Welcome to the Evangelism C.S., Introduce yourself / co-teachers, Handout, Pray

**Introduction**

This is the **4th of 13** classes on evangelism. As we have mentioned throughout, this class is intended to both educate you on theological truths about evangelism, but more than that, it is designed to equip you and exhort you to be active and intentional in taking the Gospel to the people God has placed around you.

*Last week*, we spent some time looking at what the Bible says about the Gospel, and then we looked at how the Bible defines the Gospel before finally looked at the things we need to clearly explain as we go about sharing the good news. If you remember, we suggested a four-part framework for delivering the gospel message: God, man, Jesus, and response.

God created us to serve him, to love him, and to live under his authority, but we have rebelled against God, choosing instead to serve and love ourselves and to reject God's rule in our lives. The Bible doesn’t take rebellion lightly. It calls it sin. Because God is completely good, he would be just in punishing us eternally for these sins. BUT, while we were yet sinners, he provided a way for us to be reconciled with Him. He sent His Son, Jesus, into the world. Unlike us, Jesus lived in perfect obedience to his Father and then died on a cross as a sacrifice for sinners. And three days later, Jesus rose from the dead, proving that God had accepted his sacrifice. What Jesus accomplished on the cross -- the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God -- is now available for anyone who would turn away from their sins -- what the Bible calls "repentance" -- and put their trust in Christ.

As Christians we count it both a joy and a privilege to be given the responsibility of sharing this Gospel. HOW could we not share it? It’s bigger than any news we could ever pass along about the weather, about our health, about sports, about a great meal or great book, about politics or the economy, the Gospel is the one and only message in the world through which God brings souls from death to life.

If you are a Christian, you know that to be true about yourself, you know how you, as the song puts it, "were lost in darkest night" until you "beheld God's love displayed" in the Gospel, and how, as a result, "now all [you] know is grace." Which brings us to our topic for today: What it means to faithfully share your personal testimony.

**What A Personal Testimony Is And Isn't**

What I mean by personal testimony is: the story of how you came to be reconciled to God through the Gospel. We will flesh this out in more detail in a few minutes, but right from the get-go, we should be clear about something so as to avoid any misunderstandings. **Sharing your testimony, in and of itself, does not necessarily constitute evangelism.**

In Matthew 28, Jesus commissions Christians to "go and make disciples" -- in other words, to share the Gospel with people and then to encourage those who accept it to grow in spiritual maturity in their relationship with God. Jesus brings Christians into the Great Commission to tell others about what he accomplished on the cross. That is his charge, not an option. Evangelism, as we have said several times, is the act of sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

**So, even though we are dedicating a whole class to it, we don't want you to think that sharing your personal testimony should ever be a substitute for sharing the Gospel.** Our senior pastor put it like this in a message a few years back:

**"**A personal testimony is a wonderful thing. The Bible is full of examples of it, and we should testify to the wonderful experience of receiving God's mercy. But consider **John 9** and the man born blind. He gives his testimony but doesn't even know who Jesus is. His words glorify God, but they don't present the gospel. This is not evangelism. Unless you're explicit about Jesus Christ and the cross then it is not the gospel."

**Our personal testimonies are not the Gospel, but rather a testament to how the Gospel has proved itself true in our lives.** In our remaining time, we hope to grasp how the act of sharing our testimonies can be an effective tool for the purposes of evangelism.

**3 Reasons To Share Your Testimony**

**Psalm 66:16** “Come and listen, all you who fear God, let me tell you what he has done for me.”

There’s definitely many more, but let's discuss at least three reasons why we ought to reflect upon and share our testimonies.

