

The Surprising Simplicity of Sharing The Gospel

We know we should, but we don't.

In a nutshell, that's the state of evangelism among Christians in America today. In fact, a recent Barna Group study found that although 73 percent of born-again Christians in this country believe they have a personal responsibility to share their faith, only half (52 percent) actually did in the past year.

What is to blame for this huge gap between theory and reality? Why do we know we should share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others—and even want to do so—yet rarely follow through with this?

As an evangelist, I always try to inspire people to become soul winners—to go after the lost, preaching the gospel to friends, family and co-workers. In my experience, the myriad excuses for not sharing Jesus can usually be boiled down to one word: *fear!*

Fear comes in many forms: fear of the unknown, fear of man, fear of failure, fear of rejection and fear of confrontation, to name a few. Fears like these imprison and silence too many Christians. It seems we have subconsciously allowed fear to masquerade as a legitimate reason for silence.

But Jesus rejects this excuse. His parable of the talents explains how one servant actually buried his talent because of fear (Matt. 25:14-30). When the master returned, he rebuked the servant severely, calling him “wicked” and “lazy!” (For more on this, go to).

We must overcome our fears to share the gospel. The question that follows, then, is this: *How?*

To answer that, here are four principles for overcoming fear, followed by five tips for communicating the gospel. Putting these points to practice will make us fearless and effective soul winners.

Principle #1: Fear is a phantom.

Zig Ziglar used the power of an acronym when he famously defined the word *fear* as “false evidence appearing real.” When it comes to sharing your faith, often you will discover that those you are worried about offending have actually been waiting (or even praying) for someone to talk to them about matters of the soul. Everyone has questions about life, death and God, yet often the most intimidating people are those most open to the gospel. Begin to share your faith and soon you will discover that your fear was but a phantom. As you confront it, like a mirage it will fade away until it completely disappears. I have heard countless stories illustrating this.

My mentor, Reinhard Bonnke, told me the amazing story of his brother’s salvation. Many years ago Reinhard had a dream. He saw his unsaved brother, Jürgen, walking on a treacherous footbridge stretched above a deep, rocky chasm. Suddenly a cloud of fog came over the bridge, and he heard his brother crying for help as he fell to his death.

Reinhard awoke with his heart pounding and his bed soaked in sweat. Then the Holy Spirit spoke clearly and specifically: “Jürgen is on the bridge to eternity. If you don’t warn the godless man, I will hold you accountable for his death. ... Write him a letter and tell him what you have seen in this dream.”

Reinhard struggled, knowing this could make Jürgen and his other brothers turn against him. Besides, Jürgen grew up in a pastor’s home and was very familiar with the gospel; what could Evangelist Bonnke tell him that he didn’t already know?

But the next day, when the Holy Spirit prompted Reinhard again, he decided to obey no matter the cost. He wrote the letter and mailed it right away.

Weeks passed. Finally the long-awaited reply came from Jürgen. Emotion overcame my mentor as he read it. Jürgen said that his wife had just left him and his best friend had just died. Drowning in depression, he had decided to take his own life when he had a dream—*the exact same dream* as Reinhard's! When he awoke, he fell at his bedside and prayed, "Almighty God, you know that I don't even believe in You, but I have a brother who serves You. If You have spoken to me through this dream, speak to me through Reinhard."

A few days later, Reinhard's letter arrived like a word from heaven at just the right moment. "Your dream was my dream," Jürgen said. "I have given my life to Jesus. He has forgiven my sins."

Imagine if Reinhard Bonnke had allowed fear to stop him from writing the letter that saved Jürgen's life (physically and spiritually). He would have lived with the regret that Jürgen's blood was on his hands!

Principle #2: Trust that the Holy Spirit is working with you.

As much as you want to see people saved, Jesus wants it more. The Holy Spirit is highly invested in evangelism. He lingers at the foot of the cross. He cooperates with soul winners because they do what is closest to God's heart. Cultivate a deep conviction that when you share the gospel, the Holy Spirit—God Himself—works with you! That will make you fearless. After all, if God is for you, who can be against you (Rom. 8:31)?

