

Witnessing About the Gospel in a Culture of "You Do You"

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Date: 03 November 2024

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning. I'm Constance St. Clair, and I'm part of the Christ Church Youth Group.

Today's reading is from Psalm 67, verses 1-7, Colossians 4, verses 5-6, and John 15, verses 1-3, 11, 18, and 20.

For the director of music, with stringed instruments, a psalm, a song. May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us, so that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.

May the peoples praise you, God. May all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples with equity and guide the nations of the earth.

[1 : 20] May the peoples praise you, God. May all the peoples praise you. The land yields its harvest. God, our God, blesses us. May God bless us still, so that all the ends of the earth will fear him.

The grass withers and the flowers fall. The word of God stands forever. A reading from Paul's letter to the Colossians. Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders.

Make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. A reading from the Gospel according to John. After Jesus said this, he looked towards heaven and prayed, Father, the hour has come.

Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people, that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

[2 : 25] I will remain in the world no longer, but they, the apostles, are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.

As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one. Father, just as you are in me, and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord. Good morning, Christ Church. I know pastors are not supposed to have favorites, but that is one of my favorite scripture readers. And it's my daughter, so.

Well, here we are, two days away from this election. And we're going to pray about that in just a bit. But I do want to just say a word about it, because it's on all of our hearts and minds.

[3 : 33] And my question for you is, what did Jesus say when he was standing before Pontius Pilate? Do you remember what Jesus said?

Jesus said, My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight. But my kingdom is from another place. And do you know what Jesus said just the night before?

The night before he went to his cross. You know what Jesus was thinking about and praying about? I'll give you a hint. He was not praying for the United States of America.

He was not praying for election 2024. Although these are certainly things we should pray about. But what was on his heart and his mind, we just heard in John 17.

He was praying for the unity of his apostles. He was praying for the unity of the church that he would build through his apostles. He prays that they may be one, even as the Father and the Son are one.

[4 : 37] And he not only prays for the unity of his church, but he also prays for the people that he's sending his church to reach. And he says, Father, just as you sent me out, so now I'm sending them out with my message of eternal life.

And so I pray for the many, many people that they're going out to reach. And I pray that those people would encounter that message of eternal life. And that when they encounter that message, would you allow them to hear it?

And when they hear it, would you allow them to believe it? And when they believe it, would you allow them to come into a living relationship with us? So that just as you are in me, Father, and I am in you, that they may be in us.

Jesus, on the night before his cross, was not praying for our election. He was praying about something much bigger and much more important, which is evangelism. And that's what we're going to talk about today, this holy habit of grace.

We're going to be engaging this question of how do we respond to God's grace in our lives by bearing witness of his grace to other people. You know how just as like in our lives, when God came into and he entered into our stories, everything changed?

[6 : 00] How we were basically hopeless and then God came in and he filled us with hope? And we were just weighed down by fear and guilt and shame and then God came in and we were filled with love, freedom, and courage?

Don't we long to see that happen in the lives of other people around us? Go like this. Go like that. If you really believe that. In general, I think this idea of Christian evangelism, Christian witness, bearing witness about our faith in Jesus Christ, I think for many people that can feel overwhelming. It can feel overwhelming. It can feel awkward. And my attempt today is just to take all of that off of you by talking about the big picture of Psalm 67 and then just kind of giving some practical guidance.

Okay, you ready to do that? I have four questions I want to explore. And don't freak out because a lot of times I have three points to my sermon. But I have four questions and the sermon length is going to be the same.

[7 : 09] Okay, so you don't have to worry. But four questions is, what does God want to do in our city? Secondly, what do people need from God? Third, what role has God given to us?

And then how do we take some next steps? So what does God want in our city? What do people need from God? What role has God given us?

And how do we take some next steps? All right, so question number one, what does God want in our city? We repeat the mission of Christ Church every Sunday and we say this.

We say that our church exists for the city. We exist for the city. Well, what in the world does that mean? I'm going to give you a couple clues here from Psalm 67 because it tells us quite plainly God's purpose for the nations.

And he's not talking there about geopolitical nation states. Nations means the peoples. Nations means the tribes. It's all those ethno-linguistic groups of people that make up the diverse cities of North America.

[8 : 12] So what is God's purpose for the peoples in our cities? And God's purpose is this. It's to be known, to be praised, to be enjoyed, and to be feared among all the nations.

