



"Disengaging from Skepticism: Breaking Down Barriers in Sharing Our Faith"

Readings: Psalm 139:1-12; Acts 6:1-7; John 13:31-38



Today, we are exploring the challenge of why we disengage from sharing our faith in a skeptical world. I will explore our hesitancy to share our faith openly, identify the barriers, and discover ways to support and encourage one another to share Jesus.

This is not coming from guilt or failure.

Christianity Explored



- Comfort
- Fear of rejection
- Lack of confidence
- Feeling like you don't know enough
- Out of practice
- Faith is private



Rico Tice, who wrote "**Honest Evangelism**", the background to *Christianity Explored*, provides valuable insights into the barriers hindering us sharing our faith such as: comfort, fear of rejection, lack of confidence, the misconception of needing all the answers, loss of practice, and viewing faith as intensely private.

Which of these resonate with you?

I am going to raise two considerations as to why we disengage and then, two considerations as to how we might re-engage

Breaking Down Barriers in Sharing our Faith

- Church needs to have an open door to all because from this starting point, we build faith.
- We can disengage when we don't know where to start.
- It is very easy to feel tempted to dilute our beliefs. Does this stem from a lack of confidence in the Gospel?
- Allow God to search our hearts, test our thoughts, and guide us.



1) Breaking Down Barriers in Sharing our Faith

Firstly, maybe you are hesitant to share your faith because it feels as if the people around you have little interest in matters of faith. We mentioned last week that Christianity has been foundational in the formation of western society. But we are now living in a post-Christian world. The Church no longer shapes society. People now have very little knowledge of God and no personal history with Him.

The message is that people are not looking for God.

So, every request for a baptism, wedding, or funeral, I will gladly accept because in this conversation, people are connecting with God.

These are key moments in my ministry, as I find inroads into the skeptical world. Church needs to have an open door to all because from this starting point, we build faith.

In the past, the average person was familiar with the main stories of the Bible. This is why it made sense to approach evangelism by encouraging others to take their knowledge of God and translate this understanding to give their hearts to Christ.

Clearly this is not the way to share our faith with a skeptical world today. We can easily disengage, when we don't know where to start.

Secondly, it is very easy to feel tempted to dilute our beliefs in order to not offend, and as a way of connecting with the skeptical world.

A big proportion of these temptations, stem from a lack of confidence in the Gospel. Conflict can be off-putting for many. I encourage us afresh to find your worth in God.

In Psalm 139:1-12 we are reassured that our worth and value comes from God. We do not need to fear being measured by others. God is our ultimate measure.

The tension arising from human judgments and differences can create anxiety and fear when sharing our faith. When we allow God to search our hearts, test our thoughts, and guide us, we find peace in His unchanging truth.

God is at work. Let His confidence guide you.

My second point of disengagement:

Being Known as a Church who Prioritise Evangelism

- A Great Church is an Evangelistic Church, not a silent Church within closed walls. A great church is a connecting Church, to build bridges into people's lives.
- Evangelism takes personal commitment, perseverance, practise and prayer.
- As the body of believers, we need to work together making evangelism a natural outflow of our shared faith.
- Evangelism must permeate our Church culture.



2) Being Known as a Church who Prioritise Evangelism

A Biblical understanding of evangelism clarifies our role in the mission God has given to the church: we are to preach the good news about what Christ has done and pray that God would bring people to believe in Him.

We need to prioritise evangelism as a Church. Interestingly, the National Church Life Survey (NCLS) indicated, that as a church, we desire to develop our practise in the area of evangelism.

During this year, Michael, Cameron and I will develop further opportunities to develop our confidence in sharing the conversation of our faith.

A great Church is an Evangelistic Church, not a silent Church within closed walls.

A great church is a connecting Church, to build bridges into people's lives.

Evangelism takes personal commitment, perseverance (practise), and prayer.

Our church's intentional evangelism is what builds layers of an outward, Gospel focus that makes it normal... inevitable... for people to come to Christ.

Breaking down the walls of skepticism requires cooperation, reconciliation, and actively living as ambassadors for Christ.

