

Sharing the Gospel as Good News (4)

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[0 : 00] Okay, team, what a delight to look out and actually see someone and be of good cheer, because obviously you have persevered to be here, and in the scriptures, perseverance is a sign of election.

So that should encourage you heartily. Well, we're now nearing the end of our journey together, and if we glance back at the road that we've traveled, we began with a consideration of the fountain pulse of witness bearing.

From what fountain does our witness bearing spring, and what sustains the flow? We unfolded five fueling dynamics. One, it flows from the command of our king.

Second, it reflects an attunement to the great drama. Third, it is impelled by a love of our neighbor. Fourth, it's a part of our praise of our Savior.

And finally, it arises out of the stirring of the Spirit. We then turn from motive and motor to the message itself. What is the gospel that we as witness bearers bear?

[1 : 15] And we explored, what is the significance of the gospel being news, and what makes that news so good? And in particular, we lingered over the vital question, how may the gospel be heard as good news?

And critical here was to offer the gospel as an answer to a question that they, our hearers, are asking. To translate the gospel into terms of something that they care about.

What is the good news for that particular thing? And finally, in our most recent journey's leg, we proposed six stars to navigate by in our witness bearing.

We said, one, proceed with good questions. Two, frame the interaction collaboratively. Third, listen well.

Fourth, lead with affirmation and look for resonances. Fifth, be prepared to tell your own story of how you came to faith. And sixth, keep fresh and vivid how the gospel is good news for you.

[2 : 32] So, that's where we've been. And in this, our final stretch, we want to consider together some first steps in getting started.

And if you've been with us on our entire journey, you will have heard a lot. How and where do I begin? Well, here are four starter steps.

Four starter steps. And the first is, be prayerful. Be prayerful. One of the early witness bearing lessons that the master impressed on his disciples is recorded in Matthew 9.37.

Matthew 9.37. And the context is in the previous verse, which reads, When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

Then he said to his disciples, The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, why do you tarry? Let's rush down into the harvest right now.

[3 : 37] Last one there is a rotten matzo ball. Wait a minute. Did I get that right? I'm trying to recall. Can someone check the passage for me? Matthew 9.37. How does that go?

Workers are few. Sorry, the harvest is plenty. The laborers are few. Therefore, can someone help me out? Earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into Jesus. Ah, that's it.

Okay. Pray earnestly. Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest. Remarkable, is it not? As ripe and ready as the harvest fields are, our first step is to pray.

Pray to the Lord of the harvest. And is this not compelling? I mean that we address the one who is sovereign in the whole matter of gathering a Christ-redeemed people.

So, let's go and beseech the one who disposes all things, including the hearts of hearers.

[4 : 45] And if we comprehend just how utterly sovereign that the Lord is in this harvest, we might be even forgiven for the mistake that we don't need to do anything.

He is so sovereign. He'll take care of the harvest all by himself. This was intriguingly the response that the missionary aspirant, William Carey, got from the elders of his Baptist, Baptist church, when he proposed that he might be sent out to be a missionary to far-flung nations.

He was heading out to India. And the response of the elders of this Baptist church was, Sit down, young man. If God wants to reach the heathen, he will do so without you or me.

Can you believe that? Fine. But it seems that the... Oh, so kind of you. Thank you, Beth. It seems that the Lord of the harvest actually does want to use you and me to accomplish his sovereign saving purpose.

For Jesus tells us what to pray when we pray the Lord of the harvest. He says, Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers and do his harvest. Notice it's still his harvest, but we, you and I, are the harvesters.

[6 : 03] So here's a prayer. Ah, welcome. Here's a prayer. I try to pray most every day as I go out to be among my neighbors in the world. Lord, just like you assured Paul in Corinth, remember in Acts 18, Jesus tells Paul in Corinth, I trust you have many people in this city or in this gym or in this college or in this book club or toddler group, whatever it is, whose hearts you are preparing.

Lord of the harvest, would you sovereignly cause them to just cross my path today and make me attentive to those providences that you've orchestrated?

I'm available to bear witness to my Christ-shaped hope. So here's a question for us, a non-rhetorical. We can talk about this. Is there some place where you could be cued to pray such a prayer?

Lord, I'm ready. I'm your witness bearer. Orchestrate some people to cross my path. I'm going to be attentive to your province. Would there be some sort of place in your typical day that would cue you?

Maybe like the Q Bridge. The name would even cue you, perhaps. If you're driving in across the Q Bridge and you're coming across the bridge, you think, okay, Q Bridge, Q, that's my cue. I'm going into my day and I'm going to pray that the Lord might give me an opportunity to bear witness to him.

