

Seven Principles on Sharing Our Faith Effectively

Over the years I have tried my best to listen to the Holy Spirit as He guides me on how and when to share my faith with people. It can be so exciting to join Him and trust Him in this adventure. I don't believe it is ever wise to use practiced formats, programs and routines. It is rare that these come across to people as authentic and fitting our personality (although they clearly did to the people who created them). Kiwi's I believe don't want to be treated as a number in a system or a cog in a program. They want to be engaged personally with a real person who just loves God and cares about them.

The 7 Principles below are just that, guiding principles to help you be a part of the 'main thing' the church exists for and are not a 'how to' formulae or program.

These are the principles of evangelism that I have tried to live by and I find the family at Ranui Baptist Church are increasingly doing.

1. SOW SEEDS EARLY

A Story about a Farmer, Luke 8



⁴ When a large crowd from several towns had gathered around Jesus, he told them this story:

⁵ A farmer went out to scatter seed in a field. While the farmer was doing it, some of the seeds fell along the road and were stepped on or eaten by birds. ⁶ Other seeds fell on rocky ground and started growing. But the plants did not have enough water and soon dried up. ⁷ Some other seeds fell where thorn bushes grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ The rest of the seeds fell on good ground where they grew and produced a hundred times as many seeds.

¹¹ This is what the story means: The seed is God's message, ¹² and the seeds that fell along the road are the people who hear the message. But the devil comes and snatches the message out of their hearts, so that they will not believe and be saved. ¹³ The seeds that fell on rocky

ground are the people who gladly hear the message and accept it. But they don't have deep roots, and they believe only for a little while. As soon as life gets hard, they give up.

¹⁴ The seeds that fell among the thorn bushes are also people who hear the message. But they are so eager for riches and pleasures that they never produce anything. ¹⁵ Those seeds that fell on good ground are the people who listen to the message and keep it in good and honest hearts. They last and produce a harvest.

In this parable about effective evangelism it seems clear to me that the responsibility of Christians is to throw seed everywhere, that is, find ways to scatter spoken words about Jesus, the Kingdom wherever we go in the world (field). My primary responsibility to the pre-Christian world is to speak to them. Scatter seeds. Whether the hearers are 'good soil' or not is not our responsibility initially. Our job is just to talk about Jesus.

Romans 10:17 says that no one can come to faith without 'hearing' the message about Jesus Christ.

The big mistake of this generation has been to think that people don't want to hear our words, or that our actions will speak for themselves.

Francis of Assisi has been misquoted so many times with the saying, "witness at all times and if necessary use words." Utter, unbiblical rubbish! I have never known anyone to become a follower of Jesus Christ without someone else explaining things to them. God takes the seed of our spoken words, a testimony, a declaration, and plants them like seeds of faith in the souls of others. Seeds He begins to grow if the heart of that person is willing. One of the biggest misconceptions of the last 20 years in western Christianity has been that you can befriend someone for a month, a year, a decade and eventually you will 'earn the right' to speak to them about Jesus (if they don't die first). The reality is with most people you befriend the longer you leave Jesus out of your conversations the harder and less natural it will be for you to include Him later.

The parable says that wherever you go about in the world (field) throw seeds (i.e. God's Word). Let me illustrate for you how easy this will be for you to do.

I am one of seven budget advisors in our church and when I sit down to do a budget for someone in the community I will mention, at the very start of our conversation, that I have seen the biggest miracles in finance when I have asked for God's help. As I complete this persons budget and make suggestions for them to consider – they will usually come back and ask me questions about God and faith. It becomes so natural if I throw the seed early. They are usually very open to me praying for them.

You and I might speak to quite a range of people in the course of our days' work. Be friendly to them all. Throw a seed early at the start of the conversation and you will find that a lot of people will want to start talking to you about the Lord.

