BE ONE
Essential Disciplines

BETHANY CHURCH
Sharing Your Faith
Over the next four weeks we will learn about Sharing Your Faith as we continue working through the series of Four Essential Disciplines:

2. Read Sharing Your Faith Study Guide.
3. Discuss in a Group or one-to-one.
4. Come to church next Sunday.

Next Steps:
Welcome to another session in our Essential Disciplines series. In this session, we address what, for many people, is perhaps the most challenging aspect of their spiritual journey. It is one thing for us to work on our own spiritual development, but how do we invite others to join us on this journey? What happens when our private faith must go public? This line might be difficult for some people to cross, but tremendous growth and fulfillment awaits those who are willing to take this challenge. In this session, we explore why God has commanded us to share our faith, and, in the next session, we will make some practical suggestions about how to do this, even for introverts like me!

Beginning, then, with the why question, let’s look at three foundational, biblical truths:

1. The Plight of Our Neighbor
2. The Call of our Lord
3. The Power of Our Story

1. The Plight of Our Neighbor

As we learned in our Essential Truths session on “Why the Cross?”, sin is the root of the problems in our messed-up world. By rejecting God’s will and ways, people have created an avalanche of destructive consequences that have damaged our bodies, our relationships and our spirits. Apart from God’s intervention, therefore, humanity seems destined over time to destroy itself. In the meantime, oppressors and victims, the innocent and the guilty, all do battle within the same world, and we, who desire to follow Christ, must find our place within this struggle.

The Example of Jesus

In defining this role, we turn first to the example of Jesus who cared deeply about the plight of His neighbor. The Gospel of Matthew says:

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’” Matthew 9:36-38

On another occasion, He looked at a lost and rebellious city and cried out:

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate.” Matthew 23:37-38

1 Unless otherwise indicated, all English translations of the Bible in this document are taken from The New International Version. (2011); Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
Notice that these cries are targeted and specific. Jesus wants His people to know Him, because He is the only one who can save them. While He is certainly concerned with their physical suffering, as we observed in our Essential Truths session on Stewardship, He is even more concerned with the root of their suffering. The only real solution to their broken and hopeless lives is to know Him, as their Lord and Savior.

Jesus intends for us to have the same compassion that He demonstrates to the “harassed and helpless” that surrounded Him. As followers of Jesus, we must share His concern for the lost neighbors of our world, and we must share His conviction that, only by knowing Him, will they find a genuine release from their plight.

The Apostles’ Teaching

The apostles whom Jesus appointed reinforce this compassion for our neighbor. We hear the Apostle Peter’s passion in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost:

“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.’ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’” Acts 2:38 40

The Apostle Paul goes ever further, saying:

“For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel.” Romans 9:3-4

Now this is deep and unqualified compassion! And, he cares not just for the physical children of Israel, but for all people. To the Ephesians, he writes:

“I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all the Lord’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ....” Ephesians 3:7-8

Paul regards himself as a “servant of the Gospel”, which he believes contains the “boundless riches of Christ”. He wants these riches for the spiritually poor crowds around him, whether Jew or Gentile.

In his letter to the Romans, he says:

“For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’” Romans 10:12-15; compare Isaiah 52:7; Joel 2:32

Here we have an unbroken chain of logic from need to solution. To be saved from their sinfulness and brokenness, people must call on Jesus. To do this,
however, they must know about him, and they cannot know about Him unless someone shares this knowledge with them.

So, let me ask you directly, are you willing to be part of the solution? Do you honestly care for the spiritually broken people in your world? Do you earnestly believe that Christ is the answer for their deepest hurts and wounds? This need itself should motivate us to share what we know about the riches of God’s gospel.

2. The Call of Our Lord

Jesus, however, adds another layer of motivation. As our Lord, He calls and commands us to share our faith. On one occasion, He says:

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:14-16

If we hide the truth that God has given us, by keeping it private and hidden from the world, then we are of little use to those walking in darkness. How then will they come to know and glorify the Father?

Before Jesus ascends to be with the Father, He repeats this call to his disciples in a passage known as the Great Commission. He says:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:18-20

This call becomes a command for the entire community of disciples. Together, they must go, baptize and teach. Each person in this community is responsible for some part of this commission. Everyone must go into some part of this broken world. While not everyone will actually do the baptizing, everyone must help others see the need to be baptized, as symbol of turning their lives over to Jesus as Lord and Savior. And, while not everyone will teach in a formal classroom, everyone must nevertheless share in countless personal conversations what they have learned as they lead others into a relationship with Jesus.

