

Chapter 20

Sharing My Faith

KEY IDEA

I share my faith with others to fulfill God's purposes.

KEY VERSE

Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. – Ephesians 6:19-20

BEGIN BY RECITING THE KEY VERSE AND THE KEY IDEA TOGETHER AS A GROUP.

LESSON

INTRODUCTION:

THE CALL TO SHARE OUR FAITH

Catastrophically, the fall of humankind in the Garden of Eden shattered humanity's connection with God — the connection he originally intended when he created people. So God unfolded a plan to provide the way for all people to come back into a relationship with him. His grand plan included the founding of a brand new nation. Two thousand years before the arrival of Jesus, God called Abram (later renamed Abraham) to start this new nation, eventually known as Israel. People from all nations would come to know God through Abraham's offspring.

Genesis 12:1-4

The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. ² "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." ⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; ...

In verse 3 God has told Abram that all people would be blessed through him.

> He was, at the very least, expected to live a life different from what the world around him would live.

> He was set apart by a holy God, to be the father of a holy nation.

> We see here the foreknowledge of God in extending justification to the Gentiles, by faith. (Galatians 3:8-9 -- ⁸ Long ago the Scriptures said that God would accept the Gentiles because of their faith. That's why God told Abraham the good news that all nations would be blessed because of him. ⁹ This means that everyone who has faith will share in the blessings that were given to Abraham because of his faith.)

FROM THE TRANSFORMATION STUDY BIBLE

God blesses us that we might be a blessing to others, and his great concern is that the whole world might be blessed. The missionary mandate of the church does not begin with John 3:16 or Matthew 28:18-20. It begins with God's covenant with Abram. We are blessed that we might be a blessing.

In the two thousand years that followed, Israel was a living demonstration to the world of the lengths to which God would go to re-establish his relationship with his people. Then, with the ultimate sacrifice of his Son, the reconciliation with God that was formerly confined to Israel now became available to all humankind. What's remarkable is that we can play a pivotal role in God's restoration plan. By responding to the call to share our faith, we partner with God in his divine pursuit of broken souls.

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 (CEV)

¹⁴ We are ruled by Christ's love for us. We are certain that if one person died for everyone else, then all of us have died. ¹⁵ And Christ did die for all of us. He died so we would no longer live for ourselves, but for the one who died and was raised to life for us.

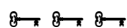
¹⁶ We are careful not to judge people by what they seem to be, though we once judged Christ in that way. ¹⁷ Anyone who belongs to Christ is a new person. The past is forgotten, and everything is new. ¹⁸ God has done it all! He sent Christ to make peace between himself and us, and he has given us the work of making peace between himself and others.

¹⁹ What we mean is that God was in Christ, offering peace and forgiveness to the people of this world. And he has given us the work of sharing his message about peace. ²⁰ We were sent to speak for Christ, and God is begging you to listen to our message. We speak for Christ and sincerely ask you to make peace with God. ²¹ Christ never sinned! But God treated him as a sinner, so that Christ could make us acceptable to God.

As Christians, we become ambassadors, or representatives, of Christ. God has sent us into the world to declare the peace of God, through Jesus.

> We represent Jesus. If sinners reject our message, they are actually rejecting Jesus.

< This is why it is so important to bring the message of truth.



*FROM **THINK, ACT, BELIEVE LIKE JESUS** by Randy Frazee*

For a vast majority of Christians, particularly in our politically correct culture, talking with a nonbeliever about a relationship with Christ seems a daunting and intimidating task. Weather. Fashion. Sports. Current news. All good. Jesus? Not so much. Putting our message on the defense is a brilliant and clear strategy of Satan to keep people from hearing about salvation. But I'm confident that you quite likely became a Christian through someone who was willing to take a risk and reach out to share the good news of Jesus Christ with you. The apostle Paul writes: How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (Romans 10:14-15)



KEY QUESTION: HOW DO I SHARE MY FAITH WITH THOSE WHO DON'T KNOW GOD?

PARAPHRASED FROM *THINK, ACT, BELIEVE LIKE JESUS* by Randy Frazee

The key belief of eternity — that there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus will return to judge all people and to establish his eternal kingdom — is real. The final destination of people is based on them receiving forgiveness of their sins through Christ. He has provided the way of salvation, but people must embrace it individually for themselves. The gift is free, regardless of what they have done.

- > As his followers, we are here to let people know, by how we live our lives and by the words we speak, what we know about Jesus.
- > Statistics show that most people come to faith in Jesus through a person who cared enough to share the gospel with them.
 - < Relationships are God's primary way for bringing people into his kingdom.
 - < God has one plan for saving the world: his people — us.
- > Our mission is simple: tell the message to all we can.

