

LESSON 7 Consider Your Approach

People are all different. Even within one nation, one people group, or one family, you cannot treat everyone alike. What is effective in one country may not work in another. Very often we must use several different approaches with one person. When we speak of approaches in personal evangelism, we mean the steps we take to reach a person for Christ.

You may ask what specific method can be used for a certain person. There is no single method that always works. You must keep trying until you find the right approach. Be willing to change your method when necessary, and let the Holy Spirit lead you.

We have just studied how we can overcome some important cultural barriers. Do keep that in mind as you study how to approach people.

The Plan

- A. Be Natural
- B. Do Not Condemn
- C. Show Respect
- D. Have Concern

The Goals

1. Show a positive, natural approach in sharing the good news.
2. Give two biblical examples of God's attitude towards sinful men.
3. Give an example of how a respectful attitude can bring results in personal evangelism.
4. Explain why we need to show concern for people.

A. BE NATURAL

Goal 1. Show a positive, natural approach in sharing the good news.

If we are to win souls, we need to understand what approaches will help us to share the good news. First, we must let our words and actions be living examples. Then we must be natural, and look for ways to share with people from a point of view they will understand.

Jesus approached the Samaritan woman as a traveler in need of help. Even this sinful woman could be of help to Jesus. He did not think of himself as too important to be helped by her. On the contrary, He asked, “Will you give me a drink?” (John 4:7). In my country this kind of approach is called the *stranger* or *traveler* approach.

By using such a natural approach, Jesus was able to meet the innermost need of this woman. He was able to give her His living water. We read in the Old Testament that Abraham's

servant used this same approach at the well when he asked Rebecca, ““Please give me a little water from your jar”” (Genesis 24:17).

People are often eager to help others in need. If you give them the opportunity to do just a little service for you, they are likely to listen to you as you share the good news.

The apostle Paul used the natural approach. On visiting Athens, he was very sad when he saw that the entire city was full of idols. Yet when he spoke to the people, he used wisdom:

“I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.” (Acts 17:22–23)

By this simple method of talking about something in their lives, Paul got their attention. Even though they were idol worshippers, he was able to pass on the good news by making use of their worship of idols. As a result, some of them joined him and believed (Acts 17:34).

Suppose the apostle Paul had said, “You are sinners. You will go to hell. An idol worshipper will never see God.” Maybe the people’s response would have been much different. Probably no one would have believed him that day.

We cannot win people with a negative approach. We must identify with them by being natural and positive. Several years ago I led my blind uncle, a pastor, to a village. The people in this village made animal sacrifices in hopes that their gods would be pleased with them. My uncle told them that animal sacrifice was not a new thing. He told them that God was pleased with sacrifice, and that at one time He told His people to do this regularly.

Up to this point, the whole village just stood there listening. They had never heard such a thing before. They were used to negative approaches. Then my uncle went on to explain that

when the time came, God sent His Son Jesus as a sacrifice. He told them that Jesus died on the Cross to save all humanity. And from that time until now, God no longer wants animal sacrifices. Jesus has taken care of it all. We can come to Him, speak to Him, and He will hear us.

My blind uncle used a positive approach to a subject of interest to all the people and was able to draw many of them to Christ. Some of these people are now spreading the good news about Christ.

Application

- 1** How can we best help those who are living a sinful life?
 - a)** Tell them they will go to hell if they do not change.
 - b)** Join them in what they are doing so we can help them more.
 - c)** Show how our sinful life has been changed by Christ's love.

2 Write 1 in the blank space in front of each approach that is positive. Write 2 in the space if the approach is negative.

- ... **a** Being critical
 - ... **b** Being natural
 - ... **c** Being helpful
 - ... **d** Receiving help
 - ... **e** Judging
 - ... **f** Showing love
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B. DO NOT CONDEMN

Goal 2. Give two biblical examples of God's attitude towards sinful men.

God has not condemned us. When Adam and Eve sinned, God could have destroyed them at once. But He did not. Instead, He sought them, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9).

During the time of King David, the world was filled with sin. People of all nations were worshipping idols, and some were sacrificing their children to their gods by putting them into fire (Leviticus 18:21). Even the people of Israel had abandoned their God and had become like other nations. Of such widespread evil King David wrote:

They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. . . . All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. (Psalm 14:1, 3)

You would think that when God looked upon the world, then and now, and saw its sin, He would have condemned us. But no, listen to what He says:

“Come now, let us reason together,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.” (Isaiah 1:18)

God is pleading with the human race. He does hate sin, but He loves the sinner. When He looks down from heaven, He does not see merely sinful people. He sees people sitting in darkness, not knowing where to go and what to do. He sees them damaged by sin. In spite of all this, He loved the world so much that He gave us His only Son. He did not want to condemn the world, but He wanted to save it (John 3:16–17).

Jesus did not condemn us. It was not part of His mission. When He talked to the Samaritan woman, He knew she was living in sin. He knew that according to the law she should have been stoned to death. But He had compassion, and He offered her eternal, living water. He knew that this living water would draw her to God and away from sin (John 4:10).

