

Enjoying Evangelism

July 2, 2006

Special Speaker: Josh Kelley

My first mission trip was when I was 14, six weeks in Jamaica. That trip had all the essential components of a good mission trip: Working in hot weather, personality conflicts, living in a very different culture, and eating bizarre foods.

It was a pivotal event in my life. I was forced to make my faith my own, without my parents. I had to choose how I would respond to very trying circumstances. And it was also my first time to really “witness.”

Our team was made of up kids from age 5 to 18. We would gather a crowd, do dance routines to Christian songs, and then mingle and talk to people about Jesus.

My wife will tell you that I can’t dance. Our engagement barely survived dance lessons. I was a clumsy 14 year-old boy with a mullet trying to dance and tell people about Jesus.

- Even worse, it was videotaped.

I spent every performance dreading what came after the show: I had to talk, to people, about Jesus. That terrified me. As we finished each song, I knew I was that much closer to “witnessing” time and I’d try to ignore the growing ball of lead in my stomach. At the same time, I was ashamed of my fear.

- What’s wrong with me? I thought if I loved Jesus more, I would be able to witness effortlessly, like the rest of my team.

Fear won out and I did what ever I could to avoid witnessing. I had some stage skills, so slid myself into a stage hand role.

- I developed a reputation of having a real “servant’s heart”.

This was my defining experience with evangelism: fear, dread, shame. And to this day, whenever someone talks about witnessing, I still feel a twinge of dread, mixed with guilt.

Q: Do any of you feel that way?

EXCITED TO SHARE?

We know that we should want to share the Good News. We know Christ has given us the awesome privilege and responsibility of being His witness. We know the “Great Commission”:

[Jesus said] Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. *Matthew 28:19-20 NIV*

These are our “marching orders.” As Pastor Nick said a last month, we are God’s plan “A” for sharing the Gospel and He has chosen not to have a plan “B.”

If I really believe that this world is dying in its sin, and if I believe that only Jesus can rescue the lost, and if I love my neighbors as myself, shouldn’t I be excited to share the Gospel?

- Well – yes. But obstacles had been put in my way; they took what should have been a joy and turned it into a burden.

I’ve spent the past 18 years trying to remove them and relearn what witnessing really is. This morning I hope to help in the same process, so we can actually enjoy evangelism.

I’M NOT AN EVANGELIST!

Q: What is an evangelist? What come to your mind when you think of an evangelist?

Being an evangelist is not about the height of your hair, or using a southern drawl. An evangelist is someone that God has gifted and impassioned for sharing the Gospel.

- It is more about how God wired you than how you say “Jay-zus.”

It was [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, **SOME** to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers... *Ephesians 4:11 NIV*

Notice it say some, not all. The first obstacle to enjoying evangelism is trying to be something you’re not. And it’s removed when you share the Gospel out of who God made you to be.

The reason I dreaded witnessing after those performances is because it was so contrary to my wiring. I would have been much happier teaching new believers how to read their Bible.

But that doesn’t remove our responsibility to share the Gospel.

- Some are called to be evangelists, but all are called to be evangelistic.

How can you tell which you are? If you hear the word evangelist and think “Ick!”, perhaps you are called to be evangelist-ick!

What’s the difference between being an evangelist and being evangelistic? Both look for opportunities to share God’s love and share the Gospel. But evangelists also create opportunities.

- The evangelist reads the Great Commission and has a passion for going and baptizing.
- Others have a passion for teaching and making disciples.

It’s very freeing for me to know I am not expected to be an evangelist. Every believer is still expected to be evangelistic.

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 NIV*

I'M NOT PREPARED!

This command is for every believer, evangelist or not. But it highlights the second obstacle to enjoying evangelism: not feeling prepared. I don't know the Bible or the 38 stages of salvation!

- For heavens sake, I haven't even made it through Romans!

There's a simple solution to this: Get prepared! You don't need to have all the answers, but every Christian should understand their own faith well enough to explain the basics to friends.

- To share your faith, you only need a basic understanding of the basics.

People aren't impressed if you can recite the books of the Bible in Greek. I can, and they aren't.

- Beyond the basics, simply know where to get the answers.

If someone asks you, "Why does God allow hurricanes?" and you don't have an answer, that's okay. But you should know where to look – here at the church or a good website. I have several good resources listed on the church's website (www.hisplacechurch.com).

What does impress unbelievers is seeing the difference God has made in your life, and that is your area of expertise.

- You are the only expert on what God has done in your life.

For most of us, this is the most effective form of witnessing.

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God.... *1 Peter 2:12 NIV*

If there is something in your life that they want, but don't know how to get, then God will be able to provide multiple opportunities to share His love.

While working at McDonalds with my sister, someone asked me why we got along. Using that question to tell him about Jesus was far more fun than witnessing after those performances.

- And we can do this kind of witnessing without being a weirdo!

When we live our faith in a real, relevant, and attractive manner, we'll be able to share Christ in a normal, natural way.

The second obstacle to enjoying witnessing is being unprepared, but it can be removed by 1) knowing the basics of your faith and 2) by being an expert on what God has done in your life.

I DON'T KNOW ANY NON-CHRISTIANS!

Ironically, now that I'm better equipped to share the Gospel than I've ever been, I have the least opportunities.

I know the Bible better, I can answer almost any question, and I am comfortable talking about God. But I work with Christians (and they're tired of hearing me talk), almost all of friends are Christians, and all of my family are Christians.

The third obstacle to enjoying evangelism is not having non-Christians friends!

The most effective way to evangelize is friendship evangelism. Tracks and crusades may have a limited role, but nothing is better than sharing the Gospel with those who've seen you live it out.

Q: How many of you were saved through a track, crusade, or TV?

Q: How many of those had no prior, impacting contact with Christians?

- The Gospel should be seen before it is heard.

But the longer we are Christians, the stronger our tendency to separate ourselves from those in the world. This tendency must be actively counteracted if we are to reach our world.

Sadly, many Christians actually encourage this separation. They seem to be afraid of being contaminated. But Jesus loved hanging out with sinner and they loved hanging out with him! This tells me that He must have been a lot more fun than movies usually portray Him!

- If you can safely relate to unbelievers, you should!

The third obstacle is only having Christian friends, but this is removed by actively developing and maintaining friendship with co-workers, neighbors, and parents at Little League. And if you don't have any of these, join some civic club!

I DON'T HAVE A PLAN!

The last obstacle is not having a plan. So this morning I am going to give you a simple plan.

1. During the worship time, take time to pray and then, on the back of the card, write down the names of three non-Christians friends or relatives you want to become Christians.
 2. Pray for them regularly. This card is small enough to place in your wallet, as a regular reminder.
 3. Invite them to hang out with your Christian friends. Specifically your normal Christian friends! Go to the movies, play cards, just have fun, so they can see your faith lived out normally.
 4. Pray for an opening to share what God's doing in your life. This may happen when hanging out with friends, or when they are facing a crisis. Be ready and watchful.
 5. Invite them to church and ask them what they thought. Have lunch afterwards; nothing pushy. If an opportunity arises, ask them if they want to become a Christian, then pray with them.
- Remember, Jesus stands at the door and knocks, but he doesn't knock it down!

The Holy Spirit can do great thing through you when you are available and just being yourself.