

Sharing Your Faith

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[0 : 00] Those of you who like historic novels will probably have come across the writings of somebody who is an academic historian as well as a novelist called Philippa Gregory.

And reading about Tudor times, which is primarily her interest, you discover what it cost at certain times in our history to actually acknowledge the fact that you were, well, the big tension then, of course, was, and thank God these days are over, was the tension between Roman Catholicism and the Reformed faith.

And if you found yourself in the wrong company or in the presence of the wrong monarch, and you admitted you were of the other parish, if I can put it in Anglican speak, you very likely lose your head for that.

And I find that a kind of salutary thing to remind myself because I think today, I think it was Os Guinness who said that, rather cryptically, said that, he was talking in the 20th century, he said the 20th century church is like the St. Lawrence Seaway.

We were all like, what? He said, frozen at the mouth in winter. And what I want to talk to you about today is, just so you know, I am not obsessed by the idea that sharing our faith is only about the words we use and the way we speak.

[1 : 38] If you can hang on for this evening, and this first session will probably dictate either way, whether you do or you don't. If you can, what I am going to be talking about this evening is, the impact of change in a person's life in terms of our credible witness.

I mean, you can argue with a lot of things. You can argue with creeds. You can argue with clergy. You can argue with bishops. Believe me, people do. You know, I can name names.

But what you can't argue with very easily is a changed life. And this evening, I want to look at that and the impact of that. But this afternoon, if you'll forgive me, and truthfully, you have no choice.

And what I want to talk about is this difficult area in our culture. You know, it would be nice for me to say, why don't you do this? It's easy. But actually, I don't think it is that easy.

Although I identify in our culture at the moment huge amounts of need. I think we'd all be agreed that whatever the political agenda is exercised by any political party, somehow our society seems to be on a hell-bent journey towards damaging people.

[3 : 04] And, you know, one thinks of our younger people. And, you know, the reported increase in incidence of mental health issues, issues with personal image, the impact of social media.

I'm not here to tell you that's all bad. I just, you know, don't quite get it. Somebody said, you know, the worst day of my life was the day my mother learned to text. So what I want to talk to you about is this.

But before I actually get around, and by the way, I want this to be as practical as I can make it.

Okay? So you can decide when you leave here, am I going to act on any of this stuff?

Or am I just going to, you know, write it in my journal tonight and ignore it for the rest of my time here on planet Earth? I can't make you do that. I'm rather glad I don't have that power.

But what I want to say is that there are two very fundamental things that you need to think about before you will even get started on this whole idea of offering a verbal witness.

[4 : 14] Before I do that, I want to read to you this amazing narrative from 2 Kings chapter 7, which I feel sure you're all desperately familiar with.

But it's a remarkable story. Where we are is there's a city called Samaria, and there's an enemy army led by a rather violent king called Ben-Hadad.

And his military strategy in order to capture Samaria is to lay siege to it. So there are people inside the city who can't get out.

There's no logistic channel, so they're starving to death. The narrative amusingly tells us that actually they were so hungry and so desperate for food that things like a donkey's head were selling for big bucks.

I mean, you know, can you imagine those of you who are cooks, you come home to your partner, those of you who got one, your wife, your husband, whatever, and say, darling, what's for lunch today?

[5 : 21] And he or she says, I got a donkey's head. Right? I can tell you you're not even smiling at the thought of that. I mean, just illustrative of how horrific the situation was.

But even worse, sorry, I'm just telling you this because you need this background before I actually read the narrative. But even worse are four lepers. And they're trapped between the armies of Ben-Hadad on the outside of the city wall and the inhabitants of Samaria who are inside the wall. And you understand that leprosy wasn't just a horribly disfiguring disease, but was in fact a major kind of socially unacceptable.

So these people are sitting outside and they're wondering what to do. Here's what the Bible says about them. There were four men with leprosy at the entrance of the city gate.

They said to each other, why stay here until we die? If we say we'll go into the city, the famine is there and we will die. And if we stay here, we will die.

