

Sierra Leadership Network Curriculum: Month 3, Year 1

Participation in the Sierra Leadership Network (SLN) is a process of adult learning. It is the responsibility of the participant to do their assignments and seek out the necessary accountability. It is the responsibility of the participant to schedule time with their mentor, not the other way around. Here is a checklist of this month's exercises and space for comments. All useful generated materials should be placed in your Sierra Leadership Network binder. The mentor will look over the exercises and be given opportunity to add their own comments. Be sure you take your binder to the quarterly meetings at Granite Springs Church to also be available to the SLN directors.

Month 3, Year 1

Date Completed

____/____/____ Mission of God in the Old Testament : [Estimated time: _____]
Mentor Comments:

____/____/____ Heart for the Lost Exercise: [Estimated time: _____]
Mentor Comments

____/____/____ Teaching/Preaching Exercise: [Estimated time: _____]
Mentor Comments

Participant Signature

Mentor Signature

Mission of God in the Old Testament

Write a paper dealing with the following questions. Be prepared to present your paper (either as a paper or a presentation) at the next full SLN quarterly retreat. Your paper/presentation can be as long or as short as you need it to be. Post your papers on line and we will discuss them on line. Also (obviously) discuss them with your mentor and your regional group.

1. As Christians we too often see the Old Testament as a failed prologue to the work we see in Jesus Christ. We turn to it for juicy tidbits concerning creation and some nice Psalms to give us comfort, but in large part we ignore it. What about the Old Testament, and what about God in the Old Testament makes us uncomfortable?
2. Many evangelicals view what God was doing in the Old Testament as simply “setting up for Jesus”. “Jesus couldn’t have been born if there wasn’t a David, an Israel, an Abraham, etc.” Now certainly God through Jesus God is brought most clearly into focus, yet his actions, his relationships, his goals in the Old Testament in many ways stand on their own, and often at no small cost in bloodshed, human suffering, and geopolitical drama. All throughout the Old Testament we find God dealing with this rebellious lot in a very serious way. Consider the following:
 - a. All of the stretching he made his saints go through in seeking righteousness
 - b. The death of the Egyptian first born, slaughter of the Egyptian army
 - c. The death of a generation of Israelites in the desert as punishment for not believing Yahweh would take them into the desert. Episodes of immediate individual punishment not only of perpetrators but of their families as well.
 - d. The treatment of the Canaanites that in contemporary terms would be described as genocide.
 - e. Ongoing war and eventual exile of Israel and Judah with accompanying suffering, rape, pillage and murder

It seems rather glib to simply dispel the Old Testament as “getting ready for Jesus”. If God can raise up children of Abraham from stones, why go through that long and tortured history to raise up his Son? **What was God really doing in the Old Testament and why was he doing it? (This is the main question of your essay.)**

3. In answering the question of “What was God really doing in the OT”, take the following sub-questions into account. You may deal with these questions explicitly or ignore them if you have a better idea. If you follow can answer these questions you will likely be able to generate a good answer to the big question. Please defend your answers with Scripture.
 - a. Why did God create the world? What was he looking to get out of it?
 - b. What was humanity’s intended role in God’s creation before the fall?
 - c. How did the fall affect God getting what he wants out of his creation?
 - d. What do you imagine God trying to accomplish through the flood? Was he successful?
 - e. In terms of strategy (especially contrasted with the flood), how was his initiative through Abraham a “change in strategy”?
 - f. What indication do we have from the books of Exodus, Numbers and Joshua that God is concerned with his “image” with respect to the surrounding nations?

- g. Why did God “elect” Israel and what was her calling? What was God’s mission for her besides providing genetic material for Mary’s contribution to Jesus?
 - h. What was God trying to do with Israel in its desert wanderings?
 - i. How was God’s election of Israel intended to impact “the nations”?
 - j. Why did God command the Canaanite genocide? Why were the stakes so high?
 - k. Find the key passages describing God’s mission for Israel with respect to the nations.
 - l. What was the main mission of the prophets in the Old Testament? Why was their mission so critical?
 - m. Why did God destroy both Israel and Judah? What is the meaning of the exile?
4. Given what you have surveyed in the Old Testament, how then is Jesus “the fulfilment” of what God was doing in the Old Testament.
- a. How is “fulfilment” different from “substitution” or “replacement”?
 - b. Why did Jesus chose the concept of “The Kingdom of God” as the central focus of his preaching? How does that relate to the Old Testament? Wasn’t Israel intended to be the literal “Kingdom of God”?
 - c. How is the election of Israel related to the election of the church?

