

TUTORIAL
7.7

Engaging at a worldview level

This tutorial discusses the second question in the area of *Word*: ‘Are they having God’s Word presented to them in a way that allows it to enter and engage their hearts at a worldview level?’

Last time

We reminded ourselves of the amazing fact that God is committed to communication, revelation. This is interwoven with His grace because nothing compels Him to communicate... no one earns the right to hear from God. More than simply making Truth available, He pays the cost of giving people genuine access to His Revelation of Himself. He invites us - His Body on earth - to share in this commitment and, like Him, gladly pay the cost.

We also talked about *access* in terms of how familiar an individual or a group is with the language in which they have the Bible available. This is not only relevant in cross-cultural church planting contexts but also in our own multi-cultural contexts. And finally, we thought about the need to use every available means to communicate God’s Truth without distorting the Message.

The second question under “W” for *Word*

- Are they able to access the Bible in a form that clearly and faithfully communicates God’s revelation to them?
- Are they having God’s Word presented to them in a way that allows it to enter and engage their hearts at a worldview level?
- Are they learning to give God’s Word its proper place and authority?
- Are they growing in their ability to correctly understand God’s Word as His complete Narrative, with Jesus Christ as the heart of the story and its interpretive key?
- Are they increasingly able to make use of God’s Word as He intends for His children and His Church?

This question is really an extension of the first one that we looked at in the last tutorial, although that was specifically talking about the *form* in which a person

or group of people are accessing the Bible itself: i.e. the language or medium in which it's available. But now we want to consider the way God's Word is being presented to them by others, ...perhaps by *us*. Here we're looking at more than just the words, sentences and paragraphs of the Bible itself - what the Bible itself calls *inspired* or "breathed out by God". We now want to consider how a person/group is having God's inspired, unchanging and infallible written Word shared with them. Again, what we're concerned most with is their degree of real access to God's revelation of Truth.

All of the different Truth-sharing contexts

If we were primarily focusing here on the presentation of God's Word in the more formal, corporate setting of a church - the kind that many of us from traditional Christian backgrounds are most familiar with - then we'd be talking about *homiletics*: "the art of preaching or writing sermons". And, of course, in many contexts, what is taught from the church's pulpit is most definitely a key part of the picture. In fact, as we move on to other W.I.L.D. questions, the whole area of how people are hearing God's Word taught authoritatively within the setting of the gathered *ecclesia* will come more into focus. But for now we're starting further back and asking a more general question about *any* situation where someone is not just reading/listening to the Bible but where they are also having it presented, shared and explained to them.

Questions about the *form* in which the explanation comes to them are very similar to those we asked about the *form* of the Bible itself. If someone is not familiar with the language of the Scriptural text they are engaging with, then it will also be challenging for them to understand any additional comments that are being made about it.

Two compelling reasons to value "heart language"

As we've said, it isn't our intention in this curriculum to make pronouncements like, "Everyone should be taught in their first language." But to "put our cards on the table" as it were, we do hold "heart language" communication of Truth as an ideal that should be vigorously pursued in many contexts. For one thing, our theology leads us to understand that God places a premium on there being representation from every language/ethnic group in His Church and ultimately around His throne. His glory will shine out for eternity in all its richness because it will be seen through a multi-faceted prism that's made up of people from "every nation and tribe and people and language" praising Him. So that in itself is a very potent reason for valuing opportunities to share God's Truth with people in their own languages. Secondly, our experience and all the evidence we see leads us to conclude that a group that has had Truth consistently presented in their own language (given many other factors that are touched on

in the W.I.L.D. outline) has a greater chance of growing and bearing fruit than one that only has access through a language they've had to learn.

