

Developing Worldview- Specific Ministry Tools and Story Sets

By Rick Brown and Durk Meijer

ION 2005 Annual Working Conference

“A Story For The Nations: Making Disciples Of Oral Learners”

This session addresses foundational principles and will include setting clear goals, considering the content of your message, addressing and overcoming worldview differences, considering contextual issues, fitting in the large picture and being a wise steward.



Where do we start...

In this workshop we're focusing on the message communicated and not on the technology used.

Therefore a foundational principle to consider is the communicativeness of the message.

We can say that a Scripture product is “communicative” to the extent that it enables an open-minded audience to have those assumptions (beliefs, values, and practices) which the original authors intended their original audiences to hold as a result of their message.

In other words we want our audience to receive the same thing from us as what God is intending to share with them.



**Who do I want to
communicate with...**

**How should I
communicate...**


**What do I want to
communicate...**

The first principle of communication is “Know your audience.” Good communicators begin with what their audience already knows and accepts. They build on that to draw them step by step to an understanding of new things.







**Who do I want to
communicate with...**

Who is my audience...



People are different and we need to consider who they are.

- 
- What language do they speak?
 - What gender is our audience?
 - What is their age?
 - How do they normally receive important information?
 - Where and how do they live?
- 
- 



People are different and we need to consider who they are.

- What kind of education have they completed?
- What is their livelihood?
- What is their current faith?
- What is their worldview?



A worldview is a person or society's framework of values and beliefs about life, God, man, and the universe. It is not just a collection of perspectives but a structured framework based on the core beliefs and values of that person or society.



It is through this framework that a person views the world and evaluates other people, events, and ideas.



As a result, people with conflicting worldviews may see the same event, hear the same report, or meet the same person, and yet interpret them in very different ways. This is because they filter their cognitive input through the grid of their own worldview.



The diagram below provides an abstract representation of a worldview grid, through which a person views the world, receives information, interprets it, and decides how to respond.



Worldviews are formed in children by the way events are interpreted to them. Most of these events are vicarious, in the form of traditional stories or reports about other people, but their own experiences are also interpreted to them.



For example, a child may be told that he became sick because someone did witchcraft against him, or because he broke a taboo, or because he upset an ancestor by failing to perform a required ritual.



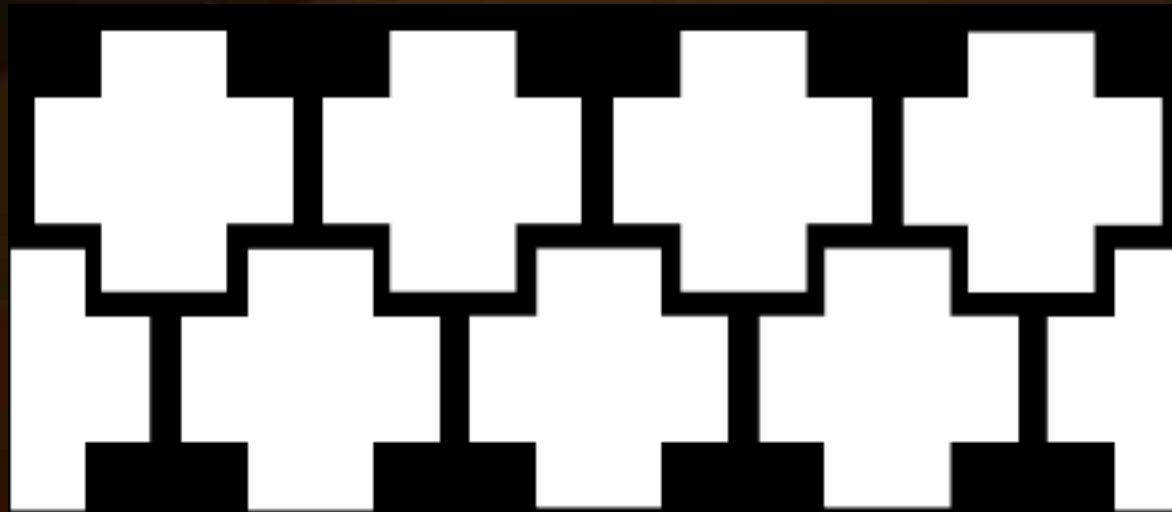
A society's worldview guides a person's responses as well. He may be told that he should contact a witchdoctor to counteract the witchcraft, or that he should perform some penance to pay for breaking the taboo, or should perform the neglected ritual.



