

Caring Enough to Share the Very Best • I Corinthians 9:19-23

Jesus started out with a handful of followers. Today about two billion people around the world call themselves Christians. How do you think that happened? The answer is obvious—Christians convinced unbelievers to follow Jesus. That’s what Christians do. We tell others about God. We explain the gospel of Jesus Christ. We send missionaries. We evangelize. To be a Christian is to act in ways that produce more Christians.

Mercedes Benz created a television ad showing one of their cars crashing into a concrete wall. The point of the ad was to demonstrate that they have a design that absorbs energy and saves lives in otherwise fatal car crashes. In the ad someone asks a Mercedes representative why the company doesn’t use patent law to protect their design from being copied by other auto companies. He answers, “Because some things in life are too important not to share.”

That’s the way it is with the very good news of Jesus Christ. It is just too important not to share. Yet, some of us are reluctant. We don’t share the gospel because we aren’t convinced or we don’t know how to do it. So, let’s talk about the why and the how of evangelism. There must be a thousand reasons why Christians share their faith but let’s keep it short and simple with a starter list of three.

Reason number one is because Jesus says so. When we become Christians we pledge our allegiance to Jesus Christ as the Savior and Lord of our lives. That means that he is the boss and we promise to do whatever he wants us to do. Even if there were no other reason, Christians would recruit others to become Christians because that is what Jesus called us to do. In Matthew 28:19-20 he said, “. . . go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Jesus expected every Christian to make more true disciples—those who are baptized and are learning to obey everything Jesus commanded.

The very good news of Jesus Christ. It is just too important not to share.

Reason number two is because people are lost. This is a not-so-popular-notion in post-modern America. Our culture says that everyone is good, everyone is headed to heaven and every religion will ultimately get us to heaven. However, that is not what the Bible teaches. The New Testament is clear that non-Christians are lost from God and that Jesus is the only way to salvation. In John 3:16-18 Jesus said:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.

It’s good to know John 3:16-18, but it’s important that we not stop reading the rest of what Jesus taught about those who don’t believe. In John

14:6 he said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* Acts 4:12 tells us, *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”* If we really believe that people are lost without Jesus, that Jesus is the

only way to heaven and that we can affect a person’s eternal destiny then we become motivated to evangelism.

Charlie Peace was a notorious criminal in England in the mid-1800s. He was hung in London on July 4, 1854. In those days in England an Anglican priest was part of every public execution ritual for criminals. The priest read the liturgy as the condemned was led to the gallows. Here is the liturgy that was read: “Those who die without Christ experience hell, which is the pain of forever dying without the release which death itself can bring.”

Charlie Peace stopped and shouted at the priest, “Do you believe that? Do you believe that?”

to which the surprised priest haltingly replied, “Well, I . . . suppose I do.”

“Well, I don’t,” said the man about to die. “But if I did, I’d get down on my hands and knees and crawl all over Great Britain, even if it were paved with pieces of broken glass, if I could rescue one person from what you just told me.”

Why do we communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ? We share the gospel because people are lost without Jesus Christ.

Reason number three is simply because it works. The gospel of Jesus Christ transforms people from sinners into saints. Christians get their help and hope from God. Christians have their sins forgiven and have eternal life. Christians have the Holy Spirit of God living inside of them. We have experienced the presence and the power of God and are satisfied customers. We are true believers.

In the marketing world it is said there is nothing better than a satisfied customer and those of us who are Christians are satisfied in Jesus Christ. We have every good reason to try our best to convince others to become Christians as well.

These and other reasons convinced St. Paul to do whatever he could in order to persuade unbelievers to become followers of Jesus Christ. That’s why he wrote these extraordinary words in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law. . . . To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel. . . .

This man was a true believer. He was willing to set aside his own preferences and comforts in order to evangelize others.

During the 19th century the Dutch ruled a region of South America that is now called Suriname. Some missionaries wanted to reach the workers on a nearby island for Jesus Christ. Most of the islanders were slaves and the plantation owners refused to allow missionaries access for fear that there might be an uprising if the slaves became Christians. They established a rule that “only slaves may talk to slaves.” So the missionaries sold them-

selves into slavery for the rest of their lives and went to work in the hot tropical climate with long hours, harsh treatment and tropical diseases. They did exactly what Paul talked about—they became slaves to reach lost people for Jesus.

There are lots more reasons to evangelize but we need to move from reasons to actions. Just because we think something is a good idea doesn’t mean that we know how to do it. So let’s talk about what we can do.

First, we believe. Belief is an action. We choose to believe that evangelism is good and that sharing the good news of Jesus Christ is what we are supposed to do. It’s not about fear and it’s not about guilt. It’s about belief. We tell ourselves and we tell God that we believe in Jesus, we believe in evangelism and we believe in missions to win people to Jesus Christ.

Second, we care. Sometimes I believe, but I don’t much care; but when it comes to sharing the gospel, caring counts. If I don’t care I become a debater and antagonist; I may have a sense of superiority and arrogance. As a Christian I choose to care for others like Jesus cares.

