

SHARING FAITH – “ALL IN THE FAMILY”

As we continue with our series about “**Sharing Faith**,” I call your attention once more to Paul’s letter to **Philemon**, in which he writes: **⁴I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, ⁵because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. ⁶I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. ⁷Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.** As I mentioned a couple weeks ago, the word translated “*sharing*” here is “*koinōnía*” which is usually identified as “*fellowship*.” Some versions of the Bible render this passage using the idea of “*communicating*” or “*demonstrating*” faith which can be done in any number of ways. Others convey the concept of “*partnering with others in living out our faith*.”

In context, Paul was encouraging Philemon to receive a runaway slave named Onesimus. He urges him to forgive the one who he perceives wronged him. Rather than punish him, he’s asked to accept him as a brother in Christ. Consider that calling when interpreting what it means for someone to “*share their faith*.” We’re not talking about “*preaching*” here; Not even what we might commonly call “*teaching*” in any formal sense of the word.

Perhaps you’ve heard the quote attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: “**Preach the Gospel always. Use words when necessary.**” That sounds noble, although there’s no evidence whatsoever that he ever said such a thing. Truth is, ***you can’t preach without words – but you can “share your faith” without preaching.*** And often, it is that message that comes through most clearly, and rings most true. I’ve heard it said that the majority of people would rather “*see a sermon than hear one*” any day.

So how do we “*share faith*” within our family? It doesn’t have to be as intimidating as we may have made it out to be; for them or us. **Deuteronomy 6** offers some insight. **⁵Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.** Obviously, “*sharing*” faith here has a lot to do with “*showing*” faith. Here are few suggestions...

Pray Constantly. If members of our immediate family - those we interact with more than most - never see us pray, what does that say about our professed faith? But if they do see us pray – and often – they’ll know we believe in a God who cares and whom we believe is able to take care of our needs. And the more they see our knees bent or our hands folded in prayer, the more that message will stick with them. (**1st Thessalonians 5:17**)

I do not recall seeing my folks praying when I was a child, but, I have many images deeply impressed upon my heart of them in prayer after they gave their lives more completely to Jesus. It's not too late for you to start leaving that legacy for your family. My mom folded her arthritic hands and bowed her head, whispering to the God she trusted. I have fond memories of my Dad standing and offering humble petitions to his heavenly father – saying grace before family meals or blessing communion on Sunday mornings. Yet, when faith is real, prayer is not just a sometime thing. It's an all the time thing. I recall once when Dad was really struggling with something that was interfering with his relationship with Christ. He told me he was having trouble praying. After we talked awhile, I started to pray for him, but he interrupted me, saying he could do it. He barely got started when he broke down crying – which is something I'm not sure I'd never seen him do before. We wept together and prayed together trusting the Holy Spirit to intercede with words we couldn't express. That has left an indelible impression.

Worship Always. This is important to do corporately and personally. People of faith assemble with people of like faith, praising God together, raising voices in unison. They encourage one another and inspire one another to grow in faith. If our family seldom sees us “*go to church,*” they will likely conclude that we don't believe it's important.

Yet, people of faith may raise their hands in reverence to God any time and any place they are moved by the Spirit to do so. (**John 4:24**) Unbelieving family won't likely see what we do in church. But, they'll watch what we do and hear what we say at home. That passage in **Deuteronomy 6** has to do with our family being impressed by the overflow of our love for the Lord. I have a reputation for random singing. I sing songs I know and I make up others. Sometimes my songs are silly– but more often than not, they are solemn expressions of joy and contentment in my relationship with God. By the way, an occasional heartfelt “*Praise the Lord!*” is not a bad idea, either. Give Him glory for the blessing of life - that is, if you believe He deserves it. It will not go unnoticed. Faith is expressed in worship in ways that a sermon may never do.

Love Deeply. This perhaps is most on point with Paul's words to Philemon. Forgive those who wrong you. Be kind to those who don't deserve it. Though a parent who loves their child will discipline them, they will always do it with love, not anger; with genuine concern for what's best. And they will **ALWAYS** forgive. Stay with me a moment. If husbands and wives don't display love for one another in wholesome ways, kids may never know what it looks like. And, good luck trying to explain God's love to someone if you haven't received it yourself and then openly shared it with those closest to you.

I mentioned before that my dad resisted the prompting of the Spirit for many years. One excuse he offered was the hypocrisy he'd seen among so many believers. I once asked, “*Do you mean me, dad? Have I hindered your faith?*”

He said *“Of course not”* - but I often wondered. After he confessed Jesus as his Savior later on, I asked what finally brought him to faith. It wasn't a sermon that was preached or a class someone taught. It wasn't a formal presentation of the Gospel at all. Though there was no single thing he could put his finger on, what ranked high on the list of positive influences was the consistent witness of his family. Of course, if no one had ever *“preached Christ”* to him, he might have been inspired to faith, but faith in whom? And to what end?

Thankfully, more than one person told him about Jesus. I know ministers who did. I also know that his dear mother did from the time he was a little boy. And I know that when I developed faith enough to share, so did I. Yet, without a consistent witness from those who told Him about Christ, I don't know that he'd have believed much of what he heard. *“Sharing faith”* takes more than words.

Though I've concentrated mainly on parents sharing faith with their kids, I hope you see that the same principles apply to sharing faith with our parents, or our grandkids, or our spouses. In fact, the apostle Peter says a believing wife can convict her nonbelieving husband by daily choices that make such an impression on him that he is moved to come to personal saving faith. In **1st Peter 3:1-2**, he writes: **“Wives, in the same way (as Christ) be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives”**

I've also personally seen aunts and uncles, cousins and nieces, nephews and their spouses and children - and even a rebellious brother confess Jesus because family continually lived out their faith in visible ways. No wonder Paul wrote in **Ephesians 5:1-2**: **“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”**

One final footnote. *Sharing faith isn't like sharing ice cream*. You can't give someone ½ of yours. But you can tell them about how good it is and offer to take them to the One who dispenses it. In fact, in **Psalms 34:8** we are invited to **“Taste and see that the Lord is good.”**

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