Since a person's worldview forms the structure of his conceptual world-his view of reality-it does not easily change. It takes time and compelling input to modify worldviews, and even then the changes are partial.

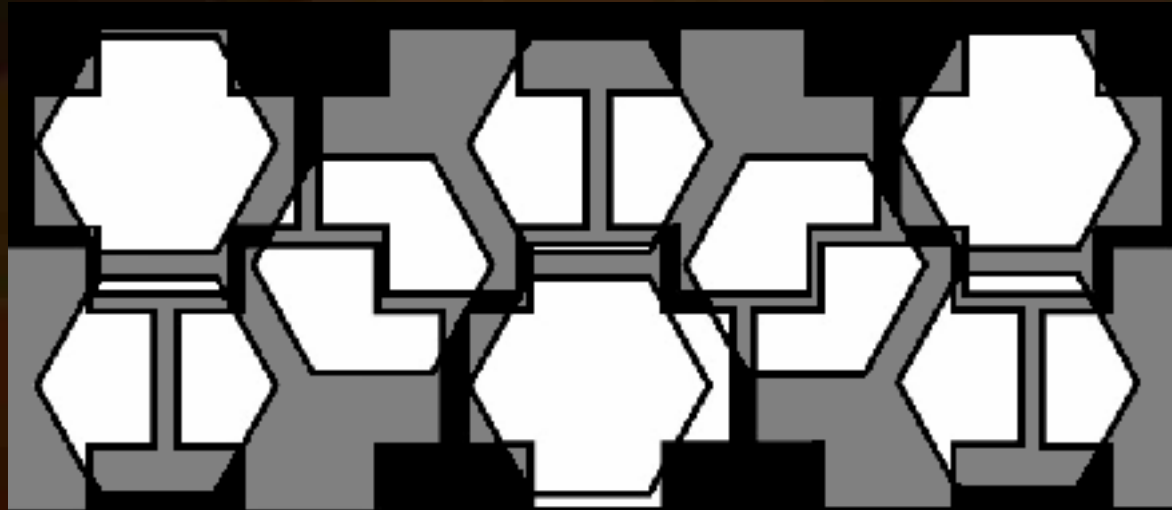



It is our desire to bring people's worldviews into greater alignment to the truth. Let's represent this revealed "truth" worldview with the abstract grid below:





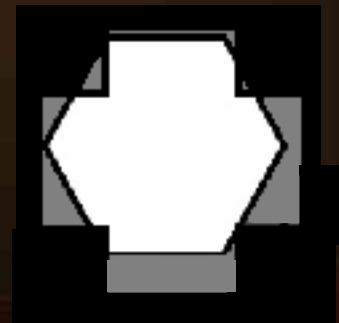
The abstract diagram below represents the Biblical revelation, as seen through the grid of a contrary worldview and it looks like a mess:





For example, all people already have a set of beliefs, with or without what they would consider to be a god or gods.

- Do they even know about the Biblical God?
- If so, what... good things, bad things, truth, or lies?
- And... how much?



Many people understand what fear motivated and achievement or works oriented faith is. They also may understand what bondage is.



What do redemption and regeneration mean... or are these new and foreign concepts? As part of salvation they are unique to Christianity.