(Remember the footy call ... Authenticity)

As the body of believers, we need to work together to create an environment that fosters evangelism, making it a natural outflow of our shared faith.

Evangelism is not one moment and then done.

Don't dump and run.

To be evangelistically effective, evangelism must permeate our Church culture.

Once we have prioritised evangelism, how do we engage with the skeptical world, break down the barriers, and share the Gospel with others?

Breaking Down Barriers in a Skeptical World

1. Story telling

- Gospel formulas leave people cold.
- Jesus modelled story telling.
- God is the hero of your story, not you.
- Three-point testimony story telling tool:
 - 1) Before knowing Christ
 - 2) How you met Christ
 - 3) After you met Christ



3) 3rd point is Re-engaging in a Skeptical World

i) Story telling

While I believe asking questions of another and that careful listening is the key to evangelism, how do we answer when asked about our faith?

Everybody loves a good story. In an age when pre-packaged Gospel formulas leave people cold, stories can be used powerfully by God to touch people's hearts and draw them to Himself.

Jesus modelled this. He told stories, engaging where each person was, and that opened up God's Kingdom and so lives were transformed for God.

Each of us has our own story of how God has worked in our lives. This story evolves and grows as we grow in Spiritual understanding and maturity. Remember God is the hero of your story, not you.

Own your story. God will use it to connect with others.

No one can argue with the story of how God changed your life. They may not agree with the Bible, your faith, or your morals, but they can't ultimately disagree with what Christ has done in your life.

If you are not sure what to say, try this three-point story telling tool.

Take a look at the insert I have provided today. This is a framework for a story testimony in a skeptical world: a "skeptimony": untangling your conversation with others

- 1) Before knowing Christ
- 2) How you met Christ
- 3) After you met Christ

1. Before Knowing Christ

When developing the "before Christ" part of your story, think through your life before you met Jesus. What were you defined by? Choose a few defining characteristics of your life apart from God and describe this. This is you being authentic and real.

2. How You Met Christ

Explain the circumstances that led you to consider Christ. Even if you never had a rock-bottom moment, every believer comes to a point where they meet Christ. Explain how God touched your heart and opened your eyes to His truth.

3. After You Met Christ

Share how God has changed your life. Pick a few characteristics of your life that have changed now that you follow Jesus. Don't forget to include how the Holy Spirit works in your life today. It's okay to let people know that you aren't perfect, and life can still be challenging, but you have found joy in the hope God offers.

Keep your story simple. Don't use Christian jargon that people wouldn't understand. Our language has to be accessible; not create a barrier.

Remember Christine Dillon's visit in November 2022? She encouraged us to tell stories from the Bible. Maybe this is less threatening than your own story. She encouraged us to practise. This series is a good reminder to keep practising.

Whatever story you tell, it is to glorify God and share His love and mercy. Story telling can be a non-threatening way to engage and break down barriers.

Breaking Down Barriers in a Skeptical World

2. The Body of Believers (Acts 6:1-7)

- The apostles actively engaged in their daily lives, allowing God to build His Kingdom in unexpected and transformative ways.
- Together we can use our varied gifts to engage with the skeptical world and break down barriers.
- We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.
- Use your unique gifts to build bridges to God's Kingdom.



ii) Walking together as the Body of Believers (Acts 6:1-7)

The Book of Acts underscores that God works through individuals with different gifts, talents, and backgrounds. The disciples' trust in God's profound possibilities is evident as they step out in faith. They actively engaged in their daily lives, allowing God to build His Kingdom in unexpected and transformative ways. This trust in

the diverse gifts and the power of the Holy Spirit contributes to the rapid spread of the Gospel throughout the early Christian community and beyond.

Each of Jesus' disciples had unique gifts and responses to conversion, emphasizing the diversity in God's design for sharing the Gospel.

Evangelism is not a formal speech; it is a way of life.

(Footy call ... Authenticity)

We each have different gifts given from God. We all play a part, together.

Together we can use our varied gifts to engage with the skeptical world and break down barriers.