[7 : 35] Or maybe it would be the elevator where you are going up, you're rising up to your lab on the whatever floor it is, and as it lifts you up, you lift up your eyes to the harvest, and that cues you to pray your prayer.

So think through your day a little bit, and what might be something that could cue you, to prompt you, remind you to pray that prayer.

For me, it's the door of my gym. When I hit the, and I put my hand on that door, I say, okay, Lord, I'm opening this door. Could you open some doors for me in this space here?

And open doors of people's hearts and start opening. So whenever my hand hits that door, and it's almost always closed, very rarely does somebody open it for me, so I always have that cue.

It just reminds me to say that prayer. So that helps to put me into the pattern of actually being prayerful to the Lord of the harvest for the harvest.

[8 : 36] So think through your day and what thing might be able to cue you. Anybody have an idea or any thought about their day? Anything that, Dennis, we're just talking about.

Any, any, when we want to pray to the Lord of the harvest, and anything that might cue us in our morning to pray. Whether you associate your coffee pot in the morning with saying a prayer, whatever it is.

Anybody have any ideas? What would you, what would work for you? Yeah, yeah. Maybe taking my vitamins in the last. I like that. Okay, if that happens pretty consistently, you want to piggyback some habits on other habits.

So that's fantastic. Yeah, that's fantastic, Fiona. Yeah, right with, associate it with your vitamin pills. Anybody else? What would, what would work as a good cue for your day? To, a reminder to pray the Lord of the harvest.

Yeah, Beth. We share in driveway, so there's often times we cross paths in our driveway with our neighbors. Excellent. There you go. Yeah. Whatever works well for you, find a good cue.

[9 : 37] Because I'm, I'm just staggered at how much I, I'm kind of convinced that prayer is important, but how forgetful I can be, it just is a really, a really big help for me if I have these little prompts and reminders and cues, if you will, to pray.

Okay, so, in fact, why don't we do it right now? Why don't you just turn to the person on your left, or right, or whatever it is, and just, just say a quick, just, we're not going to take a lot of time, but just a

quick pray that the Lord would help to remind us to be prayerful in regard to the harvest. All right? Okay, let's do it right now. All right? Dear Heavenly Father, Lord, we pray that you would help us to find times throughout the day consistently to pray to you and ask that you would providentially cause us to cross paths with someone whose heart you have been working on, intending to for some time, and that we might be alert to those signs, and we might be ready to have a conversation, to ask good questions, that we might not be scared, that our tongue might not be tied in those moments, but we might trust that you will give us the words to say and help us to never have a dull moment in which we think we're no longer used for you and your kingdom. Amen. Lord, make us prayerful harvesters. In Jesus' name. All right, team, far be it from me to interrupt your prayers, but that's what I just did. Yeah. Yeah. But to be continued. Well, there's your first starter step. Be prayerful. A second starter step is be prepared.

[11 : 25] Be prepared. Be prepared first in terms of content. Okay? Now, we've given a good bit of attention to this in our time together.

What's some of the things that we've discussed in terms of content? Well, be prepared in terms of having some good questions in your pocket, which could prove serviceable in starting a conversation.

Remember, that's something that we talked about. So, maybe jot down, okay, I'm going to spend some time to think of some good questions that I could use when I encounter someone. And remember what some of those things are.

Those are questions that we want to get at what they care about, because we want to connect the gospel to what they care about. So, these are the sorts of questions.

There was a fellow that introduced himself as an actor the other day. So, the question I asked was, Oh, wow. So, if you were to think of your life as a many-act drama, freeze frame just a couple of moments that were critical acts in your life that have made you the person that you are, that you aspire to be.

[12 : 43] I'd love to hear that if you'd love to share that. Oh, and he got so excited. And then I found out what were the things that were really important to him and shaped him. So, it's just a fun way.

So, to have good questions like that, and maybe think through what would be some natural questions for you to ask that would be really natural and fun questions for the people who are in your circles.

They think, Oh, that's a great question. I'd love to answer that. So, that would be one way that we could kind of be prepared. Another way that we can be prepared is thinking through our own story of how we came to faith and how we might be able to deploy the different themes.

So, think through your story, and probably it's probably as varied, its themes are probably many. Was it a sense of giving me a sense of meaning?

Was it just a sense of forgiveness that was important to me? What were the themes that came together that the Spirit used in drawing me to himself? And then you think of the different themes, and you think, Well, you know what?

[13 : 48] I wonder, that theme might resonate with this particular person. If I had a chance with them, I bet you that would be a good way to share. And again, the themes are probably going to be as multiple as the distributaries in the Nile Delta.