Now, if you have a pen, I want to encourage you to pick up your pen and circle some of these words that you'll find. It's verse 2. It says, That your ways may be known on the earth.

Circle that word, known. And then in verse 3, it says, May the peoples praise you, God. Circle that word, praise. And then it says in verse 4, May the nations be glad.

Circle that word, glad. And may they sing for joy. You can circle that word too. Joy and gladness.

And then verse 7 says that all the ends of the earth will fear him.

Circle that word, fear. That is God's purpose. That is God's heart. He passionately desires that all the people in all the cities of the United States of America and all the cities of the world would know, praise, enjoy, and revere him.

[9 : 21] And what are the opposite of these terms? The opposite of knowing God is to be ignorant of him. Right? The opposite of praising God is to be disrespectful of him. The opposite of enjoying God is to be bored by him.

The opposite of fearing God is to have a cavalier attitude or a casual attitude in his presence. And that grieves the heart of God. It grieves God when people are ignorant, disrespectful, bored, and casual with him.

And so what do we do with that? Like how do we respond in a situation where God's purpose is extremely clear, and yet what he wants to see happen is not happening?

Where his passionate desire is going unmet, and all the people around us, they seem to not know and praise and enjoy and honor God.

What do we do? Well, Psalm 67 is a song, but it's also a prayer of the people of God. And the people of God, they're crying out to God in accordance with the revealed purpose of God.

[10 : 30] And they're saying, Lord, this is why human beings exist. Right? This is why we exist. This is why we have breath in our lungs. And so we're praying that your name would be hallowed, and your kingdom would come, and your will would be done.

And we can join in this prayer too. We can pray, Lord, don't let the people in our cities and the peoples that we love, who you put into our lives, remain ignorant of you.

Rather, give them a knowledge of you. Lord, don't let them remain disrespectful of you. Rather, reveal to them all the things that they have to praise and thank you for. Lord, don't let them remain bored by you.

Heavens know. Lord, show them your grace so that they can be glad in you and rejoice in you. And, Lord, do not let them be cavalier or casual toward you.

Just show them the awesomeness of your glory that they might honor you and revere you. Friends, what I want to say today is that when we think about Christian evangelism or Christian witness or sharing our faith, we need to shift our focus away from ourselves and whatever anxieties we might feel and all the things that we need to do or to be, and we need to shift our attention to God.

[11 : 50] Shift our attention to what God has done and what he is doing and what he wants to do in the lives of the people that we meet every day. Because God is very clear about his purpose for your friends and neighbors and coworkers and family members.

He wants them to know, praise, enjoy, and fear him. And he cares way more about his purpose in their lives than any of us do. And so we don't have to wonder today whether or not God is wanting to reach them or not.

He does. And he's welcoming all of us to join in his work in their lives. Right? God is already at work in the people around us.

And we are invited to join God in his work. And that means that we get to engage in situations. We get to engage in conversations with people in our everyday life with more openness and more curiosity and more compassion.

Because we know that we're being invited into God's purpose and what God is already wanting to do. Does that make sense?

[13 : 03] So, what does God want to do in our city? I hope that's become a little bit clearer to you. Second question is, what do people need from God? What do the people in our lives, the people in our city need from God?

And I want us to consider the people with whom we live and work and play and study and create. What does Psalm 67 reveal about what God wants people to know about him?

Right? And this Israelite poet here in Psalm 67, the assumption is that he's praying that the one true living God would be known instead of all the gods of the nations.

Right? When he prays, may the peoples praise you, God. What he means is that he wants all the people to know that the one true living God is the only one that they should praise and serve and not all these false gods of the nations that they're living their lives for.

Right? This true God, he wants to be known for being a very particular kind of God and not some other kind of God. Right? And what does God want people to know him for? Well, he wants the people in our cities, the people in our lives, to know that he's a God of justice, he's a God of power, and he's a God of grace.

[14 : 25] You ready to circle a few more words? Verse 4 says, you rule the peoples with equity. Circle that word, equity. Some translations say you judge with uprightness and fairness.

The one true living God, he wants to be known as a God who is just. As one who does what is fair and right and equitable. And the reason why the nations of the world can be glad and sing for joy is because in their heart, they're longing to live in a world where all wrongs will eventually be put right. In their heart, they're longing to live in a world where evil will be cleansed from the earth. They're longing to live in a world where justice reigns. They're longing to live in peace without the specter of bullets and bombs and bullies ripping apart their families and their schools and their communities. And what Psalm 67 is saying is that only this God, only the one true living God can fulfill that hope of the nations. Only he can make people truly and everlastingly glad and full of joy because only he has the ability and the right to rule with equity.