SHARING OUR FAITH THROUGH OUR LIFE

The most powerful way to share our faith in God is through our life — being a positive example to all in how we live every day. When others see the faith, hope and love in our life, they are drawn to live the same way. After paying attention over time, they will notice our confidence in and relationship with the one true God.

Many Christians are intimidated by the idea of sharing their faith. Jesus never intended for the Great Commission to be an impossible and burdensome task for the believer.

- > Our witness should come from the natural evidence in us by living for him.
- > The most practical way to show our faith is to simply be an example of and for Christ.

First you must determine your own faith. You cannot share a faith that you do not have.

- > People can spot a phony. You cannot say one thing and do another.
 - < If you aren't committed to applying Christian principles in your own life you will be ineffective. People will see you as insincere and phony.
 - < People aren't as interested in what you say, as they are in seeing how it's working in your life.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO SHARE YOUR FAITH WITHOUT HAVING TO SAY MUCH AT ALL?

One of the best ways to share your faith is to demonstrate the very things you believe by staying positive and having a good attitude even in the middle of a crisis in your own life. When the people around you see the peace in your life, especially when it seems like you're surrounded by storms, you can bet they'll want to know how to get what you got!

- > Treat people with respect and dignity, no matter the circumstances.
 - < Be consistent in your treatment of people, no matter what the circumstances may be surrounding them
 - < Jesus treated people right, even when they mistreated Him. People around you will wonder how you're able to show this kind of respect for others. You never know, they may even ask and open an opportunity for a verbal witness.
- > Find ways to be a blessing to others.
 - < As you strive to be a blessing to others, they will recognize there is something to your faith. It will plant seeds of faith.

< It shows that you live what you believe. Saying you're a Christian is one thing, but living it in tangible ways every day is something else.

> Don't compromise your beliefs.

< Situations happen every day where compromise is not only possible, but many times is expected.

< Live a life of integrity. Be honest and unmoving in issues of faith and morality .

> Develop the ability to forgive quickly.

< This is a powerful way to show how Christianity really works.

< Unwillingness to forgive creates division, hostility, and turmoil.

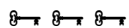
^ Even when there is no foundation for the attack, being right doesn't give you a free pass to be unforgiving.

} Do not punish, humiliate, or embarrass someone else because of your hurt.

} It still doesn't eliminate your responsibility to forgive.

The best way to share your faith is to be an example. People will want to know how you can live your life in the manner you do, and how you know for sure about your purpose in life. And when they ask, you'll have all kinds of great stuff to share.

How important is it to live your witness of faith? Do you find it easy or difficult? Does your witness suffer during times of crisis, or do your crises times confirm your faith witness?



In 2 Kings we find a story in which a young girl from Israel who had been taken captive speaks up because of her faith and her noble concern for her master, the commander of the army of Aram — Israel's enemy. The girl's words eventually healed this foreign soldier and inspired his belief in the one true God.

See 2 Kings 5:1-15 (pgs. 312-313 in BELIEVE).

NOTE: Jesus referred to the story of Naaman and Elisha in Luke 4:27.

Story Summary

Naaman was the commander of Syria's (Aram's) army and well regarded as a military man, but he had leprosy. His wife's Israelite servant girl suggested he go to Elisha to be healed. Naaman left for Israel, taking a large gift with him and a letter from Ben-hadad, the king of Syria, asking the king of Israel to heal Naaman (5:1-6). The king of Israel's reaction was panic—how could anyone heal leprosy? The king of Israel thought Ben-hadad was trying to start a fight (5:7).

When Elisha heard of the king's distress, he sent a message to the king telling him not to worry, but to send Naaman to him. So Naaman went to see the prophet (5:8).

Elisha did not come out to greet Naaman--this man of great power who was accustomed to some public respect. Instead, Elisha sent him a message telling him to wash himself in the Jordan River seven times. After he did this he would be healed. ¹¹ But Naaman stormed off, grumbling, "Why couldn't he come out and talk to me? I thought for sure he would stand in front of me and pray to the LORD his God, then wave his hand over my skin and cure me." ¹² What about the Abana River or the Pharpar River? Those rivers in Damascus are just as good as any river in Israel. I could have washed in them and been cured." (2 Kings

5:II-12).