Rebecca Oehrig is a young Wooddale Church missionary in the African country of Mozambique. She wrote a lament that I share with you in part:

“My country is dying. It is my country not by birth, nor by nationality, nor by choice, but it is my country that has chosen me and despite my best efforts to remain somewhat aloof, has entwined itself in my heart. Today I weep for Mozambique.

“I weep for the sorrow that salts the air in the throes of a deadly acronym. I weep for the daily funerals. I weep for the broken homes, destitute widows, orphaned children. I weep for the still-breathing skeletons with hollow eyes that sit in a lonely wait for death. I weep for the hunger pangs, the bloated tummies, the oozing sores that eat at flesh which hangs like oversized clothing. I weep for the helplessness, the despair, the loneliness. I weep for myself because to me AIDS has names and faces. To me, these are my friends.”

We can't all care about everyone and everything. But let us care deeply for someone and something beyond ourselves. Let us care deeply for others in Jesus' name.

Third, we pray. Not just for our family, our health, our jobs, our car and ourselves but for others. Make a list. Pray for neighbors. Pick a place somewhere on a globe; pray for another people and country. Believe that prayer matters and makes a difference. Pray for a day, a week, a year or a decade. Pray for others to know Jesus and do it convinced that it will actually work!

A church in Phoenix, Arizona, was challenged to choose at random 80 names from the phone book and pray for them for 90 days. After three months the people of the church called 160 names from the phone book—80 who had been prayed for and 80 who had not. When asked if someone from the church could visit their homes only one from the 80 un-prayed-for names said yes; 45 of the prayed-for names welcomed a visit.

Here's the challenge. Make a list of eight people you know who are unbelievers and pray for them every day for eight weeks and see what God will do!

Fourth is to talk about Jesus. Look for, seize and even create opportunities to share your Christian faith. It doesn't have to be a sermon. Just share an answer to prayer, a line from the Bible, an encounter with God, maybe even a dream. Just talk about Jesus.

Wait a minute! Don't we have a law that forbids talking about politics and religion? Actually, it's not against the law in America to talk about either religion or politics. The Barna Research Group reports that in a typical week more than 100 million adults discuss political issues and 90 million adults talk about spiritual issues. As a Christian, try talking less about politics and more about Jesus!

Fifth is to invite people to church. By far, the top reason anyone ever goes to any church is a personal invitation. So, make a list. Check it twice. Set up a goal of inviting at least twelve people to church in the next twelve months. See what God will do.

***Pray for others to know
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that it will actually work!***

Sixth is to give—money, that is! Actually, there are far more missionaries ready to go around the world to represent Jesus Christ than there is money to send them. I am convinced that every true Christian should regularly and generously give financial support to evangelize the world.

As a pastor I really want Christians to support the local church. I think a lot about paying the mortgage, meeting staff payroll and providing children's ministry. But, I am even more convinced that every follower of Jesus should personally give to support the global advance of the gospel. At Wooddale Church we make missions a separate line on offering envelopes so that people can be sure their money goes specifically to the cause of Jesus Christ outside of this building and around the world. The cause of missions is the greatest cause in the world. Don't leave it to everyone else. Give to missions.

Compare the price of bottled water to gasoline. Americans spend over \$10 billion per year on Evian, Poland Springs, La Croix and other brands. Blind tests have shown that there is no distinguishable difference in the purity or taste of bottled water over tap water. At the same time, millions of people around the world are dying from unclean water that

could be fixed.

I'm not trying to talk anyone out of a bottle of water. What I am saying is that every Christian ought to give at least as much and more to touch the lives of lost people and make a difference in Jesus' name.

Seventh is to go. Become a missionary. It may be to the other side of the world and it may be for a lifetime. It may be across the street to meet a new neighbor. It may be to translate the Bible into an unwritten language or to build a house for the poor in Guatemala. It may be as a church planter in Venice or as a compute programmer in Vietnam. It may be to consider a career or just to take a trip and see what God is doing. At least ask God where he wants you to go and what he wants you to do.

On March 15, 2004, I was in Atlanta speaking to a group of Southern Baptist church leaders.

The conference was interrupted to announce that five Southern Baptist missionaries in Iraq had been killed that day. One of them was Karen Watson. She had written a letter to the pastors of her church to be read in the case of her death. Near the end of her letter she wrote:

Care more than some think is wise.
Risk more than some think is safe.
Dream more than some think is practical.
Expect more than some think is possible.

Christians care enough to share the very best. Frankly, we cannot call ourselves Christians if we do not evangelize. Evangelism is what we do. Not just one time, not just one dollar, not just one person, but as a lifestyle. Caring about other people is what it means to be a Christian. So, what are we going to do?

Act like a Christian.
Care more than some think is wise.
Risk more than some think is safe.
Dream more than some think is practical.
Expect more than some think is possible.

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