

# ALPHA 9: How and Why Should We Tell Others?

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This morning we continue our series of messages based upon the questions we are discussing in our Alpha class each Wednesday evening. These are core questions we ask about the Christian faith. This morning we look at the question: "How and why should we tell others?"

Let's look at what Jesus said about sharing our faith.

## Acts 1:1-8

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach <sup>2</sup>until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. <sup>3</sup>After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup>On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. <sup>5</sup>For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

<sup>6</sup>So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

<sup>7</sup>He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Several years ago the Wesley Foundation sponsored a weekly event they called "Lunch and Last Lecture." They invited speakers to answer this question: "If you were giving your last lecture, what would you want to say?" I remember really wrestling with that question when I was asked to speak. If this were my last lecture, what is the most important thing I would want my listeners to know? I can't remember what I talked about. Apparently those in the audience could not either, because I was asked to come back two more times and deliver a "last lecture!" They kept giving me opportunities hoping I would finally say something worth remembering!

In Acts chapter one, we have the last lecture of Jesus to his disciples before he ascended into heaven. Jesus took this last opportunity to focus them on what really matters. What did he choose as his last words? "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses."

Why was that so important? Jesus lived all his 33 years in the area of Palestine—he never traveled more than 200 miles from the place he was born. By the time of his death a relatively small number of persons had heard about him. Yet Jesus had come to save the whole world. The whole world needed to hear that he had died to take away the sins of the world. The whole world needed to hear that Jesus rose from the dead to conquer evil and death so that we could live forever. Jesus told this small group of persons to give witness to what they had experienced with him: in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. In order for his life, death and resurrection to impact the world—they had to spread the word. Jesus chose his last words very carefully: “You shall be my witnesses.”

When we talk about witnessing or sharing our faith with others, it often arouses negative feelings in us. Our parents taught us, “Don’t ever talk about religion or politics.” Why? Those are topics people have strong convictions about. Conversations on those topics can quickly become heated and argumentative. That happens because we want to convince the other person that our viewpoint about politics and religion is the right one, and he or she should believe like us. When we try to argue another person into coming around to our viewpoint, we usually just antagonize them. We both leave the conversation frustrated or angry. Very few people come to know Christ because someone argued with them.

Others resist sharing their faith because they don’t think they know enough about the Bible or theology. They believe that only Bible scholars can really talk to others about the Christian faith. They are afraid the other person will ask them a question they cannot answer and they will look foolish. Let me tell you an amazing response that covers all the questions about the Christian faith for which I don’t know the answer. It took me many years to discover this great truth. I can say, “I don’t know.” It is amazing how many people

are satisfied with that answer—much more so than when I make up an answer so that I will sound like I know what I'm talking about.

Others resist sharing their faith because they don't feel worthy to talk about the Christian faith. They have struggles in their lives. They don't have their act totally together. They sometimes even have doubts about their faith. How can God possibly use them to share the Christian faith with another person? If we had to be perfect to share our faith, no one would ever be able to share their faith. The disciples who spread the Christian faith had their struggles. Thomas wrestled with doubts. James and John were called "sons of thunder" because of their tempers. If only the people who felt worthy shared their faith, the Christian movement would have stalled out in the first century, and we would not be here. You don't have to have your act together to share your faith.

There is a reason why Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses." Picture a courtroom. In a courtroom is a prosecutor whose job it is to convince the jury of the guilt of the accused. Also present is a defense attorney whose job it is to convince the jury of the innocence of his client. At the front of the room is the judge sitting behind a tall bench. The judge's responsibility is to be an expert in the law and to ensure that all matters in the courtroom are handled according to the law. The jury is present to make a decision based upon on the evidence presented about the guilt or innocence of the accused.

Also present in the courtroom are witnesses. Their responsibility is to share what they have observed or experienced relative to the accused.

Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses." He did not say we would be prosecutors or defense attorneys. Our job is not to convince anyone that Jesus is God or Savior or anything else. We are not to argue the case.

Jesus did not say we would be judges. Our job is not to be religious experts with all the answers. I've discovered that most people who have intellectual questions against the

Christian faith use those as a smoke screen to hide the truth that they want to be in control of their lives. If they acknowledge that there is a Creator God and a Savior of the world, then they know that means there is Someone to whom they are accountable. They just want to do what they please. By claiming to be an atheist or agnostic, they can maintain control of their lives. For most of these folks, an intellectual answer will not change their minds because that is not where the problem is. The problem is they don't want to give up the controls to God. Arming ourselves with intellectual answers is usually a waste of time. Jesus did not call us to be judges—experts with all the answers.