[6 : 33] That's what you call a classic Hobson's choice, right? So let's go over to the camp of the Arameans and surrender. If they spare us, we live. If they kill us, then we die.

At dusk they got up and went to the camp of the Arameans. When they reached the edge of the camp, not a man was there, for the Lord had caused the Arameans to hear the sound of chariots and horses and a great army.

So that they said to one another, look, the king of Israel has hired the Hittite and Egyptian kings to attack us. So they got up and fled in the dusk and abandoned their tents and their horses and donkeys.

They left the camp as it was and ran for their lives. The men who had leprosy reached the edge of the camp and entered one of the tents. They ate and drank and carried away silver, gold and clothes and went off and hid them.

They returned and entered another tent and took some things from it and hid them also. Then they said to each other, we're not doing right.

[7 : 36] This is a day of good news and we're keeping it to ourselves. I know this is a dangerous thing for a preacher to say, but I cannot tell you how many times I preached on that text.

What an amazing kind of recognition. And so the two basic requirements I want to say, before you will even get started on this business of offering any kind of verbal witness, is this.

The first thing is, in whatever way, I don't think there's one way, but I think you have to have experienced the good news of the gospel before you will even have any motivation whatsoever to share the good news that hopefully has changed your life.

So I said, I don't think that there is one way to do that. I think, you know, I say accepting the gospel is a bit like falling in love. You know, there are some people who are standing in a room and somebody comes into the room and they know from David, that is my future wife, my future husband.

Then there's people like my wife, who, you know, looked at me for a very long time, down her nose to a certain extent, till she kind of warmed up to the idea that, you know, maybe I'm desperate enough to...

[9 : 03] Some people come to Christ like I did, literally overnight. And for other people, it's a much longer journey. And I don't think any of those experiences is inauthentic, but I do believe there needs to be a point where you realize that you are the recipient of the good news for yourself.

And you don't need to just experience it if you're going to get involved in verbal witness. You need also to be pretty certain that it is good news.

The Greek word for good news is the Greek word euangelion, which we translate in two ways. One is we translate it by the English word gospel, the other by the English word good news.

Why? Because the gospel is very good news. And if it's good news, why wouldn't we want to tell others about it? I remember seeing a movie when I was a kid.

I can't tell you the title of it. But the movie was about the world being attacked by this really dangerous bacteria. And everybody, all the scientists, were working overtime to try and find how

you might get rid of this bacteria.

[10:18] Mixing chemicals, spraying it on the bacteria, etc., etc. It turns out that the hero of the story, who wasn't even a scientist, discovered that the best way to get rid of the bacteria is to chuck water on it.

And you, just imagine, that you had found a cure for a bacteria which could wipe out the world, and you decide, I'm going to keep this to myself. Would you have any moral, don't shout out, would you have any moral conscience about that?

And yet it seems, there are many of us who have experienced the good news, and are agreed that it's the best news, are very happy to keep shtun about it.

I saw some data recently, incidentally, which is vaguely encouraging, and that was that, the outcome of the data was that more people at least claim to talk about their faith than anybody ever thought was likely.

I don't know if that's true of you. I hope to God it is. But I want to talk to you, you know, I love that story from 2 Kings 7, because in a way it embodies the gospel.

[11:29] It's about those lepers who were just, you know, they had no options whatsoever. And in terms of eternity, you know, one of the things that scripture teaches us is that without Christ, your options for eternity are extremely limited.

It's a story about an intervention of God. In this story, it's about an intervention of a God who makes a great big noise somehow, and people confuse that with the noise of Egyptian armies, and decide to leg it.

And it's about four people who had no hope, finding hope, and deciding in the very short term that the hope they've discovered they're going to hold on to themselves.

This is a day of good news, and we're keeping it to ourselves. I don't know about you. You know, I heard a message this morning that Russ preached where he stood up and owned for himself on the subject that he was to.

He's like, I'm not talking at you about this. I'm talking with you about this because what I'm describing is, you know, part of me as well. He was talking about, you know, Jesus' imperative, you know, that we shouldn't worry.