So, you'll have a lot to pick from. But if you could just be ready with some of those themes, and they're at hand, then that would be a good way to prepare. Remember how you want to frame the discussions collaboratively.

Remember, we talked about you don't want it to be oppositional. Well, you believe this, and you behave that, and I believe differently, and I behave differently, and I'm going to try to rest you over to this way. That's really kind of, that's an antagonistic way to frame it.

But remember, we want to try to frame our discussions collaboratively. Hey, ever confused about what the shape of life and meaning of life is? You ever feel like it's like a thousand-piece puzzle, and we don't know what the picture is?

Hey, have you think you've come up with any corner pieces, or any straight lines that give us clues? I'd love to hear what you're thinking. So then you're, see, how you're just, you're solving the mystery of life together collaboratively, and you're getting into these themes.

[15 : 05] So think of some sort of way that you might frame your encounters collaboratively. That would be another way to begin to prepare. Make it a habit, another great way to prepare, make it a

habit to keep asking, now how is the gospel good news for me today?

What are, what are some of the Christ-shaped hopes that are particularly vivid for me? Why am I so glad that the gospel has encountered me?

And if you can keep that fresh, that will be, that will, that will give you, I think, fresh motivation. And then just, just it kind of bubbles up all these good things about why the gospel is such good news. So that's another good way to be prepared. And you know, I often find that when I'm prepared to take opportunities, I tend to notice those opportunities a little bit more acutely, because I'm prepared.

So that can be really helpful. But, so, so, we want to be prepared. We want to be prepared. But, don't let your perception of not being adequately prepared keep you from engaging.

[16:26] Does that make sense? You know, it's easy to think, okay, I need to prepare, I need to prepare. It's kind of like, I need to prepare for this exam. You know, a lot of you think in those terms, oh, I'm not quite prepared yet. I want to postpone having to take this thing.

So you might postpone, no, no, no, no. Don't let your sense of not being quite as prepared as you'd like to be keep you from taking opportunities. Why?

Well, because remember that first one, pray the Lord of the harvest. The Lord of the harvest can give you an encounter that's really easy.

He might be able to give you an encounter like that of Paul with the Philippian jailer. Where Paul doesn't say anything first.

The Philippian jailer comes up to him and says, what must I do to be saved? You think, oh, that's a pretty, that's a slightly easier one. I didn't think I was going to, you know, I thought I was going to have to be more prepared.

[17:25] No, no. No, that's a, that's a pretty easy one. And he can do that. And sometimes I don't feel, you know, I, I'll just, I'll just tell the Lord in prayer that I'm feeling really flat.

I had a rough night. I'm not feeling very eloquent or I'm not feeling very creative. And I remind him, and usually it's more of a reassurance to myself than a reminder of God.

Okay. But that he delights. Remember, Lord, you delight. You said in 1 Corinthians 1:27, you delight to use the weak things in this world. Oh, but I'm a candidate for that today.

Looks like I'm qualified. I'm feeling really weak. Yeah. And accordingly, Lord, I, I, I suppose I'm eminently qualified for using me as you delight to put your treasure in little common crack pots, earthen vessels.

You know, 2 Corinthians 4:7. So once again, I seem eminently qualified. I'm just that. I'm just an old chamber pot. I'm feeling that way right now.

[18:28] And then I just tell him, Lord, if you'd taper the opportunity to my slender capacities, and Lord, if you just, just all you need to do, Lord of the harvest, is just, if you, if you kind of lob a softball right over the plate, I'll, I'll, I'll do my best to swing at it.

But it's got to be a softball and it's got to lob right for the plate, right over the plate, then I will. And that's fine. That's fine to do. And the Lord loves to honor our faith, even though it's just faith the size of a mustard seed.

That's okay. He loves to do that. So let's just be honest, pray the Lord of the harvest, and he can orchestrate that. He can orchestrate that. And, you know, I tell him, well, and I, you know, keep, keep, keep loft them over the plate and I'll keep swinging.

But in between swings, however inept I perceive myself to be, as to the opportunities that the Lord provides, I will, in the interim, between swings, be deliberately and diligently sowing to a growing preparedness.

I want to keep, keep being prepared. I don't just want to keep asking you to lob really, really softballs. I want to keep being prepared.

[19:45] For who knows? Maybe someday I might even be able to swing at a curveball if I keep trying to prepare myself a little bit.

So, you know, God will meet us just where we are and where we need to start with. But we want to keep, keep moving and getting, getting some more preparedness. So who knows?

Maybe a curveball or a speedball or whatever. I'm, I'm, I'm running out of my baseball knowledge here on this stuff. Okay. So we want to be prepared in terms of content.

