

Prepared to Answer



A PROGRAMME OF TEACHING AND ACTIVITIES TO HELP CHRISTIANS TO TALK ABOUT JESUS

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. (1 Peter 3:15)

A major task for the church is to equip Christians to be able to talk about Jesus with wisdom, confidence and boldness: to be able to initiate and develop conversations exploring and sharing faith and spirituality. It was evangelist D.L. Moody's guiding principle that "it is better to set ten men to work than to do the work of ten men". It is notable that not only pastor-teachers but also evangelists are given "to prepare God's people for works of service" (Ephesians 4:11-12) so that all of us can share in the work of evangelism.

Drawing inspiration from many of the books and courses which others have created to train Christians in personal evangelism (listed at the end in the Bibliography) I have attempted to recast those ideas for today's post-modern, post-Christendom culture to create **Prepared to Answer**.

THE THINKING BEHIND "PREPARED TO ANSWER"

Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ. (Acts 5:42)

The first Christians never stopped talking about Jesus. The problem for many Christians today is that we don't know how to start. Even facing persecution, the Early Church would not be silenced. As Peter and John said to the Sanhedrin, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God.²⁰ For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:19-20)

Today many Christians feel unprepared to share their faith. They do not know how to speak simply and directly about Jesus, or how to answer challenging questions. It is both appropriate and entirely spiritual to prepare in advance to give answers to particular questions. The phrase in 1 Peter 3:15 "give an answer" is rooted in giving legal testimony. Witnesses in court would prepare their testimony beforehand. So can we. Not only will we have a better idea of what we might say, but we will also be more vigilant and be more able to recognise openings to speak when they come. And then we will be more confident and bold to talk about Jesus and to discuss our faith.

Reasons why we don't talk about Jesus

We will begin by addressing the reasons why so many are so reluctant to talk about Jesus with their non-Christian friends and contacts. The saying, "Preach the gospel, if necessary use words", which is incorrectly attributed to Francis of Assisi, is used by some Christians as a comfortable excuse not to talk about Jesus. It is even used by some to suggest that if we actually need to use words we have somehow failed to witness adequately to Christ in our daily living. Perversely, this can leave Christians feeling guilty if they do talk about Jesus. This idea that our actions should be sufficient and that words should not be necessary in evangelism is gravely mistaken. I have challenged this error in an article, **Preaching the gospel necessarily uses words**, which draws together my reading in the area of Evangelism in Post-Modern Britain and also covers many of the other points below. We do not have a choice. Talking about Jesus is not an optional extra!

There are many reasons why Christians might find it hard to talk about Jesus. Andrew Kirk writes, "They are afraid of giving offence, causing embarrassment or being met with apathy, misunderstanding or ridicule.

They may not wish to risk valued friendships. Perhaps the biggest cause of misgivings is the fear of being made to appear foolish, and thus of betraying their faith.” (in *Mission Under Scrutiny*, DLT 2006 p 91)

Michael Green notes the pressure of the privatisation of religion (in *Evangelism through the local church* Hodder 1990 p 11ff) with pressures from society making it less acceptable to talk about faith in the public arena. He also notes that many Christians are culturally isolated in ghetto churches, so they don't have any friends to talk to about Jesus. Disgraced televangelists have given “evangelism” a bad reputation.

Evangelist Pete Gilbert (in *Kiss and Tell Evangelism as a Lifestyle* CWR 2003) recognises a number of hurdles to evangelism. Many Christians have been content to leave the task to “evangelists” the experts and the professionals, but as Michael Green notes, the good news “is too good to leave to the professionals”! (in *Evangelism now and then* IVP 1979 p 15) Some lack faith or are discouraged by a consciousness of sin in their own lives or are simply not walking close to God, and some churchgoers are not necessarily themselves saved. Some are disillusioned from having tried previously and failed. Some are afraid of failing or of taking risks. “Fear of man”, how others will view us and potentially losing friends can be a factor. Some are discouraged by the cost in time and money and prayer. For many, evangelism is just too low a priority, or they just can't be bothered: they just don't care enough.