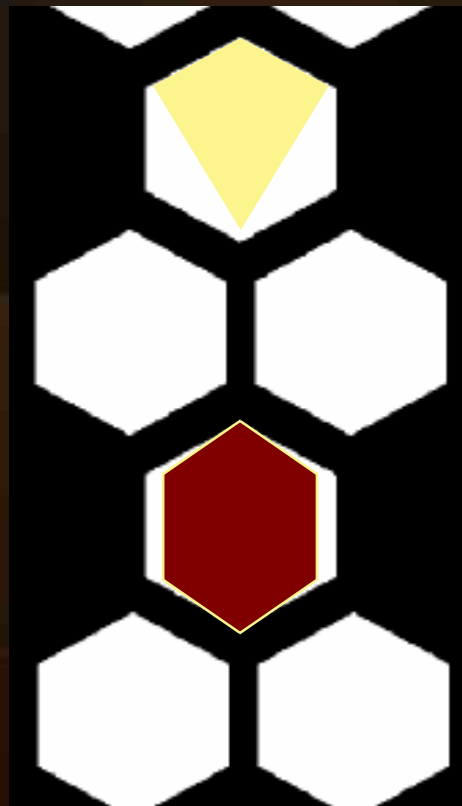


It is important to know what the faith of our intended receptor is, but it is another issue why this person follows their faith.

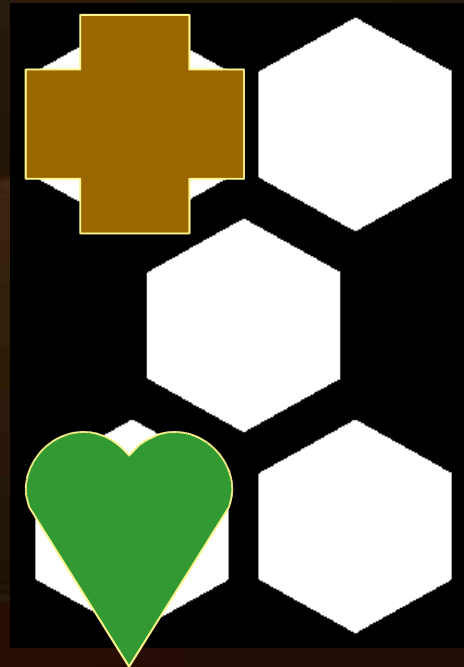
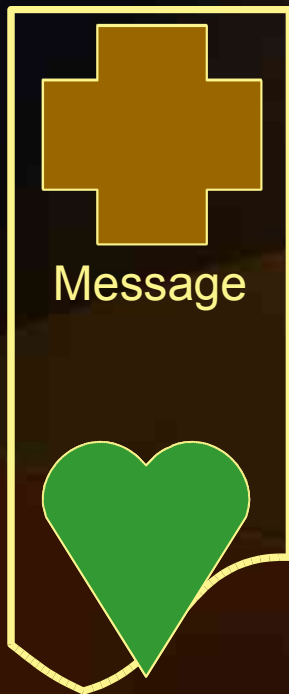
- Is it culturally motivated?
- Is it politically motivated?
- Is it economically motivated?
- Is it out of fear?
- Is it out of conviction?



Concepts that do not fit the audience's worldview grid may get reinterpreted by the audience so that they can fit through it.



When people are completely unable to make a proposition fit within their worldview, they are likely to ignore it or reject it.



The background consists of several overlapping, semi-transparent shapes in shades of green, blue, and orange. The shapes are arranged in a way that creates a sense of depth and movement. The text is centered over the blue and orange areas.

**How should I
communicate...**

First, we need to find where there is common ground.