Supplementary Reading:

Jesus and Israel by David Holwerda, Eerdmans 1995

Heart for the Lost

Make some kind of written record of this assignment, but be sensitive and considerate with what you share with others outside of your conversation with your mentor.

1. Measure your church's heart for the lost
 - a. Do a survey of your church's program. How would you describe the priority your church gives towards reaching the lost?
 - b. Review your church's budget. What does your church's budget tell you about the priority your church gives towards reaching the lost?
 - c. If you are in an older, established church (ECD), contact a new church plant and request a copy of their budget. If you are a member of a new church plant (NCD), contact an older established church and request a copy of their budget. Compare the two budgets. Comparisons are most interesting if you choose a larger ECD.
 - i. Compare both budgets with membership data (you can get it from the Yearbook or request it of the church) and arrive at a per adult giving number. What observations can you make?
 - ii. Compare the NCD's staffing priorities vs. the ECD's staffing priorities.
 - iii. Compare the NCD's and the ECD's programs for reaching the lost. What are your observations?
 - iv. Some church growth experts believe churches 12 years old and older generally focus on inward needs and priorities and de-prioritize reaching the lost. Does that fit with your observations?
 - d. Under what circumstance does your church push their panic buttons? What things, if left undone cause considerable consternation, conflict, anxiety, action or sacrifice? In many cases organizational and traditional expectations dominate the church's perceived "must do" agenda. For example, if your pastor decided to immediately and unilaterally eliminate certain things from his job description and he simply stopped doing them, which things would cause the most uproar? If he stopped doing hospital visits or stopped intentionally building relationships with unchurched people? Would people be more upset by deacons decided to no longer distribute end of year giving tax summaries or decided to no longer do any benevolence in the community? Make a list of what would make people upset if current things stopped vs. what should make people up because these things are not happening.
2. Measure your heart for the lost:
 - a. What percentage of your friends and acquaintances are churched and unchurched?
 - b. What intentional activities do you engage in to reach the lost, either in terms of direct evangelism or relationship building?
 - c. Do you have compassion for the lost and the poor?
 - d. What are you doing to increase your passion for the lost?

Teaching a Class / Preaching

Teaching or Preaching are obviously central callings, duties, gifts and skills required of church leadership. There is science to it, art to it, and when God uses it its power can be overwhelming. Like many things, the only way really to learn to teach or preach well is to get lots of practice doing it. At the same time much has been learned in the last 50 years about how we are wired to learn and how we learn best. Part of faithfulness to a call is continuing to work on your skills and gifts and making them as effective as the capacity God has given you.

Your primary resources for this exercise are your mentor and your listeners. You can learn more from good observation and evaluation than you can by any book or class. If you are working in a church, seek out every opportunity afforded you to teach children, youth or adults and get good feedback from your audience in terms of what actually was communicated and how it impacted their lives.

The primary assignment of this exercise is to teach a class or preach a sermon. You may use one of the texts you worked with in the previous month's assignments or any other, and go from that text to a written and spoken message. I will present A methodology you may follow if you wish, but feel free to do something unique, different, or creative. Here is what we are asking of you:

