



- 1 If your group didn't meet last week, it's been a while since we reviewed what TCC aims to do in the lives of our congregation. Ask a group member to read the content in this yellow box, then as if anyone has any "*quaments*"—questions or comments. Take a few moments to discuss TCC's discipleship aims. If you **did** meet last week, **and** read this statement, you can move onto "**Alternate 1**".
- 1 This question both gets folks thinking about the gospel (the big idea of today's sermon) and also subtly reminds us all that hearing the gospel is a blessing (even if it wasn't well-received the first time we heard it!).
- 2 **NOTE: This website is one to bookmark! It's the online version of Webster's original dictionary; biblically informed and a trusted source.** Now, onto the question. The gospel is the "good news" that Jesus is the divine Savior of the world, and that we can have forgiveness through repentance and faith. On the other hand, a witness merely tells what he's seen. Very often the content of his witness does not contain the whole salvation message (the gospel). For example, the man born blind (John 9) simply knew [1] that he'd been born blind, [2] a man named Jesus smeared mud in his eyes and told him to go wash, [3] he washed and came back seeing. That is not the gospel; it doesn't say how to be saved.
- 3 Ask each group member privately to mark the scale with an "**E**" and a "**W**". Ask for volunteers to share their answers. Be ready to lead off with yours, if need be. Probe for peoples' conclusions. Possible conclusions include: "I'm not very faithful as a Christian." or "I need to study and prepare more." or "I'm a faithful witness, but not a very fruitful evangelist—and I feel relieved knowing that I'm actually doing OK."
- 4 We should conclude that every Christian must witness often, as a lifestyle. But only some Christians are gifted as evangelists. Be faithful to tell others what good things God has done for you. Don't feel guilty if you're not constantly leading folks to Christ. That's God's concern.
- 5 This question is really just an extension of 4. The conclusions should be similar. We have an obligation to witness all the time. We aren't responsible for which spiritual gift God gave us.
- 6 Ask one (or more) group members to read Pastor Dan's FaithStory aloud. Although it includes the gospel (thus qualifying as "evangelism"), the key point of this question is to look for ways that it "points to Jesus". **That** is the essential component of witnessing.
- 7 Talk through the process and elements of a good "FaithStory". Consider seeing how Pastor Dan's FaithStory does (or doesn't) follow those guidelines.
- 8 The easiest way to begin writing one's testimony is to have someone else ask some questions and jot down comments and phrases, then they can say "A constant theme seems to be..." or "It seems to me that your life..." etc. Then you trade roles. Take time in the group to do this for each other. Then, each person goes home with the notes written by his interviewer, and from that begins to work through the guidelines in "How to Write Your Five Minute 'FaithStory'."

Tell your group you'd like to hear what they come up with at your next meeting (and then really do it!). Make sure you have **yours** ready to share. Ask for one or two others to be ready by next meeting.

## Sermon Summary (Key Text: John 4:27-42)

We live in a very pluralistic society, and no doubt many of your neighbors hold beliefs that are deeply different from your own. The challenge in such a society is this. How can people be open about who they are and what they believe and still get along with one other? Today we are beginning a new series of messages which I have entitled, “A Faith to Share”. We must not hide our deeply held beliefs and we don’t want to speak about our beliefs in a way that provokes our neighbors, but a third alternative holds out a prospect of hope in a pluralistic society: learn to share our beliefs in such a way that fosters dialog while maintaining peace and civility. During this series we will be looking at what the Bible says about how Christians should be open about their faith. My goal is to show us how to do that in a way that makes Christianity appealing.

**I. The Call to Sow Spiritual Seeds.** So let’s look back at the beginning of the story (John 4:1-29). Jesus has been traveling with his disciples, and it has been a long, hot journey. Jesus sent the disciples into town to buy food while he stopped at a watering well to rest. A woman came to draw water and Jesus engaged her in conversation. He gently drew her out by using an illustration (v. 7) and making an appealing offer (v. 10). Then he made an interesting request (v. 16): “Go bring your husband” and she responded, “I don’t have a husband.” In a very matter of fact, non-condemning way he replied, “That’s right, you don’t have a husband. You’ve had five husbands, and the man you’re living with right now is not your husband.” (v. 17-18). This woman had been trying to satisfy her thirsty soul through romance and sexual relationships, and it hadn’t worked. She is amazed at Jesus’ insight—and at how non-judgmental and loving he is. She left her water pot, ran home, and told everyone about her experience with this man who claimed to be the long-awaited Jewish Messiah (v. 25-26). She’s sowing seeds of faith!

