

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

Andy Stanley on Preaching for Life Change vs. Belief - Episode 246

Preaching Best Practices for 2022 (Part 4)

How can we more effectively teach and engage the people who are connecting with our churches on a regular basis? Most importantly, how do we help those people take their next steps towards Jesus? In the final episode of our Preaching series, Andy Stanley, Lead Pastor at North Point Community Church, joins us to discuss preaching that helps people follow, not just believe in, Jesus.

Preaching for Life Change vs. Belief: Interview with Andy Stanley

Tony: I've noticed that your teaching has changed through the years. Will you explain some of the shifts that you've made?

Andy: I saw a YouTube video almost 12 years ago that so concerned me about what is communicated to the average church attender, especially this generation and the generation coming along behind us, in terms of how the Bible was referred to and how easily it's undermined based on a traditional view of the Bible. So I made an intentional shift in my language and teaching: I said we need to step back and leverage the people *behind* the scriptures and the stories of the people behind the scriptures, and bring that to the forefront, rather than simply saying "the Bible says."

Tony: Rather than just teaching me what the passage says and why it's true, you encourage me to see myself in the story. Is there something to this when you're considering how you're going to approach a message?

Andy: I've always intended to be application-oriented because I feel like people need to know what to do with what they've heard. That's kind of our pattern: "What do you want them to know? Why do they need to know it? What do you want them to do? Why do they need to do it?" I've leaned into that strategy for a long, long time. And, going back to what I just said, whenever we front load or contextualize a passage with the person *behind* the passage and a bit of their story, it actually makes it easier to find the tension point and the application point. Because all these historical figures have a story, and oftentimes it's their story that creates the connection point to our story.

Tony: You've mentioned the distinction between "believing" and "following" frequently in your recent messages. How and why do you emphasize that distinction?

Andy: We have so front loaded and emphasized salvation by faith alone, as opposed to works, and I'm afraid we forgot that we're *supposed* to work. The way the term "believe" or "believers" is used in the New Testament is not the way we use it today—and the same is true with the term Christian, it's almost a brand based on a set of beliefs: I'm a Christian because I believe _____. But in the New Testament times, they were called **disciples**. A disciple is a follower—somebody who's *doing* something. And as we know, doing is what makes the difference.

So I feel like in some ways we've forgotten what it means to be Christian. And I try to teach to our church that it's following Jesus, not just believing in Jesus, that will make your life better... It's not enough to be an admirer.

Tony: Can you share some of the practical approaches that you take in your messages to help people apply the teaching to their daily lives?

Andy: I always go back to these four questions: If there's just one thing, what do I want people to know, and why is it important to know it? What do I want people to do, and why do they need to do it again? That's the inspiration: What's the outcome of this? So I force myself to not move on to the next thing until I'm able to specifically answer those four questions. Especially this last year, I'm focusing on what we want people to do and why they need to do it. In other words, "What's either the benefit to them, the benefit to the society, the culture, or what's the benefit to their conscience in terms of following Jesus?"

This goes back to the system that I introduced in [Communicating for Change](#) years ago: What would happen if we all did this? And every once in a while, you'll notice in my sermons, I'll say: "Imagine if we just did this, the difference it would make right here in our community. Imagine if every Christian in America did this."

Tony: You made this statement in your new book, [Not In It to Win It](#): "Christians have reduced our faith to faith." What did you mean by that?

Andy: It goes back to what we said a little bit earlier—it's like Christianity is just a set of beliefs now. And obviously what we believe is fundamental and foundational, but being Christian is what we're called to **be**. We're not simply called to believe. In fact, there's far more in the New Testament about how to **be** Christian rather than how to **become** a Christian. If you follow Jesus' activities and look at his teaching, it's not simply about belief. It's how we live our lives that makes the difference.

Tony: What impact do you see our current culture war having on the next generation? And should that impact how pastors approach their teaching on Sunday mornings?

Andy: Approach is everything. In terms of how we approach preaching and teaching, how we engage politically, and how we engage with cultural issues, the approach is so important as we think about the next generation. Because my concern with the generation coming along behind us is not that they're *not* going to believe what we believe—it's that they're going to wonder if we believe what we say we believe, because they have a realistic expectation that we would live our lives in such a way that it reflects what we say we believe. So if we don't know how to *be* Christian, we communicate: "Hey, here's what we want you to believe." But there may be some doubt in your mind as to whether we truly believe it, because of the way we live our lives.

Tony: Any final encouragement you'd like to give pastors as it relates to their teaching and preaching?

Andy: I go back to the four questions we talked about earlier—because if you can answer those four questions and if it's super clear for you, it will be clear for your congregation. But, if as the communicator, you're a little bit unclear, it's going to become exponentially more unclear for the people who are listening. And don't depend on your personality and the hype—if you have a big charismatic personality, leverage it, but fill it up with practical content and be true to Scripture.

Next Steps

As we approach the development of our messages, we need to make sure the content addresses these specific questions:

1. What do we want people to know?
2. Why do we need them to know it?
3. What do you want them to do?
4. Why do they need to do it?

If we just get that right, it will dramatically improve our teaching, and more importantly, it will improve our ability to help people become more like Jesus.

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