

Di121 Effective Communication

Lesson Di121-14 Method: Using Emotion to Persuade

People can be moved to action by appealing to their emotions. God made us with emotions. Jesus moved people to feel joy, awe, or conviction through his words and miracles. Often the crowds said of Jesus, “No one ever spoke like this man!” When pastors preach with the anointing of the Spirit, it affects and motivates their people. Through passionate, emotion-filled preaching, God speaks to both the sinner and the believer. In this story people took action after the emotional message of an early deacon named Stephen.

Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, had performed great wonders and signs among the people. Stephen not only spoke powerfully, but God used him to perform miracles. His faith encouraged other believers in their ministry such as Philip. As God worked, more and more people opposed them. Both believers and nonbelievers were moved by their emotions to do either good or evil. Opposition arose especially from members of a certain religious group who began to argue with him. But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave Stephen as he spoke. They secretly persuaded some men to say, “We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.”

This particular religious group stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Jewish high court—the Sanhedrin. They produced false witnesses, who testified, “This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. We heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.” All the court looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel. Then the high priest asked him, “Are these charges true?”

Even the face of Stephen as he began his defense moved people emotionally. He perhaps knew already how the day would end. He had a joy and peace on his face no one could explain. He answered the accusations brought against him by saying: “Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran. ‘Leave your country and your people,’ God said, ‘and go to the land I will show you.’”

With these words Stephen began his defense before the religious leaders, just as other believers had done. Stephen chose to tell the story of how God worked with the people of Israel through their history. Beginning with Abraham he recounted the stories of their ancestors. He focused on the people of faith and God’s promises to them. He reminded his listeners of God’s promise to Abraham, that his descendants would be strangers in a country not their own. They would be enslaved and mistreated. After 400 years, however, they would be delivered from that country.

Then he spoke about Joseph, Abraham’s great-grandson, whose brothers sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him and rescued him. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled

him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Pharaoh made Joseph ruler over Egypt and all his palace. Then famine struck in Canaan. Joseph's father Jacob heard that there was food in Egypt. He sent our forefathers to buy grain. On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was. He brought his entire family to Egypt so they would not starve.

Then the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham. A new king arose who oppressed the Israelites, forcing them to kill their male babies. At that time Moses was born. God spared him from death by a miracle. When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter found him and brought him up as her own son.

When Moses was 40 years old, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites. He thought they would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. After killing an Egyptian, he fled to the wilderness of Midian. He settled there as a foreigner, married, and had two sons.

Forty years later, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush. The Lord said to him, "I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Moses shook with fear and did not dare to look. God said, "I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning. ... I will send you back to Egypt." Moses led the people out of Egypt through many wonders and signs. In the desert Moses told the Israelites, "God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people." In his sermon, Stephen was appealing to the Jewish respect for Moses, to persuade them to see that Jesus was the one God had sent.

He continued to relate how their ancestors had refused to obey Moses. Instead, they had turned their hearts back to Egypt. They told Aaron to make them gods who would lead them. Then they made an idol in the form of a golden calf. But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon, and stars.

Then Stephen, filled with emotion, addressed the court directly: "You stiff-necked people; your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors. You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him. You who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it."

When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven. He saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

They covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, seized him. After they dragged him out of the city, they stoned him while he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died (Acts 6:8-7:60).

With great feeling Stephen delivered his final sermon. In it he contrasted the faithfulness of Abraham and Moses with the disobedience of their descendants. The Jews had accepted God's law, but refused to obey it. They had received the promised Messiah, but had killed him. With powerful word pictures Stephen showed them their true spiritual state. As the religious leaders were killing him, he saw Jesus in heaven. The leaders hated Stephen, but he forgave them.

Luke tells us one more very interesting fact. Saul, who later would meet Jesus on his way to Damascus, was present that day. The religious men who were throwing stones laid their coats at his feet. Saul heard this message, and God would use it to bring him to faith.

This story is **important** because it demonstrates how Stephen used the power of human emotion in his communication to bring conviction to the people. He was trying to persuade them that Jesus was their Messiah.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that we can appeal to people's emotions as we speak the truth of God and try to persuade them to follow God's will for their lives.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. How does the Bible describe the deacon named Stephen? [Pause]
 - A. If you said, "He was a man full of God's grace and power, who performed great wonders and signs among the people," you are correct.
2. What theme did Stephen use in his message before the Sanhedrin? [Pause]
 - A. If you said that Stephen contrasted the faithfulness of Abraham and Moses with the disobedience of Israel as a whole, you are correct.
3. Which person was greatly affected by the passionate sermon of Stephen? [Pause]
 - A. If you said that Stephen's emotional message affected Saul, later called Paul, you are right.

Your **assignment** consists of learning this story and telling it to someone who has not heard it before. Then ask them this question, "What made Stephen's message so powerful? He had no formal training and told a well-known history to the leaders." Answers: He had an experience with God. Although it was a well-known story, he told it with great feeling as he was led by the Spirit.