



Week 4: The Message Memorized Script vs. Jazz Improv

GOAL:

See how the contextual approach to evangelism used in Scripture can work in our lives.

CHECKLIST

- Prepare for the meeting by praying for yourself and your group (feel free to use the prayer below) and reading through this Leader's Guide.
- Watch this week's teaching video together.
- Facilitate a conversation about the contextual (jazz improv) approach to evangelism.
- Debrief last week's Practice Exercise and discuss the instructions for this week's exercise.
- Close with a time of prayer
- Take attendance in Planning Center, including guests/new members.

PREPARING THROUGH PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, I praise you as the Lord over all creation, the Source of all good things, and the Answer to all of our deepest questions. Thank you for the beautiful and powerful message of the gospel that has changed my life, and thank you for the faithfulness of the people who willingly and lovingly shared the good news with me. I pray that through the Holy Spirit, you will give me the desire, the ability, and the opportunity to share that same good news with the people in my life. As I do, please help me to share in a way that clearly communicates the truth of the gospel, honors the unique personality and needs of the person with whom I'm sharing, and relies on the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. In your strong and sufficient name I pray, Amen.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

CONNECT, COORDINATE, AND PRAY (10-15 minutes)

Spend the first portion of your time together connecting relationally in whatever way works best for your group. Discuss any details you need to coordinate and spend a few minutes praying together. This might also be a good time to ask people to share anything that the Holy Spirit showed them through this week's Growth Guide readings.

Watch the Teaching Video (10 minutes)

Video Instructions (at VRBC)

1. Turn on the TV and make sure you're on the Roku input (turn the Roku on if needed)
2. Click on the Youtube app
3. On the left side, scroll down to "Library"
4. Select the "This is My Story" playlist and click on the WEEK 4 Teaching video

Video Instructions (at Home)

1. Open the Youtube app on your TV
2. Search "vrbcgrowgroups" (all one word)
3. You should see the VRBC logo with the title "Grow Groups." Select this option
4. Under "Playlists," select "This is My Story" and then click on the WEEK 4 Teaching video

DISCUSS (25-35 minutes)

- What was the main point of John's illustration about the two types of music? What do you think are some of the benefits and limitations of the "memorized script" approach to evangelism? What are some of the benefits and challenges of the "jazz improv" approach?

Leader's Note: *The main point of the illustration is that while learning a "script" to share the gospel can be helpful to a point, a more biblical and effective method is to know the basics of the gospel message and tailor the conversation to the specific context.*

The memorized script approach has some benefits: many of these "scripts" are based on solid biblical teaching, and memorizing them helps us internalize these scriptural truths. Also, learning the script in advance can help you feel more comfortable in the moment. However, there are many limitations as well: the memorized script approach assumes that all listeners are the same, which certainly isn't true. It ignores the context, which is a poor communication strategy in any situation! Because these 'scripts' tend to be designed to be shared simply and quickly, they often don't represent the fullness of the gospel message and they may not address the questions a particular person may be asking in that moment.

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WEEK 4

The ‘jazz improv’ approach has many benefits: It’s based on learning and internalizing the key concepts of the full story of the gospel (learning the “scales and chords” so to speak), including the Scriptures that communicate those truths. But it tailors the approach to each individual situation, which allows for more effective communication. At the same time, it’s harder! Memorizing a script just requires time and effort. Learning to share contextually requires not only learning the content, but a desire and ability to listen to and empathize with others, a willingness to take risks and respond in the moment, and a desire to rely on the Holy Spirit speaking to and through us.

- For each of the following passages, discuss these questions:
 - 1) What prompted the gospel conversation?
 - 2) How did the person sharing the gospel introduce the topic?
 - 3) What was the main message they shared?
 - 4) How did the specific situation influence what they said?
 - 5) How did the people respond?

- Acts 3:1-25
- Acts 8:26-38
- Acts 16:25-34
- Acts 17:16-33

Leader’s Note: *There is a ton of material here! Of course, use your judgment on how to best spend your time, but our thought is that the best way to approach this is to try to answer the questions for each passage fairly quickly. We’re not trying to get to every detail of each passage – we’re trying to paint an overall picture for the groups of how the apostles tailored their approach for each situation.*

Acts 3:1-25

1. *The healing of a lame man at the Temple (or, more generally, the apostles paying attention and meeting to the needs around them, then looking for an opportunity to point to Jesus)*
2. *Peter used the event they had just witnessed and clarified that the power for the miracle came from faith in Jesus.*
3. *After sharing God’s overall plan for salvation, they invited the listeners to repent and turn to God so their sins would be forgiven and they would receive times of refreshing (v19)*
4. *They were in the Temple courts, talking to people who know the Old Testament, so they connected much of the presentation to those Scriptures the people already knew.*
5. *In this story, we don’t know how the people respond! And that’s an important lesson for us, too. Sometimes, God gives us the blessing of seeing the fruit of our willingness to share the gospel. Other times, we just do what we’re called to do and trust God with the results.*