To walk with this assurance requires something called faith. Just as we are saved by faith, as followers of Jesus we live by faith. Is it any surprise that we must also evangelize "by

faith?"

- By faith we trust that the Holy Spirit has gone before us and prepared the hearts of those we encounter.
- By faith we choose to view the encounters we have in our everyday lives as "divine appointments."
- By faith we trust that the Holy Spirit will give us the right words at the right moment as we share the gospel.
- By faith we trust that the Holy Spirit will take those words and continue to use them in that person's heart long after we've parted ways.

Keep in mind, however, that every action of faith includes an element of risk. That will never change.

So why would we risk our well-being and comfort for someone else? We find the answer in our next principle.

Principle #3: Love trumps fear.

Fear is an emotion everyone feels, but love is infinitely more powerful than fear. Love compels us to take risks. Love acts like an anesthetic, numbing us to fear so it won't govern our actions. As 1 John 4:18 says, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear."

At one of our Schools of Evangelism, a young man asked me an honest but painful question during a question-and-answer session: "I have been preaching on the streets for more than 20 years but have never led anyone to Christ. What must I add to my message to get results?"

The answer was immediately obvious to me. I simply responded, "Love." And that answer applies to more than a frustrated street preacher; it applies to all of us.

According to 1 Corinthians 13:1, a message without love turns us into "clanging cymbals." How utterly annoying and unappealing!

I've encountered many people who view the lost as "targets," or a convert as a "notch in the belt." (I've even been guilty of this myself). Winning the lost is all about "winning" for them. Because of this, they think they must be a better debater or more clever and witty than their target.

But that's not how it works.

"Winning" the lost often means being willing to look like a "loser." It requires vulnerability. It means being willing to be embarrassed and even accepting persecution. What compels us to subject ourselves to such exposure? Love—seeing the lost the way Jesus sees them.

Love is not selfish (1 Cor. 13:5). That means to love others is to put them before ourselves. If fear of rejection keeps us from sharing the gospel, it means we love ourselves more than we love the lost. Love risks the loss of comfort, convenience and security for the gospel's sake (Mark 8:35).

I believe love is the most crucial part of evangelism. If we want to become more effective as sharing the Good News, we must ask God for a baptism of love. Evangelism will become as easy as breathing!

Principle #4: Be prepared.

From grade school to Bible college, I always feared test day. But I discovered a secret. After graduating from seminary, I went to university and got a job as an all-night security guard. The job's long, boring hours gave me the opportunity to study more than ever—sometimes four to five hours a night. Soon I came to realize I did not dread tests anymore. I actually looked forward to them—because I was ready for them!

Preparation puts confidence where there used to be fear and insecurity. That's why 1 Peter 3:15 says that we should *be ready* to give everyone an answer for the hope that we have.

Don't wait until the middle of a conversation with an unbeliever to start thinking about what to say.

In the ancient world, warriors had to be ready for surprise attacks. An unprepared soldier was a dead soldier. If a soldier lounged around in bare feet, it meant he did not expect an attack. But wearing his military shoes signified readiness. Paul had this in mind when he said, "Stand ... having shod your feet with the *preparation of the gospel of peace*" (Eph. 6:14-15, emphasis mine).

Smith Wigglesworth used to say, "I don't get ready; I stay ready." Whether we are at a gospel crusade or grocery store, we must live with our "gospel boots" on!

I'm amazed by how few Christians can quote a few basic evangelistic Scriptures on command. Perhaps this is a major reason so few share their faith—they're not ready! Part of wearing "gospel boots" means being able to represent the gospel message faithfully when needed. (To help with this, see "The ABCs of the Gospel" for a few Scriptures every Christian should know by heart.)

If we are prepared to share the gospel, the Holy Spirit will use us. Imagine losing power in your house and it becomes dark. You go down to the basement and find two lanterns—one has kerosene and the other doesn't. Which would you use? The lantern that's ready, of course! We don't have to beg God to use us. If we are ready, God will use us automatically!

5 Tips for Sharing Your Faith

Even if you've overcome your fears and are ready to be used by the Holy Spirit, still there are ways we can all grow when it comes to being messengers of the gospel. So here are five tips to prepare you more to share your faith.

