

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY
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“ENGAGING THE CULTURE WITH THE GOSPEL” (part 2)

SHARING YOUR OWN FAITH STORY

I. Review of Study #1

- A. What is the Good News?
- B. What is Evangelism?
- C. Why Evangelize?
- D. What is Our Responsibility and God’s?
- E. What Are the Four Core Points of the Gospel Message?

II. Plausibility structures

What makes something plausible?

C _____

E _____

F _____

This parallels what we spoke of last study. **Relational, experiential, intellectual!**

For something to become believable to us. We need to see that it has some factual evidence
There needs to be some kind of personal experience of it And we need to be around other people who believe
the same thing. A good example would be the belief in gravity. We experience gravity. We also have
equations and facts that support it and can be tested. And we live in a society in which it is taken for granted

*****Community and relationships are most important**

III. Being a Community Where the Gospel is Plausible

Aaron Renn who has captured this idea by saying that we now find ourselves as Christians in what he
calls “*The Negative World.*” Today many people actively view Christianity negatively

- A. So how did we go from positive to neutral to negative? Fr. Ward will give a brief history.
 - 1. First 200 years (1745-1945) - positive
 - 2. Post WW2 - positive
 - 3. 1960’s – everything turned upside down – things start to breakdown
 - 4. Jesus movement - positive
 - 5. Televangelism and the Moral Majority - positive
 - 6. Mainline denominations – positive to neutral
 - 7. Roman Catholic clergy abuse

8. President Clinton – abortion and LGBTQ
9. Smartphones and social media

So, what does that mean for us as the Church today? In other words, how can we make the gospel plausible to non-Christians? We need to go back to the beginning of the early Church!

B. Example of the early Church (Acts 2:42-47)

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

1. Devotion to the Apostles Teaching (God's Word)

- a) the authoritative teaching of the apostles, captured for us in both the NT & OT
- b) reading, studying, learning, inwardly digesting and applying the inerrant Scriptures in their lives
- c) growing deeper in their knowledge and love of God as they walk the narrow way

Devotion to God's Word comes first for a reason. Deep and true theology is the foundation of their fellowship

2. Devotion to Prayer

- a) dependance on God: Father Son and HS rather than self-dependence
- b) increasing trust that God hears them and provides for them
- c) not just prayer but “to the prayers” a set form of prayer (The modified practice of synagogue worship in the early church of liturgical prayers and praying the psalms together.)
- d) not an individualistic thing but something done together in community
- e)

3. Devotion to Fellowship

- a) not just about attending one or two church programs each week
- b) they shared life together
- c) joyfully spending time with one another
- d) having meals in each other's homes day by day
- e) sharing needs and providing for needs generously
- f) living as a joyful family

4. Devotion to the Sacraments

- a) breaking bread weekly in the Lord's Supper
- b) being reminded and strengthened

5. Devotion to Evangelism

Day by day people were being saved. Wouldn't that be amazing to say for us? That daily and weekly people were being saved and putting their faith in Jesus for the first time at St Barts?

And for the Acts 2 community they were proclaiming the good news and as people looked in and saw the kind of community they were, they said "yes I want this!" "Yes, the gospel makes a difference and I want it"

People heard the gospel and when they saw the community it became plausible to them. They saw the way that Jesus transformed their lives. They saw those who had nothing provided with what they needed. They saw those who had much living sacrificially. They saw widows and orphans being cared for. They saw a community that seemed not just to talk about God, but that really seemed to know and experience God. And when they saw it, they wanted it too.

And so, if we want to be effective in our evangelism we need to start thinking as a community: How could our church grow to be more like this kind of community? How can we as a church live out the gospel so faithfully that as people come and visit, the gospel becomes plausible to them?

IV. Personal Experience of God and Testimony

To share our faith effectively we need to be able to share our experience of God. And that can include our testimony of how we first came to know the Lord. But primarily what I mean is to be able to share our ongoing experience of God in our day to day life and how he makes a difference

We see this in **Acts 22:1-21**: ***"Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you." 2 And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet. And he said: 3 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. 4 I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, 5 as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.***

6 "As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. 7 And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' 8 And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' 9 Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. 10 And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.' 11 And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus.

12 "And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, 13 came to me, and standing by me said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. 14 And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; 15 for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'

17 "When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance 18 and saw him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your

testimony about me.’ 19 And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. 20 And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.’ 21 And he said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

So here Paul, amid being arrested, shares his experience of God with the crowd that is gathered there, and he shares in order to convince them of the power of the gospel to bring real transformation. Before Paul was a Christian, he was a devoted Pharisee, actively arresting and killing Christians for their faith. But one day Jesus physically appeared to him on the road to Damascus. Paul was blinded. Paul was miraculously healed from his blindness. And then his entire life was transformed. He went from passionately killing Christians to preaching the gospel. Paul experienced God and it changed his life

In the same way we need to be ready to share how we have met God and how he has changed our lives. We should be ready to answer the question: **Why are you a Christian?** We should be ready to share the story of **how you became a Christian**. But perhaps even more important than sharing the testimony of your conversion is **being ready to share the small ways you experience God in your day-to-day life!**

We need to be ready to share, in casual conversation, how we have seen God answer prayers. We need to be ready to share what challenges we have faced recently and how we have experienced God in the midst of those challenges. *****Just being ready to share small things like that can open doors for evangelism.**

Most non-Christians, when they think of God, they think of some old man off in the clouds. Abstract, impersonal, uncaring, and far away. But as people hear how we have experienced God, they stop thinking of God as distant and start thinking of God as someone they could experience too. They hear how God is an active part of our lives and they begin to want God to be active in their life. But we will only ever be ready to share how we are experiencing God **if we are devoted to two things: the spiritual disciplines and careful reflection.**

If we are not reading the Scriptures each day and living a life of prayer and reflecting on our life with God regularly we will be blind to the ways God is at work in our own lives. And if we are blind to how God is at work in our lives, we won't be ready to share it with others in evangelism.

As you think about an outline of sharing it can be helpful to think of it in three simple parts:

- 1. How I was**
- 2. What Jesus did**
- 3. How I am now**

V. Workshop: write and practice sharing testimony or recent experience of God

So, what we are going to do is to practice sharing our testimony, or a recent experience of God in our lives. Something where God has made a difference in your life or answered prayer

Next step challenge: think of someone in your life that you think would be encouraged by this experience of God, or another experience of God you have had. Don't force it in an awkward way. But be on the lookout this week and be praying for an opportunity to share your experience with that person!