If some sales person asks how my day is going, I will be honest, I might say, "It's good, I have already seen God heal someone today", or "Good thanks, God seems to make me happy every day". Simple one liners, but the next time I go into that shop there is a good probability that that person asks me to pray for them, pray about something or asks me a question. It becomes natural to include God in our future conversations.

When asked, "What have you got planned for the weekend Mr Watts?", I might respond, "Oh, a few repairs, maybe a fishing trip, but what excites me most is church on Sunday morning, you never know just what God will do, it's fun".

Consider for a moment how you might respond to these statements e.g. throw seed early:

What a beautiful day?

How's the family?

What did you get up to in the holidays?

How are you?

This government is useless!

Did you know that chocolate will make you feel happy!

If you buy this all the girls/ guys will like you!

It amazes me that simply looking someone in the eyes and saying "God bless" can be a seed that God will use to begin to germinate faith in that person.

Often people tell you that they are witnessing without using words 'we are being incarnational to those people' i.e. Jesus with skin on. The thing is they forget that Jesus never stopped talking about the kingdom and salvation. How can we be 'incarnational' without words?

2. FOLLOW THE HOLY SPIRIT

Where you see the spoken words germinate with faith in someone, make yourself very available to follow them up. Be a co-labourer with Christ. Trust Him to guide you. Join in where you see Him working.

Imagine you have four people who you have recently met and out of love for them boldly thrown a seed or two towards them. Which one of these four should get your time?

- a) **John who has lots of needs and wants you and your church to help him.**
- b) **Mary, who has a few questions about God and is not sure what she believes.**
- c) **Wendy who is a Jehovah's Witness and wants to talk to you about matters of faith.**
- d) **Gopalan who is a Muslim and not interested in your version of Jesus. Or**
- e) **All the above.**



Take a minute to consider your answer before you read on....

If it's the Holy Spirit who convicts people of sin and draws them to Jesus and to salvation and we are called to be co-labourers with Him I would suggest to you that you make yourself very available to Mary and her enquiries. I will often say to folk who have just started to ask questions, "I will make time for you no matter how busy I am because I would be so happy if one day when I get to heaven you get to move in next door".

John may demand all your time as might Wendy and yet you may get nowhere and find the whole evangelism thing discouraging. I spend time with people and pray for people to be saved who God is already at work in and so I have good results and plenty of

encouragement. Love them all. Respect them all but focus 95% of your energies on Mary.

There are many people in our church who have the ability to prophecy over strangers and then to follow them up. Several who have the ability just to discern that a person is open and ready for a direct challenge. If you learn to

follow His leading in reaching the lost, it's not about you, it does not become about your ability or polished presentation. It becomes an adventure with Him which will have encouraging results.

When someone expresses to me an interest in Jesus, the Bible or the church I will make sure I have time and resources to feed that interest straight away.

I have found that if you don't, then satan will get in. Never say in a couple of weeks we are having an Alpha course, why don't you go to that and get your questions answered. Feed them today, now, constantly, without giving them a break or an opportunity for satan to distract them (because he often does). If you feed them as much as they can take, they will want more and they will drag truth out of you. If you leave them with nothing to grow on for days or worse still weeks, often the fire will go out. Please join in where you see God at work.

I apply that to the whole process of discipleship. Many people have challenged me on my practice of baptizing a person immediately on confession of their faith and repentance in water and the Holy Spirit. They say wait until Uncle Fred can come and witness their baptism, wait until they have done 6 weeks of study, wait until it is their special day, their birthday or their anniversary of something. The goal of evangelism is to make disciples. If you help the seeker respond to His Voice immediately especially at the start and especially with water and Holy Spirit baptism, that will become a pattern for life. They will always experience the power of God when they are baptized. If you wait until a 'convenient time' often they won't sense anything special happening and the transformation of their life for Uncle Fred to see will be nothing like it could have been. Please follow the Holy Spirit.

