

Just Walk Across the Room #3 - The Power of Story

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Julian Doorey - Sermon - Cavy Bap - 21-5-17

(1 Pet 3:15b, James 3:9-10, Heb 4:12, John 5:24, Luke 5:12-16 & others)

Introduction

We're up to Week 3 of our Just Walk Across the Room - 4 week shared learning experience. The key objective is to gain motivation, confidence and ability to share our faith story with non-Christians. Each week has a Big Idea and associated Bible verses. So far we've had:

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- Week 1: The Single Greatest Gift... [The greatest gift] Jesus-followers can give people, is an introduction to the God who created them, loves them, and has a purpose for their lives.
- Week 2: Living in 3D... Relational based witness requires Jesus-followers to Develop friendships with non-believers, Discover stories of their life journey, and Discern next steps to help point them to faith.
- Today we start Week 3: The Power of Story... All Jesus-followers can learn to share their faith story and God's good news story, with brevity, clarity, simplicity and humility... helping point people to faith in God. The Bible verse supporting this week's Big Idea...

1 Pet 3:15b: Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. (NIV)

Houston, we have a problem

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We're called to invite people to become followers of Jesus... we call this witness or outreach or mission. In my understanding, witness is holistic, sharing God's love through 'word, deed and sign' or 'speaking, action and prayer'. I think we believe this. But... how often do we have meaningful faith conversations with non-Christians?

Justin O'Malley, National Director of Tandem Ministries, has recently done Master's level research on 6 Auckland churches, to find out about their verbal witness. Findings: Despite church mission statements and preaching expressing a commitment to evangelism, 95% of Christians do not share their faith (speaking) out of fear of people's reactions or being unable to answer questions.

As Tom Hanks said in the Apollo 13 movie... '*Houston, we have a problem*'.

Why don't we share our faith story (speaking)? Here's a few reasons and comments.

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1. NZ society is very secular and generally dismissive towards the Christian church?
2. Perhaps we've lost our motivation, confidence and ability to speak our faith (discouraged)?
3. We're afraid of social rejection, embarrassment and teasing?
4. Religion is not discussed in the public arena?
5. Actions speak louder than words?
6. Our religion is very personal and seen to be irrelevant to social issues in the real world?
7. We need to have formed a relationship with someone for a long time, before we talk faith?
Comment: Is this correct thinking? Do we need a paradigm shift? Of course we want to Live in 3D - Develop friendships, Discover stories, and Discern next steps... but every situation is different. A meaningful faith conversation can occur at any time, even on the 1st meeting. The idea that we need to know people for several years before sharing, can result in us only sharing our faith story every few years. Extrapolating this over an adult lifetime, and we may only share our faith story 10 to 15 times, as a result of this thinking.
8. Verbal witness is 'aggressive', like 'forced conversion', or 'proselytization'?
Comment: Is this correct thinking? Do we need a paradigm shift? I've experienced some evangelist types who have not been very loving people. They've been more concerned about

evangelising people than loving people. The Bible tell us to do both... to share God's love through both word and action. However, to share our faith verbally, doesn't have to be an aggressive, unloving act. We can share our faith story in a humble and loving way.

9. If people do not respond positively, we were wrong to share our faith story... we've failed?

Comment: This is untrue. It's a mystery why some people become Christians and others don't. If we've done our best, and shared in a loving way, the result is between the person and God.

10. Our faith story and the gospel is powerless to interest and motivate change in a person?

Comment: We'll talk more about this below.

Point 1: Words and stories are powerful

5 Words and stories are powerful. We've all heard the saying 'sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me'... this is a complete lie. Words and stories that people have said to us, or about us, impact our lives for a lifetime. While physical and sexual abuse is horrific, we know that verbal abuse is also damaging. James 3 tells us of the power of the tongue (words)...

James 3:9-10: [With our tongues we bless God our Father; with the same tongues we curse the very men and women he made in his image. Curses and blessings out of the same mouth! \(Msg\)](#)

Our words and stories can bring life (relationship with God) or death (alienation from God).