And to judge the peoples with righteousness and fairness. And in the end, he will put the world right. And people will be glad. But what else does God want people to know about him?

[15:54] If you circle another word, look at verse 4. It says, you guide. You can circle that word guide. You guide or you lead the nations of the earth. And that tells us that this one true living God is a God of sovereign power.

He's a God of power. Many nations and many kings and rulers of the nations, they boast about their power as if it's not derived from and dependent upon God.

And Psalm 2 says that when they do that, God laughs at them. God laughs at the kings of the earth that set themselves up against God. In fact, Proverbs 21 says this.

It says, the king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord and he turns it wherever he wills. Daniel 2 says that he removes kings and he sets up kings.

Is this not what anxious people on the eve of a precarious election need to know? That there is a sovereign God with saving power who guides the nations of the earth.

[16:59] Yes, that is, yes. You can say, mm-hmm, yep, that is what people need to know. But then in verse 1, we learn something else about this God of justice and this God of power.

And that is that he's a God of grace. Circle that word gracious. God, be gracious to us and bless us so that your salvation may be known among all the nations.

The only true God who is just and who is powerful is a God of grace who saves people who believe in him.

And isn't this, isn't grace that thing that people in our culture are most longing for but not finding?

Right, that sense that I can be known all the way to the bottom.

I can be known warts and all. I can be known for all of my deep and serious flaws and all of my embarrassing sins. And yet I can also be loved and accepted.

[18:02] I can also belong and be delighted in. That's what God's grace is all about. And I want to ask you this question. When you think about your friends and neighbors and coworkers and family members, do you think that they have actually heard the whole truth about God's grace from somebody who loves them?

Do you think they've heard the whole truth about who this God of grace is? Probably not. And some of them, when you talk to them, they're going to say, you know, I don't believe in God.

And to that we should respond compassionately and curiously and say, hey, you know what? Tell me about this God that you don't believe in because I probably don't believe in him either. And then we can start to have conversations about who God isn't and who God is.

And we can talk about this God who's not a God of injustice but a God of justice. This God who's not way off and distant and passive and weak but a God of power.

We can talk about this God who's not cold and cruel and uncaring. We can talk about this God of grace. Right? He has what people's hearts are longing for.

[19:19] Justice. Power. Grace. So what has God won in our city? What do people need from God?

And then third question is, what role has God given to us? What role has God given to us? And here's the main point of Psalm 67 is that God blesses you so that through you the nations can be blessed.

The psalmist sees that God wants to be known, praised, enjoyed, and revered because he's the one true living God of justice, power, and grace.

And so what does he pray? He prays verse 1, May God be gracious to us and bless us and bless us and make his face shine on us so that your ways may be known on the earth, your salvation among all nations.

You see that linking phrase, so that? Don't circle that or underline it. Put asterisks by it. Put exclamation points beside that. Because God blesses, he's saying, God bless us, your people, so that through us, the nations can come to know, praise, enjoy, and fear you, and be glad in you just as we are glad in you.

[20 : 35] And what is the logic here? Well, he's quoting God's covenant promise to Abraham back in the first book of the Bible. And it goes like this in Genesis chapter 12, verse 2.

The Lord said to Abraham, I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless you.

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you, I will curse. And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. You see this prayer of Psalm 67, it's rooted in God's self-revelation.

It's rooted in God's word. It's rooted in God's covenant promises. And he basically just brings that covenant with Abraham up to date, and he's praying that covenant into reality here and now.

He's saying God's plan is that all the peoples of the world would be blessed, that all of them would be glad, that all of them would sing for joy. And so to that end, he chose a people.

[21 : 35] To that end, he chose Abraham. To that end, he chose Israel to be the bearers of God's blessing to the world. He made a covenant and said, I bless you so that you can bring my blessing to the nations.

And friends, God has beautifully fulfilled that covenant promise in Jesus Christ. Jesus came as a child of Abraham. Jesus came and lived as the true Israel.

He came and fulfilled all righteousness. He died for sins. He defeated death. He has made it so that anyone who believes in him would receive that blessing of salvation.

They would receive the blessing of being in a real living relationship with God. Jesus came in order that this prayer of Psalm 67 would be sealed by his blood.

He stepped out of heaven into earth. He stepped out of eternity into time so that people could actually see and touch and hear and experience the one true living God of justice, power, and grace.

