

Don't Keep the Faith; Give it Away!

DAVE BAST

Say the word *evangelism* and you will see many different reactions on the faces of Christians. Evangelism, of course, means sharing our faith. Yet, many of us feel unprepared to do so, or guilty about not doing it enough, while there are some Christians who just seem to love it. Why are there so many reactions to evangelism? Could it ever be appropriate *not* to evangelize? How do we share our faith effectively? Stay tuned.

BOB HEERSPINK

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Bob Heerspink.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

BOB HEERSPINK

So Dave, Leighton Ford of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association had a favorite saying. It went something like this: Don't keep the faith, give it away.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and I think a lot of us would resonate with that. If we are serious Christians, many of us have been raised even with the understanding that we want to share our faith. That is something so basic that every Christian ought to be doing that, or at least be prepared to do it.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, but I think as I have worked in churches, this is one of the guilt points for so many Christians. I have had parishioners say to me: You know, I should be sharing my faith more. I don't know what's wrong with me. I freeze up. It is so hard for me to witness to Jesus.

DAVE BAST

Well, it is not just a guilt point for parishioners; it is a guilt point for me. I often have sat back and thought, you know, how many people have I led to the Lord? And how come I am not doing this more often? And why do I sit on an airplane and just put headphones on and shut up instead of turning to the person next to me: Brother, are you saved?

BOB HEERSPINK

And maybe some of that is our personality – you know, the extrovert versus the introvert. Maybe part of that is, you know, we have a very fixed way of how evangelism should happen. Me as a Christian talking to a total stranger about Jesus, that that is *real* evangelism.

DAVE BAST

Well, we are going to talk about these questions and explore them in this program; and actually, we are prompted to do so by another one of our 8th grader questions. We have been doing a whole series on some really terrific questions that a class of 8th graders raised about their faith in a local Christian school; and

today we come to the last of those, and it really is a question about evangelism. Here is how it went: There is someone I know who goes to our school. They are new and they say that they are agnostic. How can I help this person? So I am wondering, Bob, how do you respond to that question?

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, I think the person asking this question is probably first of all surprised that in a Christian school, the kid sitting in the seat next to them is saying: I don't know if God exists or not. So, you know, the first challenge, I think, is simply to discover that being a witness for your faith can take place even what we identify as Christian circles.

DAVE BAST

Or maybe even in church, you know, the person sitting next to you down the pew; you never know what people are struggling with; but to me, this sounds like a great kid. What a great question. Clearly this is someone who is really committed to Christ himself and they feel a burden for this student, and they have at least talked to them enough to know that they have some spiritual questions and spiritual issues...

BOB HEERSPINK

This person has a heart for this other kid.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; and they want to help – they want to help.

BOB HEERSPINK

And you know, I don't think we should be too hard on this 12-13-year-old agnostic.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

BOB HEERSPINK

I suspect this is...

DAVE BAST

Who knows what that means?

BOB HEERSPINK

This is a young person who probably now is coming to the point in their life of saying: Hey, Mom and Dad believe in Jesus, but what about me? Do I really believe in him? This young person is going through their own crisis of faith. That is where I would think this person is at, and this young person sitting next to them in the classroom is saying: Hey, how can I help?

DAVE BAST

Well, and who knows, even, how serious the other person is. Maybe they are kind of assuming a role or they think they are cool, or they think it is cute, you know. How much of life can you know at the age of 13? I don't know, but I think the base response to the question... I mean, the very simple, straight-forward response is: How can I help this other person? The answer is become a friend to them, and maybe that is the key to all real, good evangelism – all effective evangelism. It will spring out of some kind of relationship. I think we can unpack that and explore it a little more, but that is where we are headed, right from the get-go. Real evangelism needs to be relational...

BOB HEERSPINK

It is in the relationship. You know, we asked this question on some of our social media sites to say: Okay, is there a right way or a wrong way to approach evangelism? I think we got some interesting responses. Certainly the feeling of most people who responded, as one person said: Well, it is our job to do evangelism.

We have got to do it. But it does not mean shoving the Gospel down people's throats, and that gets back to the relational side.

DAVE BAST

Right. Here is another response: There are all kinds of ways to evangelize: From door-to-door; what do you think of Jesus; that kind of thing; to just showing love to someone by providing for their physical needs. I think we should be willing to do whatever it takes to reach people, and sometimes that is by more "hardcore" evangelism, and sometimes it is more behind the scenes.