[12:47] And look, I am saying to you, I have been tempted on more occasions than one to keep my mouth shut. I think it would be true to say, I am looking at my clergy colleagues here for some support, but I think generally, when we're in Mufti, you know, and we're out in, you know, maybe on vacation or something like that, and somebody says, you know, you've been having a cup of tea and you're starting to chat to people, and somebody says to you, so, you know, what do you do for a living?

I'm like, oh, you know, shall I say I'm in middle management in a large, you know, national organization. And if I did, would I hear a cock crow in my head or something?

So, but I mean, I'm tempted. But I need to tell you that some of the most amazing moments of my life have come from unplanned, inadvertent conversations when even unwillingly I have said something about my faith and somebody's life has been transformed.

And that's not me saying I'm great, you know, I mean, I can tell you stories where I was extremely half-hearted about it all. So, let's just for a moment, if we may, meditate on what I would call the possibilities of the spoken word.

You remember that right at the beginning in the book of Genesis when chaos brooded over the whole earth, it was God speaking into that chaos that started to form order from the chaos.

[14:28] The logos, the word of God, bringing order from what was kind of cosmic chaos. You can fly through the centuries a little bit and I love that verse and I think it's Psalm 107 and verse 2 and I love the authorized version of this.

It says, let the redeemed of the Lord say so. I like, well, I don't like, I mean, it fills me with trepidation.

You know, when Jesus said, if anyone in this sinful and adulterous generations is ashamed of me, then will the Son of Man be ashamed of him or her when they return in glory.

The Son of Man is kind of, Jesus' kind of, apocalyptic, speak for himself. That's worth bearing in mind, isn't it, that if we're ashamed of him, he might be ashamed of us at that moment in our lives when it will really matter.

And then the day of Pentecost. I've heard so many people, you know, build a massive construction on what happened on the day of Pentecost.

[15:44] You know, sometimes I think the actual text of the day of Pentecost won't bear that construction. But actually, do you notice this? What happens there is the Spirit comes upon the people, people who are standing by and think, well, what's happening?

You know, it's like fire coming from heaven. And what happens? You know, does it say, and they started to sing hymns louder? Or they started to wave their hands?

Or they started to jig around? You know, no. What it says is they began to speak about the amazing things that God had done. And even more amazingly, the Spirit inspired them to be able to speak out those things in a way that the people who are in the crowd could understand them.

You're sitting there, saying, well, that's a novel idea, you know, never went to church thinking I might understand the sermon, you know, and you had to kind of endure it, but no, the Word was spoken in a way that people of every different tongue who were gathered there could understand exactly what was being said.

And finally, in 1 Peter 3.15, where Peter says, look, look, look, always be ready. Always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you.

[17:07] I mean, don't put your hands up, but you know, would you say you're ready to give a reason? And I want to speak to you about this verbal witness because I think it can be such a game changer in the lives of others.

Although, I do want to say to you, this could seriously affect your comfort zone, you know, health warning. And here are some factors that I want you to bear in mind.

The first thing is, specific prayer in relation to this verbal witness, I would say, prepares the ground. I think it does that in two ways.

The first way is, trust me, if you pray for opportunities to share your faith, I can promise you they will come. Okay? If you don't want them, don't pray them, but if you pray them, pray for opportunities. They will come your way. The second way it does this is, I think, I mentioned this in church some months ago now, but anybody remember prayer triplets?

[18:10] You know, I think we called it Operation Andrew or something like that, and three people would meet together, and each of them would bring three names of people who didn't know Christ, and they would sit together, and they would pray about those people, and, I mean, in my prayer triplet, and, you know, we were, frankly, a bit haphazard.

I mean, nearly everybody we prayed for intensely in those prayer triplets crossed the line and became a Christian at some point. So I think that part of preparedness is to be prayed up for the opportunities and for the, to us, that God might use me when those opportunities arise.

Second thing I want to say to you, I think you need to bear in mind, is check your love dial. What I mean by that is, I don't think you should plunge into verbal witness if you're a kind of spiritual scalp hunter.

