

Sharing Our Faith in a Time of Social Distancing

By Jennifer Garcia for the Hein-Fry Book of Faith Challenge 2020

Evangelism: helping other people find that unmerited grace in Jesus so that they can live a full life.

- Rev. Gerald Sharon

Evangelism can be a scary word, evoking knocking on doors or handing out pamphlets. But in a time of crisis when we are maintaining social distancing to care for our health and our neighbors', we can find different ways to approach sharing our faith. This Bible study is meant to open a biblically-based discussion about how to be relational, flexible, and respectful in our evangelism efforts. Since no one is an expert on how to do evangelism during a pandemic, this study is heavily discussion based to spark ideas, conversation, and involvement among participants. The curriculum could be easily adapted for general and non-COVID-19-specific use.

Objectives:

- Start a conversation about evangelism
- Explore varied evangelism practices from our own experiences
- Practice sharing parts of our faith stories with each other
- Discuss biblical evangelism stories and identify ways they connect with our evangelism practices
- Brainstorm what evangelism could look like during social distancing

Session Overview:

Each session is designed to be about 90 minutes, depending on the talkativeness of your group.

- Welcome and Introduction (5-10 minutes)
 - Greet participants, share any logistics, and introduce the topic and the theme for the day.
- Bible Study (20-25 minutes)
 - Scripture is foundational in evangelism but can sometimes be used to justify aggressive, uncompassionate evangelism methods. This series is grounded in biblical evangelism stories that show relational, flexible, and respectful ways of sharing our faith. It may help to reiterate the theme at the end of the Bible study portion before moving on to the group discussion.
- Group Discussions (20-25 minutes)
 - These can be done as a whole group or in smaller groups. The breakout room feature on Zoom is helpful for breaking up into small groups in virtual workshops. A 5-minute break afterward may be included.
- Storytime (30-35 minutes; 5 minutes per person in each small group)
 - This is a crucial part of these workshops and should be done in small groups. Sharing our faith involves sharing stories about how God is involved in our lives and the world. Storytime is meant to be a practice space where we share stories about God with each other in small, unthreatening groups so we get used to talking about God with others. Leave plenty of time for this portion.
- Closing (5-10 minutes)
 - Bring the group back together. If desired, choose a "homework assignment" for the next week. Example: send a personal invitation to friends and family to watch a livestream or prerecorded worship service.

Workshop Session Guide

<p>Week 1</p> <p>Theme: Relational Evangelism</p> <p>Bible Story: The Woman at the Well, John 4:1-42</p>	<p>Week 2</p> <p>Theme: Flexible Evangelism</p> <p>Bible Story: Philip and the Ethiopian, Acts 8:26-40</p>	<p>Week 3</p> <p>Theme: Respectful Evangelism</p> <p>Bible Story: Paul in Athens, Acts 17:16-34</p>
<p>Key Takeaway</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relational evangelism: Like the woman at the well, we can share our faith with people we already know through conversations and loving behaviors over time. 	<p>Key Takeaway</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexible evangelism: Like Philip when he interacted with the Ethiopian, we can be open to the Holy Spirit moving us in unexpected directions without tying ourselves to evangelism scripts. 	<p>Key Takeaway</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respectful evangelism: We live in a world of diverse beliefs, so like Paul in Athens, we can find something we appreciate about others' beliefs to start a conversation.
<p>Bible Study Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What did the woman do after talking with Jesus? Who did she tell? What do you think was compelling about what she shared with them? What does this story have to tell us about how we share our faith? 	<p>Bible Study Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the differences between Philip and the Ethiopian? How did they connect? What things happen in this story that the characters might not have expected? 	<p>Bible Study Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How was Paul feeling when he was in Athens (vs. 16)? How did he react? What did Paul appreciate about the Athenians (vs. 22)? How did he use that appreciation as a way to start conversation with them?
<p>Group Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What have your experiences been with evangelism? How can we do relational evangelism during social distancing? 	<p>Group Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did your "homework" go? If it was difficult, what was difficult about it? What was a time you felt completely loved and accepted? What made you feel that way? 	<p>Group Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What have you learned about sharing your faith in these workshops? How will you continue this work?
<p>Storytime</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share part of your own faith story. This could be about your baptism, a crisis that shook your faith, a time God answered a prayer, etc. 	<p>Storytime</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tell a story about a way you have seen God's love expressed during the time of social distancing. 	<p>Storytime*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write and share a no more than two paragraph summary of God's story (creation to Jesus, if not creation to now) avoiding religious language/jargon. It should be understandable to someone who has never been to church.

*This storytime assignment is challenging, so introduce it at the end of session 2 and consider assigning it as "homework." A crucial part of sharing our faith is being able to talk about how God works in the world in non-technical terms, so it's a worthy challenge.