

The Story That Doesn't Need Stretching

If the gospel is truly worth sharing, why are we afraid to offer it without embellishment?

Randy was a great evangelist—and a great liar. For three weeks in July our church was captivated by the visiting preacher's stories and charged to, as his catchphrase went, "Go big for God!" Unfortunately, Randy couldn't help but go larger than life when it came to his version of reality.

Everything seemed so believable. He had the scars to prove he was a walking miracle. Allegedly the lone survivor from a car crash, Randy had been burned throughout his body, including his face. He'd undergone more than 40 surgeries and had several organ transplants. He still relied on a breathing machine at times, which seemingly explained his heavy breathing during preaching. Add to all the drama and trauma, his messages—stories aside—stirred the souls of all ages with a reminder that every minute we have is a gift from God and an opportunity to share His hope with others.

I still don't understand why Randy felt he had to fabricate his testimony given his physical condition. But the evangelist's public confession years later left those he'd impacted wondering the same thing: *Why did he make all that up? Isn't sharing the gospel enough?*

Sadly, for many believers in the American church, it isn't. We often feel compelled to add something more to the Good News—some extra sizzle that leads people to an emotional response and, ultimately, a "decision for Christ" (that is the end goal, isn't it?). We've become so conditioned by stage performers—liars or not—on the church platform that we've created an unspoken rule: If your testimony doesn't include a

past life of alcoholism, drug dealing, an overdose (or two), abuse, addiction, pornography or another form of sexual immorality, then don't bother sharing it. (Bonus points for anyone who can check off everything from the list.)

I'm being extreme, but the truth is that we can become so enamored with the depths of our own depravity that we lose sight of the real star of salvation, Jesus. In the process, we forget the *dunamis* power of the gospel. There's a reason it's called the Good News, and if we don't think it's good on its own—without our embellishment—then something's wrong.

We're not all called to the role of an evangelist, but as believers we *are* responsible for relaying this Good News. The story of what Jesus has done for us should be on the tips of our tongues at any time. So how do we make sharing the gospel a natural part of our life?

1. Tell *your* story, no matter how dramatic. Drama may sell on reality TV shows, but in the *real* real world authenticity trumps flair. People want what's real more than they want to be wowed, and there's nothing more real to believers than how God saved us. He's given you a unique story of being rescued from sin, whether that involves 50 years of crime or 5 seconds of lust. Don't be ashamed of the unique way God drew you out of the darkness.

2. Speak in English, not in Christianese. *Salvation. Atonement. Sanctification.* I dare you to find any of these words spoken as you're waiting for your coffee in Starbucks. The message of the gospel doesn't change; how we deliver it does. That doesn't mean you need to twist the truth of God's story or how it's affected you; it just means you may have to rethink using churchy lingo if you want to be heard and understood when sharing with unbelievers how God has changed your life.

3. Serve with no strings attached. Want to engage unbelievers?

Meet their needs without expecting anything in return. *Show* God's love—by serving—before talking about it. (See p. 28 for more ways to do this.)

4. Make room for the supernatural. One of the surest ways to see the gospel's raw power on display is to force yourself into situations requiring supernatural faith. For example, it takes more guts than faith to ask strangers in the grocery store if they know Jesus. But if you instead asked them if you could pray for their healing, that not only opens the door for conversation, it paves the way for the Holy Spirit to win them over with power.

There are countless ways to share the gospel but only one bottom-line message. Let's keep that, not what we add to our delivery, as the main focus.

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