Naaman's servants urged him to reconsider, and Naaman wisely did. After dipping himself in the Jordan River seven times, he was completely healed as Elisha had said. Naaman returned to Elisha and said, "Now I know that the God of Israel is the only God in the whole world. Sir, would you please accept a gift from me?" (verse 15). Naaman presented Elisha with the gift he had brought, but Elisha refused it and sent the Syrian commander away in peace.

Naaman's healing from leprosy is a wonderful picture of our salvation from sin—freely bestowed by the grace of God in response to faith (see Ephesians 2:8-9).

> This entire story, with political leaders and God's own prophet, hinges on the voice of one small girl.

A young child without any power of her own, a young servant girl spoke with courage and wisdom. She shared the truth of what she knew in her heart.

< This slave girl, who trusted the God of Israel, was a witness to her mistress. Her words convinced the woman to tell her husband, Naaman, who in turn informed the king.

< Never underestimate the power of a simple witness. God can even take words from a child and carry them to the ears of a king.

The God of all the world wants us to reflect his will in our life. In his famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus used the metaphor of "salt and light" to express the power of a life lived in faith and obedience to God.

Matthew 5:13-16 (CEV)

¹³ You are like salt for everyone on earth. But if salt no longer tastes like salt, how can it make food salty? All it is good for is to be thrown out and walked on.

Salt is useful for many things. It preserves, it heals, it brings out natural flavors. We find it in every household because of its importance. During the New Testament time, it had even greater value.

FROM COFFMAN'S COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE

Salt was accepted and collected as taxes by the Romans from the people of the Holy Land. One of the main sources of salt for Palestinians, of course, was the Dead Sea, or Salt Sea. So oppressive were these taxes that the people adulterated the salt with sand or other earthy material (the salt to begin with was not our nice pure table salt). The government purified the salt by spreading it in big vats or tanks, filling them with water and drawing off the concentrated salt solution or brine. All that remained was the earthy, insoluble material. Indeed, the salt had lost its savor because it was no longer salt. It was fit to be trodden underfoot.

And this was not the only way that salt could lose its savor. The surface waters of the Dead Sea, on evaporation, have a chemical salts content of about 31 percent sodium chloride, 13 percent calcium chloride, and 48 percent magnesium chloride, together with other impurities. The calcium and magnesium chlorides are hygroscopic (take water out of the air) and will thus literally dissolve the sodium chloride. A bitter tasting composition results. It was the custom to store vast amounts of this salt in houses that had earthen floors. In time, the salt next to the ground spoiled because of the dampness. Since it would be harmful to fertile land because of its salt content, no man would allow it to be thrown on his field. The only place left was the street, where it was trodden under foot of man.

¹⁴ You are like light for the whole world. A city built on top of a hill cannot be hidden, ¹⁵ and no one would light a lamp and put it under a clay pot. A lamp is placed on a lampstand, where it can

give light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ Make your light shine, so that others will see the good that you do and will praise your Father in heaven.

Verse 14 is another example of the importance of Christian witness. The world would be in darkness without them.

> It would seem reasonable to suppose that God would not allow a wicked world to stand if it were not for the faithful remnant in it who are remaining faithful to God.

> When Jesus says, "I am the light of the world" it is not a contradiction of this verse. It means that the light Christians give forth to others comes from Christ (2 Peter 1:19).

Being the light of the world requires a humble servant attitude, a willingness to adapt our approach to meet the needs of the people we are trying to reach. Others were drawn to the Christian faith by the way the people of the church lived and served those around them.

Acts 2:42-47 (CEV)

⁴² They spent their time learning from the apostles, and they were like family to each other. They also broke bread and prayed together.

⁴³ Everyone was amazed by the many miracles and wonders that the apostles worked. ⁴⁴ All the Lord's followers often met together, and they shared everything they had. ⁴⁵ They would sell their property and possessions and give the money to whoever needed it. ⁴⁶ Day after day they met together in the temple. They broke bread together in different homes and shared their food happily and freely, ⁴⁷ while praising God. Everyone liked them, and each day the Lord added to their group others who were being saved.

The early church spent much time together. The time was spent in learning more about Jesus and growing in their faith.

> They became a family. They shared their material possessions and resources. Many have said that this was a pure form of communism because of their ability to put all their resources together for the good of the group. However, below is a different way of looking at it.

FROM JON COURSON'S APPLICATION COMMENTARY

The early believers were not Communists. They were "commonists." And there's a big difference. Communism says: What's yours is mine. "Commonism" says: What's mine is yours.

The believers continued to use the Temple for their place of assembly and ministry, but they also met in each other's homes.

> The new believers needed more instruction than what was done at the temple in order to grow and become effective witnesses. The fellowship came naturally.