[22 : 43] And they could know who he really is once and for all. And so what does this mean for us? What does this mean for you?

Just consider this question like, why has God blessed you? And if you're sitting here today, God has massively blessed you.

So why has God done that? Why has he been gracious to you? Why has he made his face to shine upon you in Jesus Christ? The answer is that so that through you he could bless others.

So that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. So that through you he could bless your friends, neighbors, coworkers, and family members with the message of salvation.

So that they too can be glad. And they too can sing for joy in knowing, praising, enjoying, and honoring God. And God is inviting you to join him in his work of blessing and transforming people's lives.

[23 : 51] And some of us right now might be thinking, you know, I'm not sure I'm the best person for this. And if I found myself in a conversation about faith, I'm not sure what I would say or how I would go about it.

And if that's you, I totally get that. But please allow scripture to apply to you personally here for a moment. When you hear God wants to use you to reach and bless other people, you can easily interpret that to mean what God really wants to do is use all the other people here to reach and bless other people.

Or if you do embrace the idea that God wants to use us, the us that he wants to use is probably not the current version of us. What he wants to use is a future version of us that's more confident and more equipped, right?

And we look forward to God using us someday in the future. But friends, the truth is that God wants to use you and me right now. In 2024 and 2025.

Do you think the world needs the message that we have? He wants to use us to get that message out. And the truth is that God, he never blesses us except to channel his blessing through us to other people.

[25 : 05] He never calls us in except to send us out to reach and to bless and to serve other people. When Jesus called his first disciples, he did not say, just come follow me.

What did he say? He said, come follow me and I will make you into fishers of people. And when he gave after his resurrection, when Jesus commissions his church and he tells his church, go and make disciples of all the nations.

He's not saying something new. He's saying something very, very old. He's saying, I will bless you so that I can make you into a blessing to others. He wants the nations to be glad.

He wants the nations to sing for joy. And the instrument he wants to use, the vehicle he wants to use, the channel he wants to use is you. And me.

Now, we may question that strategy. It's a questionable strategy, right, when I look around. But that is what he wants to do, including me, right? He chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.

[26 : 10] And so my last question is this. What does God want in our city? What do people need from God? What role has God given to us? And how do we take some next steps? How do we take some next steps?

Step number one is you should have received a red card when you came in, sitting on your pew. If you didn't get one, I think we have maybe some people in the back with cards. And if you just put your hand up, they'll give you a card if you need that.

And what I want to encourage you to do is to take a pen out and to write down three names. And please don't stuff this in your pocket and put it away and do this later.

We want you to kind of do it right now while it's fresh. And we want you to write down the names of three local friends, neighbors, coworkers, or family members that you would like to see begin to explore faith.

Just explore their questions about God. Just explore, you know, what is in their heart about ultimate reality. And begin to write those names down.

[27 : 15] If you're sitting there and you're like, I don't know three names to write down, that's okay. Okay, your task this week is to go introduce yourself to three people where you live or where you work and remember their name and go write it down, okay.

And then you may be wondering, well, what should I do with these three names? And step number two is to turn that little card over. After you've written down those three names, you can turn that card over.

And you'll see it says Luke 11.2. And that's where Jesus teaches us to pray that the name of God, the kingdom of God, and the will of God would break through into people's lives. It's an amazing prayer.

It's a prayer that's changed the world. And what we want to encourage you to do is to begin to pray that prayer for those three names on a daily basis. In fact, if it would help you to just pause at 11.02 a.m.

Or if you're up at 11.02 p.m., you should go to bed. But before you go to bed, you know, pray for those three names. And if you're willing, we would like to pray for those names as well.

[28 : 17] And I think we have a slide here. You can email us at alpha at ChristchurchEastBay.org. What we'd like to do is just as a staff, when we gather with our elders, when we gather at our monthly prayer meeting, in our prayer room downstairs, you can just email us first names.

We're not looking to, like, figure out who these people are. We just want to talk to God about them and pray for God's blessing upon them. Pray that God would do a good work in their hearts. And so help us to pray for them.

The third thing, well, let me just say before I close with that one, I think we sometimes underestimate the power of prayer. Because God can go and He can take a closed door and He can open it.

God can take a closed door and open it up for conversation. God can take closed ears and open them up to listen. God can take a closed heart and open it up for understanding and belief.

