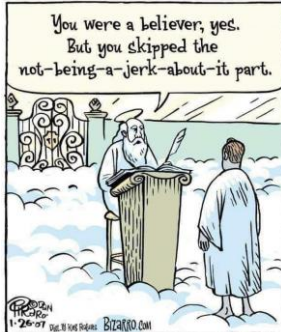




## “How to Engage in practical ways with a Skeptical World”

Psalm 78:1-8, Matthew 5:43-48, 28:18-20, 1 Peter 3:8-18



Sam Chan’s book “How to talk about Jesus (without being THAT guy)” reminded me of this cartoon where St Peter at the pearly gates points out to the recent Christian arrival he WAS “THAT guy”.

St Peter says,

“You are a believer, yes. But you skipped the ‘*not-being-a-jerk-about-it*’ part.” Image credit to “bizarro.com”

So this morning as I speak here I don’t want to be THAT guy **myself** because as Sam Chan says in the book there is no ONE right way to DO evangelism.

Let me pray as we commence.

Loving Father, as we hear from your word this morning, may the words spoken bring honour to Jesus and enable us to live in obedience to him. We pray in Jesus name, Amen

### A. There is a crisis in evangelism

Tim Keller gave a talk in 2006 called “The Supremacy of Christ and the Gospel in a Postmodern world.”

In this talk Keller quotes Dr Martin Lloyd-Jones a Welsh preacher who was minister of the Westminster Chapel in London for 30 years. In 1959 Lloyd-Jones gave a series of messages on revival and one was on Mark Chapter 9, where Jesus’ disciples **cannot** cast out a demon. They ask Jesus,

“Why couldn’t we drive it out?”

And Jesus answers, “**This kind** only comes out with prayer!”

Keller says quoting Lloyd-Jones,

“Jesus was teaching his disciples that their ordinary methods did not work for “**this kind**”.

Lloyd-Jones went on to apply this to the church in the contemporary world asking the question “Is the spirit of this age like the spirit of past ages? Is it the same? It is not!”

Put simply, Jesus is saying, “**the demon is in too deep for your ordinary way of doing ministry**”

Keller then goes on to say that what Martin Lloyd-Jones and others are saying is that:

“the Western world is now a mission field ... unlike any Mission field we’ve ever faced because it is an **ex-Christian Mission field** and it is the first time that the church has had to evangelise on a large scale a Western culture that used to be Christian.”

Let me pause from the quote to make a couple of observations about what he was saying. I saw this shift happen in Australia in the late 1990s. I was leading an **Adult EE** personal evangelism training program in our church. We saw many people come to know Jesus and we had trained numerous teams of church members in how to witness. BUT in about 1997, it was as if our culture shifted overnight and the number of people responding declined.

Keller says that the historic ways of evangelism such as crusades, personal evangelism training, and seeker services; all **assumed** that people understood the basics,

“They had a Christian **mind** and **conscience**, but they didn’t have a Christian **heart**. The need, then, was for some kind of campaign or program that roused and shook people — taking what they already basically believed and making it vivid and personal for them, seeking an **individual response of repentance and faith**.”

BUT this assumption is **no longer valid** in the west.

Sam Chan in his book notes that we now live in **two worlds in the 2020s**. There is the **majority** world of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East where Christianity is growing rapidly. And the **Western post-Christian** world of UK, Europe, Australia, Canada, USA

LifewayResearch in 2022 said that

“Christianity is growing faster in Africa than any other place in the world and more Christians live in Africa than any other continent,…”

[...according to the 2022 Status of Global Christianity report.

- **LifewayResearch, 31 January 2022]**

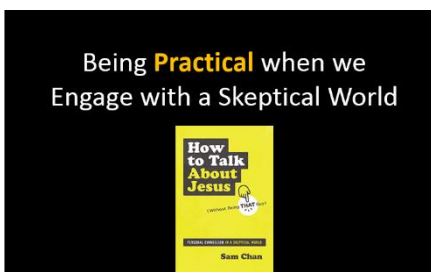
Lloyd-Jones spoke about the shift in 1959, Keller was saying it early 2000 and Sam Chan is saying it again nearly 25 years later. There is **no magic bullet** for evangelism in the West in the 21<sup>st</sup> century,

**“the demon is in too deep”**



It is as if we had gone back to 500 AD when the majority of the western world had no knowledge of Jesus and when evangelism was a long and radical **PROCESS**.

**AND this is Sam Chan’s premise.** While acknowledging that a 20 minute sermon event or a 15 minute walk up gospel presentation have their place... **The majority of personal evangelistic gospel activity, 90% says Chan, will be one-to-one conversations with people who have become our friends.**



Sam says we all want friends and family to know Jesus. And the way we would like to do it is:

- Without losing our friendships;
- While not being unnecessarily socially awkward;
- And not being inappropriate.

