

NINE REASONS/ANSWERS FOR NOT SHARING OUR FAITH

1. We think evangelism is a program or event rather than a lifestyle.

Somehow, in some way, church people have come to equate evangelism with things like special outreach events or teams of church members 'going calling' weekly on unbelievers or a slot in the weekly calendar reserved for outreach.

Those can all be forms of evangelism, but they are unlike what Jesus had in mind when he unleashed His Church on a broken and blind world. We are evangelistically off-course if our understanding of personal outreach is event-oriented rather than every-day-relationship oriented...

The apostle Paul's great success in Thessalonica was fueled by this: "*you know how we lived among you for your sake.*" (1 Thess 1:5b) And, this in 2:8, "*We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.*" You don't read in those verses that Paul reserved Wednesday nights for evangelism or that his hope in someone placing their faith in Christ hinged on some big church event.

No. To Paul, it was about every-day relationships. Evangelism for Paul happened as a result of naturally rubbing shoulders with unbelievers all around him...24/7.

He did not need to add anything to his schedule in order to become effective in personal outreach. He just loved people wherever God placed him. He loved them, invested in them, became friends with them....spoke truth to them as well.

Don't think evangelism is something you have to add to your schedule. Perhaps the only thing that must happen in your life is a determination to identify the not-yet-Christians God has planted around you.....then love them....and say a good word for Jesus when it's time.

2. We are wrapped up in church activities and fellowship groups, giving us little time or interest in rubbing shoulders with the irreligious. (Do I have any significant outside-the-church friends....real friends?)

Only you know your personal calendar, so this may or may not apply to you. But, many great people I know at church are the very ones we heavily depend on for helping to lead communities or volunteering in important ways. And, there are some who come to every Bible study we offer. Therefore, reason #2 is listed.

Tell me if its you or not. Here's what I think we could do about it.....

1. We pastors should establish the model of being engaged in our communities and neighborhoods.
2. The Chapel offers many great programs and still must send the message that being at the church building removes you from the playing field where the not-yet-Christians are.
3. We all need to be reminded again and again that Jesus led an incredibly balanced life, teaching at times and often hanging out with those who were not yet aware of the gospel of God.
4. We need to shed ourselves of an insular mindset. Like, "I am safer when I am

with Christians.” Maybe the concern would be true in the middle east somewhere, but not in Ohio. We are called to live by faith and not be afraid.

3. Church leaders talk about evangelism but do not give enough evidence that they themselves have woven interaction with unbelievers (integration) into their everyday lives, leaving church members uninspired.

Let's be honest, from toddler through adulthood, we emulate others. Mimicry is a reality for all of us, to some extent. We find ways, subconsciously mostly I imagine, to allow the ways others think and behave to influence our own thoughts and actions. We all understand this can be a bad thing. But, by no means is this something that God would frown upon. It was Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:1 who wrote: “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” And, in Philippians 2, Paul celebrates Timothy's growth in ministry as a result of the “son with a father” relationship they had. Indeed, pre-modern history shows that sons would grow up to learn their father's trade....a farmer's son learned to be a farmer....same with a baker, a cobbler, etc.

A connected biblical and life principle is this: generally, we can expect a student to take on the thoughts and attitudes of his teacher. If a church leader talks a lot about loving the non-Christian and unchurched and waxes eloquent about spending time with those who don't believe in Christ but does not do it himself, how can anyone expect the average Christian/church-goer to be anything more than all talk.

My point is obvious. A pastor must set the example of how a Christian should live his or her life. (The shepherd leads the way.) In the context of evangelism, the church leader can't let the trappings of 'church business' and Christian gatherings and fellowship groups keep him from rubbing shoulders with those who will not darken the door of a church building. At weeks end, his schedule should give proof that he has *enjoyed* the *natural* company of those who may not be Christians.....those from his relational circles 'out there' in the community.

How else will church members get the sense of freedom and motivation to *weave* the same into their lives. Pastors lead the way. But, even if they do not lead the way, every believer still has the commandments and narrative of Scripture to serve as a model and motivation.

4. Our walk with Christ has not yet brought us to a level of maturity such that we begin to see unbelievers from Christ's perspective and respond accordingly.

