Q&A: How can we best share the good news with friends who are indifferent due to self-reliance?

Sarah writes:

Hi Will,

How can we best share the good news with friends who are totally indifferent to the message of the gospel? Particularly when the indifference is due to self-reliance (working hard, planning ahead and being the best they can be in the responsibilities and relationships they have).

[This is a Q&A question that has been submitted through this blog. You can submit a question (anonymously if you like) here: http://briggs.id.au/jour/qanda/]

Thanks Sarah. An interesting question. Allow me to answer it generally, and then more specifically.



Generally speaking: My first inclination is to say, "Perhaps you can't, you may have to wait for the right time."

Don't get me wrong here, I'm not suggesting that sharing the good news of Jesus is a bad thing to do; it's just that at any given time it may be that you've said and done all that you can.

I think of Jesus with the rich young ruler in Mark 10:17-27. This young man was pious and upright, yet the gospel for him was "'Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.'" Jesus delivered that message with a more perfect understanding than any of us could ever muster. Yet the man still walked away. And Jesus let him.

I think of Jesus' instructions to the disciples that he sends out to the villages in Luke 10:1-23. They had a gospel of peace to proclaim, which they did. Yet Jesus fully expected that in some places they would not be welcomed and their peace would "return to them." Their instruction was to move on.

Now, I recognise that in both these cases, even though Jesus is talking about *people* who are indifferent to the message, that is not quite the same as *friends* who are indifferent to the gospel. So there's nothing here that should suggest a "moving on" from the friendship or anything like that! Friendship is valuable for its own sake. Be friends with your friends. Pray for your friends. Share your life with your friends.

But there *is* a certain wisdom in knowing that there *is* a time and place for explicit evangelism, and that may not be right now! Within a friendship, it may be that at some point the wisdom of 1 Peter 3:15 will apply: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect…"

More specifically you mention the particular circumstance "when the indifference is due to self-reliance (working hard, planning ahead and being the best they can be in the responsibilities and relationships they have)."

Thank you for this. What you have done is an important part of the *missiological* task, which is to consider your context and to be aware of the prevailing presuppositions,

assumptions, motivations and patterns that manifest in its culture. It's remarkable how often this necessary work is overlooked.

You have identified "self-reliance" and it is, indeed, prevalent in our culture, including within the church. We often find that our *talking* about the gospel is ineffective because, *functionally*, the culture we embrace as Christians and as a church proclaims its self-reliance more loudly.

Having identified this characteristic, what you are able to do is to be deliberately *counter-cultural*. This means we think about how our life can proclaim *faith* and *dependence* on God, and we turn aside from self-reliance. This consequentially means that we need to be *real*, vulnerable, and emotionally honest.

After all, when our friends get to the end of themselves, (which we all do at some point), what will we say and do? A false-gospel of self-reliance in the name of Jesus ("Let's buck up and smile and get on with life") will not bring any sense of hope, peace, or restoration, and certainly not conviction and repentance. Rather, our readiness to "give an answer to everyone who asks" will need to take the counter-cultural form, that shares in the suffering ("I've been there also, my friend.") and lays hold of hope ("This is where I lean on Jesus.")

So adding to your general readiness to share the good news, put your missiology into practice. Reflect on yourself and your culture. Be counter-cultural and Chistlike. Come in close to the real world of your friends, *especially* when that's a costly hard thing to do. Walk the hard roads next to them. Simply live out your faith.