



Going Public

1 Corinthians 3:5-7

Notes: The primary reference used in developing this Bible Study was the book *Going Public with Your Faith* by Peel and Larimore. The Scripture references in this Bible study are taken from the New King James Version.

One of the great challenges with sharing your faith at work is that it is not acceptable by society to try to impose your beliefs on others.

How does the pressure from society to not impose your beliefs on others conflict with what Christians are called to do?

All Christians are called to share the good news about Jesus Christ with others. Jesus gave us the Great Commission which is not a suggestion, it is a commandment:

Matthew 28:19-20 - "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you."

What happens to people who overtly engage in activities intended to proselytize others?

People find this very offensive and they end up avoiding the proselyte. Generally these people end up leaving the company either because they find they do not fit in or they are let go during a lay-off having been identified among the poor performers.

So how are we to be obedient to the Great Commission and not end up losing our jobs in the process?

I recently finished reading a book titled, *Going Public with Your Faith* by William Carr Peel and Walt Larimore who are associated with Focus on the Family that addresses this very issue. This book advances the idea that we should stop thinking of evangelism as an event and instead see it as an on-going process. Most of us have come to believe that evangelism is all about harvesting souls for the Lord. But this is putting the cart before the horse because before a crop can be harvested, the soil of a person's heart must be cultivated with planting and watering being essential prerequisites to the harvest.

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How does the idea that evangelism is a long term process conflict with our impulses about it?

We live in a fast-paced, sound-bite-oriented society that is accustomed to seeing immediate results. Christians should resist being drawn into this way of thinking. God invests in people for the long term and so should we. Nothing of lasting value is ever obtained in haste.

How does it affect the person sharing Christ if you only think of evangelism as an event rather than a process?

This is setting yourself up for rejection. You can deal with that for a while because we are told to expect to be rejected by the world. But eventually, continued rejection will cause a Christian to become discouraged to even continue evangelism activities thinking themselves to be a sub-standard Christian or worse, causing them to start thinking of unbelievers as the enemy.

Consider 1 Corinthians 3:5-7. This is a key passage that addresses how God views the process of evangelism...

1 Corinthians 3:5-7 - Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

What does planting and watering refer to in 1 Cor 3:5-7?

Planting is sharing a little nugget of good news that points people to Christ. Watering is reinforcing a little nugget of good news that points a person to Christ. A person usually needs to hear the gospel several times before they respond and yield themselves to the Lord.

What causes a person to yield their life to Christ?

When a person yields their life to Christ, it is in response to what He has already done in their life. It is God who gives them a new heart enabling them to respond to Him...

John 3:3 - "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Being born again means to be spiritually born which can only come from God. People are body, soul and spirit...

1 Thes 5:23 - Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What distinctions should we make between the body, soul and spirit?

Our body is that part of us that interacts with the physical world God created to be a context for us. Our soul is the seat of our personality, our thoughts and emotions. Our spirit is that part of us that has the capacity to commune with God. Before our spirits were born again, we were dead to things of God...

1 Cor 2:14 - But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

So, knowing that it is God who brings about salvation in a person's life, how should we view our role in the process?

We need to be diligent to discover what God is already doing in someone's life and join in the effort. Our attitude should be that we are here to help others become new creations, not coerce them to change their religions.

What is wrong with the idea that the Great Commission is promoting a religion?

Religions all have the same thing in common, they are about what to do or not do to earn favor with God. Biblical Christianity is so far from this idea that it should not even be called a religion. True Christianity is a relationship with the Savior.

When you think of evangelism, what comes to mind?

People usually think of preaching or aggressive tactics to convince people to change their mind about Christ. The authors of *Going Public with Your Faith* have identified five models they've seen for evangelism:

1. **Proclamational evangelism** – announcing the truth to a large audience such as Billy Graham crusades.
2. **Confrontational evangelism** – initiating a conversation with people, usually strangers with the purpose of leading them to Christ.
3. **Intentional evangelism** – activity created to provide a non-threatening environment for people learn about Christ.
4. **Passive evangelism** – uses symbols, objects or art to arouse curiosity in the observer in hope that it will result in someone asking about God.
5. **Relational evangelism** – builds a bridge of friendship between a believer and nonbeliever which provides opportunities to share Christ.

Which of these models should we use at work?

We should use any and all of them that we are gifted in but not all of these are appropriate for work. The evangelism models that are best suited for work are relational and passive. The intentional model may be possible in certain special circumstances but this would be a special case.

Which of these evangelistic models do you think is the most effective?

The relational model was actually the backbone of what was used by the early church that had phenomenal growth. The book referenced a survey which reinforced this giving data about what 14,000 Christians said God used to lead them to Christ:

1. 75-90% - a relative or friend
2. 5-6% - a pastor
3. 4-5% - Sunday school
4. 2-3% - they just walked into church
5. 2-3% - a church program
6. 1-2% - a special need drew them in
7. 1-2% - a church visitation
8. 0.5% - an evangelistic crusade or TV program

How does today's society make it more of a challenge to engage others in a discussion about spiritual matters?

- We live in a postmodern age that dismisses universal truth.
- People will say Christianity is not valid but they will say it is not relevant.
- People consider it is arrogant, unintelligent, and intolerant to believe that the Bible contains "the truth."
- Neither reason nor revelation carries much weight for the postmodernist.
- The common assumption is that we are intentionally deceiving others for the sake of our selfish agendas.