We read in the Bible about another woman charged with adultery. There were more than two witnesses against her. No one, not even her husband or the cry of her children, could have saved her from being stoned to death. But Jesus came to her

rescue and said to her accusers, “If any of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7). No one was found without sin to cast the first stone. Jesus alone would have been the one to do it. But He said to the woman:

“Has no one condemned you?” “No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.” (John 8:10–11)

Imagine this woman going back to her home, rejoicing because she had been set free! Jesus was not sent to condemn but to give life to all those who will believe on Him.

Let us follow our Lord’s example. Our work is to give the message of hope to those whose sins have already condemned them. We must approach them with His love, seeing them through His eyes.

Application

3 What was Jesus’ attitude to the two sinful women?

- a)** He punished them.
- b)** He forgave them.

4 What was God’s attitude toward the Israelites when they sinned?

- a)** He wanted to punish them
- b)** He wanted to wash them white as wool.

5 What was God’s answer to humanity’s sinful condition?

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6 Why did God send Jesus to die for our sins?

- a)** Because He hated sinners so much
- b)** Because He loved us so much

7 What should be our attitude toward sinners?

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C. SHOW RESPECT

Goal 3. Give an example of how a respectful attitude can bring results in personal evangelism.

We have already talked about the importance of knowing how to approach those whose age or position are different from yours. We see many examples of this in the Bible.

Look at the way a little Israelite girl approached her mistress. She said, “If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy” (2 Kings 5:3). There is great wisdom in such an approach. Being young, being a servant, and living in a foreign land, the young girl could only suggest to them what she felt would help. When she did so, the result was positive, and her master, Naaman, went to the prophet.

Again, when the prophet told Naaman to go and wash himself in the River Jordan, he could have made the wrong decision. Because of his position, he did not want to wash himself in the dirty water. He was going to go back home without doing as the prophet said. But his servants approached him: “My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, “Wash and be cleansed”!” (2 Kings 5:13).

This careful, positive approach to their master made him willing to humble himself and go down into the muddy waters of the Jordan River. As a result, he was healed completely!

In my country, many villages have been opened to the gospel because the approach was positive. Some are still closed because of a wrong approach, even though the Christian workers had the right intentions. There may be times when the right approach is straight or direct. But we must be certain that we are led by the Holy Spirit at all times.

Application

8 Give an example of how your respectful attitude helped you witness to someone.

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9 The story of the little Israelite girl teaches us that we can show respect by

- a)** showing concern.
- b)** not saying what we think.

10 What do you think would have happened to Naaman if his servants had been afraid to speak the truth to him?

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D. HAVE CONCERN

Goal 4. Explain why we need to show concern for people.

In personal evangelism, more than anywhere else, we should have concern for other people's needs. As those sent by Christ, we should learn to walk where He walked and let our hearts be touched with the needs around us. Human needs are basically the same everywhere.

Jesus attended a wedding ceremony that He was invited to, and because He was there, He was able to meet a need. Suppose He had refused the invitation. The joy of the wedding might have turned to sorrow, and His disciples might not have believed in Him so soon. We would not have known of His loving care in this situation (John 2:11).

When a woman from Sidon cried out to Jesus on behalf of her daughter who was possessed by devils, He met her need. Though His earthly ministry was demanding, He did not remain indifferent to her cry. Jesus wept with those who wept, and He rejoiced with those who were happy. You and I have been given the same mission.

During an evangelistic campaign many years ago, a deacon and I were going from compound to compound, inviting people to our evening service and sharing with them Christ's good news. In one compound, we found a woman whose child had just died. Many people were there to comfort her. We talked to the woman and her husband and shared with them the experience that Eve had when she lost her son, and how God had comforted her by giving her another son (Genesis 4:25). We talked about King David who knew sorrow too, and how God had comforted him. The hearts of these parents were opened as they both asked for prayers. We asked God to comfort them even as He had done for Eve and others.

One year later, this same woman gave birth to a lovely daughter. She had experienced God's comfort in a personal way. The only thing these parents regretted was not having met Christ before.

Because we were concerned with their need, God was able to do wonderful things in their lives. And through their testimony, other people in the village have accepted Christ.

Application

11 Now it is time to practice what you are learning. In an earlier lesson you wrote the name of someone with whom you would like to share the good news. You have been praying for that person. Now begin to share your Christian experience with this person. Write his or her name here, and the date you first shared your experiences with him or her. Then add other names and dates as you share with people.

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Check Your Answers

- 8** Your answer. I hope you are always respectful. Remember that you can be truthful with people about their spiritual needs if you speak in love.
- 1 c)** Show how our sinful life has been changed by Christ's love.
- 9 a)** showing concern.
- 2 a** 2
b 1
c 1
d 1
e 2
f 1
- 10** Probably he would not have been healed.
- 3 b)** He forgave them.
- 4 b)** He wanted to wash them white as wool.
- 5** He gave His Son, Jesus, as a sacrifice for our sin.
- 6 b)** Because He loved us so much
- 11** Remember that you are to plant the seed and water it. God will do the rest
- 7** We should follow Jesus' example and love them, not condemn them.

