

Topic 29: Evangelism

Sharing the Message of Your New Life in Christ

“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”

—1 Peter 3:15



Evangalism simply means sharing the good news of God’s love for the world through Christ. But in today’s world, sometimes it comes across differently. What comes into your mind when you hear the word “evangelism”?

- A silver-tongued television preacher smiling at the camera and asking for money
- A sweating preacher who is flailing and yelling at his congregation
- A red-faced person who is arguing obnoxiously with a skeptic about the Bible
- Putting Christian bumper stickers on your car
- Turning off all your friends by being preachy and weird
- Other (write on blank line below):

The sad but true fact is that many Christians, for many reasons, don’t talk about their faith to non-believers.

Primary Reasons Christians Don’t Share Their Faith⁵

Reason	Example
Fear	“I’m scared of what others might say; how people might react.”
Lack of training	“No one ever showed me how to talk about spiritual matters. I wouldn’t know what to say!”
Minimal contact with unbelievers	“I mostly spend time with my Christian friends.”

5 “Successful Witnessing,” *The Compass*, www.cru.org/content/dam/cru/legacy/2012/01/successfulwitnessing.pdf.



Reason	Example
Shaky theology	"God is in control; he knows who is going to become Christian, so I don't need to say anything. Besides, who am I to foist my views on others? People have to find their own way."
A lack of concern	"I've got a lot going on in my life; I really need to focus now on my schooling/career/etc."
Losing sight of the power of the gospel	"As if my pitiful words and life could make a difference!"
Disobedience	"Bottom-line: I just don't want to do that."
Forgetting what successful evangelism is	"I have talked to twelve people about Jesus, and none have become Christians. So obviously I'm not called to evangelize."

And yet, a careful reading of the gospels shows that a disciple is a person who follows Jesus—to *know* Jesus and his teaching; to *grow* more like Jesus; and to *go* for Jesus, serving others and making new disciples. In this lesson we're looking hard at that third aspect of discipleship: going out into the world with Jesus. And specifically, talking about the gospel—doing evangelism, witnessing, sharing your faith, etc.

Bible Study

1. Have you ever tried to have a spiritual conversation with someone who was not a follower of Jesus, and if so, what happened?

2. If you are reluctant to talk to others about spiritual matters, what are *your* reasons?



The apostle Peter wrote his first epistle to believers who were being persecuted for their Christian beliefs. If ever there were a group of folks tempted to be “close-mouthed” about Jesus, this would have been the group. And yet, in 1 Peter 3:13–18, we find a challenge for them to verbalize their faith:

“Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. ‘Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.’ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.”

3. Before we look at it more deeply, what jumps out to you from this passage?

Evangelism Myths and Truths

Based on the passage above, work your way through the following chart, reflecting on the wrong notions many believers have about evangelism and how this passage refutes these evangelism myths.

Evangelism MYTH	Seeing the good news as GOOD NEWS!	Evangelism TRUTH
Sharing your faith depends on having a slick, prepared speech.	“in your hearts revere Christ as Lord...”	Sharing your faith depends on a surrendered heart.
You have to know a ton of theology.		You have to know Christ as Lord.



Evangelism MYTH	Seeing the good news as GOOD NEWS!	Evangelism TRUTH
It's the pastor's job.	"Always be prepared to give an answer..."	It's the job description of every disciple.
Witnessing is an activity.		Witnessing is a way of life.
I prefer to let my life do the talking.		We need to add words to our good deeds and humble, loving attitudes.
Nobody is interested in the gospel.	"to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have..."	People are interested in a life that's being transformed by the gospel.
Christians spread the gospel best by inviting Christians to religious gatherings.		Disciples spread the gospel most effectively by breaking out of their church groups and permeating the rest of the world.
Evangelism means confronting people—usually strangers—in a hard-hitting, and usually awkward, offensive, and abrasive way.	"But do this with gentleness and respect..."	Evangelism means loving the people God has placed in your life until they ask you why. And then, with great sensitivity, gently introducing them to Jesus.
A witness should "have it all together."	"keeping a clear conscience..."	A witness should be authentic and real, sharing his or her own struggles.
We should use whatever means are necessary to get the message out.		We should always be honest and ethical in our interactions with unbelievers, treating them with the same respect we want to receive.
Success in sharing your faith means that a non-Christian prays "the sinner's prayer."	"so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."	Success in sharing your faith means that God works in hearts in his way and his time, using our witness as he sees fit.

4. As you look at that chart, would you say your understanding of evangelism has been based more on myth or on truth? Why?



One of the best and easiest ways to share the gospel with others is to simply tell the story of your spiritual journey. The Bible word for this holy habit is “witness.” What’s a witness? It’s someone who has experienced something and who gives testimony about that experience to others (1 John 1:3). A witness has seen something with his own eyes. She’s heard something with her own ears. A witness is nothing more than a truth-teller.