Eventually, in the list of 9 reasons, we'll get to ways of talking about Christ. But, reason #4 is a biggie in my opinion because it's connected to our mindset. And, if we don't have the proper mindset (that is, we are not thinking from God's perspective according to the Bible), then we likely won't go too far in our efforts to verbally represent Christ to non-Christians. Therefore, we need to discuss a most foundational piece in all of our evangelistic attempts...

Jesus said, *“I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”* (John 15:5) Of course, the outworking of our relationship with Christ is that we have something to show for it. Implied in this verse is that there is something to be done, but apart from Christ it cannot be done. Fruit should show up in a Christians life and this fruit can probably mean a whole bunch of Spirit-produced outcomes, but one of those outcomes should be the ability to live and speak as an open witness for Christ.

Bottom line...I think some Christians are ineffective in actively representing Christ in their natural, relational circles because they have not given effort to abiding in Christ. That is, they have not developed in their lives some of the most basic disciplines that help us grow in that relationship. For example, the Bible remains unopened, prayer is a glance at God now and then but nothing more, church attendance is usually a Sunday morning “do I really feel like going” decision.

Such disciplines help the Christian draw close to Christ, and as a result the mindset and heart of Christ is gradually and increasingly shared by the believer.

Avoidance of such disciplines leaves the Christian void of passion for evangelism.

Paul wrote in in 2 Cor 5:16, *“So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.”* Because of Paul’s vibrant and on-going walk with Christ, he developed a way of looking at and thinking about non-Christians all around him.

He could see them from God's perspective and this gave him extraordinary compassion and love for them such that he could bust through former obstacles that may have at one time kept him from reaching out to them.

All our hopes and efforts for personal evangelism will only be sustained for the long haul by continuous nurturing of our relationship with Christ. He gives us the mindset we need. He brings forth the fruit

5. We think we don't know enough about the Bible in order to share the message of Christ. (What if I don't say it right or get asked a really tough question?)

This may be hard to hear, but here goes. I would say that most people who resist or even avoid talking about their faith, sharing Christ, do so because of maturity and mindset issues, not for lack of knowledge or methods.

In other words...a Christ-follower does not need to know very much in order to share the love of God expressed through Christ. A Christian does not have to be ready to answer a skeptic's tough questions in order to speak openly of their relationship with God through Christ.

When will you ever know enough Bible to consider yourself ready to speak up for Christ? When will you have answers to the anticipated tough questions someone may ask you about God, the Bible and your faith (questions that are usually more imagined than reality)?

Learning methods (certain Scripture, certain answers) of sharing Christ is good.

But, maturing in Christ and taking on His mindset of love toward unbelievers are necessary forerunners of any methods you may learn. As author Michael Green once said, “mindset must precede method”.

Here is the way to go in a nutshell. Engage in pre-evangelism by cultivating friendships with those who may still not know Jesus. Love people where they are. Speak truth from Scripture and from your own walk with God when you can. Always leave people wanting more conversation about God and Christ, not less (and leave them wanting more of you, not less!). Allow God to do His part of generating interest and curiosity and even faith within your friend’s life.

You know enough right now, but continue to learn the Bible and how to talk about Christ even more convincingly. Don’t sweat hard questions that may come your way. Love God and love people.

With Paul in Colossians 4:2-4, pray for an open door, boldness and clarity.

6. We think we must have our ‘act together’ before we share the message of Christ. (Who wants to hear from a Christian with obvious flaws?)

Rebecca Manley Pippert (author of *Out of the Saltshaker*) once stated in an interview something like, “Acting in front of our unbelieving friends as if we have it all together makes us irrelevant...which then makes God irrelevant.”

Yes, it is true that the Christian is called to live a different kind of life. In fact we are challenged by Jesus to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect (Matt

5:48). But, we fail miserably at times and we all know that. Our need for God to help us become what he has intended for us, better and better reflectors of Christ, is never more apparent than when we fail, fall short of His calling on our lives.

Trying to appear perfect or like we have it all together in front of those apart from Christ is a form of lying or deceit. Isn't it better that we live authentic lives in front of non-Christ-followers and admit freely when we have blown it, not lived the way we wanted to? Isn't it better to acknowledge our need for God's forgiveness and healing and intervention in our lives, admitting our need for a Savior daily?