3. The Power of Our Story

The Lord’s command to make disciples, then, must become personal. In fact, as we argue in our Essentials Truth class, “Why Am I Here?”, the entire purpose of our life on earth is to become and make disciples, to Be One and to Make One.

Faced by this command, we may wonder, “why us”? Who are we to do this big and difficult job of leading others to God? You may remember that Moses asked this same question, when He was asked to lead the people out of Egypt:

“But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” Exodus 3:11
But this is the wrong question. It really doesn't matter who Moses is. It only matters who God is:

“And God said, ‘I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.’"

God says he will go with His servant, and the sign of His powerful presence will be the people who will worship on the very mountain on which Moses now stood.

Do you need a sign that God is with us? Look at the people worshipping next to you at church. Or, consider your own story. Chances are that we are all here because somebody did the big job that they were asked to do. Maybe it was parents who fought the culture to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Maybe it was a grandparent, an aunt or uncle who went the extra mile. Maybe it was a friend, a co-worker, or a neighbor who dared to invite us to join them. Or, maybe it was a random, casual acquaintance that turned out not to be so random.

The point is that God used somebody's story, some average, ordinary somebody, to lead you out of the mess into a place of worship. All of us together, assembled to worship here, are a sign that God is with us.

We therefore should not underestimate the power of our story. One of the things I appreciate so much about the scriptures is the way that God uses other people's stories to impact us. And not just the perfect stories, but also the less than perfect stories. How many people have been challenged and encouraged by the story of David, even with his failures, or the story of Peter, even though he denied Christ? Our story does not have to be perfect to be effective. Our story matters precisely because it reveals the powerful work of God that forgives, heals and restores us.

Paul famously makes this point in his letter to Timothy, when he says:

“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.”

1 Timothy 1:15-16

God’s effective working in us shows others that God can also work in them. No matter how average or how messed up our stories might be, they can be and, in Christ, will be redeemed and used for God’s glory.

Conclusion

These then are three primary reasons for sharing our faith: the plight of our neighbor, the call of our Lord, and the power of our story. So, we hope you are inspired to take up the challenge and become part of the solution. In the next session, therefore, we will offer some practical recommendations for how to share your faith. In the meantime, we pray that God will lead you even deeper in your relationship with Jesus. For more information, please visit us at bethanychurch.com.
Welcome to the final session in our Essential Disciplines series, where we take up some practical recommendations for sharing your faith. In the previous session, we explored why God has commanded us to share our faith, and, now, in this session we discuss how to do this.

1. Listen to Their Story

The process of sharing your faith begins with listening, and we can all do this. Each person has a unique story, filled with an infinite variety of twists and turns. If we truly love our neighbors, as Jesus has commanded us to do, then we must listen to them. (see Mark 12:31) Love requires us to understand our neighbors and meet them where they are.

### Asking Caring Questions

In sharing the Gospel with others, Jesus often begins with a question that leads into a deeper discussion. Consider, for example, His encounter with the woman at the well:

“When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, ‘Will you give me a drink?’” John 4:7

This discussion of physical water leads to a deeper discussion of the spiritual water that Jesus can provide. And, in the process, they are eventually able to discuss the troubled family situation in which she found herself.

On another occasion, He sees several people laying by a pool of water, which they believed could heal them.

“One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, ‘Do you want to get well?’” John 5:5-6

Notice how Jesus has compassion on this one in need, and, before preaching to him, asks him a question. Jesus listens before He speaks, and now the real conversation can begin.

### Listen without Judgment

Notice also that, when Jesus listens, He is full of mercy. At one point, He says categorically to His disciples:

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” Matthew 7:1

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The Apostle James likewise warns:

“My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.” James 1:19-20

And then he adds:

“Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.” James 2:12-13

The goal in our conversation is not to judge and condemn, but to listen to the concerns, questions and hurts that each person brings. Because we love that person, as Jesus commanded us to do, we want to understand his or her circumstances, including the need or concern that is drawing that person toward God.

2. Sharing Our Story

So then, listening to their story, without judging, is the first step. Then, we should be ready to share our story. For this step, we offer a few practical considerations.

1. Keep It Real

First, keep it real. Don't embellish, beautify or sanitize the story. Tell it like it is. The power of our witness depends on our honesty. Consider, for example, Paul's transparent confession:

“For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect.” 1 Corinthians 15:9-10

Paul's past made God's grace more evident to those who observed the change in his life. We don't necessarily have to go into salacious details, but we do need to be clear. God should receive all the credit for our transformation.

