

TUTORIAL
9.4

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?'

Hebrews 4:12: For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.

That verse is quite appropriate as we think about God's Word and the inherent power of His Word in this tutorial. He's wanting us to be able to hear His Word so that its power can penetrate. It doesn't work if we have a copy of it in a language that we don't understand. It's important to actually have it in a format that we can understand, that the way it's communicated in our language is clear and so able to actually divide all the way to the innermost part of our selves and do what God intends for it to do. God's Word enters not only into hearts but also into a community as well and cuts right into it.

Last time

We looked at the first question from the WILD outline. We talked about many issues relating to people having access to a clear and faithful translation of God's Word.

In this tutorial we will discuss the second question in the WILD outline which is also 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?

Are those sharing Truth with them 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?

Greg talks about the absolute need to build relationships in a suspicious, former Soviet republic:

We began by building relationships, taking the time to get to know the people. It was very important for us to build a bridge for them through relationships. The suspicion that they had for us as foreigners was huge. They thought that one of our objectives was to somehow overthrow their government. It was very early on that a deep level of distrust was taking place, so one of the challenges that we had was to try to grow in our understanding of their culture, to grow in our understanding of what they did, to try to talk to them about aspects of God; that God actually does exist and how God can impact their lives and that there is truth.

Greg talks about the efforts they made to become good communicators in the language of the community they lived in:

The language we learned was a Russian language. That was the heart language of the people that we were working with. To understand the language, to be able to communicate clearly with them, that took time. For us we had the extra challenge of not only the people group that we were working with, but also with the deaf community. We began to learn their language. It was interesting to us that although you could have a complete society of deaf people living within a Russian culture of the time, they could have completely different cultures. Dealing with the Russians and dealing with the deaf were completely different. Their worldview is very different. Having to learn their language allowed us to be able to understand better how they saw the world, who they are in this world, and actually show them that we cared about them enough to learn their language clearly enough to communicate with them. When they had struggles, we could deal with it. When they had questions, we could answer those questions because we were able to speak both those languages.

Dave talks about how important it is for Bible teachers to understand the worldview of those they are teaching:

Well, it was very important that we had learned their worldview (the way they viewed the world around them) because, of course, it's from that perspective that they would receive everything that we told them. The fact that we understood their view of the spiritual forces and of the spirit beings that were floating all around them meant that we were able to present truth in a way that they would understand. There were many parts of their culture that we were able to use to help them better understand the truths of the Gospel. One of the areas that really proved to be helpful and beneficial is their court system. They have their own ways of dealing with wrongs within their society. It's not the same as ours, but there are three main elements to their court system that really made a good outline for presenting the Gospel.

First of all, they understand that when a wrong has been done, payment must be made. For example, if someone steals something or if adultery is committed or if they injure someone intentionally or kill someone, payment must be made. As long as payment has not been made, the offended parties have nothing to do with each other. They won't look at each other. They won't come near each other. Obviously, they will not speak to each other. Fellowship between them is completely cut off. Now, some people in our society would suggest that there's a balance system that perhaps if my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds, then surely God will accept me.

From their perspective, they understand that this doesn't make sense because as long as a deed has not been paid for, fellowship is broken and things are not back to what they should be until payment of some kind has been made. Even in our own culture, we understand that payment must be made. Say, for example, there was a doctor who, through his medical practice, saved the lives of a thousand people. Then at one point, he murdered one person. Well, I guess we'd say, "That's okay. I mean, he only killed one person, but he saved a thousand." So that should be okay, right? His good deeds outweigh his bad deeds. Well, even in secular society people realise that this doesn't make sense. When that doctor stands trial for murdering that one person, the fact that he saved a thousand lives is totally irrelevant. The people we worked amongst clearly understood that.

