

Reaching the disinterested. NWA 2011

1. Listening to people of peace

Understanding defences

Defences are the initial barriers people put up in when conversations turn to spiritual matters.

1. I'm out of my comfort zone

– different communication styles: hedgehog vs rhino

2. I've been hurt in the past and don't want more

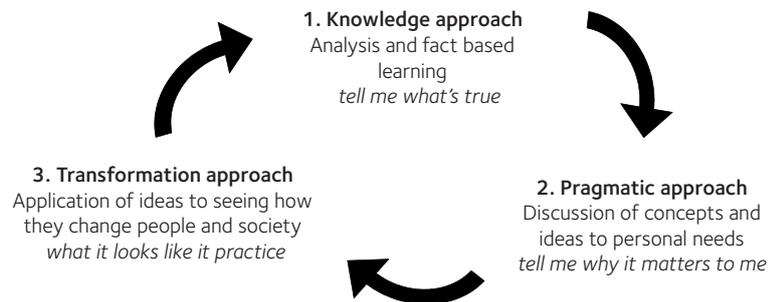
3. It's just a mask

– different communication levels:

- cliché
- facts & opinions
- feelings
- honesty

4. It's all about their agenda not mine

– different learning styles



Therefore grow in compassion for people

1. Discover your People of Peace

Matthew 10 & Acts 16

5. Pray regularly for People of Peace

Home groups; evangelism prayer groups

2. Show that you love them - see model of Paul in 1 Thess 2

- appreciate them don't criticise or condemn
- remember their name

3. Start by discovering their context - see model of Paul in Acts 17

- show a genuine interest in their lives
- discern why conversations about Christianity might be threatening
- seek to understand how they're wired by the questions they ask

4. Develop listening skills

- Look at them (show you're listening and pick up non verbal communication)
- Concentrate on what they are saying rather than half listening and with the other half of your brain trying to think of answers
- Keep praying for God's Spirit to fill you with wisdom and to open their heart
- Occasionally repeat what they've said in your own words to show you've understood / heard correctly. If you don't understand, ask for clarification

5. Understand different teaching approaches

Jesus taught in all sorts of ways because people learn in all sorts of ways:

- Two-way discussion seminar (Lk. 2:46–50); Outward bound assignment (Lk. 4:1–13); Preaching (Lk. 4:14–30; 6:17–49; 21:37–38); Practical demonstrations (Lk. 5:1–11, 17–26; 8:22–25); Parables (Lk. 5:33–39; 8:1–15; 10:25–37); Practical assignments (Lk. 9:1–9; 10:1–24); Question and answer (Lk. 10:25–37); Practical models (Lk. 11:1–13)

Jesus employed different approaches depending on where his audience was starting from:

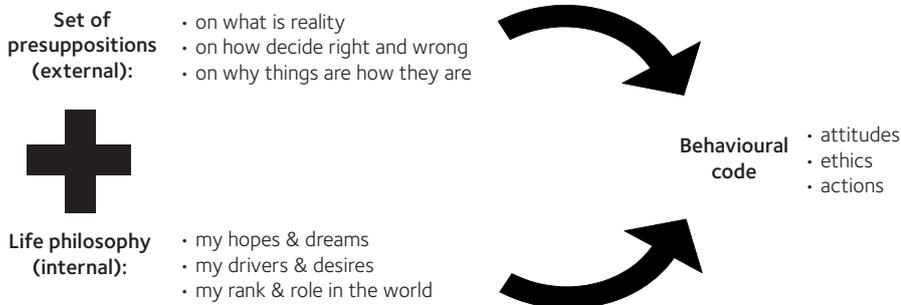
Religious knowledge but no personal encounter (John 3:1–21); Social and moral outsider (John 4:1–26); Disciple (John 4:27–42).

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2. Asking the right questions

Understanding defeater presuppositions

A 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) which 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 being." – James Sire¹



Every decision a person makes and action they take is determined by their beliefs about the world (presuppositions) and about themselves ('life philosophy' – focus of session 3). If they get these wrong, their whole worldview will be misaligned.

Some common false presuppositions:

1. The Material presupposition

2. The Now presupposition

3. The 'just a story' presupposition

The philosophical presuppositions that develop and are shared within a culture produce a set of 'defeaters'. Defeaters are a structure of 'common sense' consensus beliefs held by cultures hostile to Christianity which are so strongly believed to be true that the claims of Christians are automatically implausible.² There are many of these 'off switches' and if any one of them is engaged when talking to someone then from that thought onwards, they switch off.

1. Assumption defeaters – Contrary evidence (e.g., suffering and evil); God seen as angry and the Bible as full of violence and wars; Science, evolution and the trustworthiness of the Bible; Harsh actions in the name of religion and hypocrisy of corrupt church leaders

2. Tolerance defeaters – pluralism; relativism

3. Slow burn defeaters – materialism; narcissism

Therefore challenge presuppositions and suggest an alternative

1. Point out the holes in the logic

"An argument for God's existence is the impossibility of the contrary."³

• Preconditions

• Inconsistencies

• Arbitrariness

2. Use the questioning method

3. Suggest an alternative

Tim Keller: "I urge sceptics to wrestle with the unexamined 'blind faith' on which scepticism is based, and to see how hard it is to justify those beliefs to those who do not share them. I also urge believers to wrestle with their personal and culture's objections to the faith. At the end of each process, even if you remain the sceptic or believer you have been, you will hold your own position with both greater clarity and greater humility."⁴

People will be willing to look at the gospel of Jesus when they've revisited their underlying understanding of reality: 'have you ever thought what if...?'

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3. Releasing the grip of idols

Understanding false saviours

1. Identify idols

• The desert island test

– If you were put on a desert island what would you miss the most from your current life? If then you were told you could keep one thing from your current life (eg job, a relationship, a possession or status) what would you want to keep?