Okay. But, but not just content, but also context. Because, because in our, in our witness bearing, it doesn't just involve communicating content. It's always going to involve some sort of context for the

communication of that content.

And it's really important for witness bearers, for us as witness bearers, to think about this also. What might be the womb of a good extended and comfortable natural conversation?

[20 : 51] So we think about that. And, and we're all, we're all embedded in our group of friends in our society. So we're going to have really good instincts about what, what would be a really, what might be the womb of a good extended, comfortable, natural conversation.

And then we think, well, how could I generate such a context? Is there, is there something that I could do to generate that? And Jesus found a really good context for a conversation at a well in Samaria or, or walking along the seashore.

Have you ever noticed in the gospels how often he's like walking along the seashore? Once he put out in a boat just off the shore where he wouldn't be too crowded and the acoustics would be marvelous.

Jesus thought about where and how conversations might happen well. And so should we as witness bearers.

So let me ask you, what do you think would be some of the contextual ingredients of a good womb for conversations?

[22 : 04] Just among the people that you were with. What, what would be, what would be some good contextual ingredients? What would help make for the prospect of a good conversation?

Thoughts? Shared experiences.

Shared experiences. Okay. And, and what would be the context in which you might be able to share some experiences? I don't know. I was talking to someone who was also with a family this morning. So I ended up just like choosing to talk about the God. So something that they hadn't owned.

Actually, yeah. Go, go into a place where you, you have some sort of understanding that a person would, would be really ready to have a conversation about this sort of thing.

Ah, that, that's helpful. Yeah. You, you, you, you think about, you think about where would they, and, and are, do you find that, that, that people are ready to have a conversation just about anywhere they are?

[23 : 08] Probably not. Probably not. People are in incredible hurry. Sometimes people have those, you know, earbuds in or, you know, they're just like, like, don't you dare intrude upon my personal space.

You think that's rough. Can't even get their attention, you know, to warn them that, you know, their pants are on fire or something. You know, they're, they're so, so, you know, context becomes important.

But, but, but where have you found there to be, wow, what do you know? Good conversation.

Good, good context for conversation. Long lines.

Say, long lines. Excellent. Yeah, yeah, long lines. Here I am. You're not going anyplace. Neither am I. We're kind of shuffling around, awkward, and then, boop. You know, something humorous to break the awkwardness.

And, you know, I'm dying to have a conversation, but I can't quite think of it. And, and yeah, you've got one. Yeah, you've got a conversation. What about, what about over a meal?

[24 : 07] Is, is that, we're finding people are thinking, I mean, good grief. Even a Yale student occasionally has to like break from their work. And sometimes that happens when you're actually shoving food in your mouth instead of ideas into your head.

So, over a meal could be a good spot. You know, could be a good context for doing this. I found a great context in a sauna, would you believe.

Guys come in, they're sitting around. They're willing to be pretty vulnerable because they're buck naked. You know, and, and, you know, it's a small group, so it's not a large crowd. So, you can just keep one conversation.

Really great. Iver, were you, were you, yeah? Yeah? I had a co-worker who was a black Muslim. And where did that happen, Iver?

Where did that conversation break out? What? Where did that conversation break out? What was the context for that? Well, I asked him a question about the mothership. Okay. And he had time, presumably, to answer.

[25 : 08] He did to me. Yeah. And he started asking me questions about my faith. And it went back and forth. I don't think we converted each other. Yeah, yeah. But. I'm relieved to hear that at least

half, I'm relieved to hear at least half of that.

Yeah, but he, he had, he did say one time to another, at least he's a man of faith. Uh-huh. Good. That's one thing he did say to me once. Yeah, good.

Is it over lunch? No, we were just. Just working sideways. Yeah. Okay. Yeah. Yeah. And some of the conversations, some of the context for conversations we're going to find.

Sometimes we have to forge them. We've got to put them together. All right, guys. Hey, let's go on a hike. You know, usually if I have good conversations in the sauna and I realize, oh, this person's getting really ripe, but I need to get a, just about a good hour with them.

Um, and, uh, not, you know, a little bit away from the crowd. I say, okay, hike, let's go for a hike. And that's a, that's a good one too.

[26 : 12] Conversations. And you can, a lot can happen going up and down East Rock even. And that's really local. So be thinking in terms of, you know, start, start your wheels, your imaginative wheels turning on what are the good contexts.

Because so often in witness bearing, we tend to be thinking about, well, what would I say? What would be a good way to say it? That's all good. And we've talked about that. But absolutely critical is not just the content, but the context.

Where would be a place where I would get a chance to do that? Where we'd be able to maybe have a half an hour to have a leisurely conversation. Where they won't be distracted.