A second aspect to their court system is that they understand that when a wrong has been done, first payment must be made—but it must be the right payment. It must be the payment that is prescribed by the village elders, and generally that would include strings of shell money. If it's a serious crime it might also include live pigs, which are very, very valuable to them. They're domestic pigs. We said, "Well, what if a person said, 'I don't have any shell money. I don't have any pigs, so I'll give you something else. Maybe I'll give you a shirt or something else.'" They said, "No. That would not do." If the offending party doesn't have the right payment, he needs to get it from his relatives, from his brothers and uncles. They need to help him make this payment. It has to be the right payment. If you try to give the offended party the wrong payment, the offence will grow even greater. They understand that it must be the right payment.

Of course, we know from Scripture that there is only one payment for the sin debt that we all have and that is the blood of Jesus Christ when he died on the cross at Calvary. The third important element to

their court system is once payment has been made, it's a dead issue. They will never bring it up again. It's something I think they understand perhaps even better than we do. If a wrong has been done the village elders came together, they agree on the payment, and once the payment has been made and accepted no one will bring that issue up again. It will never be discussed again. If you bring that issue up after the payment has been made and accepted, now there's going to be another court case. Now you are in trouble because you brought up this issue that had already been paid for.

Is God's Word being shared with them in a way that gives the Spirit opportunity to "prepare the soil" by challenging fundamental assumptions, commitments and alignments?

Dave talks about how the animistic worldview was challenged in the community where they lived in the time before they taught God's Word:

Initially, when we were learning their language and culture, we just wanted to be learners. We didn't seriously question any of their beliefs early on because we wanted them to be open and honest and tell us everything that they believed. Then, as we got closer to the time that we were going to be teaching them God's truth, we did begin asking them questions about some of their beliefs; how they believed it was their own personal power that was controlling the rain and the growth of food in their gardens. It was their own personal power that controlled sicknesses. For example, there were certain individuals in our village who claimed to be rainmakers and we said, "There are places in the world where it almost never rains and if you could produce rain and go to that place, perhaps the Sahara in Africa, and produce rain there, then they would pay you a lot of money."

Some of them started to understand the fact that some of these beliefs, perhaps, didn't really fit with reality. Also, when they would talk about sorcery, they would talk about tying up a person's spirit and then eventually that it would squeeze the life out of that person and that person would eventually die. We started asking questions about that, too, as they understood that God is the Creator and so He's the Creator of human spirits. Can we really tie up another person's spirit that God has created? They started to question some of the beliefs. I remember early on in our teaching, when we were asking questions about some of these beliefs, and afterwards, hearing some of them discussing these things and starting to realise that, wow, the things that their ancestors had told them didn't all really make sense. Their belief that they had held onto without question was starting to unravel. It was encouraging to see the truth of God's Word do this.

Dave gives a description of the way they taught in order to address the worldview in its most foundational elements:

Once we had learned their language and culture well enough to communicate the truths of God's Word to them, we wanted to find out from them when would be the best times to teach and what's the best time of year with their gardening cycle. We worked all that out with them and initially taught them five days a week for about 45 minutes per session. We started at the very beginning of the Bible, first establishing the authority of God's Word and then getting into who God is. We started teaching in Genesis chapter one with Creation. We hit the high points through the Old Testament and, eventually, the life of Christ. It took several months before we eventually presented them the truth of the Gospel—salvation through Jesus Christ alone. At that point, a small church was born.

John talks about how he and Betty and the rest of their team contributed to the preparation for God's Word through their lives:

So anyway, one day I was talking with a couple of guys and I started to tell them that we'd actually come with a message. It was great that we could help them medically and honestly, I believe the medical program was a tremendous tool for building relationships and developing that trust. That was a very tangible way of showing them that we really did care about them and building those relationships. But I said to them, "It's been great that we could do that, it's been great that we could do some things to help you economically as well, but there's another reason we came and that's the most important reason. We've come with a message, and the One who made everything that you see around you wants you to know His Story. That's why we've left our families back in Australia and America and Chris and Ida have left their families and come here to live amongst you, and we've spent all this time learning your language. It's so that we can tell you this Story."

