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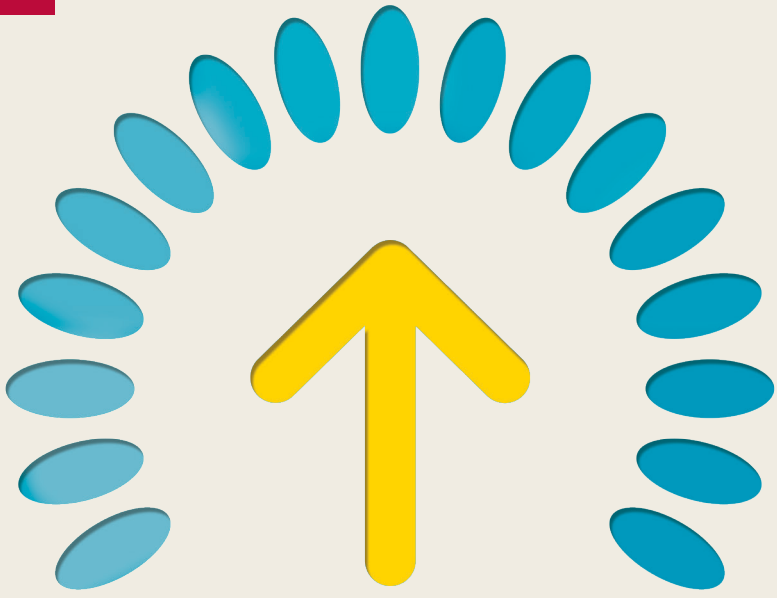
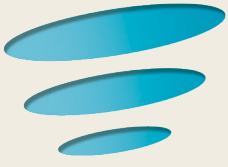


MOVING MESSAGES

Ideas That Will Revolutionize the Sunday Experience



RICK BUNDSCHUH
Best-Selling Author of *Soul Surfer*

SAMPLE CHAPTER

MOVING MESSAGES

Ideas That Will Revolutionize the Sunday Experience

RICK BUNDSCHUH
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Group resources really work!
This Group resource incorporates our R.E.A.L. approach to ministry. It reinforces a growing friendship with Jesus, encourages long-term learning, and results in life transformation, because it's:

Relational—Learner-to-learner interaction enhances learning and builds Christian friendships.

Experiential—What learners experience through discussion and action sticks with them up to 9 times longer than what they simply hear or read.

Applicable—The aim of Christian education is to equip learners to be both hearers and doers of God's Word.

Learner-based—Learners understand and retain more when the learning process takes into consideration how they learn best.

MOVING MESSAGES

Ideas That Will Revolutionize the Sunday Experience

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PART

2

The Case for a New Paradigm on Sunday Morning

The Importance of Experiential Worship

Experiential learning. Yeah, I know the term sounds postmodern, college snobbish, with a touch of New Age.

But it actually just means learning something by engaging in more than a passive role.

It's also the shortest route to the kind of learning that actually changes behavior, thinking, and attitudes.

Prove it? Okay, here's an example:

As a kid I hated avocados. I wouldn't touch them. I picked them out of any dish or salad and turned my nose up at any meal that contained the mushy green things.

Oh, did I say that I'd never actually tasted an avocado? I just didn't like the way I imagined it would taste. People told me they were delicious, but I dismissed their comments out of hand.

And then one day, by accident or to impress some avocado-loving girl I had a crush on, I tasted one.

Yum!

The *experience* of tasting an avocado changed everything: my attitude, my thinking, and my dietary behavior.

Every Sunday, we pastors deal with people who have preconceived ideas about God, values, priorities, lifestyles—you name it. To them we offer something new, unfamiliar, and by and large untouched by our culture. We offer the ideas, values, hope, and rhythm of the kingdom of heaven.

Helping people have life-changing and continuing experiences with God is what all pastors worth their salt desire to do every Sunday morning.

The big question is, how well is that working?

