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How to Organize Discipleship Training - Part 5
How to Share a Christian Witness

By Freddy Davis

"I don't have belief," said Jeff as he brushed off Bill's inquiry about his religious faith. "Beliefs are only necessary for those who don't know."

"Don't have any beliefs?" Bill replied back. "Just because you can't articulate them doesn't mean you don't have them. You certainly do have 'beliefs.'"

"No sir! Truths are not bathed in beliefs. I don't follow doctrines based on belief ... only logic, facts, and truths," Jeff responded back indignantly.

"That is simply not true. You have no idea what you are even saying," Bill reiterated. "For instance, do you believe in God? Support your answer with logic, facts, and truths."

Jeff stared back at Bill and replied, "I do not believe in God, but see him everyday I look in the mirror. Logically, factually, and truthfully, I KNOW I exist, therefore believing is not necessary."

"So, since you don't believe in God," Bill further inquired, "am I to assume that you believe that the natural universe is all that exists?"

Sensing that he needed to give a more definitive answer, Jeff finally responded, "Yes! What I can see, touch, and prove are all that exists for me."

Bill, finally having something definitive to work with, responded, "So how do you know that what you can see, touch, and prove are all that exists? Do you have some kind of empirical basis for making a statement like that?"

Getting a bit put out with Bill's questions, Jeff retorted, "Hey, just because my answers don't conform to your standards does not invalidate them. If you think I 'believe' something then hey, that's on you my friend. I am a spiritual being, so there is no need in my consciousness for me to have a belief system. I still don't have to 'believe' anything because I KNOW me."

"So," Bill responded, "you say you are a 'spiritual being.' I suppose you have some science to back that up, or is it something you believe by faith? Unless you have some empirical way to measure your spiritual beingness, the only way you KNOW is by your belief that it is true."

Finally Jeff just turned and walked away. As he began to realize that he was in over his head, and didn't want to lose the argument, he felt the only way to end this was to get out of the situation.

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This story is based on an actual conversation. And it is important to understand that people who think like Jeff are not isolated individuals – they are everywhere in modern society.

As we consider the process of sharing a witness for Christ to people who don't know him, we need to understand that our role is that of a messenger. We, as human beings, do not have the ability to transform people's lives. Only God can do that. However, we do have the ability to share the message of the Gospel, and God has called every believer to do that. The role we play as a messenger may be different in different situations. Sometimes we are nothing more than the person who tills the soil of their soul. This was, no doubt, the

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role Bill was playing in Jeff's life in the conversation above. Other times we will be the seed planter, or the cultivator; and occasionally, perhaps, the harvester. But whatever role we end up playing in the witnessing process, it is one in which God uses us, as believers, to share the message of salvation with those who don't know him.

Setting up the Context

Most people, when they think about the idea of sharing their faith, think only in terms of sharing the Gospel message itself. It certainly must ultimately involve that, but there is another element that must also be considered. It involves sharing the message in a way that the hearer can comprehend, as well. In the conversation above, Jeff could not even understand the Gospel message because he was attempting to interpret it through his naturalistic worldview lens. He simply did not have a frame of reference that would allow him to make sense of it. He didn't have to believe the Christian message in order to grasp the meaning of what Bill was sharing with him, but he did, at the very least, have to understand the Christian worldview paradigm. That understanding had to happen first, before the actual Gospel message would even make sense to him.

Every worldview has its own paradigm for understanding reality. Those who don't understand the Christian worldview paradigm will not be able to grasp certain key elements of the Gospel message until they do. The things that must be emphasized will be different depending on an individual's worldview beliefs.

- Naturalists, like Jeff, must somehow come to understand that a transcendent reality is actually possible.
- Animists need to understand that there is only one God.

- Far Eastern Thought believers must be able to understand that a personal God objectively exists.
- Non-Christian Theists need to understand that the God of the Bible is the only true God.

So before actually sharing the gospel message, we have to make sure people understand the biblical worldview paradigm. So what does that look like? It can be shared using a story involving five points: 1) Creation, 2) Fall, 3) Life after the Fall, 4) Redemption, and 5) Eternity. Here is the story:

Creation

Nothing about the Christian faith can ultimately make any sense until we understand God's purpose in the creation. The beginning of the Christian story has its roots in the creation of mankind. Before God created man in his own image, there were other created material creatures. These other creatures, however, did not share the characteristic of being created in the image of God.

