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How Do I Begin?

SHARING YOUR FAITH

Daniel Teerman



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Daniel Teerman



Grand Rapids, Michigan

This study is part of In the Works, a faith formation program for adults.

Studies in this series include:

Where Do I Come In? Joining God's Mission

What Do I Do with My Life? Serving God through Work

What Do I Owe? Managing the Gifts God Gives You

How Do I Make It Right? Doing Justice in a Broken World

How Do I Begin? Sharing Your Faith

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How to Use This Book

How Do I Begin? Sharing Your Faith, as well as the other books in the In the Works series, offers a unique format that combines insightful daily devotions with a discussion guide for small groups. It's simple and easy to use. Here's all you need to do:

Before your group meeting, please carefully read the five daily readings that offer insights on the topic for the week. You'll find them stimulating and full of practical ways to help you share your faith. We suggest reading one devotional on each of the five days rather than reading through all five at once. That way you can take your time and reflect on what the reading says to you personally. You may want to highlight lines that speak to you or jot questions or comments in the margin.

Note: Before your first small group session, you should have received a copy of this book so you can read the daily readings for Week 1 prior to your first meeting.

During your group meeting, use the small group discussion guides found at the end of each week of readings. These self-directing guides offer plenty to talk about for forty-five minutes to an hour or more. Groups should feel free to use them selectively, choosing the questions or activities that fit the group and the amount of time you have.

Each discussion guide includes

- an **Opening** question or activity that takes group members into the topic for the session.
- a **Bible Study** of passages that relate to the topic of the week. Group members should bring their own Bibles to the meetings or arrange to have a supply of Bibles available.
- **Group Discussion** questions that take participants back into the daily readings for the week and help relate them to their daily lives. Groups should feel free to select which of these questions they want to discuss; of course, you can

always substitute questions and comments from group members for our precooked ones!

- a brief **Closing** time of focus and prayer.
- **Action Options** for groups and for individuals. These are suggestions for follow-up activities that flow from the daily readings and group discussion.

From time to time, the discussion guides offer **Options** or **Alternative Approaches**, giving groups a choice of activities or questions.

Of course you'll want someone who's willing to lead the discussion and keep things moving for each small group meeting. But the discussion guide is written for the whole group, not just the leader. Together, may you grow in your understanding of how to begin sharing your faith in response to God's call to spread the good news.

—Faith Alive staff

Introduction

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

—Romans 10:13-15

When I was a young boy I was terrified of being in front of the other students in my class. I didn’t know what to do with my hands, and I was almost certain my classmates didn’t want to hear what I had to say. This fear became a paralyzing agent that seeped into my walk of faith.

Telling people about Jesus seemed more like selling outdated encyclopedias door-to-door than sharing good news. But then I began to consider it from another perspective. It’s really the story of how a friend of mine, who happens to be King, cleared away all my past mistakes through his sacrifice. What’s more, this King has great plans for me as an adopted son in his kingdom. I realized that this is an exciting story worth telling. It is a story that I *must* tell.

Some of us have been conditioned as Christians to be unfruitful as disciples. The way we think may need adjusting so that our actions not only match what we say we believe, but they become instrumental in helping us to live the most fruit-filled lives.

Perhaps you can relate to my fear as a young boy standing in front of the class when it comes to sharing your faith. You’ve been taught that your faith is personal, even private. It’s one of the things—along with politics—our culture teaches us to keep to ourselves. Or maybe you’ve just assumed that you don’t have

a story worth sharing. You think it's boring or uneventful, and you're afraid of your life being marked as insignificant.

That leaves you in a tenuous position. You want people to get to know Jesus, you really do, but you're also secretly hoping they find him some other way that doesn't involve you. Maybe you've played this out in your mind a hundred different ways, trying to figure out how to achieve both desires: "How can these people know Jesus without me messing it up? Do I have what it takes to contribute?" Maybe you've even settled on the position that you are actually "taking one for the team" by not "messing up" someone's chance of knowing Jesus. This inner struggle is a healthy call to obedience: to be and make disciples for the King. Experiencing fear and anxiety is normal, but it can also be a tool the enemy uses to cut down your ability to bear fruit in God's garden.