We come together for the experience of worship and often measure our effectiveness by how many people attend…which is certainly one indicator, as people usually vote with their feet. But numbers don't give us much of a handle on whether lives are being touched by God.

We come together for community, but in most cases people at church don't talk to anyone but their friends.

We come together for enlightenment, inspiration, and guidance from the Scriptures, but there are few ways to measure what has taken place inside the heart.

With experiential learning, rather than sitting passively during church services, every believer is given opportunities to participate in deep, meaningful ways.

I know this sounds a bit scary to most of us who like things done decently and in order. We fear that the congregation will run amok and chaos will ensue as they all do their own thing.

And I get it. I've witnessed such bedlam in a church service.

I once attended a church in Baja California that encouraged *full participation* during the musical part of the worship service. Everyone was given an instrument of some kind to bang on: shakers, tambourines, claves, washboards, castanets, cabasas, percussion blocks, güiros …you name the noisemaker, someone had it.

Hoo boy!

Did you know that there are some people who can't find the beat of a song…ever? No God-endowed sense of rhythm or timing whatsoever. And did you know that those people should *never* be given a tambourine?

But I do have to admit, it was, in some ways, riotous good fun.

I'm not sure the racket was conducive to helping us draw closer to God, but it *was* full involvement, and it *was* a worship service I'll never forget.

So instead of handing out instruments to everyone in attendance, how can we make the Sunday morning hour an experience people have rather than just an event they attend?

> **How can we make the Sunday morning hour an experience people have rather than just an event they attend?**

Well, it's an *experience* if something touches them, if the Holy Spirit moves their hearts.

It's an *experience* if they have an aha moment—if illumination comes streaming in, if a new perspective suddenly makes apparent something they hadn't seen before.

It's an *experience* if people are in some way bound to other worshippers.

It's an *experience* if, even for a moment, they see God in a new light, understand an aspect of his nature in a way they'd never before considered, and if even for a flash, God is revealed to them.

It's an *experience* if at the end of the service, something sticks with them: an idea they can't stop turning over in their minds, a realization that leaves them marveling, a new motivation to pursue goodness, a godly stain that doesn't easily wash off.

I don't think there's a pastor in the world who wouldn't hope that his 30-minute contribution to Sunday mornings would result in this kind of experience.

And I think the most humble among us are the ones who would honestly confess we rarely are assured that these experiences are truly taking place under our watch.

One of the greatest mistakes a pastor can make is to assume that presenting divine data guarantees a spiritual experience.

Consider Nicodemus, who, like most of the men in his high position in the Sanhedrin, had deposited the entire Old Testament into his memory bank. But all that data, as good as it was, didn't give him a clue as to what Jesus was getting at when he started talking about being "born anew" (see John 3).

James cautioned believers not to just be sponges of data but to be involved in life-altering, experiential faith: "Don't fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. *Act* on what you hear! Those who hear and don't act are like those who glance in the mirror, walk away, and two minutes later have no idea who they are, what they look like" (James 1:22, *The Message*).

In our leadership team meetings, we refer to what we are trying to do as "moving the ball down the field."

We do everything we can to create Sunday morning experiences that move the ball down the field toward the goal of transforming each and every person there into the image of Christ.

And we understand that for some people, that movement is measured in inches, not in yards. But for us, it is at least movement in the right direction.

Teaching Like Jesus

Around 2,000 years ago, the hills of Galilee buzzed with excitement over a new rabbi who was teaching in a powerful and gripping way…mostly by way of stories.

Today, religious and secular experts recognize Jesus as a master communicator, yet the methods used in virtually every church on Sunday mornings bear little resemblance to his way of teaching.

I suggest that our wisest course is to carefully consider how Jesus taught and, if possible, to imitate him.

Not a Lot of Bible Quoting

One interesting thing about the teaching of Jesus is how infrequently he quoted Scripture.

As was customary for Jewish boys, Jesus would have memorized the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) by the age of 10 and the rest of the Old Testament in the following years (not to mention the fact that, as God incarnate, he actually breathed those Scriptures into existence). Yet in his teaching, Jesus never did a verse-by-verse exposition of an Old Testament book.

