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A Newsletter of the Amy Foundation



Speaking Your Audience's Language:

How to Avoid 'Christianese'

by Rusty Wright

When you seek to communicate the message of Jesus to those outside the faith, do you ever feel like you're not getting through? There can be many reasons for this, including their own resistance, spiritual blindness, spiritual warfare, ego, personal pain, anger with God, disappointment with God or Christians, etc. But a major reason might be that you just aren't speaking their language.

You can make the Gospel very clear — just use language that relates to your listeners and their situation.

We are offering people a gift that is infinitely more valuable than a million dollars, the gift of peace with God and eternal life. But too often, we don't speak their emotional and intellectual languages. I don't know about you, but at the end of my life I don't want to look back with regret on the people who didn't appreci-

ate Christ because I didn't make the message clear. I want to speak their language so clearly that they see how attractive my Jesus is, so they run to him to receive him.

In communicating with non-believers, seek to avoid Christian jargon. Consider this example:

"The Bible says all you sinners need to repent and trust in the finished work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who, through his propitiatory sacrifice on Calvary's cross,

made atonement for you so you could be justified, redeemed, sanctified and gloriously saved!"

That is all true, but will the unbeliever understand it? How about this

instead?

"The biblical documents explain that humans have an emptiness, an inner void, a longing to love and be loved. Jesus of Nazareth said he came to fill that void, to offer hope and genuine purpose. He died a physical and spiritual death to pay the penalty humans owed for their flaws and

imperfections. Then he returned to life to offer people the opportunity to plug into God both now and forever.

"If I had a traffic fine I could not pay, you could offer to pay it for me, as a gift to me. Just as I would need to accept your gift to pay my fine, so we need

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Rusty Wright is an award-winning author, journalist, and lecturer who trains Christian leaders, broadcasters, print-media and Internet professionals worldwide in effective communication with secular audiences. Wright, who is an Amy Syndicate contributor, holds Bachelor of Science (psychology) and Master of Theology degrees from Duke and Oxford universities.

Prayer Requests

We believe "The prayers of the righteous availeth much." We invite you to pray with us about various aspects of The Amy Foundation Ministry.

Amy Prayer List:

- Amy Writing Awards — increased number of submissions in 2010.
- Christian writers mobilized and equipped to use their skills in obedience to Christ's call to make disciples.
- Amy Internet Syndicate—new users this year.

Spread the Word!

The Pen & Sword is now published online only. If you or someone you know would like to receive a notice when the next issue is posted, along with a link to the online edition, send your e-mail address to amyfoundtn@aol.com

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to accept Jesus' free gift of forgiveness to enjoy a friendship with him."

Depending on the situation, you may wish to use either the more direct second-person or first person-plural ("you" or "we") or the more indirect third-person plural ("humans," "people," "they," etc.). You can make the Gospel very clear. Just use language that relates to your listeners and their situation.

Consider a few additional suggestions for connecting with your audience.

Aim to contextualize your words and examples for your listeners or readers, and to paint memorable 'word pictures.' Jesus took examples from the surrounding society and culture to fill out the content of abstract concepts. For instance, the Prodigal Son story illustrates repentance. The Lost Sheep story conveys God's heart for someone whose life is a mess. Redemptive par-

allels from familiar stories that resonate with your audience can be vital. Popular culture is one very valuable source for such material.

For evangelism in a non-Western or non-Christian culture, careful use of language is equally important, because the words may carry entirely different connotations from those that Western Christians intend. Many non-Western societies are also shame cultures and view modes of behavior in dramatically different ways than Westerners do.

Another audience that your "secular-friendly" language may help is those who are familiar — even overly familiar — with Christian terminology. Some may let Christian jargon simply wash over them without attaching much meaning to the words, having been somewhat immunized to their truth. For others, 'Christianese' may trigger memories of negative or hurtful past church experienc-

es. In both cases, jargon-free language can add freshness and clarity that helps minimize these potential communication barriers.

Here are some suggestions for translating 'Christianese' into language that can better connect with the non-believers you seek to reach. No item in the table below is inviolate, but ask God to give you wisdom to apply these suggestions as appropriate for your situation. Trust Him to give you words and thoughts that will help people understand God's truth. Remember, you are not seeking to compromise God's message, but simply aiming to communicate it using language and concepts your audience can understand, relate to, and digest.

This article was first published at www.InternetEvangelismDay.com/christianese. ◀

Christianese Jargon	Normal HumanSpeak: examples of equivalent
the Bible says	• a biblical perspective would be that ...
saved, salvation	• made safe (rescued) from separation from God
hell, damnation	• separation from God forever • separation from God
sin(s)	• missing the mark of divine perfection
sin nature, depravity	• fallen nature • to use a philosophical term, humans are deeply fallen
witness, evangelism	• communicating the basic message of Jesus
pray/prayer	• talking with/communicating with God • expressing your thoughts/views/heart to God
gospel	• Jesus' message of good news
saving faith	• place trust in Jesus as the means of one's forgiveness
you need to receive Christ	• a biblical perspective of how anyone becomes fulfilled and complete is that it involves developing a relationship with one's creator.
propitiation	• Jesus, through his sacrificial death on the cross, paid the penalty we owed for our rebellion/disobedience/alienation
God's view is ...	• a biblical perspective would indicate ...

