

"Outreach - and REASONS for faith"

A problem to recognise

Terminology

- Reasons for faith
- Aka, 'apologetics'
- Aka, experiential and rational evidence / reasons to believe

Measuring attrition

Our churches still lose about 2/3 of their young adults. Studies across the past 30 or more years have consistently shown a lack of known reasons for faith to be a primary factor.

For example... a telling study called '**Fall Out**' studied university students who had left their faith. They discovered that , "...every student we spoke to who was equipped with answers as a young person still retains their Christian convictions..."

This is only one symptom of the problem.

In case the nature of this problem is missed...

Consider the following objections.

- Why believe in a God when you can't see him, and the world is full of evil?
- Why trust the Bible when we know the documents have been changed?
- Why trust the Bible's prophecies, when we know things like that cannot happen?
- So what if Christians have spiritual experiences. All the religions do, right?

... and these are questions YOUR MEMBERS are silently asking.

(Their friends don't ask these questions because they don't believe answers exist!)

We suggest this area of knowledge, witness and conversation is more important to discipleship and witness than our NZ churches generally recognise.

Below is an outline of HOW this could be changed
- with a view to sustainability

(A true change would need more than a one-time programme / teaching)



In this topical update **A 'book' of thought at the length of a medium book chapter**

(1) An introduction

- Summary of evidence
- Biblical basis
- Gospel communication
- A mechanism - storytelling

(2) Understanding where the problem sits

- A challenging question
- Ross' story to illustrate the point

(3) Some simple solutions - if the goal is a long-term effect

1. Teaching the art of storytelling (As witness - suiting public contexts - with resources)
 2. Simple leadership HABITS (A four point resource is articulated)
 3. Other support resources
- Why Christians believe Christianity to be true
 - Thinking Matters (conferences and more)

Introduction and overview

A wealth of evidence for our faith exists:

There are many areas of learning that point toward the rational and experiential truth of our faith. Consider the testimony of...

- History,
- archaeology,
- literature,
- eyewitness and contemporary accounts,
- fulfilled prophecy,
- scientific study of the creation (information, irreducible complexity within life -exhibiting intelligent integrated order, system and process...),
- rationality within philosophy,
- miracles,
- and also of a changed life.

A Biblical basis for including evidence in Christian witness

- **Acts 2:** When preaching the gospel Peter refers to the **evidence** of Biblical prophecy – which his hearers were familiar with.
- **Acts 3:** When preaching the gospel in Acts 3 Peter refers to the **evidence** of a miraculously healed man the people could see standing in front of them.
- **Acts 22:** When giving a defence of himself in Jerusalem (wisely in Aramaic) Paul tells his own testimony - appealing to the **evidence** of common history and of his own human experience.
- **Acts 27:** When preaching in a context of Greek philosophers in Athens Paul intrigued them enough to be invited to a meeting of the Areopagus, where he then made a **connection** through an inscription 'to the unknown god', to then give **evidence** (reasons) as to why he believed in a single God who is over all - as contrasted to their culture of worshipping created things.

Communicating our core message ('the gospel') is not only about stating WHAT we believe, but also WHY we believe it to be true!

A teaching framework for including 'reasons' as a component of gospel communication

In considering Peter and Paul's examples, gospel communication therefore includes not only a core message as is summarised here...

1. **Creation** (Created by a loving God with good purpose)
2. **Fall** (Separated through sin)
3. **Jesus** (Redemption - a path for restoration because of love)
4. **Restoration** (...to relationship with God - affecting relationships amongst people, and with our planet)

It also includes...

5. **Evidence** (Why we believe these claims to be true).

An appropriate mechanism for passing evidence on within our culture...it's called "STORY"!

- 'Argumentation' can backfire easily. It is possible to win arguments, while losing people.
- However, every area of evidence listed above can be shared as a story.
 - For example, we explain a reason for faith as a personal story about what amazed us. (Same message - different mechanism)

*The above is so simple that it begs a challenging question.
WHAT ARE WE MISSING?*

Understanding where the problem sits

A challenging question:

Why have we, as Christian leaders in NZ, generally NOT valued this area of teaching / witness in our churches and denominations?

Could it be that we have assumed it somehow unimportant to our DISCIPLESHIP and WITNESS?

What might have led to our 'cultural' disinterest as churches?

- Did we once hear that some Christians used to argue with people on the streets? They won the argument but lost the person. We don't want to be like that.
- Are we fearful of the accusation that, 'Christians are against science' - so we have backed off?
- (Freely make your own list of possible causes.

Could we now consider the possibility that this needs to change?