BOB HEERSPINK

I have been involved in some of that door-to-door witnessing, and that kind of cold-calling I am not sure is the most effective form of evangelism; but you know, I think sometimes calling door-to-door actually is less scary than witnessing in relationship because the person at the door you talk to, you walk away, you never see them again. You know, if you are witnessing in relationship, you are going to see that neighbor next week, you are going to see that friend at school the next day, that is really when witnessing for Christ can get very, very intense.

DAVE BAST

Well, and I have also, you know, done all kinds of scenarios and different situations where I have tried to share my faith or where I have tried to engage people. I think for me one of the hardest things about a kind of a superficial encounter (Can we say that?) is the feeling that you are almost being manipulative; you know, you are trying to direct or steer the conversation over toward Jesus so that you can get in your zinger and make your point. It is like you are trying to sell something; and to me, that rings false; that is not really what authentic witness to Christ... because actually that is what the New Testament talks about. It calls us witnesses; and we have turned that into a verb: witnessing. We have to witness. We have to go out and witness; but New Testament witness is a noun. It is who you are. It is your whole life, and your relationship with Christ, and being able to share out of that, not have some one-time conversation, where you try to get somebody to say the magic word and accept Christ.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, because in that style of witnessing, we are so caught up into what I have called the "gotta say the right thing" syndrome. Do I have my little speech prepared? Do I have my pitch ready to go? That kind of witnessing is forced and it doesn't respect, either, the way people come to the faith. I mean, most people do not hear a presentation and immediately say: I am ready to commit my life to Christ. It is a journey, and the way in which we involve ourselves in witnessing for Christ might be just one of the stepping stones on that journey, where someone moves closer to Jesus.

DAVE BAST

At the top of this show we raised the question: Should every Christian be a witness, or does every Christian need to evangelize? I think we need to turn to the scripture to try to answer that after this break.

Segment 2

BOB HEERSPINK

Welcome back to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Bob Heerspink.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and so, Bob, let's dig into scripture. Let me read the Great Commission, which is the closing passage of the Gospel of Matthew – Matthew 28 – beginning at verse 18:

Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always to the end of the age."

BOB HEERSPINK

Now, that was Jesus' last command before he ascended into heaven, and I would say, if we ask the question: Okay, whose command is this? It is not just to a select few. It is a command to the entire Church – to all of us.

DAVE BAST

Go make disciples. There are a number of action words in that pivotal verse, but the central command is to make disciples, that is why you go into all the world. If you go without making disciples, you are just a tourist. If you make disciples without going, you are not reaching the world. So Jesus wants this to be... I mean, it is his last thing – it is the last thing he says to us – to the Church. We have a phrase in our church; we have just been working on what is our mission as a congregation? And it has been intensive work; I mean, not just a superficial "mission statement," but the phrase that our church has come up with is "growing disciples who make disciples."

BOB HEERSPINK

Now, that kind of language really indicates that we are talking a lot more than just making some converts to Christianity; and there is an approach to evangelism, which says: You know, as long as you've got someone to confess their sin and pray to Jesus that he is now my savior, well, your evangelistic work is done; but that is not how Jesus presents it here. He is saying: Don't just make converts, make disciples. Bring men and women to me so that they walk with me – they follow me.

DAVE BAST

Well, that is why he adds: Teach them to observe all that I have commanded, and I am with you in doing this. As you do this, I will be with you. There is a lot there that we could unpack, too.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, there is certainly the message there that to bring people to Christ means walking with them as they progress with their Christian life. It is not just addressing them at one point – one chapter – where they reach that point of saying: Okay, I am turning now to Jesus. The Spirit has worked in my life and he has opened me to faith; but that is just the beginning of a longer process; and I wonder if one of the challenges we have as Christians is to recognize that this is the way we need to be in the lives of people that we are seeking to bring to Jesus. Once they have come to Christ, the work really has just begun.

DAVE BAST

I think it is easy to approach this very superficially. I remember hearing once a Romanian pastor's definition of the great commission for Americans – you know, what is the American's idea of the Great Commission? his answer was: Go into all the world and have yourself photographed preaching the Gospel. You know, we could be guilty of that as just sort of a real skimming the surface kind of approach, but as you say, this requires us to be involved in people's lives. Disciple making is ultimately relational.