For many the rejection of literal understandings of hell and growing acceptance of a “love wins” universalism have diminished the urgency of evangelism and for some removed it altogether. Many are mistakenly led to feel that, if nobody is ultimately “lost”, why do we need to talk about Jesus at all?

Some are also understandably fearful of the potential consequences of witnessing for Christ in the workplace or in public places. Recent highly publicised judgments of industrial tribunals and of courts have been disappointing in penalising Christians for sharing their faith. In some cases there are lessons to be learned about how, when and where it is appropriate to speak. Elmer Thiessen's recent book *The Ethics of Evangelism* (Paternoster 2011) also contains principles we should all be aware of. We recognise that declaring that “Jesus is Lord” and that we are His disciples will sometimes carry all kinds of risks. But the courageous witness of countless believers through history and around the world today puts many of us to shame. And the words of Jesus challenge us.

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. (Luke 9:24-26)

All these fears and concerns will be addressed at different points in sermons as part of **Prepared to Answer**. When Christians feel they lack Bible knowledge, or are uncertain about what they believe, or fear they might do more harm than good, this programme will help them to think through their answers and encourage and inspire them be confident and bold to speak about Jesus.

Reasons why we should talk about Jesus

At the same time as addressing the barriers which discourage Christians from evangelism we will also remind them of the many strong motives we have for talking about Jesus. The greatest is our gratitude and our indebtedness to God for the grace He has poured into lives and for the love, joy and peace we experience in our relationship with Jesus. Then we are confronted by the commands of Jesus,

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:19)

“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. (Mark 16:15)

The Holy Spirit initiates, leads, guides and empowers Christians in evangelism.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

So the Early Church give us continual examples of their witness through the book of Acts and through the Letters. God gives all Christians the responsibility of being His Ambassadors.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.
(2 Corinthians 5:18-20)

Christians are also motivated to talk about Jesus as we love with God’s love both friends and strangers who the Bible tells us are lost and even dead without Christ. Throughout **Prepared to Answer** we will encourage Christians by reminding them of the many good reasons we have for talking about Jesus.

Andrew Kirk defines evangelism as “the process of communicating the most crucial piece of knowledge possible about real life in such a way that the recipient has the maximum opportunity to understand and act upon it.” (*Mission Under Scrutiny* DLT 2006 p 103) Most fundamentally, the mandate for preaching the gospel is found within the gospel itself. It is a message so important that it deserves and demands to be passed on. Walter Brueggemann wrote, “The ground of evangelism is found in the gospel itself, and not in any church condition or societal need.” (*Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism* Abingdon Press 1993) The gospel in itself is our motivation for proclaiming the gospel. **Prepared to Answer** will repeatedly remind Christians of the important reasons why we should be talking about Jesus.

Prayer

A vital part of **Prepared to Answer** will be encouraging prayer for evangelism. We need prayer which includes both listening for God to guide our witness and also interceding for others. In *Kiss and Tell* (CWR 2003 p209ff) evangelist Pete Gilbert reminds us that prayer should be both event and lifestyle. We will pray about our evangelism strategy and evangelistic events and special services. We should pray for ourselves for boldness (Acts 4:29-31, 2 Timothy 1:7) and for wisdom (James 1:5). We can pray for others, for their physical needs, for their understanding, for binding and loosing remembering that evangelism is spiritual warfare (Matthew 12:29; 16:19, 22 Corinthians 4:4). If appropriate we can tell others we are praying for them and ask them what they would like us to pray for them. We pray and persevere in praying for specific individuals that they will be saved. We should pray in our personal devotions, in Home Groups and Cell Groups and special prayer meetings and days of prayer, in prayer walking and sometimes praying with fasting. If we are serious about evangelism we will take every opportunity to pray!