2. Keep It Short

Second, keep it short, at least initially. We should prepare to tell our story within about 5 – 7 minutes. This allows us to get to the main points within a limited window of opportunity. We can always fill in the details when we have more time. To get to this point, we recommend that you write out your story, and then practice telling it to another disciple. Here at Bethany, we offer several workshops and online tools to prepare your story in this way.
Keep It Organized

Third, keep it organized. We recommend that you focus on three central points.

1. My Life Before I Met Christ
   Explain the circumstances that brought you to faith. Was there a crisis in your life? Were you looking for answers or meaning? Were you a child, teenager or adult?
   
   This is where people can connect with your story. Remember, your story is unique and meaningful. There are no boring stories here. Every story is a powerful witness to God’s transforming power.

2. How I Met Christ
   In this section, tell the story of how you decided to follow Christ. What events lead up to this decision. Was it a sudden decision? Did it occur over time? When and where did it happen? Were other people instrumental in leading you through this decision?

3. How Christ Is Changing My Life
   In this part of your story, give some examples of how Christ has made a difference in your decisions, actions or relationships. Some differences are large and dramatic, while others are slow and gradual. And often, the struggles continue. Again, keep it real. Don’t hide the fact that spiritual transformation often takes time.
   
   If you keep your story to these three main points, you will find it is easier to remember and repeat. Over time, you will be able to vary the amount of detail required, depending upon the circumstances. But, in the meantime, you can start here with this simple outline.
3. Sharing God's Story

After we listen to their story and share our story, we must look for an opportunity to share God's story. For some, this is the most difficult part of the challenge. As you learn more about the story of the Bible, you should become more comfortable with telling it in various ways.

You can start, however, by preparing yourself. Here are few suggestions to maximize your opportunity to share the Gospel.

1. Learn the Essential Truths

   Our Essential Truths sessions provide a starting point for discussing the major themes of God's story. Let's summarize them below:

   1. Who Is God?
      God is beyond us, God is with us, God is Trinity.

   2. Who Is Jesus?
      Jesus is God and Man, Lord and Savior.

   3. Why the Cross?
      The Cross is God's solution to the human problem of sin.

   4. Why the Bible?
      The Bible is God's story with the power to shape our story.

   5. Why Am I Here?
      I am here to become and make disciples.

By memorizing these five questions and responses, you will be able to start a conversation about these core messages of the Gospel.

2. Memorize a Few Key Verses

   It is also helpful to memorize a few key verses to get you started. The following verses describe the essence of the Gospel.

   “...[F]or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23

   “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23

   “...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” John 10:10

   “Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” John 14:6

   “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” John 3:16-17
“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Romans 12:1-2

There are many other verses that we could list here, but these can get you started in a conversation about how God’s Word describes the Gospel.

Create A Simple Outline

We recommend that you keep it simple and clear. Here is a brief template that addresses the main points of the Gospel.

- **The Problem: Sin**  
  *Key Verses: Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23*  
  Sin begins with the rejection of God, His will and His ways. Because we have all rejected God, both we and our world are severely broken and destined for judgment. Unless God acts for us, we will be eternally separated from Him.

- **The Solution: Jesus**  
  *Key Verses: John 3:16-17; 10:10; 14:6*  
  God has sent His Son Jesus, who is both God and Man, to save us from this judgment. By dying on the cross, He takes our judgment on Himself, so that we can be restored to a loving relationship with both God and one another. By raising from the dead, Jesus promises new, abundant and eternal life to all who will follow Him as His disciple.

- **Our Response: Repent and Believe**  
  *Key Verses: John 3:16-17; Romans 12:1-2*  
  While Christ died for us, we do not receive the eternal benefits of His saving work unless we repent and believe. We repent by admitting our sinfulness before Him, and asking for His mercy and forgiveness. We then believe that Christ has died for us and in our place, and, entirely because of His work on the cross, we now are adopted as beloved children into God’s eternal family. Given this new beginning, we commit ourselves to follow Him for the rest of our lives, learning from Him and obeying Him, as we depend upon His Spirit to cleanse us from our sinful hearts, minds and actions.

You can use this template to develop your own simple outline. However, use your own words to make these key points. Make it personal. Just make sure, however, that you stick to the main biblical points of the Gospel. Again, at Bethany Church, we offer several workshops and online resources to assist you in developing your outline.
4. Connecting Their Story to God’s Story

The last step in sharing your faith focuses on decision. We would like the person hearing both your story and God’s story to be impacted in some concrete way. You should therefore be prepared with some possible next steps.

1. **Invite Further Discussion and Questions**
   
The process of coming to faith can often be a long one, filled with many questions and experiences. It is important, therefore, we stay in dialog. Offer to have a follow up conversation and, if possible, schedule that time.

