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Jesus Made Faith Sharing Easy: So Can You!

Pastor Glenn took his place in the pulpit as the last verse of the song came to an end. As usual, he said a short prayer that God would bless his speaking and the value to the congregation. He asked the people to be seated and began: "Today, I want to focus on the concept of evangelism."

Pastor Glenn was shocked to notice that the entire congregation, in unison, bowed their heads. They weren't praying. They were looking at their feet! They wanted to escape the wrath of evangelism.

It's amazing how petrified people are about sharing their faith. Why? For one thing, no one with a healthy attitude likes rejection. Further, many Christians have the idea that to share faith you have to be an expert who knows Bible verses, by chapter and verse.

In most churches, there is mass confusion about evangelism and witnessing. Evangelism is a spiritual gift. About 10 percent of any church have this gift. Ninety percent do not. However, with a little help, they can become witnesses.

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MULTIPLYING MINISTRY

- ▶ The *Church Doctor® Report* is provided at no cost. Forward it to those in your network of influence and add value to their lives!
- ▶ Forward it to staff and leaders in your church, denomination, network, or fellowship.

You can retrain your entire church to be witnesses of their faith, and they'll never see it coming. They'll never know what happened. It will become a part of their lives, even though you never once announced a program.

Great Christian Movements

In 1865, William Booth began the Salvation Army. It was a brilliant idea! Booth recognized that in London, where he lived, there were many people in need. Everywhere you looked you could see hunger, poverty, needs for education, job training. William Booth thought this would be a great platform for sharing Jesus Christ.

It worked! Over time, the Salvation Army experienced spiritual drift. Several decades ago, I was asked to address the world leaders of the Salvation Army at their headquarters in London. Why? Their great movement was stalled. I already knew this. I had consulted Salvation Army churches in the U.S. Those churches had been declining. What happened?

William Booth had a great plan. But the Salvation Army that followed slowly and quietly drifted from his plan. They didn't drift from feeding the hungry. They just forgot to tell people about Jesus. So, the Salvation Army, as an evangelistic movement, became the local soup kitchen.

The same thing happened to the YMCA. The YMCA was founded in 1844. Then came the YWCA, for women. Today, it has rebranded as the Y. The original intent was to gather Christian young men and women who liked physical activity: lifting weights, running, playing basketball in a gym, or whatever. The idea was they would be involved in Bible study. Faith would be shared; Christianity would grow.

The YMCA (and the YWCA) began to drift, just like the Salvation Army. The YMCA movement became the neighborhood gym. They had lost their focus, not on fitness, but on spiritual growth in Jesus Christ.

Today, much like the Salvation Army, the YMCA is experiencing renewal. This is just beginning in the U.S. It has already occurred among many churches in England.

Our local YMCA is in Auburn, Indiana. It is one of the most magnificent locations in the entire city. It represents the new "town square" of the community. The old town square, complete with courthouse, was intended to be the meeting place. It has landscaped lawns, flowers, and benches. However, if you look at the cars in the parking lots, the new gathering place for the city is the YMCA.

Thankfully, the YMCA movement has regained its original purpose: to reach people for Jesus Christ. The YMCA in Auburn has its own "missionary" on staff. Recently, my son, Jon, completed the first series of Alpha, a wonderful introduction to Christianity via DVD at the Auburn YMCA. Alpha originally came from Holy Trinity Brompton, in London, England.

Churches that Fall into the Feel-Good Trap

Many churches have been energized by reaching the needs of people. My colleague and the leader of our ministry, Tracee, consulted a church in Michigan. They had a food bank that grew so large it filled every room of the church six-and-a-half days of the week. The mission of that church was clear: feeding people. They gave away more than a million pounds of food every year. However, they called in Tracee as a consultant. Why? Their church was declining — and aging. The handwriting was on the wall. This church won't be around 10 years from now. It will just be a food pantry.

There are many churches and whole denominations that have rewritten the Great Commission. They claim: "We are the hands and feet of Jesus." This is a good idea. However, it is only good for God when it's in the balance. Helping people with their physical needs is a Christian act of kindness. However, when it becomes all you do, you are no longer a church or a mission. You are a social agency. Meeting the needs of people is a great way to develop relationships. Relationships are the platform for sharing our faith. The key takeaway? It is not an either/or issue. It's both/and.

