

Sharing our Faith Part 2:

How Should We Do It?



Recap:

In part 1 we asked 4 questions about sharing our faith and answered 3!

- What is It? (Witness and Evangelism)
- Who Must Do It? (All of us)
- How Should We Do It? (today's topic)
- Why We Must Do It (because of eternity)

Introduction

What is the best way to share your faith?

Ask 10 different people and you'll probably get 9 different answers!

Some examples might be:

- Friendship evangelism
- Street evangelism
- Door-to-door visitation
- Handing out tracts
- Outreach services and special events
- Regular outreach programmes and groups like playgroups, craft groups, children's and youth groups, Scripture in schools.
- Media campaigns like "Jesus, All About Life"
- Short courses like Alpha or Introducing God
- Hospitality
- Short-term mission trips
- Servant Evangelism

There are so many different programmes and methods designed to help Christians to be effective and more confident in sharing their faith – which ones should we use?

Today we are going to build a biblical foundation for how we can share our faith, before we look at some practical things that you and I can do to be obedient to God and loving to those around us by sharing the most important news that anyone will ever hear.

In order to get a feel for how God has designed His church to grow as people come to faith in Christ, let's look at how it got started. Turn with me to the book of Acts chapter 1 as we look for some principles that will guide us today.

Acts 1:1-11

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.³ After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

⁶ So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

⁷ He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

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Acts 1:12-14

¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. ¹³ When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴ They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

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Acts 2:1-14

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” ¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

¹³ Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.” ¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd...

Acts 2:41-47

⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Conversion is God's Work!



Who added to the early church daily those who were being saved? God did!

Speaking to Christians in Corinth who had taken their eyes off God and were following certain leaders instead, Paul wrote: ⁵ *What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. ⁶ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.*” (1 Cor 3:5-6)

Conversion is God's work. He uses His people in some of that task, but it is never people who do the work – it is God working through those people, as well as through other means”.

We must not forget that we are in a spiritual battle.

In 2 Corinthians 4 we read: ⁴ *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*” (2 Cor. 4:4-6)

In other words, unless God causes His light to shine in our hearts to illuminate our minds to the truth, we cannot comprehend or accept the gospel message in order to be saved.

I came across a book recently in which the author was saying that ordinary Christians are like witnesses – they simply testify to what they have seen and heard and believe. He went a step further to argue that some Christians are soul-winners. They are more like the prosecuting attorney, who *“...employs a skillful approach to the prospect. Using calculated phrases, he extracts information from his prospect and then uses that information to bring him face to face with Christ. With careful timing he moves up to the crisis point and presses for a decision. Everything he does and says is geared to getting his man to DO SOMETHING with Jesus. If he does it right, there is no way for a prospect to avoid a face to face encounter with the Lord. You can see that it takes skill and confidence.”*²

There is a real danger in thinking that skill and confidence on our part can win others into the kingdom. Churches fall into this trap when they seek to copy methods that work elsewhere, thinking that if they have good enough music, good enough speakers, good enough programmes, good enough facilities and so on, that they will grow God's Kingdom.

What they'll actually do is grow their own kingdom, with people who've transferred from other parts of God's Kingdom and people who aren't in God's Kingdom but who go there because of the good music, entertaining speakers, helpful advice, the promise of a more satisfying life, good child care and so on!

I am in no way suggesting that we shouldn't do our very best in each of those areas – we should give God our absolute best in everything we do. We should be showing people that we are serious and we are passionate about the gospel we are presenting. But we must keep a right perspective that conversion is God's Work, and if we try to do it our own way we will only get in His way!

² C.S. Lovett, from http://www.soshelp.com/how_to_be_a_successful_soul_winner.html © Copyright 2007. SOS Inc.

So the real question becomes:

What can we do to see God's work go ahead in and through us?

Well, what did the early Christians do after they received Christ's command?
They stood around gawking at the sky! They did nothing!

Then they were reminded by two angels that Jesus had gone into heaven *and would return the same way He left!*

That got them going! Jesus is coming back, we'd better do what He asked us to!

1) We need to Remember the Return of Jesus

One of those present was the apostle Peter. Many years later he wrote the letters which we now know as 1 & 2 Peter. If you ever need reminding to live as someone who expects Jesus to return at any time, read those letters! It's clear that Peter never forgot this lesson from the angels, and it never stopped filling him with urgency and purpose in life.

Satan wants to lull us into a stupor of selfish and pointless pursuits that indulge our own comfort and desires. He wants our lives to be about things that have no eternal purpose. He wants to keep us distracted from the main game. Don't let him do that to you. Remember the return of Jesus as Judge over all the world. Be ready. Help others be ready.