- **Are there any areas in the worldview of our audience that overlap with the truth as reflected in the Biblical worldview?**
- **Are any of those in common with areas in my worldview?**

**Audience
worldview**

**Biblical
worldview**

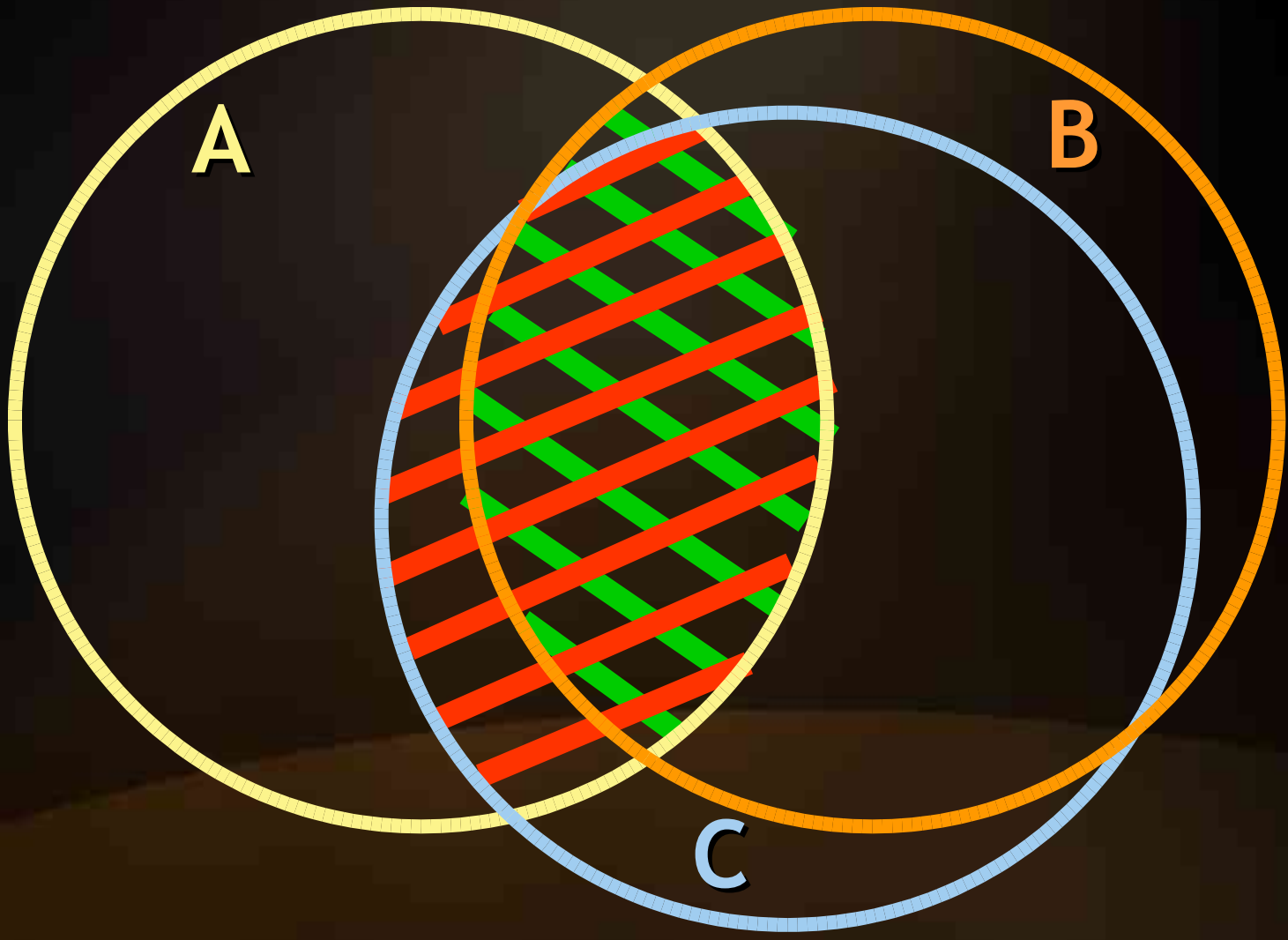
**Worldview
of a growing
Christian**

A Venn diagram with three overlapping circles. The top-left circle is yellow and labeled 'Audience worldview'. The top-right circle is orange and labeled 'Biblical worldview'. The bottom circle is light blue and labeled 'Worldview of a growing Christian'. The intersection of the yellow and orange circles is filled with green diagonal stripes. The intersection of the yellow and light blue circles is filled with red diagonal stripes. The intersection of the orange and light blue circles is also filled with red diagonal stripes. The central intersection of all three circles is filled with a pattern of green and red diagonal stripes.