Hence the book !!!

## B. What can be done?

I want to talk this morning about three practical steps to engaging with a Skeptical world drawing from Peter’s letter, Sam’s book plus other places and passages.

The three steps are:

- Prayer
- Practice
- Patience

### 1. Prayer

When you become involved in evangelism in any way, shape or form, you are very quickly confronted with your own weaknesses and short comings, so the first practical step **HAS** to be Prayer.

Peter says in 1 Peter 3:15,

- “set apart Christ as Lord” (NIV 1973)
- “in your hearts revere Christ as Lord” (NIV )
- “honour Christ the Lord as holy” (ESV)

Here is the first reason

Jesus says in John 16:9

**“when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgement:” [...he judges]**

- a) It is the work of the Holy Spirit. Why is it important? We are **simply the messengers** – the rest is up to God and so.
- WE shouldn't **DESPAIR** if friends do not respond; OR
  - Likewise we shouldn't become **PROUD** hearted if they ALL do;

Because, **GOD DID IT!** And HE is Lord of the Harvest.

- b) **Secondly**, as Martin Lloyd-Jones said “the demon is in too deep for your ordinary way of doing ministry” and Jesus says in Mark 9

“This kind only comes out with prayer!”

Have you ever seen a move of God after a long, looong period of seemingly unanswered prayers. I have, 10 years ago when it seemed as if everything had just lined up to build and pay off the CPC. People said to me afterwards, it was the culmination of years of prayer by faithful saints in **Kiama and Minnamurra**.

Luke 5:16 says that,

“Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”

Peter in v12 of **1 Peter 3** says – quoting Psalm 34

“The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayers.”

- c) **Thirdly**, Faith is a gift from God as it says in Ephesians 2:8-9
- As Christians we can sometimes forget how hard it is to believe.
  - We need to pray that God will grant the **gift of faith** to those around us because as Jesus says in John 6:44...
  - “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them” John 6:44
  - That is **EVERYONE** God provides rain and sun for; the people he calls **you and I to love** in Matthew 5, our: family, friends, colleagues, neighbours, acquaintances, **even our enemies**

- d) **[Exercise 1]**

**Do you see an empty seat? Look around you.**



Who is it you know who **does not know** Jesus?

I want you to **FOCUS** on that seat. **IMAGINE** them in that seat?

For **the next few moments** pray for the empty seats in Christ Church, Church Point Centre, and St.Paul's.

And also all the empty seats at the other local churches Baptist, Presbyterian, Uniting, Catholic, Independent.

... .. **Lord FILL these SEATS, AMEN**

## 2. Practice

Peter says in the second part of this verse,

“Always **be prepared** to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”

– 1 Peter 3:15b

Our **SECOND STEP** is about being **intentional practiced** in your evangelistic way of life.

Part of this preparedness is of course to be prayerful as mentioned

Here is a dangerous prayer to PRACTICE each morning,

“Lead me Lord to the person/people that you have been preparing for your good news about Jesus, teach me how to connect with them in a meaningful way; how to serve THEM sacrificially; and how I can to be an authentic witness for them...”

We also need to be intentionally practiced in three **ARTS**:

- The Art of Hospitality
- The Art of Listening
- The Art of Stories

a) Intentionally practice **the Art of Hospitality**

Sam Chan’s book says the majority of personal evangelism today will take place in the context of **hospitality**. Hence the most effective evangelistic tool for the 21<sup>st</sup> century may just well be **the BBQ**.

Chan says that **Evangelism is a lifestyle change**.

Whereas in the past we have always said to people “Come to our events, to our place, to our stuff!” Sam is saying we have to go to their things; their events; their places. The reason is because the most powerful influence in determining belief is **NOT** Facts and Data **NOR** even Experience. **IT IS a Community** of people who share similar beliefs. Christians need to be intentionally practicing ways to merge worlds so that our Christian and non-Christian friends meet and do stuff together in community.

Tim Keller notes that our gospel conversations will be unfolding more progressively in our life situations rather than as one-shot events.

*Please do not hear me saying that a person cannot hear the gospel story and respond right there and then. I’m not saying that. I have seen these God-appointments on numerous occasions.*

What I have seen in practice, and Sam Chan, Tim Keller and others are saying is that **now-days** a longer and slower progressive process of understanding is more likely as we unfold the gospel story.

Chan’s tip in his book for a progressive conversation is:

- **Coffee – Dinner – Gospel**
- At a 20 min coffee: conversations will usually start with **interests** – sport, family, hobbies.
- Over a longer time at dinner: and as social trust and relational capital is built; people may progress to sharing their **values** and their **worldview**.

b) The second ART we need to be intentionally practicing is the **Art of Listening**

Peter reminds us that when we do deliver our answers to

“... do this with **gentleness and respect**,” – 1 Peter 3:15

Being **GENTLE** is about how **we** should act, i.e. with kindness.