And while his allusions to the ancient text were frequent, he actually quoted only a few lines now and then. Yet all of his teachings were in concert with Scripture.

While Jesus ministered to people who were, for the most part, very familiar with Scripture, the apostles often engaged people with no knowledge at all of the Torah or the gospel. And they didn't do any verse-by-verse explorations of Scripture either.

Instead they got the conversational ball rolling by talking about the everyday lives of those they were trying to reach. For example, when Paul talked to the philosophers in Athens, he began by referring to the statues they'd erected all over the city. Before long they began to question him, and ultimately they were engaged in genuine dialogue about his "new teaching" (see Acts 17:16-32).

I'm not suggesting that we eliminate the Bible on Sundays, but I do propose that we use what we need to get the job done… and no more.

Variety

Jesus used an assortment of devices to make his point. No one could claim, "Same place, same thing" about how Jesus delivered his message.

For example, some scholars suggest that, when he delivered them in the original Aramaic, some of Jesus' adages actually rhymed (which makes Jesus a rapper of sorts).

Jesus sometimes used rhetoric, a style of teaching held in esteem by the Romans. He also used the methods of dialogue and argument favored by the Jewish leaders of the day. In reality, he was using styles of teaching that were, for his time, very contemporary.

Humor

There's no doubt that humor was part of Jesus' stock-in-trade, as he used hyperbole, satire, and jesting in his teaching and interaction with others.

Can you sense this in the following? "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:9-11).

Stories and Parables

Jesus used stories and parables to help his listeners understand big ideas. And often he didn't tie the stories up with a bow; instead, he forced his listeners to really think, to figure out the meaning themselves.

And these stories weren't fairy tales. Quite frequently they were troublesome or provocative; often they were cautionary tales with tragic endings.

Illustrations and Metaphors

Jesus frequently referred to his surroundings, including common, everyday items and people at hand to make his point.

For example, when he described the consequences of leading a believer astray, he said, "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better

for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea" (Matthew 18:6). People of his day were very familiar with millstones: enormous stones weighing hundreds of pounds that were used for grinding grain. So the image of a person having one of these stones hung around his neck and then being thrown into the ocean was truly horrifying. Jesus clearly meant for this image to be indelibly imprinted on his listeners' minds.

Today the word *millstone,* in most people's minds, conjures up a picture of…nothing. To make Jesus' meaning clear, then, we should at the very least project an image of a millstone and describe its weight to give our listeners the chilling experience that Jesus intended.

Wherever he went, Jesus used objects at hand to make piercing, unforgettable points. For example, sitting on the edge of a well, he used water to describe the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer, using the natural world to give his listeners a glimpse into the supernatural.

Interaction

Jesus taught through interaction, dialogue, conversations with individuals and groups. He asked a lot of questions—the kind of sticky questions that get people thinking and talking. I'm convinced the disciples' faith took root during talks with Jesus around a campfire.

> **[Jesus] asked a lot of questions—the kind of sticky questions that get people thinking and talking.**

Interestingly, Jesus rarely taught by delivering long monologues, which is the primary teaching method used in churches today.

Even what's now called the Sermon on the Mount was hardly a sermon but a collection of mini messages.

Just for kicks, time how long it takes to read John 14–16, Jesus' lengthiest recorded monologue. Unless you read it r-e-a-l-l-y s-l-o-w-l-y, you'll find the passage is a lot shorter than a typical sermon.

The Apostle Paul, having been schooled by the Pharisees, might have put people to sleep with his teaching, but Jesus, through his winsome and clever methods of communicating, never did.

And neither should we.

How Ideas Are Absorbed

"What I hear, I forget; what I see, I remember; what I do, I understand." —Chinese proverb

How many commercial messages bombard a person each day? Nobody really knows, not even the marketing folks who *should* know. Guesstimates range from a few hundred to thousands. But one thing we do know: It's a lot.

