

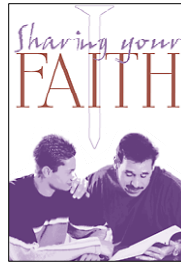


Sharing Your FAITH

Pastor Eddie Ildefonso

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

In the middle of an everyday conversation with a friend, you suddenly sense the Holy Spirit’s tug upon your heart. As you make small talk about the weather and current events, you attempt to disregard the twinge in your spirit, but the feeling intensifies. “Tell her about Me.” It is as if Jesus is whispering the words softly in your ear. Then, a ringing telephone distracts your friend and she walks away. Why didn’t I say something? you think as you allow feelings of regret to flood your mind.



How many times have you felt a strong desire to share the Gospel with another person? Have you ever walked away from a religious discussion with someone of a different faith because you were uncertain of what to say? Do you ever feel compelled but frightened to share the story of how you met Christ?

If you have experienced one or all of these situations, you understand how challenging it can be to speak out with boldness when the Holy Spirit prompts us to do so. This is why it is vitally important to be prepared to share our faith compassionately, effectively, and truthfully.

Sharing Compassionately

There is much to be learned about evangelism, or “witnessing,” from the One upon whom we base our faith—Jesus Christ. The New Testament provides countless examples of Jesus’ compassion and mercy as He embodies the message of God’s unconditional love and forgiveness.

This truth is evident in Jesus’ encounter with the woman at the well in the fourth chapter of John. When Jesus meets this woman—a known adulteress—He does not reject her. Instead, He shows compassion by explaining the wonderful gift of “living water,” the opportunity for eternal life.

In **Revelation 3:20**, Jesus is shown to be patient and considerate as He “stands at the door and knocks.” Never does He barge in uninvited. As we seek to follow His example, we should proceed in love and refrain from acting critically with regard to the nonbeliever’s lifestyle or past choices. These are areas the Holy Spirit will deal with once this person receives Christ.

Demonstrating the mercy and compassion of Jesus can accomplish two important goals: drawing a nonbeliever’s attention with unexpected love and kindness, and providing him with a glimpse of the acceptance that is available through Christ. Both of these objectives

are supported by Scripture.

Colossians 4:5-6 encourages us to conduct ourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, letting our speech always be seasoned with grace so that we will know how to respond to each person. And **John 6:37** can be used to provide the assurance that anyone who comes to Jesus will not be rejected or “cast out.”

An excellent way to demonstrate compassion is to share the story of our own conversion experience. Since many people struggle with feeling worthy of God’s love, they are eager to identify with another person’s shortcomings. Sharing how we realized the need for Christ in our own lives allows us to establish common ground. After all, no matter what language we speak, where we grew up, or what type of education we received, we are all in need of God’s forgiveness.

The apostle Paul certainly understood the power of personal testimony, as in **1 Timothy 1** he described his thankfulness to God for using him despite his sinful past: “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor” (**verses 12-13**).

Sharing Effectively

Another important facet of sharing our faith is presenting the Gospel in a way that is both relevant and irresistible to the listener. Being an effective witness generally involves three things:

1. Listening to the Holy Spirit. (**John 16:13**) Recognizing the Holy

Spirit’s voice will enable us to act upon His promptings. Since waiting upon and submitting to God’s timing and plan is extremely important (**Isaiah 55:8**), we must listen carefully to Him while resisting our own urges to forge ahead or back away. The Holy Spirit will also impart to us the gift of discernment. This invaluable resource allows us to “tune in” to an individual’s spiritual and emotional condition, as well as to his or her receptiveness to the Gospel message. (**1 Corinthians 2:10-13**)

2. Knowing our audience. (**1 Corinthians 9:22**) In this Scripture passage, Paul explains his method of reaching the lost: “To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.” Though Paul was careful to remain obedient to the Lord, it appears that he took time to understand the culture and concerns of the people to whom he delivered the Gospel. Therefore, if we hope to reach the members of a particular social group (single parents, teens, the unchurched, followers of other religions), we must focus on relationship building. In addition, prayerfully studying the trends in our society will allow us to understand the specific struggles nonbelievers face. When we know our audience, we will be better equipped to present the Gospel to them in an effective way.

