



1 Corinthians 9:19-23
Believe
Share My Faith

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This morning we bring to a close Part 2 of *Believe*, which we started in January. It has been about our response to what we believe about God (which was covered in part 1), and has been centered on the idea of: In light of what I believe, “What should I do?” Many of you are reading the Believe books that go with this, taking a chapter a week. Next week we will begin part 3 of the series, which will revolve around the question of “Who am I becoming?” In light of the events of this past week – from the shooting in New Zealand to the college entrance exam scandal – our world would be a lot better off if people wrestled a little bit with this question of “Who am I becoming?” So that’s next week.

Today, we wrap up part 2 with a look at a topic that used to be a foregone conclusion about what it means to be a Christian. We can summarize it with this statement, **“I share my faith with others to fulfill God’s purposes.”** The word traditionally used for this is “Evangelism.” The passage we read this morning is one of the preeminent portions of Scripture that deal with this topic, as Paul shares how he has lived out his evangelistic efforts. And for a variety of reasons, there is a slow shift in what people believe about evangelism; about sharing their faith in Jesus with others. And it’s a shift *away* from believing it’s ok or good or right to do this. An article in Relevant Magazine – which if you don’t know, is a magazine dedicated to exploring the intersection of Jesus and popular culture – an article they ran a couple months ago was titled, “47% of Christian Millennials Believe Evangelism is Wrong.”¹

The article was a summary of some research recently done by the Barna research group. Here’s part of what the article said, “The goal of the research was to better understand what Christian millennials believe about the Gospel and sharing their faith in general. Though the vast majority agreed with statements like ‘the best thing that could ever happen to someone is for them to know Jesus’ and ‘they know how to respond when someone raises questions about faith,’ things took a turn when they were asked about sharing their faith.”

The article went on to state that nearly half (47%) of millennials “agree at least somewhat that it is wrong to share one’s personal beliefs with someone of a different faith in hopes that they will one day share the same faith” (Relevant Magazine). This is a change from older generations, including Generation X as well as still older generations of Christians, who place a higher value on sharing their faith. The shift seems to come from ideals that are gaining momentum in our culture such as not critiquing anyone else’s life choices, do whatever suits you, and so forth.

And then finally, there was this concluding statement, **“As much as ever, evangelism isn’t just about saving the unsaved, but reminding ourselves that this stuff matters, that the Bible is trustworthy and that Jesus changes everything” (Relevant Magazine).** This is why we spent most of last year in our sermon series called, *The Story* to be reminded of the trustworthiness of the Bible and that Jesus changes everything; and it’s why we then continued on with *Believe* this year which builds on that to remind us of some of the core beliefs of Christianity and what all of that means for us as Christians.

Now, Millennials aren’t the only ones who struggle to share their faith, even if they’re the ones who question the validity of doing it the most. I think it’s something that a lot of people struggle with – especially when we think of sharing our faith verbally. Perhaps we’ve seen and heard people share their faith in ways that aren’t helpful, or make us uncomfortable, and unfortunately it’s hard sometimes to get those ideas out of our head, and so we can’t think of ways we *could* do it.

I’m reminded of a story I once shared with you about Dwight Moody, the great Christian evangelist who lived in the mid- to late-1800’s. One day a lady criticized him for his methods of evangelism in attempting to win people to the Lord. Moody’s reply was “I agree with you. I don’t like the way I do it either. Tell me, how do you do it?” The lady replied, “I don’t do it.” Moody retorted, “Then I like my way of doing it better than your way of not doing it.”ⁱⁱ

So how do we share our faith? I think there are a few things to keep in mind that can make it easier and can open doors to sharing our faith with others who aren't Christian.

First, get to know people who aren't Christian. I mean, that sounds so obvious, but I have literally had people tell me, "All my friends are Christian" and that's their excuse for not knowing people outside their Christian bubble. I get it that your closest friends are Christian. My closest friends are Christian, too – both of them. ☺ But I have a lot of acquaintances who are *not* Christian, including nearly everyone in our neighborhood whose homes I can see from my front porch, families I meet through my kids' schools and extracurricular activities, extended relatives, and people I know through other avenues of life as well. Probably, most of us know people who aren't Jesus followers, if we look beyond our closest circle or two of friends.

