

Ev221 Sharing Your Spiritual Journey

Lesson Ev221-28 Assessing Effective Methods: Conversational in Approach

The encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman is a good example of sharing with a stranger. You heard about the impact of her testimony in Lesson 22. Many in her town came to hear Jesus and became his followers. For today's lesson we want to focus on the conversing aspect of Jesus' witness to her. She was an outcast, drawing her water in the noon heat to avoid ridicule. Jews of the day would not speak to her because she was a Samaritan who worshipped in a different way.

It is just one example of how Jesus used conversing with others to bring faith into their lives. He didn't just stand up boldly and preach a sermon in her hearing. Rather he became vulnerable, asking her to satisfy his thirst. With respect, he then spoke with her about 'living water.' Recognizing her spiritual needs, he brought up her marital condition. Women of that day could not divorce a man. That meant this woman had been rejected by five different husbands. She recognized that Jesus was a prophet. He involved her in a genuine interchange, bringing truth to bear on her situation. She was the first person to hear Christ say, "I am he"—the Messiah! As a result, she took the message to her own people in the nearby village and invited them into further conversation with Jesus.

Evangelism can be defined as the interaction of God in the mutual sharing of spiritual journeys between a believer and an unbeliever. Talking is the means whereby that interaction occurs. The divine conversation has three aspects: 1) talking with God, 2) talking with the church, and 3) talking with the world.

1. Evangelism starts from a relationship with Jesus, which is begun by the sinner repenting in prayer to God. This ongoing talking with God in prayer is critical for our outreach efforts to be effective. As one great preacher said, "Before I talk to people about God, I talk to God about people." Talking with God is much more than reciting one's needs, as if God were waiting to serve our every desire. Humans participate in this divine interchange when they are willing to listen and act in obedience to what God says. It becomes two-way conversation.

Prayer helps us overcome our fears in witnessing. Sincere prayer seeks how you might best cooperate with the activity of God in answering your request. Instead of "Please send someone..." your prayer becomes "Send me..." Therefore all effective evangelism involves a discussion with God from beginning to end. Believers must have this exchange before they pass on their faith. Only if we have a dynamic relationship with Jesus can we hope to share that relationship with others. If prayer is conversation with God, then we must be sensitive to hear his voice at all times. This was Christ's relationship with the Father throughout his earthly ministry.

We need to be in conversation with God before, during, and after all of our soul winning efforts. He is the one that will take the seed that is sown and bring it to fruition. Paul noted that he had planted, another watered, but God "makes things grow" (1Cor 3:6). Our task is to obey his prompting and look with the eye of faith to the fruit that will result.

2. A discussion must take place within the church before the “holy conversation” we call witnessing can begin to take place. The church should give room for the Holy Spirit to speak. He will help them discern what it is that God wants to do in their specific context. Effective outreach respects God’s voice by shaping its methods and practices in response to his urging. Open and extended discussion can yield good fruit in this regard. This might include talking about past involvement in various methods, recalling what was successful. Reviewing biblical accounts of evangelism can help a community of faith form their beliefs about methods.

Sharing people’s experience with using personal testimony might reveal some of the do’s and don’ts. Every culture and setting has things that hinder good conversation. So as witnesses, people must be aware of what may be offensive. Religious ‘jargon’ or uncommon Christian terms should also be avoided.

When we hear what the Bible says about our witnessing efforts, we see that some of our expectations may not be possible. The faith community needs to agree on what is reasonable. Leaders in the church can thus embrace those methods that are meaningful to their context and their members. They can encourage an ongoing conversation about witnessing that will lead to more people taking part in the effort.

3. Finally, we need to talk with the world around us to be truly effective. It should begin by asking what questions seekers are asking. This question is basic for those who want to be spiritual guides for others. Sometimes the church’s actions emerge out of its own agenda, rather than from truly listening to those in need. In such a case, it is in danger of offering answers to questions that no one is asking.

Every town and culture has its own way of seeing the world. Furthermore, within each worldview different generations have differing views and attitudes regarding many things. A person’s felt needs and other factors must also be considered when sharing the truths of the Christian faith. Part of the solution is to attempt a true dialogue. That requires a genuine willingness to listen first before speaking. Openness, tolerance, and humility go a long way in assuring people that we are truly interested in their welfare. We could argue that evangelism is mostly a matter of speaking God’s Word to unbelievers—telling others about Jesus. But it surely involves more than just one-way talking. Good two-way communication must take place in the give and take of real conversation.

Who we are speaks much louder than any words we might ever say to those outside the church. This central truth is plain in what Jesus means when he says we shall *be* his witnesses, not *do* his witnessing (Acts 1:8). What people want is a witness, an eyewitness account that they can see and know. The holy conversation with the world is a sharing of the greatest story ever told. It is followed by an invitation for the hearer to participate in that story. In order for unbelievers to hear our story, we must first hear theirs.

Jesus encouraged conversation with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus; he talked to Nicodemus at night. Paul exchanged ideas with the people of Athens in the marketplace; Philip had a discussion with the Ethiopian official. The Bible cites numerous examples of discussions that took place between people inside and those outside the faith. In every instance,

the believer first tried to hear from the inquirer about their spiritual condition before sharing the message. They then shared the good news of redemption in a way that their audience could understand.

This lesson is **important** because the Bible makes clear that all those who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. They cannot call on him if they do not first hear about him, in language they can understand. This happens through the holy conversation we call evangelism—sharing your spiritual journey.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that all our witnessing methods should include listening closely and conversing with those in the discussion. Building a relationship must come before talking to them about the truth that addresses their need.

Review Questions

1. In this lesson, what is the main point to be made about our witnessing efforts? [Pause 5 seconds]
 - A. If you said, “All our methods should include listening closely to the voices in the discussion before engaging them in conversation about the truth that addresses their life,” you are correct.
2. What were the three aspects of the divine conversation discussed in this lesson? [Pause]
 - A. If you answered, “The three aspects of divine conversation are: 1) talking with God, 2) talking with the church, and 3) talking with the world,” you answered correctly.
4. If evangelism is not just a matter of telling others about Jesus, what else is necessary for it to be effective? [Pause]
 - A. If you said, “It should also involve two-way communication which takes place in the give and take of conversation,” you are right.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to think about the methods that you have learned about in this course. Do these approaches promote a conversation with God, the church, and unbelievers? Consider some of the other approaches you have used in the past to reach out to people. Do they promote a genuine conversation as well? If not, how could you change the approach to help ensure that you are following God, getting the church involved, and listening to unbelievers?