

## Evangelism

1 Peter 3:15-16

Remember when your teacher at school told you there is no such thing as a stupid question. I know. I know. They were encouraging class participation. They wanted to help you get over your fear of asking questions. But with all due respect, there are stupid questions

- Are we there yet? Yes, we're just driving around in circles to annoy you.
- Are you asleep? To someone snoring away. (Lisa Hardy)
- This question was asked on a cruise ship. Does the crew sleep on board?
- What's 10% of \$60?
- On a cruise ship: Does the crew sleep on board?
- Where did I put my phone? While talking to someone on the phone.
- How late is the 24 hour study room in the library open?
- Is it cold outside? Snow covers the ground. (Carmen Diehl)
- If I eat myself would I become twice as big or disappear completely?
- Do these pants make my \_\_\_\_\_ look \_\_\_\_\_?

There is one area though where there may be no such thing as a stupid question, and those are spiritual questions. Questions of faith. I know some spiritual questions can appear to be stupid. "How much can I make if I sell my soul?" "If I go to heaven, can I still watch anime?" Because every spiritual question, no matter how dumb it may appear to be, has the potential of opening eternal doors. A spiritual question when asked of someone who is prepared to give a good answer can lead to salvation.

As Christians we are a part of two worlds at once. We live HERE, but we belong THERE. THERE is our identity. THERE is our destiny. We were meant for THERE. We were created for THERE. As Christians our goal isn't just to go from HERE to THERE. We want to take as many people with us as we possibly can.

We don't want to go from HERE to THERE by ourselves. The good news of Jesus needs to be shared. So, as we live our lives HERE, we want to live in such a way that others want to join us THERE.

Here is what the Apostle Peter writes in 1 Peter 3:15-16:

*15 But in your hearts revere 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, 16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*

What we're talking about is evangelism. Evangelism is simply sharing our faith. Evangelism doesn't have to be scary. Evangelism can be living our lives in such a way that it draws attention to Jesus, and gets people to ask the right questions, and then answering those questions in a thoughtful way.

How do we live a life that makes people ask? This is just as important for you and I here this morning as it was for the people Peter wrote to originally. We don't just want to get from HERE to THERE. We want to take as many people with us as possible. So, how do we live a life that makes people ask? Before you can ever find the right answer, you must first ask the right question. So, how do we get people to ask the right questions.

## I. HOPE

The first ingredient is hope. What is it that gets people to ask? What makes them wonder? What sparks the intrigue? Peter says its hope. Verse 15 says, *“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you give the reason for the HOPE that you have.”* It’s our hope that makes them ask.

Hope is the expectation of a positive future that redefines our outlook now. Hope is the knowledge, the certainty, the assurance of THERE that changes how we see everything HERE. With hope, big problems become small problems. Out of our control becomes within His control. Monumental setbacks become momentary inconveniences.

But the word that describes most people’s expectation of the future is not hope, but fear. A February 19 article in *Psychology Today* talks says that for most young adults their idea of the future is one of “dread.” As a culture, we are losing our hope. Contemporary imagination is filled with dystopian visions and apocalyptic landscapes. Our expectation is shackled by anxiety.

In 2017, Sarah Fader a 37 year old social media consultant texted a friend about an upcoming visit. When her friend failed to respond quickly, Sarah began to panic. She posted the following message on Twitter, “I don’t hear from my friend for a day– my thought, they don’t want to be my friend anymore.” She followed with the hashtag #ThisIsWhatAnxietyFeelsLike. There are time we all tend to overthink, or jump to the wrong conclusion and assume the worst, but here’s what got me. Within hours, thousands of people added their own stories with the hashtag #ThisIsWhatAnxietyFeelsLike, and Sarah’s original tweet was shared more than a thousand times. She had struck a very tender nerve.

People want hope. People need hope. This is where our hope in Christ can make a difference and really stand out. Because we believe in a future; we know a future where the last word will not be death, or disease, or dementia, or terrorism, or climate change, or political polariazation, or disappointment, or loneliness, or failure.