**RESPECT** is how **we** should treat other people i.e. with dignity.

We Christians can often be opinionated, quick to interrupt, and very ready to argue. We have lots to say and tell but often cannot hear what other people want to say. **And I know** that on more than one occasion I have assumed what someone was saying rather than **LISTENING** to them.

**Jesus in his interactions with people in the gospel narratives would more often ask questions rather than provide answers.**

Craig Springer in his book, "*How to revive evangelism*" says that Jesus asked over 300 questions, was asked 200 questions, and only directly answered questions 8 times.

Sam encourages us to evangelise like a counsellor (i.e. the way we would want to be evangelized) and **Ask Curious Questions** so people can tell **Their Story**.

**A helpful practice phrase to use is: "Tell me more!"**

*Things aren't going so well at work for me. Oh ok – tell me more...*

The best way that we can show **RESPECT**, says Steve Dinning, is to give people the "**gift of listening**" Putting aside our busyness, own agenda, our smart phones... and take time to Actively **LISTEN** to people's answers as they respond to our questions and tell **THEIR STORY**.

**LISTENING** is being present as another person shares about their interests, their values, and their worldview as we seek to understand and reflect their feelings and concerns.

- A helpful habit to practice is **remembering people's names** as well as names of family members, children etc. and next time you meet follow-up on them. **This will also take practice.**

### [Exercise 2]

**At morning tea** ask someone for three (3) first names...

- Partner or Parent
- Child or Niece/Nephew or grandchild
- Neighbour

Then... **REPEAT them back** in the reverse order to them.

**Evangelism today is going to look more like counselling and pastoral care than preaching.** Conversation rather than proclamation.

c) Thirdly we need to intentionally practice **the Art of Story**.

As a person shares **THEIR STORY** there may come a time when you will have an opportunity to share **YOUR STORY** so it is helpful if you have prepared and practiced what you might talk about.

Last week **Steve gave some simple steps** to preparing Your **STORY**.

Sam Chan also has a few tips... He says that the majority people when they tell their story either struggle to get to a point, i.e. lack a direction; or it is **SOOO** dry it sounds the same as everyone else's story, i.e. it lacks any personal detail.

In the coming weeks we want to help you refine your **UNIQUE** story. Sam says that it should not just say the same as everyone else's:

One day I was convicted of my sin, and then I repented, and I became a believer, and since then Jesus has been my best friend.

The reason that **YOUR** unique **STORY** is so crucial for witnessing today is that in this post-Christian world it provides plausibility that a Christian life **might actually be livable**.

Remember earlier Tim Keller quoting Martin Lloyd Jones about people needing to be “roused” to live what they know to be true?

The evangelism process in those past days follow the steps:

- It is **TRUE** -> you need to **BELIEVE** it -> you need to **LIVE** it

The process steps today ARE more like:

- I can **LIVE** it -> I can **BELIEVE** it -> it must be **TRUE**

Now more than ever the authenticity of the life that Christians lead is under scrutiny by the world. The top attractor to Christianity today is seeing people with genuine faith.

Coming back to our passages:

As **Steve said in week 2** of our series Jesus says that our lives should point people to God the Father,

“...let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” - Matthew 5:16

**1 Peter 2** says the same thing

“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.” - 1 Peter 2:12

And **1 Peter 3** says “ALL of you... live in harmony...be sympathetic,... love each other,... be compassionate,... be humble..., repay evil and insult with blessing...” **verses 8 and 9 SO THAT**

“... those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.”

- 1 Peter 3:16-17

Paul in Galatians agrees how we live our lives is crucial for witnessing

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” – Galatians 6:9

“And as for you,... never tire of doing what is good.” - 2 Thess 3:13

Or we can go on – but you get the picture. People today need to SEE Christians “walk the talk”

And through this process of extended conversations:

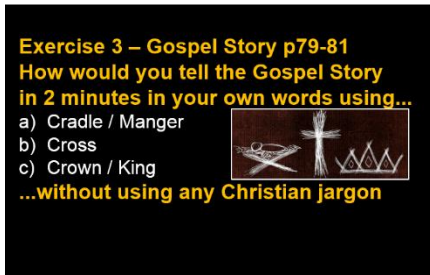
- a) A person may ask “**How did you become a Christian?**” which is an opportunity to share YOUR STORY; or
- b) You may also have an opportunity to ask “**Would you like me to respond?**”.

And so we ALSO need to be **intentionally practiced** in sharing both the **Gospel Story AND Jesus Stories**. AND There are any number of ways to share the Gospel Story.