BOB HEERSPINK

And you know, it is a tough work for us to do. You struggle with why is this so hard? What really gets in the way of being a witness for Christ? And maybe part of it is, there is a spiritual dimension, especially if we have been living the faith for years and years, and now someone new comes into the faith and suddenly, well, they've got everything that we have had after all these years of following Jesus.

DAVE BAST

Well, and culturally maybe the biggest obstacle we face to this is the relativism of our culture that says you cannot impose your faith on me. What I believe is my business, what you believe is your business.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, the embarrassment that I think we often feel, that if we are bringing someone to Christ, somehow we are manifesting intolerance of others; this notion that, hey, you know, all religions are the same. We all have to get along and understand each other. The very notion that you would bring someone to Jesus means that you are somehow offending their own innate sense of spirituality.

DAVE BAST

This goes so against the grain of our society. I was just talking to a friend this morning – a really good friend of mine who is in a PhD program at a state university, and he was talking the other day with a couple of his fellow students who know he is a Christian, and they just pointblank said to him: How can you be a Christian? How can you believe that?

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, you are parking your brain at the door when you walk into the classroom.

DAVE BAST

No modern person really believes that. Most of them probably have never met a Christian other than my friend, and so they put it to him pointblank. Well, so he said: I had a chance to witness, but I don't know how well it went because... What he said to them was: I am a Christian because I believe that the resurrection really happened. I believe Jesus really rose from the dead; and that cuts through all the relativistic fog of our age or any other age. You know, Jesus says here: All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. What a claim to make.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, you know, the whole notion, Dave, that all religions are the same I find is not respectful to other religions. I mean, let's recognize what other religions are saying, let's recognize what the Gospel says, and be honest about it; and certainly for us as Christians, the stake that we drive in the ground with regard to the event that happened in history that turned everything inside out is the resurrection.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely. This whole thing hangs together, this great commission thing. If the "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" is not true, then there is no reason to go into all the world and make disciples...

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

But it is the resurrection that proves that Jesus is not some crackpot claiming this kind of supreme, divine authority. He really *is* – he *was* and *is* and *always will be God* – God in the flesh; raised from the dead – and that trumps any kind of relativism because he is, then, Lord.

BOB HEERSPINK

You see, that gets at a description in the Bible as to what evangelism really is. Evangelism is really serving as an ambassador of Good News. Evangelism means simply telling good news. When I am witnessing, I am not just sharing my personal ideas about religion, I am God's ambassador, proclaiming a message that the world needs to hear.

DAVE BAST

Yes; what is that? 2 Corinthians 5: God has made us ambassadors for Christ, proclaiming the truth; but you know, practically speaking it is still hard to do; so, let's talk about some of those practical issues when we come back.

DAVE BAST

Hi; welcome back to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. So Bob, right before the break we raised the issue of practical problems with being witnesses – with doing evangelism.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; here we are, we are ambassadors of God; we've got this incredible message, and yet we freeze up when we are in opportunities of witness. I know that happens to me. I mean, here is an opportunity to share the faith and I am looking for the right words and as I think about those right words, the opportunity just slides right on by and the door closes.

DAVE BAST

Yes, but without trying to get into, okay, here is what you say, and... there have been approaches – plenty of them – that have done that. They print little tracts or they give you four laws that you can go through...

BOB HEERSPINK

Sure; go through the Romans road...

DAVE BAST

Yes. It starts with lifestyle really, doesn't it? I mean, one of the things that a number of people mentioned on the website when we asked them about evangelism was: If you love people, if you do what Jesus did... you know, how he came healing and teaching and serving the needs of folks, that that is a form of evangelism in a way.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, certainly our lives have to demonstrate by a consistency and integrity that we are disciples of Christ; and I think if we look for those opportunities, then just in the natural flow of our lives that they happen. I talked to a friend of mine a while back and he said: You know, at work people know I am a Christian, and sometimes I get mocked for that; but when they've got personal problems in their lives, they tend to come into my office and say, hey, can we talk? Because they know he has something going on in his life that they want.

DAVE BAST

Well, and there is a famous saying often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: Go into all the world and preach the Gospel; use words if necessary. Now, A: I am not sure that is actually something that St. Francis said, and B: I really have a bone to pick with that.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, you see, I think that can be a cop-out...

DAVE BAST

I think it is...

