Re: Presenting Jesus: “Listening to Hear”

Brief Review of Re: Presenting Jesus

- We are to be ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor 5:17-21)
- 7 Principles of Evangelism: (1) Show respect, (2) build bridges, (3) understand what they believe, (4) speak their language, (5) reasoned persuasion, (6) clarify good news and (7) challenge heart and mind.

Moving People from Distrust to the Kingdom

- We are seeking to engage with people wherever they are at with Christianity. Often when we engage with non-Christians we skip straight to principle 5 (1 Peter 3:15).
- Many people in “post-Christendom” are likely distrustful of Christianity, complacent with their current lives, and/or operating from a very different worldview than our own (e.g. naturalism, postmodernism, etc.).
- How can we reason with/ clarify/challenge people with “gentleness and respect?”

“Listening to Hear” in Evangelism Research

“Evangelism Research” intends to engage with non-Christians by listening closely to their worldviews and spiritual attitudes. It posits that we are to be learners of the non-Christians around us. Dayhoff’s methodology is centered on five questions designed to engage with non-Christians in a non-condemning, engaging way. The questions are as follows:
- Where do you think the world came from?
- What do you believe about God?
- What do you believe about Jesus Christ?
- What do you personally believe about life after death?
- If you could ask God one question, what would it be?

These questions help us to learn about the spiritual background, worldviews and longings of people’s hearts. They function on some level as pre-evangelism.

Key Themes of “Listening to Hear” in “Evangelism Research”

- Many people want to be heard, even researched.
- People often “talk themselves to God.” As they discuss their responses, they may begin to recognize their spiritual needs.
- The research is more concerned with how people respond than with what people respond with.
- Christians in a variety of settings can certainly use this methodology as well by asking thoughtful questions and listening well to the non-Christians in their lives.

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1 The research element of the project is closely based on Al Dayhoff’s “Evangelize Today.”
2 Rather than being concerned with gathering hard data, as the scale of this modest project is unable to gain much helpful information in this category, the project will seek to focus on soft data. That is, the data which is full of opinion, belief, certainties and uncertainties.
Building Trust and Relationship through “Listening to Hear”

- Non-Christians will each be dealing with loneliness, frustration, and lack of purpose among other things that we all deal with. Asking sensitive, probing questions is the first step to helping them recognize deeper needs in their lives.³
- Relationships are the crux! We want to love our neighbors by getting to know them well through relationship.
- Asking good questions paired with engaging and loving people well will help us to discern how and when to proceed to principles 5-7. “One good question is worth a thousand answers.”⁴
- Take a moment: Think through the relationships that they already have with non-Christians in your life (specifically here in St. Louis) and also places in your lives where they have the potential to “listen to hear.” Feel free to jot down names or places:

Final Thoughts on “Listening to Hear”

- Many people can see through dishonesty and do not want to be “truthed.”
- Asking questions in a compassionate way, and then listening well, will help to open doors for gospel conversations.
- This is a very early step in “presenting” Jesus. Patience is paramount!

Discussion Questions

2- Read John 8: 1-11. How does Jesus engage with people seemingly distant from the Kingdom?
3- Read Acts 17:22-33. What is unique about Paul’s presentation of the gospel in Acts 17? How do you suppose he knew the worldview and culture of the Athenians so well?

³ Michael Green, Evangelism Through the Local Church (Nashville: Oliver-Nelson, 1992), 265-266.
⁴ Don Everts and Doug Schaupp, I Once Was Lost: What Postmodern Skeptics Taught Us About Their Path to Jesus (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2008) 55.