



## “Engaging with a skeptical world!”

**Bible Readings: Isaiah 53:1-9, Romans 15:5-12, Matthew 9:27-36**

Do you remember Uri Geller? He claimed he could bend spoons using his mind. Is he a psychic or magician? Were you a skeptic (then)?

What are you skeptical of now?

Skepticism is doubting the truth in something.

What are you skeptical of? There are advantages to being skeptical. Skepticism encourages you to challenge that which is widely believed rather than just accepting everything. The negative aspect of skepticism is it can lead to cynicism and a lack of trust in anything or anyone.

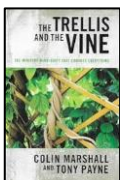
Religious skeptics question God. Today, as we begin a four-part series on *‘Engaging with a Skeptical World’*, I am excited to open our hearts to the work of God in the world and to reframe our thinking about the **positive challenge** of engaging with people who ask questions.

In this way, skepticism is not an enemy to faith but rather a fertile ground for engagement. Skepticism becomes a catalyst for deeper understanding and growth in faith. Through honest dialogue, and a willingness to grapple with tough questions, we can build bridges that connect our faith with the skeptical world.

1 Peter 3:15 says “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.”

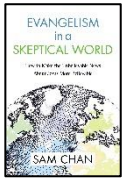
What can feel impossible in our estimation, is always possible for God. A random new fact about me. I am amazed by the scale and ability to build bridges or tunnels to cross large volumes of water. In 2008 as we were preparing to leave Hong Kong for Kiama, in the recalibrating of China with Hong Kong, a bridge to Macau and the Chinese coast, which are 50 kilometres apart, was promised. Within a decade it opened.

A marvel, yet it is nothing compared to the bridges the Spirit of God can create across lives! While engaging in meaningful conversations, bridge building, we become aware of the twists and turns in each person's life journey, and we learn to show the grace of God. Let the Spirit of God engineer the bridges to create the opportunities within our conversations.



It is in this first sermon in this series, I want to introduce this book. In the book "The Trellis and the Vine", the authors use the concept of the trellis and the vine as a metaphorical framework to describe the relationship between structure (the trellis) and the vibrant life of a Christian community (the vine), particularly in the context of Christian discipleship and growth.

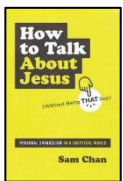
The connection in faith lies in finding the right balance between the trellis and the vine. Both are necessary, but the danger arises when the trellis (structure) becomes the main focus, overshadowing the life of the vine (spiritual growth, relationships, discipleship). The authors argue that a healthy Christian community should prioritise the life of the vine over the maintenance of the trellis. Evangelism is clearly the vine. Bible knowledge, which is our trellis, should transform the way we interact in our world, building relationships as Jesus did. This is discipleship.



Sam Chan, in his book *'Evangelism in a Skeptical World'* defines evangelism as "preaching the Gospel with the aim of persuading someone to respond to Jesus and his kingdom." How to talk about Jesus without the weirdo version of 'being that guy!' This encapsulates the core purpose of evangelism, the communication of the Gospel message with the intent of inviting others into a transformative relationship with Jesus Christ. Our Vision Statement inspires us to build connections, being directed by prayer, and seeking to see ourselves and others transformed to be more like Jesus.

The Gospel message is best understood as the proclamation of Jesus. When sharing this story, we are able to engage with others more easily if we think of it as a conversation, more than knowledge. The truths are still there. The Gospel is the good news that God, in Christ, has reconciled the world to Himself, offering forgiveness, redemption, and the hope of eternal life, through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

God is the primary source in the salvation narrative, taking the initiative to reconcile humanity to Himself. Evangelism, from this perspective, is based in God's love, grace, and redemptive plan for humanity.



When we share the Gospel message, we don't need to give all Gospel truths in one go. This book\* [*"How to talk about Jesus (without being that guy)"*] gives practical examples of how to share Christ in a grounded, practical way. I found it really helpful and if you take the time to read it, I hope you do too.

To be intentional about evangelism, we need to get our head right with God and our hearts will lead the way! All evangelism should revolve around God and draw its power from Him.

There are four Biblical truths that Jesus modelled and taught, that connect our efforts to share Christ in a skeptical world.

### 1. Christ's Purpose: The Glory of God

The ultimate aim of evangelism is the glory of God. God with all of His greatness on display. Of course, God is great in all that He is, all that He has, and all that He does. When that is on display, we see the glory of God. So to glorify God is to reveal Him or make Him known. This has driven our Mission statement, **'To glorify God, making Jesus known, as we love and serve together'**.

That is exactly what true evangelism does. Every time you share the Gospel you reveal the glory of God. The Gospel reveals his great and excellent attributes—His love, His righteousness, His holiness, His justice, His wrath, His mercy, His grace, His power, His wisdom. The Gospel reveals His glorious act of salvation in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, every time you share the gospel you glorify God, whether anyone responds or not; because you are revealing the greatness of God through the person and work of Jesus Christ. There is nothing to lose.