6 Throughout the Bible, we're told about the impact of words. A few examples:

- Psalm 119:130: Words can give [light](#) and [understanding](#) to those who don't yet understand.
- Prov 12:18: Reckless words pierce like a sword, but words from the wise bring [healing](#).
- Ecc 9:17: [Quiet](#) words are more beneficial than loud words.
- Ecc 10:12: Words from a wise person are [gracious](#), while the talk of a fool self-destructs.
- Deut 32:2: Words descend like [dew](#), like [showers](#) on new grass, [abundant rain](#) on tender plants.
- Prov 16:24: Kind words are a [honeycomb](#), [sweet](#) to the soul and [healing](#) to the bones.

Words... [Humble words](#) > [Healing words](#) > [Wise words](#) > [Gentle words](#) > [Grace-filled words](#).

Are the words which you and I speak... grace-filled, life-giving and orientated to love?

God's Word / The Bible

7 What about 'God's Word / The Bible'? Hebrews 4 tells us God's word is very powerful...

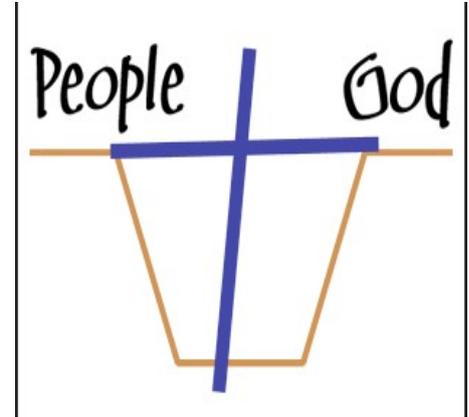
Heb 4:12: [For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. \(NIV\)](#)

Let me tell you a faith story about this. I became a Christian at Canterbury University back in the early 80s. I read a book called 'Run, Baby Run', by Nicky Cruz, about New York street gangs. A key idea was that God's word is very powerful, able to bring change in gang member's lives. I really took this idea to heart, that God's word is powerful. After completing my final year, I had a fantastic summer holidays, with Spreydon Baptist young people - zooming around in cars, parties and Christian rock n' roll. After a while, I became a bit bored with social events, so, initiated street witnessing in the Christchurch Square. One Friday night, after street witnessing, I came back to my flat, and found a British traveller (met on the street and feeling a bit lonely) had been offered a place to stay. It's one thing to go street witnessing, it's quite another to have an unknown person move in. The next day, 'Pete the Pom' (as we called him), much to our shock, said he was interested in talking further with someone (more knowledgeable than us) about Christianity. He became a Christian, was baptised and stayed around Spreydon for about 8 months, before returning to the UK. The key point: God's word is very powerful, sharper than a 2 edged sword, piercing between joints and marrow (bones and flesh); judging thoughts and attitudes. God's word changes people's lives.

Point 2: God has a story - learn to tell it well

8 God has a story, a powerful redemptive story. What would you say if someone came to you today and asked you to explain the whole God thing? There are many ways of explaining it. One old approach is to use 'The Bridge' illustration. Many of you will know this. The Bridge is simple and shows pictorially what God, and his Son, Jesus did for humanity...

- There are 2 beings, people and God.
- Between people and God is a great chasm, due to people rebelling against God's way and going their own way. The Bible calls this 'sin'.
- The problem (*Houston, we have a problem*) is that people cannot get across the chasm to God. All the human effort in the world is not enough to get us to the other side.
- Because God loves us so much, he sent his Son, Jesus to die on a cross for our sin. Jesus's cross is the bridge for people to get to God. This is the only way.
- Christ came to earth to be our bridge, and whoever makes the decision to cross the bridge will live with God forever.
- The apostle John put it this way...



[John 5:24](#): Jesus said... Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him (God) who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. (NIV)

At the end of the day, you need to decide how to tell God's story. The key thing is to be clear, confident and do it in a way that suits you, your context and audience. Keep in mind... Words... [Humble words](#) > [Healing words](#) > [Wise words](#) > [Gentle words](#) > [Grace-filled words](#).