Fortunately, we manage to slough off most of the commercials bombarding us, except for those that slip into our subconscious minds and urge us to choose Pepsi instead of Coke or Apple instead of PC.

Because it's their business (and an enormous one at that), marketers know a lot about how people absorb and retain ideas.

A television ad campaign for Charmin bathroom tissue ran from 1964 to 1985, an incredibly long run for one campaign. It was brilliantly conceived by someone who understood how people absorb and act on messages.

The commercial featured a crotchety grocery store manager named Mr. Whipple.

Apparently this guy had nothing better to do than chase away customers who were so enamored by the softness of the Charmin brand of bathroom tissue that they would take it off the shelves and squeeze it.

In these 30- to 60-second spots, Mr. Whipple would see the violation and come racing down the aisle to liberate the abused TP while scolding the patrons with his mantra, "Please, don't squeeze the Charmin!"

It doesn't get much dumber than this—or more brilliant.

This ridiculous ad led potential customers to actually touch the product. The marketing people knew that once customers touch a product, they're much more likely to purchase it. Another case in point: car dealers who urge us to test-drive the cars we fancy. (To delve into this, I encourage you to read "The Power of Touch" in the August 2008 issue of the journal *Judgment and Decision Making*.)

So what does squeezing toilet paper have to do with anything that might take place in your church on a Sunday morning?

Well, it demonstrates that people retain ideas best when as many senses as possible are involved in the process.

> **People retain ideas best when as many senses as possible are involved in the process.**

For example, you can tell me how to tie a square knot, and I'll probably look at you with a blank stare.

Hand me a drawing with arrows and dotted lines showing how to tie a square knot, and I'll begin to grasp the concept.

But give me a length of rope, show me how, let me look at the drawing and then practice, and with any luck, I should be able to not only tie a square knot but also remember how.

Suppose I want to communicate what it's like to live a life full of grace.

I could try to explain the concept in theological and biblical terms.

I could explain it using analogies or stories that illustrate the biblical idea.

I could show a film clip illustrating it.

I could walk into the audience and hand out gift cards as an act of grace.

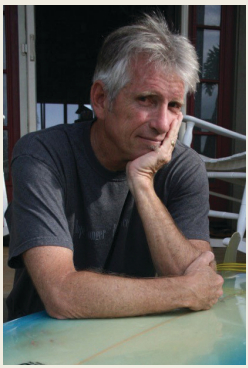
I could walk into the audience and hand out gift cards and ask the recipients to give them to others as a way to show grace.

Clearly, *experiencing* grace is a much more powerful way of understanding the concept than simply being *told* about it. It's the experience that gives us the ability to take an abstract concept and put work boots on it.

We pastors are privileged to communicate the most important, life-changing message the universe contains. Yet we prefer to do it using the least successful method available to us. If God designed people to absorb and retain ideas in a variety of ways, common sense would suggest that we take advantage of all of them.

“We pastors are privileged to communicate the most important, life-changing message the universe contains.”

MAKE EVERY SERMON MEMORABLE!



Rick Bundschuh

Rick Bundschuh serves as a teaching pastor at Hawaii's Kauai Christian Fellowship. He worked with Bethany Hamilton on the best-seller *Soul Surfer* and is also the author of *Deep Like Me*.

MOVING MESSAGES: *Ideas That Will Revolutionize the Sunday Experience*, by Rick Bundschuh, will help EVERY church leader do just that!

Pastors…teachers…every church leader longs for Sunday messages to be memorable and meaningful, to move listeners closer to God.

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Pastor and author Rick Bundschuh asked the same question—and began finding new ways to connect his church audience with the life-changing truths of the Bible. He preached participatory sermons, wove experiences into messages, and invited congregational conversation as part of the Sunday morning experience.

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This book is a must-read for all church leaders eager to make Sunday messages engaging and impactful. You'll benefit from Bundschuh's journey and transform passive listeners into active participants in next Sunday's message.

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