Second, it helps to recognize that sharing our faith in order to fulfill God's purposes is really about leading someone along to a place of faith. And when you're trying to lead a person or a group – regardless of the context...this is true about any leadership setting; it could be faith, it could be at work or school, or some other leadership setting – regardless of the context, if the person or people you think you're leading aren't following you, then you're just taking a solitary walk. That's not the goal. **In leadership, you want to bring people along with you. And the key thing (or a key thing – arguably the first thing) to doing that is getting on their "level."** Knowing them. Relating to them. Hearing their story and their journey of life. Too often, in an effort to share our faith, we Christians forget that God gave us two ears and only one mouth for a reason. We start by listening to the people God puts in our lives.

About a week or so ago I heard an interview on the radio where the two guys were talking about leadership in sports, particularly the leadership of players (as opposed to coaches), and the impact of that leadership on the success of the team. And one of them said this: "What makes [Tom] Brady the great leader in American sports is that even though he has a net worth with his wife of over \$500 million, he literally knows the name of everybody [on his team] – including scout team members. [...]He'll go up to a rookie, a 7th rounder

[that's the last round of the NFL draft – you're not likely to make a team drafted there] and say, 'Hi, my name is Tom Brady. What's yours?' He comes down... When you're a superstar you're on a stage. ... You have to come *down* to people.'ⁱⁱⁱ Now, as a Seahawks fan, it pains me to use Tom Brady and the New England Patriots as a positive example. But there's no denying the unbelievable success of the Deflatriots... I mean, the Patriots, the last 17 years or so, with Tom Brady as the quarterback.

And when I heard those comments about a good leader coming down to the people, my daughter Hailey was getting in the car right at that moment, and as we listened to the last sentence or two of what he said, I responded by saying, "That preaches!" And she looked at me like, "Dad, this is sports-talk radio; have you lost your mind?" But you see: this is exactly what Jesus did. Philippians 2 uses nearly this exact language to describe Jesus... but all you have to do is read any one of the gospels and you can see it in his life first-hand. **Jesus is the superstar of all superstars – He's fully Divine! – and yet He stepped down from eternity, "emptied himself" (Philippians 2:7, sometimes "made himself nothing") and took on flesh, and became one of us.** And He didn't just come down from the heavenly realms a little – like to an earthly king or to a super-religious person, to an uber-rich person like Bill Gates or Mackenzie Bezos... he did hang out with people of his day like that; but he spent significant time with the people on the margins of society, too.

He hung out with and talked with the lepers, the beggars, the prostitutes. He hung out with the people who are only known by the labels they'd rather not have, but that society puts on them, anyway. He'd ask them what they wanted, he'd talk to them about their problems. He got to know them on their level. **Jesus "came down" to them. For what purpose? To lead people into the Kingdom of God.** That's what He did. That was His purpose, because it's God's purpose. And when we share our faith, it's for that same purpose: to lead people to know Jesus and come into His Kingdom. And that begins by getting to know who they are... getting on their level, understanding who they are.

So: If we are going to lead people into the Kingdom of God, we would do

well to model our lives after Jesus' life of coming down to people. And it's not that we're "coming down" as though we're in some high and mighty position. Maybe we should even change the language a bit for our purposes, because we're not superstars up on a pedestal like Tom Brady. The point is we can get to know people and meet them right where they are. If you meet someone for the first time: find out about them. (I know this is basic stuff in some ways, and it comes easier for some people than it does others.) Ask them their name, where they're from, how long they've lived in the area, do they work inside or outside the home...what do they do...what do they like to do in their free time. That's just basic stuff. More depth can come if the relationship continues. If they're new to the Northwest, make sure they know to keep telling their friends that it rains here all the time. Days like today are rare occurrences. ☺ And if it's someone who is a neighbor or a co-worker or some other connection where you see them regularly, there will come opportunities to help them out, to serve them and be a blessing to them. And when we do that, we're sharing our faith. That is the beginning of sharing our faith. Probably all of us have had those kinds of opportunities.