What if you could learn some skills that would help you be a more effective witness? What if you began to understand that it doesn't have to be so scary after all? What if you learned to exercise your faith muscles and engage with people in a way that didn't make you feel like the kid in front of class with sweaty palms every time?

I want to walk alongside you in this journey of discovery. All of us are people "in the works"—and we're supposed to help each other along the way. You have a story to share because the Storyteller created you. It's God's story, and God has a part for you to play in it. Let's walk together so that others can know this story and their part in it as well. Let's go!

WEEK 1

We Begin Together



The Great Cloud



These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

—Hebrews 11:39-12:2a

Everything changed the day that I became a father. I began to take more seriously what I would pass on to my children and to their children; the legacy I would leave behind. I remember vowing that I would let my children stay up late for important moments of television history—like Evel Knievel jumping a tank of sharks with his motorcycle. I didn't get to see that, but now I find myself imposing on my children a bedtime discipline that is undoubtedly more important than the crazed actions of a stunt man. Most of us have made similar vows, promising never to say things like, "Because I said so,"

only to hear the words come out of our mouths from a place we didn't even know existed. Whether we're aware of it or not, we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us.

Foundational to leaving a legacy is building on the lives of those who have gone before us. Sifting through the positive and negative patterns we inherit from parents, teachers, or other significant influencers is a constant challenge. People in our lives, along with their habits, have become a part of us. What will we keep that is worth standing on, passing along to our children? What trend will we break, desperately hoping not to pass it on?

The author of Hebrews describes our spiritual ancestors, those who have gone before us, as “a great cloud of witnesses.” These are the ones through whom God worked out his salvation and gave us as examples to follow, strong shoulders on which we can stand.

Some of the names in Hebrews 11 are familiar: Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Moses, Rahab. Countless others, unnamed, are examples of obedience to God's call in the face of seemingly ridiculous odds—jeered, flogged, stoned, sawed in two, and put to death by the sword. All of them persevered through trials “by faith”—not a faith they somehow stirred up on their own, but by desperately seeking and obeying Jesus, the “pioneer and perfecter” of faith. We are surrounded by this community of faith.

This community is informative to our witness. From them we understand, first of all, that the good news about Jesus is not a tale someone invented; it's rooted in history. The early disciples were *witnesses* to what God did through Jesus. They lived its reality. Second, their stories can comfort us in our own struggles and suffering. Peter reminds us not to be surprised at difficulties we'll encounter when living out our witness as a community: “Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you” (1 Peter 4:12). It's happened before and it will happen again. Third, we understand with much more clar-

ity what our community of faith is supposed to look like—a community of faith, perseverance, and power. A community in which God actively partners with people who understand that their lives are part of something greater than themselves. Something worth dying for.

Consider this “great cloud”—those who have gone before us and those who will come after us—as a team working toward the same goal: to proclaim Jesus as Lord and Savior to all people for the glory of God the Father. Everyone must hear. All of us are called to play our part in this community of proclamation.

God is not limited by us, but in his infinite wisdom, he has chosen to unfold the kingdom through people working in community with each other. How will you step into this community of faith? In what way will you identify with the great cloud of witnesses and stand on their shoulders? It’s time to look forward through the lens of history and evaluate the legacy you will leave, taking your place in that great cloud.

Discussion Guide



Opening (10 minutes)

Turn to a person right next to you and briefly discuss what comes to mind when you hear the word *witness*. Do you have good thoughts? Anxious thoughts? Does it conjure up notions of duty or privilege? Does it create feelings of being alone or belonging?