1. **To fight fear and doubt in evangelism.**

Whenever you start to get nervous at the thought of sharing the Gospel with someone, or whenever you start to doubt if God really has the power to save the person he has laid on your heart to talk to about the gospel, taking some time to remember how God intersected your own life can be a powerful weapon in your struggle to find boldness and faith. **Think about this, praise God that the person who shared the Gospel with you didn't cower in fear but was brave enough to speak the truth, in love, to you!**

Recall how lost you really were without God. "Remember," as Paul instructs the believers in Ephesus in **Ephesians 2:12**, "that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.” Recall how you, like the preacher and hymn writer John Newton wrote of himself before conversion, were "capable of anything" and "had not the least fear of God before [your] eyes … nor the least sensibility of conscience." Recall how you were hell-bound, how the emptiness of the world's lies gnawed at you, how your heart was cold, and hard as a rock, how you were an enemy of God.

Then marvel at how God saved you. Marvel at how, as Paul continues in that passage from Ephesians, "in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ." Marvel at how, as St. Augustine wrote in The Confessions, God "released [you] from the fetters of lust which held [you] so tightly shackled and from [your] slavery to the things of this world." Marvel at how he changed your trajectory. How he rescued you. How he filled that gnawing void in your life. How he forgave your sins. How he broke your stony heart and replaced it with a heart of love for Him. How he made you his friend.

The truth, if we are honest with ourselves, is that if God can save you and me, he can save anybody. By remembering the miracle, and the joy of our own salvation, we are stirred to boldness in pursuing the salvation of others.

2. **To encourage other Christians to share the Gospel.**

In a similar way, when we encounter brothers and sisters who are struggling to be faithful in evangelism, or brothers and sisters who are struggling with apathy towards the lost, we should share with them how we have seen God at work in our own lives and challenge them to recall God's saving and sanctifying work in theirs. Help them remember!

IT’s easy for us to talk about where we're from, what we do, or what kinds of things we're into, conversations among Christians should be full of testimonies about what the Lord has done and what he is doing. Here's a question for you:

Do you know the stories of how your friends, of how the people in your small group, of how the folks you regularly sit near at church, came to know the Lord? Do you, when you pray for your friends and fellow church members, thank God for how he saved them, for how he brought a faithful Gospel witness into their lives and brought them to repentance and faith?

If not, make it a point, even this week, of asking them to tell you their story, and of sharing yours with them. You may find that by doing so you may feel he desire to share your faith growing again.

3. **To steer conversations with unbelievers towards the good news and bear witness to its truth in your life.**

Although sharing a personal testimony does not take the place of sharing the Gospel, it can be an extremely effective on ramp into evangelism. It’s a great way to move a conversation with an unbeliever that you are trying to build a deep and meaningful relationship with towards the gospel.

**Tapping Our Testimonies To Point Unbelievers to Jesus**

To unpack this third point, let's turn to the Bible and let it guide our thinking. So, if you have your Bibles, turn with me to the **fourth chapter of the Gospel of John.** This is the passage about Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well. Let's read, starting at verse 4:

**4** Now [Jesus] had to go through Samaria. **5** So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. **6** Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

**7** When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” **8** (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

**9** The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.**) 10** Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

**11** “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? **12** Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?” **13** Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, **14** but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

**15** The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.” **16** He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back." **17** “I have no husband,” she replied. Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. **18** The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”

**19** “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. **20** Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

**21** Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. **22** You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. **23** Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. **24** God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”

**25** The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” **26** Then Jesus declared, “I who speak to you am he.” **27** Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

**28** Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, **29** “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” **30** They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

Then skip down to verse 39:

**39** Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” **40** So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. **41** And because of his words many more became believers.

**42** They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”

There’s a lot that we could say about this passage. (1)The way Jesus goes directly against societal and religious standards of the day by willingly entering into an exchange with a Samaritan woman, (2)the way he reads the woman's heart and reveals her sin, (3)the way he in mercy holds out himself to her as the fountain of life, (4)the way he affirms God's revealed will through the nation of Israel while at the same time opening up the Kingdom of God to the Gentiles. Pretty amazing, this is the Jesus we serve!

But let's look more closely at what the woman does in response to her encounter with Jesus at the well. From this we will come up with two rough guidelines for sharing our own personal testimonies with unbelievers.