3. SHARE THE GOSPEL LOVINGLY

I realized not so long ago, when talking to someone who had been doing community hours with us who had become a Christian that 'we treat people as family before they really are'. I can think of so many folk who through their Corrections Department placement with us, or the food parcel system, or through receiving a budget from us have felt so respected and so honoured and included (because we often assume that they are going to become Christians soon) that they do join the local 'family.'

In the context of a genuine love for people, the beginnings of a real friendship, you can share the gospel freely. In fact they will ask you to.



There is this amazing story in Numbers 10:29-31 where Moses invites his unbelieving father-in-law Hobad to join them on a journey with God through the desert to the Promised Land. Initially the father-in-law says, "ah, no thanks mate, I have got my own people and my own religion." Haven't you heard that before! Then Moses who I am sure was confident that God would get them through the wilderness says; "listen old fella, we need you, you know the desert better than any of us. Come on mate. The team will be much better off with you on it" (or words to that effect). And so Hobad joins them and becomes a part of the community of faith

journeying with God to the Promised Land (heaven for us). I find in our Church people often speak to unbelievers like Moses spoke to Hobad, "hey we respect you, we would really value your contribution to the team."

Over the years there have been so many programs on evangelism and so many tracts to hand out to random people in the street and so many publications that we have put in peoples letter boxes, but to what lasting effect? While it is not that hard to get someone to pray 'the prayer' with you in the street, in 20 years of being a Pastor I can only think of one person who was witnessed to in the street that ended up in the church (and that person was surrounded relationally). Therefore, I conclude that in New Zealand, the street evangelism that we do, the publications that we drop in letter boxes, in reality have next to no impact on people long term. It's an impersonal and potentially confrontational method of evangelism that only a few people can do well and that the rest of us feel condemned and discouraged over. Even the word evangelism scares most Christians because we have tried the confrontational approaches and it hasn't felt authentic and it hasn't worked for 98% of us.

Share the gospel, according to your style with words, lovingly. Treat people like family before they are. The statistics in all our churches show that that works. Virtually all the people in our churches are there because a family member or a friendly person gave them time individually.

4. MAKE DISCIPLES



As I mentioned earlier, in the Matthew 28 Great Commission Jesus said go into the world and “Make disciples”. First you baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, then you teach them to do everything that Jesus has told you to do. The goal is to make disciples; people who love and fear God and are committed to living their lives in obedience to His Word and His Holy Spirit.

Who is the evangelist here?

- a) *Mary* interceded daily for her wayward teenage grandson Jeff.
- b) On a course a *Christian guy* introduced himself to Jeff and through a seed i.e. said something about God.
- c) Jeff’s car broke down on the side of the road and *Martin* a total stranger (a Christian) stopped, assessed the situation, towed Jeff home and when Jeff went to thank him, Martin just said “God cares about you mate, God bless.”
- d) Jeff loved the \$\$\$ at work and was totally shattered when he was made redundant (last on first off). Steve (a workmate) asked Jeff if he could pray with him and in response to Jeff’s question gave him a DVD testimony to watch.
- e) Jeff went with Steve to see Steve’s home group leader *Andrew* who explained the gospel clearly and answered his many questions.
- f) On hearing Jeff’s confession faith and repentance *Robyn* the local Pastor baptized him and prayed with others for him to receive the Holy Spirit.
- g) Jeff joined the church and the young adults group where he was mentored for the next two years with *Alvin*.

The question to ask is this. Which one of these people in italics was the evangelist??? Take a moment to work out your answer or to discuss it with a friend before you move on.

If the goal of evangelism is to make disciples all 7 of them were the evangelists in reality. It always takes a team to make a disciple and so when you see someone walking with God and being led by His Spirit there is a whole bunch of people that should be celebrating with the angels.