Jesus did not say we would be members of the jury. It is not our job to determine the guilt or innocence of anyone. It is not our job to pronounce the verdict that someone is going to hell or to heaven. That is God's responsibility. He did not ask us to serve as jury for our peers in spiritual matters.

Jesus did say we would be his witnesses. Our responsibility is to share with others what we have experienced with Jesus Christ. We are to tell others about the difference he has made in our lives.

We are to share the gospel. The word "gospel" means "good news." News is something that is reported. Ideally it is reported accurately and objectively. It is not intended to convince anyone of anything. It is merely reporting what happened. We are witnesses of what has happened in our lives because of Jesus Christ.

Why do we share our faith? Because Jesus said it is important for the whole world to hear the good news about him. It is important for those who have experienced him to witness to what they have heard and seen. You are here today because someone shared Jesus with you. Someone told you about what a difference Jesus made in their lives. It might have been a parent, grandparent, sibling, Sunday school teacher or coach. Who was

it that witnessed to you about Jesus in word or action? Jesus calls all of us to be his witnesses. He wants to use you to reach someone who does not know him.

How do we share our faith with others?

First let's look at an example of how not to share your faith!

**VIDEO: "HOW NOT TO SHARE YOUR FAITH"**

Don't force Jesus on people with evangelistic ploys! It is not our responsibility to convince every person we come across that they need Jesus as their Savior. Jesus said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses." We cannot convince another person to become a Christian. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. We are simply witnesses. The Holy Spirit brings us together with the persons he has prepared to come to Christ.

Our part is to pray each day and make ourselves available to the Holy Spirit to be used by him. "Holy Spirit, if there is someone you want me to witness to today, I'm available. You prepare the way. You prepare the person. Give me eyes to see the moment when it happens. Give me the words to say." It is not about me evangelizing the world. It is not about me manipulating every conversation to include something about Jesus. It is about me being available for the moments that Holy Spirit provides to witness.

We ask him to give us ears to hear when people are ready to hear about Jesus. We listen for the needs that people express. Someone may share with you that they feel overwhelmed. That is an opportunity for you to share the difference that Jesus makes in your life when you feel overwhelmed. Rather than pretending to be better than the other person, and say something like: "Because I'm a Christian, I never feel overwhelmed. So obviously you are not a Christian since you fell overwhelmed. Repent right now and give your life to Jesus or you will go to hell!" Instead we have the opportunity to be real and share how Jesus makes a difference. "Sometimes I feel overwhelmed. In fact today I felt

overwhelmed by all the demands on my time and all the things that are piling up. I've found that when I take a few minutes to pray and ask for strength, Jesus is there to help me. I don't know if I could make it without him." Then stop. If they want to know more they will ask. You have planted a seed. You have witnessed for Christ. The results are up to him. If they ask more questions, answer from your experience. Or say "I don't know!" If you feel a nudging from the Spirit, ask if you can pray for them.

Has someone recently experienced a loss in their life—perhaps a loved one or a job? Pray for an opportunity to share with them that you have gone through loss and how the presence of Jesus made a difference in your life. "I can't imagine dealing with this situation in my life alone. It is so comforting to know that God is with me."

Is someone feeling empty or bored with life? Is someone looking for direction in life? Share with them an experience when Jesus made a difference in your life. If you can't relate to their situation, don't make something up. Be authentic. Pray for them silently or aloud and ask God to meet them at the point of their need.

Billy Moore was a death row inmate in Georgia. His mother called some friends to go visit him in prison. One of the friends said to Billy, "Jesus loves you so much he wants to find a way to make your life count, even in prison." Billy had never heard that anyone loved him, much less that God loved him. He knew it was love that he needed, and he gave his life to Jesus. God changed him from the inside out. He led Bible studies for years. He gave hope to inmates on death row that God could find a way to make their life count. When a pastor came to visit him, Billy gave this witness about the difference Jesus made in his life even in prison:

"Jesus changed me in ways I could never have changed myself. He gave me a reason to live. He helped me do the right thing for a change. He gave me a heart for other people. And he saved my soul."

Billy Moore simply told others about the difference Jesus made in his life. What difference has Jesus made in your life? That's your story. That is your witness. Will you make yourself available today to witness to someone that God has prepared?