

The Seven Pillars of Christian Growth

Part 4 – The Third Pillar – Evangelism

Luke 7:36-49

I want to talk about the Third Pillar of Christian Growth – evangelism.

You would be justified in asking, “What does this passage of Scripture have to do with evangelism”?

But I want to deal with something that sits right at the root of this issue of evangelism.

ILLUS – I was having coffee with a friend who is a pastor, and we got onto the subject of evangelism, and getting opportunities to share our faith. I said, “What’s stopping us from walking over to that table over there, sitting next to those people, and sharing the Gospel with them? We are surrounded by opportunities.”

While there are people, there are opportunities.

Because it suddenly hit me: What’s stopping me from doing this?

Nothing, but my own lack of boldness.

Nothing prevents me except my own fear.

And I’m telling you this because the Western church is largely in the grip of timidity.

And we’re good at making excuses for it.

We say, “But you’ve got to be wise”.

Yes, let’s be wise, but the Word of God says that he who wins souls is wise.

We say, “But you’ve got to be sensitive”.

Yes, let’s be sensitive, but we’re so sensitive that we never preach the gospel for fear of offending someone and pushing them away.

We say, “But we need to do Friendship Evangelism”.

And that’s true because it can be very effective, but ten years down the track we’ve got an unsaved friend that we still haven’t shared the gospel with because we’re afraid of rejection.

I say “we”, but I’m talking about me; I know none of you ever feels like this.

We pastors have our own special little excuse: It’s up to the sheep to give birth to sheep, not the shepherds.

But I have a dual role: I’m not just a shepherd, I’m also a sheep.

Read John 10, if you are in any doubt.

And I have to be an example to the sheep.

I can’t expect the sheep to have the courage to do the things that I am afraid to do.

If I sit in the safety of my church’s four walls and wait for the church to bring people to me so I can preach to them, how can I expect my church not to do the same?

Jesus said, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” (Mark 16:15)

Not “wait for people to come to your church” or “stick an ad in the paper and see what happens”, or “wait for opportunities”.

Opportunities drop in your lap if you have your lap where opportunities drop. Herbert V Procknow.

When Jesus said, “Go”, He was talking about being proactive; it means that I take the initiative.

So what prevents us from fulfilling the Great Commission to go ...?

Fear is what we have to deal with.

The early church faced the same problem.

Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Why the Holy Spirit? To be witnesses.

Where? Everywhere.

And again, the early church made the same mistake we often do.

They were supposed to go out into all the world and be proactive.

But most of them just hung around Jerusalem, waiting for non-Christians to come to them.

Until God stepped in.

Acts 8:1 Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Acts 8:4 Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.

At last! The church doing what the church is supposed to do.

But it took persecution to get them to do it.

ILLUS – I used to go out every Wednesday to the local shopping centre to share the gospel with someone. I want to tell you that I saw this guy: He was 6’4”, humungous, wore a sleeveless Tae-kwon-doe jacket, T-shirt saying “I hate Christians, tattoos saying “death to all Christians”, and I went up to him and gave him the gospel. And I didn’t pull any punches.

I said that I’d like to say that, but it wouldn’t be true.

ILLUS – In reality, I’m cruising around looking for a victim, and I see this little old lady. She’s huddled over, leaning on a cane, she’s about 112. She looks pretty much like your standard-issue little old lady. She’s not a black-belt in karate.

So why is it when my eyes lock onto her, my heart beats just that little bit faster?

And one part of me says, “Ah, another victim”, but another part of me says, “Don’t do it!”

I can preach the gospel in Papua New Guinea or some other country, but somehow it’s different here.

I can do it as a one-off just to prove that I’m not scared, but doing it regularly seems that much harder.

I can do it in a group, where I have the support of my fellow-believers, but on my own it’s not so easy.

What’s the worst that little old lady can do to me?

She’s not going to hit me with her can; I don’t think she could even lift it.

All she can do is say no.

In contrast to this, listen to this.

2 Cor 11:23-28 – What this man suffered for the Gospel!

And I’m afraid of a little old lady!

Folks we have to deal with the fear.