Won't be agitated. So we want to think about context. So that's the second one. The third starter step is be at peace.

Be at peace. I don't know. Having just had a Sunday school series on witness bearing, it seems to me it's really easy to feel anxious about, oh, there were so many principles there.

[27 : 16] I got to remember all these principles. And I got to get all these things lined up. And I got to get it just right. And I got to be able to answer all the questions. And we can think, you know, it's kind of like trying to keep all that information before you go in and take your exam.

You know, just for fear that there's a leak in the bucket. And you can feel a little bit anxious. But we have wonderful reason to be at peace in this matter of witness bearing.

Wonderful reason to be at peace. Because remember that God is sovereign. He's the Lord of the harvest. And he will infallibly draw his own.

It says in John 6, 37, all that the Father has given me, Jesus assures us, will come. And that our message to those who are appointed to life will be a fragrance of life.

A fragrance of life. Just like the apple pie that kind of draws you into the kitchen. I'm always led into the kitchen by something wonderful that needed to be made that's just fragrant throughout the house.

[28 : 24] So we will be the fragrance of life to those who are appointed to life. And God appoints people to life. It says in Acts 13, 48, as many as were ordained to life, they believed.

So there will be people who will respond. And God will sovereignly open hearts to the message as it's communicated. Just as he did with Lydia in Acts 16.

It says the Lord opened her heart to receive the things that Paul said. Or Cornelius in Acts 10. So many examples. So that could encourage us. That could encourage us. And remember that a spiritual change of heart does not ultimately pivot upon our sophistication as witness bearers.

It doesn't. If it did, Jesus would have told the parable of the sower and the soils, remember that, in a different way. You know, he might have said something like, well, a sower went out to sow.

But that first sower didn't have a very good technique. So he didn't get any harvest. Happily, though, another came with another method of seed dispersal.

[29 : 35] But he too failed, alas, to be productive. For the technique, which is all about getting the flick of the wrist just right, was pivotally missing.

But then there came one who had mastered that technique and raised up a harvest 30, 60, yay, a hundredfold. Well done, that witness bearer.

Let her who has ears hear. No! No! Okay? For those of you that might not be familiar with the Gospels, that's not the way Jesus told the parable. Okay?

The sower goes out and simply sows. I mean, there's almost, as you read, don't you get impressed, there's almost like this, a careless prodigality in sowing.

Some ends up on the road. Would somebody, you know, he's just getting that seed out. Getting that seed out. So, well, let me ask this.

[30 : 34] In the real parable, okay, not the fake one, not the false parable that I just, that I gave. Okay? In the real parable, it's in Matthew 13, it's in Mark 8, it's in Luke 8. What is it that accounts for the absence or the quality of the harvest?

Do you remember in the real parable? What is it that accounts for either the abundance or the absence of harvest? What was the distinguishing difference? Do you remember?

Is it the technique of the sower? What? What was it? Anybody remember? Yeah! The soil type! Yeah, exactly! The different soil types. In other words, what was the heart type that receives that seed of the word?

It's exactly that. So, we want to just, it's the soil type. So, is it the burden of this, next question, is it the burden of the sower to change the soil type?

No! No! He just keeps throwing the seed. Just keeps throwing the seed. And what the seed does, as the gospel seed goes in, that will reveal what the soil type is.

[31 : 58] Is it a responsive soil type? Or is it resistant? Okay? So, so, so the, and the gospel itself will reveal what the heart soil is, responsive or resistant.

Which really is simply to reveal where the Spirit of God has been preparing the heart and rendering it. And rendering it soft and malleable and humus-like, rich to, to, to, to, to, to, to, to, to receive those seeds.

Okay? So, so, and we'll make the hearts willing in the day of salvation, as it says. So, we as witness bearers don't need to be anxious about our ability to change soil types, to change heart types, or rather our inability.

We don't need to be anxious about our inability. We don't have an ability to do that. We simply sow and leave the soil and the results to the Lord of the harvest. We can be at peace.

We can be at peace. Indeed, let's be of good cheer for whether our message meets with a joyful acceptance or determined opposition, whether it's a fragrance of life or a scent of death.

[33 : 26] In either case, what is the other aroma present? Take a look at 2 Corinthians 2.16.

2 Corinthians 2.16, where it describes us. We as witness bearers are going out, and we bring the message. For some, that's going to be a fragrance of life to those who are appointed to life.

And for some, it's going to be a scent of death. But who else is smelling something?

A lot of smells going on there, aren't there? Who else is smelling something? And what is being smelled? Look up at verse 15, the one just prior. What else?