It is in this context that Jesus gives this metaphor to his disciples (v. 31-38). They were urging him to eat, but he said that the work God gave him to do sustained him just as food does (31-34). His work is “harvesting”, which is the end result of spiritual “sowing” (v. 35-38). Jesus used metaphorical language to describe what just happened between himself and the Samaritan woman, and what’s happening now between her and her friends back in town! We sow spiritual seeds by pointing people to Jesus; the harvest comes when people place their faith in him for eternal life. People are at different points in their understanding and response to Jesus (see the “**Engle Scale**” on the following page). Our goal is to help them take the next small, positive step toward God. Sowing and harvesting is a team effort, but we each have an obligation in this harvest.

**II. The Method of Spiritual Sowing.** Back in her home town this woman shared her experience with Jesus with friends she already knew. It didn’t matter to her that she was not a moral pillar of the community! Whatever your social context, we are to sow seeds there. Anytime you bring God up, there’s always the possibility someone won’t like it. But still, we must speak, because people’s eternity is at stake! She didn’t know much theologically; she just shared her story, and she pointed people to Jesus. We can do that too; disclose a bit about yourself, and then, over time, reveal more and more. As the relationship progresses, you disclose the fact that your faith in Christ is central to who you are. It plays a big role in how you make decisions, and how you deal with problems, and how you set your priorities. We don’t change who we are in order to gain others’ approval. Being open about your faith requires that you be honest with others about who you really are. Share your story. That’s what this woman did—and then she pointed them to Jesus. In every other religion, what’s really important is that you follow the religious rules; in Christianity, it’s all about Jesus. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one can come to God except through Jesus (John 14:6). It’s loving to tell people about the only man who cures our sin-problem. It’s also logical to speak up—the evidence for Jesus’ truth-claims is substantial.

**III. The Motivation for Sowing Spiritual Seeds.** Jesus broke a lot of societal norms to speak to this woman; he did it because he loved her. Our faith is personal, but it is not private. We need to tell our faith story and lovingly and respectfully point people to Jesus. Only Jesus offers true soul satisfaction. Because of her word, others checked out Jesus for themselves (v. 40-42). This is how people come to know Jesus. We share our story, and point people to Jesus. They share their story, and point still others to him. It is all about Jesus.

## The **Engle Scale** of spiritual receptivity to the gospel message:

- 7 Has no awareness of Christianity
- 6 Is aware of the existence of Christianity
- 5 Has some knowledge of the gospel
- 4 Understands the gospel fundamentals
- 3 Grasps the personal implications of the gospel
- 2 Recognizes a personal need
- 1 Repents and professes faith in Christ
- 0 Conversion
- +1 Evaluates the decision for Christ
- +2 Incorporates into fellowship
- +3 Learns and practices the Christian lifestyle
- +4 Communes with God
- +5 Develops stewardship

From James Engel's What's Gone Wrong With the Harvest?

### Our Speaker



Dr. Les Lofquist serves as Assistant Professor of Practical Theology at Shepherds Theological Seminary. Previously he for twenty years oversaw an association of 1,500 churches, pastors, Christian workers, chaplains, mission agencies, as well as eight Bible colleges and seminaries in twenty-seven countries and served as Editor of VOICE Magazine. Dr. Lofquist has authored over 120 articles. Married to Miriam for almost five decades they have five grown children.



# POINT

## **PointMan** Breakfast at the fire pit!

- Saturday, December 4

- 9<sup>00</sup>-10<sup>30</sup> am

- Just \$10

- Bring a camp chair

- Chick-fil-a breakfast (gluten free option available)

- To register: **tcc.org**

Keyword: **firepit**



## My “FaithStory”

Dan Clement

When I was in college I had a painful experience set the course for the rest of my life. The deadline had arrived for me to declare my major course of study, but already that year I had changed my major **five times!** I was **so** confused and frustrated! What added to my confusion was the fact that I actually was doing OK in all my classes. So I figured that my problem was bigger than just **school**; I didn’t know what to do with my **life**.

I’d heard people say that the Bible talks about “purpose in life”—but I didn’t know **what** it said **about** it. Then I saw a poster for a meeting sponsored by a campus Christian group, and I decided to check it out.

The meeting was fun—it was all done by students. During the evening two students even told their own life stories. They said that they had begun personal relationships with God, and that as they read and obeyed the Bible, they were growing in their love for God. They also said that God was changing them in very specific and good ways. **That** sounded like what **I needed!** One of the students offered to grab a Coke and talk some more.