2) We Need to Pray Constantly

We discover that as they waited for the promised Holy Spirit, the believers met together constantly for prayer. They did not run ahead of God and start the work on their own, but they obeyed Jesus and waited. As they waited, they prayed.

So often when we think about reaching the lost, we leap straight to ideas and methods that we can use. We need to learn how to wait and pray. When we pray, we do a number of things all at the same time. We somehow influence the actions of God in ways that we cannot understand. Why would the all-knowing, all-powerful God listen to us, answer us and even grant us our desires? Yet, according to His sovereign knowledge and plan, He does. In prayer, our hearts and minds are also drawn closer to God. Our desires are moulded after His desires. Our thoughts are changed to be more like His thoughts. It is where we receive guidance and are shaped in character.

Perhaps the greatest hindrance faced by many churches today is the lack of spiritual wisdom and power that comes from a lack of time in prayer.

When you look at the lives of the Apostles – who followed the example of Jesus Himself – as well as the many Christians that God has used to accomplish great things over the centuries, you always find this common thread: great devotion to prayer. Of course, you also find many, many examples of people who were fervent and committed in prayer and who never achieved anything great according to our estimation. But who knows what their true accomplishments were in God's sight?

Prayer is not a tool we use in order to get God to bless our efforts. It is spiritual breathing – we do it just to stay alive.

3) We Need to be Filled With the Spirit

What was it that got the people in Jerusalem curious about what was going on with the group of believers, and gave Peter the chance to share with them about Jesus? It was the evidence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Not everyone understood what they were witnessing. Some mocked. But both the mockers and the curious inquirers got to hear the message of the gospel because they heard and saw evidence of spirit-filled lives.

The Holy Spirit works in all sorts of ways in Christians. He works through the quiet consistency of a holy life. He works through passionate preaching in churches, auditoriums and street corners. He works through acts of kindness. He works through intellectual debate. He works through miraculous signs. He works through conversations among friends. He works through art – music, painting, drama, literature, architecture – the forms are limitless. Anything we do by the Holy Spirit is able to produce spiritual life.

In one of the home groups that Carolyn and I were a part of several years ago we were going through a book called “Honest to God?” by Bill Hybels. In one chapter he described six different New Testament characters who all had different ways of leading people to Jesus. The point is that we don’t have to be like someone else, or be something we’re not, in order to share our faith. As we are watchful and prayerful we will discover that God has made us the way we are on purpose. He will work in us through His Spirit as we faithfully respond to the prompts that He gives us.

In Acts 2:42-47 we see described what it looks like to be Spiritually filled. It produced

- a devotion to growth in spiritual maturity (the apostle’s teaching)
- a devotion to Christian fellowship (the fellowship)
- a focus on Jesus as the source of our life (the breaking of bread)
- a devotion to prayer
- evidence of supernatural power (wonders and miraculous signs by apostles)
- a generosity of spirit (everything in common, selling possessions)
- public and private worship (temple courts and homes)

These things are all evidence of a spirit-filled life. When we see these sorts of things, we can also expect to see God working through us to add to our number those who are being saved.

4) We Need to Be Bold

Regardless of how God has designed you to best share your faith with others, it will still require boldness. It will not be easy. You will be tempted to hold back, to temper down you witness so as to not offend or alienate.

When people wanted to know what was going on with the early believers, Peter had to stand up and speak. He couldn’t even speak to one servant girl about Jesus 6 weeks ago, but here he is preaching to thousands! The Holy Spirit was working in him, but it still required a choice of will to get up and open his mouth. The same thing is true of us.

We need to love God and love others enough that we will put ourselves on the line and share the truth when we are given the opportunity to do so.

5) We Need to Be Biblical

We didn’t read through Peter’s sermon from Acts 2, but if you are familiar with it you will know that he used both the Old Testament Scriptures and the teaching he had received from Jesus as the foundation of what he said to the crowd. Of course we read later on that one of the things that early Christians devoted themselves to was the Apostles’ teaching.

We need to know the Bible so well that whatever we share with people has a firm foundation and framework of biblical truth. The truths of the bible need to be so well grounded in us that they are able to flow from us. There are a lot of great outlines that help us to summarise the teaching of the Bible, there are training courses that we can do to help us apply the Bible in all sorts of very specific ways. We need to be filling our minds with Biblical truth and we need to be practicing the communication of that truth with one another and those who don’t yet know Christ. It’s one thing to have it in here (our minds) but quite another to speak it out clearly.