1. Write out your sermon or study. Many who begin preaching (and many who have done it for years) find it enormously helpful to write out their study before they have to present it. Even if they don't bring the manuscript to the pulpit or class with them the process of thinking through the introduction, arguments, transitions, conclusion, etc. is greatly aided by writing it all out before hand.
2. Preach your sermon or teach your class. Some of you are seeking eventual ordination as evangelists and hope to be preaching regularly. According to the CRC church order you may "read" a sermon in church under the supervision of your local council or board. Seek permission from your council and go for it. Some of you hopefully will seek a classical license to exhort and be able to preach in various churches on a regular basis. Talk to your pastor about this possibility. Others of you are leading small groups, teaching Sunday School, etc. Get permission if you need it to "do something different" this one week and prepare a lesson. Your lesson does not have to be a "lecture". You can have a guided exercise using visuals, activities, etc.
3. Get good evaluation of your effort. I am not providing you with an evaluation instrument. I think you should think through what you want to know from those observing your efforts and develop your own evaluation tool. You might ask someone to jot down on a 3x5 card what they thought the main point of your teaching was. You might do an audio tape interview to see what they remembered of your lesson. You might make out a sheet with a 1 to 5 scale, etc. You might just have someone take notes. Whatever you find helpful. Summarize your evaluation with writing a brief report on what you discovered by your evaluation and discuss it with your mentor.

Tips on Preaching and Teaching:

1. Begin with the goal or theme of the text you have been studying. What is this passage teaching you? How does it relate to life today? Work hard on this in order to develop a thematic sentence that will ground and guide your lesson. This is the one main point you want everyone to “get”.
2. Once you know the heart of what you are going to say, then you have to figure out how to say it in a way that people will be motivated to listen, moved by what you teach, and prepared to apply it to their lives. I have long used an altered organizational method proposed by Thomas Groome in his classic Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision. The book is rather esoteric but I’ve used his 5 point organizational scheme in most of the sermons and classes I have produced. The steps are these:
 - a. *Name the present situation*: What is the contact with the lives of the listeners that you are attempting to engage. Many people are simply not interested enough in what a particular passage of the Bible says in some abstract sense, they are selfish, self-centered sinners (like the rest of us) and what they really want to know about is something in their own lives. That is the function of the introduction of your sermon. Get the attention of your audience by connecting with them, identifying with them, relating to them, and beginning with something in their lives.
 - b. *Analyze the present situation*: In many cases what we are doing, what we are thinking, or the present state of the world is consistent with our fallen human nature. Do some talking about that. Be careful not to take on a judgmental air or tone, but take some time to show that how we usually go about X isn’t smart, good, practical, godly, etc. Use illustrations.
 - c. *Share God’s Story*: Here is where inject the power of “God’s story”. You have spent a fair amount of time situating everyone’s mind around a situation or reality in their world. Now as you open up God’s word to them it will be unfolded IN THAT SITUATION. This is why it was central to be very sure about what the Biblical theme was because now they will be contextualizing that particular passage within this particular reality of their lives. Now hopefully you won’t have to go into exhaustive dry detail about why the passage means this or that, but rather they will hear the passage in some way closer to how it was originally taught. This will help them to not only UNDERSTAND what the passage says, but also have an EMOTIONAL response to the passage because they should be able to see how the passage impacts their lives.
 - d. *Articulate the dynamic or discord between the present the present (sinful) situation and the teaching of God’s Word*. Work through the difference between how things are and how they should be as revealed in the Bible. Use illustrations, examples, etc.
 - e. *Name a preferred future*: If people are actually going to APPLY what you teach (which should be your goal for them), you need to paint them a picture of what that will look like. Many sermons get bogged down in guilt-tripping people, whining at people, or just becoming a long litany of “oughts” and hand wringing. If people are going to change, you must engage their imagination and the best way to do that is imagery. Look at how Jesus taught, often with parables and word pictures. SHOW them a preferred future with word pictures, visual illustrations, stories, etc.

3. Be coherent and be creative: Use visuals, stories, activities, interactive techniques, etc. I say this with a warning. Creativity cannot substitute for a coherent and solid message. Flash and excitement ultimately cannot save an incoherent or poorly put together message, but laziness in communication (just talking at people and expecting they will listen or care) can kill a solid message.
4. Check out Thom and Joani Schultz's Why Nobody Learns much of Anything at Church: and How to Fix it . This is a very accessible little book full of very applicable concrete ways of improving your communication methods.
5. Talk to your mentor to find out what process they go through in preparing their messages. It is often said that most preachers really only have one sermon that they preach over and over again and there is a lot of truth to this. Find out what and how they preach that sermon and see what you can learn from them.