Christian hope is having a certainty, an assurance of an eternity where everything is as it should be. This is no make believe fairy tale. I’m not talking about riding the good ship lollipop, and singing pure imagination from Willy Wonka. It’s not sticking our fingers in our ears and yelling “LA LA LA LA LA LA.” It’s not going through life with our fingers crossed behind our backs like we “hope” we packed our deodorant.

No, Bible hope is having assurance about a glorious future because of our certainty of what Jesus did in the past. Remember what Peter said in 1 Peter 1:3:

***Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.***

We have a living hope grounded on the historical reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have hope because the tomb is empty. We have hope because death is defeated, and the grave will not have the last word. And Since Jesus rose to new life in glory, we can rest assured in His promise that we will share that eternal life with him. We’ve been promised an inheritance that can never perish spoil or fade. Knowing that’s what awaits me THERE changes my perspective on a whole lot of garbage HERE.

Why hope? Why does Peter single out hope. Why not give an answer for the faith that we have, or love, or joy? Those are all important. Maybe that is best answered by Anne Frank, the young victim of the Nazi holocaust, who wrote in her diary. "Where there's hope, there's life. It fills us with fresh courage and makes us strong again."

Do you remember Elizabeth Smart? She was the 14 year old girl who was abducted from her home in Salt Lake City. She was raped daily and held captive for 9 months. She was rescued after a stranger saw her with her captors at a local Burger King. Last year she wrote a book about overcoming the trauma. The title of her book, "Where There's Hope." People always want hope. They need hope. We have hope.

## II. Curiosity

The second ingredient is curiosity. They ask about our hope because they're curious. The difference in our lives creates intrigue. "Why do you have such a positive outlook? How do you look at life so differently? How do you have so much hope even when so much is going wrong?" It's curiosity. People want to know.

They may look down on your faith. They may call you a Jesus freak. They may profess to be agnostic, but there's still something about us that makes them curious.

Peter says we need to give them an answer because they asked us. They want to know. Evangelism works best, not when you're shoving the Bible down people's throats, not by carrying signs and yelling at people you disagree with, or cornering strangers in public. It works when we're the salt of the earth and we sprinkle or faith into everyday life, and it flavors everything around us. Jesus says we're the salt of the earth, well, one thing about salt is it makes people thirsty.

Jesus also says we are the light of the world, and the way we let our lights shine is through our good deeds. Evangelism works best when we let our acts of love shine into the darkest corners of people's lives.

Peter is writing to a group of Christians who live in Rome. They are in the heart of a pagan empire. At best, people look down on them for their faith. At worst, they are persecuted for their faith. That's the context surrounding these verses. But Peter wants them to live their lives in such a way that it generates curiosity. No matter how badly you are treated, no matter what people say about you, live in such a way that generates curious questions, positive questions, searching questions.

Back in chapter 2:12 Peter said this, *"Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."*

This means there is to be something very public and open about our faith. This isn't just for Sunday morning only. Your faith isn't to be kept completely personal and private. It must be lived out. It must be put on display. Curiosity comes from, as J.I. Packer says, "Christians being Christian in the world."

Jesus points out in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 that salt that loses its saltiness is useless. We can't hide our light under a bowl. In other words, people have to taste and see the difference in us. Here's a question for you to ponder this morning, what about your life makes people wonder why? And in a good way. Is there anything in you that makes people wonder where your hope comes from?

### III. Engagement

The third ingredient in evangelism that gets more people to go with us from HERE to THERE is Engagement. They ask. We answer. We need to engage with them. This is where the idea that there is no stupid spiritual question comes in. Because any spiritual question, whether it's about Jesus, the Bible, prayer, church, your faith, and yes, even your hope is an opportunity to tell them the good news about Jesus.

