

# Go and Tell Sessions

## ***“Intersecting ~~the~~ Your World”***

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### **The premise of the *Intersecting ~~the~~ Your World Series***

*To intersect your world with the light of the gospel, you need to know your world and understand where the people in it are coming from in their way of life and thinking.*

#### **Part 3 of a 3 part Series**

A third place people are coming from is their view that truth is *relative*, and we therefore need to communicate the gospel in terms that show that there is such a thing as *absolute* truth.

#### **I. What is post-modernism?**

A. In a book entitled *Truth or Consequences*, Millard J. Erickson refers to post-modernism as a movement with “variety and complexity.” He makes the following observations:

1. Post-modernism is both a popular and an intellectual movement, a sociological characteristic of much contemporary Western society, and a way of thinking.
2. There is no uniform, consistent, or thoroughly worked-out scheme of thought such that it could in any way be called a system.
3. It is a variety of architecture, a school of art, of literary criticism, of history, and of philosophy; and within each of these fields, it has many and varied representatives. In addition, it is characteristic of much of popular culture, including popular music, and the popular cultural form shows virtually infinite permutations.

B. As to the content of post-modern thinking, it has to do with ideas concerning truth, and in a word, it has to do with *relativism*.

1. Erickson writes, “... one of the strong emphases of postmodernism is the conception that all understanding is conditioned historically and culturally, and that moral principles are grounded in communities rather than in the nature of things.” (p. 231)
2. In his book, *True Truth*, Art Lindsley writes that various post-modernists affirm the following: a). There is no objective view of reality. b). Because we are so culturally determined, we cannot judge culture. c). There are no facts, only interpretations. d). History is fiction. What is “historic” is totally subjective. e). Knowledge is power. We ought to be suspicious of any who claim to give us truth. f). Ethical claims are mere sentiment. g). Deconstruction is justice. h). Whoever “spins” best wins. Since there is no objective truth, all we have is rhetoric.

3. Altogether, post-modernism says that there are multiple ways to think about things, and all those ways are true!
4. Despite the fact that surveys show that in the US, the number of people who believe in God has consistently been in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile, these same people, or many of them, refuse to believe in absolutes!

## **II. Can believers speak into post-modernism (can we present absolute truth)?**

A. The answer to this question is emphatically “Yes!” In fact, the even better answer is “Yes we *can*, and indeed we *must*!” Believers must contend for absolute truth because the typical defense for the post-modernist, according to Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli in *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, is “*What you say may be true for you, but not for me. Truth is relative. What right do you have to impose your beliefs on me? You’re being judgmental.*”

B. We can speak into post-modern thinking because rational thinking is still relevant *to people*.

1. Post-moderns certainly have the (God-given) ability to reason. Moreover, they reason all the time.
2. The problem of the post-modern is therefore *not* reasoning; rather, it is that the post-modernist believes that reason cannot lead them to religious truth.
3. People’s knowledge rests on belief in something (*e.g.*, that life is not just a dream), and their *lives* are lived out on the basis of such beliefs (whether they articulate it or not). So, when it comes to *relativism*, it is possible to speak into that way of thinking because of what people *do* believe and reason about.
4. We can speak into post-modern thinking because people by and large are interested in *spiritual* things. People are, after all, *spiritual* beings, and they do desire *meaning* in life, and want their lives to count for something.

## **III. How can believers communicate that there is such a thing as absolute truth?**

A. The first step is to show that post-modern relativism doesn’t hold up to analysis.

1. Post-modernism is really intolerant. Post-modern thinking typically asserts that a Christian assertion of absolute truth leads to intolerance. However, that statement in itself is an objective moral judgment (*i.e.*, that tolerance is right), and the post-modern, who says there are no absolutes, thus has no basis on which to say that Christians are intolerant.
2. Post-modernism is internally inconsistent. The statement that there is no objective knowledge of truth or morality cannot hold as it is an absolute statement in itself.
3. Relativism leads to meaninglessness. The other way to say this is that the lack of absolutes leads to meaninglessness, and people don’t really want to live that way.

4. Post-modernism fails in that it uses partial truth as the whole truth. In actuality, a partial truth taken as a whole truth becomes an untruth.

B. The second step is to be sure to define the word truth.

1. Unless you define truth, you will not even be on the same plane with the post-modern relativist. Remember the defense often used by such a person is, “*What you say may be true for you, but not for me. Truth is relative.*”

2. Kreeft and Tacelli write that *objective* is to be defined as “*independent of the knower and his consciousness.*” Thus, it is not an attitude, it does not mean what is known by all or by a majority, and it does not mean proved. They go on to define *truth* as “*the correspondence of what you know or say to what is.*” Some wrong definitions of truth are: a). The pragmatic theory: *Truth is what works.* b). The empiricist theory: *Truth is what we can sense.* c). The rationalist theory: *Truth is what can be proven by reason.* d). The coherence theory: *Truth is the coherence, or harmony, among a set of ideas.* e). The emotivist theory: *Truth is what I feel.*

3. Wrong definitions of truth lead to statements such as *we all know truth*, or *there is truth for everybody*, or *there is no error*, or *everything is true “for” somebody*. And these lead to thinking like “different strokes for different folk.” and “alternative lifestyles” (‘cause it’s right for *me*). Essentially, this thinking is based on subjective *values*, not objective *truth*.

4. *Truth* is actually about laws, about what is right and what is wrong no matter what one thinks or feels, about absolute principles, about what transcends instincts and cultural trends, and about a reality that is outside of self.

C. The third step is to use an indirect approach to speak about the truths of the Bible without necessarily even saying that they are from the Bible.

1. The indirect approach of using questions, quotes, even personal issues can be helpful in opening up dialogue and showing both how relativism doesn’t hold up and what the Bible has to say.

2. Find points of commonality - areas around which you *can* dialogue with your input coming from a Christian world-view.

3. Use analogy; use stories, either personal or otherwise. Remember that God’s involvement with humanity, His plan of redemption is truly the best *drama* of all time!! Use imagination. Jesus, of course, used parables

D. The fourth step is to relate in love and, as we said last week, focus on Jesus.

1. Lindsley says it this way: “*The love of Christ may in fact be the ultimate apologetic.*”

2. Practice love, a love that works itself out in caring, understanding, and respecting.

3. As it relates to the post-modernist, this means being fair, willing to listen, humble, avoiding *ad hominem* argument, acknowledging difficulties in your own Christian view, and keeping the relationship going.

E. The last step is to pray that the Holy Spirit would open the mind and heart of the post-modernist.

1. *We cannot save anybody.*

2. It is only the Holy Spirit who can convict a person of his or her need for salvation; and our prayers have part in that.

#### **IV. Application**

A. People are coming from a view that truth is *relative*. But truth is not relative, and we therefore need to communicate the gospel in terms that show that there is such a thing as *absolute* truth.

B. We needn't be afraid of failure to convert, because we cannot succeed anyway. In that reality is the freedom to be who we are in Christ and share the gospel, confident that *it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes*. (Rom. 1:16)