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## Reaching Out – In Your Own Words

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The gospel - it is good news because it has reconciled us to God and assures we will live with Him for eternity. It is *the* message that needs to be heard by everyone. As an act of love, it is the greatest thing we can do for someone without Christ. This week's devotions are intended to help you share your faith. It begins with an understanding of the gospel message, the experience of the gospel power in our own lives, and the sharing of the gospel – sometimes in our own words. Read on... –*Pastor Mike*

### Day 1: Reaching Out, Week 2 – Sharing Our Faith

What are some truths you learned from last Sunday's message? How can it make a difference this week?

### Day 2: The Gospel

Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-5.

The essence of the gospel was passed down to Paul who passed it down to us: that Christ died for our sins, that he was buried, and that he was raised from the dead. Continuing on in the chapter, Paul discusses our own resurrection. This is all good news for us, His children. It is a simple message really, and yet it can be a very difficult one to convey simply. If someone asked you to explain the gospel, could you?

Here is one way (and there are many) to keep it simple and brief. It is wrapped up in just a few verses:

#### **Romans 6:23**

*"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

1. Our sin has a penalty, and it is death – **eternal death** apart from God and heaven. (The issue of sin is usually accepted. I don't know anyone who doesn't believe they aren't guilty of sin.)
2. But God paid that penalty with the gift of Jesus Christ. Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sin and give us **eternal life**. It was a gift, therefore eternal life cannot be earned.

#### **John 1:12**

*"Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."*

#### **Romans 10:9**

*"...if you confess with your mouth "Jesus is Lord" and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."*

3. You can receive the gift of eternal life by placing your trust in Jesus for your salvation and then striving to follow Christ in your life. When we acknowledge Jesus as Lord, and believe he was raised from the dead, the Bible says we can be saved from God's wrath, the penalty of sin.

Certainly there are other ways to share the gospel, and perhaps there are things that could be introduced that aren't introduced here. But the gospel is simple at its core. It is God saving mankind from the wrath of sin by giving and taking the life of His only Son for the payment of the just penalty of our sin, and raising Him to life to give us life with Him forever. Give thought to the gospel message – it is good news.

### Day 3: The Power of the Gospel

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10.

No one can deny the power of the gospel to save. We can try arguing and debating peripheral issues, but in the end it comes down to one's relationship with God through Christ. The power of the gospel comes through the work of the Holy Spirit, not by our own strength, but by His. The gospel has the power to save, and it brings forth a change in the life of the believer. A willingness to live for Christ accompanies salvation. Debating and arguing has its place, but only if an individual is willing to make a change.

Reading the passage from 1Thessalonians, what was the evidence of their salvation? (i.e. what gave Paul the assurance that they're salvation was real?)

v. 6 \_\_\_\_\_

v. 7 \_\_\_\_\_

v. 8 \_\_\_\_\_

v. 9 \_\_\_\_\_

God has given us to the gospel in order to live a life pleasing to Him both now and for eternity. He has given us the power to live a changed life.

As an aside, notice also from verses 9-10, the same elements of the gospel found in yesterday's passage, and the subsequent life of the believer:

- Repentance: turning from idols to serve a living and true God
- Resurrection: Jesus raised from the dead
- Deliverance: from the wrath to come

#### To Consider

The gospel changes lives. The Thessalonians had come a long way since their pagan days. How has the gospel changed your life? In what ways is it similar to that of the Thessalonians?

### Day 4: Your Personal Testimony, Part I

Read Paul's testimony to King Agrippa in Acts 26:1-29. While it is a long reading, it is an excellent story of Paul's faith journey.

It is one thing to know the gospel, it's another thing to know how to share it. The words of the gospel are pretty straight forward once they are clear in our heads. But the gospel is more than mere words. They are accompanied by a body – us. And when the gospel is very, very personal and touches our lives in a meaningful way, the gospel message can be very powerful. Of course, it means nothing without the power of the Holy Spirit working in the life of the unbeliever. Which raises the question: Is a personal

testimony important? Based on yesterday's passage, aren't the gospel words and the Holy Spirit powerful enough by themselves? Is our testimony really needed when it is the Holy Spirit that draws an unbeliever to Himself?

The Bible says to always be ready to give an answer for the hope in us (1 Peter 3:15). That is something personal because one's life generates questions about their hope. Paul shared his testimony on several accounts (you have just read one). Is there a place for personal testimony?

### **Personal Thoughts**

A personal testimony helps provide credence to the gospel through the eyes (and ears) of the listener. When a witness testifies to a crime, the truth of the act is verified by the witness. Our testimony is a similar kind of witness. The truth of Jesus is verified by our personal witness. That is the gist of Jesus' words that the disciples would be witnesses of Jesus, testifying to what they had seen (Acts 1:8). When we have seen something and have experienced Christ personally, then our testimony has a little more weight. Is that an attempt to replace the Holy Spirit's work in the unbeliever? I think not. The Holy Spirit's work is essential. The gospel words are essential. And that's where a personal testimony comes in. Our testimony is in essence the gospel in our own words and life. The power is still the gospel, but the way the words are communicated differ from person to person, but the essential truth of the gospel is the same: Jesus saved me from a wretched life deserving of wrath.