< The early church made more than converts, they made disciples.

The church was unified which gave it the power to multiply.

> It had a powerful testimony among the unsaved Jews.

< They saw the miracles done by the apostles.

< They saw the way the members of the fellowship loved each other and served the Lord.

Paul, too, illustrated well a humble servant attitude, which is captured in 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (CEV)

19 I am not anyone's slave. But I have become a slave to everyone, so that I can win as many people as possible. 20 When I am with the Jews, I live like a Jew to win Jews. They are ruled by the Law of Moses, and I am not. But I live by the Law to win them. 21 And when I am with people who are not ruled by the Law, I forget about the Law to win them. Of course, I never really forget about the law of God. In fact, I am ruled by the law of Christ. 22 When I am with people whose faith is weak, I live as they do to win them. I do everything I can to win everyone I possibly can. 23 I do all this for the good news, because I want to share in its blessings.

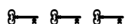
Verse 20-22} Paul was willing to adopt the Jewish way of life temporarily to gain a hearing among Jews, but his ethnicity no longer defined his existence.

> Paul didn't force Jewishness upon the Gentiles.

> Without compromising his morals or violating his principles, he fit in with the people to whom he was ministering.

< He developed "common ground" to make those he was ministering to feel comfortable and more open to listening and receiving the gospel.

Paul blended in with Jews and Gentiles because rather than be an obstacle that caused people to stumble, he was an instrument of ministry.



SHARING OUR FAITH THROUGH OUR WORDS

Most of us recall the intensely pleasant feeling of telling our friends about that dream car we just bought! Or outlining, with many details, the Kirk Gibson home run in 1988. Or calling our parents to describe the new girlfriend, and confessing with joy: "I think this is it." Witnessing, or sharing our faith, is the same thing – we enthusiastically tell others about the change that Jesus has made in our life. " -- DAVID SMITH

In Luke 8, Jesus heals a man who was possessed by a legion of demons. When the man is set free he is so thankful that he immediately wants to be a disciple. But Jesus tells him to return home and tell how much God has done for him.

In addition to sharing our faith by the way we live our life, we are also called to share who God is and what great things he has done for us through our words.

When was the last time that you personally talked one-on-one with someone to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

> For far too many believers, the answer to that question is that quite a long time has passed.

At the very basic level, we should be able to present to someone a clear illustration of what God is like, what his son is like, and what the kingdom is like.

Sharing the Gospel is the ministry of the church. The mission of the church may involve many elements, but the primary mission of the church is to proclaim the single message of the church—the Gospel. There are three major motivations for the believer to share the truth of Christ:

> *The Lord commands us:* The Great Commission was spoken by Christ Himself, instructing us to share Him with all the world. To be an obedient servant of God, we must honor His instructions.

> *Our consciences direct us:* Every Christian longs to walk in the Spirit. We want to do what the Lord wants us to do.

< However, when we knowingly fail to fulfill the Great Commission, we leave a void in our walk with Christ.

< We cannot be obedient to Christ and consider ourselves committed believers if we are indifferent to sharing His Gospel.

> *The condition of man calls us to share the life saving gospel:* The world desperately needs to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

< Human suffering is a direct result of spiritual darkness that has filled the world since the fall of man.

TO GIVE AN EFFECTIVE WITNESS WE MUST KNOW WHAT WE ARE TALKING ABOUT.

> When the book of Ezra was written, the Israelites were coming back from Babylon after living as captives. Their children no longer knew God's law. Ezra felt called to help get Israel back on track, but instead of just teaching others about God's law, he spent time studying it himself. *"¹⁰ Ezra had spent his entire life studying and obeying the Law of the LORD and teaching it to others."* (Ezra 7:10)

< He made sure he understood it before trying to tell others about it.

< It is important that we take time to study God's Word and know it, so that we can be better witnesses.

> What about you?

< *If someone asked you a tough question about the Bible, would you know how to find the answer?*

< *Think of some questions non-Christians might have about God. Then search your Bible and talk with someone to find the answers.*

< Ask God to help you live out the things you learn as you read your Bible.

WHY DO WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE GOSPEL?

We want to make sure that we witness to the true gospel.

> The apostle Paul showed the importance of understanding and guarding our beliefs when he told Timothy, "*Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers*" (1 Timothy 4:16).

> False gospels usually fall into one of two categories:

< THE WATERED-DOWN GOSPEL

^ It offers God's forgiveness, saying that all one must do is believe, without any mention of repentance.