Then have someone read the following focus statement aloud:

God is waiting for his people to come together and be the body he sent his Son to redeem. We begin by recognizing that we're on this journey together—a journey some of us may have been walking for far too long on our own. As participants in God's story, with a history and a future, we find our strength in Jesus . . . *together*. Connecting with God and connecting with each other will bring about the unity for which Jesus prayed and will allow our witness to impact the world, through the power of the Spirit. And it all begins with a shared life.

Bible Study *(15-20 minutes)*

Read the following Scripture passages. Then use the questions below to guide your discussion.

- Hebrews 2:5-18; Romans 8:16-17
After reading these passages, what great advantages do we have as a community of faith compared to other communities (such as clubs or other associations) you may be a part of?
- Ephesians 4:4; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27
Reflect on how the body of Christ is supposed to function. What are some ways that you can build up the body rather than tear it down in your small group? In your neighborhood or local community? In the world? List at least three reasons why it is necessary for the body of Christ to be unified and working together.

Activity Variation

Divide into two small groups, each reading and discussing one set of passages and questions above. Leave enough time for the small groups to report to the larger group.

Discussion *(20 minutes)*

As time permits, discuss some or all of the following questions. Or discuss questions raised by group members instead.

1. "In God's infinite wisdom, he has chosen to unfold the kingdom through people working in community with each other" (Day 1). How does this partnership with God and with others encourage and shape your daily witness?
2. Reflect on a time when you felt wronged and thought you had a right to confront someone. How did it turn out? What might you have done differently? How did it either uphold the integrity of your collective witness with other Christians and your witness with non-Christians or not?

3. In what ways can our church, our “religion,” our way of doing things (even good things) become stumbling blocks that get in the way of people knowing Jesus?
4. It is said that people don’t understand the “why” of evangelism so they’re not concerned with the “how.” How is this true (or not) in your own experience? Why is being a witness so important?
5. “When we remain connected to the vine, something amazing happens. We begin to see fruit appear all around us. This happens because of our connection, not because of our effort” (Day 5). How do you stay connected to the vine, Jesus? Are there good things in your life that sometimes cause you to “burrow deep” rather than risk being exposed and “lifted up,” leading to more fruit?

Alternate Approach

Instead of using the five discussion questions above, spend some time paging through the daily readings together, and have group members raise their own questions and comments about what ideas resonated with them.

Closing (5-10 minutes)

The Greek word *koinonia* refers to an intimate bond of fellowship, a sharing community that seeks to have things in common and be in agreement. Only in Christ is it possible to find unity in our diversity. Spend some time praying for the bond of fellowship to develop in your small group together as you begin this study on sharing your faith, perhaps “popcorn” style as people are led. Close your prayer by praying the Lord’s prayer in unison.

Action Options

Group: Choose one of the following options for following up this session with your group:

Option 1

As a group, visit a local congregation, preferably one that's not part of your denomination. After the service, list three things you noticed that contributed positively to the body of Christ (things like teaching, hospitality, or creativity). Try to list *unique* qualities without entertaining negative qualities.

Option 2

Read Matthew 18 together and review the appropriate steps to lovingly confronting others to protect our witness as servants of Jesus. It may not always be neat; in fact, quite often it is messy, but this effort toward appropriate reconciliation honors God and promotes a witness for the world to emulate. List them on a board or sheet of newsprint, and then think of a specific situation in your community to which you could apply these steps.

Personal: Here are a couple of options for following up this session on your own this week:

Option 1

Take some time to write a list of people who helped shape your walk of faith. Pray for them one at a time. If you get a chance, call or send a note to at least one of the people on your list and thank them for allowing you to “stand on their shoulders.”

Option 2

“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18). Make an effort to step toward peace with those whom you are not at peace. Share a phone call, a kind word, or an all-out plea for forgiveness and understanding. Protect your witness as you go through your day in what you do and what you say. Make sure there is no separation between your walk and talk.