Feeding people is a real feel-good exercise. It's simple. People are grateful. No one argues with you. You aren't rejected. So, we feed people, and now these people are fat when they die and go to hell. People without Christ, no matter how full their belly, are lost for eternity.

It is ironic that some churches meet needs, but forget to share the gospel. Other churches focus on spirituality, but never develop relationships or meet needs. Can we get this right? We are the hands and feet of Jesus. We are also ambassadors for Christ proclaiming the eternal dimensions of faith. Healthy churches meet spiritual needs of heart and soul *and* the challenges people face. In truth, everything is spiritual. But there is only one way to salvation and eternal life: Jesus Christ. Faith in Him is the only unique issue for Christians. Think about it. Atheists, Muslims, humanists, Buddhists — all these people help some people with physical, social, and financial needs. But none of them can share the spiritual power in Jesus Christ.

It does feel good to help those in need. It is eternally good to introduce them to Jesus. Why? (1) It moves people beyond the symptoms to the eternal causative issues that plague those who suffer, and (2) it guides them to the free gift of salvation, with eternal consequences.

KEY RESOURCES

Alpha. <http://alphausa.org>.

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The Evangelism Committee Catastrophe

My friend John said, “If they ask me to be on the evangelism committee — I’d leave the church. Who are those weird people that would do that, anyway?”

Look at the typical evangelism committee. After consulting a couple thousand churches, we’ve seen a few patterns emerge about evangelism committees. These people love God and love the church — no question! They do want their church to grow, but, most often, they don’t have a clue how to go about it. Their objectives are honorable, but their strategies are ineffective. They are committed to the church but ignorant about how God intends His people to reach this world.

Many are willing to sit on an evangelism committee, board, team, or group. They have some issues in common. They want their church to grow. They care about people without Jesus who are going to hell. They see their team efforts as part of the church structure. In that way, they’re much like the property or worship committees.

In truth, most evangelism committees spend time talking about institutional strategies: publicity for the church, website development, the church sign, mailings to those in the community. All these issues are church-building-centered! They talk about evangelism but don’t do it. They are often elected or coerced to the evangelism committee. They may not know whether they have the gift or calling to evangelism.

The last thing those with the gift of evangelist should do is to sit in a meeting at church. They should spend most of their time among those who are unchurched. They should never use their gift alone. Ephesians 4 says evangelists are a “gift” to the church and they are to “equip God’s people for the work of ministry.” Consequently, evangelists should reach unbelievers *and* equip others who have the gift of evangelism while they are in the process of reaching unbelievers.

One of the biblical principles missing in many churches is that many do not discover, develop, and use their spiritual gifts. In history, whenever there has been a great move of God, there has been a resurgence of two important biblical principles:

TEN FINE POINTS FOR SHARING YOUR FAITH

1. Helping people with their needs is the Christian thing to do *and* a great conduit to share your faith.
2. Empower those with the gift of evangelism to focus their lives among non-Christians.
3. Dissolve the evangelism committee. It implies sharing faith is not for everyone.
4. Everyone is an eyewitness of what God has done in their lives.
5. Front-end witnessing is not about Bible verses, theology, or inviting people to church.
6. Develop a culture of sharing God stories — be a cultural architect.
7. Launch a movement of witnessing in your church — be a movement architect.
8. Your primary target for God stories is your social network, where you have influence.
9. Pray, every day, for receptivity in those in your social network who don’t know Jesus Christ.
10. When *they* are interested, share one of your God stories.

1. The priesthood of all believers: Everyone is a minister (not just the staff) and
2. The discovery of spiritual gifts for everyone in the church. The gifts determine the ministry the Holy Spirit has given you. Those with the gift of evangelism have the spiritual ability, given by the Holy Spirit, to share Jesus Christ with non-Christians. They should disciple those who have that same gift through “on-the-job experience.”

But what about the rest of us? Most don't have the gift of evangelist. We have the role of witnessing.

