



Importance of Knowing Your Chapel Audience

“Our number one goal for every student here with us is that they encounter God.”

– Donnie Dee, President/CEO, SDRM

Chapel is just one of many ways men and women encounter God at the Mission. No matter where they are in their faith journey, students are required to attend Chapel for the *opportunity* to encounter God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit through worship and the message you deliver. As a chapel host, it's important that you prepare your message with an understanding of the men and women you'll be addressing, as this may vary greatly from the audience to whom you typically deliver sermons.

Who are the students and guests of SDRM?

- The vast majority come directly from living on the streets or were on the verge of experiencing homelessness when they arrived
- They come with varying degrees of spiritual maturity. Some are longtime believers, some are new believers, some are spiritually mature while others are spiritually immature.
- Some have experienced spiritual trauma, which causes them to repel from hearing about God or be skeptical of what they do hear.
- The majority struggles with trauma, mental illness, and addiction.
- People experiencing homelessness often struggle with psychological, social, and spiritual distress.
 - *Psychological* – Living in shame and fear, running from their past, lack of self-respect and self-awareness.
 - *Social* - Lack of support, community, and stability, Alienated by friends and family.
 - *Spiritual* - Struggling with addictions, past trauma, lack of identify, low self-esteem
- Factors that may have caused them to become homeless:
 - *Disadvantages of poverty* - Low level of education, unstable family structure, racism, classism
 - *Traumatic Childhood Experiences* - Incarcerated parents, drug addicted parents, early exposure to violence, sexual abuse, emotional abuse
 - *Disabling Conditions* - Depression, a painkiller habit, PTSD, pattern of heavy drinking, agoraphobia

- *Life-Altering Events* - Divorce, death of a family member, being robbed or scammed, loss of employment, car accident, domestic abuse.
- *Lack of Healthy Relationships* – No one they can trust. no one who sees them/hears them/understands them/loves them/guides them.

Sermon themes that that can always stand repeating:

- God is who He says He is.
- God can do what He says He can do.
- You are who God says you are.
- You can do all things through Christ.
- God's word is alive and active in you.

It's about BELIEVING GOD, not just believing *in* God.

Other themes that resonate well with our students:

- *Messages of safety, security, and healing in God* -- Forgetting what lies behind and pushing ahead with confidence
- *Encouraging positive relationships and community* – Like the importance of making new friends that lift you up, pray with you, support you. And, joining a local church!
- *God's power to heal people* – Includes relational, emotional and spiritual healing that can reduce the pull of addiction and other temptations.
- *Shared brokenness* – We're all broken and need Jesus, just in different ways.
- *Humility* – My way of doing things isn't the only way, and sometimes isn't the best way for you. I struggle with certain things in life and I'm learning too!
- *Our common needs* – We are all driven by a desire for love, meaning, and significance, and we are all in need of God's forgiveness and grace.
- *Kindness* – Love one another as you love yourself (with an emphasis on what it means to love yourself so you can love others).
- *Empowerment* – In discovering their purpose/calling and accomplishing anything they desire through Christ who strengthens them.
- *Identity* – Who they are in Christ and who they're not (refuting lies from the evil one)

What does not help our students encounter God?

- Condemning talk or calling them out for their sin
- Telling them they “have to get their act together or else” (shame-based teaching or what is often referred to as “hellfire and brimstone” messages)
- Condescending talk (where it is implied that you are better, or better off, or further along in life than they are)
- Talking about their past mistakes or bad decisions as if they still define them
- Labeling them as homeless
- Oversharing about rape, attempted suicide, or physical abuse.