

Stories in Evangelism: Natural Pathways for Supernatural Grace

Facing the Obstacles

- Evangelism intimidating to many: “I could never do that...” “I’m not an extrovert...”
“What will they say/think...?” “I don’t know what to say...”
- Misconceptions re: evangelism: Evangelism requires a *special event*
Evangelism requires *special training*
Evangelism requires *elite gifts*
Evangelism must be *invasive*
 - Caveat: Does evangelism sometimes involve special, organized events? Yes! Is there a place for special training? Yep! Are some specially gifted? Of course! Are there even times/places where evangelism involves an invasion of enemy territory? Yes!
 - But: *Must* evangelism always look like this? No.
Does the *best* – most biblical and most fruitful evangelism – look like this? No.

Stories in Evangelism

- Purpose of this class to learn evangelism through studying real evangelistic stories.
- Some stories taken from the New Testament, some from the experience of your pastors, and others from the lives of other Christians. As we go, let’s ask: what do these stories teach us?

Story #1: A Gerasene Demoniac (Mark 5.1-20) & a Woman of Samaria (John 4)

- For purposes of studying evangelistic stories, the key verses come at the end (vv. 17-20):

And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. And he did not permit him but said to him, “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.

- This former demoniac perhaps the 1st evangelist sent out by Jesus. Four things to note:
 - His mission is local: “Go home...”
 - His method is relational: “Go home to your friends and tell them...”
 - His message is personal: “...tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”
 - His testimony is impactful: “...and everyone marveled.”

- We see the same pattern in Jesus’ encounter with the woman of Samaria (Jn. 4). After Jesus gently exposes her sin and reveals himself as her Savior, we read these words (vv. 28-30, 39-41):

The woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” They went out of the town and were coming to him... Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word.

- Three principles: 1) Local context,
2) Natural connections, and
3) Personal testimony.

Story #2: Seeking the Open Ears (Acts 13-20)

- In his missionary journeys, the apostle Paul's favorite 1st stop was the Jewish synagogue (Act 13.5, 14; 14.1; 17.1, 10, 17; 18.4, 19; 19.8). Why? Because he could anticipate at least one respectful hearing, and might even be invited to speak:

And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it." (Acts 13:14-15)

- Yet as he makes his 1st landing in Europe at Philippi (in modern Greece), there is apparently no synagogue to be found. What then did he do?

And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. (Acts 16.13-14)

- When Paul went to Athens, in addition to visiting the synagogue, he also went to the market:

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babbler wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities" – because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean." Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. (Acts 17.16-21)

- The *message* of the cross is always offensive (1 Cor. 1.22-24). But the *methods* can be natural!
- Principle: 4) Seek venues where spiritual conversation is welcome.

Story #3: "David" from Iran, "Richard" in East Asia

- "David" was a PhD student from Iran. His father had been jailed by the mullahs, leaving him with a bad taste for religion. I could beat him in a philosophical argument, but this never seemed to move him. Then one day he asked me, "Why do you believe in God?"

"I was raised in the church and taught to believe. But this isn't why I still believe. When I look at the world, seeing all the order wired in the universe, I simply cannot believe that it is random."

- "Richard" was a college professor in East Asia. For nearly a semester, he attended my free English class using biblical materials. In class, he always played the skeptic. But one day when we met privately, he asked me, "Why do you believe the Bible?"

"I was raised to believe in the Bible, but I have not had the amazing experiences that some people can report. Yet I could not walk away from the Bible. It would haunt me if I tried. The Bible simply makes sense of everything: of the world, of history, of sin, and of me."

- Principle: 5) Personal testimony is more potent than philosophy alone.

Discussion

- 1) How do these first stories correct some of our misconceptions?
- 2) Where can we find venues today where spiritual conversation are welcome?
- 3) How would you answer David and Richard's questions?
- 4) If somebody asks you, "What does Jesus mean for you today?" – what's your "today testimony"?

"In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect..." (1 Pet. 3.15)