

Bridging the Gap

Part 6: 'Sharing the Gospel'

Up to this point in our study of *Relationship Evangelism*:

- we have identified the various forces that hinder our effectiveness in evangelism
- we have defined *Relationship Evangelism* and considered its value as a method of leading people to Christ
- we have discussed the value of a 'Focus list' and offered suggestions for developing one
- we have offered recommendations for developing meaningful relationships

It was in the last sermon that we examined the four stages of forming substantive relationships, what we called 'building bridges.' These stages are:

1. Making the initial contact
2. Getting better acquainted
3. Being a servant
4. Being a friend

Now in this sermon I want to offer some suggestions on how we might use the 'bridges' we have built to let the gospel flow. That means we use the opportunities provided by our relationships with others to introduce them to the good news of Jesus Christ. There are also four stages in this process as well.

5. Sharing Your Faith

Some principles to remember:

- You wish to make a clear identification that you are a Christian in the course of your natural conversations
- Conduct yourself in such a way that people are aware of your faith. (1 Peter 3:15)
- Don't try to say everything at one time.
- Ask questions - seek to understand first, then to be understood.
- Be sensitive to people's reactions; place yourself in their shoes. As you share your faith, always seek wisdom from God through prayer (James 1:5; Nehemiah 2:4)

Some suggested activities:

- In daily conversation, interject your beliefs that are based upon God's Word, without getting spiritual or using Christian jargon.
- Don't hesitate to speak of the special benefits and blessings of being a Christian if and when the situation arises.
- When appropriate, give God the glory as you discuss good things that you experience (but avoid excessive praise, for it can sound artificial and hypocritical).

It's important to understand that at this point your purpose is not to convert; rather, you are simply communicating what your faith means to you what Jesus has done for you.

There's a lot more I want to say about sharing your faith and so the next two sermons in this series will be devoted to understanding what the Gospel is and the importance of preparing our story, our testimony to share with people in this stage of the process of leading them to Christ. So watch this space!

The next stage will involve introducing your friend to other Christians.

6. Witness of the Body

Some principles to remember:

- People may at first discount your 'individual' faith and lifestyle, but the 'corporate' example can be a powerful witness and influence (John 13:34-35; 17:20-21).
- At this stage you are wanting to introduce your friend to the love and unity of other Christians.
- As far as possible, connect your friends with Christians who are similar in age, outlook and personality. Do all you can to make it easy to relate to each other.

Some suggested activities:

Around the neighbourhood:

- Include Christians in your social, recreational and work activities with your non-Christian friends
- Have your friend over for dinner, and invite some Christian friends as well
- Invite your friend to functions of the local Church
- Invite them to fellowship dinners, café Church or other social functions organized by Christians
- Invite them to home Bible studies with a mixture of Christians and non-Christians

At work:

- Introduce them to other Christian associates at work
- Invite them to attend weekly Bible studies at places of employment, or with other businessmen outside of work
- Invite them to lunch or dinner where other Christians will be present

Again, the purpose at this stage is not to convert, or to 'gang up' on the prospect, but to simply let them be around other Christians where they can see the faith of others being demonstrated in their lives. Then at last, we come to the point where we get to the most important thing of all: the Gospel.

7. Exposure to the Gospel

Some principles to remember:

- You want to expose your friend to a full and clear explanation of the Gospel.
- Your goal is not so much to convert, but to create some understanding of the Gospel and its implications. (Note: Lots more will be said in the next two sermons about this).
- With those who are already firm believers in Jesus, but mistaken in their understanding of the gospel... you should not be trying to convert them from 'their Church' to 'your Church,' but rather lead them closer to the Christ they love.

- Like Aquila and Priscilla, you are seeking only to help them learn the way of God more accurately concerning salvation and the Lord's Church (Acts 18:24-26).
- If you do not feel you are capable of teaching what they need, ask someone else to step in and take over

Some suggested activities:

- You might appeal to their interest in learning more about the Bible by recommending some basic Bible introduction books.
- Invite them to study with you one of the Gospels, or the book of Acts.
- You might get them enrolled in an *Alpha Course*, or *Christianity Explained* or some other material which presents the basics of the Christian Faith.