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Acts 8:26-38

1. *The Spirit prompted Philip to go near the Ethiopian's chariot and stay close by.*
2. *Philip took what the man was doing (reading from Isaiah) and used it as an opening for a gospel conversation. He started by asking a simple question.*
3. *The main message Philip shared was "the good news about Jesus." (v34)*
4. *Philip used the question that the man had as a way to share the good news that Jesus is the ultimate answer to our deepest questions.*
5. *The man received Jesus and immediately became baptized!*

Acts 16:25-34

1. *Paul and Silas were in a terrible situation. They had been arrested and imprisoned for performing a miracle and sharing about Jesus. But even in this difficult situation, they were faithfully praising God and praying to him – right in front of the other prisoners and the prison guard. Against this backdrop, God sent an earthquake to open the jail doors.*
2. *In this case, the initial way Paul and Silas introduced the topic was by trusting God and praising him in the midst of their hard circumstances. This is a huge point for us...the world is watching how we handle the adversity that comes our way. When we respond in faith and faithfulness, it opens the door for gospel conversations.*
3. *In this story, we don't get to hear the exact message. The text just says they "spoke the word of the Lord." But I (John) imagine the image of God setting the captives free was a big part of the conversation!*
4. *The specific situation gave Paul and Silas the opportunity to love the jailer in a tangible way. Through their actions, they demonstrated that they were more concerned for the jailer than their own safety. They could have run out of the prison and let the jailer kill himself. But instead, they called out to let him know they were still there, which opened the door for his wonderful question: "what must I do to be saved?"*
5. *The jailer and his entire household believed in Jesus and were baptized.*

Acts 17:16-33

1. *Paul was in Athens and he noticed that the city was full of idols. This broke his heart and caused him to seek out conversations with the people of the city.*
2. *In the meeting that starts in verse 22, Paul begins with something specific to the listeners (the idol 'to an unknown god') and uses it as a starting point to share the story of the gospel.*
3. *The climax of his presentation is the invitation to repent (v30) and telling them about Jesus' resurrection (v31)*
4. *Unlike Peter's presentation in Acts 3, Paul doesn't use references from the Old Testament – the Athenians wouldn't have known what he was talking about! Instead, he uses the things they know – their idols, their poets, their philosophers – to point to something higher than all of them.*
5. *Some rejected him, but others were intrigued. We don't know if any of them ultimately put their faith in Christ. (like many of our gospel conversations!)*

WEEK 4

- What was consistent among all the stories you looked at above? What was different each time? What principles do you take from this?

Leader's Note: *This question is where it all comes together. I'm sure your group will come up with lots of great similarities and differences between these stories. Here are a few to get you started.*

What's consistent: the speaker...

- *Is on the lookout for opportunities to share the good news*
- *Pays attention to the context*
- *Genuinely cares about the person/people they're speaking to*
- *Uses words and images the people are familiar with*
- *Uses the current situation to point to Jesus*

What's different:

- *The entry point to the conversation is different each time*
- *The way the gospel story is shared is different based on each context*
- *The response is different each time*

Help the group see that there is a pattern in all of these stories. The core message is the same! But the way the message is approached depends on the context. The person speaking is sensitive to the needs and the background of the person with whom they are speaking, and tailors their approach accordingly. They are also constantly on the lookout for opportunities to share the good news. In the story about Philip, the text explicitly says that the Spirit spoke to him. But even though the other passages don't state it explicitly, the people sharing seem to have a sensitivity not only to the people around them, but also to the movement of the Spirit within them.

- Thinking about the people in your life who don't yet know Jesus, what do you think this "improv" approach could look like in practice?

Leader's Note: *This may require a little bit of prodding! The goal here is to help people think about what this might actually look like in real life. If you want, you could ask someone to share about a person in their life who isn't yet following Jesus and the group could discuss what it would look like to apply the principles you've discussed in that situation. If talking about a specific person feels like too much of a stretch, you could ask the group to talk about various types of people in their lives and have a conversation about what it might look like to use this contextual approach in those situations.*

PRACTICE (10-15 minutes)

Last week, we asked each person to take part in an “As You Go” prayer Walk.” On Tuesday, we sent a reminder and a link to the instructions (vrbc.net/prayerwalk) by text. Take a few moments to debrief the experience together. Ask those who participated what the experience was like and what the Spirit showed them.

We know that last week was Spring Break, and many may have missed Grow Group. If that’s the case for your group, you might want to spend this time letting people share their “story in a sentence” with each other if they didn’t get to do it last time. We’ll also send out the instructions for the “As You Go Prayer Walk” again on Monday so those who were out last week can participate.

After debriefing last week’s practice, please share this week’s exercise with the group:

Spend a few minutes several days this week praying specifically for the people you noticed during your “As You Go” prayer walk. Pray that God would increase your love for them and to help you notice opportunities to point them to Jesus. As you pray, think about one small step you could take toward sharing the good news of Jesus with them.

PRAYER (5-10 minutes)

As you close this week, lead the group in a time of prayer:

1. *Thank God for the salvation that you have received through faith in Jesus and the difference it’s making in your life.*
2. *Ask the Holy Spirit to give you opportunities this week to share the good news of Jesus with others in your life and to heighten your awareness of these opportunities.*
3. *Ask God to give you courage and strength as you take small steps to share the gospel with others.*