

Engaging with your Hindu neighbor

Introduction:

In the parable of *the Good Samaritan* (Luke 10:30-37) Jesus calls us to be examples of the good neighbor. The priest and the levite was indifferent to the man in need and passed him by, without caring. The Samaritan, however, was moved with compassion to help. The Christian community needs to be sensitive to God's 'broken heart' for all sinners, and develop a passion to communicate the gospel to the Hindu neighbor too (Exod. 3:7-10, Isa. 6:8, Matt 28:18-20).

The love and character of Christ exemplified in us impacts people and it is very vital, particularly in engaging a Hindu neighbor. It is very common among us Christians to think of a Hindu neighbor as a 'pagan' or 'idol-worshipper,' and as a result, to keep a distance from him. But this will only jeopardize any attempt to engage him with the gospel.

Study the mind-set of your Hindu Neighbor:

In order to understand the mind-set of the Hindu neighbor, it is important to observe his life, keeping in mind his inclinations, tastes, values, and preferences in order to learn as much as we can about him.

Characteristics of the Hindu Neighbor

Strengths

- 1. The Hindu is a Religious person and curious and open to new or different spiritual experiences.***
- 2. The Hindu has a strong sense of community and shared community life: He looks forward to occasions to experience community life through religious festivals, and cultural and family functions.***
- 3. The Hindu is a good friend and neighbor. He is open-minded, accepting, helpful, and hospitable. He also has due respect for elders.***
Hindu hospitality is very notable. Even strangers are welcome in their homes.

Weaknesses:

- 1. The Hindu accepts and accommodates every spiritual way of life/religion without treating any particular one of them as special. It is all-inclusive and considers no religion or spiritual system or belief as exclusive. The exclusive claims of Christianity are therefore often resisted.***
- 2. The Hindu cannot think of separating himself from others in the larger community. While in the case of the believing Christian community we are called sometimes to come out and stay separate or abstain from certain practices and occasions which defile us.***
- 3. The Hindu is very particular about family name and prestige and not going against family tradition, or religious and cultural values. Going against these results in rejection and ostracism of the individual. The average Hindu individual converted to Christianity will experience ostracism and rejection from the other members of the family and community.***

Practical steps in engaging the Hindu Neighbor (Things not to do):

Do not develop a negative or indifferent attitude towards him and his way of life.

Do not be critical about his faith. Do not isolate yourself from him. Many Christians refuse to attend Hindu festivals and celebrations. This attitude among us has resulted in our being alienated from them. While sharing the gospel, never engage in Christian jargon.

Practical steps in engaging the Hindu Neighbor (Things to do)

***Hospitality:** Share meals with him, inviting him over for dinner etc., and also attend similar occasions you are invited to.*

***Be friendly:** Take time to visit, talk to him and attend the Hindu neighbor's religious meetings and festival celebrations.*

Practical steps in sharing the gospel with the Hindu neighbor

***Jesus' approach** to the Samaritan woman is the ideal way to share the gospel with the Hindu neighbor.*

***Take the initiative** by establishing common ground between Hinduism and Christianity. Engage in sensitive dialogue with him just as Jesus did with the Samaritan woman. This will help us to communicate the gospel in a Hindu context.*

***Supply or lend him** tracts, books, audio/video CDs of testimonies of Hindus, who have come to Christ.*

***Welcoming the Hindu neighbor to the Christian fellowship or community life**, while he considers the Christian faith, introduce the Hindu neighbor to a fellowship of believers who will provide him the unconditional love, support and encouragement he will need to make a commitment to Christ and become a disciple. The quality of Christian community life is a source of great strength.*

Conclusion:

When we are engaging our Hindu neighbor, the application of the parable of the Good Samaritan is of prime importance. We need to be a good neighbor as Christ implied through the parable. Since the Hindu believes in hospitality and good neighborliness it is the most effective way of preparing the soil for the seed of the gospel to be sown. Loving your neighbor as yourself is a way into his heart.

***Lesson from my own example:** The lifestyle of a Christian student is what attracted a Hindu student like me towards Christ. There were times of discussions and arguments about Christ, no doubt, but ultimately I was challenged and transformed by the student's lifestyle.*

Life-style evangelism is most effective in engaging the Hindu neighbor. My life should be an open book.

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