Hone Skills at a Writers' Conference

The explosion of the Internet has created many new options for Christian writers. In this opportune time, a writers' conference is an excellent way to hone your skills, pitch ideas to editors, network, and be inspired by other writers.

The American Christian Writers (ACWriters.com) hosts dozens of conferences nationwide with the express interest of providing writers with the training and resources they need to produce noteworthy work. The conferences are taught by journalism professionals who will help you learn the elements of the craft and launch new ideas effectively. Mark your calendar for the next ACW conference near you.

2010 American Christian Writers' Conference Schedule:
March 12-13, Dallas, TX
March 19-20 Oklahoma City, OK
April 9-10 Nashville, TN
April 16-17 Fort Wayne, IN
May 1 (Saturday) Memphis, TN
May 14-15 Charlotte, NC
May 21-22 Atlanta, GA
June 5 (Saturday) Columbus, OH
June 11-12 Grand Rapids, MI
August 6-7 Minneapolis, MN
August 14 (Saturday) Des Moines, IA
August 21 (Saturday) Springfield, MO
September 11 (Saturday) Louisville, KY
September 24-25 Spokane, WA
October 22-23 Phoenix, AZ
November 20 (Saturday) Orlando, FL
November/December 27-4 Caribbean Cruise

Having writer's block? Here's help on the Web:

Find the word you're looking for with the use of a dictionary, thesaurus, or encyclopedia at www.dictionary.com

Investigate the original meaning of a word or phrase at www.etymonline.com, an online etymology dictionary.

Read statistics and current studies compiled by a Christian research group at www.barna.org

Note: George Barna, founder of The Barna Group, will be the guest speaker at this year's Michigan Prayer Breakfast in Lansing on May 12th, 2010.

Call (517)323-6233 for reservations.



Submit Today!

15 writers will receive
\$34,000 in cash prizes

The Amy Foundation Writing Awards program recognizes writers who skillfully and creatively present the biblical position on issues affecting the world today in a sensitive and thought-provoking manner. Qualifying non-fiction entries must have been published in a mainstream non-religious publication.

Winning entries will be re-published in an annual collection of prize-winning entries.

For rules, sample articles and submission forms, visit www.amyfound.org or call 877-727-4262.



Tell us a discipling story

Do you have an interesting discipling story to tell? Send a vignette (200-400 words) about a situation or interaction that led to your discipling another person—or group of people—in an unusual or unexpected way. How was God faithful in supporting, reinforcing or extending your obedient actions?

Send stories to:
 Pen & Sword
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 Amy Founda-
 tion,
 P.O. Box 16091,
 Lansing, MI
 48901;
 or email
 amyfoundtn@
 aol.com.

Find Your Passion — Then Write About it

By Mary Jackson

If money were not an object, what would you do? This simple question can help you discover what you are passionate about. Would you produce travel guides? Would you write a cookbook? Would you start a parenting magazine?

Perhaps your ideas are not exactly lined up with God's plans for your life. However, our interests, heritage, talents, and passions — unless rooted in an ungodly or evil desire — are God-given. Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart."

As writers, our passions can provide us with clues as to how to communicate most effec-

tively with our readers. We will produce our best written work when we find our unique voice. Researchers are increasingly acknowledging that those who love what they do are more likely to succeed.

"The kind of commitment I find among the best performers across virtually every field is a single-minded passion for what they do, an unwavering desire for excellence in the way they think and the way they work," said Jim Collins, corporate researcher and best-selling author.

The digital age we have come into provides us with new avenues to use writing as a discipling tool. Short

vignettes on topics ranging from local politics to gardening can be compiled, edited, and turned into a viable Web site or blog.

We will produce our best written work when we find our unique voice.

We often get overwhelmed with lofty goals when it comes to our passions, yet God's way of building is "precept upon precept, line upon line," (Is. 28:10). Consider utilizing the media to encourage others to excellence and godliness in an area you are passionate about.

Thank You Linda and Shaunna!

Please join The Amy Foundation in offering sincere thanks and appreciation to Linda Wacyk and Shaunna Howat for the wonderful job they have done for more than 15 years in producing the Pen & Sword newsletter. This has been a labor of love on their part, and we thank them for their dedication, as well as for the encouragement, mentoring, helpful hints and challenges they provided to our readers.

On behalf of the Russell family, The Amy Foundation and its Board of Advisors, many thanks to you, Linda and Shaunna, for a job well done!

"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"

Matthew 25:21 NIV