Yeah, yeah, Alex. Yeah, okay, God is smelling something. What's God smelling? The aroma of Christ. Ha, ha, ha, ha, yeah. Do you see that? Isn't that motivating?

[34 : 30] That when we go out with the gospel, and when we declare the gospel, whether it is the scent of life or the aroma of life to those who are appointed life, or whether it's the scent of death, in either case, in either case, it is a sweet-smelling savor to the Father.

Because the message that we are communicating is a message that centers in the Son of His love. And that just delights the Father's heart. So even if some people are feeling like your gospel presentation has a bad smell to them, it has an incredibly sweet smell to the Father.

He is absolutely delighted at that fragrance. So that's wonderfully motivating. It motivates me a lot that he is smelling that.

Well, I wonder, hey, can anybody testify to the possible anxiety that we can feel when we're trying to get this thing right of witness-bearing, when we're wondering if we're going to be successful or fruitful or fruitless witness-bearers?

Anybody feel any anxiety about that? Well, let me ask, what is it among these truths or others that encourages you?

[35 : 53] Because, yeah, an anxiety can really prevent us from taking any steps. But is there something that can be a solvent to that anxiety? I don't know.

If anybody wants to share an anxiety or maybe a solvent to it, anybody have anything to share? Yeah, yeah. Frequently, for me, in conversations, I'm scared about, like, oh, if I bring up Jesus at some point, are they going to walk away?

Yeah. Something that's helped me so much is I've been so encouraged by the fact a lot of times people will share they've actually been thinking about, you know, God or faith or Jesus.

And that sort of helped me to appreciate the fact that in every conversation, I don't know what the soil type is. Yeah. I don't know how, you know, God may have been working in their hearts previously.

So I try not to anticipate the worst when I go into conversations. Yeah. And because I found it, it tends to be, like, it's not the worst case scenario.

[36 : 53] Yeah, yeah. A lot of conversations. And what spiritual truth gives you some sort of confidence that, you know, I don't need to expect the worst every time? Hmm. I would just say simply, simply the one of, I will never leave us, not forsake us.

Well, God is with me, yeah, absolutely. Yeah, that makes a difference. I think, I think for me, knowing the fact that God is going to put us through an experience that won't in some way be for our good sanctification.

Yeah. Like, even if it is a really tough conversation, I can deal with that with a more prayer. Yeah, yeah. But typically, he's, you know, he's faithful to reward us for, you know, seeking out those opportunities.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And he, and he goes before he's preparing. I mean, this is kind of like Philip in the Desert, you know, the behold. Oh, what do you know? There's actually someone here.

I thought I would be all alone. And, and, because, you know, God is not just sending us out. He's also sending people across our path that he's prepared.

[38 : 00] That he's prepared. So, yeah, yeah. And, you know, there is, there is a wonderful promise of fruitfulness.

In, in John 15, in John 15. So, this would be a great study. We can't do the whole thing now, but there, there, there are three times in the, in the, in the high priestly prayer.

So, from 13 through 17. That Jesus tells his disciples, ask me for anything and I'll do it. Come on, I dare you.

Ask me for anything. And, it's so interesting to see the immediate context of each of those three times that he says that. And, one of them is in John 15.

Where the context is, you didn't choose me. I chose you and I appointed you to go out and to bear fruit and fruit that would abide.

[38 : 58] Therefore, ask me for anything and I'll do it. Now, notice the context of that, that prayer is going out and sharing the gospel and it bearing fruitfulness.

And, in that context, Jesus says, ask me for anything and I'll do it. I'll do it. Like, I did, you know, I always feel like Jesus said, come on, I dare you to.

I dare you to ask me. And, watch how I'm going to answer that. Well, it's just wonderful encouragement. Wonderful encouragement. And, you know, we could take that maybe individually, certainly collectively.

He's telling his disciples there. You know, this is the intimate group, you know, there. And, certainly collectively. So, it certainly, certainly would apply collectively.

As we go out as the people of God and we bear witness, we will be fruitful. You know, so, maybe this is filled out by, remember in John 4, at the woman at the well, where Jesus explains that, hey, some sow and others reap.

[40 : 13] And, you know, you've had a chance to reap and harvest where other people sowed.

And, maybe they sowed and didn't quite see the harvest in the way that you're seeing the harvest.

But, that's okay. Because, we all get to enter into each other's joy. So, we collectively, as the people of God, will be fruitful in the harvest.

And, we all might have a slightly different part. But, that's okay. We all enter into each other's joy.

It's just a wonderful thing. And, each person contributing their might or gripe of goat's hair, whatever it is, or two pigeons worth.

