

Sierra Leadership Network Curriculum: Month 5, Year 2

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 5, Year 2

Date Completed

____/____/____ Church History: Acts to Medieval Church
[Estimated time: _____]

Mentor Comments:

____/____/____ Teaching and Preaching for Change:
Mentor Comments [Estimated time: _____]

____/____/____ Spiritual Guidance for Change
: [Estimated time: _____]

Mentor Comments

Participant Signature

Mentor Signature

I. Church History: Acts to the Medieval Church

This assignment is very easy. Read [Church History in Plain Language](#) by Bruce Shelley from Chapter 1 through Chapter 23. Post any questions you might have on the SLN e-mail group or ask your mentor.

IIa. Background for Teaching for Life Change and Spiritual Guidance:

Why do we teach or preach? Ideally we do it to change lives. Certainly we enjoy the self-expression involved, but what we really want to see is change in the lives of the people we are ministering to. That is a very difficult thing. All of us have settled into a variety of beliefs, habits and customs that for better or worse we will keep.

It is also a deception to imagine the human heart to be simply a function of the simple human will. Because of our inherited sinful nature we are slaves to sin. We are also in this broken world locked into sinful and destructive habits and beliefs by a complex web of assumptions, culture, relationships, childhood experiences, etc. Change is hard work that requires the work of the Holy Spirit as well as a conscious and disciplined readjustment of ourselves, and those around us. This is why convincing people of the need for change and helping them follow through with change is such hard work.

There are many ways to preach and teach for life change. As a preacher or teacher you will no doubt experiment with a variety of approaches and models. What I submit to you here is a template of one that I have used countless times throughout my ministry. It is somewhat based on the book [Christian Religious Education](#) by Thomas Groome which was a textbook of mine in my teaching class at Calvin Seminary. The book itself is quite philosophical and probably overly abstract, but the basic outline of teaching for change that I have adapted and used I believe is sound and effective.

Phase 1: Name the Present Experience

It is alarming to notice how unaware we are of the world we live in. It is often the case that there are many things in our own lives that we are blind to that are obvious to others around us. I recently got off the phone with a guy working 80 to 90 hours a week who was complaining about how he felt depressed, that he was drifting spiritually, that his wife was complaining that he is always tired, etc. Can anyone figure out why he feels these things? On one level he knows he's working too much, but on another he may be having difficulty seeing that what he really needs to do is to establish some boundaries to have a healthier, more balanced life. Whether it be in pastoral counseling, in teaching Sunday School or in preaching, often the best place to begin is by articulating people's present experience is. By articulating what a person is experiencing, you begin to build a bond with the listener. You want to do this to break down the distance between you and them and have them mentally put you on their side. We all do this in the context of conversation. When we listen to someone, we may not always agree with what they are saying but we nod our head and say "yes" just to show that we understand. In the context of a small group lesson often a helpful way to start this first step is to get the people themselves to name

their present experience. This process takes the step of building a common ground, an initial assumption of community so that the lesson or sermon is not something being lobbed in on them from outside, but something coming from a trusted and valued friend.

There are many ways to name the present experience. In a small group ask a question which gets the people to share their experience on the topic. In a sermon you might begin with a story or an illustration that places what is about to follow in a life context that your listeners can relate to or have had experience with. In counseling or giving spiritual guidance this usually begins by having the person you are meeting with begin to tell their story, to share what is happening in their life.

Phase 2: Analyze the Present Situation: Dig Deeper to see what is really going on.

Once the person or the group has put on the table the sinful or destructive habit or situation begin to take it apart a bit. Start probing and poking around to see if the assumptions behind the behavior or beliefs are consistent and sound or faulty and self-defeating. Sometimes this may involve, as I said above, stating what is obvious to you and others about the person's life. Let's say you are preaching a sermon on "You can't serve both God and money." You begin by talking about the present paradox of remarkable affluence and remarkable debt in our society today. People both have more money and stuff and less money and stuff at the same time. How can that be? That would be step one. Step 2 would involve looking deeper at what is driving this ironic reality of dual affluence and consumption. What is beneath the drive that launches is to strain family and friends to work more, to earn more, but then needing to spend more because we are working so much, etc. What heart issues are behind the money.

