

Journey to the Gospel

Acts 17:16-21

Part of sharing the gospel successfully is meeting people where they are and walking them to Jesus

Pastor Patrick Holt recounts the story of his dad's salvation.

"My father was born in 1923 to an unsaved father and a Christian mother. He attended church as a small boy with his mother but stopped going as a teen. He dropped out of school in the tenth grade to help on their farm during the Depression. He served in the Army during World War II in the South Pacific.

After returning home from the war, he met my mother, and they would be married in 1947. Although my dad didn't attend church, he told my mom that we would attend a church that was about ten miles from us when there was one that was only a mile and a half from us. After attending for a short time and hearing about salvation, my mom was saved.

And thus began the many years of praying for the salvation of my father. My dad would allow us to go to Sunday school and church on Sunday mornings and to revival meetings. My dad disliked the church and preachers. He said that churches only wanted people's money. He would normally attend our Christmas program in December. Many people joined us in praying for my dad's salvation.

About 20 years later a young soul-winning man became our pastor. My dad began to attend church on Sunday evenings. One summer Sunday afternoon after baptizing some new converts in a river near us, my brother-in-law, who had been saved a few weeks before, asked our pastor if he would come over and talk to my dad about salvation. My brother-in-law and I went over to my parents' home, knowing that our pastor was coming.

This time my dad didn't go out the opposite door as the preacher came to the door. After some conversation, my pastor asked Dad about salvation. Dad responded that he had never been saved. My preacher gave the plan of salvation and asked my dad if he wanted to be saved.

My dad simply shook his head "No."

My preacher, knowing that my dad was under conviction, pleaded with him one more time, and we knelt at a footstool in the living room, and for the first time in my life, I heard my dad pray as he received Christ as his Savior. We were all crying as we rose from our knees. Dad was saved about 26 years after Mom had begun praying for my dad!

Here are a few thoughts that might encourage you. My dad's mother never saw my dad come to Christ because she died from a house fire while he was in the Philippines during World War II. Still, God answered her prayer that her son would be saved!

While in the Philippines, God paired my dad with a Christian young man from North Carolina. The two men carried wounded and dead back from the front and then returned with supplies on their trip back. This buddy prayed for my dad to be saved, and his prayer was answered.

The reason why my dad wanted us to attend the church farther away was because he worked with a Christian man who attended that church, and he was always witnessing about Jesus. My dad knew that church cared about souls. Our witness on the job does matter!

Although my dad was verbally abusive to my mom, she still taught us to honor and love and respect him. She was in subjection to him. Because of her submissive spirit, he allowed her to teach a primary Sunday school class for over 30 years.

Don't give up! Keep praying and believing!"

Sharing the gospel is difficult. Sharing the gospel requires us to be determined, faithful, prayerful, and obedient to the will of the word and Spirit of God.

The reason I am excited about our text this morning is twofold:

- It helps the believer understand and value that sharing the gospel is often a process.
- It helps the person here today who does not know Jesus, understand the need for salvation and the depth of the love of God.

We want to be a church, a family that reaches out to the lost, to those who do not know Jesus.

We want to be a church that preaches and teaches the gospel, recognizing the absolute need of the salvation of the lost.

If you are here today and do not have a relationship with Jesus, I plead with you right now to listen, pay attention, allow the Spirit of God to work in your heart this morning.

Let's jump into our text.

We remember Paul was run out of Thessalonica and Berea and he went to Athens, and is waiting for Silas and Timothy.

¹⁶ Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols. ¹⁷ So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present. ¹⁸ And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, "What would this idle babbler wish to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,"— because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ And they took him and brought

him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? ²⁰ For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean.” ²¹ (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)

²² So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. ²³ For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, ‘TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.’ Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; ²⁵ nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; ²⁶ and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, ²⁷ that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; ²⁸ for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children.’ ²⁹ Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. ³⁰ Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, ³¹ because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

³² Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, “We shall hear you again concerning this.” ³³ So Paul went out of their midst. ³⁴ But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

In this text we are made aware of several tips to sharing the gospel message in our lives.

I. TIPS FOR SHARING THE GOSPEL

A. Be Sensitive to the Spirit as You Go Throughout Your Day

¹⁶ Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols.

After getting off at the harbor of Piraeus, Paul walks through Athens and enters the famous city through one of the northwest gates.

As Paul walks through the city, adorned with magnificent architectural structures, massive temples, marvelous sculptures of idols, instead of feeling a sense of awe and wonder he feels a sense of indignation.

The English word “provoked” is not a strong enough translation. Paul is infuriated at the sight of the idol worship and temples.

His heart was simultaneously hurt and angry.

Look with me at verse 17.

(The Next Three Points Come from Verse 17-18)

17 So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present.

In this single verse we observe 2 important principles of personal evangelism.

B. Be Intentional about Gospel Conversations as you Go Throughout Your Day

Paul made his customary stop at the Jewish synagogue in Athens.

Paul was intentional about where he went and who he engaged.

He made a point each day to encounter those who did not know Jesus.