^ It presents Jesus Christ as though He were some mere additive to make one's life a little better.

^ It tells about heaven, but leaves out the message of hell.

< THE RULE-LADEN OR OVERLY COMPLEX GOSPEL

^ It strips the true gospel of its simplicity and power.

^ It comes laden with rules and regulations that we must keep to find forgiveness.

^ It is so complex that no one can understand it.

WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST?

We must be careful to accurately present the gospel. For that reason, we must be able to identify its key elements.

> We all stand as sinners before a holy God.

< God first tells us the bad news to show just how good the good news of the gospel really is. The bad news is that we have all sinned—sometimes in ignorance, but often knowingly.

< Because of our sin and our inability to change this condition, God did the ultimate for us. "⁶ *Christ died for us at a time when we were helpless and sinful.* ⁷ *No one is really willing to die for an honest person, though someone might be willing to die for a truly good person.* ⁸ *But God showed how much he loved us by having Christ die for us, even though we were sinful.*" (Romans 5:6–8), he sent His own Son to come down from heaven and to die on the cross in our place.

> Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father.

< The only way God could resolve the sin issue was to send His Son, Jesus, to take our place and to pay the price for our sins.

< Jesus, who was both God and man, without sin or fault, was uniquely qualified to bridge the gap between sinful humanity and a holy God. "*All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation*" (2 Corinthians 5:18–19 NIV).

< Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father.

- Jesus Himself said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*" (John 14:6).
- The apostle Peter wrote "*Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12).
- Paul said: "*For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus*" (1 Timothy 2:5).

> The cornerstone of the gospel is Christ's death and resurrection.

< Jesus paid the price of redemption through his death on the cross, and his resurrection brought victory over death.

> A Simple Summation of the Gospel

< The gospel is the message that we are all separated from God because of our sin. The result of this sin is an emptiness, an ever-present guilt, and a certain fear of death. Yet, because God loved us, in spite of our rebellion, He sent His own Son to die in our place and to bridge the gap between Him and ourselves.

KNOW HOW TO SHARE YOUR PERSONAL TESTIMONY

Your personal testimony can be a powerful example of the transforming power of Christ to others. It doesn't have to be long and detailed. By focusing on three key points, you can share your testimony in just one minute.

> My Life before Christ

< Don't glorify your past, but mention how you were before Christ:

> My Life Changed by Christ

< Summarize how you came into a relationship with Christ. Be sure to mention the key elements of the gospel:

^ "I realized that I'm a sinner and that I fall short of God's glory" (see Romans 3:23).

^ "I recognized that Jesus Christ died on the cross for my sins" (see Romans 5:8).

^ "I repented or turned away from my sins" (see Acts 3:19).

^ "I received Jesus Christ as Lord of my life" (see Revelation 3:20).

> My New Life in Christ

< Tell what God is doing in your life right now. Even if you became a Christian years ago, God is constantly working in you, so share what he is doing now, what he is showing you, and how you are growing. Talk about how your life is noticeably different now that you are in Christ. Put into your own words the following benefits of being in Christ:

^ "I now have peace in my life" (see Romans 5:1).

^ "Now that I'm a Christian, I know I have a purpose for living" (see Jeremiah 29:11).

^ "I now have the assurance that I'm going to heaven" (see John 3:36).

Our testimony about Jesus' saving power is only going to be persuasive if his power has made an attractive change in our own lives and we've been faithful to our commitment for the long haul.

The entire early church had a mission to share the truth about God's love and faithfulness, which they accomplished by testifying with their mouths about the resurrected Christ. Like the early church members, we all have a mission to share our faith with others. It is through God that we have been given the power to carry out that assignment.

Acts 1:1-8 (CEV)

¹ *Theophilus, I first wrote to you about all that Jesus did and taught from the very first² until he was taken up to heaven. But before he was taken up, he gave orders to the apostles he had chosen with the help of the Holy Spirit.*

³ *For forty days after Jesus had suffered and died, he proved in many ways that he had been raised from death. He appeared to his apostles and spoke to them about God's kingdom. ⁴ While he was still with them, he said: Don't leave Jerusalem yet. Wait here for the Father to give you the Holy Spirit, just as I told you he has promised to do. ⁵ John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.*

⁶ While the apostles were still with Jesus, they asked him, "Lord, are you now going to give Israel its own king again?" ⁷ Jesus said to them, "You don't need to know the time of those events that only the Father controls. ⁸ But the Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you power. Then you will tell everyone about me in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and everywhere in the world."

