

Reference our culture....Share God's Love! 10-05-14
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Week 4 of "More Than Survivors": How to thrive spiritually!

One way we rise above life and become 'more than survivors' is to live with Purpose!

How? By Sharing God's Love (so that all men might be saved)

Today, how can we reference culture to talk about God to others? How can we build a bridge?

What is culture?

The ways that a group of people live (their values, customs & practices) at a specific time and place.

Culture is broken down by:

- Youth Culture (language, dress, attitudes)
- Pop Culture (music trends, dress, social media, arts)
- Church Culture (open / closed, modern / traditional, stuffy / come as you are)

Other words we might use:

Customs; Traditions; Values; Society

Billy Graham's Story

In the early 1940's as a young pastor, Billy was invited to speak on a weekly radio program. Every time he spoke he started with the culture around him.

"I built my radio talks around the events of the day. Keeping up with current events through newspapers and radio news programs, I began each message with a reference to something people would have been hearing and talking about that very day. Then I moved into a biblical message, showing that God and the Scriptures are relevant to every problem. . . ."

Since 1943 he used these steps to share the gospel of Jesus:

- Start with the common denominator of cultural happenings and
- establish a point of identity with your audience

- share the truth of God with them
- Do all believe? NO! But some do. In Billy's ministry, thousands have!

This is the approach the Apostle Paul used in **Acts 17**. Let's read together beginning in vs. 16 (16-23):

"While Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy in Athens, he was upset because he saw that the city was full of idols. In the synagogue he talked with the Jews and with the Greeks who were worshipers of the true God. He also went to the public square every day and talked with everyone who came by. Some...philosophers argued with him.

Some of them said, "This man doesn't really know what he is talking about. What is he trying to say?" Paul was telling them the Good News about Jesus and the resurrection. So they said, "He seems to be telling us about some other gods."

They took Paul to a meeting of the Areopagus council. They said, "Please explain to us this new idea that you have been teaching. The things you are saying are new to us. We have never heard this teaching before, and we want to know what it means." ...

Then Paul stood up before the meeting of the Areopagus council and said, "Men of Athens, everything I see here tells me you are very religious. I was going through your city and I saw the things you worship. I found an altar that had these words written on it: 'to an unknown god.' You worship a god that you don't know. This is the God I want to tell you about."

Paul is not naïve about the culture and the evil around him!

- He was 'upset', troubled, by what he saw, just like many of us are today
- Not many looking to God, not much that is holy and pure
- He had knots in his stomach while he began his ministry in Athens

Instead of being turned off by non-religious cultural things (idol worship) Paul was motivated to get involved. Here are 4 Principles to referencing culture so we can share our faith in God.

The first principle: (about effective personal evangelism)
Celebrate the Mission (instead of despairing over sin!)

For Paul:

- He didn't distance himself from sinners
- He didn't rant and rave about negative this and negative that...
- He saw that people were hungry spiritually, that they wanted something 'more' from life
- He had the answer, and was willing to find ways to communicate this with others

Second principle: Start with receptive people!

What did Paul do?

- Who had something in common with him? Jews.
- Who spoke his 'language'? Jews
- He must have been bi-lingual because he also spoke with Greeks
- What did Jews and God fearing Greeks have in common with Paul?
 - 1 God (though they didn't know correctly about Jesus)
 - OT / The Bible was respected
 - Didn't worship idols (which he saw all around the city)
 - So Paul had a starting point...we have friends and co-workers who have heard but have not committed to Christ; we should engage them in spiritual conversations to lead them deeper into genuine faith.
 - **Great Question to ask is this: Are you a Christian?
Tell me about Jesus!**

Third principle: Expect resistance (from people who don't go to church!)

Paul's welcome in the marketplace was marginal at best.

- Some called him a babbler
- Others were curious: "Let us hear more"
- Others were just skeptical and suspicious
- Yet some believed
- We should **EXPECT** the same

**Fourth principle: Celebrate what others value,
(and they will value what you have to say)**

Someone has said, “You catch more flies with honey!”

It’s what Billy Graham found to be true in his ministry.

1. Nobody paid attention to Paul till he affirms their spiritual searching:

“Men of Athens, 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.”

- Muslims **help the poor**
 - People who pray are **Praying! Yea!!!!**
 - Co-worker has a religious picture—“Wow, I see you value faith...”
2. But that’s not all Paul did. He also quoted from a couple of the Greeks’ poets. He could dialogue with them. He didn’t “just speak about God!”
 3. So instead of mocking and judging their pagan pursuit of spiritual truth, he complemented them. Wow!! Who does that now-adays?!
 - We are afraid of others religions
 - We believe they are wrong (they are!) but don’t feel confident addressing them
 - So we bad talk about them or simply say “It’s / they are wrong!” and then the door is closed on any further conversations
 4. The results of Paul’s approach? Some became believers! Not all, but some. He earned the right to be heard. Have you?
 5. The key? Meet people where they are. Be authentic. Accept their position in life. After all, didn’t someone do this with you?
 - a. Show interest in what interests them
 - b. Affirm them by affirming their affections / pursuits
 - c. Celebrate the person before sharing Jesus
 - d. Ever hear the expression: “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

Good Points—Notice:

1. Paul wasn’t afraid of false religion / idols

2. All the idol worshipping didn't influence him
3. He **thrived spiritually** by meeting culture head on but without giving into their power

Today's Application:

1. Do you read novels? Non-Christian books?
Do you watch non-Christian movies....have you thought of spiritual parallels that can help you talk about your faith?
2. TV shows like Survivor or Law and Order can be used to spring board into spiritual conversations
3. Say something positive about the interests of the people around you, building bridges so you can be heard regarding your faith down the road

"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who is wise wins souls."
-Prov. 11:30, NASV

Live on purpose this week, reference the culture around you and be wise by sharing God's love!