studying the passage, it's easy to lose sight of the point you want to make while you're putting together your message. You get off on a tangent or an idea that's taking you in another direction... And before you know it you're stuck in a cul de sac with no way to turn around. **What do they need to know** is about information. It's the biblical principle that you've carved out of Scripture. If at this point you can't articulate that point then you know where you need traction. **Why do they need to know it** is all about motivation. Have you given them a reason to apply this point to their daily lives? Then comes **what do they need to do**, which is obviously about application. Have you given them a way to apply it to their daily lives? And finally, **why do they need to do it**? And that one is all about inspiration. Giving them a vision of what their lives will look like once they've applied it. Once you've answered these questions, you'll be back on the road in no time.