You know, if it's more about you than it is about seeking to bring the good news to the people that you speak with, I'm not sure how helpful that is. It's not about winning, it's not about making people feel judged.

But verbal witness should be an expression of God's love for the world, as far as I can best see.

Third thing is, if you wait until you're ready to give a verbal witness, you'll wait.

[19:40] I think it comes to a point when you've just got to plunge in there and say something. Fifth thing is, have you met Christians Christians who, frankly, are desperate to kind of promote Jesus and his kingdom, but actually have the net impact of putting people off massively?

You ever met people like, am I the only person who meets people like Ryan? I mean, very often they've got a Bible the size of a paving slab and they'll go around beating people around the head with it until, you know, people just give in to get rid of you.

And I think there is a kind of sensitivity that's kind of required here, but, you know, that needs to be put alongside a kind of boldness as well.

I would say this, I found this really helpful when I was a young Christian. I did this thing. Anybody heard of Evangelism Explosion? Well, you're going to be horrified by it, right, before I explain it, just let me say.

Evangelism Explosion was a process evangelism course that was put together in a church in Florida by a man called James Kennedy.

[20 : 51] Basically, it was a door-to-door visitation program. I can see you, you know, scared already. And what you did was you learned a kind of skeleton of the gospel.

And the idea was you knocked on the door, somebody answered it, and you would, you know, you were instructed that you needed to do, you know, English people do this, don't we?

You know, there's a kind of intro that we go through in, I just want to say this phrase very carefully, social intercourse.

There's something, you know, we go through, we talk about the weather or we say, you know, all that stuff. So the course encouraged you to kind of do a bit of that stuff. And then it had a diagnostic question.

And at the right moment, you're supposed to feed in this diagnostic question. And the, it's a very good question, this actually. I mean, you might, don't, you know, mind it to room it. But the diagnostic question was, if you were to die tonight and God were to say to you, why would I let you into heaven?

[21 : 54] What would you say? Some people would say stuff like, can you come back after EastEnders is finished? interesting. But a lot of people would be like, oh, well, you know, I'm not perfect, you know, not religious, but, you know, I try my best given to kind of, you know, a comic aid or all that stuff.

But it was all, the idea was that 99% of people, scarily 99% of church people, place the emphasis on their effort to save themselves rather than the intervention of God in Jesus Christ who came that we might do for ourselves, sorry, he might do for us what we could not do for ourselves and that is save ourselves.

So having, you know, asked that question, given that 99% of people gave the wrong answer, it kind of gave you a way in to talk about the gospel.

Do you know what? I know you're sitting there horrified by the very idea of it and, you know, I get that in a way. Actually, I find that a really helpful thing. I found it really helpful to learn a skeleton of the gospel with some Bible verses so it's not just me talking, it's, you know, what scripture says about this, that and the other and I found that really helpful and then I found something else really helpful and that was I went to a, I think they call it a clinic, you know, it's never a great thing is it to call something a clinic because it implies you're not well before you get there but the clinic basically said you need to be able to give a thumbnail sketch of your Christian story and you need to be able to do that within two minutes and, you know, I think that is another really helpful thing to do.

You know, if somebody says to you, you know, why are you a Christian? What would you say? And, you know, if you need, you know, two and a half hours to drone on to explain it to people, they're probably going to lose the will to live by the time you finish trying to explain it to them.

[24 : 10] But the important thing about trying to set a limited time around your testimony is this, it helps you to focus on what is the real change in my life as a result of my discipleship in Jesus Christ?

What is the thing that God has really changed in me? I think it's really important and can I just say that? Can we agree that it's really not helpful to kind of give our testimony and it's founded on sort of what I will politely call simplistic nonsense?

You know, I'm not saying that God doesn't care where you park your car, but the kind of testimony, you know, that goes like this, I couldn't find a parking space, you know, I needed to get out of the car because my four-year-old was desperate for the bathroom and, you know, God opened up a car.

Let me tell you, people are not massively impressed by that kind of thing. What they're much more impressed about is when there was a season of adversity in your life, how did God help you deal with it?