Luke records Jesus' last words to His disciples. These were a warning not to be satisfied with a half-hearted effort to reach the world. He commanded them to carry the gospel to every place where they could find people: first to their home city, Jerusalem, then to the neighboring regions of Judea and Samaria, and eventually to "everywhere in the world."

> The work of the new believers was to testify of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that followed. They were to preach a crucified Jesus as the only Savior of lost sinners.

On the occasion in Matthew 28:18-20, when Jesus spoke of the church carrying the gospel to the whole world, He viewed this work as something we are commanded to do. But in Acts 1:8, He views it as something that we will actually accomplish.

> In Acts 1, when Jesus tells his disciples that they will be witnesses, He used the future tense, treating the evangelization of the world as a fact that will eventually come to pass.

< He was saying that before He returns, the whole world would hear the gospel.

We might compare the Great Commission to an order from a military commander, or an assignment from a teacher, or a directive from a boss. We have all had the experience of complying with two of these, ... We take commandments from human authority very seriously. We may suffer considerable anxiety about whether we will be able to satisfy the demand. Are we just as serious about the Great Commission? Indeed, we should be far more serious about it. If we fail to be conscientious about an obligation to our Creator and Master, the consequences will be much worse than we ever face in this life because we fall short of pleasing a mere man. -- ED RICHARD

Jesus had told his disciples of God's plan for them to be witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, but none of them ventured outside of Jerusalem with the good news . . . until they were forced to do so because of persecution. In the moment, the horrible harassment the believers experienced must have seemed to be a setback. They may have left their belongings in Jerusalem, but they took their faith with them.

Acts 8:1-8 (CEV)

¹⁻² At that time the church in Jerusalem suffered terribly. All of the Lord's followers, except the apostles, were scattered everywhere in Judea and Samaria. ³ Saul started making a lot of trouble for the church. He went from house to house, arresting men and women and putting them in jail.

⁴ The Lord's followers who had been scattered went from place to place, telling the good news. ⁵ Philip went to the city of Samaria and told the people about Christ. ⁶ They crowded around Philip because they were eager to hear what he was saying and to see him work miracles. ⁷ Many people with evil spirits were healed, and the spirits went out of them with a shout. A lot of crippled and lame people were also healed. ⁸ Everyone in that city was very glad because of what was happening.

Because Jerusalem was the center of spiritual activity, for six years, no one wanted to leave. It took persecution to get the believers moving through Judea, Samaria, ...

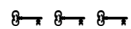
FROM JON COURSON'S APPLICATION COMMENTARY

Maybe doors are closing and you're wondering why. Although it would be wonderful if we were all spiritually sensitive that we would feel the prompting of the Lord and respond immediately, most of us don't have that kind of sensitivity. ... Perhaps you'd rather stay where you are, but in reality the Lord sees where He can use you most effectively.

Persecution does to the church what wind does to seed: It scatters believers and produces a greater harvest. --WARREN WIERUSA

When we choose to partner with God in his plan to piece together this broken world, we become his ambassadors, his representatives on earth. Being an ambassador of Christ is not an easy task. The apostle Paul, who suffered greatly for sharing his faith, understood this well. Despite the persecution, he was passionate in sharing the good news. See Acts 20:17-24 (pg. 318 in BELIEVE).

In his letters, Paul asked fellow believers to pray for him as he shared his faith. And he called them to make the most of every opportunity to share the message of the good news as well. Paul's words are precious to us as well as we work to share our faith with those in our life. See Ephesians 6:19-20; Colossians 4:2-6 (pg. 319 in BELIEVE).



SHARING OUR FAITH WITH ALL

It was God's plan from the very beginning for all nations and all people to be a part of God's plan of redemption and restoration. The Israelites resisted God's calling to be the channel of his redemptive purposes for the peoples of the world. This sentiment was demonstrated in the story of Jonah. He was called by God to take God's message to the Assyrian people in the great city of Nineveh. When this assignment came to Jonah from God, he ran away in the opposite direction. God gave Jonah an opportunity to rethink his decision by placing him in the belly of a giant fish for three days. After God had the fish vomit Jonah onto dry land, he offered him an opportunity to change his mind. (See Jonah 3:1-4:11, pg. 319-320 in BELIEVE).

The resistance of the Jews to share their faith with outsiders carried over into the time of Jesus. The Samaritans were a mixed-blood race resulting from the intermarriage of Israelites left behind when the people of the northern kingdom were exiled and Gentiles were brought into the land by the Assyrians. Resentful hostility existed between Jews and Samaritans in Jesus' day. To avoid these people who lived in the large region between Judea and Galilee, Jews would often go out of their way and cross over the Jordan River and travel on the east side. Modeling the value of inclusivity to his disciples, Jesus traveled directly through Samaria and went out of his way to talk to a Samaritan woman. See John 4:3-42, (pgs. 321-323).