After I told him about my confusion and frustration he showed me an article about God’s plan for our lives. It had simple points, helpful diagrams, and was all backed up with quotations directly from the Bible. I already was familiar with the idea that God loves me and has a wonderful plan for my life and that my sin has disrupted that relationship. However I was totally unaware that I needed to respond to God individually through repentance and faith in order to establish a relationship with Him. I thought that by going to church every week I was doing everything I was supposed to.

Jesus once said: “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes God who sent me, has eternal life and will not be condemned, but has crossed over from death to life.” (John 5:24) So that day I bowed my head in repentance and faith and prayed for God to forgive my sin, and, in Jesus’ words, I “crossed over from death to life”.

Looking back I realize that I’d just taken the decisive step in what actually had been a fifteen-year journey toward God. Even as a very small boy I’d felt the pangs of conscience convicting me whenever I was mean to my brother or lied to my mother. As I entered my teen years I received a Christian album with songs about Christ’s love and sacrifice. It stirred my heart. I think I wore the grooves out of that vinyl! A couple of years later my sister gave me one of those novels of the “Left Behind” type—and it terrified me! I knew I wasn’t ready to answer to God for my life!

But now, as I trusted Christ’s death in my place to pay the penalty for my sins, I took the decisive step that my journey had been leading toward all along. And as I began studying the Bible and getting to know my wonderful Savior, **He** began the process of changing me into the kind of person He intended me to be. He also has been helping me learn to trust him with decisions which are **much larger** than simply deciding what to study in school!

Ten years later, married and with two toddlers, we were preparing to serve as missionaries in communist Eastern Europe! Soon we were stepping off a plane in Romania, and as I saw police with machine guns throughout the airport I began to panic—*what was I getting my family into?!* But then I realized: “Wait! We’ve been allowing God and His Word to shape us and our choices, and although **we** don’t know what this path holds, **God** does—and **He** is trustworthy.”

That was over thirty years ago and God continues to guide me and change me as I read and obey His Word and learn to trust Him as the loving Heavenly Father that he truly is. Today the challenge is trusting God in a world-wide pandemic. But the Bible says: “God will show you the path of life, granting you the joy of his presence and the pleasure of living with him forever.” (Psalm 16:11), and time and time again, God has proven himself faithful to that promise.

## ***How To Write Your Five Minute “FaithStory”***

You can write an attractive, winsome, five minute story of your faith journey—your “*FaithStory*”—and learn how to share the story of your faith in a way which will see results. Preparing your *FaithStory* begins with **telling the story** of what your life was like before you received Christ. It is **not** necessary to go into extreme detail. Effective communication is usually concrete, clear, brief, and to-the-point. Your *FaithStory* will take no more than three to five minutes to tell.

### **Guidelines for Writing Your *FaithStory***

#### ***Don't:***

- Make statements which reflect negatively on any church, organization, or person.
- Don't mention denominations or church names—keep the focus on Jesus.
- Don't speak or write in a preachy manner. The purpose of a *FaithStory* is simply to tell **your** story.
- Don't use vague terms like “joyful”, “peace”, or “changed”, or religious terms like “saved”, “sin”, or “convicted” without explaining what they mean in everyday language or giving a real example from your life.

#### ***Do:***

- Ask God for wisdom. Be realistic, don't exaggerate.
- Begin with an attention-getting sentence or incident.
- Be positive, accurate, and specific—details arouse interest.
- Use a Bible verse which directly relates to your experience, but don't give detailed verse references (such as “1 John 5:11-13 says...”). Instead simply say, “One of Jesus' followers said...”
- Write things as you would say them.
- End with a logical conclusion.

#### ***Now, grab pencil and paper:***

- My attitudes, needs, and problems before I received Christ were...
- My life revolved around (I gained happiness and security from)... Give a simple example.
- How did this disappoint you? (How was it unfulfilling? How did you realize it?)
- When and how did you realize or become convinced that your sin caused a problem between you and a holy God?
- When and how did you first hear about Christ?
- What were your struggles with the idea of receiving Christ as Savior?
- What happened when you received Christ and how/why did your attitudes begin to change?
- What happened after you received Christ?
- How did your life change? When and how did you begin to notice change?
- How are you differently motivated now?
- Is there one verse from the Bible which powerfully relates to or illustrates your story?

#### ***Final checklist:***

- Does it read like a story?
- Is it disjointed? Does it make sense?
- Can you read it aloud in three to five minutes?
- Have you exaggerated anything?
- Did you give God credit for the changes in your life?