“It is not our work to make men believe: that is the work of the Holy Spirit.”—D. L. Moody

You don’t have to be a theologian or pastor to learn to tell others about your own experience with Christ. Your testimony is just a succinct telling of how you met Jesus and how He has altered and continues to transform your life. It means sharing the ups and downs of your journey of faith.

Sharing your spiritual story is a valuable skill. It’s an effective tool for several reasons:

- ▶ Who can argue with a changed, authentic life? People can debate the Bible or quibble over theology, but no one can deny that something significant has happened to you.
- ▶ Your personal testimony can be adapted to all sorts of unique situations.
- ▶ God often uses the story of a person’s spiritual journey to pave the way for deeper discussions of the gospel.

So how to do it? How can you become adept at “sharing your testimony”? Here are some basics to get you started.

5. First, take a few minutes to read Acts 26:1–31, the apostle Paul’s testimony to King Agrippa about his own encounter with Jesus. What stands out to you about Paul’s witness here?

Do you notice how Paul spoke simply, logically, and chronologically? He began by speaking about his life *before* he met Christ on the Damascus Road (vss. 4–11). Then he related the circumstances surrounding his actual encounter with Jesus (vss. 12–20). Finally, he shared how his life changed *after* believing in Christ (verses 21–23).

That’s an easy and clear outline to follow in preparing our own testimonies. Let’s do it!



Writing Your Testimony

6. Answer the following questions lettered a through f. Then, take these answers and copy them to a separate sheet of paper or type them into your computer. Make whatever adjustments are needed for clarity and flow. The end result will be a concise and clear rendering of your personal testimony.

On the lines below, jot some notes and recollections about your own life prior to placing your faith in Christ. Perhaps you struggled with one or more of the following. And by the way, it's okay if these struggles continue to affect you. It's your *growth, trust, and persistence*—thanks to the strengthening of Christ—that matter.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling far from God | <input type="checkbox"/> Loneliness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gnawing inner emptiness | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling unloved |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of peace | <input type="checkbox"/> Insecurity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of death | <input type="checkbox"/> Immense guilt |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family dysfunction | <input type="checkbox"/> Desire for control |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Longing for meaning in life | <input type="checkbox"/> Addictive behaviors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traumatic childhood hurts | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of purpose |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feelings of insignificance | <input type="checkbox"/> Emotional instability |

a. Describe yourself before you met Christ in a personal way.

Oftentimes people try without success to solve their own problems. Perhaps this is your story as well. Maybe you looked for answers to the deep needs of your heart through a job, money, fun experiences, or popularity—even being religious? Maybe you thought academic success or athletic achievement or romance would “save” you.



b. Describe some of *your* failed attempts to fix your own problems.

Now, recall the circumstances surrounding how you were drawn to Christ. What made you consider him as the solution to your deepest needs?

c. Identify the specific events that led to your trusting in Jesus. If this was a long-term process, summarize it, but don't leave out important details.

d. State clearly the steps you took to put your faith in Christ. If God drew you to himself through a particular Bible verse, share that verse.

However you describe this life-changing moment, make sure to make the gospel clear. This includes the following truths:

- ▶ "I realized I was a sinner, separated from God."
- ▶ "I saw that the penalty for sin is death."



- ▶ "I understood that Jesus paid the penalty for my sins."
- ▶ "I put my trust in Christ alone and what He did for me."

Now very concisely, talk about your life *since* coming into a relationship with Jesus. Your goal here is to show the difference that Christ is making in your life. You don't need to show one-hundred percent victory over every difficulty. Simply sharing your confidence—through examples—that the Lord is walking beside you through the problems, will help your listener understand.

e. What are the biggest changes that have happened in your life?

Be sure to conclude with a statement along the lines of, "And, of course, in addition to the amazing benefit of being accepted in this life, I also have the promise of heaven." A statement like this often leads to a deeper conversation of spiritual matters. Your friend may ask, "How can you say that? How can *anyone* say that? How can you know *for sure*?"

f. Write your closing statement.

"I look upon this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a lifeboat and said, 'Moody, save all you can.'"—D. L. Moody

Take-Home Reflections



Top Ten Testimony Tips!