Basic Principles

We live in a Post-Modern and Post-Christendom society. Many people have rejected Christian values and a concept of absolute truth. Truth is not objective, rooted in fact, but subjective, rooted in experience and consequently understood to be different for each person. Nowadays the only thing we can be certain of is that we aren’t allowed to be certain about anything. To the post-modern mind, “the preacher can become another dodgy salesperson almost certainly out to con you.” (Steve Hollinghurst in *Mission Shaped Evangelism* Canterbury Press 2010 p 161) We live in a consumer society, “Tesco ergo Sum, I shop therefore I am” (Graham Cray) which demands freedom of choice and satisfaction guaranteed. Most folk have very little knowledge of the Bible or of the life and teaching of Jesus, which were presupposed in the preaching of Billy Graham and to some extent in courses like Alpha. Far from being a disadvantage, this gives us wonderful opportunities to present the gospel afresh! At the same time preaching “at” people simply doesn’t work, if it ever did. We need to learn how replace monologue with dialogue, to engage in conversations which explore spirituality and share faith. To begin with we need to learn to proper listening,

paying close attention to what is being said and to the person saying it. It is true that “people won’t care what we think until they think that we care.” Our actions and our lifestyle are vitally important. But it is also essential that we verbalise our faith in conversations about Jesus. For this we need to help Christians to thoroughly understand what the good news of Jesus Christ actually is and express the gospel in words which will make sense to not yet Christians. I have discussed the basic principles above in the companion article **Preaching the Gospel Necessarily Includes Words**. They underpin **Prepared to Answer** and will be spelled out in sermons at different points.

Talking about Big Questions

Research summarised in *Evangelism in a Spiritual Age* (editor Stephen Croft Church House Publishing 2005) identified six Big Questions ordinary people want answers to.

1. Destiny? what happens after we die?
2. Purpose? what is the point of life? What values should I live by? Who inspires us?
3. The universe? How did it start? Is it designed or planned or controlled?
4. Does God exist? What is he/it like? Can we know or have a relationship with God?
5. Spiritual realms? What form do they take? Angels, ghosts. Supernatural?
6. Suffering? Why is there so much? What can be done? Concerns about domestic abuse, crime, intolerance and lack of respect.

Additionally in his book *You Must Be Joking* (Hodder 1976) Michael Green offered Christian responses to some of the most common objections people raise to the Christian faith. I talk more about these Big Questions and objections in Idea 19 of the companion resource online **42 Great Outreach Ideas**. (see www.pbthomas.com/takingeveryopportunity/e19) The sermons in **Prepared to Answer** will help Christians to think through their own understandings of these issues and offer constructive ways to talk about them with confidence and wisdom.

Unchaining the Lion – the Bible in Evangelism

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30-31)

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

We believe that God can speak powerfully through His Word the Bible not only to believers but also to not yet Christians. So a major part of **Prepared to Answer** will be encouraging Christians to memorise key Bible verses and learn to retell Gospel stories about Jesus, and also be able to find these in their Bibles, so they can have them available to share when appropriate in conversations about Jesus. It was C.H. Spurgeon who said, “Defend the Bible? I would as soon defend a lion! Unchain it and it will defend itself.”

Personal Testimony – This is My Story

I wrote in **Taking Every Opportunity – Conversations about Jesus** about the enormous value of Christians sharing their testimonies of their own experiences of God and of the difference Jesus makes in their daily lives. **Prepared to Answer** will encourage this by giving opportunities for Christians to think through what they might say. Since “practice makes perfect” we will offer opportunities to talk about Jesus and share our testimonies with one or two other Christians and in a safe environment. In particular we will include a Workshop over a shared lunch after a morning service working on ideas based on the approach suggested by Janice Price in *Telling our faith story* (Grove Evangelism 85, 1999 revised 2009).

The Language We Use: “In Other Words”

In *The Gospel Message Today* (Grove Evangelism 100) Lawrence Singlehurst helpfully encourages us to give thought to how we might express gospel words and ideas in language and concepts which are more accessible to our not yet Christian friends. Prepared to Answer will tackle that important issue in a number of Workshops entitled "In Other Words".