But given that our perspective here is wider, taking into account the whole range of possible scenarios we can consider for sharing God's Word, perhaps the way we can state this is along these lines: *God's gracious commitment to providing access is compelling motivation for us, His co-workers, to keep moving towards the best possible forms of sharing His Word with others...whatever that means in the situation.*

Unleashing its potential

Back to our question: *Are they having God's Word presented to them in a way that allows it to enter and engage their hearts at a worldview level?* When we talk about allowing God's Word to do something, we're not inferring that as humans we control its inherent power. God says that His word is like a fire and a hammer that smashes rocks to pieces (Jeremiah 23:29). Paul called the Good News about Christ (which by extension refers to the whole of God's Word that points forward and backward to Him) "the power of God at work" (Romans 1:16). Elsewhere it is said to be alive and powerful, cutting through peoples' pretenses and defenses like a super sharp sword (Hebrews 4:12). Charles Spurgeon famously likened God's Word to a lion that shouldn't so much be defended as let loose.

So when we consider how God's Word is being presented to someone, we're obviously not questioning the power of God's Word. What we're asking - to badly mix these metaphors - is whether the fire is being fanned, the power unleashed, the hammer wielded, if the sword is piercing and the lion has been let loose. This touches, as do so many things, on the mystery of how God's Sovereignty co-exists with human free will, and how God channels His infinite wisdom and power through finite, flawed human beings like us. But we know that those things do co-exist and that He sends us out as His witnesses, storytellers and disciple-makers.

Our mandate to teach

Before He left the earth, Jesus sent the disciples out - and through them all His church - with the responsibility of *teaching* disciples from all the world's ethnic groups. The Holy Spirit came and gave - and continues to give - different ones in the *Ecclesia* special abilities or gifts for specific teaching roles in different situations. Paul, writing to his young disciple and co-worker Timothy, describes himself as a preacher, apostle and teacher of the Good News. Timothy is to hold on to the good teaching he's heard from Paul, to carefully guard this treasure so it's not changed or eroded, and then to pass it on intact to other trustworthy people who will do the same (2 Timothy 1:11 - 2:2). Later, in the same letter, (2 Timothy 3:16-17), Paul describes a servant of the Church like Timothy as having the resources within God's inspired Word to teach people

so that they realise where their thoughts and actions are inconsistent with Truth, so they can realign them and live as God wants, and to equip them for productive contribution in His purposes.

So when we consider a specific situation where God's Word is being shared, we need to ask ourselves if it is being done in such a way that allows its inherent power to flow freely. Does the person sharing (and that might well be us) take very seriously the responsibility and privilege? Are their own lives aligned to the Truth they are sharing? Are they gifted by God's Spirit for teaching in this particular kind of setting? Are they properly equipped and can they explain and apply it faithfully?

Our question uses three words that take us further in considering the *access* that a person or group is being given to God's Word; *enter*, *engage* and *worldview*. It digs down into the responsibility God gives to us as His witnesses, His Truth-bearers. It recognises that we haven't necessarily communicated just because we've said something. Even if we share a basic language with someone, we can all think of many instances in which the words we've used in a conversation have not ended up in clear communication. Of course there can be any number of reasons for confusion and misunderstandings, but one way of describing the most foundational layer in which communication does, or doesn't, happen is *worldview*.

Worldview commitments

In other parts of the *AccessTruth* resources we discuss this concept of worldview in much more depth than we will here (see Tutorials 6.1 - 6.4). We utilise the following definition, by James Sire, that is slightly technical perhaps, but helpful nonetheless for our purposes here of considering whether or not the way Truth is being presented helps someone have *access* or not.

Worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) that we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being¹.

There are some very far-reaching implications of the reality that people don't just have certain beliefs and values in the way that someone *has* a certain hair colour or a particular accent. As Sire correctly identifies, when we talk about someone's *worldview* we are talking about things they are committed to, or invested in. If a shipwreck survivor has been holding on to something grimly for days to keep themselves afloat, there's every chance they'll find it difficult to loosen their grip when a rescue boat finally arrives. People don't easily let go of the story or explanation that they are told - by themselves, by their society,

¹ James W. Sire. *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 5th Edition. Kindle Edition. 2009

and by Satan - makes sense of everything. The fingers of their souls, so to speak, have been holding on so tightly to their worldview for so long that it is painful to even open their hand so they can let go and reach for the Truth.

