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RESOURCE: NEW BELIEVER'S GUIDE TO HOW TO SHARE YOUR FAITH
First Steps for New Christians
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The Cornerstones of the Gospel

Communication Is Critical

Jesus, the Master Communicator

Jesus never dealt with any two people in exactly the same way. He varied His approach from person to person. He was, after all, the Master Communicator. Central to His dealings with others was His compassion.

This is especially seen in Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:3-42). Scripture says that in spite of His busy schedule and all that He had to do, He "had to go through Samaria," no doubt knowing that there was a lonely, hurting woman who would be coming to a certain well in that region. As He was waiting for her at the well, there she came, drawing water in the heat of the day. She was an outcast, known for her immoral life. She had gone from marriage to marriage, each one ending tragically in divorce. And when she met Jesus, she was living in an immoral relationship with a man.

If anyone had the right to get up on a soapbox and give her a strong sermon about sexual sin, it was Jesus! He knew everything about her. He could have addressed all of the sins that she had committed. But He didn't.

As they conversed a bit, she became somewhat flippant in her responses to Him. Jesus could have responded, "Repent, you adulteress!" Yet, it is interesting to note that He did not do that. He saw behind the façade to what was really troubling this woman. Instead of hammering her for her immoral lifestyle, He went to the root of her problem: she was empty and separated from God. Then, lovingly, and tactfully,

Jesus shared with her that He, as God, could fill the void in her life that she had previously tried to fill with men. He essentially told her that if she drank from the “well” of relationships, she would thirst again. But if she drank from His well of living water, she would never thirst again. She accepted Jesus that day, and immediately became a witness. Jesus stayed in that town for two days and many people believed – largely because this woman told them about Jesus.

How different Jesus’ approach to that woman is from many well-meaning but poorly trained Christians today. They act as though they are robots, spouting the same clichés to each person they meet without recognizing each individual’s need. It is important to know to whom you are speaking and how best to grab their attention.

Know Your Audience

This was the very strategy Paul used when he spoke to the people at Mars Hill in Athens (See Acts 17:16-34). Athens was the cultural and intellectual center of the world at that time. But as Paul walked the streets of this magnificent city with its incredible architecture and gleaming monuments, he was troubled. Everywhere he looked, there stood a statue, an altar, a temple, or a shrine to some god. They were made out of stone, brass, and even gold, silver, ivory, and marble – beautiful works of art, but idols, nonetheless. The city was overrun with idols. In fact, it was said in that day that it was easier to find a god in Athens than a person.

Paul thought and prayed carefully about what he would say to these Athenians when he appeared before them. He could have understandably delivered a searing sermon on idolatry and false worship. But Paul saw what was behind it all. These people were largely ignorant. They really didn’t know any better. So, he stood before them and said, “Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious, for as I was walking along, I saw your many altars. And one of them had this inscription on it – ‘To an Unknown God.’ You have been worshiping Him without knowing who He is, and now I wish to tell you about Him” (Acts 17:22-23).

What a perfect statement! Talk about building bridges. At that moment, I’m sure that the Athenians were really listening.

Avoid Arguments

Another practical tip: Don't be drawn into an argument. Scripture reminds us:

Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will (2 Timothy 2:23-26, NIV).

The woman at the well tried to draw Jesus into an argument about the religious and cultural differences between Samaritans and Jews. Instead of entering into a fruitless discussion, Jesus brought her back to the main message.

No one has ever been argued into the kingdom of God. There is a place for disagreement and for clearly making your point. At the same time, however, we must be careful not to lose sight of our objective. The goal is not to win an argument, but to win a person to Christ.

Use Tact

We need to utilize something that is sorely lacking in the evangelism toolbox of many believers today. It is called tact. Tact is essentially putting yourself in the other person's shoes. It is an intuitive perception of what to say and when to say it. We do not need to unnecessarily alienate the person to whom we are speaking.

I read about a barber who, as a young Christian, attended a meeting one night where the speaker stressed the need to share the gospel with others. The barber knew he was lacking in this area, so he determined that he would speak to the first person who sat in his chair for a haircut the next day.

The next morning, after the customer had been seated and the apron was tucked around his neck, the barber began to strop his razor vigorously. Testing the edge, he turned to the man in the chair and blurted out, "Friend, are you ready to die and meet God?"

The man looked at the razor and fled out the door – apron and all! The barber had the right idea. He just needed to use a little tact.

Going back to Philip, that evangelist displayed his tact brilliantly as he shared the gospel with the searching man from Ethiopia. As that man read aloud from Isaiah's book, Philip came up alongside him and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (Acts 8:30). Now that is friendly, bridge-building stuff. He didn't huff, "Hey, you!" Yeah, you, you pagan! Did you know that you're going to hell?"

Instead, he sought to reach out to this man, and the Ethiopian responded in kind: "How can I understand this, when there is no one to instruct me?" (Acts 8:31). Then he invited Philip into his chariot to do just that. The result, once again, was a conversion.

Paul summed it up this way:

When I am with the Jews, I become one of them so that I can bring them to Christ. When I am with those who follow the Jewish laws, I do the same even though I am not subject to the law, so that I can bring them to Christ. When I am with the Gentiles who do not have the Jewish law, I fit in with them as much as I can. In this way, I gain their confidence and bring them to Christ. . . . Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone so that I might bring them to Christ. I do all this to spread the Good News, and in doing so I enjoy its blessings. (1 Corinthians 9:20-23, NLT).

Pray for God to give you sensitivity to whomever you speak about your faith. If you know them well, key in on their needs. If you don't, be sensitive and listen. You'll learn what is keeping them from the faith, and what you might be able to say to help. Don't argue, be tactful. You'll listen, and then you'll find that they will listen to you as well.