




THE COMPASS

A TOOL FOR DISCIPLERS

Responses to the Gospel

Conversation On the Journey

If your disciple has spent any time sharing his faith, he has probably seen a variety of responses. Hopefully, he may have seen someone genuinely place his faith in Christ. There is nothing like seeing someone's life changed by the Gospel to make you love evangelism. At the same time, the opposite is true. If he's ever had someone respond with extreme negativity, he may have become disheartened and concluded that evangelism is pretty beat. You want to step in and show him that it is normal to get varied responses. It happened to Jesus. It happened to Paul. It's going to happen to him, too. Normalizing that for him can help him stay in the game where God can use him to make His glory known.

The last couple of verses of Acts 17 do a great job encapsulating the three major responses. A brief study through this text can help your disciple recognize likely outcomes, and be prepared for them. By the way, we are just looking at vv. 32-34 in this lesson, but the chapter is loaded with incredible insight on how to share the Gospel in a pluralistic culture such as ours. Cru. Comm has a study on this chapter. Going over that material may be helpful during a different discipleship time.

As we jump into the narrative, Paul has just finished doing an incredible job laying a foundation for the Gospel. With great grace and tact, he has warned them of the judgment to come - a judgment that will be carried out by a man who has risen from the dead.

Luke records that there are three responses that people show. Take a look:

The first response is found in v. 32. "When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered." This is the worst-case scenario everybody fears. Usually our response to this response falls into one of two categories. One is that we feel like a dork. We think people are making fun of us, or that we are perceived as weak, too stupid to know that science has disproved God, or whatever. Fill in your favorite insecurity. At the other extreme, we might feel guilt since we apparently blew the evangelistic opportunity. Now the unbeliever is condemned to an eternity in Hell because I screwed up the third law and forgot that really good illustration. Nonsense and nonsense.

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This Week's Excursion

Your goal in this lesson is to make clear that our responsibility in evangelism is merely to faithfully share the Gospel in a relevant way. When we do so, we will encounter a variety of responses. Successful witnessing is taking the initiative in the power of the Holy Spirit to share Christ, and leaving the results to God.

Responses to the Gospel

Notice what those two reactions have in common? They are both about us. I, I, me, me. Here's the thing: Evangelism isn't about me, it's about God. It is about declaring "the praises of Him who called us out of darkness and into His wonderful light". I am not the issue. And it's about the lost. It is an invitation to those who are separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel, foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope, and without God in the world, to come inside and find life, forgiveness, and peace with God.

If you sense that your disciple takes rejection personally, try to reassure them that it's not about them. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, lost men will always reject God. They echo Isaiah's detractors who said, "Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions. Leave this way, get off this path, and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel!" (Is. 30:0,11). We shouldn't be surprised or affronted when lost men reject the Gospel. Instead we should:

Be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. To those who oppose us, we should gently instruct in the hope that God will grant them repentance, leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses, and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. (2 Tim 2:24-26)

If, on the other hand, he has an inordinate sense of responsibility, and feels that he has failed, remind him that it is God who saves. God is the one who longs to show mercy. It is the Father who, "devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him." (2 Sam 14:14) He is sovereign in extending His grace. You can't thwart Him. Remember, successful witnessing is taking the initiative in the power of the Holy Spirit to share Christ, and leaving the results to God.

Alright, back to Acts 17. Take a look at v. 32 for the second response:

"Others said, "we want to hear you again on this subject." I love this one. These people are intrigued, but unsure. They want to think about what they've heard, and talk more. They have some questions, recognize that you might have some answers, and sincerely want to investigate. That's a dream come true. When this happens, we should praise God and ask Him to move in their hearts to respond in faith. By all means, make it a point to get back with them soon; the next day, if possible, and be ready to answer questions.

Talk through what your disciple would do on a second appointment like this. This is one of the reasons that it's good to have lots of tools in your bag. It might not be all that great to go over The Four Laws again, so maybe you could share your testimony. Bone up on apologetics. Be ready to explain one of Jesus' parables that makes the Gospel clear, or speaks to a point of hesitation for the non-believer. It's important to be ready for these kind of "second appointment" opportunities.

The final response though is everyone's favorite. It's found in v. 34. "A few men became followers of Paul, and believed." Glorious. Whenever this happens we should show appropriate exuberance. Someone has crossed over from death to life! What could be greater? When this happens, two things should become critical tasks for your disciple. But before you tell them, ask them what they think are the most critical things to do once someone has made a decision.

Next Steps

After talking through the three basic options, have your disciple figure out which response they feel the least able to handle. If it's rejection, make sure they understand the definition of successful witnessing and are adequately trained to share their faith. If it's the second appointment, work through what skills they need to add to their repertoire. If it's following up a new believer, make sure they know how to use Life Concepts.

Responses to the Gospel

1. Introduce the new believer to other Christians. Your top priority should be to see them get relationally connected to the body. Goto lunch with them and another Christian friend, invite them to play basketball with other believers, catch a movie with some guys in your small group. Something, anything to get them in a relationship with multiple believers. I cannot over stress that.

2. Begin to meet regularly to teach them the basics of the faith. Cru's Life Concepts are fantastic. You can find them at centerfieldproductions.com. They give you five lessons on basic ideas of the Gospel. Have them on hand and train your disciple to use them to follow up new believers.

Bottom line is that you want your disciple to understand that the three likely responses they will encounter are normal, and to have some idea of what to do when each occurs. Even going over this information with them may increase their comfort level and embolden them to share the most wonderful news ever announced.

Side Trails

"An Unknown God." Cru.Comm. New Life Publications.

Order at campuscrusade.com

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