These commitments are on a cognitive level (i.e. related to logic and conscious thought) but they are also emotional...as Sire says, an "orientation of the heart". It's the default direction their lives head towards like a compass needle swinging back to point north. And so people have often never stopped to analyse what it is that is really motivating and driving them to be who they are, or valuing the things that they do; they don't know, or often don't care to know, why they think, speak and act the way they do. There is a strong impulse *against* that kind of scrutiny. It's too confronting, too risky, too painful.

And this worldview that each person holds is comprehensive, in the sense that it tries to explain all of his or her experience. Human beings are created specifically to be the listeners - the active participating audience - for God's true Story of all things. Of course we are fallen and corrupted through our choice to tell our own small, false stories. But we're still created to live in this world and to have sense made of it for us. That's not at all to say that peoples' worldviews are always coherent...that they don't have many gaps and inconsistencies. They most certainly do, but the difficulty that people face is finding any ground from which to evaluate the contradictions and weaknesses. They can't take off the "glasses" of their worldview to look at themselves or anything else without it. To change the metaphor, it's like the water in which a fish swims. It has no point of reference to imagine any other way of existing.

Preparing the soil

So the first thing we should be looking for in any situation where Truth is being presented is a real commitment being made to understand the listeners' worldview. Good intentions and a passion for sharing the Truth are absolutely necessary. But a love for Christ and others and a desire to share God's Word is not in opposition to a passion for understanding people's worldview commitments and fundamental orientations. In fact, not to do so often demonstrates a lack of love and respect; a preoccupation with ourselves, with our own worldview commitments and orientation. We must be willing to listen to and understand other people's stories before we offer God's wonderful Narrative with its complete and satisfying answers that people's hearts really desire.

Secondly, if a presentation of God's Word is going to enter and engage at the deepest level, it will be in the process of the listeners questioning their worldview commitments and orientation. Far too often, for example, in their eagerness to get to the "good part" - the Good News about Christ - servants of the Church fail to carefully prepare the soil, or rather, to wait for God's Spirit to use His Word to prepare the soil. If peoples' worldview allegiance remains

solidly in place, if the alignment of their hearts isn't being challenged, if they are still holding on tightly to their own "story", then the Sword isn't penetrating, the Hammer isn't crushing the stone, and the repentance that precedes faith is not taking place.

Finally, any efforts to share Truth should be focused on bringing people to stand before God in all His glory and grace. Although different programs and strategies, apologetics and convincing arguments, testimonies and personal stories might have their place, they are only ultimately successful if people are being helped to hear God's own voice speaking to them. It is Him revealing Himself, telling them His true Story, explaining who they actually are and how they stand in His eyes, drawing their eyes towards the only solution to their true needs, His Son Jesus Christ, giving them hope and purpose...this is how Truth enters and engages at the fundamental - worldview - level and produces repentance, faith, life, growth and fruit.

Some extra questions

To go along with the question: 'Are they having God's Word presented to them in a way that allows it to enter and engage their hearts at a worldview level?'

We can now add these:

- *Are those sharing Truth taking the responsibility seriously; are they qualified, gifted and equipped for that particular setting, and are they genuinely committed to getting to know and understand the worldview of those they're sharing with?*
- *Is God's Word being shared in a way that gives the Spirit opportunity to "prepare the soil" by challenging fundamental assumptions, commitments and alignments?*
- *Is Truth being shared with people in a way that leads them to stand honestly and humbly before God and to turn to Jesus Christ as God's answer to their deepest longings and needs?*



DISCUSSION POINTS

Engaging at a worldview level

1. In your own words describe how you understand the relationship between the inherent power of God's Word and the role that teaching (i.e. sharing, explaining, discussing, preaching, etc.) plays in "activating" the power of God's Word.

2. Reflect on the idea that there are a variety of qualifications and gifts related to different Truth-sharing situations. Do you agree with this?
3. Imagine you start talking to someone on a plane. The flight will land in two hours and you're unlikely to ever see this person again. You sense they are searching and somewhat open but know very little about God's Word. In this hypothetical scenario you don't know how they'll respond, but in general, what will your approach be - what are the key things you would hope to ask, or to say?