

Listening, Talking, and Sharing the Good News with Others: Questions and a Few Answers on Evangelism

Jim Holthus, Lutheran Campus Pastor at Bemidji State University, Bemidji, MN.

What are some Bible verses that will encourage me to share Christ with others—and keep me from being so nervous about this?

You are part of a progression of people who can help someone's faith deepen, but it doesn't all depend on you. People will grow when they are ready to grow. Remember, "You can't make the plants grow faster by pulling on them."

I Corinthians 3:5-7 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

You don't have to get immediate results. "We're in labor, not management." The Word of God is sown continually. Sometimes it takes root but we don't see growth for a long time. Farmers know they have to plant a new crop every spring, plus cultivate once or twice, in order to get results. Sometimes the seed of Christ has to be planted repeatedly in someone and then faithfully cultivated in order to get results. We can help with the planting and cultivating but God is responsible for the sun, rain, and the soil—and thus finally the miracle of grace and growth.

Ecclesiastes 11:6 In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand, for you do not know which will prosper, either this or that, or whether both alike will be good.

Isaiah 55:10-11 For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

Perhaps the goal of listening and speaking to others about Christ is summed up in how the neighbors of the Samaritan woman reacted when she shared with them the story of her encounter with Christ. *John 4:42 They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."*

Okay, these are helpful Bible passages but what if someone asks me a question about the Bible or God and I don't know the answer? Isn't it safer to not say anything at all instead of saying something that might offend the person or might be wrong?

No. Whether we realize it or not, each Christian is already a witness for Christ. *Luke 24:48 You are witnesses of these things.*

So how can you be a more effective witness to Christ when the opportunity presents itself?

- A) Read your Bible regularly. Don't be afraid to highlight passages or verses in your Bible. **Memorize** your favorite Bible passages that speak to you.
- B) Review your own faith journey. How did you get to where you are now in your own spiritual walk?
- C) Find a close friend who is also a Christian and ask if you can "practice" sharing your faith stories with one another. You can also share your favorite verses.
- D) Accept the fact that whenever you are with another person or persons and dare to speak the name of "Jesus" out loud you will get butterflies in your stomach. This is a given. What you may NOT know is that these are not butterflies but the wings of the Holy Spirit, fluttering like a dove inside you to help you!

Okay, I've read more of my Bible and memorized my favorite Bible verses. I know my faith journey. I've talked about it with a friend. Now what?

The clearest evangelism opportunity often occurs when others have gone before you stirring up the desire to get closer to Jesus in a person and then they come to you for help in taking the next steps. This happened to Phillip and Andrew:

John 12:20-22--Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus.

So you can—if you want—bring these people with you to speak to your pastor, but you can also pray with them yourself, read the Bible together with them, and help them find a passage or Bible verse that helps them know they are loved and forgiven by God, just as they are. If you aren't sure what to pray with them, open your Bibles to Ephesians 3:14-21 and pray this prayer aloud with them, naming them as you do it.

Here are some possible Bible verses to share with them at this time (There are others which fit their particular situation which you might feel particularly appropriate; use your judgment and listen to the moving of the Spirit):

Romans 3:23-24 and Romans 8:26-28
2 Corinthians 5:14-21 and Ephesians 2:8-9

What's another way to mention "Jesus" in a conversation? I don't want to go up to a stranger and ask them, "Hey, do you know Jesus?"

Good point. We are supposed to be "fishers" of people, not "hunters". We don't stalk people; we offer them a relationship and let them think about it if they need to, giving the Spirit time and space to speak to them.

John 4 is about Jesus talking with the Samaritan woman at a well. She eventually goes into town and says this to her friends in John 4:29: *Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Can this be the Christ?*

Acts chapter 8: 26-40 has the story of Philip paying attention to the Holy Spirit and getting near enough to overhear a conversation the Ethiopian was having—he was reading the Bible out loud and Philip overheard. Then Philip simply makes himself available and asks simple, open-ended questions to get the Ethiopian to open up so Philip can respond and share more about Christ.

In John 1:46 Philip responds to Nathanael's concerns about Jesus coming from Nazareth with a simple invitation: *Just come and see for yourself!*

You are **not** there to debate with people about the reality and lordship of Jesus. You are there to invite them to talk more about their faith and experience, to come with you to speak to someone else, to come with you to a worship service, Bible study, or other place where they might experience the joys and claims of discipleship. The commitment you are making to this person is to go **with them and beside them**, just as Christ goes with us and walks beside us.

But if I am in a conversation with people and nobody is talking about faith or the Bible but I think they'd be open to doing this, how can I bring it up?

There are different levels of communication based on how much we know and trust the person we are with, how much we feel like opening up and being vulnerable, and what the immediate situation is prompting us to do.

- Level 1: simple and non-threatening that prompts an agreeable response and breaks the ice. *"Nice weather we're having, huh?"* (Universal experience)
- Level 2: Sharing something we may have in common that could get us to a bit deeper level: *"Have you been to ____? Me, too!"* *"Have you ever had ____ for a class? Me, too!"* *Your major is secondary ed? Mine, too!"* (Personal and factual experience)
- Level 3: Voicing our opinions about something we are emotionally invested in and realizing people may disagree with us. This is more risky but it might get us to a still deeper level: *"I'm a huge Vikings fan!"* *"I never miss an episode of 'Lost'."* *"Yeah, I like to party."* (Personal and emotional and factual experience)
- Level 4: Sharing more intimate dreams, hopes, goals, or past episodes of our lives. *"I grew up going to church but I'm not sure what I believe now."* *"I want to work for the Peace Corps when I graduate."* *"I can't stand people who criticize what we're doing in Iraq."* *"I really messed up last weekend and drank too much."* (Personal, emotional, factual and vulnerable experience)

We have to figure out where the conversation is already and how we might move it to the next deeper level—or realize that maybe this moment is not the right time to go deeper, but next time might be.

CONVERSATION HELPERS:

I've had some times when I feel like God is far away from me and other times when I feel like I am really close to God. Like one time when I [*insert your own story here*]. Has that been true in your own life at all? Is that something you'd be willing to share with me?

There are some things I enjoy about going to church and some things that bore me to tears occasionally. How about you? (Depending on their answer you can follow up by asking if they haven't been to church lately and why they stopped going.)

You're obviously older and different than you were when you quit attending, so what type of church service might appeal to you now?

I enjoy going to worship at _____ and I usually get a lot out of it. If I called you to remind you about it, would you consider sometime going with me?

There are some things about the Bible I like and some things I don't understand. When you read the Bible (or used to read the Bible) do you remember any part you liked the most? What did you like particularly? If I had a Bible study in my room would you be willing to attend if I called to remind you about it?

I sometimes hang out with people here and end up doing things that don't help me get my schoolwork done so I'm trying to find other people who'd like to get together and talk and socialize without going to parties or bars all the time. You probably already have some friends up here but if you'd like to check out another bunch of potential friends, I'd like to invite you to some of the things I attend at the Lutheran Campus Center. What's your schedule like?

SUMMING UP: It doesn't all depend on you. The Holy Spirit is working **in** you and **through** you whenever you pray or speak about Jesus to someone else or invite that person to come with you to learn more. And you can't make the plants grow faster by pulling on them. Amen to that.

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