ILLUS – Cyprian (a Christian who lived in the middle of the third century) would stand publicly in a hostile environment and say, “I am a Christian. No need to wring the confession by torture. I avow it. Your gods? I

do destroy them – not in remote and secret places – openly, publicly, in the very market-place where your magistrates and governors can hear ... if your gods have anything of divinity and power, let them arise for their own vengeance! Oh, would you but hear and see when commanded by us, cut with spiritual scourges, cast out from possessed bodies by torture of our words. As they feel the lashings they howl and groan at the voice of man and the power of God, and they confess that Judgment is to come. Come and see that what we say is true. ... You will see that we are entreated by those whom you entreat, we are feared by those whom you fear, whom you adore. You will see that under our hand they stand bound, and tremble as captives, whom you admire as lords.”¹

Where is our boldness?

W.E. Sangster: “How shall I feel at the judgment, if multitudes of missed opportunities pass before me in full review, and all my excuses prove to be disguises of my cowardice and pride?”

Where is our willingness to sacrifice?

ILLUS – Robert Arthington was a 19th century English businessman from a wealthy family. Unable himself to go overseas, he enabled others to reach the lost by living meagrely while sacrificially giving over 500,000 pounds to foreign missions. He wrote, “Gladly would I make the floor my bed, a box my chair, and another box my table, rather than that men should perish for the want of knowledge of Christ.”²

ILLUS – Imagine there’s a great cliff, and I’m a blind person, one of many blind people who are all walking towards this cliff. And there we all are, thousands and thousands of us, all walking over the cliff. And suddenly, just as I’m about to step over the cliff, someone reaches out, grabs me by the hand, and pulls me aside. And not only that, they lay hands on me, say “be healed”, and amazingly I’m healed. It’s a miracle. The person who saved my life says, “Just rest there a little while”. And then they go back out to try and save more lives.

How tragic if, after a while they ask me to help, and I say, “No, I’m not ready.” Or: “It’s not my ministry”. Or: “I don’t know enough to answer all their questions.”

The reason **I’m** not going over that precipice is because someone had the courage to preach the Gospel to me.

Now I have a responsibility to do that for others.

Evangelism is the third great pillar of Christian growth, so I have to deal with the fear that impedes my growth in that area.

How can I do that?

Four principles

1. No more excuses

I have to call fear by its real name and deal with it.

I’m not just edgy, a bit nervous, jittery, having an attack of butterflies in my stomach.

The Bible calls it fear.

But the Bible also tells me: (2 Tim 1:7) For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

The fear comes from the devil, to try to prevent me fulfilling everything God has for me in His plan.

No more excuses like: I’m too busy, don’t know the Bible well enough, don’t know how, I won’t be good at it.

ILLUS – When I used to teach the guitar I was always hearing excuses from students: “I’m too old, I’m too young, my fingers are too short, long, fat, thin.” And they were just excuses.

ILLUS – The next time you think you have an excuse why God can’t use you remember: Noah was drunk, Abraham was too old; Isaac was a day dreamer; Jacob was a liar; Leah was ugly; Joseph was abused; Moses, David and Paul were murderers, Gideon was afraid; Samson had long hair; Jeremiah and Timothy were too young; Elijah was suicidal; Isaiah preached naked; Jonah ran away; Naomi was a widow; Job lost everything;

John the Baptist ate locusts; Peter was hot tempered; John was self-righteous; the disciples fell asleep; Martha was a worrier; the boy with the loaves and fish was unknown; Zacchaeus was too short; Peter was too impulsive; Timothy had a stomach ulcer ... There is no excuse. God can use anyone in His time and in His way.³

2. Pray for boldness

Acts 4:29-30 Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all **boldness** they may speak Your word, (30) by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.

In a very hostile society, they recognised that their problem wasn't lack of opportunities, but lack of boldness – so they prayed for it.

And God answered their prayer and filled them afresh with the Holy Spirit. (vs. 31)

3. Love

This is where we come back to that lady washing the feet of Jesus with her hair.

Why was she unafraid of what people thought of her?

Her love for Jesus was much bigger than her fear.

Is your love for Him bigger than your fear?

1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

Love is the real issue, so perhaps we need to be honest with ourselves and start to deal with our lovelessness.

4. Make a decision

This is why we were baptised in the Holy Spirit.

So that we could be witnesses.

If we stop making excuses, pray for boldness, pray for the love of God, then next we need to make a decision.

And take a faith step.

Sooner or later, if you want to be obedient to God, you have to make a choice.

Only you can open your mouth and begin to speak the words of life: God won't do it for you.

¹ Foster, John *After The Apostles* p 68

² MacArthur, John *The Wrath of God* p31

³ White Ribbon Signal