

How to Reach Young Adults In a Wesleyan Way

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1. **Tell his story** – A Postmodern generation is all about stories and real people. Make Wesley real to them! Tell them his story as a young adult, specifically such things as:
 - His passion as a young adult college student at Oxford for living the Gospel in a tangible way through devotion to God mixed with care for the poor and imprisoned. *Wesley himself was a young twentysomething when it all began!*
 - His failed mission to Georgia to convert the natives. [i.e. Journal entry 1/24/38]
 - His fear of dying before his Aldersgate experience [i.e. journal entry 5/19/38]. Even as a devoted Christian—a minister even!—Wesley faced fear and doubt and feelings of unworthiness. But God didn't leave him in that state forever.
 - His relationship with the Moravians, Whitfield, and other Christians with differing theology. He learned from them, was inspired by them, loved them dearly, but eventually had to separate from them doctrinally. He never lost his love for them though or his recognition of how God used them in his life.
 - His challenging the system of lifeless anemic church leadership and faith devoid of the Holy Spirit and apathetic to evangelism. He became convinced and convicted by field-preaching [i.e. journal entry 4/29/39] realizing that his call crossed denominational boundaries [i.e. "The world is my parish" journal entry 6/11/39].
 - His openness to moving beyond the bureaucracy in order to advance the Kingdom of God. He ordained lay preachers [i.e. journal entry 12/27/45].
 - His openness to allowing God to be God—but still maintaining a desire for structure, accountability, and discipline. He experienced all sorts of manifestations of the supernatural, yet didn't seek to quell such "enthusiasm", as his detractors labeled it. [i.e. the "exorcisms" such as that recounted in journal entry 10/23/39].
2. **Talk about his relationships with women!** Love life is a key topic for young adults, many of whom have experienced unhealthy or broken relationships themselves and are looking for true love.
 - Wesley's childhood under Susanna shaped him spiritually, but also may have played a significant role in his view of marriage and family life.
 - His stoic "pursuit" of and subsequent rejection by Sophie in Savannah and his petty reaction of denying her communion illustrates how romantic pain can lead to all kinds of rationalization of poor behavior!
 - His tepid, strained marriage shows that even the great men of God can be extremely clueless in marriage!
3. **Share his passion for the Gospel—the Biblical, Apostolic, Orthodox Gospel!** Young adults do not respond to a Gospel of social justice and brotherly love without the underlying commitment to Biblical authority and Evangelical faithfulness that Wesley embodied. We want to be challenged! We want to be pushed! We want to be made uncomfortable by complacency and comfort that most North American Christians have always enjoyed! We must uphold and pass on the unwavering commitment Wesley held

regarding such issues as:

- Biblical Authority – Outdated continental scholarship based upon Enlightenment assumptions should be given a long overdue burial.
 - Social Justice – Young adults want to be involved in tangible ways of helping the poor—such as the current situation in Darfur—without having their faith co-opted by political agendas, *both on the Right and the Left!* We don't resonate with the John Hagees or the John Spongs; the Pat Robertsons or the Rudolf Bultmanns.
 - Holiness and Church Discipline – Young adults don't want to be part of a church that adopts an anything-goes attitude towards personal or corporate Sin. [i.e. journal entry 8/29/39, 3/16/48, etc.]
 - Orthodox Ecumenism – Denominations have become increasingly irrelevant to most young adults who identify themselves primarily with Jesus rather than the UMC, SBU, AoG, or RCC. [i.e. journal entry 8/15/47]
4. **Learn our language** – Young adults are not spiritually apathetic; just look at the demographics at churches such as Granger, North Point, Mars Hill or Mosaic and you'll see large-scale involvement among the 20s and 30s crowd. What do these and other churches who are reaching young adults have in common? *They speak the language of young adult culture!* Just as Wesley took the Gospel of the High-church Anglican tradition to the town squares and open fields of England in a manner they could hear and receive, so too must we not be afraid to communicate the Gospel of the Wesleyan movement to the visually-oriented, institutionally-cynical culture of young adults in our areas. Practical ways of doing this are such things as:
- Recognizing and affirming the young adults in our churches as spiritual (or at least potentially-spiritual) leaders in Kingdom of God.
 - Committing to building a young adult community or networking with other churches (even across denominational lines) who have the same desire to reach our generation.
 - *Becoming a partner church with CharlotteONE!!!* (info available at www.charlotteone.org)
 - Subscribing to young adult resources such as *Relevant Leader* and becoming familiar with key figures in the emergent and relevant churches around the country (Granger Community Church in South Bend, IN is a prime example of a UMC that is doing just this!)

And finally...

5. **Feed us MEAT, not just milk!** Young adults may initially be drawn in by felt-needs and spiritual fluff (though many are actually turned off by it ironically!), but beneath that is a craving for the deeper things of God. As people like Rob Bell, N.T. Wright and John Piper have shown, young adults crave theologically deep preaching and teaching. We don't want flash without substance! [cf. "Young, Restless and Reformed", *Christianity Today*, Sept. 2006]