Theory into Practice

It has been said that many Christians are "educated beyond their obedience." Often our problem is not that we lack knowledge but that we fail to put what we do know into practice. Nevertheless, I am convinced of the value of training materials and activities such as **Prepared to Answer**. We will build up to specific outreach opportunities in the lead up to Christmas. Bill Hybels of Willow Creek holds out an exciting vision of what could happen as more Christians are empowered to talk about Jesus. "When ordinary Christians throughout the fabric of the church get trained and active in spreading their faith – you'd better watch out! A whole new era of lifechange is going to explode!" (*Becoming a Contagious Christian* Zondervan 1994 p 266-267) That is the goal and the prayer behind Taking **Every Opportunity – Conversations about Jesus** and particularly the rationale of **Prepared to Answer**.

PREPARED TO ANSWER – THE PROGRAMME

Below is the outline of some material I will present to North Springfield Baptist Church in the autumn of 2015 leading up to the evangelistic opportunities which Christmas will offer.

Each of the ten (not necessarily consecutive) weeks will include material for morning and evening services. **Sermons** will be posted online immediately afterwards at www.pbthomas.com/blog. Some of the evenings will take different forms and will only have introductory notes. In particular there will be four **workshops** entitled "**In other words**" when we will wrestle with translating words and concepts which are central to our Christian faith into language and terms which will be accessible to our not-yet-Christian friends. Two further **lunchtime workshops** will take place over shared lunches following morning services. Each week will also suggest a **Bible verse to memorise** and "**Something to talk about**", an invitation of a topic for a conversation which the hearers may care to have over tea, coffee and cake as the morning continues.

Each week a simple **leaflet** will include the Bible Verse and the "Something to talk about" conversation starter alongside a summary of the morning sermon and suggestions for further reading which will include books and also other sermons previously posted on my blog. The leaflets will also include some of the conclusions of the Workshops on "In Other Words" which folk from the evening service will be invited to share with the morning congregation. Services will also include opportunities for sharing short testimonies which individuals will be invited to prepare in advance.

Everybody will be given a copy of the booklet **Journey Into Life** and there will also be **other training materials** at different points. Books on personal evangelism and on issues Christians find themselves in conversations about will be available to borrow and some of these titles are listed as Idea 15 of **42 Great Outreach Ideas** online at www.pbthomas.com/takingeveryopportunity/e15.

The morning service in Week 8 will be an evangelistic message at a **Guest Service** linked to Operation Christmas Child. The morning of Week 10 will also have Guests in mind and the series will then lead into our **planned evangelistic Christmas services and activities**. Members of the church and congregation will be encouraged to use **publicity materials** to take the opportunities to invite their friends and contacts to these occasions. We will also be producing some form of "**outward-facing**" **magazine or Christmas Card** and encouraging our folk to pass copies on as widely as possible as well as delivering to the neighbourhood.

Below is only a draft outline and changes may be made over the weeks in particular to the order. Early in 2016 this paper will be extended to include a report what we actually did and our reflections on the effectiveness of the different elements of the programme.

Week 1

Morning theme	Introductory sermon: "Prepared to Give an Answer" 1 Peter 3:15
Conversation starter	Share with a friend your favourite Bible verse.
Verse to learn	John 3:16
Evening theme	Sermon: "Chattering the gospel" an overview of evangelism in Acts

Week 2

Morning theme	"Sermon: Just what is the Good News?"
Conversation starter	Share with a friend your favourite Bible Story
Verse to learn	Mark 10:45
Evening theme	Workshop "In other words" looking at "salvation" and "eternal life".

Week 3

Morning theme	Sermon: "Why we don't and why we should talk about Jesus"
Conversation starter	Share with a friend the name of somebody you are praying for an opportunity to talk about Jesus with.
Verse to learn	Philippians 4:6-7
Evening theme	A prayer occasion focusing particularly on evangelism and our own witness.