This step obviously involves spiritual discernment and an in-depth understanding of the roots below the present experience. It is critical that this analysis be accessible and compelling either to the individual or the audience you are working with. If they can't see the connection between their present experience and the hidden sin or deception below causing the malady, then you will likely lose your listener and your credibility with your audience. This requires work, prayer, study and thought on your topic so that you are in fact credible in your analysis. This is why church leaders must not just be experts on the Bible, but also be discerning students of modern life as lived by the people they are serving.

Phase 3: Reveal the Biblical picture of how life in the kingdom of God is different from the life we are living.

After naming the present experience, and digging deeper to reveal the hidden sinful assumptions or roots of our misery, we now need to open the Bible and see what God has to say about how life is supposed to be lived.

In both preaching and teaching I seldom open with the Biblical text and the reason is this. Before the people can see what the Bible is telling them in an aspect of their lives, they need to focus a bit on seeing the truth about themselves. It is essentially the first section of the Heidelberg Catechism. What's more, they need to feel the need and desire the answer and in their hearts and

I want them to have a degree of hunger for God's Word before I give it to them. In a sense I am setting the table for them, letting them smell the good stuff baking in the oven, raising the anticipation of what is to come. I am also positioning the Biblical text to be fresh and surprising for their ears. So often familiar texts have been read and gone stale in people's minds and hearts because it has not been immediately apparent how exactly the Bible is speaking to their lives. They assume they know what the text is about and they assume the Bible isn't speaking to them. Waiting until this point in the conversation or presentation allows the Bible to be read in a fresh and revealing way.

4. Further analysis of the Biblical material in terms of how it is speaking to the present experience.

Once the Biblical material has been presented, there very well may be some added spade work, teaching or clarification necessary to help the person really see what God is saying and God is calling to make some changes in their lives. The Bible is not a book that simply presents topics and answers for every life experience found in contemporary living, but it does present a world view and tell the human story and the story of redemption in a way that every experience of ours fits somewhere into. On some topics or subjects the presentation path is short and direct. On other topics the path may be long and require some hand holding. This is probably the portion of your message or lesson where you need to make the case that these Biblical realities need to be applied to this present situation in life and how.

5. Name a preferred kingdom future for this situation:

Now it is time to paint the picture of what the kingdom of God's coming in this area of life should look like. This may involve some concrete steps the person or people need to take to make some corrections in their lives. It may describe some new beliefs or commitments they need to make. It may simply show them how things will be different if they begin to live in obedience to God's commands. This will be the conclusion of your session, lesson or sermon.

Iib. Write a study, lesson, or sermon using the 5 step Life Change approach based on ONE of the following topics connected with your reading in Church History:

1. A knowledgeable skeptic or believing doubter comes into your office and declares to you, "I can't believe what the Bible teaches because the Bible as we know it is merely a collection of books selected by fallible human beings sometime in the third century. What's more the committee who selected the books of the New Testament had an axe to grind and intentionally withheld other Jesus stories that we are now discovering that raise all kinds of questions about our traditional understanding of who God is and who we are. Unless you can convince me I'm inclined to pick and chose which book or books I care to believe in and find my own version of the truth."

2. Briefly look into the resurgence of Gnostic beliefs in many New Age writers and "spiritual" authors today. Why is Gnosticism once again a temptation for people today and why was/is Gnosticism incompatible with a Biblical world view?

3. At the end of the book of Matthew Jesus promised that he would be with us always, even to the end of the age, yet when we read church history we see a story of trouble and difficulty throughout the ages. Many critics of the church look back over its history and find fault with the church for a variety of evils in western history. Some Christians as well as some sects and cults have asserted that the Holy Spirit left the church at some early date, either sometime after the time of the Early Church, or perhaps when Constantine made the empire “Christian”, only to once again rejoin the church at some cherished point, perhaps the time of the Reformation or the founding of their particular group or sect. Can you really preach that throughout the history of the church Jesus has never abandoned it? Can you really assert after looking at church history that the gates of hell have not prevailed against it?

III. Spiritual Guidance for change:

The real test of whether or not God will entrust you with the hearts and lives of other believers is whether or not he is using you already in this ministry. Do people seek out your counsel and your guidance? Do they listen to what you have to say to them in terms of what God is calling them to do or to become? Write an account or description for your mentor a time when God has blessed you by giving you the opportunity to guide them spiritually. As best as you can describe the context of this situation, how the conversation went and what the conclusion of that conversation was. Analyze the encounter using the 5 phase approach I listed above to see if one way or another the flow of the conversation followed that pattern. Discuss it with your mentor.