3. Recognizing our purpose. (**1 Corinthians 3:7-9**) Though it may be tempting to share everything we know about Christianity all at once, it is important to reveal truth in pieces that can be digested by the listener. This does not mean we are to hide any portion of the Gospel. Instead, we should speak in simple terms, and proceed with patience.

For instance, God may be calling you to “plant seeds of truth,” with the intention of using someone else to “reap the harvest”—leading the person into a decision for Christ.

In his exceptional book on evangelism, *Finding Common Ground*,* author Tim Downs suggests that Christians should place equal importance on planters and harvesters. “What if the harvester, by elevating the importance of his own role, devalues the role of the sower?” he asks. The solution lies in our willingness to perform any act of evangelism that God calls us to do.

Sharing Truthfully

When we are faced with an opportunity to explain to someone how he or she can be “saved,” or born again through faith in Jesus Christ, it is extremely helpful to have an outline of scriptural support written down or memorized. Otherwise, we can be caught off guard, or end up in a precarious situation.

The good news is that this situation can be easily overcome by studying God’s Word daily. Contained within its pages are the answers to help you explain the love for Christ in your heart.

The Bible encourages us to study in order to present ourselves “approved to God . . . accurately handling the word of truth” (**2 Timothy 2:15** KJV). To carry out this command, we need to fill our hearts with the Word of God in preparation for evangelistic opportunities.

Below is a suggested outline for sharing the basic message of Christianity with another person. At

the appropriate time, when the Holy Spirit leads you, use these key points to reach out in love.

- God knows you and loves you. (**Psalm 139:13, Proverbs 8:17**)
- We are all sinners. (**Romans 3:23**)
- God sent Jesus to pay our sin debt. (**1 Corinthians 15:3, 1 Peter 2:24**)
- We must repent and seek God's forgiveness to be born again. (**1 John 1:9, Ephesians 1:7**)
- Salvation is a free gift. (**Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:8-9**)
- Receiving Jesus is the key to eternal life. (**John 14:6, John 3:16**)

An important final note on sharing truthfully: When we receive questions that surpass our knowledge, it is important to admit that we are unsure, as opposed to inventing a response. It is perfectly acceptable to stop and look up an answer in your Bible, or to defer a difficult question to someone with greater scriptural knowledge, like your pastor.

Of course, every evangelistic opportunity will be original because each person is unique, with different life experiences and needs. Therefore, even though there is but one Truth, there are many effective ways in which to share Him—Christ—with others. While we long for chances to guide nonbelievers into a relationship with Christ, there are ways in which we can testify of God's love every day. Have you considered:

- Passing along Scripture cards as means of encouragement?
- Responding with love and assistance to co-workers or

neighbors in times of death, illness, or disaster?

- Sharing topical Christian books with friends who are experiencing marital difficulties, depression, addictions, or problems with children?
- Inviting college students, teens, or young couples to join you at a church concert or worship service?
- Starting a daytime Bible study to include retired neighbors and stay-at-home moms?

Now that you have been encouraged to share your faith, are you ready to get started? If the Enemy is still delivering messages of doubt and discouragement to your mind, hold fast to this promise: The Word of God will not come back to Him empty. (**Isaiah 55:11**) The Lord can use you—your personality, your experiences, and your gifts—to effectively reach others for Him. If you are ready to make a difference for God by sharing your faith, pray this prayer:

“Lord, I know You have called me to share with others the joy that comes from knowing You. Forgive me for the times I have been too busy, anxious, or scared to listen to Your voice. Please begin to show me through Your Holy Spirit how I can serve You by leading people into a growing relationship with Your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.”





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