### **To Consider**

No matter if your faith journey was a dramatic transformation or a smooth transition, God can use your story because the gospel is at its core. Tomorrow we will look at our testimonies in more detail, but for today, begin thinking about your own faith journey and how it can be woven into spiritual conversations. The gospel is powerful, and it becomes much easier to share it with others when it comes from your personal story.

## **Day 5: Your Personal Testimony, Part II**

Reread Acts 26:1-29 (from yesterday's reading).

Your personal testimony is all yours. No one can argue with it. Therefore, it can be a great way to share Christ with others because no one can question it. When communicated clearly and personally, it can put the ball in the other person's court, so to speak. Note the clarity of Paul's testimony. He begins with his past (26:4-11), moves to his conversion experience (26:12-19), then to his new life (26:20), and finally to the present day (26:21-23). He ends with a question: "*King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?*"

Are you able to clearly articulate your faith journey? It has been said that our job is to convince, and it is the Holy Spirit's job to convict. We communicate the truth clearly and convincingly, but the Holy Spirit brings conviction to the heart of the unbeliever.

How did God save you? What was life like before Christ? What happened in your life that awakened you to Christ? How is God continuing to save you (from this present life of struggles)? For Paul, he was struck down. He was on his own mission. But God stepped in and struck him with blindness. And in the midst of his ailment, God awakened him to the truth of the gospel.

### **To Consider**

If you have time, write down in one paragraph your faith journey: (1) your life situation when you were awakened to Christ, (2) how you came to understand the gospel (did someone share with you, did you hear it on tv, read it in a tract?), and (3) why you believed.

Note: For some, you were saved as a child. Looking back on your life before Christ is a blur and, of course, childlike and not relatable to the adult unbeliever. One's testimony, though, can be more than the salvation experience. The testimony of Christ in our lives continues for a lifetime. If you are one who

believed as a child, consider emphasizing how Christ is making a difference in your life today. How has Christ helped you through an experience in your life? What is He teaching you? How are you coping?

## **Day 6: The Gospel – All About God**

Read Titus 3:3-7.

At one time we were foolish. (Okay, sometimes we still are, but how much more foolish before Christ.) God pulled us out of a life headed for wrath. Why did he save us according to this passage?

\_\_\_\_\_, v. 5

This means that our former lives brought forth no good thing worthy of salvation. Our history is His-story showing how His mercy delivered us from ourselves. That's what makes a personal testimony all about the power, love, and glory of God – it has nothing to do with us. A personal testimony is not about us as much as it is about God.

### **To Consider**

Go back and review your personal testimony from yesterday. How does it reveal the power, glory, and mercy of God in your life?

# Home Group Questions

Week of November 10, 2008

## Reaching Out: In Your Own Words

The gospel - it is good news because it has reconciled us to God and assures we will live with Him for eternity. It is *the* message that needs to be heard by everyone. As an act of love, it is the greatest thing we can do for someone without Christ. This week's devotions were intended to help you articulate your faith. It included an understanding of the gospel message, the experience of the gospel power in our own lives, and the sharing of the gospel –in your own words.

Opening: How have you seen God work this week?

1. If someone asked you to share the gospel with them, could you? Is there anyone in the group brave enough to “practice” with the group? (It's not as easy as you might think!) As uncomfortable as it may be, consider splitting into pairs or triads and practicing sharing the gospel. There are many ways to share the gospel, but look for these elements: personal sin, penalty of sin, payment for sin, repentance, and confession of Christ's death for sin and subsequent resurrection for us.
2. No one can deny the power of the gospel to save. We can try arguing and debating peripheral issues, but in the end it comes down to one's relationship with God through Christ. The power of the gospel comes through the work of the Holy Spirit, not by our own strength, but by His. The gospel has the power to save, and it brings forth a change in the life of the believer. A willingness to live for Christ accompanies salvation. Debating and arguing has its place, but only if an individual is willing to make a change.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10. What were the evidences of the Thessalonians' salvation:

v. 6 \_\_\_\_\_

v. 7 \_\_\_\_\_

v. 8 \_\_\_\_\_

v. 9 \_\_\_\_\_

3. The gospel changes lives. Getting more personal, how has the gospel changed your life?
4. Last week you read Paul's faith journey as he grew up with the education of the Pharisees, became zealous in his religious commitment, and later met Christ on the Road to Damascus (Acts 26:1-29). Are you able to clearly articulate your own faith journey. Take some time right now to answer the following (be brief):

What was your life like before you met Christ?

What was your life situation when you were awakened to Christ?

How did you come to understand the gospel?

Why did you believe?

What difference has it made in your life since?

\*If you are someone who believed as a child, consider emphasizing how Christ is making a difference in your life today.

How has Christ helped you through an experience in your life?

What ways is Christ important in your life? (What difference is He making and how could it help someone going through like struggles?)

5. A personal testimony is not about us as much as it is about God. Read Titus 3:3-7. How has God's mercy been evident in your life?

In addition, consider the following questions:

- How have you struggled this week?
- How can the others in the group help you?