Now by this time, they knew that we were Christians, and they were pretty wary of that, but somehow I think God had been at work building these relationships and we'd been hard at work too. So I think they were fairly confident that we were on their side, that we were there for them, we cared about them and we'd had ample opportunity to show them love. They had seen that the things that scared the daylights out of them didn't scare us, and that had a huge impact on them.

In fact, one woman said to my wife, "Why aren't you leaving the house when your neighbours die because his spirit is going to come back and get even with anyone who's offended him. We're all taking

off and you need to take off too." And Betty said, "No, we're just going to stay. We're not afraid." The woman said, "Why aren't you afraid?" And Betty said, "Well, that's the real reason we've come here to live amongst you and are learning your language, so that we can tell you that." "This woman said to Betty, "Oh, I hope you learn our language quickly, because we want to know that."

There were lots of little incidents that I think had them thinking, "There's more to this than what we can see." When the time was right, we started what we call pre-evangelism, starting to prepare the people for the coming story.

In this setting John and Betty had opportunity to teach God's Word to a large group for an extended period of time:

And come they did, about 250 of them turned up every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The majority of those stuck right through for six months, the six months that it took us to work our way through the Old Testament. We spent four months on the Old Testament and about two months on the life of Christ. As we progressively unfolded God's story—that's what we called it, God's story—we just saw God do an amazing work amongst those people as His truth penetrated that darkness and illuminated their minds. For the first time, they heard the truth that there was a God who made them and who cared about them enough to send Someone to make sure they understood all He had done to redeem them. I think that period of my life was probably the most exciting six months ever. It was an incredible privilege of just witnessing God at work among a people who knew nothing of Him, and who, for the first time, had the opportunity to find out.

Greg discusses the challenges of getting down to a worldview level in a deaf community:

Literacy was a problem amongst deaf people so we had to work with them in the area of literacy, helping them understand how to read, how to understand the Bible, how to understand God's Word and what it meant for them. It was a big challenge for most of them. Much of the Bible was difficult for them to grasp. Even though they might've understood the word or been able to spell the word, to understand the depth of its meaning meant we had to teach this idea of what it means, a meaning-based understanding of God's Word. Amongst the Russians, and amongst the people group we worked with especially, they used a very different vocabulary from what was in the Bible, what was in God's Word, so actually helping them understand it from God's perspective and having them understand a different worldview was challenging.

Phil gives a cultural example of some of the commitments and alignments that need to be challenged:

Here's one of the illustrations that we used. They have divorce. You can divorce your wife and there's a little symbolic coin, like a small amount of money that you would give publicly to your wife, or the wife gives to the husband, depending on the situation, where it's like a final divorce saying, "We divorced." You can divorce, but nobody's free to marry somebody else until this symbolic little coin is handed over and now it's over.

We're saying, "What happens when, as a woman, this guy you know has divorced this lady over here and he comes over to you and he's telling you that he really loves you and he wants to marry you and you've got his whole heart and he's committed to you and nobody else, but you know for a fact that he's never severed completely this tie over here with this woman. He's still holding his back door open that says that he can go back to her at any time. What does that tell you as a woman if he's saying he's totally committed to you but he actually hasn't severed ties over here?"

They're like, "Yeah. He's just lying. He's a ..." They've got a word for one of those guys who cheats and takes advantage of women. They're like, "That's what it is." We're saying we trust God, but in our back pocket we've got kind of this backdoor openness kind of thing where we can get out of this and we actually trust a few other things.