As a Trinitarian person, God is able to have an actual, viable relationship within His own personhood. In fact, relationship is a vital element of his very being. While he does not need any other creatures to fulfill His relationship need, He, at some point, decided to create another class of being that had the characteristics of personhood.

For his purpose to become a reality in actual existence, though, there had to be a place for this new person to live. So God created the material universe, with Earth as the one place capable of sustaining the physical life of this new creature. Then, when it was ready, God created man and interacted with him on this physical planet. He did this in order to share fellowship and fulfill His purpose for the creation.

The Fall

The concept of the Fall gets to the very heart of the human condition. It helps

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us understand our human nature and why human beings are separated from God.

In the beginning, God created mankind with the capability of interacting with Him in a loving, personal relationship. Initially, He and man enjoyed perfect fellowship as they interacted with each other in the earthly paradise He had created.

There came a time, though, when Adam and Eve willfully disobeyed God, and did the one thing that was able to break fellowship with Him. The result of this act introduced sin into the world and caused the destruction of the unrestricted fellowship that Adam and Eve had enjoyed with God. It also caused the degradation of the physical paradise itself. This evil penetrated the very core of humanity in general, and mankind's very nature became infected with sin. Every human person born since that time has inherited that sin nature. This sin nature predisposes individuals to think and act in ways that express sin through their lives. As a result, all human beings continue to find themselves separated from God because of this evil within.

Life After the Fall

After sin entered the world, it became the primary principle that ruled the universe. The ultimate result was that it broke the perfect creation God had made. It broke man's personal relationship with God as well as the very order of the physical universe itself.

Redemption From the Fall

Redemption is the process God used to restore His fallen creation. Recognizing and understanding this fact is important because it is by God's redemptive plan that His salvation can be applied to our lives personally.

After the Fall, God could have chosen to destroy everything and start over. However, rather than allow Sa-

tan to win, God decided to overcome him and, in the process, fix (redeem) His creation. He would do this by providing mankind a means of salvation, and by ultimately creating a new heaven and new earth from the carcass of the old.

To do this, God began a process that would reverse the effects of sin that were introduced at the Fall. This process began with God's decision to send a redeemer into the world who would offer Himself as a sacrifice in place of those who found themselves separated from God because of their sin. This redeemer would have to be a person who would be completely without sin, and thus worthy of standing in this position. As no other being was qualified, God determined that He, Himself, would become the redeemer.

As the history of the earth moved forward, God continuously revealed to mankind how to know this relationship with Himself. With the death of Christ on the cross, God actually fulfilled the work of redeemer; to make the possibility of salvation a reality. Then, with His resurrection from the dead, He demonstrated that He actually had the power to accomplish this task. With that, the completion of the redemptive process was sealed.

Eternity

In the beginning of this section, we noted that everything begins with an understanding of the purpose of God. Nothing in the story of the Christian faith makes any sense until we understand why God did what He did in making his creation. Once we understand that, the culmination of God's plan begins to make sense.

When we examine God's plan for the redemption of mankind, we see that it works itself out in a three-step process. It all began in the mind of God, and was put into effect at His instiga-

tion through the creation of the world and of mankind. But the ultimate outworking of His plan is expressed in the life of individual human beings, based on the decisions they make during their life on earth.

Those who receive God's salvation will enter eternity in relationship with Him. Additionally, when the fullness of God's timing is accomplished, He will also restore the material universe as a "new heaven and new earth." He will do that to fulfill His original plan. With that, all of the believers who had been brought into the presence of God at their physical death, will be resurrected to the new earth and given resurrected bodies. All of these people will then begin to dwell in this new condition on a physical earth, for eternity, as God had originally intended.

