



That We May Love Them Well

How metrics can empower more effective ministry.

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It seems strange to think about data as a tool for loving others. But when we look to Scripture, we see that Jesus and Paul did exactly that.

*Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When **he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.** Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”*

Matthew 9:35–37

Jesus **gathered data** by taking stock of people’s needs.

He **analyzed that information** which motivated him to feel compassion.

He **acted on behalf** of the information and analysis.

In the book of Acts, Paul goes to the Jews at Pisidian Antioch and speaks to them as men of Israel. He speaks to the nonreligious in Lystra, citing nature, the harvest, and the ocean. And he speaks to the people of Athens, quoting their Epicurean and stoic philosophers.

“How did Paul know that in one place he should talk about nature, and in the other he should talk about poetry, and in the other he should talk about Jewish history? Because he knew people. Fast forward 2,000 years: We have tools to know people in a way that we didn’t have before, and those tools can be quite remarkable.”

ED STETZER, *Billy Graham Distinguished Chair of Church, Mission, and Evangelism at Wheaton College*



WHAT CAN DATA DO?

Inspire action.
 Challenge our assumptions.
 Prompt us to release bias and prejudice.
 Keep us from generalizing.
 Correct flawed conclusions.

Millennials have short attention spans, right?

Well, not when it comes to sermons. Recent Barna and Gloop statistics show that millennials across four major regions—the Dallas-Fort Worth area, Kansas City, Columbus and its environs, and South Florida—prefer lengthier sermons than Gen Xers or boomers do. In Kansas City, for example, 50% of millennials polled indicated a preference for sermons that lasted 31 minutes or longer; only 38% of Gen Xers and 29% of boomers said the same.

Responding to Knowledge

Brooke Hempell, Barna Group’s senior vice president of research, and her team noticed an unsettling contrast in a Dallas-Fort Worth dataset: While the city seemed to be flourishing economically and culturally, that trend did not bear out in the African American community.

“Data gives pastors the power to advocate and to make changes that are needed,” Hempell says. Armed with this information, pastors could meet with community leaders to better understand the wealth disparities. They may prioritize faith-and-work conversations in order to educate congregants on the workforce, economy, or housing markets that contribute to these numbers. Or they may preach a series on biblical stewardship and generosity, emphasizing the importance of investing in the local community.



DATA ISN'T MATHEMATICAL—IT'S PERSONAL

“Broadcasting has given way to narrow-casting.”

KARL VATERS, author, pastor, and small-church expert

With the ubiquity of the internet and social media, data collection has moved from lengthy chats to laptops. Unprecedented access to data and insights can help pastors know, love, and intentionally serve their people.

This shift prioritizes what marketers refer to as **need states**—a focus on what an individual person needs in a particular moment. What might need states look like in your congregation?

Loneliness, grief, or major transition in a post-pandemic world.

Dating and relationships for young adults, single middle-aged women, or the newly divorced.

Financial strain shared by the elderly, single-income young families, or college students.

When we're able to identify these shared needs, we can better shape our ministries and resources.

Like Jesus and Paul, your ministry can be empowered by what you see, your compassion can be stirred by what you learn, and your actions can be motivated by truth. Know your people, pastor, that you might love them well.