There is Evangelism Explosion; Two ways to Live; 4 Spiritual Laws; Christianity Explored which we have used at KAC - all provide great discipleship tools for learning the Gospel Story. Each taking a different point of emphasis.

Tim Keller has a very simply model he called Cradle; Cross; Crown based around Philippians 2:5-11

**[Exercise 3]**

This is my last exercise for today.

How would you tell the Gospel Story in 2 minutes in your own words using: Cradle-Cross-Crown OR as Chan calls it Manger-Cross-King – WITHOUT using any Christian jargon.

**[IT Jargon example if there is time]**

Christians believe that God sent his son Jesus to be one of us. **[CRADLE]** He died on the cross to save us **[CROSS]** but he rose from the dead and will come again to fix everything up and setup his kingdom **[CROWN]**. And we get to be part of his kingdom...

**OR** Try this one using verse 18 from 1 Peter 3: “Christians believe that God sent his son Jesus to be one of us. **[CRADLE]** Jesus died once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God. He was put to death on the cross to save us **[CROSS]** but he rose from the dead and will come again to fix everything up and setup his kingdom **[CROWN]**. And we can be part of his kingdom...”

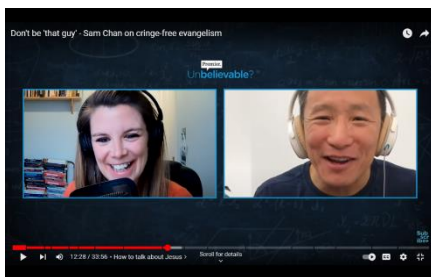
Find your way to tell the Gospel Story, learn it and practice it.

**It doesn't need to be perfect**, and you don't need to say every point in the first conversation...

### 3. Patient

And last and most importantly we need to be **Patient** remembering that Faith is a gift, transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit and that understanding and belief will be an unfolding progression for most people.

**Remember the barbarians** in 500 AD? As the gospel was spreading out from Jerusalem and Rome to a pre-Christian world it was a long drawn out process, a bit like the IGL village ministry, where relationships and social networks have to be built before people will trust the Christians enough to listen to the stories about Jesus.



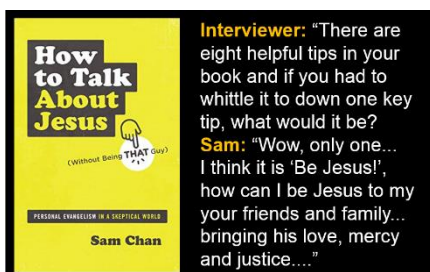
Sam Chan says that it takes **about two years** (as a rule of thumb) for new friendships in a neighbourhood to be secure enough that people will want to know what it is that is different in your life as a Christian and then trust you to share the gospel story.

Sam was asked by interviewer Ruth Jackson the one tip to take away from his book and this is his response...

**[Video - “Don't be 'that guy' - Sam Chan on cringe-free evangelism”**

From: [https://youtu.be/T4\\_Ib1iKaKM?t=725](https://youtu.be/T4_Ib1iKaKM?t=725)

To: [https://youtu.be/T4\\_Ib1iKaKM?t=830](https://youtu.be/T4_Ib1iKaKM?t=830)



**Interviewer:** “There are eight helpful tips in your book and if you had to whittle it to down one key tip, what would it be?”  
**Sam:** “Wow, only one... I think it is ‘Be Jesus!’, how can I be Jesus to my your friends and family... bringing his love, mercy and justice....”

He says Christians need to **BE JESUS** to the people around them. This will take **PRAYER** – lots of it; **PRACTISE** in the arts of hospitality, listening and story-telling PLUS time and **PATIENCE**.

In **Psalm 78** that we read this morning [at 8am] speaks of faith proclaimed to the generations by the current generation.

“we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done...”

“so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children...”

“Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds...”

The fruit of our witness and a life lived for Jesus may be seen now or it may not be seen until future generations. In your children, your grandchildren and even our god-children.

The take home for me from Sam’s book is that evangelism in 2024 will be a community activity of hospitality and ongoing conversation.

Please **will you join us in 2024** as we seek to **BE JESUS** to the generations that God has entrusted to our witness for as long as he gives us on this earth.

**Let me pray** Sam’s car prayer for us now.

Father help us to BE JESUS to our family and our future family; to the friends we have now and the friends we are yet to know. May we bring Jesus love, mercy and justice into their lives and the Holy Spirit’s peace and wisdom as you transform our hearts. We pray for those who consider us enemies and especially ask for your measure of grace to demonstrate Jesus love in practical ways to them – may they also come to know Jesus as Lord. **Amen**

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- “How to Talk About Jesus (without being that guy)” by Sam Chan – 2020
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