

LESSON ESSENTIALS

INTRODUCTION TO EVANGELISM

LESSON 6: KNOWING YOUR AUDIENCE

Successful evangelism needs to connect with the listeners. . The story we will talk about here will get you thinking about how to connect with people when you preach the Gospel. This lesson will help you identify possible barriers to evangelism and will give you tips on how to overcome them by changing your approach.

It's always difficult to reach out to people you don't know. Hence it is important to gather information about a person or a people group that you intend to evangelise to. Here's how to get started.

It is important to remain unbiased and non-judgmental while interacting with people of different worldviews.

Do you know the first secret to making a successful film? The secret lies in understanding the audience. That is probably the reason why filmmakers spend months and years trying to understand what's going to connect with the audience. The characters, the dialogues, and the situations go a long way in making a film a hit, because the audience can relate to it. The theatrics, action or special effects are only add-ons. As silly of an analogy as this may be, ministry is not too different. What you say and how you deliver the message matter a great deal. Your personality and your public speaking skills are just an added advantage.

It is wise to try to understand your audience before you try to explain the gospel message. This way you will be able to modify your message to better fit their needs, as well as explain to them concepts that may be different from their prior understanding. For starters, it would be helpful to know about their belief system, family background, social structure, religious beliefs, economic conditions and their political stance. However, even if you feel like you know all about your audience, it is important to remain unbiased. They may not believe exactly what or how you think they do. If you're able, start a conversation before you move to the Gospel message. Connect with them on a personal level so that you have a chance to tell the Gospel message in a way they understand. This way, not only will you know them better, they will feel like they can trust you when you explain to them about the Gospel.

The following case study of a boy from a South East Asian country will help you understand the significance of studying your audience. This second son of a fruit vendor is now in the business of selling fruits with his father. But this young lad wasn't born selling fruits. As a child, he spent several years in a monastery training to become a monk. The idea behind this was to gain 'merits' for himself and his family for a better life in their next births. Recently, when his grandmother passed away, his father spent a fortune in rituals that would supposedly earn her enough merits for the next life.

Just like the rich man in Matthew 19 who thought that it was 'his' good deeds that would earn him salvation, this boy's family also believed that their merits or karma could guarantee them a promotion post their deaths. So, his mother undertook the task of faithfully feeding the monks rice every morning, believing that they would transfer their merits to her. His father on the other

hand regularly performed ancestral worship rituals so as to keep the spirits happy. He also frequently consulted fortune tellers before making important business decisions. Heavily rooted in superstition, this family hailed from a country that practised a polytheistic religion as part of their national identity.

This boy meets a Christian who is acquainted with his culture. The Christian wants to tell the boy about Christ but starts by connecting with him on a personal level, asking him about his thoughts on God and if he has heard of Christ. The boy recounts the story of his cousin who was ostracized from the community because he became a Christian while studying in another country. Since he has left his national identity, he is blamed for every bad thing that happens in the village and is kept away from all the religious rituals that his family and friends are a part of.

Unlike his cousin, the boy does not understand the concept of God. He's more concerned about his good deeds, hoping that one day he'll be able to break away from the state of karma and attain nirvana. He does not think about the true God or the message of salvation, because he has never heard it. But this young lad is terrified of evil spirits and frequently participates in rituals to ward them off.

You may think that witnessing to him would not be easy. After all, you're likely to face many different barriers. As he believes in karma and self-effort and rejects the concept of forgiveness, salvation, heaven, and is not sure about God or gods, presenting a simple Gospel message may seem like an impossible task. But it's not. Once you've understood your listener, the next step is to look into Scripture to find passages that would be relevant to the person and his situation. In the case of the boy, you could start bridging the barriers by asking him how he can be liberated from karma? A good follow-up question could be how karma began. Once he's started thinking about the origins of sin, it might be a good idea to slowly introduce him to God through the book of Genesis, starting with Adam's sin and its consequences, and then explain Romans 1 and 5. While discussing Genesis, it would be important to highlight the Creator God, His attributes, the story of Abraham and how he inherited God's promises through faith and not his good works, the origin of sin and its consequences.

This is where you can introduce Jesus as Lord and Saviour to the boy, explaining to him why He came into the world and the power He wielded over the dark forces, and telling him about Gospel

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God's Word is truly powerful, 'living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword' (Hebrews 4:12). The Bible has so many verses that can speak to a person's area of need. We also have very unique testimonies, probably so that we can connect with different people. As you are challenged to reach out to diverse groups of people, don't forget to depend on the Holy Spirit to prompt you and tell you what to say. (Luke 12:12)

miracles where Jesus cast out evil spirits. In explaining Jesus' death, you could talk about how Christ frees us from the bondage of sin and even promises us eternal life. So, in this case, instead of starting with John 3:16, you are telling the Gospel message starting from Genesis. Then you explain the Gospels. The advantage of this approach is that you are using God's Word, but starting with what he knows – talking about good and bad karma, then leading to a conversation about where sin came from.

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IN REVIEW

- It is difficult to evangelise to a person or group if you are not familiar with their background. So, it would be helpful to learn what you can: about their belief system, family background, social structure, religious beliefs, economic conditions and their political stance before you start telling them about the Gospel. Don't be afraid to listen to their personal story before you tell them your message.
- The purpose of getting acquainted with your audience is so that you can change your approach so that they can best understand the message.
- It is important to rely on the Holy Spirit when you are struggling to relate to your audience and you don't know what to say.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- What are some of the ways you can start a friendly conversation with your audience, to get to know them better?
- What sort of discovery questions you will ask to know the worldview of your audience?
- How will you discern barriers in a worldview and build appropriate bridges from God's Word? From the story of the young man you read in this lesson, identify barriers that he had to understanding the truths of the Gospel.
- What are the challenges in learning and studying the worldview of a person or people group?
- Have there been instances when you have struggled to preach your message in a way that is relevant to your audience? What could the reasons behind it? Can you think of ways to overcome those challenges?

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