If we are not intentional about sharing the gospel, we will not share the gospel.

C. Take Every Opportunity to Share the Gospel as You Go Throughout the Day

Not only did Paul go to the Jewish synagogue, but he also went to the marketplace.

This was not like our farmer's market.

On a daily basis he went to the agora, the most famous marketplace or hub in Athens.

The agora is lined on each side with altars, statues, and temples. The area is used for buying, selling, and other commercial purposes.

This was a busy place with lots of people doing business and gathering.

Paul knew this was the hub of the city and went there on purpose to meet people, have gospel conversations, lead and introduce people to Jesus.

He used his time wisely to take every opportunity to share the gospel

D. Do Not Prejudge People as You Go Throughout Your Day

18 And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, "What would this idle babbler wish to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

While there he encounters the Epicureans and the Stoics.

The Epicureans tended to follow Aristotle's teachings and were more realists in their philosophy. They believed the universe consisted of atoms and that all reality is material.

The Stoics tended to go along with the ideas of Plato who was more of an idealist. They believed reality existed apart from the material.

These two groups would argue back and forth all day.

They loved to entertain new ideas.

So, when they heard Paul, they wanted to understand his message. After hearing a small part of his message they called him a babbler, which meant a person who picked up ideas from many places and put them together, but didn't really know what he was talking about.

To hear more, they invited him to come to the Areopagus.

The Areopagus was a hill adjacent to the Acropolis. This hill stood 378 feet high and once served as the location for the supreme court of Athens.

Next to the Areopagus was the Acropolis. The Acropolis housed the many major temples of Athens including the temple of Athena which measured 228 feet by 101 feet.

It was truly an intimidating setting.

Paul knew who they were and what they were saying about him.

But notice what Paul did not do. He did not talk about them. He did not gossip about them. He did not discuss their motives.

Paul did not prejudge them and thus rob them of an opportunity to hear the gospel.

When we prejudge how someone will respond to the gospel, we make the gospel small.

II. WHEN SHARING THE GOSPEL (Paul's Sermon)

²² So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. ²³ For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; ²⁵ nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; ²⁶ and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, ²⁷ that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; ²⁸ for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.' ²⁹ Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. ³⁰ Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, ³¹ because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

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In Paul's sermon, in which Luke recorded the highlights, Paul walks these philosophers through the plan of God.

In his speech we are given several helpful tips when sharing the gospel.

A. Recognize Where a Person is Spiritually

Paul knew he was talking to two different groups of philosophers.

- The Epicureans
- The Stoics

"Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. ²³ For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.'

The Greeks were so careful to not offend a deity they made an altar to an unknown God.

When we share the gospel, let us recognize where a person is spiritually.

B. Be Honest with Them About Where They are Spiritually

Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;

Once we know where they are, we need to be honest about their spiritual state.

C. Walk Them to Jesus in a Way They Understand

²⁹ Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. ³⁰ Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, ³¹ because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

Paul began with what they knew and walked them to the resurrection.

In verse 29 he transitions to let them know everyone is a child of God, that is made in God's image and that God cannot be thought of as an idol.

He shares with them God's grace in verse 30 and the need for people to repent.

In verse 31 he shares the judgement of God and the resurrection.

He takes time to share the gospel on a level they can understand.

D. Don't Rush the Process/Be Willing to Have Multiple Gospel Talks

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some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

From Paul's sermon we see three responses: some believed, some rejected his message, and some wanted to hear more.

Don't rush the gospel process.

Don't be discouraged. Keep praying. Keep witnessing. Keep expecting.

To assist us in sharing the gospel I want to walk us through a gospel presentation this morning- use your bulletin to practice.

This presentation follows the model laid out by Paul.

If you are here this morning and do not know Jesus, I plead with you to listen carefully and allow the word of God to minister to your heart today.

III. THE THREE CIRCLES

- A. God's Design (Gen. 1:26-27)
- B. Sin (Rom. 3:23)
- C. Brokenness (Rom. 6:23)
- D. Repent and Believe (Rom. 10:9-10)
- E. Gospel (John 3:16)
- F. Recover and Pursue (2 Cor. 5:17)
- G. Whole Picture

Once we have made this presentation we can simply ask, "Where do you see yourself in this?"

If we have presented the gospel and showed plainly how sins can be forgiven, we can ask these simple questions:

- Do you believe Jesus died for your sins and rose from the dead?
- Would you confess Jesus as Lord today?

As we come a time of decision this morning, I want to ask Bro. James to come.

I say "time of decision" because whenever the word of God is proclaimed a response is to be made.

You don't have to be a professional evangelist to share the gospel.

Believer: Part of sharing the gospel successfully is meeting people where they are and walking them to Jesus.

I want you to commit to sharing the gospel. Be intentional about praying for the lost. Be intentional about praying for gospel interactions. Be intentional about taking every opportunity to share the gospel that gives life.

Unbeliever: Where are you on your faith journey?

You may be here today, and this is the first time you have heard the gospel message or the 10th time you have heard the gospel message.