- ▶ No two testimonies are alike because no two lives are. Don't try to copy someone else's story. God can and will use your own unique experience to speak to others. Be real. Be authentic. There's an old Yiddish proverb that says, "If you try to be someone else, who will be you?"
- ▶ If you met Christ as an adult, you may have a distinct *before*, *how*, and *after*. If you trusted Christ as a child, you may not be able to report radical changes in behavior; nevertheless, you ought to be able to point to some concrete ways Christ is changing you now or has changed you in the past (in attitudes, goals, challenges, desires, etc.).
- ▶ Avoid Christian clichés. Many Biblical words and phrases that are meaningful to believers (saved, sin, lost, born again, live in your heart, washed in the blood, sanctified, etc.) are meaningless to unbelievers. Translate Christian jargon into normal English.
- ▶ Avoid controversial statements or subjects. For example, going off on a rant against alcohol may turn off a skeptical person.
- ▶ Don't criticize specific churches, individuals, or groups.
- ▶ There is no need to share a lot of the seamy details of your life before meeting Christ. Be discreet.
- ▶ Keep your testimony warm and personal. Don't get preachy and wordy. Make it a point to say "I" and "me" rather than "you." This is your story, and yours alone. God deals differently with each person.
- ▶ Practice sharing your testimony with a spouse, child, parent, Christian friend, or small group until it becomes second nature. Then ask God for opportunities to share your testimony with non-Christian friends and acquaintances.
- ▶ Don't bore people with tons of unnecessary details. A succinct summary—three to four minutes at absolute most—is sufficient. You want to arouse curiosity. You want, when you're done, people asking for *more* details rather than thinking, "I thought he or she would *never* shut up!"
- ▶ If you can, include a meaningful Bible verse. God's Word is far more powerful than anything we might say. It has the power to change hearts and lives (2 Timothy 3:16–17). If you quote a verse, make sure it's one that speaks about the hope that Christ brings or about the free gift of the gospel (John 10:10, Ephesians 2:8–9). It's usually a good idea to do this from one of the more modern, easy-to-understand translations like the *New Living Translation* (NLT), the *New International Version* (NIV), or the *English Standard Version* (ESV).



Life Application

An important part of discipleship is learning how to apply God's truths to your life. Below are just a few ways you can start thinking about what you've learned and apply it to your daily life.

1. Memorize our memory verse,
1 Peter 3:15:

"But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."

2. Read through the suggestions in "How to Create Opportunities to Talk About Your Faith," on the next page. These suggestions help you weave your testimony into everyday conversations.
3. Wrestle with one or two of the questions in the right-hand column.
 - ▶ How can a rich, authentic relationship

with Jesus—and submission to his Lordship (1 Peter 3:15)—make a difference in how we share our faith?

- ▶ Which is more important: "walking the walk"—Christian living—or "talking the talk"—telling others about Christ? Which are you better at and why?
- ▶ Why is it that some Christians have no meaningful contacts with unbelievers?
- ▶ Why would Christians get defensive when skeptics attack our faith?
- ▶ Does Peter's command to respond "with gentleness and respect" mean that we can never say "hard" things to non-Christian friends?
- ▶ Make a list of five people with whom you'd like to discuss spiritual matters. Pray for them. We should always talk to God about people before we talk to people about God.





How to Create Opportunities to Talk About Your Faith

- ▶ Don't spend all your time with church people! Build relationships with those who don't know Christ! Move toward them in love. Love them because God does. Love them with no strings attached. Win the right to be heard.
- ▶ Don't condemn unbelievers for living like unbelievers. That's what they are! Their biggest need isn't a lifestyle change—it's Jesus! Accept them as they are. Many of them are leery about judgmental Christians. It's the Holy Spirit's job to convict them of sin and repentance, not yours.
- ▶ Open your life. Talk about everyday stuff (family, hobbies, job, school, friends, children, relationships, etc.). Listen attentively for expressed needs such as family problems or stress in school or at work. For example, if your friend says, "I'm really worried about my son . . ." maybe you can sympathize and tactfully share how Christ has helped you in a similar situation—or how he brought you through your own difficult teen years.
- ▶ Discuss personal struggles and needs—both past and present. "Did I ever tell you how I survived my divorce?" "We're going through a rough patch financially, and it's nerve-wracking, but you know what? Never in my life have I felt abandoned by God. He has always provided for us."
- ▶ After sharing something Christ has done or is doing in your life, ask a question like "Have you ever experienced anything like that?" or "Does that make sense?"
- ▶ Don't argue. Absolutely refuse to debate. No one ever got dragged kicking and screaming into the kingdom of God! Today may not be God's timing.
- ▶ Never "dump the truck." Better to say less, and have them ask for more, than to say too much and have them looking for the nearest exit.
- ▶ Piggyback off contemporary situations and news stories. Ask thought-provoking questions. For example, when a friend brings up how so many politicians seem to tap into and prey upon voters' fears: "Why do think people are so afraid? What are the things that scare you? What do you do when you feel fearful?" After listening thoughtfully, maybe you can say something like, "You know, I can certainly relate. The world is a pretty scary place. But that's something my faith has helped me with . . ."
- ▶ If it's clear your friend is uncomfortable, end on a positive note. Communicate love and acceptance. Allow the Holy Spirit to set the pace. He opens and closes doors of opportunity.