   Sometimes during these conversations, questions arise that you may not be able to address immediately. In this case, offer to do some research and get back to them with an answer, or a least another resource that can address their question.

2. **Invite Them to Join You**

   Often the next step in faith will require community. The people with whom you are speaking may need to see faith in action. So, invite them to join you at church, in a support group, or in a service project. Then, follow up with them, to see if they have questions or feedback. Keep the conversation going.

3. **Invite Them to Follow Jesus**

   Ultimately, this is where we want them to be, not because we are trying to make a convert, but we because we know that this is where God wants them to be. This is where the forgiveness, healing and restoration begins.

   Be sensitive to the process, but, when you feel the person is ready, ask whether he or she is ready to commit to following Jesus. Be assured that the Holy Spirit will guide you through this moment.

   If the person is willing, lead him or her in a simple prayer of commitment. Help them to find their own words to confess their sin, and to ask for God’s forgiveness and healing. They also may need help to express their belief that, because of the Cross, they are now forgiven and fully restored as God’s son or daughter.

   After completing the prayer, encourage them to take the next step in their spiritual journey. Make sure that they are plugged into a caring, nurturing church environment where they can grow in their new faith. And, if possible and appropriate, mentor them through this journey.

**Conclusion**

Well, we have just touched the surface in this discipline of sharing your faith. But we pray that these few practical suggestions will inspire you to get started. And, know that God will use you. He promises to go with you in this mission. As you grow in this discipline, we pray that God will lead you even deeper in your relationship with Jesus. For more information, please visit us at bethanychurch.com.
Sharing Your Faith Discussion Guide | PART 1

Opening

What are the biggest obstacles we face as we try to share our faith with others?

Going Deeper

1. The Plight of Our Neighbor

✓ Read Matthew 9:36-38. What does Jesus mean when He says that “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few”?

✓ Read Romans 9:3-4. How far was Paul willing to go to have others know the truth? What would it take for us to have that same passion?

✓ Why should our love for our neighbor inspire us to share the gospel with them?

✓ How do we balance our concern for the physical needs of our neighbors with their spiritual needs?

2. The Call of Our Lord

✓ Read Matthew 5:14-16. How can our “good deeds” shed the light that Jesus is talking about to the world around us?

✓ Read Matthew 28:18-20. Why should we take this Great Commission personally?

✓ Do you believe that God intends the practice of tithing to continue among His people today? Why or why not?

3. The Power of Our Story

✓ Read Exodus 3:11-12. How does God respond to Moses when His servant asks, “Who am I, that I should go….”?

✓ Read 1 Timothy 1:15-16. How does God use Paul’s broken story to build His kingdom?

✓ Share examples of how other people’s God story has changed your story.

Next Steps

• Spend time this week reflecting on the scriptures listed in this session. In prayer, ask God to use these scriptures to strengthen your resolve to share your story.

• Share with a trusted friend your desire to share your faith more faithfully. Give that person permission to pray for encourage you in that mission.

• Begin to pray for at least one person, that God would give you the courage to share your story with that person.
Sharing Your Faith Discussion Guide

Opening

Share with group an experience where you shared or tried to share your faith with someone else. What sort of response did you receive?

Going Deeper

1. Listen to Their Story

✓ Read John 4:1-26. How does Jesus show His care and compassion for this woman in His conversation with her?

✓ Why is it important to listen without judgment?

✓ Why is it important to listen to the other person’s story before we seek to share our story or God’s story? Are their exceptions to this guideline?

2. Share Our Story

✓ Read 1 Corinthians 15:9-10. How does Paul’s transparency about his own past failures make him a more effective witness?

✓ Have you taken the time to write a brief, organized summary of your God’s story? If you have, how has it helped you to share your faith? If you haven’t, what would it take you to take this step?

3. Share God’s Story

✓ Have you created a simple outline to share God’s story? Is there a tool that you have used that makes this easier?

✓ What are the obstacles that prevent some people from sharing this story with others? How do we overcome these obstacles?

4. Connecting Their Story to God’s Story

✓ How can we continue ongoing discussion with someone regarding God’s Story?

✓ How do you know when it is time to invite another person to follow Jesus?

Next Steps

• If you have not already done so, write out a brief, simple account of your God story, using the outline provided in this session.

• Likewise, if you have not already done so, write out a brief outline of God’s Story, using your own words, so that you could share it with someone else.

• Take the plunge. Begin this process of sharing your faith with the person you prayed for in the previous session. Let someone else know that you have begun this process, and give them permission to pray for and encourage you in this mission.