Romans 12:4-8 says *"For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully."*

Each of these gifts are important to God and to His Kingdom. Use your gifts with authenticity. Use your unique gifts to build bridges to God's Kingdom.

As we continue to seek to re-engage...

Breaking Down Barriers in Sharing our Faith

3. Walk the Talk (John 13:31-38)

- Love is our mission directing us to patiently follow God's guidance until He calls us home.
- We are just the building blocks. It is God who is the builder.
- Practise sharing your story and persevere without losing hope.



iii) Walk the Talk (John 13:31-38)

We engage with a skeptical world and break down barriers when we are compelled by Jesus' command to love one another.

John 13:34 -35 says *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

Love is our mission, directing us to patiently follow God's guidance, until He calls us home. Reflecting on Peter's three denials of Jesus is a wake-up moment for Peter. V38 says *"Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!"* and in the days leading to Jesus' death, we see Jesus faced the skepticism of the disciples, and yet He loved them without measure.

Peter reflected, and learnt from his mistakes. Peter is a good example of what it means to be just the building blocks. It is God who is the builder. As we know, God went on to use Peter mightily in establishing the trellis, that is, the first church, and the vine, as the Word of God spread, and people's lives were transformed for Christ.

We do not need to be frightened of a skeptical world. Questions lead to growth. You don't need to know everything. When you can, share your story, using the gifts God has given you. Practise sharing your story and persevere without losing hope.

Finally, as we seek to re-engage

Breaking Down Barriers in Sharing our Faith

4. Read the Clues in our Culture and Community

- It is important our door is always open so that conversations can be raised without the fear of judgment. We need to cross the boundaries of difference and show respect for each other.
- To read our culture we need to be willing to wade into it, to understand why people are skeptical and from here, find a starting point by which to point people to the Living God.
- As ambassadors of Christ, we become people who practise sharing the Gospel, so that all may come to know Christ.
- Just go out and start by being Jesus to our community every day.



iv) Read the Clues in our Culture and Community

The process of breaking down barriers cannot begin without understanding perspective. We need to appreciate the diversity of our heritage, culture, families, and life experience. We live in a multi ethnic, multi religious culture. We need to cross the boundaries of difference and show respect for each other. When we love and are other-centred, we engage with diversity. We grow when we push gently into our differences. This is how we build bridges into the lives of those different to us.

When we avoid different lifestyle choices to our own, such as gender and sexual identity issues, we are disengaging from a skeptical world. There will never be an opportunity for conversation. It will be impossible for the vine to grow in these places. It is important our door is always open so that conversations can be raised without the fear of judgment.

We see this modelled with each of our Mission partners. They enter a different culture and must grasp the underlying beliefs and practises of this culture before barriers can be broken down and Christ can be shared.

In Acts 17 Paul also gives an example of engaging with the skeptical world when he spoke with the scholars and philosophers in Athens.

He understood the Greeks believed in multiple gods. They valued these deities so much that they carved images of them into stone and displayed them in prominent places around the city.

Paul found among these statues an 'Unknown god'. He used this statue as a way to introduce Jesus.

To read our culture we need to be willing to wade into it, to understand why people are skeptical and from here, find a starting point by which to point people to the Living God.

We must grow more aware of the clues within our own culture and more comfortable to let people share who they are. From this place we begin the journey of an authentic conversation about our hope for eternity.

Together, let's pray that as ambassadors of Christ, we become people who practise sharing the Gospel, so that all may come to know Christ.

In conclusion, I return to this verse: 1 Peter 3:15 *"But in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect"*.

Rather than forcing the opportunity or feeling forced to evangelise instead, wake up and decide every day to be as Jesus, in every moment and experience.

You will be amazed at the opportunities that will open up. Be ready by preparing your 'skeptimony' this week. Maybe you would be willing to send it in or share it at next week's service.



Let me pray.

Heavenly Father, search our hearts. Soften our hearts and fill us with your love. Please give us a love for others that seeks their best and we know, this is to come back into a relationship with you, as you created us to be.

As your ambassadors, help us to live lives of love and service, reflecting your glory and inviting all to experience the transformative power of the Gospel.

In Jesus' name we pray,
Amen