At this point, our primary responsibility is to share the Gospel and to make sure the person has a proper understanding of God's love for them and what Christ has done for them. The last stage of involves calling for a response to the Gospel.

8. The Invitation

Some principles to remember:

- It is important to actually ask them if they wish to embrace Christ's gift of salvation. Sometimes we never get around to actually asking! While there is a place for persuasion (Acts 2:40), we need to avoid pressuring someone to do something they really don't want to do. If they are not ready, or if the Holy Spirit has not prepared them, any response will be superficial and will bear no long-term fruit. In fact, you could make it harder for them to genuinely accept Jesus later if you try to coerce them too soon.
- Ensure that you continue the relationship even if they say no - some people take longer than others to make the decision. Don't abandon this person and leave them with the impression that your relationship with them was only a means to this end and had no substance of its own. That is horrible and it happens all too often. If you do not genuinely want to relate to this person over the long haul - as a person, not just as a prospect for the Kingdom of God - then don't form the relationship in the first place.
- I am not suggesting you need to be best friends with everyone - not at all - but a friendship needs to form and be maintained, regardless of their response to the Gospel. It may take years. What is a human soul worth, after all? How long will you wait?

Some suggested activities:

- Approach a person privately after a Bible study or presentation of the gospel and ask them if they have considered responding personally to the gospel.
- The following questions may be helpful after a study:
 - "Does this make sense?"
 - "Is there anything I have said that you do not understand?"
 - "Would you like to respond to Christ and embrace His free gift of salvation?"
- Give them time to make a decision - some people need to study and pray about it for a while.
- Let them know you are always available: any time of the day, any day of the week; when they decide to respond to Christ, you will be glad to assist them. When they are ready to respond, pray with them and ask God to bless them and help them understand what He has been doing in them to bring them to this point.

- Then lead them in a very simple prayer of confession and acceptance. Make it personal and casual ... not like some formula ... perhaps like this:

“Lord God, I don’t understand all that is happening to me at the moment but I do know that you love me and you sent Jesus to die for me and show me the way. I confess that I need you and cannot reach my full potential without you. I thank you for your forgiveness and love and your promise to restore me to my intended place as your much-loved child. I accept your free gift of salvation in Christ now and ask that your Holy Spirit would make all this real to me as He teaches me, day by day, all I need to know as your disciple. Thank you for your love and grace. Amen.”

- After they respond to the gospel, follow up with a Bible study designed to help them grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:17-18).
- Get them involved in a nurture group or home group as soon as possible.

Conclusion

Relationship Evangelism is really quite simple and the last six sermons could be summed up in this way: *Be a friend - share your story!* Even for those who feel they are unable to preach or teach, *Relationship Evangelism* can be used by anyone to lead others to Christ. Just be a friend and let your faith show by example. When it comes down to the point of explaining the gospel, you may even let another Christian do the actual teaching at Church or through other material you provide.

Many Christians (especially those new in the faith) have led their friends to Christ in this way. Some didn't even know they had because very often people are led towards Christ by one person, but someone else gets the privilege of issuing the invitation and being there when the light comes on in that person's heart. Statistics prove beyond doubt that this is the most effective way to lead others to Christ and we might be surprised to see how many people the Lord will add to our number if all Christians applied themselves to *Relationship Evangelism*.

One last point I want to mention here. For an approach like this to work, it is imperative that Christians constantly encourage one another along the way. In your Home Groups or Bible Studies or just over coffee one day, get together each week and be encouraging to one another as you implement some of the suggestions in these sermons. Help each other set definite goals for things to do each week as they make contacts, build and strengthen relationships and make certain the relationships evolve to the point where the gospel is shared and the invitation is given.

As you gather together with your co-labourers in the gospel, share your successes and failures in meeting your goals, in an effort to learn from each other. Pray together for those people with whom you are building relationships. This whole process needs to be saturated in prayer and brought before the Lord day and night. The powers of darkness will seek to distract, discourage and destroy any attempts you make to build bridges with those Satan still holds captive. Trust God to complete what He started - be diligent and faithful and you will see many bridges established in the days ahead and many souls transformed by the God's amazing grace!

"Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honoured, just as it was with you.

(2 Thessalonians 3:1)