1. **First, the woman testifies to others about her experience with Christ.**

The fact that the woman leaves her water jar at the well speaks to her astonishment over Jesus' apparent omniscience, which is shown clearly in his revealing of the hidden sins in her life, and of her amazement at Jesus' claim to be the Messiah. Look at her response, she had to find somebody and tell them what Jesus had done, had to tell somebody about what had just happened to her.

And that's exactly what she does. Back in town, the text says, she goes and finds a group of people, people who, presumably, have known her all their lives, Sychar being a small town, and she tells them how Jesus, whom she had never met before, knew all about her many marriages, her many sins. The whole scene has a hurried feel, as if she is testifying on the run, while ushering her audience to go see for themselves.

Before we move to the next observation, we should make an application here: Sometimes, it's the people who know us the best -- family members who have been with us through tough teenage years, friends we used to party with, co-workers who witnessed our grumbling or dishonesty at work before we became Christians -- sometimes, it is those people, the ones who know us best, that we fear sharing our testimony with, and sharing the Gospel with, the most. We feel they’ll call us out, and not take the changes in us seriously.

This is where we take cues from the woman at the well. We shouldn’t shrink back from sharing the Gospel with the people who know us best. As a matter of fact, these may be the very people we should pray about sharing with the most. How amazing of a testimony it would be to explain to them God's grace and saving power, how God has changed our lives, to admit to them that we were so lost before and that, as they well know, our lives were full of sin and self-righteousness. Then to proclaim to them how Jesus changed all that on the cross.

**2. She directs them to Jesus.**

A second observation: After testifying to others about her experience with Christ, the woman then points them to Jesus. She directs them back up to the well. And the testimony of these Samaritans is pretty revealing. Afterwards, the text tells us they said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”

**It is never our testimony that brings someone, finally, to salvation. (repeat)** God is the one who saves. And even still our testimonies can be a wonderful way, as we have seen here in John 4, to steer people towards the Savior. Unlike the woman at the well, we don't have the option of literally taking our friends and family to Jesus. Instead, we have the charge to introduce them to Jesus through the Gospel.

**A General Framework for Sharing Your Personal Testimony**

We'll close, then, with a brief template for how to go about faithfully sharing our testimonies.

1. What your life was like before Christ.

This is not a place to brag about your sin (if you sinned widely or publically) or to minimize your sin (if you came to Christ at a young age and didn’t publically rebel as much), but instead, this is a place to talk about where you were apart from Christ. **No one is born a Christian.** By God’s grace some come to know Him early, but all of us were apart from Christ, enemies of God. Talk about this season of your life. Talk about how you used to think about God or sin or Christianity. It is often in this sharing that the person or people you are sharing with will be able to relate to you and see how they too have strayed from God.

2. How you came to repent of your sins and believe in the Gospel.

Again, some people may have a dramatic circumstances around their conversion while others may have a seemingly “less dramatic” conversion…the point is that there is a time you turned from your sin and trusted in Christ. Talk about what God did during this time and what it was that your turned to believe in. Talk to them about Christ’s death in your place and His resurrection. Share with them how you turned from your sin and how you trusted fully in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

3. What your life has been like since knowing Christ.

This is not a time to highlight how great you are, but instead it is a time to show them how great Christ is and how he has transformed your life. It is also an excellent time to talk with them about your enduring need for the Gospel, the fact that you still need it to this day. Take the opportunity to dispel the false ideas that Christianity is for perfect people. No! Tell them how Christ is still your Savior and how you still need His abundant mercy to cover your proneness to wander.

4. How the person you're sharing with can experience the same.

As with any Gospel presentation, there must be a call to respond to Christ. It is important when you’ve just shared your testimony and are calling someone to repentance that you clearly state the fact that you aren’t asking them to become like you…instead, you are calling them to do what the woman at the well did…come and see Jesus. Your testimony should point to Christ and your call to repentance should do the same. Call them to consider this Jesus who has changed your life. Tell them that He can change them too.

**Conclusion & Homework**

* Continue to pray for hearts that see lost people like God does.
* Continue to pray for open doors in evangelism.
* Continue to pray for the lost people in your everyday area of influence.
* Write out your testimony and share it with someone this week.