

A Sincere Gospel

Sharing meaningful faith with today's kids

*This generation is sick
of fluffy presentations
and tired of the soft sell.*

by James Rock

In an open-air amphitheater on the Riverwalk in San Antonio at last year's CCCA national convention, I joined other attendees at a western-style concert. A river ran between the stage and the audience. Every three or four minutes, different boatloads of tourists would float past.

Enjoying this revolving temporary audience, the expressive lead singer began talking to boat passengers, saying things like, "Jesus loves you."

Sometimes the artist got smiles and waves; other times he got confused, odd

looks. It became so interesting to watch the reactions that I'm not sure he or any of us remembered there was a concert.

At one point, a friend sitting next to me leaned over and said, "This sure is great. There's no way it would work on our postmodern kids, but it sure is great!"

My friend was saying that some guy on a stage singing, dancing, laughing, and telling people Jesus loves them doesn't work anymore. Or at least it wouldn't work for modern youth.

What if he's right? I thought. What if the direct witness doesn't work anymore? Do we have to be careful with our campers?

Since then, I haven't been able to uncover statistics that prove that if you kind of tell someone about Jesus in a nonthreatening/nonspecific way 10 times, the eleventh time he or she will drop everything and find someone who knows the rest of the story. I also haven't found any proof that if we tell kids the hard-core truth about Jesus they will never believe and always walk away.

From relating to my staff, I know this generation is sick of fluffy presentations and tired of the soft sell. This generation knows that if we really believed Jesus loves them, we would say it no matter who was in the room. Even U2 has learned this. Why haven't we?

Our campers desperately want to make their lives matter in this world, and many feel they are not getting any help from church. Our ministries must be more Paul-like and less modern church-like. We must not only stand up and clearly preach the gospel, but also



Photo by Raley Ellison at Cedunore Camp and Conference Center

have staff members who live the gospel example.

Today's kids listen to people based on their perception of that person's sincerity. These young people despise insincerity. If we come across as less than committed to our faith, youth will ignore us.

According to a recent study by The Barna Group, far fewer individuals than estimated by pastors make their faith a significant priority. The average American Protestant pastor assumes that 70 percent of adults in the congregation give God first place in their lives. In reality, only 23 percent of American adults who attend Protestant churches claim their faith in God as their number-one priority.

The researchers believe this difference is connected to the standards by which pastors judged congregants' devotion. They relied heavily on church volunteerism and attendance, and a life-changing experience (often a commitment to Christ as Savior). Referenced fewer times were such factors as evangelism involvement, biblical knowledge gained, spiritual maturity, accountability, and faith integration into daily life.

Young people smell this type of insincerity a mile away, and then they walk away.

Camp staff must be different. You, your counselors, and your speakers must be people who show this generation what it means to follow Christ.

Do we present a faith that resembles the outrageousness of God's overwhelming love and grace, or do we present a faith that resembles a typical sermon?

Which of these two methods is going to attract this generation? Which will change the world through its ministry?

Today's youth are looking for something—something that we have in our hands. But we must be sincere enough in our faith to prove that it's something for them, too. ■

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