

A strategy for God talk

If you're a pastor or church leader, I'd like a quiet word with you.

Do you have a lurking suspicion that despite all of your urging and encouragement—perhaps even in spite of your best efforts at running training events—your people are just not very active in sharing the gospel? I mean, I'm sure you don't stalk them during the week, surveilling them to see what evangelistic efforts they are making. But you probably have a feeling that if they were having those positive gospel conversations, they'd most likely be telling you about them, or you'd at least be seeing more non-Christian visitors coming with them to church.

As a layman I'll 'fess up: I'm not very evangelistically active. And from my interactions with other lay people around me, I'm definitely not on my own. I believe your lurking pastoral suspicions are pretty well founded. Why is it so hard to get evangelistic enterprise firing in people?

Others have pointed this out before me, but it's actually pretty scary to even admit to being a Christian in today's 'tolerant' social climate, let alone take steps to persuade someone else to become a Christian.

One of our authors, Col Marshall, rightly said this five years ago:

Saying to our congregations, "go out and make disciples" is the scariest thing, particularly in our Western world where we're abused now for being Christian. And we're saying to people, why don't you try to persuade someone to become a Christian? Well, you need very deep convictions to do that, and a very deep prayer life. And you need to be in a fellowship where everyone is doing it, so it's just by osmosis; we're all doing it. Like a team or an army.

But while it's no doubt true that it has become scarier, I don't think a lack of evangelistic initiative is a particularly new problem. Hasn't it always been a big step for most of your people to go from forming an acquaintance with someone to having a serious conversation where they explain what they believe as a Christian?

Indeed, from the earliest days of the [Two Ways to Live training course](#)—which has been around for well over 40 years now in one form or another—a solution to this problem has been suggested: 'God talk'.

God talk is the idea that our conversations with unbelievers might usefully be sprinkled with words that flag that God is a vital part of our lives. Almost incidental words. For example, if asked what our plans are for the summer holidays, instead of saying "we're going to head north to..." we might say "God willing we're going to head north to..." (definitely a biblical thing to express, by the way—James 4:15). Or instead of "what a lovely day" we might say "hasn't God blessed us with a lovely day?" Or if asked what was

the highlight of our weekend, instead of “I had a nice dinner with friends” we might say “I actually got a lot out of church on Sunday night”.

Of course, it’s obviously much better if God talk doesn’t come across as totally phony. Hopefully it flows from a genuine personal awareness of God’s presence with us—a recognition that it *is* actually up to God as to whether we head north, and it *is* God who has given us this day, and you *did* in fact get a lot from church.

But in [another article](#), I have suggested that this piece of God talk is one of the easiest to be genuine about and the best to use: “I’ll pray for you.” You can read in that article why I think so. But, if you agree, I want to suggest that you, as a pastor or church leader, **give those four words to your congregation** and ask them (more than once!) to **keep an ear out for when they could use them**.¹

Those opportunities, I think, will be many and varied if we are attentive. It could be a work colleague mentioning one of their kids is sick; a parent at the school gate expressing a concern about whether they are going to make it to work on time; a neighbour expressing frustration about their teenager’s bad behaviour... you get the idea. Let’s just say, I don’t think these sorts of opportunities are rare.

That small and not-so-scary step of saying “I’ll pray for you” is a good start in evangelistic initiative—succinctly expressing not just care for the pray-ee, but the personal faith of the pray-er in a God who also cares and is willing to help.

It might also open up an opportunity to take the conversation a bit further and explain why we pray, who we pray to, and why we have confidence in his love and kindness. However, that next step is a bigger and braver one. So my second suggestion is that you have copies of Matthias Media’s new tract, [What I mean when I say “I’ll pray for you”](#), available for your congregation to take and use to help them in that next step. Have your church buy some copies and invite people to take one if they’ve managed to use those four words with a non-Christian in the last week. Then they can pass it on to that person when they follow-up and ask about what was prayed for (described in my other article).

To create a *culture* of doing this, as pastor please don’t just suggest it one Sunday and then never mention it again. Convey the idea one week, then ask if anyone was able to do it the next week. Suggest those people give away the tract, but remind everyone to try again this coming week. Then repeat for at least 6–8 weeks in a row. Get people up in church and interview them about their success in using the four words. Better still, interview them about following up with that person and giving them a copy of the tract or having a next-step gospel conversation. Then come back to the idea at least once a month after that to keep it on the boil.

I hope you agree this might be a really effective first step in building a ‘team’ or an ‘army’ of people that together express a more active culture of evangelism. ■

¹ By the way, if it’s helpful, feel free to share that article with your congregation. No copyright. Go for it. Print it out, put it in your church email or bulletin. Whatever you want.