You know, maybe you went through bereavement or maybe you've been through divorce, maybe you've lost somebody really close to you, maybe you've, I mean, maybe you've had none of those old things and for crying out loud, don't make stuff up.

[25 : 40] But actually, I think it's far more impactful. If you've got something to share about the way God helped you through adversity, then it is talking about God providing you with a parking place.

Focus on what has changed in your life as a result of your faith. The seventh thing is, and I'm glad to say this to churches together in Clevedon, though clearly this is a ramification for local congregations, if together we covenant to seize the opportunity to share our faith.

I think that's a really good thing to do. And the reason I think that is that it kind of builds in a level of accountability. If we've got stories to share about when we tried it, that's a very powerful thing. Some of you will know Pip and Jay Church in Bristol was one of those churches that went through the very first wave, of renewal. And it's amazing back in the day, you know, I saw when old Malcolm Whittacombe was the rector there, you know, he stood up there with his big pork chop, sideboards, you know, holding forth from the pulpit.

And in turn, it's a massive church, probably twice the size of this church, standing room only. And, you know, he did his thing there, and they covenanted together as a church to be people who would seize the opportunity, if and when it arose, to share their testimony.

[27 : 24] The impact was truly staggering, and what they used to do in the services, I don't know if they still do, it was, they would leave a short time for people to come and tell their stories as to when they'd spoken about their faith in the week, and the outcome of speaking about their faith.

And very often, no, not very often, occasionally, they would bring a person to the front with them to share their experience, which is the person who they shared the faith with, who come to church for the first time, maybe ever, maybe for years, maybe not for years.

The full thing is, I need to say this to those of you who are living on yesterday's spiritual experience. You know, if you look in Isaiah 64 and verse 6, the prophet there writes about those whose spiritual experience fades like the leaves in autumn.

I mean, I think it's much better if your spiritual experience is fresh and you try and maintain it in a fresh way. rather than, you know, people say to you, you know, what's the most significant moment in your life?

[28 : 41] I mean, clearly your conversion, if it was a long time ago, is a very significant moment. But if, you know, you're talking about the conference you went to in 1957, you know, probably people in today's world are not going to kind of quite resonate with the lack of contemporaneity around that.

So, I want to leave some time for questions. But here are, are you ready for this? Buckle up. Ten things. Practical tips. One, I don't need to say.

Pray and pray for people who are not Christians, who you in your heart would love to see across the line. Second thing is, you might need to start with a spiritual order.

Where are you? Are you hot for God or are you lukewarm for God? You know, is your experience like that which Isaiah spoke about? Is it fading like the autumn leaves?

I mean, you can't, you know, I know where people are moved and all that stuff, but generally, generally, would you say you're hot for God or would you say, yeah, you know, maybe not.

[29 : 54] Third thing is, you need to build authentic relationships. I never forgot, when I went to the church where I was a rector, there were a lot of people in middle age there, nothing wrong with that, you know, I am one, but one of the things that, you know, I taught them about sharing their faith and taught them about evangelism and they come to me and say, you know what, we don't really have any friends outside of the church these days.

I'm like, seriously, you know, I was quietly thinking, are you that sad? And, no, we don't. I've never forgotten this.

In fact, we had that man from Florida come to Slough when I was a cure at there, James Kennedy, and the Salvation Army guy, he'd been going on about evangelism explosion, the Salvation Army guy was there, lovely guy, said to him, well, the problem for me and for my congregation is such a kind of big social thing as well as a kind of spiritual thing that most of us only have socialized within our immediate circle.

So he said to James Kennedy, do you have any advice? Right, don't follow this. I think he was joking. He said, yeah, why don't you go down to the nudist beach?

And we're all kind of having an attack of the vapors, you know, who are going? Look, some of you, you know, I know some of you, I know some of you are in roles that put you in touch with people who are going through difficult times in their lives, people who don't know Christ.

[31 : 44] I think that you know, the important thing is that we build authentic relationships, not just relationships that solely we're making to try and exploit them in some way, but relationships that, you know, are truly reflecting the love of God for the person that we've been praying for.