That's a big part of what Paul means in today's passage when he writes, "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22). He knows Jews, Greeks, religious leaders, anti-religious leaders, philosophers, laborers, prisoners, government officials, and more. I mean, he came in contact with a lot of different people. And it's clear from his writings and the account of his ministry in Acts, that he always keeps in view the idea that any relationship is an opportunity to share the gospel. But first, like Jesus did, he understood who they are and how to connect with them or serve them. (See Acts 17 for arguably the best example from Paul's life.) So how we treat others, how we encourage them or help them or serve them or just get to know them is a huge part of sharing our faith.

The problem is that so often we think of sharing our faith purely as a verbal thing and so we forget that there are other ways we share our faith. And the fact is many people are hesitant to talk about their faith, even if presented with a golden opportunity. And yet many of us are familiar with 1 Peter 3:15, **"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give**

the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15). And we read of all the teachings from Jesus and the first disciples where words had such a profound impact on other people’s decisions to follow Jesus. But we oftentimes struggle to use our own words about our faith. Why?

A little over a month ago I came across an answer that is full of truth. Tim Keller wrote an article on this topic that struck a chord with me. Tim is the founding pastor (and recently retired pastor) of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, and it’s a church that has had great success in reaching people for Christ. The Kingdom of God is definitely bigger because of that church and his leadership of it.

In an article titled, *How to Be More Public With Your Faith*^{iv} here is what Tim Keller writes: “In the end, what we most need [in order] to be public about [our faith] isn’t more training (although that’s highly recommended), but proper motivation arising from a grasp of the gospel—that we are sinners saved by grace.

There are at least three major reasons for evangelistic unfruitfulness. There is a lack of sensitivity—countered by the humility that comes from knowing we are undeserving sinners. [In other words: humility about our own “undeservedness” of God’s grace keeps us from sitting on a throne in judgment of others.] There is a lack of courage—countered by the boldness that comes from knowing we are unconditionally loved. [Even if we mess it up, God will still love us.]

Finally there is indifference. We look around us and see people struggling to find meaning, satisfaction, hope, [and] confidence. The biggest reason we keep our mouths shut is that we’re failing in love for them. But the gospel produces love (Gal. 5:6). Now you may say, ‘Well, yes, I see I ought to be that humble, that confident, that loving—but I’m not.’ But see, you’ve confirmed the point. **The problem is ultimately in our hearts, not in our lack of training or knowing how to answer all the questions.”**

That last sentence hits the nail on the head. “Knowledge” really isn’t the problem. We can sit in our Christian bubble and talk with people about the

finer points of theology and Scripture...and yet sometimes we don't "love your neighbor as yourself" (Jesus' words) and share our faith with them in any way, shape, or form. That's not a knowledge problem. We have more than enough knowledge. It's a *heart* problem, as Tim Keller says. Maybe we're judgmental or jealous or fearful of some of the people in our lives, and so we don't love the people around us enough to share our faith with them; we haven't even gotten to know them. We can change that by getting to know them, and being open to ways to serve and bless them and ultimately, when the opportunity is there: to share verbally about our faith as well, so that the Kingdom of God would grow as more people put their faith in Jesus. Or at least invite them to church or to some other Christian event where someone else will share with them the Good News of Jesus (like in a sermon, a retreat "talk," at a concert, etc. Just as Jesus did: we can get to know people, find out about their lives, live out our faith, and even speak about it, so that others might come to faith in Jesus as well. All of that is an act of love. And love is at the center of all of God's purposes; so let's live into them.

I invite you to close out this morning's message by joining our voices together in saying this morning's statement of faith: **"I share my faith with others to fulfill God's purposes."** Let's pray...Amen.

ⁱ <https://relevantmagazine.com/god/report-47-of-christian-millennials-believe-evangelism-is-wrong/> - All the quotes related to this article can be found at this link.

ⁱⁱ SermonIllustrations.com

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.iheart.com/podcast/139-softy-interviews-27882152/episode/colin-cowherd-explains-his-recent-statement-30662508/> It's about a 15 minute interview if you want to listen. You can also fast forward to the relevant part to the sermon – go to the 14:20 mark.

^{iv} <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/public-faith/>