

5 Tips for Witnessing to Eastern Europeans

Whether your friend is Belarusian, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Russian, Ukrainian, or from another historically Slavic country, there are some ground rules for when engaging them with the Gospel. Most of these tips can also be applied to other people groups as well.

#1 - Define your Terms

People of different religions use a different dictionary. Just ask someone if they are “saved.” Being “saved” might mean something vastly different than how you define it - and more importantly, how the Bible defines it. For instance, a Mormon, JW, and a Muslim would not even define “Jesus” the same way. Discerning their intended meaning requires two things: research and lots of listening to the feedback from questions that you ask. Of course, on top of all this is the natural language barrier that uses a different lexicon already. Be patient, the lost soul may not even know much about the religion they are an adherent of. Perhaps they were simply dunked as an infant and are only familiar with those religious elements which have permeated their culture.

#2 - Build a Relationship

The generations who survived the Soviet Union were accustomed to having a small, close-knit circle of friends. Everyone who was not essential to life was kept at arm's distance. The cultures of Eastern Europe are classified as “cold” which means that, as a rule, they are not open and friendly. In fact, if you do meet someone in Eastern Europe who is friendly, they either are an immigrant, have spent significant time in the West, or are trying to sell you something that you usually don't buy. Used by some expats to describe the people of Eastern Europe, the picture of a turtle illustrates for us what the people are like. There is a hard outer, protective shell, but a soft and squishy being inside. Building a relationship requires communication, understanding, patience, discernment, and much love. As the culture continues to change from one generation to another, the need for building relationships does not change - only the amount of work to form and maintain one does. The younger generation is increasingly less skilled at face-to-face interaction and thus your job is getting more difficult because building that bridge over which the Gospel must cross is a two-sided affair. Seek the Lord as to how best to approach this. And lastly, always leave the door open for them to contact you or someone else if or when they are interested. Maybe it was your job to work at sowing the seed or watering where someone else has already sown. Perhaps it will not be you who God intends to see them repent and make a profession of faith.

#3 - Live What You Preach

One of the major differences between a dead religion (that many are all too familiar with) and a personal relationship with God (as the Bible describes) is that a real relationship is a daily connection to and a growing understanding of God. People are not necessarily impressed by a religious adherent's church attendance, tithing, etc. What tends to impress them most are the two commandments that all the others hang upon (Matthew 22:40); loving God supremely and loving your neighbor equally. Let those you are witnessing to hear about what God is showing you, how God is guiding you, and what changes the Saviour has done so far. Walk in the Spirit and own up to the times that you do not. Also, walk through the open doors when God gives you an opportunity to share about Christ, but be sensitive to the times when the heart and mind is not prepared and not willing to receive.

#4 - Teach Chronologically

The Bible was written and compiled in a logical way for a reason. The first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, lays a foundation. Genesis itself lays a foundation for the entire Bible as many of the key principles that continue throughout Scripture start there. John 1:29, "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." has little meaning to someone who knows nothing of the promised Messiah or of God's requirement for a sacrifice. It made sense to the original Jewish audience, but not to Gentile cultures in the 21st century. Therefore, it is important to teach the Biblical background and the patterns of God's gracious way of salvation in the midst of righteous judgment for man's sin. Many today have bits and pieces that are erroneously sewn together to make an unfortunately monstrous understanding of God's beautiful Truth. As difficult as it may be, do not contribute to manufacturing of Frankenstein theology. Instead, spell it out as God intended by teaching logically, orderly, and chronologically.

#5 - Know Your Battlefield

As you enter into this arena where culture, ideas, feelings, propaganda, history, science, and perception meet, it doesn't hurt to have a few scientific and historical facts handy when practicing apologetics. Being knowledgeable of the evidence that creation gives for the existence and character of a personal God can only be a benefit when talking to an atheist or agnostic. When speaking to a Russian Orthodox adherent, it is important to have a firm grasp on church history and how the church of Jesus Christ survived without being married to a government (in Rome, London, Kiev, or Moscow). Be aware of cultural landmines such syncretism and "golden-calf" superstitions that can either confuse your efforts or attempt to derail them. Remember that your primary objective is to introduce them to the Creator and spell out the story for them to Golgotha where the Messiah paid for their sin. There are many pitfalls along the way, but be prayerfully vigilant and obedient to the Spirit. Souls are at stake and you have the enormous responsibility of being sent with the most important message that a lost sinner will ever hear.