

COVID-19 and Sharing the Gospel

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This follows the 'Faith-Based Facilitation' model. You may wish to consider the 'Four Theological Voices' when reading Scripture (NB all references are from the NIV, 2011). Please see OurHub for details.

Introduction - The issue

Evangelism is an important part of our Christian witness. It was clear in the previous chapter that while Christians are all missionaries called to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with the world, the empowerment of the Holy Spirit coupled with good discipleship cannot be overlooked. It is also important that disciples are grounded in the word of God if they are to share the gospel. In support of this, the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC, 2007, p21) states,

“ There is a direct connection between whole-life discipleship and evangelism. Lives which consistently display Christ create a hunger for Christ in others. Evangelism without discipleship borders dangerously on hypocrisy. ”

This highlights the importance of discipleship for believers to effectively live out the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The First Steps - What is evangelism?

The word 'evangelism' means sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is rooted in the Greek word Euangelion which means 'gospel' or 'good news'. This gospel is God-centred and not man-centred. It is a gospel which says that even though there is nothing lacking in God, through his love and desire to redeem mankind he sent his son Jesus Christ to die for the sins of the world so people can be reconciled back to God. Therefore, having been reconciled back to God by accepting his redemption, Christians have the mandate to share this gospel with others through evangelism.



Christians are all qualified to share the gospel of Jesus Christ without being ashamed of it (Romans 1:16). There is a great importance on the ordinary church member to be empowered to pray, speak, give, and invite people to Christ without depending on ordained leaders to do so. Therefore, this booklet serves as a reminder that all Christians are all in ministry as co-workers with God in his mission to reconcile the world to himself (1 Corinthians 3:9).

Going Deeper - What does the Bible say about evangelism?

Evangelism as being sent

Matthew 28:18-20 is a well-known Scripture which serves both as a mandate and confirmation that Christians are to share the gospel wherever they are and beyond. Before Jesus ascended to Heaven he said to his disciples, 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you' (John 20:21). Did this just apply to the disciples or to all Christians? This applies to all Christians because they have all been enabled to go and be witnesses for Christ's saving grace. In Acts 1:8 Christians are assured of power which comes with the infilling of the Holy Spirit to enable them to be witnesses for Christ. In addition to this, the love of Christ 'compels' them to share Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14).

Jesus' desire for humanity to follow him flowed from the burden he had for the 'lost', according to Major Howard Webber:

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John 3:16 reveals the enormousness (sic) of Christ's love, his burden, his concern that without him doing anything about it people would perish.

Therefore, we need to have a burden of love like Jesus.

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Questions for reflection

- Read Romans 10:14-16-17: What is Paul trying to emphasise in these verses?

Evangelism as living epistles

2 Corinthians 3:1-6

This living epistle (letter) Paul speaks about describes Christians as living letters communicating the word of God, not written using pen and paper, but that how people led their lives was testament to a life lived for Christ. Paul does not propose a sacred versus secular divide in the way Christians live their lives. This is because Christians represent Christ regardless of their environment whether among other Christians or non-Christians.



Evangelism as living epistles

Paul speaks about Christians as living letters (epistles) communicating the word of God, not written using pen and paper, and that how people led their lives was true testament to a life lived for Christ. How people live with their neighbours, how they conduct themselves in private and in public, should be like letters communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit working in their lives in this way. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, our lives consequently become vessels that glorify God.

A culture of Evangelism

It is important that in addition to other activities that happen in our churches, a culture of evangelism and prayer is cultivated. This culture equips everyday believers to proclaim the gospel. Nothing strengthens evangelism more than a culture of prayer. It is equally important to declutter some activities which solely focus on befriending and not going as far as making Jesus known.

Questions for reflection

Read 2 Corinthians 4:1-12. In this passage Paul talks about what true ministry is. Consider the following questions with the understanding that all Christians are part of God's mission on earth.

- What does life in Christ entail?
- Does one primarily need qualifications to share the gospel?
- What treasure does Paul refer to in this passage and of what use is it?
- What role do God and the Holy Spirit play in making us living epistles of Christ?
- Why does our relationship with God produce death according to this Scripture? How does this relate to our sharing of and living out the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Reflection - Evangelism in practice

The gospel is not limited to certain people or cultures; it is transcultural, universal. It is not limited to those that are ordained, gifted, or extroverts. God empowers all to be his witnesses.

Sharing of the gospel does not always occur in dramatic ways like witnessing in the streets or holding large crusades. The lockdown measures which were imposed as a result of the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic caused many churches to transition to technology by livestreaming worship via social media, Zoom, Facebook Live, Microsoft Teams and Facetime. The pandemic made the Church realise the importance of being equipped with evangelism tools which are relevant and effective. Furthermore it proved the importance of intentionally showing an interest in people using the technological tools which enable access to people, albeit remotely. This is because the

authentic relational way in influencing people for Jesus is the new way going forward in this new post-COVID world (Comer, 2020).

We share the gospel not in our own strength but with the understanding that we rely on God and the Holy Spirit to inspire and empower us, and to convict the person hearing the gospel (1 Thessalonians 1:5-6). Cromer (2020) suggests having an ongoing meaningful spiritual conversation with people as they journey to Christ. According to Major Howard Webber,

“ Before we speak about Jesus we need to listen, and not only listen to what troubles them. God is at work in the hearts of the people we meet long before we arrive on the scene, and we need to listen to them and what he may be revealing to us through what they say. We are very junior partners; he is the Great Evangelist.

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Questions for reflection

Consider some of the equipping features for evangelism:

- Positioning: How can people adopt a relational kind of evangelism which is more of an ‘influence paradigm than a telling approach’?
- Deepening: How can we teach specific evangelistic/mission skills geared towards relationship building for the sake of the gospel?
- Influence: How can we ‘provide mission structures with coaching/discipling which is interactive, personal and includes real engagement with building ongoing redemptive relationships?’ (Sam Chan et al, 2020).

Moving Forward - Evangelism resources

Resources

- Greene, M (2010), *The Great Divide: The Biggest Challenge Facing the Church Today and What We Can Do About It*. London: LICC.
- Hudson, N (2019), *Scattered and Gathered, Equipping Disciples for the Frontline*. London, Intervarsity Press.
- Hudson, Neil (2021), ‘Why Does Whole-Life Disciple Making Really, Really Matter?’ Available at: <https://licc.org.uk/resources/chapter-1-making-disciples-for-everyday-life/> (Accessed 25 May 2021)
- Webber, H (2010), *Meeting Jesus: Inspiring Stories of Modern-Day Evangelism*. London, Shield Books.

We hope you have found this helpful. A bibliography for this chapter and the full COVID-19 booklet that addresses key themes in greater detail is available on OurHub. If you have feedback or any ideas you’d like to share, email rdu@salvationarmy.org.uk.