

How to Share Your Faith with Someone

Acts 16:11-15; John 3:1-17

The Big Idea: Living our faith includes witnessing to others with words and actions.

Learning Goal: Learners will understand Jesus' call to "make disciples of all nations," the evangelical nature of the Christian life, and their power to spread the Word of God.

Opening: Begin by sharing a high and low from this past week. When each person has had a chance to listen and share, open your session together by praying the following prayer together, out loud.

Opening Prayer

Leader: Jesus, you called your disciples to follow.

All: Help us to be messengers of your good news.

L: Jesus, you reached out to the lonely and distressed in their need.

A: Help us to be messengers of your good news.

L: Jesus, you commissioned your followers to make disciples of all nations.

A: Help us to be messengers of your good news.

L: May our words and our actions proclaim your good news. In your name we pray.

A: Amen

Read: Lutherans don't tend to be the evangelizing kind. We generally don't offer testimonials in worship, unless you count temple talks at stewardship time. We don't stand on street corners, waving brochures and preaching at full volume. We don't begin a conversation with a new acquaintance by asking, "Are you saved?"

However, that doesn't mean Lutherans don't share their faith with others. Lutheran Services in America, a coalition of Lutheran social service agencies, is the largest denominational coalition in the world. Lutheran denominations are deeply involved through national efforts to address hunger issues with more than just bags of grain. Advocacy and systemic change are also a part of the agenda. Individual Lutherans show up to help in times of disaster, whether organized by their national church or not. Faith in action is part and parcel of Lutheran life.

If Lutherans were placed on a continuum between conversion and witness, they would probably fall much closer to witness. Lutherans don't tend to be coercive types. However, giving account of what faith has meant in their lives would be more consistent with their constitutions. Lutherans also don't tend to worry inordinately about whether or not they will go to heaven. Jesus, Lutherans confess, took care of that. So the fear tactics relied on by some denominations for the core of their "witnessing" don't tend to show up when Lutherans give their account.

However, that doesn't mean Lutherans are good at talking about their faith. In some places around the world, a Lutheran might begin a conversation with, "How is your walk with Jesus today?" That generally doesn't happen in North America. Between our general shyness and an idea we got somewhere along the way that we have to have the doctrine mastered in order to talk about faith, we generally avoid discussions about faith.

Perhaps we should reorient our thinking. Perhaps we should think more about talking about our *lives* with people we know. Faith comes in when we season the conversation with notes about how God has been at work day to day and year to year. This need not be in published memoir form. There is always a new day, and we confess that God is active in our lives every day. Instead, we could think about sharing the small ways we have seen God at work, as recently as today.

This implies that we can see and name God at work in our lives today. This may be the first and greater challenge. How to begin? We confess that God is intimately involved in our lives and is constantly drawing us toward love and abundance, justice and mercy. Luther called this *sanctification*. So that might be a place to begin—just noticing how God is growing us, blessing us (not necessarily with material things), and keeping us.

Confirmation students inhabit a complicated time of life. Their bodies are changing. Their relationships are changing. Their sensitivities, and even their way of thinking, is changing (see Piaget's *formal reasoning stage*). But rooted in baptism, they are God's own, and loved. How do they see God's love around them? Where are their lives being enhanced, and where are the lives of those around them (globally too!) being enhanced? How are they growing and learning? How are they becoming better people? How have they been spared lately? Or if they have not been spared, what did they learn as a consequence? Answers to all of these questions point to God at work.

The next challenge is to discern when to say something in the course of a conversation. It doesn't have to be big and flashy. God asks us to give witness, not accompany our stories with organ music and solemn processions. It might be as simple as, "I see God at work there."

Confirmation students are also in a great position to witness through action. In the cutthroat world of peers they live in, there are many opportunities to "defend the widow, orphan, and sojourner," one of God's fundamental invitations to us as people of faith. The creation also calls out for our protection. Something as simple as picking up a candy wrapper carelessly dropped, especially if that is not your "job," can be a witness to God's influence.

My Faith Story

Describe the things you do that are a reflection of your faith (teaching confirmation, giving to charity, volunteering, caring for neighbors, caring for those in need, and so forth). Describe situations when you have spoken about your faith with others. How did it feel? How did others respond to it? How is sharing the good news a combination of the things you say and the things you do?

How to Share Your Faith with Someone...Tips

Sharing the faith with others is a natural part of exercising a mature faith. In fact, Jesus commanded his followers to do this, making it an important part of the life of faith (Matthew 28:18-20). Still, Lutherans tend to be rather shy evangelists.

While evangelism has become a negative word for some people, sharing the story of salvation in Jesus Christ is still the most rewarding what to live out one's faith. It is also a discipline that takes practice.

1) Look for the opening - Regular daily conversations offer lots of chances to talk about your faith. Listen for open-ended comments, such as, "I wonder why life is like that" or "Sometimes life seems so hard." When possible, offer a response from a Christian perspective. Begin sentences with phrases such as, "I've come to think..." or, "I don't have the perfect answer, but I believe..."

2) Be yourself – Expressing your faith should be natural and the same as other types of daily conversation. Avoid suddenly switching your tone of voice or vocabulary. Also, don't try to impress the other person with your knowledge. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you.

3) Watch for a chance to take the conversation deeper – Carefully gauge the other person's response. Observe his or her facial expression, verbal tone and body language. If they seem to be closing down, set the topic aside and wait for another time. If they key in and perk up, be prepared to continue.

4) Open up – Human beings are attracted to each other by our strengths, but we can be bonded because of our weaknesses. Key to sharing your faith is the willingness to be honest about your own life's struggles. This will communicate safety, which for many people is critical.

5) Follow up – Offer to continue the conversation later and arrange a time. At this point, the conversation will have become personally valuable to you. Allowing the person to see your commitment to your faith alongside your continuing questions will reassure them of your sincerity.

6) Offer to share your faith community with the other person – Most people join a church after being invited by a friend. When the time is right, invite the person to attend with you. Tell the person what makes it special to you.

7) Try to maintain the relationship regardless of what the person does – Be prepared for the other person to shut down around faith talk, decline your invitation to attend church, or even appear to avoid you. The most effective way to communicate that you're a follower of Jesus Christ is through your actions; continue to live naturally and with integrity. Watch for another opportunity to open the subject later on.

Points to Ponder

- Read about Lydia's coming to faith in Acts 16:11-15. Lydia was a successful businesswoman, also a Gentile, who supported Paul's missionary journeys. If it weren't for Paul's missionary journeys and sharing the good news, Christianity would not be what it is today.
- Read John 3:1-17, the story of Nicodemus coming by night to Jesus. Nicodemus is a faith seeker. Though he is a learned Pharisee, he is curious about Jesus. How does your congregation welcome visitors? Underline or highlight John 3:16 in their Bibles.
- How are you better able to share the good news with others?
- What do you do that shows your faith?
- What do you say that shows your faith?

Closing Ritual

L: The Lord be with you.

A: And also with you.

L: Let us pray. God of abundance and blessing, fill us with faith. Help us to speak words that reflect the hope that is in us. Help us by our actions to give witness to your goodness. Bring others who seek your goodness and grace to discover the ways of Jesus, in whose name we pray.

A: Amen