We're trying to work with them, saying God's intent for us is total commitment and total rest in His sufficiency and what He's done on the cross. We're seeing guys as they understand and hearing it in their conversations, their prayers and the discussions and the teaching. I think it was always there for a lot of those guys, that they really did only trust Him and they realized this right from the beginning, but we're hearing this growing sense from them as a corporate identity, "We are people who trust only in what God did through Christ. That's what distinguishes us from the people around us, because the people around us are trusting what they've done. We're trusting in what Christ has done for us. It's not what we bring to the table in terms of, 'Here, God. Accept me for this reason.' We're coming empty handed and saying, 'It's what Christ has done for us.'"

Is Truth being shared with them 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?

Greg gives an example of a situation in which a high level of education proved to be a barrier to be overcome:

We were working with a people group that's actually considered one of the largest people groups in the country that we were working in, but the most unreached group in the area. A lot of times when people think of people groups, they have a perspective of uneducated or village-type situations. Although they may have lived in villages, the education level for these guys was astronomical. There were more PhDs amongst the people group that we worked with than any other ethnic group probably in Russia. Just to say that, there are probably more educated Russians than other group in the world, so it's almost safe to say that they're one of the highest educated people groups in the world of academics. There are astronauts, there are people that've created all sorts of things. They're very artistic. They're very good in science.

When we were working with them, their understanding of literacy and teaching them how to read wasn't our issue. It was hard for them to understand about who God is. Their ability to take what they've understood and actually reach into the community has been phenomenal to see. Today it's a very different society than it was 20 years ago.

Kaikou explains how key it was for them to engage with Bible teaching in their heart language so it spoke to the deeper areas of their existing worldview:

Previously, when we heard anything about the Bible, it was in the national language and it didn't really communicate to us. Then, when we heard God's Word in our own language, it entered right into our lives and God was revealed to us through his Word. In the very language that was used and in the underlying meaning that came through, we realised that God's Word was true. Before it was in the language of others, but now we saw it as our own.

Just as an example, it's like when we eat from another place, it just doesn't taste as good as the food grown in our own gardens. When we eat the food grown in our own soil, it is the most satisfying. I'm referring to the difference between hearing in the national language or hearing in our own language. Hearing it in the national language just doesn't taste as good to us and it is just not clear. Hearing it in our own language revealed the underlying things in our culture, like superstitions and traditions and our own self-efforts. It made those things clear and it showed us the way of faith in Christ. We realised there was nothing we could do. Our own efforts were useless. The only way to be restored to God is through Jesus Christ and what he did on our behalf. We clearly understood the true way of God after having heard His Word in our own language.

Philip talks about the need for clear, heart-level teaching so people truly understand the work of Christ:

A very important factor was hearing God's Word in our own language rather than in the trade language. For example, the issue of sin and God's judgement on sin was not clear to us before. Once we learned in our own language about who God is and what He's like, we realised that we owed a debt for our sin and that we would be judged for that. Then we were prepared to hear that God had provided the payment for that through the Saviour. We understood the good news that God had sent Him to deal with the debt of sin that we couldn't pay for.

The testimonies in this tutorial bring home the need to have God's Word presented in a way that allows it to enter and engage. The verse at the beginning of this tutorial reminds us that God's Word is a powerful, sharp, two-edged sword that He's fashioned to cut deep into the hearts of people and into communities. We've seen the importance of those who wield that sword to engage at a worldview level: understanding the culture, knowing language well, going the extra mile, understanding the situation in the context so the sword goes in and does the work, penetrating and exposing people's hearts and their pride and doing what God intends for it to do.



DISCUSSION POINTS

Engaging at a worldview level

1. In the video there was strong support given for living in a community long-term. In your view is that *always* necessary for church planting goals to be reached, or are other more short-term approaches sometimes appropriate? Explain your thinking.
2. Picture yourself in a conversation with a friend who expresses the strong view that it isn't necessary for a Bible teacher to spend years learning the language or understanding the culture and worldview assumptions of his/her audience. How would you respond to them?
3. Many people living in cross-cultural situations are faced at some point with confronting religious or cultural practices. Imagine what might be some of the long-term implications of either avoiding or getting too involved in those kinds of situations.