Point 3: You have a faith story - learn to tell it well

9 Not only does God have a story... if you have a relationship with God through his Son, Jesus, then you have a wonderful, redemptive, powerful, personal faith story. Your job is to learn to tell it well, in a way that suits you, your context and audience. How do we create our faith story? Let's ask some questions, for example...

- What is your 'before and after Jesus' story?
- What is your 'with and without God' story?

For those raised in Christian families, who struggle to identify a 'before and after Jesus' story...

- What may have happened to you without God's grace and love? (think personality issues)
- How has your faith in God helped you cope with life issues: disappointment, worry, failure, suffering, illness, accidents, loss, broken dreams, unfulfilled plans?

For all: What difference does following Jesus make in your life? For example: Life choices?

In this way, we all have a personal faith story. Consider the man cured of leprosy in Luke 5...

10 [Luke 5:12-16](#): One day in one of the villages there was a man covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus he fell down before him in prayer and said, 'If you want to, you can cleanse me'. Jesus put out his hand, touched him, and said, 'I want to. Be clean'. Then and there his skin was smooth, the leprosy gone. Jesus instructed him, 'Don't talk about this all over town... But the man couldn't keep it to himself, and the word got out'. (Msg)

Can you imagine what it was like for this man as a social untouchable living in a leper colony

outside town, who suddenly became clean and acceptable? We're not told what was his 'before and after Jesus story' was? Perhaps it was something like: 'I was a leper, rejected by all... but then I met Jesus, he healed me, and now I'm free'. What could our faith story include? Ideas...

- I was striving... but now I'm less driven.
- I was self-destructive... but now I care for myself.
- I was fearful... but now I have more peace.
- I was without hope... but now I have more hope.
- I was selfish... but now I think more of others.
- I wanted money... but now I want to help poor people.

Your own faith story doesn't need to be complicated. But, it does need to be true, clear, humble and not-too-long... and suitable for your context and audience.

Well told / Poorly told faith stories

11 This all sounds very straightforward... but, potentially wonderful faith stories are sometimes ruined in the telling. Bill Hybels suggests 4 issues, we need to consider...

1. **Short:** Faith stories should be short. Don't go on and on and on. The listener becomes disinterested and tries to move away. Ecclesiastes 6:11 says... '[The more words you speak, the less they mean, so why bother to speak at all?](#)' (Living)
[Comment: Bill Hybels suggests about 100 words / 90s long - elevator pitch. I think this is too short. It takes time to explain things. The main point is not to be too long and boring.]
2. **Clear:** Faith stories should be clear. Don't be fuzzy or unclear about the key idea, with several story lines. The listener becomes confused about both the story and the storyteller.
3. **Simple:** Faith stories should be simple. Don't use 4-syllable religionise words. The listener cannot understand and thinks the storyteller and their religion is weird. 1 Cor 14:9 says... '[So if you speak in a way no one can understand, what's the point of opening your mouth?](#)' (Msg)
[Comment: I totally agree. However, your context and audience is critical. For example: Less educated listeners appreciate simplicity. More educated listeners are wary of simplistic answers in a complex world. It needs to be plausible and intellectually satisfying.]

Play Video: Vid 2 - JWATR - Part 3 - Clip religionise stories - 22s.

4. **Humble:** Faith stories should be humble. If the storyteller comes across with a superior attitude, the listener feels inferior and won't be attracted to that person or their faith group.

Play Video: Vid 3 - JWATR - Part 3 - Clip superiority stories - 24s.

Homework

12 This week I strongly encourage you to have a go at 2 things:

1. **God's redemptive story:** Practice explaining (and drawing if appropriate) God's redemptive story to a Christian friend. Request feedback about length, clarity, simplicity and humility.
2. **Your faith story:** Write down your faith story. Practice explaining your faith story to a Christian friend (or email it). Request feedback about length, clarity, simplicity and humility. Small groups taking part in Just Walk Across the Room will be doing this (p14 booklet).

Play Video: Vid 4 - JWATR - Part 3 - Summary - 1m 11s.

Conclusion

13 Words and stories are powerful... God has a story... You have a faith story - learn to tell them well.

[1 Pet 3:15b:](#) Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. (NIV) - End