

“SHARING YOUR FAITH”

Imagine for a moment that you are in a hospital for a terminal illness and the doctor has pinpointed the exact time of your last breath as two hours from now. Your kids have come for one final visit with you. What would you say to them? How important would these words be to you? You would probably tell them something that you really want them to take seriously.

Jesus was in a similar situation in Matthew 28:19-20. It's just before he was to ascend to heaven and he is standing with his disciples having a conversation with them in which he tells them the following:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

As Jesus' last words to his disciples, commonly referred to as The Great Commission, these are probably considered some of the most important thoughts he could say to them. Note, he was not going to see the disciples again until Acts 1 where he essentially repeats the same thing again. What he tells them here is likely so important to him that he really wants them to take it seriously as the most important thing they could do as Christians.

There are a few observations from this passage that are helpful to us.

We are most like him when we fulfill The Great Commission

For three years Jesus modeled for them what he is commanding them to do (John 4:1-2). Fulfilling The Great Commission is the most important thing Christians are to do. It comes before anything else that we do in our lives. The reason is because it is the expression of the essence of what it means to be a Christian. In short, a Christian is someone who loves God and their neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40) to the extent that they are willing to sacrifice whatever is necessary to tell others about Jesus (Luke 9:22-23). Therefore, we are most like Christ when we tell others about him.

He did not give them a method

Perhaps this was because there is no one way to share your faith. There are two popular approaches Christians generally take to sharing their faith. The first is the drive-by approach where you walk up to a stranger and make a formal presentation of the Gospel message to them, concluding with an invitation to accept Christ as their savior. The second is more relational where you get to know the person and after some time (usually when the person are more comfortable and trusting) you begin a conversation that leads towards you telling them the Gospel story.

They are commanded to fulfill the Great Commission. The highest calling of your life is to fulfill The Great Commission. Why? Because Jesus commanded it. Your fundamental identity if you are a Christian is Christ-follower, not husband, doctor, construction worker, student, mother or pastor. Having a family is secondary to fulfilling the Great Commission and the danger in American culture is that as having a family becomes increasingly idolized, more Christians will settle for family life as their contribution to fulfilling The Great Commission. Consider the following quote from John Piper:

Oh how many lives are wasted by people who believe that the Christian life means simply avoiding badness and providing for family. So there is no adultery, no stealing, no killing, no embezzlement, no fraud — just lots of hard work during the day, lots of TV and PG-13 videos in the evening (during quality family time) and lots of fun stuff on the weekend — woven around church (mostly). This is the life for millions of people-wasted life. We were created for more, far more.

Our motivation for fulfilling The Great Commission is the clear command of Jesus. Nothing else is more important.

He told them what to tell others about him

Jesus spent three years with his disciples. Discipleship is probably the most transformative time in a Christian's life. If you have not experienced this, it is highly recommended. It will do wonders for your walk with the Lord. Jesus told the disciples that the content of their message was not to be centered on anything other

than the things he had taught them. It would take an entire book to list all the concepts that Jesus taught them through modeling or formal teaching. For our purposes here, it is important to note that in sharing your faith with someone it's probably a good idea to actually know enough about life with God (i.e. theology and doctrine) such that you can answer some of the more difficult questions people have in this life. The kinds of things that are keeping people from knowing Jesus are not simple. Some of these ideas are complex but that does not mean they require someone with advanced theology training to answer them. They require someone who takes the time to study their Bible, and who desires to grow deeper in their understanding of God and service to him. They require someone who embraces the idea that theology and doctrine are the most practical things about us.

He promises to be with them until the end of the age

This probably begs the question, "If Jesus is getting ready to leave them, how can he be with them?" The disciples probably knew that Jesus was referring to this "helper" he had previously mentioned to them that he was going to send them who would remind them of everything he had taught them (John 16:12-14). That helper is the Holy Spirit. It should be comforting to know that whenever you feel like you don't know enough to share your faith, realize that it is true. You don't. And you never will because it is impossible for us to know everything. That would make us all-knowing, omniscient, and that is an attribute that only belongs to God.

So what are you to do when you feel that you are not knowledgeable enough to share your faith?

1. Make sure you are always learning and growing in your understanding of God. Practice regular Bible study. Read Christian classics. Listen to sermons on audio. If you have never been discipled, find someone to disciple you.
2. Remember, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would remind us of what we have learned about God.

Important tips to remember when sharing your faith

- Christians have a tendency to come off as know-it-alls. The reason is because our faith is a faith that is full of absolutes. This means that there are a number of truths within Christianity that are absolute truths. For instance, Jesus is

God. That is an absolute truth. In a culture that believes that there are many other “gods”, Christians have to learn the difficult task of balancing sensitivity to others without denying the essential truth that there is only one true God.

- Be loving in your approach and conversation. Sometimes, it’s good to just listen and not share anything at all. This is especially true in relational situations where you actually have a long-term relationship with the other person. At other times, we need to actually share some specifics about Christianity.
- If you are asked direct questions that you *know* the other person will not like, do not dodge them. Be honest and answer each question. If you dodge the question(s), the person can lose respect for you and may even feel you are not honest. If someone asks you if you believe those who do not follow Jesus are going to hell, tell them the truth. Afterwards, it may help to say something like, “But I hope that does not have a negative effect on our friendship and I hope we can still love each other as human beings.” This lets the other person know that they are important to you.
- Take special note of the language you use. Remember that they are not familiar with “Christianeese”. Figure out a way to share the gospel message so that you do not have to explain words like trinity or Holy Spirit. This is probably not a good time to give an in-depth theological explanation of the process of salvation.

Case Study

You have a co-worker who believes in God and is not a Christian. He/She has a difficult time accepting the idea that a God who Christians claim to be so loving can send people to hell. This is their stated reason for not becoming a Christian. What would you say to them?

Questions

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability:

1. Read Acts 20:24-27, 31 and 32. How serious would you say Paul took obeying Jesus’ command to fulfill The Great Commission?

2. Read Luke 19:10 and Mark 10:45. Why did Jesus say he came into the world? When Jesus says that he came to give his life as a ransom for many, do you think this is something that you are to model in your own life? If so, how? If not, why not?

3. List some barriers that you think hinders you from sharing your faith with others?