**Audience
worldview**

**Biblical
worldview**

**Worldview
of a growing
Christian**



Second, we need to remember that people communicate in ways that are unique to their culture.

The discourse genres that will be most suitable for them tie into the worldview they hold and they will have a significant impact on our audience accepting or even paying attention to the message.

Most oral cultures prefer non-expository genres of discourse, such as:

- Narratives**
- Dialogues and drama**
- Proverbs**
- Understandable, contextualized songs and poetry**

Most oral cultures prefer non-expository genres of discourse, such as:

- Riddles, parables and thematic questions**
- Understandable symbols & symbolic actions, including dance**

The Bible naturally comprises a variety of discourse genres which may influence the stories we initially may choose.

- **Narratives**
- **Poetry**
- **Songs**
- **Proverbs**
- **Prophecies**
- **Parables**
- **Thematic questions**
- **Letters**
- **Sermons**

Because of their genre of discourse, some tools will fit better than others, even to the extent that sometimes a tool could imply that a text is fiction instead of truth.

- If chanting is only used in prayer, then using chanting in telling stories may imply that the whole story is a prayer**

Likewise, different styles within a discourse genre may be used to convey different messages.

- If a certain music style is only used in spirit worship, then using this style to tell a Biblical story will put it in the context of their spirit worship

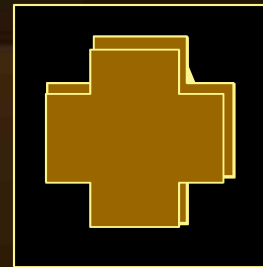
Third, oral cultures tend to rely on inductive reasoning—inferring a principle from several instances—rather than on deductive reasoning. They are like scientists who will not believe a discovery until they have repeated the experiment several times.

In oral cultures this inductive approach—that is, inferring a principle from several instances —is much more compelling than a simple declaration of a principle, even if the declaration is from the Bible itself.

Although receptors might reject the statement that “God is love”, if it conflicts with their worldview, they may accept this concept if they hear several reliable stories in which the love of God is manifest.



Repeated encounters with compelling experiences can lead to acceptance of a contrary idea and to corresponding changes in the worldview grid.



An implication of all this is that to ensure that a balance of biblical themes get communicated through the grid of the receptor worldview, it may be necessary to select additional narratives that implicate the themes which their worldview resists.

Still, there are dependency relationships among many of the elements of a person's worldview. So the basic elements need to change prior to those which are dependent on them.

For example, people will not easily accept the need for a savior if they do not first understand and accept the ideas of God's holiness and integrity and mankind's sinfulness.

By God's grace, the Bible is ideally suited to realign our audience's worldview towards what He wants—if the stories are presented and repeated in a suitable sequence.

For example, much of the Old Testament consists of narratives with prophetic commentary, i.e., stories interpreted to instill a revealed worldview. These provide interpreted experiences which can help the audience realign their worldview.