But this glorious display extends beyond initial proclamation. The work of salvation in the life of everyone who receives Christ through faith displays God's greatness. All the angels of heaven rejoice each time someone turns back in repentance (Luke 15:7, 10). What is more, the changed life of the new believer reflects the image of God displaying his glory (2 Corinthians

3:18). Those individuals, who worship God now, and in eternity, glorify him by declaring his praise (Romans 15:5-12), as we read in our Bible Reading. All this is the fruit of evangelism.

So, evangelism glorifies God, displaying his greatness. When you love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and you want him to be glorified above all else, then evangelism will grip your heart, for it is all about his glory!

## **2. Christ's Passion: His Love for the Lost**

We saw Jesus' compassion in the Matthew reading. Is this your heart too? When we share our Heavenly Father with others in our skeptical world, He opens eyes.

Compassion is true love's response to genuine need. When Jesus saw the multitudes, he saw their need "they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). So he had compassion for them. But compassion is never passive; it is not mere pity. In the Gospel records, every time that Jesus had compassion, he moved into action to meet the need.

It is love that compels witness, a love for God and a love for others. Those who love God want to make Him known and glorify Him. Those who love people want to help them to know God, who meets their greatest need. The greatest thing we can do for another is to help them come to know Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. It is also the most loving thing. Building bridges and tunnelling a love that is the road for another: other-centred love!

To ensure that our witness is truly Christ-centred, we must weave these truths into the fabric of our lives and those that we speak with.

## **3. Christ's Plan: The Great Commission**

What do you see when you enter the foyer in the CPC at KAC? The Great Commission begins with the words of Jesus, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:18-20). Have these words lost their impact? Have they become too familiar, have they made us blasé? Can I suggest maybe we are the skeptical ones of the power of God?

Understanding "all authority" has a transforming influence on the messengers—it makes the witness unstoppable. It was true for the early believers, and it will be true for us, as well. We are all called to this task.

## **4. Christ's Power: The Holy Spirit**

An unstoppable witness requires more than human strength or fortitude to be faithful and effective. Fruitful witness requires power, the inner power of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 4:29, the disciples prayed in the face of persecution for the Lord to "enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness." Their prayer was answered when "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly" (4:31). It was as Jesus promised, "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).

Like any of us, the Apostle Paul knew what it was like to witness in "weakness and fear, and with much trembling" (1 Corinthians 2:3). But he also knew that it wasn't his words that would make the difference. It was the "demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not

rest on human wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Corinthians 2:4-5). God-centred evangelism draws its power from God's Spirit.

While God is the ultimate initiator, God chooses to send believers as his messengers to the world. We are His ambassadors authorised by His command, empowered by His Spirit and constrained by His love. To be an ambassador is a humbling responsibility. If we see it as being an 'embarrasser', we are self-absorbed. Evangelism is the wonder of the beautiful collaboration between God and individuals in the process of sharing the Gospel. Believers are invited to actively participate in God's mission, becoming instruments through which, the transformative message of Jesus, is communicated.

Recognising both divine sovereignty and human responsibility reframes evangelism. It underscores the importance of dependence on the Holy Spirit while embracing the role believers play in faithfully and effectively communicating the Gospel.

When evangelism is about the glory of God, it is clear there is no rigid formula. It is about sharing the love of God by engaging with others in humility and love. People are skeptical when they feel judged and spoken down to. Begin by listening, showing compassion and interest in another.

Paul's words to the Corinthians remind us to approach the skeptical world with humility. Coming in weakness, fear, and trembling, we recognise that faith is not built on human strength, eloquence, or wisdom. Instead, it is a conduit for the Holy Spirit to work, relying on God's power, authority, and truth.

Keep in mind that engaging with a skeptical world requires a holistic approach that acknowledges the diverse influences shaping our views. Embracing skepticism as a healthy space for dialogue, we find opportunities to build bridges and share our faith in meaningful ways.

Let us acknowledge the things we are skeptical about. As we come together in unity, let us approach the skeptical world with humility, recognising the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. May our conversations be characterised by love and humility, allowing the Holy Spirit to work through the twists and turns of each life. And we do this for the glory of God.

So, make a New Year's resolution today, before you go home. Spend some time reflecting on how you can engage more effectively, just as Jesus modelled, with our skeptical world. Resolve to re-focus on God. Live with your confidence in Him. Resolve to focus on evangelism. Resolve to trust the transformative work of the Spirit to guide you.

Today I want to encourage you to engage with the skeptical world around you. Be open in your conversations, seeking to build ongoing relationships. Next week we will explore building bridges based on the trellis so the vine flourishes. When we believe this, we are living with confidence in Jesus.

Let me reiterate, 1 Peter 3:15 says "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."

Amen!

*\*Put in an order (for the book/s) at the office so that we can bulk buy*