Just as you need to keep feeding them before they came to faith, you and I also need to intentionally mentor them and disciple them in the years ahead. I find the first two months after a person’s baptism is when they will face their biggest battles. Alongside the small groups and relational mentoring that they need, we encourage them to complete our foundations course for New Christians (which you can download from the study guide page of our website whangareicbc.org.nz in PDF format). After they finish that we encourage them to read “The Purpose Driven Life” 40 day devotional then “The Relationship Principles of Jesus” by Tom Holladay.

5. CELEBRATE OUR PRIORITIES



The old adage is true “we become what we celebrate”. What we give attention to and celebrate as being important will shape the culture of your life and your church. In our church we celebrate water baptisms and we celebrate church membership.

When someone dies to self and is raised to live a new life for Jesus (Romans 6) or when they put on Christ (Colossians 3) we make a huge noise, we prophecy over them (i.e. whoever is in the room does), we give them a personally made promise box as a gift and we declare who they are now in Christ - forgiven, a new person robed in righteousness, family, on the team, in God’s army. It’s huge. It’s not a pat on the back for being good for six months. It’s a death and a rebirth, a new beginning (part of the one salvation experience).

We usually interview them for membership straight away and get them serving in some role in a ministry team.

Membership is the second thing we really celebrate at our Church because we believe that we are living stones, being added to this eternal kingdom that the very defences of hell cannot withstand. We are better and stronger having this new person bring their gifts and their ministries to the local church. Church membership doesn't have much to do with church structures and constitutions, but it has a lot to do with a local team of people who love God and each other, and are committed to reaching out into the community together.

Every new member is encouraged to fill in a Spiritual Gifts and Passions questionnaire so we can release them to serve where and how they are called.

6. BIRTH PEOPLE INTO THE KINGDOM BIBLICALLY

I spend a long time thoroughly explaining sin, holiness, the awesomeness of God, heaven and hell, Jesus and the gospel to them *before* inviting them to put their lives right with God and enter His kingdom. The Christian Faith is an action word; you cannot have faith and not live differently. You need to know who you have faith in and what that looks like.

Always take people through repentance, get them to take time to confess the sins they need to be forgiven for, and to turn from them. I encourage them to confess habitual sins out loud before a respected believer. When someone believes and repents, baptise them biblically, by full emersion, immediately. At the same time pray for them to receive the Holy Spirit upon them. You give a person the greatest chance of a continued life with Christ if you bring them into the kingdom biblically. The success rate is huge i.e. people who remain connected to church and practical Christian living.

7. CHURCH LEADERS NEED TO MODEL EVANGELISM

When Jesus instructs us **all** to make disciples we cannot relegate the role to the 2% in the church who seem so gifted and natural at doing it. That is especially true for Pastors and Elders. Whether we like it or not the strengths and practices of the leadership team will release the members of our congregations to do well in those areas. When you model it and talk about how you are sharing your faith with others, it will encourage the whole church.

When I was in training at Theological college one of the lecturers said that once a Pastor has been in a church for 5-years that church will become strong at what he/she was strong in and weak where he/she was weak. A scary thought when you are an impatient young man, with bad money management habits and virtually no musical ability. I had to acquire many new skills so I wouldn't hold back the churches I pastored. I have found that when I am focused on reaching the lost and believing God for great things in the church, the faith of the whole church is affected positively.

In December 2011 I lost a number of members, good friends all, over just a few weeks. Even though I am only one of many who lead people to Christ and disciple folk in our church, our church statistics reflect that during the beginning of 2012, when I was feeling sorry for myself and my eyes were off the ball (local mission), baptisms dropped right off.

Over the last 20 years I have often read that the Pastor and the Elders just need to be the vision holders, the CEO's of the church. Others can do the pastoral care. Others can do the work of the evangelists. How that must grieve the Lord. We are responsible to seek the Lord for direction and humbly submit that to the members, but Pastors (brothers and sisters), Elders, Deacons and Ministry Team Leaders, we need to visit new folk, follow up on seekers, and show by our lives that we too are part of the body, willing to serve others and obey the great commission!