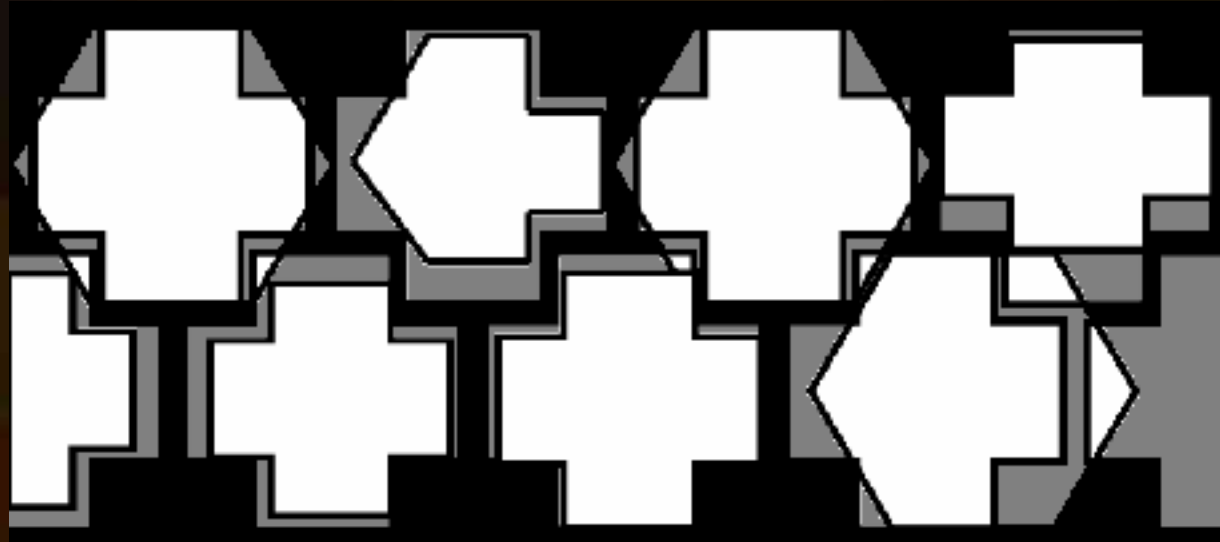
God also designed redemptive analogies or bridges for all people. For example:

- **For the Jews the whole Old Covenant**
- **For the 180 Mamaindé in Brazil the concept of the wide and narrow road**

Some bridges also can be built through our own witness as God's children by demonstrating God's love.

This can be done by helping with felt needs, like in times of hunger, disaster, or sickness.

Now we're starting to see a worldview that is partially moving into alignment with the truth:



We still face a dilemma. To infer the themes of the Bible, our audience needs to accept the premises. Many of the premises are implicit contextual assumptions, and often many premises are contrary to the basic premises of the worldview of our audience.

If we don't address this issue, our efforts will result in syncretism.

For their own worldview to change, the audience needs to get a global view of the biblical metanarrative and the worldview it conveys. So they need the big picture before they can grasp the bits, but they need the small bits to make up a picture.

By encouraging our audience to cycle through a panorama of key biblical passages, we can help them see the big picture—the biblical “meta-narrative.”



Photo: Juergen Foster



Photo: Juergen Foster

When our audience cycles through the Bible several times, they can interpret the stories in the light of their overview of the whole context.

This leads to a better understanding of the Biblical truths in their context.

This is called “spiral learning.”



Photo: Juergen Foster



Photo: Juergen Foster

This can acquaint our audience with the cultures, events, people, and themes of the Bible, especially if we help them to understand unfamiliar assumptions.

A “spiral learning” cycle



The Bible itself provides examples for using panoramic cycles. When the couple on the road to Emmaus expressed confusion over the events of Jesus' death and resurrection, Jesus clarified things with a quick cycle through the OT:

- And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:27 NIV)

When Stephen wanted to make a point with the leaders, he provided an abridged cycle.

(see Acts 7:2-50)

When the Apostles proclaimed the Gospel, they began by reminding people of things in the OT.

(e.g. Acts 2:16-36)

We can design introductory Scripture products in a way that leads the audience along a learning spiral that gives them an overview of the Bible and an understanding of its cultural setting in the Middle East.

This approach can also familiarize them with the overall metanarrative of salvation history and with the key people, places, and events of the Bible.



Photo: Juergen Foster

Which tools or story sets should we select for building a cycle of our ramp up the “spiral learning” tower?



**What do I want to
communicate...**

We need to have a clear and achievable communication goal in mind.

Evangelistic cycles:

- Introduction of the concept of a Biblical God**
- Laying a foundation for the gospel**
- Sharing the gospel**

We need to have a clear and achievable communication goal in mind.