Two audiences

(1) The Christian believer

1. An unanswered question
2. ...takes root as a doubt
3. ...which becomes a new belief
4. ...(a) leaving a person internally detached from their prior faith and
5. ...(b) unmotivated for witness.

Consider not only the church members (of all ages) who have left our churches these past 20 or 30 years - but also those still present in body who are not really present in spirit.

What if that sincerity is undermined by a fundamental disbelief - rooted in a series of questions we've never really answered?

(2) The 'postmodern' Western non-believer

- If there is no such thing as truth, why bother even asking the questions?!
- (There is no second point for the non-believer in this thought-process.)

What if so few ask questions about our faith because the hope that answers might exist has been abandoned!

Consider Ross' story

An engineer friend in his 60s recently told me how he had been long-conflicted between what secular 'science' taught him and what the Bible states. Throughout his prior 40 years of Christian life since coming to faith as a University student, his experience of God had been sufficient to feel content in his faith. However, the whole creation and flood stories made no rational sense.

In Ross's own words, his brain wasn't always in sync with his faith. For him, his faith wasn't affected by this (he kept going to church and believed), but confidence in his faith was.

He then discovered Creation Ministry and Answers In Genesis and other networks through which he heard scientists explain rational evidence for a Creation.



He says there is a new sparkle in his faith as a result, and a desire to learn. He also now feels saddened thinking of young Christians going to Tertiary Education with no answers to the secular 'scientific' worldview.

A challenging observation

It is of note that Ross had 40 years in churches without ever having a rational explanation for the Creation explained clearly enough to catalyse his discovery of amazing scientific work that exists in this arena.

What if we - as church leaders - got this one wrong?

What if 'reasons for faith' is actually fundamental to both discipleship and witness
- noting again the Scriptures above?

What might a way forward look like?

Some REALISTIC solutions for SUSTAINED RESULTS

1. **Teaching the art of storytelling** (Storytelling in witness - a mechanism for communication suiting church and public platforms - with support resources)
2. **Habits** (How even very busy church leaders can still catalyse a change)
3. **Other support resources**

1. Teaching the art of storytelling

This is a culturally suitable mechanism for giving evidence.

Why discuss storytelling when the topic is evidence / reasons for faith?

- We're practical people. If we cannot see HOW we might apply this knowledge, we'll likely be disinterested in the knowledge.

Summarising the key point:

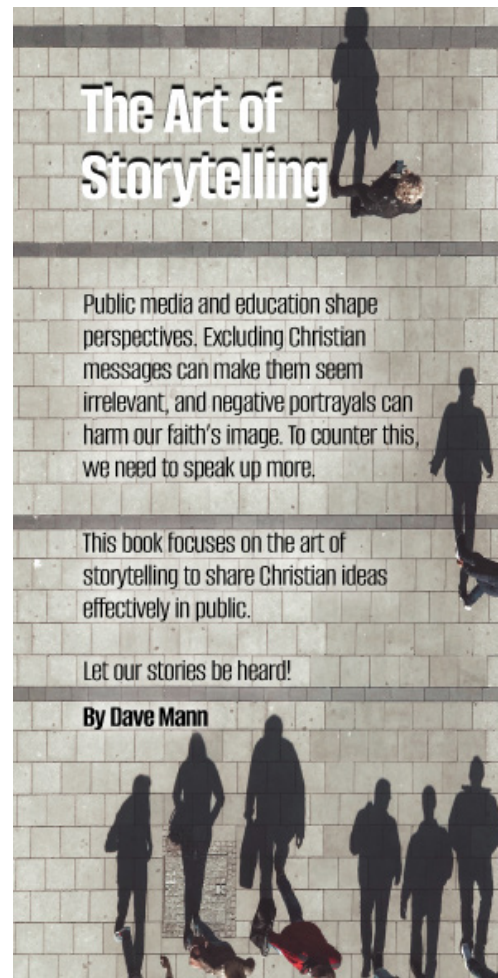
There is hardly anything said through a statement that could not just as easily be said through a story with a question.

- For example I say, "...something that convinced me the Bible could be trusted was..." I then share an evidence that intrigued or spoke to me.
- We have thereby re-framed a rational argument as a personal comment.

'Storytelling' is a topic to include within a holistic outreach equipping.

Resources:

'The art of storytelling' go to AllTogether.co.nz/rationalfaith



2. Leadership HABITS to impart a knowledge of the EVIDENCE for faith

If we teach 'reasons for faith' as a programme of the church, the programme will come and go and what was taught will soon be forgotten.

Only leadership HABITS can build culture and long-term retention.

In application

Would you please consider applying these FOUR leadership habits?

