

Timothy Keller's 12 Categories of People

Timothy Keller recommends considering twelve different kinds of people who may be in your audience while you read the text to generate applications. He recommends asking, "Does the text speak to any of them?"ⁱ Keller's list is reproduced below without modification. A simpler version of the list is to consider the four types of soil Jesus discussed in Mark 4. The four groups of people in Mark 4 are "conscious skeptics and rejecters of the faith; nominal Christians whose commitment is shallow; Christians who are divided in their loyalties and upside down in their priorities; and mature, committed Christians." What does the text say about people with these four types of soils?

With the face of these different categories of people in mind, Keller recommends looking at the biblical truth and asking: How would this text apply to this or that person? He recommends imagining yourself personally counseling the person with the text. What would you say to the following twelve categories of people?

1. Conscious unbeliever: Is aware he is not a Christian.
 - a. Immoral pagan: Is living a blatantly immoral/illegal lifestyle.
 - b. Intellectual pagan: Claims the faith is untenable or unreasonable.
 - c. Imitative pagan: Is fashionably skeptical, but not profound.
 - d. Genuine thinker: Has serious, well-conceived objections.
 - e. Religious non-Christian: Belongs to an organized religion, cult, or denomination with seriously mistaken doctrine.
2. Nonchurched nominal Christian: Has belief in basic Christian doctrines, but with no or remote church connection.
3. Churched nominal Christian: Participates in church but is not regenerated.
 - a. Semiactive moralist: Is respectably moral but his religion is without assurance and is all a matter of duty.
 - b. Active self-righteous: Is very committed and involved in the church, with assurance of salvation based on good works.
4. Awakened: Is stirred and convicted over his sin but without gospel peace yet.
 - a. Curious: Is stirred up mainly in an intellectual way, full of questions and diligent in study.
 - b. Convicted with false peace: Without understanding the gospel, has been told that by walking an aisle, praying a prayer, or doing something, he is now right with God.
 - c. Comfortless: Is extremely aware of sins but not accepting or understanding of the gospel of grace.
5. Apostate: Was once active in the church but has repudiated the faith without regrets.
6. New Believer: Is recently converted.
 - a. Doubtful: Has many fears and hesitations about his new faith.
 - b. Eager: Is beginning with joy and confidence and a zeal to learn and serve.
 - c. Overzealous: Has become somewhat proud and judgmental of others and is overconfident of his own abilities.
7. Mature/growing: Passes through nearly all of the basic conditions named below but progresses through them because he responds quickly to pastoral treatment or knows how to treat himself.
8. Afflicted: Lives under a burden or trouble that saps spiritual strength. (Generally, we call a person afflicted who has not brought the trouble on himself.)
 - a. Physically afflicted: Is experiencing bodily decay.
 - i. The sick
 - ii. The elderly
 - iii. The disabled
 - b. Dying

- c. Bereaved: Has lost a loved one or experienced some other major loss (e.g., a home through a fire)
 - d. Lonely
 - e. Persecuted/abused
 - f. Poor/economic troubles
 - g. Desertion: Is spiritually dry through the action of God, who removes a sense of his nearness despite the use of the means of grace.
9. Tempted: Is struggling with a sin or sins that are remaining attractive and strong.
- a. Overtaken: Is tempted largely in the realm of the thoughts and desires.
 - b. Taken over: Has had a sin become an addictive behavior.
10. Immature: Is a spiritual baby who should be growing but is not.
- a. Undisciplined: Is lazy in using the means of grace and gifts for ministry.
 - b. Self-satisfied: Has had pride choke his growth, is complacent, and has perhaps become cynical and scornful of many other Christians.
 - c. Unbalanced: Has had either the intellectual, the emotional, or the volitional aspect of his faith become overemphasized.
 - d. Devotee of eccentric doctrine: Has become absorbed in a distorted teaching that hinders spiritual growth.
11. Depressed: Is not only experiencing negative feelings but also shirking Christian duties and being disobedient. If a person is a new believer, or tempted or afflicted or immature, and does not get proper treatment, he will become spiritually depressed. Besides these conditions, the following problems can lead to depression:
- a. Anxious: Is depressed through worry or fear handled improperly.
 - b. Weary: Has become listless and dry through overwork.
 - c. Angry: Is depressed through bitterness or uncontrolled anger handled improperly.
 - d. Introspective: Dwells on failures and feelings and lacks assurance.
 - e. Guilty: Has a wounded conscience and has not reached repentance.
12. Backslid: Has gone beyond depression to a withdrawal from fellowship with God and with the church.
- a. Tender: Is still easily convicted of his sins and susceptible to calls for repentance.
 - b. Hardening: Has become cynical, scornful, and difficult to convict.

ⁱ Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (London: Penguin, 2015), 289-292.