And so we just want to pray to God about. God can take a closed door and open it up for a second. The third next step we want to invite you to take is just to invite people to your table between now and Christmas. Just think about your table and who you might invite of those three names.

[29 : 28] Maybe all of them. Maybe one of them. Just carve out some time to invite them to a meal. To break bread in a personal way. And just to build relationships so that God can open things up and begin to work through conversation.

This is what Jesus did. His method of engaging people was to get them around a table and around a meal where He could open up space to begin working in their lives. And this isn't about us turning people into projects.

It's not about that at all. It's just about us loving people really well. It's about us being relational in the way that God has been relational toward us.

And just saying, hey, I want to step in and be a part of what God's doing in this person's life and just play my part. The fourth step you can take is to come to our November 16th seminar.

It's called Faith on the Table. How to have spiritual conversations with non-Christians. And if you haven't heard about this, it's a seminar on a Saturday morning from 10 o'clock to 2 o'clock.

[30 : 29] It's absolutely free. We are going to provide lunch. We just figured out a child care option this morning. So our hope is that parents, you could come and participate.

Or maybe spouses, you could come and learn together. And your kids are going to have a special lesson where they're going to learn what we're talking about as adults, right? But our friend Steve Trevino is going to come.

And he's going to show us how Jesus trained His disciples to just look for people of peace who are already tilted toward God, already ready to listen. And then he's going to train us and equip us on how to just initiate simple conversations that can lead to serious conversations that can lead to spiritual conversations that are not at all awkward or weird or pushy.

Okay? And if you, like, aren't sure whether or not you're going to come, I'll come pick you up. Like, just let me know. I'll come give you a ride. If you're coming, get your whole community group to come or invite a friend.

But you're not going to be disappointed that you spent some time investing in this opportunity. Our fifth next step is this, that when folks come and sit down at your table, just ask the Holy Spirit to come and to help you ask good, open-ended questions.

[31 : 46] And here's an example. Instead of saying, how you doing, you can say, what was the best and worst part of your week? And then ask the Holy Spirit to help you become a compassionate and curious listener so that when that person's answering that question and they start telling you about the worst part of their week, you can say, hey, that's really tough.

I'm really sorry to hear that. Like, where do you turn for help and strength when life gets hard? And that's just simply turning from a simple conversation to a serious conversation, right?

And then the sixth step I want to encourage you with is just to be ready to respond. When you're engaged in that conversation, just be ready to be authentic and be vulnerable and say, you know, when life gets really hard for me, I find strength and help in God.

Have you ever thought about God? Have you ever had an experience in your life that made you think there might be a God? And, you know, this is what the Apostle Paul is talking about in Colossians 4 when he says, be wise in the way you act toward outsiders.

Make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt so that you may know how to answer everyone. It's just simply letting our questions and our answers be well-seasoned and well-prepared so that we can wisely and graciously move people from a simple to a serious to a spiritual conversation about the most important thing, which is God.

[33 : 15] The seventh thing, next step, and I'm wrapping up, but the seventh next step is just I want to encourage you to take a risk and to go public and to identify with Jesus.

So when people ask you, for example, you probably get asked this all the time, how was your weekend? Instead of saying pretty good, not bad, can't complain, or I'm getting by, you could say this.

You could say, hey, thanks so much for asking how my weekend was. Honestly, it was kind of a mixed bag. Like Saturday, we just did chores around the house, and it was pretty boring. But, you know, Sunday, we went to church, which is always a highlight for us.

Have you ever been to church? You know, for us, it's just a place where we get together with a deeply meaningful community of ordinary people who are learning about hope from Jesus. And I've never been a part of a community where I felt so known and so loved and so hopeful.

And, you know, we'd love to have you sometime. But, you know, if Jesus, here's the challenge for us. If Jesus is at the center of our lives, then the only way people are going to ever hear about him is if we stop hiding who we really are to the people around us.

[34 : 32] And we just say the name of Jesus out loud. And then my last thing, my last next step is just invite people to whatever the next thing is.

After they've come to your table, invite them back to your table. Invite them to Christmas Eve. Invite them to Alpha, which we're going to talk about at our congregational meeting in a moment. But Jesus said this.

He said, the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. And then he says, ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.

And so that's where we just want to end in prayer right now. It's just Lord of the harvest. We humbly ask that you would open our eyes and you would open our ears and you would open our hearts to help us see the plentiful harvest that you prepared.

And to make us the willing workers that you want to send us out to gather that harvest in. We pray in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.