Week 4

Morning theme	Sermon: "Sharing our story" starting from Paul's use of his own testimony
Conversation starter	Share with a friend an experience of God answering prayer.
Verse to learn	John 10:27-30
Evening theme	Workshop "In other words" looking at "conversion" and being "born again".

Lunchtime Workshop "Sharing our story" Workshop
There will be opportunities to share testimonies in evening services.

Week 5

Morning theme	Sermon: "Can we trust the Bible?"
Conversation starter	Tell a friend about an occasion in life where you can say, "God did that!"
Verse to learn	John 20:30-31
Evening theme	Jesus' way of evangelism with the woman at the well John 4

Week 6

Morning theme	Sermon: What happens when we die?
Conversation starter	Share with a friend the name of somebody you are praying for an opportunity to talk about Jesus with.
Verse to learn	John 11:25
Evening theme	Workshop "In other words" looking at "sin" and "repentance"

Week 7

Morning theme	Sermon: Is Jesus the only way to God?
Conversation starter	Tell a friend your favourite story about Jesus (e.g. an event or saying)
Verse to learn	John 14:6
Evening theme	Sermon: How can we believe in God in a world so full of suffering?
Lunchtime Workshop	"What would you say?" Conversations in twos and threes practising giving a brief answer to various questions of faith and spirituality. A list of questions will be provided in advance and each person can choose which question they will answer.

Week 8

Morning theme	Sermon: What is the point of life? (Guest Service)
Conversation starter	Ask a friend "What do you think the point of life is?"
Verse to learn	John 17:3
Evening theme	Training: How can I help somebody who wants to commit their life to Christ?

Week 9

Morning theme	"Ambassadors for Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:17-21)
Conversation starter	Share with a friend the name of somebody you are praying for an opportunity to talk about Jesus with, especially over Christmas.
Verse to learn	2 Corinthians 5:21
Evening theme	Workshop "In Other Words" on "discipleship", "giving your life to Christ" and "the Lordship of Christ"

Week 10

Morning theme	"How do we know God exists?" (Guest Service)
Conversation starter	Share with a friend what it is which convinces you most that God exists.
Verse to learn	Ephesians 2:8-9
Evening theme	Sermon: "What should we do with our questions and doubts?"

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Elmer Thiessen *The Ethics of Evangelism* Paternoster 2011
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Hope the Heartbeat of Mission Hope08 Ltd 2013
Sharing Jesus from www.sharejesusinternational.com

There are many programmes and courses designed to inspire and equip Christians to share their faith.

To follow on from **Prepared to Answer** I am looking forward to using two recommended courses from London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, “*Life on the Frontline*” and “*Fruitfulness on the Front Line*”.

Over the years churches have found the following courses particularly helpful.

Mind the Gap from Agape <http://shop.agape.org.uk/mindthegap.html>

Evangelism Explosion <http://www.ee-gb.org.uk/welcome.htm>

Person To Person from the Bible Society sadly no longer available

Other courses are available including:

Lost for Words CPAS, www.cpas.org.uk/evangelism/bookshop/

Living and Telling sharing faith as a way of life Video series Agapé, www.agape.org.uk

Evangelism Explosion www.ee-gb.org.uk/leaderstrainingcourse.htm

The Big Picture and But I’m just an ordinary Christian available from: www.thegoodbook.co.uk

So Many Questions Simon Roberts & Tony Payne Matthias Media ISBN 9781876326357

Becoming A Contagious Christian DVD course Mark Mittelberg Lee Strobel www.willowcreek.org.uk

Blowing your cover DVD course www.blowingyourcover.com

Breaking News – J John www.authenticmedia.co.uk

Just walk across the room Bill Hybels, Zondervan www.willowcreek.org.uk

Making Him Known Agapé www.agape.org.uk

Talking of God free online download www.methodist.org.uk/talkingofgod

Beautiful Lives www.resource-arm.net

The latest version of this paper is online at www.pbthomas.com/takingeveryopportunity/prepared-to-answer