(Read / share the full article on these points AllTogether.co.nz/rationalfaith/)

Habit #1

Bringing INTENTIONALITY to the stories you tell AS ILLUSTRATIONS

We already speak. We all tell a variety of illustrations. Through our stories and illustrations we can impart reasons for faith in a 'by the way' manner - even while talking on a different topic.

- **E.g. The topic of 'God loves us'** could be illustrated with details of the DNA in our cells, reflecting God's care in creation (while concurrently communicating the rational necessity of there being a Creator).
- **E.g. The topic of "the Word of God is to be a treasure in our lives"** could be illustrated with some of the many outstanding evidences that validate its historic reliability - adding 'awe' and interest to the message (while literally evidencing its historic reliability).
- **E.g. The topic of 'loving others' / 'helping those with needs'** could include historic testimony of the immense good Christianity has achieved in history, creating our entire cultural values related to care of the poor, needy, marginalised, sick and more - thereby illustrating your primary point (while concurrently evidencing the unique power and positive impact of our faith for good within history).

The lesson is to INTENTIONALLY choose illustrations that CONCURRENTLY impart reasons for believing this faith to be true.

In addition, by doing this you model a 'by the way' method for communication that your members can imitate in their conversations too!

This full article AllTogether.co.nz/rationalfaith/

- Book: 'The Art of Storytelling - and of becoming an intriguing person' - as above.

Habit #2

ANNUAL USE OF SHORT VIDEOS IN CHURCH / SMALL GROUPS / YOUTH GROUP

This is a very simple annual habit, which any church and youth group could adopt.

Every year, for one month, play a short Q&A video during your Sunday services (e.g. at the offering time) - followed by an encouragement to ask and engage with the big questions of life - because answers exist.

- **Culture-building habits don't get simpler than this!**
 - **Our 10 Day Challenge 'Faith Q&A' video series is Alltogether.co.nz/faith-qa/**
 - **For 'Thinking Matters' videos, search their YouTube channel.**
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Habit #3

INTENTIONALLY TEACH 'THE CONVERSATIONAL SKILLS OF JESUS' TO YOUR MEMBERS

This is a 'companion HABIT' (then including storytelling and 'reasons for faith' within that annual 'conversational outreach equipping' via pulpit, small group and youth group).

Stories are shared in the context of conversations. The conversational skills of Jesus are an important part of a church's outreach equipping.

So the point isn't missed - this annual equipping HABIT (by the church leaders) is what creates the 'framework' that sustains ongoing equipping in all areas:

- the gospel,
- teamwork and outreach,
- the Holy Spirit / prayer and outreach,
- conversational skills for outreach,
- storytelling in outreach,
- history and outreach,
- and reasons for faith in outreach.



The above is a pastors' outreach equipping 'curriculum' - to see the members equipped, enthused and able - with 52 sermon opportunities annually and maybe 40 small groups meetings annually to communicate it across.

Resources:

- Find notes on conversational outreach culture + support resources for pastors
AllTogether.co.nz/atconsulting/

Habit #4

LEVERAGE CURRENT AND TIMELY INITIATIVES AND RESOURCES

Below are examples. Their momentum can help you!

***The above four habits are achievable for any church!
Will you embrace them as YOUR habit?***

(Click AllTogether.co.nz/rationalfaith for the full article).

SUPPORT RESOURCES

Thinking Matters conferences:

Want to hear truly quality speakers on these topics?

Get to one of their events

Bless your youth / young adults / leaders / members

- **Conferences** - promote them
- **Monthly apologetics nights** - remote them in your province
- **Books** - see the website

Find out more at ThinkingMatters.org.nz



Why Christians believe Christianity to be true:

A discussion series that is designed to suit both church and non-church audiences, youth and adult — and is FREE for church use.

- 7 videos - 15mins long
- 7 discussion guides
- 7 booklets - well researched, yet short (Print options for purchase)



For church leaders:

There would be 100 powerful illustrations / stories / quotes suiting your use within the concise content of the 7-booklets. (Buy a set for your shelf- then use it!)

The booklet series covers maybe 25 different topical areas of evidence.

As an outreach resource:

This can be used as videos and as booklets (and as PDF or given in print).

Download a promo business card to print and give to people.



In discipleship:

Youth - Videos + discussion guides Older - Videos + booklets + discussion guides. (Have members read the booklet the week PRIOR - then meet for short video + discussion).

Go to whychristiansbelieve.nz

'Answers to big questions' Children's Church programme:



9-week children's church programme based out of the 'Why Christians believe' series

This **SUPERB** programme has been created by the team at C3 City Church. It includes a raft of truly interesting ideas, illustrations and activities for children.

Go to whychristiansbelieve.nz/childschurch/