Some other distinctions between modernism and postmodernism from the book are as follows:

Modernism	Postmodernism
Effects have causes	"Stuff happens"
"The Truth" is attainable	Nothing can be proven
Truth is discovered	"Truth" is constructed
Reason is trusted	Objective reason is denied
Values facts	Values relationships
Man is a biological machine	Man is a social being
Materialistic	Looking for meaning

What effect has postmodernism and the rejection or universal truth had on people?

The most insidious effect of postmodernism is the despair and cynicism it leaves in its wake. The "been there, done that" attitude has given people a sense of purposelessness. This is seen in the use of the common brush-off term "whatever."

What are the upsides of postmodernism?

- Overconfidence in human reason is being corrected. People are coming around to seeing that science, technology, and politics can't solve mankind's most basic problems.
- Spirituality is increasingly acceptable and welcome. Skepticism toward the supernatural is waning.
- The importance of relationships is being rediscovered.

To people with a predominately modern mind-set, truth is scientific and universal so you can talk to them about evidence, proof and logic. But what may be more effective in this postmodern age?

In this postmodern age, truth is personal and experiential. Emotions are more important than facts in making decisions. Thus personal stories may be more effective than a logical proof because a story enables you to connect with others on an emotional level. Christians should take advantage of this conditions because we have the best redemption story on the market.

What happens when we try to share the gospel with people who have not given us permission?

- They feel we are being arrogant, "I know the truth and you don't."
- They perceive condescending benevolence... "you're lost, you poor thing; let me help you."

What then can we do to get people to give us permission to share the gospel?

Develop a sense of curiosity about what makes us the way we are.

How can we develop a sense of curiosity about matters of faith during the course of a conversation?

Introduce matters of faith into a conversation by planting faith flags – these are brief statements, bare nuggets of a story told in the natural course of a conversation. They identify you as someone who is serious about faith, the Bible, prayer, and God.

What are some examples of faith flags?

- When someone tells you about a problem in their life, tell them you'll pray for them.
- When someone complements your work, say God has blessed you with the right skills for this job.
- When a matter of ethics is discussed, point out that you've found the Bible to be a reliable source of wisdom and tell them what the Bible has to say about the situation at hand.
- On closing a great business deal, say everyone worked hard and God blessed us on this one.

- When someone expresses frustration with the lack of peace in the world, say that some day the Lord will return to fix these problems for us.

Why shouldn't you identify yourself a member of a particular denomination when sharing a faith flag?

People form prejudices around certain denominations which may become an obstacle for them in accepting your story.

Why shouldn't you use your faith as a reason not to do something as a faith flag?

Christianity is not a set of religious rules so you should not say anything that may lead people to this conclusion. Statements such as, "I don't drink [or dance or smoke or...] because it is against my religion" does not create curiosity. This kind of communication always sounds judgmental to a non-Christian.

What should be our objective when we share a faith flag?

A faith may create an opportunity for us to share the gospel. It identifies us as someone a person may talk to about spiritual matters when their curiosity compels them ask...

1 Peter 3:15 - But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;

When someone asks you a question about a spiritual matter, this is the permission you need to take a conversation deeper spiritually.

When we have the opportunity to take a conversation deeper spiritually, what is a good way to do this especially in this postmodern age?

Tell a faith story. This is a narrative of how God or a biblical principle became real to you. It is a personal testimony.

What are your thoughts on the best way to deliver a faith story?

It should be a natural part of the conversation, not a "canned spiel" or sermon. Limit the subject to the main and plain things about God, prayer or the Bible, specific churches, denominations or religious leaders risks being identified with something that may cause a barrier for the other person.

How should we be ready to share our faith stories?

Make a list of the times you had a meaningful encounter with God...

- When God lead you to an answer for something that was bothering you
- When God did something significant in your life
- When you experienced pleasure in your relationship to God

- When you experience intimacy or renewal in your relationship with God
- When God spoke clearly to you or gave you guidance
- When God worked through you to accomplish His purpose

Write up some notes on these occasions so that you can have your thoughts about these experiences better established in your mind.

What kind of language should you use to enable the other person to better identify with your faith story?

You should speak their language, stay away from words that have religious baggage associated with them.

What are some examples of words that have great potential for unbelievers to misunderstand?

Common Term	Replacement(s)
born-again	experiencing new life
Christ	Jesus, Messiah
Christian	follower of Jesus
church	believers
faith	trust, belief
God	the Creator
gospel	good news
holy	set apart, different
lost	spiritually separated from God
justified	declared right with God
meditate	think
prayer	speaking to the Creator
redeemed	forgiven
religion	relationship
repent	turn from
righteous	right with God
saved	forgiven
Savior	Jesus
sin	wrongdoing, imperfection
Trinity	Triune Godhead
truth	fact, certainty
worship	obey, follow

What is the best way to keep a spiritual conversation going?

Ask insightful questions that show that you are truly interested in the other person.

How can you bring the gospel into your faith story?

It should be a natural part of the story. You should think about how you are going to do this in advance.

What are some good passages of Scripture to use when sharing the gospel?

John 3:16 - For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Romans 6:23 - For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.