We see a great witness technique from Jesus as he brings the message of salvation to the woman he met at a well in Samaria.

> Jesus begins in the natural realm (v. 7).

< The Samaritan woman was not a believer and did not have the witness of the Holy Spirit." (1 Corinthians 2:14 ⁴ *That's why only someone who has God's Spirit can understand spiritual blessings. Anyone who doesn't have God's Spirit thinks these blessings are foolish.*).

< Jesus spoke of something she could relate to -- water.

^ Most of us can strike up a conversation with a stranger in the natural realm.

> Jesus swung the conversation to the spiritual realm (v. 10).

< Jesus began a conversation about water on two levels. The woman talked about literal water, and Jesus offered her spiritual water. This caused her to raise questions.

< He simply mentioned the things of God.

> Jesus brought conviction using the Law of God (v. 16–18).

< Jesus gently spoke to her conscience by alluding to her breaking a Law through adultery.

< He used the Law to bring “the knowledge of sin” (see Romans 3:19,20).

< We can do the same. Most people think they are good enough, but remember the laws of God are known by all and affects their consciences. (Romans 2:15 ¹⁵ *This proves that the conscience is like a law written in the human heart. And it will show whether we are forgiven or condemned,*).

< Learn how to open up the spirituality of the Law and show how God considers lust to be the same as adultery (Matthew 5:27,28) and hatred the same as murder (1 John 3:15). Ask, “If God judges you by the Ten Commandments on Judgment Day, do you think you will be innocent or guilty?” If he says he will be innocent, ask, “Why is that?” If he admits his guilt, ask, “Do you think you will go to heaven or hell?”

< From there the conversation may go one of three ways:

^ He may confidently say, “I don’t believe in hell.” Gently respond, “That doesn’t matter. You still have to face God on Judgment Day whether you believe in it or not. If I step onto the freeway when a truck is heading for me and I say, ‘I don’t believe in trucks,’ my lack of belief isn’t going to change reality.”

^ He may say that he’s guilty, but that he will go to heaven. This is usually because he thinks that God is “good” and that He will, therefore, overlook sin in his case.

} Point out that if a judge in a criminal case has a guilty murderer standing before him, the judge, if he is a good man, can’t just let him go. He must ensure that the guilty man is punished. If God is good, He must (by nature) punish those who have lived in rebellion to the inner light that God has given to every man.

} Tell them that God gave a conscience so that we would know right from wrong.

^ He may admit that he is guilty and therefore going to hell. Ask him if that concerns him. Speak to him about how much he values his life and how much more therefore he should value the salvation of his soul. Jesus said that a person should count his life as worthless compared to the value of his soul (Matthew 5:29, Mark 9:47).

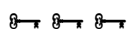
> Jesus spoke to the woman of a new way to come: (John 4:23-24) when true worshippers would worship in the Spirit.

< This was made possible after Jesus returned to heaven [glorified] (John 7:37-39) and the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. (Acts2:4).

Then Jesus revealed Himself to the woman at the well (v. 26).

A person must understand he is lost before he will desire to be found. -- PAUL TASSELL

Many of the Samaritans believe in Jesus because of what the woman had told them. As a result, they understood that Jesus is the Savior of the whole world, not just of Samaritans and Jews.



KEY IDEA: I SHARE MY FAITH WITH OTHERS TO FULFILL GOD'S PURPOSES.

After we receive Christ, we may each have different careers to make a living, but we all have the same job description. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:18 – 21: *All this [our new life] is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Again, as followers of Christ we are His ambassadors. Ambassadors take God's message of reconciliation to all the people of the world.

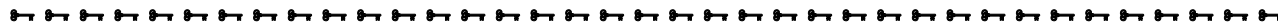
> We don't bring our own message, but God's.

> We bring it to all people. No one is eliminated from having the opportunity to receive the message.

> We do not have to bring the message on our own power. We have the Holy Spirit to give us power and direction.

> The message? That we can be reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus Christ, His son.

> The debt we could never pay has been paid in full! The purchase? Eternal life with the Father and Son.



KEY APPLICATION: WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES THIS MAKE IN THE WAY I LIVE?

FROM *THINK, ACT, BELIEVE LIKE JESUS* by Randy Frazee

We are never responsible to save, but only to share. Our goal is to bring revelation, not to broker a response. The end result is up to God. But we must learn to share our faith.