Discipleship cycles

Church planting cycles

Leadership training cycles

most

under-
standing

acceptance

least

most



**Church planting and
Leadership training**

Discipling



**Sharing
the
gospel**

Laying a foundation

Introduction



Where do we start in this puzzle?

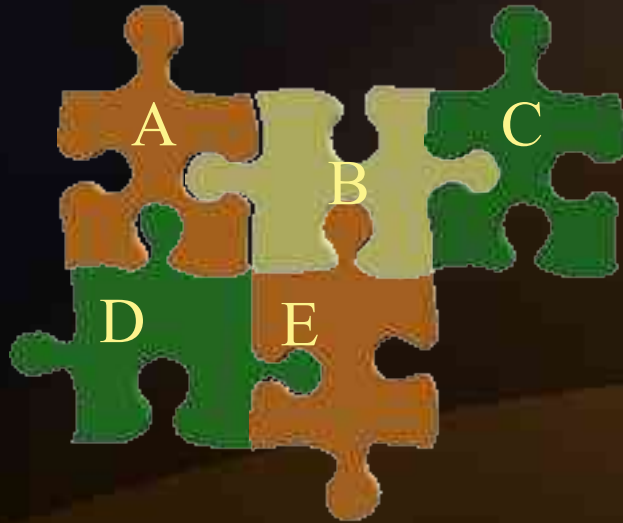


- **At the beginning...**



Or...

- With the next logical step





When people first hear parts of the Bible, they lack adequate familiarity with cultural, historical and religious information which the Biblical authors have assumed their audience knew.



As a result they are puzzled by some things, they misunderstand many other things-without even realizing it, and they fail to understand the intended meaning.



By their very nature, introductory selections cannot assume that the audience understands the cultural, historical and religious background of the stories.

One principle, therefore, is to choose portions which do not require them to learn many new assumptions about the background.



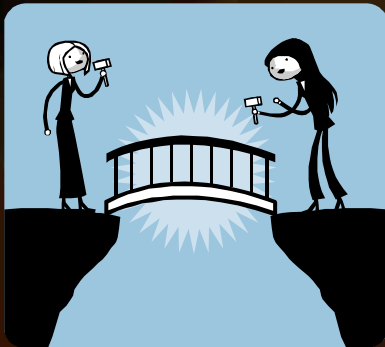
In other words, their knowledge of essential assumptions of the Bible should develop gradually and in a progressive way.

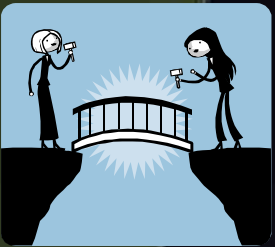
The timing of what tools and stories to use is of utmost importance...

We have only one time to make a first time impression!



In addressing audience worldview, it is helpful to discover which themes are bridges to the audience, which are barriers, and which are door-openers.

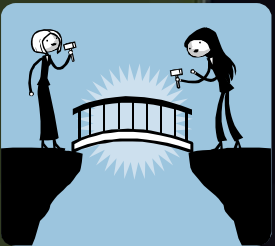




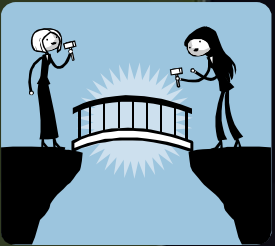
Introductory portions will have more appeal if they reflect customs and lifestyles that are similar to those of the audience. This makes the audience comfortable with the portion and helps them identify with its characters.



It is wise to begin with portions that seem relevant and interesting to our audience:



- Farmers identify with portions about farmers.
- Women can identify with Ruth, Hannah, etc.
- Many people in the 10/40 window are interested in the stories of the prophets.



Although such passages may present few new concepts, they can be very valuable for establishing common ground with the audience and for encouraging them to accept the Bible.



Good communicators are aware of local customs and values, and they deal sensitively with cultural taboos.



Introductory selections should likewise avoid offense where none is intended or at least help them with acceptable explanations.