BOB HEERSPINK

I think that's a cop-out because I talk to Christians who say: Well, you know, I witness with my life; and that is really a way of saying: I don't have the guts to share my faith with another person.

DAVE BAST

You cannot ultimately evangelize without using words, because to evangelize, as you pointed out a few moments ago, is to share the Good News, and it the Good News of what God has done in Jesus Christ to save us, and an invitation to put our faith in him. You have to use words when it comes down to it. The question

is: How do you do that in a winsome way, in an engaging way, without coming off as holier than thou or some kind of jerk or something like that?

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, I think we have to come back to this notion that we need relationships with people who need Jesus; and there is a tendency when we become Christians, or when we have been living in the Church for years, to involve ourselves in a lifestyle that doesn't connect with many people who are not believers. I remember doing an evangelistic campaign in my church, and one woman came up to me and said: You know, I would love to share the Gospel, but I don't know anyone who isn't a believer. I mean, my family goes to church, my neighbors are all Christians, all my friends are Christians. Here, she had no opportunity to share the faith because she didn't know who to go to.

DAVE BAST

Well, how many non-Christian friends do *you* have?

BOB HEERSPINK

Those of us who are involved in the Church as deeply as we are, have a real problem that way.

DAVE BAST

Yes, I can't think of any, unless they are secret agnostics or something that I don't know; but here is a way to respond to our questioner: How do I help this person who has come into my school, this new student? The answer is: Become a friend to them. What a great opportunity to be a friend to someone who is searching, who is spiritually struggling.

You know, there is a great text, it has often been used, but that does not make it any less appropriate, from 1 Peter Chapter 3, where Peter says:

^{15b}Be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you; and I think that implies that we have genuine relationships with people. We are not trying to manipulate them; we are not trying to sell them something; we are not trying to steer the conversation in a phony way.

BOB HEERSPINK

But that we also have a genuine relationship with Jesus, because it is the hope that is in *you*. I mean, you are talking the Gospel, but you have now brought that Gospel into your own life by faith so that there is an integrity to your witness.

DAVE BAST

I just happened to read an interview in *Christianity Today* with Jerry Root, who is a professor at Wheaton College, and he has written a new book called *The Sacrament of Evangelism*, which is a very interesting way...

BOB HEERSPINK

A very interesting term.

DAVE BAST

Yes, when you think about it; I have never heard anyone use that expression before. In fact, that is the first question they ask him: What do you mean by: the sacrament of evangelism? He says: Well, I think a sacrament is some kind of physical reality that mediates God's grace. It is bread or it is water, but God uses that to be present there and to bring his life and his grace into our lives.

BOB HEERSPINK

So, God is present in the witness?

DAVE BAST

Yes, in evangelism; and his point is that we don't go to someone and bring God to them. God is already there. God is already working in that person's life, even an agnostic. Something is going on there; and there will be a moment, an opportunity, when you can come and sort of participate in that.

BOB HEERSPINK

You see, that takes the pressure off us when it comes to evangelism because so often we say: It is all me. I have to have the right words. I have to argue this person into the kingdom. And if we...

DAVE BAST

Yes, if I could just say the clinching argument then they will...

BOB HEERSPINK

Or we walk away and they haven't become a Christian, and then we say: I blew it; instead of saying God is working in this person's life and I may be able to be a stepping stone for this person in the direction of a relationship with Jesus, but that "aha" moment where that person says: Yes, it's real – that's not something I bring or I do, it is what the Spirit brings. God does it.

DAVE BAST

Yes, well let me quote Jerry Root. He writes this: We ask questions, listen to the answers... he is talking when we are engaged with another person in conversation... We let the person give us information that allows us to go deeper. All of a sudden, in the process of sharing, the message gets Velcroed to a high-felt need.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, it gets stuck.

DAVE BAST

Interesting image, yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, great image.

DAVE BAST

And in that particular moment, we realize we have been participating with God all along, and he has shown up. So he says: I am going somewhere believing God is already there, and I am trying to be sensitive, ask questions, listen, and watch for God.

BOB HEERSPINK

What a fantastic way of thinking about evangelism that allows us both to relax in the moment, do the witness, and expect some powerful things to happen from God.

DAVE BAST

Well, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation today, and don't forget, it is listeners like you asking questions that keeps our topic relevant to your life. So tell us what you think about what you are hearing, and suggest something you would like to hear on a future *Groundwork* program. Just visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

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