1) Be aware of those around you. I love it when the Holy Spirit gives me a word of knowledge about someone's need. It

is a powerful tool and great “ice breaker.” (If you’ve never experienced this, ask the Holy Spirit.) However, the truth is that we don’t always need a word of knowledge to discern someone’s need. Most of the time we are just too busy or self-absorbed to notice the obvious needs all around us.

If we will make a conscious decision to be mindful of the people around us, we will find many opportunities to share “a word in due season” to pray with people and to lead them to Christ. The more we practice, the more sensitive we will become, and we may even discover that the Holy Spirit has been leading us more than we ever realized.

2) Be willing to initiate. Most churches use a model of soul winning I call “spider web evangelism.” They build beautiful buildings and offer lots of programs, then wait for unbelievers to come to them.

But that isn’t what Jesus taught. Jesus said, “Go ... and preach the gospel” (Mark 16:15) and, “I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19). This is proactive language. To be effective soul winners we must be willing to take the initiative and engage those around us.

It’s actually easier than you may think. Smile. Say hello. Ask questions and then listen. I’ve been persecuted many times for sharing my faith, but never once for being friendly and initiating a conversation.

3) Use your testimony. We often don’t feel equipped to handle objections to the gospel—and for many of us, that’s what prevents us from sharing. But the truth is, there will always be someone who knows more than us about science, history, philosophy or even religion. There’s no need to worry. Someone once said, “The person with an experience is never at the mercy of a person with an argument.”

There is one thing no one can take away from you: your testimony. And, amazingly, everyone has one!

If you are a child of God, then He has changed your life. You have something to say! Your testimony is unique to you. Even if you think your story isn't that interesting, it glorifies God and contains His power. And if the gospel has touched you, then know that it will touch others through you.

4) Don't argue. Are you afraid of getting into a debate with someone about religion? I have just the solution for you: Just don't argue at all!

Remember the story of the woman at the well? She tried to stir up a debate with Jesus. "Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain" she said, "but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem" (John 4:20, NIV). She was baiting Jesus, yet He refused to be sidetracked into a debate about religion. He had come to give her eternal life.

A friend of mine recently began to share the gospel with a group of young college students, and one girl became antagonistic. She was studying biology and instantly started pushing evolution to win a debate about the existence of God. My friend was completely undaunted by her aggression and said, "Wow, you're smart. I wish God had given me a mind like yours. Can I ask you a question? Do you have any pain in your body?"

"Yes," she said. He prayed for her and she was healed on the spot. He went on to lead that young woman to Jesus. At the end he asked, "Now can you explain to me what just happened?"

"No," she said.

If my friend had tried to debate creationism versus evolution, the young college student probably would have made a fool out of him. That may even have discouraged him from sharing the gospel again, for fear of being shut down in the same way. But God's love and power conquers every argument and empowers us to win the lost rather than win debates.

5) Ask the question! I have seen situations in personal evangelism where an unbeliever received an amazing prophetic word and perhaps even a physical healing but was never encouraged to make a decision to follow Jesus. What a tragic wasted opportunity!

D.L. Moody famously told the story of preaching the gospel at a church meeting, after which he told the people to go home and think about what they heard. That week the great Chicago fire of 1871 ravaged the town. Many of those very people lost their lives before they ever made the decision to follow Christ.

From that point on, Moody began giving altar calls whenever he preached, urging the people to make a decision for Christ right then and there and emphasizing the urgency of the matter.

An altar call may be effective in a congregational setting, but how do you bring a person to a point of decision in one-on-one evangelism? It's easy. Just ask a pointed question like, "Do you need to get right with God?" or "What is keeping you from surrendering your life to Jesus?" or "Can I pray with you right now?"

This will bring your conversation to a point of decision, and this is the point where salvation takes place. As witnesses, this is what we are after.

Don't be afraid to ask a person to make a decision and to pray with you right away. Remember, they may never have another chance. Now is the day of salvation!

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Daniel Kolenda explains why the cross of Jesus Christ must be the centerpiece of sharing your faith at