



How to ...

Share faith

1. Here's a way to prayerfully follow Jesus modelled on the Fresh Expressions approach to communal discipleship:

- find one or more Christians who share your interest.
- discover a simple way to love people round you.
- build friendships with those involved.
- share your faith.

Feel awkward about that last step? You won't know what to say? You'll look stupid?

Don't worry! Sharing your faith can be as natural as recommending a good hair dresser or telling a friend about a good deal.

2. If you are involved in a mission activity...

Add a spiritual dimension.

A weekly luncheon club met at the back of one rural church. Hardly any of the regulars worshipped on Sunday. After much thought, the leaders invited guests – with no pressure – to gather after lunch round the holy table, which they'd moved into the body of the church.

- They lit a candle;
 - played some Christian music;
 - read a story from Scripture;
 - had some silence;
 - read one or two prayers
- no more than 15 minutes in all.

Almost everyone stayed behind. The start of a new congregation?

3. Or perhaps you are starting something new.

Issue a welcoming invitation.

Imagine Jane teams up with Jalal. They give free croissants and decent coffee to their work colleagues each Monday morning. This provokes conversations and strengthens office relationships.

When asked why, they say something like 'We're into practical spirituality, and this is what we do.' When pressed, they add,

'If you want to know more, we meet after work on Tuesdays and for three quarters of an hour we explore spirituality. Jesus is known as one of the world's greatest spiritual teachers. We look at stories he told and see if we agree with them. Why don't you come and see what we do?'

4. Anyone could do this!

Imagine Gary accepts the invitation.

One of the group photocopies the bible passage, and explains that they look at the story over several weeks. 'We let it seep into our lives and see what happens.'

They prayerfully read the story and ask, 'If this story happened today, what would it look like?' They have fun re-imagining the story in their context.

Next time they re-read the story, recap their previous discussion and ask, 'What does this story show (or tell) me?' 'What am I getting out of it?' 'What's it about?'

In the third week they discuss, 'Could the story make a difference to my life? How?'

Someone explains, 'We've said we're into *practical* spirituality. So we see if the story does make a difference and report back next time.

'We are ok about this. It's an experiment. So by definition it might work, it might not. Either way, let's share what happened when we meet again.'

They share their experiences by asking, 'Did the story make a difference? How?'

Here is an easy way to introduce people to Jesus – just 4 enjoyable questions.

Gary's not embarrassed. And sharing your Christian faith is simple: 'How did the story make a difference to your life?'

5. Don't be an expert!

Worried that Gary would ask questions you can't answer? Or that he'd find good reasons to disagree with your answers and you'd look stupid?

If so, don't feel you *have* to answer people's questions!

If someone asks a *factual question* and you're not sure of the answer, invite the group to Google it. (After all, this is a *21st century way* of following Jesus!) You can discuss which are good sites to visit.

When someone asks a *question of opinion*, reply: 'From what we know about Jesus so far, what do we think he would say?'

Suggest people prayerfully consider their responses, and then share what they think God has said to them (if they believe in him).

Encourage people to listen to, rather than correct each other. Remind them that the church is full of different views, and this diversity can often give us a broader glimpse of God.

Keep responding like this and you will teach people the wonderful habit of grounding their thoughts on Christ.

Our eternal destiny does not depend on getting the 'right' answer. Far more important is to learn the habit of taking our bearings from Jesus.

6. A path to maturity

As soon as you can, ask Gary to lead the discussion.

Give him the story. He knows the questions. All he need do is to watch the time, keep the group on task and give everyone a chance to talk - time, task, talk.

When people need more 'solid food', point one person to a website with background information about the bible passage and another to a different website interpreting the story. They share what they've learnt before the discussion.

Or discuss a podcast or YouTube video by a recognised Christian authority. The group is now accessing wisdom from the wider church.

Encourage members to connect with the wider family in other ways – eg to join activities with a local congregation or church the community is linked to.

Members come to rely on Scripture, the Spirit, the Christian family and one another.

7. This approach has big advantages.

- *Anyone* can do it;
- Enquirers easily join in;
- The *Bible* tells people about Jesus, through the Spirit;
- Christians share their faith almost without knowing;
- People exploring faith see how the Bible and the Christian family make a difference;
- Leadership is shared with newcomers, increasing their commitment to the group;
- New Christians learn how to study the Bible on their own, apply it to their lives, share it with their friends, and find helpful resources;
- If the leader moves on, the group has the means to keep going - sustainability is built in.

To start a new Christian community, you don't need lots of theology, nor to be able to answer difficult questions!

8. Trust the Spirit!

You can do it!

9. Bible study

If you are in a group, try the 'Discovery Bible Study' yourselves. Choose a story about Jesus (or one he told) and prayerfully ask the four questions in the Guide. (You may need to do this over several sessions).

Then review your experience.

- Did you enjoy studying the Bible in this way?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?
- Can you imagine doing this with people who are exploring the Christian faith? How might you adapt it?

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