There are, of course, many details about the new heaven and new earth not specifically revealed in Scripture. God has, however, shared with us the big picture as we have seen here. In the End, He will have completely overcome the destructive attempt of Satan to disrupt His creation. The effects of sin will have been overcome, and the created order, as God intended it, will emerge fully developed. He will have His created world, and a class of eternal Kingdom citizens, who will personally interact and engage Him in a mutually loving relationship throughout the rest of eternity.

Sharing the Gospel Message

Once a person understands the Christian worldview paradigm, it then becomes possible to share the Gospel message itself. The message of the gospel is actually nothing more than the Bible's answers to the three essential worldview questions:

1. Who is God?
2. What is a human being?
3. What is salvation and how does one achieve it?

So, what are those answers exactly?

1. Who Is God?

In order to help non-believers grasp the context of the Gospel message, there are certain things about God that they must understand. Specifically, this includes the points that:

- God is a person,
- God is holy,
- God is just, and
- God is love.

These specific points are critical because they relate to how God's being is connected to the salvation process.

It is important to recognize that **God is a person** because only persons are able to have self-conscious relationships. God created us as persons allowing us to fellowship with Him as a person. (Genesis 1 and 2)

God's holiness (moral perfection) is important because it defines why sin is such a problem. Our sin prevents us from interacting with God because He will not fellowship with sin. (Romans 3:23; 6:23)

Knowing **God is just** is critical because this expresses the consequences of our rebellion against Him. (Deuteronomy 10:17-18) When we sin, God pronounces His judgment against it. Judgment has eternal consequences when a person dies without having his or her sin forgiven. (Hebrews 9:27)

Finally, understanding that **God is love** is critical because it demonstrates that He cares enough for us to have provided a means of satisfying His justice. His love moved Him to provide us a way to enter into relationship with Him. (John 3:16; Romans 5:8) God's love is a constant, but He doesn't force it upon us. We have to love Him back and express it by inviting Christ into our lives. (John 1:12)

2. What Is a Human Being?

Two points concerning the nature of mankind must be emphasized to ensure the listener clearly understands God's purpose for humanity and humanity's problem with sin:

1. We are made in God's image, and
2. We are fallen creatures.

The fact that **we are made in the image of God** does not mean human beings physically look like God. Rather, we are the same quality of being as is He. This element allows us to interact with Him in a personal relationship (Genesis 1:26-27).

Understanding that **we are fallen** creatures is also critical. (Genesis 3) This means we are not what we were created to be, but, due to our sin, we have "fallen" from the holy state God requires for relationship with Himself. This fallenness permeates our human nature and inclines us to rebel against God. It does not mechanically make us rebel, but it does incline us in that direction. We are still creatures possessing a free will who can choose to rebel or not. That being the case, we are responsible for any rebellion we express. This rebellion puts us outside of the possibility of having a personal relationship with God and makes salvation necessary. (Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23)

3a) What Is Salvation?

The Bible reveals that God, as a Trinity, is a person who does not need another being in order to have His personal need for relationship fulfilled. As three persons in one, He completely satisfies that need within Himself. But, for His own reasons, He wanted another personal being with whom He could further express His love. God created mankind to fulfill that purpose. Salvation is God's "fix" for the sin problem in man that allows individuals to have their sins forgiven.

3b) How Does One Achieve Salvation?

The substitutionary sacrifice of Christ on the cross makes God's salvation available to individual human beings. But just because salvation is possible does not mean it is applied automatically. A requirement must be met, though not a requirement based on human effort. It is based on the grace of God (Ephesians 2:4-10) and received through the application of our faith in Jesus Christ (John 1:12). To receive this gift of eternal life, one must make the free-will decision to accept God's offer by repenting of their sin (Acts 2:36-39). With this act, individuals are restored to the relationship with God for which they were created. It is this act of receiving Christ that accomplishes salvation.

Completing the Witness

As a believer, you have been commissioned by God to share your faith in Christ. It is not up to you to convince non-believers to accept the message, and you do not have the power to change their lives. You are simply the messenger.

While you are not responsible for the decisions other people make concerning Christ, you are responsible for being a faithful messenger. This means you need to learn to share the context of the message – an overview of a biblical worldview – and the gospel message itself. At that point you will have been a faithful witness. All that is left is for each individual to decide what eternal destiny they will choose.

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