I've said it'll help if you can find a way of expressing your allegiance to Jesus Christ, which isn't particularly off-putting. I think that's really important. Five, be attentive to the Spirit.

As I've got older, I was going to say as I've become more mature in the faith, but that would be stretching a point. But as I've got older, one of the things that I've noticed is that whereas in the early days of my walk with Jesus, my life with him was confined to kind of 20 minutes in the morning and a kind of sign off prayer before I crashed out of bed in the evening.

But the longer I've been a Christian, the more I feel like, if this doesn't sound too fanciful, that Jesus is kind of with me wherever I go and whatever I do.

I mean, sometimes that's great because it starts me sinning. What's great is I think sometimes the Holy Spirit can give you those notches to speak to someone and see where it goes.

[33 : 16] I think, again, I told the congregation here this. I have a question that I ask people that really catches them. You know, it's a bit like if you, sorry to use sporting analogy, but it's a bit like if you're playing cricket and suddenly out of the blue the bowler boils a bouncer or your head.

It takes you by surprise. And so my question is slightly designed to do that and it's very simple. It is, you know, I talk to people a bit, you know, on a train, where are you going? Going to Paddington Station, yeah, what are you doing down there?

You know, all that. And I'll say, so, how's your life? And the first thing people tell you is, it's fine, it's all alright. And then it starts to unravel.

Actually, I'm going through a really difficult divorce at the moment. Actually, my husband left me 20 years ago when I was four months pregnant with our fourth child. Actually, I'm feeling horrible malice towards my sister.

I've even had somebody say this to me, and I'd like to kill her. It is amazing. It is amazing.

[34 : 35] A number of times people have said to me, I don't think anybody who knows me would probably say that pastoral care was top of my gift list, honestly. But the number of people who just through Chan's conversation said to me, you know what, I've never told anybody this before.

And even in that, there must be some kind of release, isn't there? Galatians 5, well we say a burden shared is a burden harved. It's a sort of slight distortion of a verse in Galatians 5 where Paul says, you know, share one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

And you could do that. You know, and I mean what you've got to get through is that, you know, as Dr. House said, those of you who watched that sing on, Netflix or whatever, everybody lies.

So when you ask people about their life, they're going to probably lie to you to start with about how good it is. But actually, they keep talking, they probably start to unravel.

The sixth thing is, keep the good news fresh. I've talked about that. The seventh thing is, what a witness does is they share their experience.

[35 : 52] and again, you know, I would think, you know, call me novel, but I would think that if you've got no experience, it's probably going to be difficult for you to share it.

What is your experience of God? Do you know about him or do you know him? I think it really helps, you know, I mean, I'm always amazed, to be honest with you, you know, I don't know if I'm kind of low level Asperger's or something like that, but, you know, I tend to give honest answers to honest questions.

It used to drive my press officer bonkers. You know, I remember him saying to me, a very sophisticated man, my press officer, he wrote the world's leading treatise on being a butler.

Right? Terribly formal, very straight. He'd been a press officer to William and Harry when they went through Eton. And he used to say to me, do you know what the trouble with you is, Mike?

You know, when people say that to you, like, where's this conversation going to go? I said, no, but I think you're going to tell me. He said, the trouble with you is people ask you a straight question, you're in grave danger of giving them a straight answer.

[37 : 12] I'm like, so what's the problem with that? It's like, the press will kill you. Well, I'm still alive. Look, sharing our experience and the way, you know, I was going to say to say that, I'm always amazed how many people, I wouldn't surprise me, Russ, if people didn't come and say that to you this morning after that sermon.

People are shocked by ministers being honest. They're just shocked by it. They're like, really? You know, you suffer from that? Yeah, I do. I don't know if it's a sense of let down.

I can't really understand it. I mean, partly because I've been a minister for so long now, I can't really remember not being one. It just shocks me that people would be shocked.

It's like, you know, when you're looking for a minister, are you really looking for a liar? It just seems mad when you say it like that, doesn't it? So, sharing, the eighth thing is sensitive persistence.

How many of you have asked and bucked up the courage and asked a friend, come to our guest service, come, and they've made some feeble excuse and you've thought, oh, that's it. No.

