

Relevant – A Very Trendy Word

Andy Parks and Devin Carlile

The term relevant has become a catch-word over the past several years. We hear how people, music, clothes, and even preachers (ministries) are relevant, but what does that mean?

People often consider someone or something relevant when they are at best just trendy. Trendiness is merely following trends; what's popular right now. Wearing trendy clothes, listening to trendy music and having a vocabulary full of trendy words does not however make you relevant. Trendiness can impact your image, shape the opinions of those around you, but alone it is powerless to actually impact the lives of those you come in contact with. Being relevant, however, has power to change not only your image, but your community as well.

Dictionary.com defines Relevant as:

1. Having a bearing on or connection with the matter at hand.
2. Pertinent to the matter at hand

Being relevant is not as much about understanding what the people around like as it is about understanding the people around you. “Having a bearing on or connection with the matter at hand.” What is relevant in the inner city will not necessarily be relevant to someone in a rural community, even if they enjoy the same trends of music and fashion. The power to impact your community does not lie in understanding what people like, but having a bearing on what your community needs.

Being relevant means that you are in touch with what is going on around you and you know what to do about it. Relevance does not exclude trendiness. Often, relevant people are also trendy, because they understand the people around them. But being trendy does not make you relevant.

Awareness is key to both being trendy and relevant. Shallow awareness – being aware of what people are talking about, wearing, listening to, watching – can help you be trendy. But relevance requires a much deeper awareness of those around you, of their hopes, fears, dreams, needs, hurts, joy and pain. Shallow awareness in the effort to be trendy is also often self-serving. Noticing so as to be noticed. Often, people follow what's trendy, and imitate it in their attempt to be noticed, liked and loved. Awareness in the pursuit of relevance needs to be about us as Christians being aware of what is going on around us more than it is about the unchurched being aware of us. We spend so much time trying to get everyone to see what we are doing, that we have little time left to explore what is the “matter at hand.” In our efforts to be noticed, we often act too quickly, without understanding the needs of our communities, and our actions are ineffective.

Our “matter at hand” is sharing Jesus with a world that needs to know him. Being relevant in

our communities means understanding, getting a grip on that reality; that people need to know Jesus or they will die and spend eternity apart from him. Perhaps we need a better understanding of eternity, or maybe we simply need a greater awareness of eternity. Most of us can relate to the story of the Good Samaritan, and most would stop to help someone badly injured. But that story is about people's spiritual condition. It's about people being beat up and left for dead on their journey toward heaven. And all too often, we come in close contact with people dying in front of us (spiritually) and we offer no help at all. The Bible asks us what good is it if we see someone hungry and naked and say "be warm and well fed!" but do nothing to meet their need? What are we doing about the needs in our community? Do we even see them? Are we aware of people's physical needs? Are we aware of their spiritual needs? If not, are we in any way relevant? If what we call "ministry" does nothing to meet the needs of our world (near and far), it's not really ministry. The church must become relevant if we are to accomplish the great task the Jesus set before us – making disciples of all people everywhere. And to be relevant, we must wake up to the needs of those around us, both physical and spiritual and begin designing our efforts to meet those needs. Have a look around. God want to use you to awaken faith in someone's heart. Are you relevant enough?