And, together it'll all... I remember one time, I was buying a car. And, I had to fill out something to try to get a loan. And, when he said, I was a missionary. He said, I don't know.

I don't know. What's that? And, I answered him. I said, oh, how much time do you have? It is the most wonderful thing imaginable. I get, I get to try to explain to people who can't imagine how Jesus could have the slightest relevance to their life.

[41 : 26] How, actually, he has supreme relevance. In a way that is just absolutely, thunderingly thrilling. And, he said, oh, that's interesting.

And, then just went on. I thought, well, that's odd. Oh, well, I tried. I tried. But, then he put his pen down and waited. And, he said, are you one of those born-again types? I said, it could be.

But, I'm not exactly sure what you mean by that. So, you need to tell me a little bit. And, then I could know. And, he said, well, we've got a guy on our floor. And, he is one.

You know, he's never, we've never really had a conversation about these things. But, he's a real stand-up guy. And, I've been watching him for years. And, you know, if, if you have what he has, I want to hear about it.

I want to hear about it. Now, do you think that for all of my efforts to have a conversation with this used car salesman, I would have had a chance to have that conversation without that other guy who just had lived a really stand-up, that was a used car, stand-up life in a used car lot?

[42 : 42] That's what gave me. I was piggybacking. I was piggybacking. I just got to harvest a little bit where this good brother, who I don't even know, never had a chance to meet, had been sowing.

So, we all have our part. And, we all can enter into each other's joy. Whether, and together, it will be fruitful.

It will be fruitful. Because, the Lord delights to answer that prayer when we ask. He's told us, ask me for anything in respect to fruitful witness bearing.

Okay. So, our final step is to, for, begin. Begin, okay? Not gin. Okay. Begin.

That's okay. Okay. And, perhaps you've pondered in your mind some sort of actions that you would want to take. Maybe you formulated some notion of what your first step might be in this area of witness bearing.

[43 : 49] And, it can be extremely helpful once some notion is in our mind about, you know, I think this is something that I'd like to try to do.

To actually begin and take that step. Or, at least a half step toward taking that step fully. As, as George MacDonald observes, good notions must take advantage of their first ripeness.

Good notions must take advantage of their first ripeness. Tape these two together.

Or, as Spurgeon so memorably puts it. She will not lose her loaf who has taken care to eat it at once.

Neither can he be deprived of the benefit of the doctrine who has already acted upon it. And, then he goes on to compare some of our best intentions to put something into practice.

[44 : 55] Or, a fresh resolve. As a blossom which has not been knit all too often. And, therefore, no fruit comes of it. Such, as so often I am like.

Such, wait, waver, and then forget. And, Spurgeon goes on. Till like, oh, what an image. Till like the ponds in nights of frost.

When the sun shines by day, they are only thawed in time to be frozen again overnight. So, all this to say, let's begin.

Let's identify something. Some step that we could take. So, maybe on the paper that you have, take a moment right now to reflect, to discern if God is laying on your heart, maybe someone in your circle whom you could begin to regularly pray for.

Just think and just jot down, jot down their name. Is there someone that comes to mind? Maybe the Spirit prompting you to think, you know, they're in my circle. Maybe, maybe I would have a chance.

[46 : 10] Just pray. Begin praying for that person. Begin praying for a good encounter that you might have. Jot that name down. Or, additionally, is there some impression?

Just think back about your involvement in all the classes. Is there some impression that you've received in our studies together which you would like to act on?

Anything. Perhaps thinking through your story and how you came to faith and identifying some of the themes. Perhaps formulating some good salient germinal questions which might lead to good conversations.

Perhaps begin thinking a little bit more about what would be a promising context for such conversations. Could I have a dinner party? Would I go for a walk with a buddy?

And how might you be able to find or forge that? So, I'll encourage you to formulate some resolution that's concrete and realistic, which could become a first step for you in this adventure of witness bearing.

[47 : 28] Anybody have an aspiration that they'd like to share? Just as an example. I'd like to take a first half step by... Maybe I need a little bit more time to think about this.

Oh, sorry for you. Get us a guess once, you know? I like the idea of remembering to pray for folks every day. I do like regularly. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Who I'm praying for, but then also, I think it would be good to set up...

I think coffee is a great time to shout out to people. Yeah. To know them better. Excellent. I keep saying people are going to coffee. I'm going to get coffee with, but I never do. Yeah. Great.