It is wise to initially avoid culturally sensitive passages:

- for Muslims: Judah with Tamar; Ruth on the threshing floor
- for Hindus: the parable of the prodigal son (whose “wicked” father kills a cow)





It is wise to initially avoid culturally sensitive passages:

- for Tibetans: the great catch of fish
- for many people in West Asia: partial nudity (in visuals)





Also some biblical concepts are so contrary to the worldview of some audiences that the audience cannot readily grasp them. The specific list varies according to worldview, but here are some barriers for many 10/40 receptors:

- God's holiness, goodness, personal concern, and reliability.





- **Mankind's sinfulness and need for spiritual regeneration.**
- **The need for a sacrifice and a savior.**
- **The deity and authority of Jesus Christ.**



Some themes that are “door-openers” for many 10/40 receptors are:



- God’s goodness, love, reliability, and care for his servants, as seen in the narratives of Abraham, Joseph, the Exodus, Daniel, Jesus, and the Apostles.



- God's benevolent management of history as he works through events to oppose evil, to train his servants in righteousness and truth, and to fulfill his good purposes for his people seen in the narratives of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Ruth, David, Jonah, Daniel, and Job, as well as in Revelation.





- The portrait of Jesus himself—his kindness, devotion, wisdom, power, and ongoing reign as savior and king.

- The love and forgiveness exhibited by true followers of Jesus, seen in the Acts of the Apostles and in the lives of saints today. A similar theme is present in the life of Joseph.





- The offer of personal forgiveness and acceptance by God, as presented in the Gospel and Acts.
- The offer of assured and complete salvation from hell and acceptance into God's kingdom.





- The offer of a personal relationship with God, fully realized in the next life.

- The offer of inner cleansing and renewal through God's Holy Spirit, as presented in the Gospels, Acts, and Epistles.





- The offer and example of grace to live through the strengthening and guidance of the Spirit, as seen in the Acts of the Apostles and in some of the Epistles.

- Power to resist and repel Satan and evil spirits in Jesus' name, as seen in the Gospels and Acts.



In light of the close relationship of the barriers and door-openers, it is usually more convincing to present these themes by exemplifying them in Biblical narratives rather than in expository passages that state them explicitly.



Some vital themes are:

- God's holiness, righteousness, goodness, love, & faithfulness
- God's kingdom and his good plan for mankind
- The hopeless sinfulness of mankind
- The consequences of sin



Some vital themes are:

- Man's need for a perfect substitutionary sacrifice for sin
- Man's need for regeneration through the Holy Spirit
- Jesus' role as the Savior-King, who saves his people and brings them into God's kingdom



As we develop worldview-specific ministry tools and story sets, we must make sure to check :

- **How well they communicate**
- **How well they fit into the holistic picture**



In review:

1. **CONSIDER** *your audience.*
What is their cultural background? What is their worldview? What are their interests and felt needs?
2. **CHOOSE** *what styles and forms of communication are the most appropriate to use.*

In review:

- 3. *KNOW* what you want to communicate and why (what results do you want to see accomplished among the audience).**
- 4. *ELIMINATE* barriers, differences, criticism, and prejudice that could cause divisions or be offensive, resulting in the loss of your audience.**

In review:

- 5. PRACTICE** *the virtues of good communication: Speak the truth. Be precise and clear. Be positive, not negative!*
- 6. CONFIRM** *the audience. Encourage and build them up with love.*



*Just re-
member*

*the tools
need to
match
the task*

**Still the most important
impact comes from...**

***The inner witness of the
Holy Spirit that God is
speaking to them through
these stories from the Bible.***

***This is what convinces
receptors of the truth of the
portions and compels them
to continue listening to the
OT prophets, to the Gospel
of Jesus, and then on to the
Apostles.***

**Also do not forget the power
of our personal witness as
God's living stones.**

The End!

Pictures used by courtesy of: Juergen Foster, Jerzy Marcol,
Michelle Petersen, Jim Roberts, Mark and Vesta Sauter