• The chain of command test⁵

- whose authority do I acknowledge? To whom/what do I give allegiance?
- at whose word of command do I sit up and take notice?
- upon whom/what do I depend? Who/what can sort things out?
- who/what can make me safe and happy?
- what needs to be in place for me to get on with life?

2. Identify the false saviour of works based religion

Luke 11: 52 "Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering."

• Martin Lloyd Jones' favourite question: 'are you really a Christian?'

Often they would answer, 'well I'm trying to be' to which Lloyd Jones would reply 'then you probably aren't!' He would go onto explain God's unconditional favour.

• The God question: 'What do you imagine God thinks of you right now?' Their answer reveals a lot about their understanding of living in life transforming grace.

Richard Lovelace: Christians know in theory that they are justified by faith alone but in practice live as though their works and actions justify them. In their "day to day existence" they rely on "their sanctification for their justification... drawing their assurance of acceptance with God from their sincerity, their past experience of conversion, their recent religious performance or the relative infrequency of their conscious, wilful disobedience."⁶

Therefore know the contrast of expulsive hope

The expulsive method involves three steps:⁵

1. Step into their story: what is their idol and what need does their idol claim to meet?
2. Show up the idols as destructive frauds: fool's gold of no lasting value.
3. Show off the gospel as subversive fulfilment: present Christ as the One in whom we find rest, whose promises are lasting treasure.

Eg temptation to look for comfort in food, drink or sex:

- Show the idol up: it never gives a comfort which truly satisfies
- Show the gospel off: the comforting promise of Jesus: 'come to me all who are heavy laden and I will give you rest'

Eg temptation to look for security in what we own

- Show the idol up: it never gives a security which truly satisfies
- Show the gospel off: the secure promise of Jesus: don't worry about the food you eat or clothes you wear, 'your Father in heaven knows you need them.'

Eg temptation to look for purpose in what we do:

- Show the idol up: it never gives a purpose which satisfies
- Show the gospel off: the purposeful promise of Jesus: 'I have appointed you to bear fruit that will last.'

Eg temptation to look for identity in what others think of us:

- Show the idol up: never gives an identity which satisfies
- Show the gospel off: the identity promise of Jesus: 'As the Father loves me so I love you.'

Eg temptation to look for justification in what I do for God:

- Show the idol up: never delivers the righteousness God requires
- Show the gospel off: the justification promise of Jesus: 'I am the way, the truth and the life.'

Know why you're glad you're a Christian:

• Christian difference 1. I know who I am

- Identity from Relationship; protection of ultimate comfort as 'God's dearly loved child'

• Christian difference 2. I know what I'm here for

- Meaning from Role; purpose of eternal significance as 'God's creation transformer'

• Christian difference 3. I know where I'm going

- Comfort from Rest; hope which surpasses knowledge of 'God's happy ending home with him'

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4. Presenting the joy of salvation

Understanding false doctrines

False doctrines that block people's sight of reality:

1. No God: 'My external value gives me internal value.'
2. No sin: 'It's not my fault.'
3. No problem: 'I'm good enough for God.'
4. No worries: 'All 'good' people go to heaven.'

Therefore teach the story of Scripture

Creation (and the attributes of God)

'God said... and it was done; God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule." God saw it was very good.' (Gen. 1:9, 26, 31) Connection point: Uniformity of nature and universal laws

Fall (and the problem of sin)

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23) Connection point: Moral absolutes

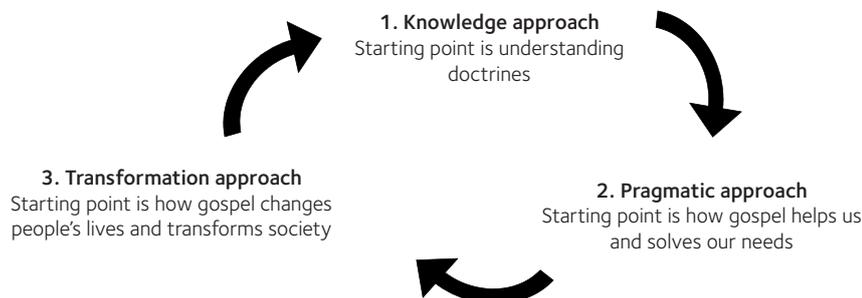
Salvation (and the reality of atonement)

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1) Connection point: Personal freedom and dignity

New Creation (and the hope of whole creation liberation)

Now the dwelling of God is with men... There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. (Rev 21:3-4) Connection point: Death, eternity and meaning

- 1 Cor 1:22-25
Same gospel, different objections



• Nudge theory

'A nudge, as we will use the term, is any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people's behaviour in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives. To count as a mere nudge, the intervention must be easy and cheap to avoid. Nudges are not mandates. Putting the fruit at eye level counts as a nudge. Banning junk food does not.'⁷

Three types of spiritual nudge:

1. The game changing evidence for the resurrection of Christ
2. The life changing gift of grace which can only be received from one amazing source and has to be offered for free
3. The sight changing reality of a personal encounter with God's love and radical kindness

REFERENCES

- ¹ James Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 122.
- ² Timothy Keller, 'Deconstructing Defeater Beliefs: Leading the Secular to Christ' (<http://www.redeemer2.com/themovement/issues/2004/oct/deconstructing.html>).
- ³ Quoted in a talk by Kerrigan Skelly (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdfkxSAPHCQ>)
- ⁴ Timothy Keller, *The Reason For God: Belief in an Age of Scepticism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2008), xviii.
- ⁵ Dan Strange, Oakhill College (Rules of Engagement Seminars, July 2009).
- ⁶ Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 101.
- ⁷ Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein, *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness* (London: Yale University Press, 2008), 6.

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