When Peter says, "*give an answer.*" The word he uses here is *apologia*. There is an entire field of theology called *apologetics*. It comes from this word. Apologetics is a big, fancy \$10 sounding word. A few weeks ago Carmen Diehl called me about a speaker they were considering for the Women's Retreat. Her name is Laurie Steward and she's an expert in apologetics, and Carmen wasn't sure about that word and wanted to make sure nothing weird was going on there.

Alright, nothing weird with apologetics. It comes from this passage right here where we are asked to give an answer, an *apologia*. It has nothing to do with apologizing. Rather, it is a legal term, that means *to give a defense*. So any theological discourse that gives a defense of the Bible, of Jesus, of Creation, of Faith, is apologetics. Lee Strobel's books *A Case for Christ*, *A Case for Faith*, and *a Case for the Creator* are some well-known examples of apologetics.

But you don't have to be a famous author or theologian to engage people with apologetics. This is something for all of us. Peter is writing to all the believers in Rome here. This is included in the Bible for all of us. Not just me or the elders, or Sunday School teachers.

This doesn't mean you have to be able to answer all the difficult questions, however, I would recommend that the more you can answer helps deepen your own faith. This is your own *apologia*. This is your personal story. This is the hope that YOU have. Why do you have that hope? Why do you believe in Jesus? What makes the difference in your life?

Engage people with your hope. Nobody can tell your story better than you, so Peter says you need to be ready to tell it.

Notice he says, "*Always be prepared...*" We don't just answer when asked. We are prepared to answer. If someone asked you this afternoon why you go to church? Why do you believe in Jesus? Do you really believe the Bible is God's Word? What makes you different? Do you know what you would say? Do you have any idea how you would answer them.

Each one of us needs to give this some thought. We need to have an idea ahead of time what we would say. We need to be prepared to give an answer.

### Love

The final thing that will help us take people with us from HERE to THERE when they ask is love. Peter says, "*Do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*"

Notice, he doesn't say be obnoxious, loud, angry and offended. Obnoxious Christians don't persuade anyone. We don't need bullhorn bullies yelling at people that they are going to hell. We don't need Christian protests with chants and slogans and signs where we go toe to toe with obnoxious unbelievers.

Everything we say and do needs to be done with gentleness and respect. Our world already has enough bitter, angry, and offended. If we, as the body of Christ, act bitter, angry and offended, then we just become part of the problem. I am concerned when Christians align themselves with things that are driven by outrage, and anger, and hostility. People will never hear our message of hope when what they see is this. (Show picture of angry Christians)

Peter's point here is that we must always take the high road. We as Christians cannot lower ourselves to their level. It doesn't matter whether it's at school, in the breakroom at work, on social media or in the public discourse. Do everything with a clear conscience. Do nothing that takes away from Jesus. It's hard to believe in the love of Jesus when those who follow Jesus are anything but loving.

Rosaria Butterfield (Show Picture) was an English Professor at Syracuse University. She was an intellectual and committed atheist. She was also a LGBT advocate in a lesbian relationship. In the process of writing an article against Christians, she came into contact with pastor Ken Smith.

Ken and his wife welcomed Rosaria into their lives and invited them to their home for dinner. They didn't attack her, berate her, or corner her. Instead, they listened to her, they valued her and in Rosaria's own words, "talked with me in a way that didn't make me feel erased."

They offered her an open hand of friendship, and she accepted. Over a period of several years, she began to ask questions, lots of questions, over and over again. Ken and his wife patiently listened to her questions, and with compassion gave her the reasons for the hope they had.

Rosaria describes the experience:

Had a pastor named Ken Smith not shared the gospel with me for years and years, over and over again, not in some used-car-salesman way, but in an organic, spontaneous and compassionate way, those questions might still be lodged in the crevices of my mind and I might never have met the most unlikely of friends, Jesus Christ himself.

Ultimately, Rosaria Butterfield put her faith in Jesus, and is married to pastor named Kent. You can read her amazing story in her book *The Secret Thoughts of An Unlikely Convert*. As an author and speaker Rosaria Butterfield now shares her own story of the hope that she has. What could happen if we did the same?