No, that's fantastic. Making the call. Yeah, yeah. And I promise you, Fiona, if you actually follow through on this, and every day you are praying for opportunities, I know God will answer that in ways that will be so thrilling to you, you will be getting regular goosebumps. It'll be thrilling. Because he just loves to answer prayers like that. And you've already thought of the context. Having coffee together. Which, presumably, is a really natural thing to do within your circle. [48 : 39] Wouldn't be strange at all. Yeah. Great. Oh, that's fantastic. That's a great example. That's a great example. And maybe you could find a brother or sister who you could communicate that to, or a wife or a husband, that can help encourage you and buttress your best resolves in this area.

You could find someone and pray with it that you would be fruitful in that. So finally, and with this we'll conclude, be prepared.

Once you have a resolution, once your heart is set on following through, be prepared for opposition to these aspirations.

Do you remember Jesus in the parable of the sower? Or he soberly warns that whenever the seed goes out and is aimed at the heart, the adversary will seek to swoop down like a bird and pluck up the seed before it can germinate.

He has come to steal. And no doubt the adversary is present right here, right now.

[49 : 58] I'm not trying to be overdramatic. This is what the parable says. Okay. Whenever, whenever the word goes out and is trying to lodge in a heart, sitting on your shoulder, is our adversary perched, ready to swoop down on your tender resolutions and keep them from germinating.

So just be aware. Yes, we are opposed by a foe and a formidable one at that. But remember, he is a defeated foe. Entrust these resolutions of your heart to the good shepherd who, just as with his sheep, he will not lose one of them.

He will not lose one of these resolutions. As Paul said, I know who I believed in, that he is able to keep that which I've committed to him against that day.

All right. Team, I'm so sorry, but we do need to conclude now, unless that clock is super fast. So we'll end there. Any final follow-up questions, comments?

Yeah, I wanted to ask, how do we proceed when we mostly have contact with people in a group?

Yeah, yeah. At lunch or at work or something like that.

[51 : 24] Right. Well, in a group, one then has to try to cast the message in what you are pretty confident.

You might not realize in every particular what they care about, but you probably, if you know your culture well, there are going to be some general things. So you want to just kind of take a general guess what people care about, but then you want to be as concrete as you can.

So just say, if you, you know, if people are, if you think that people in this age group or, you know, they're university students, they are thinking about meaning. How do I put life together in a way that gives me meaning?

You can be pretty confident that they're going to be thinking through that. So you think, I'm going to translate the gospel into that, in terms of that question. And then you want to be as concrete as you can, but then remember you want to use their vernacular.

Who, you know, who do you want to quote with a bunch of, you know, you know, students from Rome? Okay. You probably don't want to quote Mary Poppins or, you know, you, you know, you, you would probably, you know, you might quote Marcuse or Brancuse or you, you, you, you, you use, you use the philosophers, you use the thinkers, you use the artists, you use the cultural tropes that are familiar with them.

[52 : 49] So you translate it into their language. So you are, you're bringing the cup, you're, you're, you're putting the water of life in their own silverware and their own cups.

So you let them drink the water of life out of their own cultural cup. And you can do that in a group because largely our, our cultures bleed into each other.

Yes, we're all individually microcultured, but we share probably in a broader culture. So that's the way to begin to think about that. Yeah, sure. Yeah. Last one. I never thought of it this way.

It's a different thing. But usually what I would do is like, I usually like study the Bible. And because I'm knowledgeable of it, it increases my desire.

So God is like, because I'm always willing to share faith or whatever I do for God put in these situations where now it's time to exercise.

[53 : 54] See, that's a, that is an excellent observation because a lot of times, just one quick distinction, a lot of times we're thinking in terms of being relevant. Okay, well, what are the questions that they're asking? And that's, that, that's important.

But also, this gentleman, I'm sorry, I forget, but it's just, right, said, but sometimes, Curtis, the, the, Ernest, is it Ernest? Oh, no, no, Ernest, I want to get it right.

Okay, sorry. We're not always asking the best questions. The Bible is asking the questions that we need to be asking. Okay, but the Bible asks questions that are deeply human and most authentic to humanity, fallen humanity.

So sometimes, we need to try to get people to be asking those biblical questions. So this is, but, but because they're deeply human, they are going to resonate with their deep humanness.

So we want to not just ask questions that seem relevant, in other words, that people have a felt need for, but try to help them to ask questions that are resonant, that are the Bible's questions that are resonant with their own humanity and help them to ask that.

[55 : 03] That's a great question. Yeah, I've thought of it in these terms and then you might slightly reformulate it, but, you know, it's not, it's collaborative. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, that's a great question.

Here, let me, let me sketch the nose this way on this, on this thing and then you're, you're adjusting, you want resonant. We better go though. Thank you so much for that helpful. Thank you team. Really enjoyed this and I'll be praying for your, your, your resolution follow through. Thank you.