[38 : 37] You've got to keep going. You know, there's a man, it wouldn't be right for me to share his name, he's a multi, balty, squillion, billion, billionaire, made an absolute fortune, he's on the radio fairly frequently, not because he's been sexually abusing or racially abusing anybody, but because he has standards that he applies to his business and the rest of the business world just don't get it.

For instance, he will not have any of his employees, he's in retail, partly, he will not have any of his employees work on a Sunday. So they're very interested in him in the media, you know, how does your business plan work without Sunday trading?

It's like, works very well, thank you. Why, you know, because God blesses us because we, you know, we're trying to live by the way he wants us to live.

And, but, I remember for years and years and years I used to phone him up when we had, I'm trying to remember how often men, there were men's breakfasts in those days, I apologize to the women in the house for that, but that's the way they were back in the day.

I can't remember how often we had, but a number of times I got on the phone to this guy and said, would you come? He always made some feeble excuse, never came, but I kept making the calls, and in the end he said, yes, when Barry Kissel from St.

[40 : 13] Andrew's Chorleywood was our speaker, soundly converted at 9.47 in the morning, he's given millions of his wealth away to churches, charities, whatever.

And I'm not taking any credit for that, it's purely the work of God and the power of his Holy Spirit revealing himself to my friend, but I sometimes wonder, if I'd given up phoning him, because you know what, it just gets embarrassing, but if I'd given it up, I'm not saying he wouldn't have become a Christian, it must have been somewhere in God's plan, but I'm just telling you, don't be, you know, somebody says no once, keep rattling that cage, keep rattling it.

The only thing is, as Peter would tell us, always be ready. You know, have some idea of what you would say. You know, when I was in local church ministry, we did a bit of research with our members, and we said to them, suppose somebody came to you, and said, Harry, Mary, I've been thinking about this Christian thing, and I just want to say to you that I would love to become a Christian, but I don't know how to do it, what should I do?

I just think, you know, suppose you're that person, somebody's come to you, entirely positive about the Christian faith, wants to say, what would you say? Well, what we discovered was that over 90% of our congregation said, go and see Mike.

I mean, can you imagine the bottleneck that would occur if you just left it to ministers all the time? You know, I always say as an evangelist, my job's made a lot easier when you get that what Jesus has called you to, whether you're an introvert or an extrovert, no excuses, Jesus said just before he went to heaven, you will be my witnesses.

[42 : 24] Didn't say a few, a few you keen ones, you know, might like to step up now and then. No, you, plural. And as an evangelist, if you take that responsibility seriously, I'm not saying my job as an evangelist becomes easier, but I am going to say do, I think it's better than it was if I'm doing it against, you know, a church which behaves like the silent minority.

And by the way, if you behave like the silent minority, trust me, you will remain the silent minority. And the last thing is, borrowing it from a story in Matthew's gospel, comes a point where friends, you've just got to get out of the boat.

You've got to have a go. You're thinking to yourself, what if I mess it up? What if you do? You know, have you ever messed up anything else? I'm sure that we can all have good examples of conversations that we've initiated which really haven't gone well.

I mean, I could write a book about the conversations I've initiated that haven't gone well. my wife was with me one day, she just stopped me in time.

I was talking to this bloke and I didn't really recognize him, I thought he was vaguely familiar, I was talking away and he had his little one year old child in his arm and I was talking to him thinking, do I know you?

[44 : 01] I don't, I know you, I know you. Just about to say to him, has Christopher been baptized? When Anthea whispered in my ear, you're his godfather.

Out of the mouths of babes and idiots. Look, 2 Kings 7 I think puts very well in that wonderful verse, the kernel of what I'm saying to you.

Look, either this thing that's changed and changing my life and hopefully changed and changing your life, is the best news that we could share with another human being. Because if it's not, we have every right to keep still about it. It's not a message about the church, it's a message about the redeeming power of God shown to us in Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned he stood, sealed my pardon with his blood. Alleluia. What a savior.
[45 : 17] fear.