While there are many methods and resources for talking to people about Christ, here are two simple approaches to sharing your faith.

1. Share Your Story (also see information on page 9-10)

As a Christian, you have a spiritual autobiography — a story to tell about how God saved you. It is your story, unique to you. The wonderful truth about your journey of faith is that no one can debate or argue with you about its validity. Jesus made himself real to you, and you believe it. So know your story, because you have one. Tell your story, because you can.

... Here is the common denominator of all Jesus stories. We were all lost and destined for hell. He came, found us, and offered salvation. We received his gift and, therefore, were saved. Case closed. So no one's testimony is better or more interesting than anyone else's when the final scene is always the same — we are saved from death and set on the path of God's kingdom in and through a relationship with Christ. ... You may find it helpful to take a half hour to write this out. ... Write it; learn it; share it.

2. Share Scriptures

Since God's Word has the plan of salvation, then share those verses. This particular method is known as the Roman Road.

I. Why do we need salvation?

- Romans 3:10: “As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one.’”
 - Romans 3:23: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
- No one can get to God on his or her own. We all miss the mark of righteousness.

II. What hope do we have?

- Romans 5:8: “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
- Romans 6:23: “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Out of his great love, God gave the gift of his Son to offer us eternal life.

III. How can we be saved?

- Romans 10:9 – 10: “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”
- Romans 10:13: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and salvation is yours.

Paul’s letter to the Romans contains other follow-up verses (e.g., 5:1; 8:1, 38 – 39), but these three simple steps are enough to lead someone to faith in Christ.

Regardless of how you choose to deliver the good news of the gospel, the most important element is that you are willing to share your faith. If you are willing and ready, God will bring the opportunities.

Can you recall the last time you shared Christ or at least told someone how important your faith is to you? When was the last time you invited someone to belief in Christ?

In the Christian walk, nothing is more exhilarating than letting people in on the difference God makes and how true life is found in Jesus. And then when we get to be a part of someone crossing the line of faith and taking hold of eternal life, it just doesn’t get any better. When we are able to see someone point his or her life not only to God’s kingdom but also to God’s abundant life now, we fulfill the very reason God has us here.

We must always keep in mind how much God wants to save people. The criminal on the cross said to Jesus, “Remember me when you come into your kingdom” — to which Jesus miraculously responded with, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” This two-sentence exchange shows the deep longing in the heart of God to rescue people from sin and eternal death. We must simply join him in his work by sharing what he has done for us.



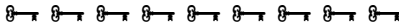
Short Summary on HOW CAN WE PREPARE TO SHARE THE GOSPEL?

Be prepared to share the gospel. There are three essential things that you must do in order to get equipped for sharing the Good News.

1. Prepare Your Mind. Apply yourself to studying God’s Word, along with reading other helpful resources that will sharpen your mind and understanding (see 2 Timothy 2:15).

2. Prepare Your Heart. Ask God to give you a heart of compassion for the lost and an earnest desire for their salvation (see 2 Peter 3:9). Ask Him to stir up an urgent fervency to see the lost lovingly called into a relationship with Christ (see Colossians 1:10).

3. Prepare the Way. You have to pray! Ask God to give you boldness to engage with every person whom He leads you to. Ask Him to grant you wisdom so that you can minister to their specific needs. Pray that you will be a prepared messenger speaking to prepared hearts.



Chapter 20 ends our second unit in BELIEVE on how we, as believers, should act as Jesus did. Here are some closing thoughts on this unit from *THINK, ACT, BELIEVE LIKE JESUS* by Randy Frazee

Closing Thoughts about Key Practices

I once heard a story about a man who attended an art show. He was amazed at a life-size statue of a lion. The details and scale were incredible. The man approached the sculptor, who was standing nearby, and asked, "How in the world were you able to fashion a lion so detailed out of a block of stone?" The artist smiled shyly and answered, "Well, it's easy, really. I simply chipped away everything that did not look like a lion."

God is methodically and continually chipping away everything on us that does not look like his Son — the Lion of Judah. He is continually shaping and molding each of us into his image.

God's goal is that by the time we leave this world and enter his, we look as much like Christ as possible. Once we enter heaven, we receive our glorified bodies and are fully formed into his image. But as we've repeatedly stated, the reason to become like him now is so we can influence as many of our neighbors as possible to join us in his kingdom.

The ten "What Should We Do?" practices are some of the primary actions of Jesus — those movements of his we should mimic, those activities that keep us becoming like Jesus.