Non-Christians look at our attempts to have it altogether and laugh. But, they also take note of Christians who live genuine lives of faith marked by failure, confession, repentance and renewed faith to follow Christ.

The Sermon on the Mount was not first and foremost a teaching on how to live out Kingdom values. It was spoken by Jesus to show the outwardly religious ones that faith needs to be genuine and an expression of need for God. Thus, the first beatitude, 'Blessed are those who are poor in spirit...', a statement that we are imperfect and in need of a Savior.

7. We think bringing a non-Christian friend to church and letting the pastor or someone else tell them about Christ is the best way to evangelize.

We are so fortunate to be in a church where in just about every corner of the

building on any given morning we can hear different parts of the Bible being taught. We can hear aspects of the Good News being explained. Nowhere is this truer than from the pulpit.

Sadly, many church leaders have allowed regular attendees to slip into a 'let the professional handle it' mentality. Some years ago a study was done among evangelical church-goers. The question was asked, "Who should do evangelism in your church?" The top three answers were disturbing: #1 Pastors #2 The gifted #3. Missionaries.

This is disturbing because: #1 Pastors are to equip people to do the work of ministry (Eph 4) and all Christians everywhere are called upon to represent Christ (Matt 28:18ff; 2 Cor 5:11ff). #2 Even *if* 'evangelism' is a gift (Eph 4:11), evangelism, once again, is to be performed by all believers. #3 Missionaries (used in a cross-cultural sense) do not live next door to our neighbors; rather, we are responsible.

8. We are convinced by our pluralistic culture that keeping our faith private is the better way to go.

Here is what's happening. Our culture is rapidly expanding in philosophical pluralism. You believe this way and I believe that way and we are both right. The exalted virtue is tolerance. Tell me that Jesus is the 'only way' and I will tell you 'that's your opinion' because you were raised that way. Or, I may tell you 'that's wonderful' but don't impose your belief on me.

Such pluralistic/tolerant/relevativistic thinking is finding it's way into our local churches. Christians are becoming more and more scared to speak up about Christ in their workplaces and neighborhoods for fear of being labeled the 'narrow-minded one'. Better just to be quiet and maybe talk about God....but not Jesus (or at least not the Jesus who called himself the 'only way'.)

Yes, its absolutely critical that we maintain a healthy respect toward those who believe differently than we. Yes, its important to love others regardless of their wild ideas about God. Yes, its essential that we listen and learn from those who are on a different path.

But, we must not be fearful, timid. We should never find ourselves guilty of being ashamed. That's dishrag, vanilla, tepid faith; completely the opposite of what Jesus called us to. (Eph 6:19,20; Col 4:2-6; Rom 1:16; 2 Tim 1:18; Luke 9:23)

9. We've not yet come to grips with the spiritual nature and questions of all people, nor do we grasp the power of exposure to the Bible.

This really should spark our evangelistic fervor:

Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, "(God) has set eternity in the hearts of men and women...".

This verse is true of your family member who makes fun of 'religion'. It's true of your hard-partying, God-rejecting co-worker. It's true of your neighbor who seems apathetic toward spiritual issues. In fact, you've never seen nor spoken to anyone of whom this is untrue. Not one person in all of history was born without thoughts of God buried deep in his or her heart.

The most important place to start in evangelism is to understand that your unbelieving neighbor is no different from you. He/she, too, was made for a relationship with God. You responded to God's gift of grace through Christ and they have not, yet. That's the only difference between you and them.

It seems apparent that within each person are God-shaped questions. Here are four that surface from time to time:

1. Where did I come from?
2. Why am I here?
3. How should I live?
4. Where am I going?

If people really have such questions, then it seems possible that they may have curiosity toward a 'spiritual book' that claims to be revelation from God.

Many people are favorable toward the Bible. They may not be Christians. They may have never read the Bible. They may have giant questions about the Bible. But, they are at least favorable or respectful toward it.

Here's an interesting reality. If invited by a trusted Christian friend to look at the Bible in a non-threatening and investigative way, often the unbeliever will accept the invitation. Then, it's a matter of trusting the strength of God's Spirit and His Word to speak to the heart of the seeker. (Hebrews 4:12; 1 Cor 2:1ff; 3:6-9)

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