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The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month
by Steve Sheely



Experiments in experiential discipleship

I have always been astounded by the impact of Christ's teaching. He used common everyday objects — seeds, coins, fish and fig trees — to offer remarkable truths about God's amazing kingdom. Concrete examples and real-life events were his lesson plans.

But I also embrace techno-gadgets. A classroom or sanctuary does not need to rely on the same passive media we rely on for everyday entertainment and information-gathering. Meanwhile, many young people are coming to church looking for an alternative to virtual lives filled with video games, on-line relationships and texting.

In the church setting, our goal reaches beyond transferring knowledge. Our goal is to shape, encourage, transform and compel. Would Christ have used DVD players and LCD projectors if they were available? I don't know. But I do know he used hands-on methods and experiential lessons to teach his disciples. And maybe because gadgets can be expensive, frustrating and time-consuming, I prefer a low-tech approach to teaching and preaching.

Following are some activities we have tried at my church. Maybe they will help you as you strive to make disciples in your own corner of the kingdom.

- On **Reformation Sunday** we brought in old doors and stood them up at the front of the room. Everyone was invited to write down those things they would change about their spiritual past and their church experience. Participants could come forward and nail those reforms to the door.
- On **Palm Sunday** we placed palm branches on the floor, and pointed out: "You will walk on the palm branches as you leave today. For just as the donkey walked on palm branches

as he carried Christ into Jerusalem, you will also carry Christ into the world."

- During **Holy Week** we passed around a bowl of scented oil to enhance the story of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet. On **Good Friday**, we filled communion cups with a piece of sea sponge soaked in apple vinegar and also distributed thorny branches. Over the years, visitors to our **sunrise services** have included a costumed gravedigger, an angel, a centurion and the Grim Reaper.
- On **Pentecost** we used gas cans, fire extinguishers and a fake fire in the baptistery (a room fan and orange crepe paper) as object lessons. We heard the call to worship read in seven languages, and scripture read by a woman in a firefighter's coat and helmet. A large shop fan rolled into the room became the "rushing wind."
- For **worship services** we have used band-aids, packets of seeds, reflective decals and salt packets stapled to the front of the bulletin as "hands-on" tools. Once we pasted a piece of paper on the front of the bulletin with the words "Do not look under here," with 1 Corinthians 10:13 waiting for those who looked.
- When we preached on the story where Christ told his disciples what *not* to take on their journey, we piled luggage around the room. We discussed the baggage we carry when we try and do **kingdom work**.
- During a lesson on **Peter's confession of Christ** we returned the offering plates to the congregation — not so they could make another offering, but so they could take a key. Each person left with a key to the gates of hell, reminding them they could help others escape from their prisons of despair.
- On **All Saint's Sunday** we invited anyone to come forward and share the name of a

departed loved one and light a candle in that person's memory.

- On **Thanksgiving** we invited volunteers to share what they were thankful for or to bring a written list of thanks and place it on the table.
- On **New Years Day** congregants came forward and brought a list of their hopes and prayers for the year and offered them to the Lord.
- As our congregation has faced opportunities for change and **vision casting**, we have questioned whether we would draw lots to determine God's will or await his Spirit to lead us (Acts 1-2)? Would we use old, traditional methods or rely on God? The sound of rocks rattling in an old wooden ice cream bucket was like thunder, and the phrase "bucket of rocks" is now part of our church lexicon. Similarly, each church member was given a compass when asked to pray for God's plans for our church.
- The cheapest trinkets can be shared with groups both large and small. To symbolize **celebration** of what God was doing in our church, each person received a party favor. Seeing members of all ages blowing toy trumpets, whistles and kazoos brings me joy to this day.

Our churches should never reinforce the notion that being a Christian is a spectator sport. If we can do something in Bible study or worship as a part of learning, maybe we will do something in our everyday lives as a part of our Christian faith. If we are going to call one another to action, then action should be part of the call itself . . . So use your imagination. Try something new. And let our Lord be your example. **BT**

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