I-Witness: Turning Your Life into a Spiritual Adventure

All Christians have the *role of witnessing*. So why don't most share their faith? Our research shows there are several reasons:

1. *The fear of rejection*. No normal person enjoys rejection. It hurts; it's painful. Many Christians begin with the preconceived notion, “They don't want to hear this. They're going to be turned off.”
2. *The false belief that non-practicing Christians are not interested in spiritual conversations*. That's not true, as we discovered through extensive research with those who are functionally unchurched. This is a lie of the enemy and a misconception fueled by modern media.
3. *Lack of confidence in Bible knowledge*. Many do not feel they can quote chapter and verse from the Scripture. Ironically, when non-Christians first consider spirituality, they are not interested in chapter and verse.
4. *Many Christians think it's the pastor's job to talk about spiritual matters with unbelievers*. However, your pastor will never meet most of the unchurched people in your social network.
5. *Most Christians don't understand what it means to be a “witness.”*

The New Testament actually has two categories for sharing the faith. One is being an evangelist. The other is witnessing. Jesus said in Acts 1:8, “When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you (all) will be witnesses for Me, witnesses of Me, in your hometown (Jerusalem); the whole area (Judea); cross-culturally (Samaria); and to the ends of the earth (foreign mission fields).” Witnessing is not evangelism.

So, What is Witnessing?

Witnessing is telling your story. A witness in a courtroom says, “I was there. It happened to me; I saw it happen.”

Stop and think about this for a moment: How long have you been a believer, a Christ-follower? What has God done in your life? A witness is simply someone who tells another person their God stories, what God has done in their life.

God Stories

If you have been a Christian for more than a year, you probably have several God stories, perhaps dozens! You don't need to know Bible verses or theology. At the beginning of the spiritual journey, other people are not interested in that part of Christianity or even ready to hear it.

Every God story, no matter what the details, is basically this story: “God is alive and working in our world today. I personally know this because it happened to me.”

Your God stories don't have to be smooth speeches or carefully worded. In fact, they are more authentic when they are not rehearsed or polished. Your relationship with the person is powerful. Just be real!

Watch for those in your social network who have a challenge. If you have had a similar experience that helped you grow in your faith, then you have a powerful story to tell.

Launching a Sacred Movement in Plain Sight

If you wanted to launch this movement in your church, what would you do?

The last thing you want to do is start a program. Try this: At my last church, I taught a Bible class every Sunday. Normally, we started with prayer requests. Then we prayed, and I taught the lesson. When I decided to launch this movement, I changed the way we began. I began by saying, “Before we take prayer requests and pray, I would just like to ask, ‘Would anybody like to share what God has done in your life since we met last Sunday? Anybody want to share anything at all?’”

What do you think happened? The answer? Nothing!

The next Sunday I did the same thing: “Anybody want to share what God has done in your life since we met last week? Anything at all?” Nothing.

By week five, I asked the question, and, after a pause, Mildred raised her hand. What Mildred said was not profound. It was not well-rehearsed. It was not smooth. However, she shared from her heart. She was the only one who responded to my invitation that week. However, it was the beginning of a movement.

The following week, no one had a story to share. However, the week after that, two people shared. After seven months, I had to cut off the sharing at 15 minutes so we could get to the opening prayer and complete the teaching lesson!

Next, I began to add this request for God stories at the beginning of every elders' meeting and council meeting. I began to ask this question at congregational gatherings before we ate a meal. I began to do this everywhere and every time people gathered, except for worship.

After 18 months, people were telling their God stories, not only in church, but to unchurched people in their social networks. The culture had changed. I don't think we ever talked about “witnessing.” We were just sharing our God stories. It quickly became a part of our lives. It became a movement, involving more and more people in our church.

Our church began to grow. People were sharing God stories all over the place, in their social networks. In the next three years, our church exploded and grew to five times its original size. No one ever taught a class on witnessing. I never preached about witnessing. I never taught a class about witnessing. We just changed the culture to sharing God stories.

The brilliance of Jesus is that He changed the culture of His disciples. He didn't simply teach it as much as they caught it. This can happen again. It can happen to you. It can happen in your church.

What has God done in your life? And what do you have to say about it?