Common Mistakes Churches Make

There are some things that churches and Christians very often forget, and therefore we miss out on seeing the work of God take place in them and through them:

1. **Forgetting our Purpose**

We are here to make disciples. To witness for Christ in the places He puts us, even to the ends of the Earth. There are many other good things we can do and should do, but there is one thing we must do, and nothing must get in the way. Churches can get very busy doing a great deal of good things and also a great deal of trivial things. We get hung up not only with all the busyness of what we do and how we do it, but also on petty issues and personal issues that stop us from working effectively together as a body. We need to remember our purpose so that we don't get caught up in stuff that gets in the way of what we should be doing.

2. **Forgetting our Power**

We are not to do it on our own. If we try, we will either fail dismally and our churches will die, or else we will succeed and our churches will be full of people who may not be genuinely saved, but who have bought what we were selling. We will become market-driven, doing anything to bring people in. The only way to save people is for God to do it, and let Him use us however He wills. Spiritual life comes from believing in Jesus Christ – not “advertising agency Jesus” designed to appeal to a consumer market, but the real Jesus of the Bible. Spiritual power comes from personal holiness – seeking God and forsaking sin. When we live godly lives and hold out the message of truth we will see more and more the powerful work of God in our midst. Power from God, not from us.

3. **Forgetting to Follow**

Sometimes people think that since God does the saving, we should not get in the way. We should pray and leave the rest to God. The same thinking applies to churches – we should continue to do what we do the way we do it and let God bring in the ones He wants to. It's the opposite extreme of trying to do it all ourselves. Instead of seeking God and letting Him lead them into effective witness, they just keep doing whatever it is that they do and expect that at any moment God is suddenly going to make it work! That's not following Jesus, that's self-indulgence. Jesus has commanded his followers to do the work of making disciples. He is the one who makes that work effective, but still we must do it with Him. He has chosen to work through you and I.

Remember Jesus said to His first disciples: *“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”* (Lk 10:2)

The Lord of the Harvest has sent those workers out, it is called the Great Commission which Connie read out for us earlier. Given the fact that the workers are few but the harvest is plentiful, how do you think the Lord of the Harvest is going to respond if some of those workers decide that they're not really needed after all? Or they're too busy, or not well enough trained, or too nervous....?

Where to from here?



Remember our Biblical Foundation:

1. We need to Remember the Return of Jesus
2. We Need to Pray Constantly
3. We Need to be Filled With the Spirit
4. We Need to Be Bold
5. We Need to Be Biblical

I'd like you to look at that list and ask God to convict you of one thing that He wants you to do from today. What specific change in behaviour needs to occur? Who will you tell about it in order to receive support and be held accountable? Perhaps you are in a home group and you can each share your action plan with each other this week and check in with each other to see how you are going.

I remember reading the story of a Christian businessman named Stanley Tam in a book called "God Owns My Business". He became a Christian as a young man while working as a door-to-door salesman. A lady invited him in and shared the gospel with him. That was the beginning of a great story of how God worked in his personal and business life to reach out and share the good news about Jesus with others. One of the things that the Holy Spirit led him to do was simply place gospel tracts in all the catalogues and orders his company dispatched. As God grew the business literally millions of these tracts were distributed, and Stanley would regularly hear back from people who had been impacted by the truth of the gospel. A simple decision, resulting from God's leading, followed through with committed action, resulting in lives changed.

I recently read of a lady who would write each week to a church member who had been imprisoned for three years as a result of his battle with drug addiction. She would include a transcript of that week's church service – songs, announcements and the sermon. He wrote back and said "Would you send four of these to me? The warden says we can only gather in groups of ten, but a lot of guys want to hear what's going on at church each week." That church now reaches out to people in other prisons, many of whom connect with them after serving their time in jail.¹ A simple act of love and obedience led to a whole new area of ministry and impact for that church family.

Over the years my parents have been involved in caring for a number of children in all sorts of different situations. A few years back Dad had the privilege of baptising a young lady who they had fostered over several years. Fostering is a lot of hard work, but what an opportunity to invest in the life of someone who might not have had a lot of love and security in their life so far. Read Matthew 25 and Luke 14 to see God's heart on that.

This church is about to embark on Missions Month. It has the "Jesus, all about life" campaign and training coming up. There are a whole bunch of opportunities.

What is Jesus asking of *you* today?

Decide. Share it with others. Follow Through.

If the Holy Spirit hasn't prompted you with a specific point of action then commit yourself to pray about it until God reveals to you what it is that He wants you to do.

ⁱ From “Can Your Church Handle the Truth” by Matt Russell with Angie Ward. Copyright 2009. Reprinted from Leadership Magazine.