

Making Small Changes Together.



The Word One to One's Director of Evangelism, John MacKinnon, shares seven helpful principles for embedding one to one Bible sharing into a local church's culture of evangelism.

We all know that it is the regular, seemingly insignificant things we do every day that make the biggest difference. It is true of life – and it is always true of ministry.

In a recent gathering of our staff team and trustees, we were exhorted from Scripture to recognise that this is something we see time and again throughout the Bible: from Zechariah's warning not to despise the day of small things (Zechariah 4:10), to the cornerstone to the capstone all pointing to Jesus (Isaiah 28:16), to the parable of the mustard seed (Mark 4:30–32) – we clearly see the value in doing small things well.

As a ministry, we regularly hear encouraging stories of everyday church members reading *The Word One to One* with others, and we cannot help but marvel at how God watches over this small act and uses it to accomplish wonderful things for His glory.

The Word One to One has the capacity to produce a double-yield in discipleship and evangelism when it is embedded into the regular culture of evangelism within a local church – and the following seven principles are essential to this process.

1: Prayer

At the root of any enduring culture of evangelism is the necessity to steep the whole initiative in prayer. Prayer that God may open a door into the hearts of lost family members, friends, acquaintances, neighbours, and strangers (FANS) who populate the communities we inhabit. Prayer that we, as God's people, would have confidence in the Word of God to do its work as we share it with others.

If we are to succeed in our mission – to raise up joyful Bible sharers across the nations – the first and most important thing we must do is to pray. To pray in obedience to the teaching of Jesus. To pray daily. To pray constantly.

"The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest." (Matthew 9:37–38)

This is a prayer request, straight from the lips of Jesus: we must pray to the Lord of the harvest to raise up workers – everyday believers – who long to be fruitful in the service of their King.

During times of revival, God has moved in incredibly significant ways: waking up His church, mobilising His people, and calling sinners to Himself. While this is history and not the present reality, the great lesson that we learn from every account of those remarkable times is that God first set His people *praying*.

Our Lord Jesus says there is no shortage of a harvest, but there is instead a shortage of labourers. In Acts 4, when one authority was threatening Peter and John to cease their activities of preaching and proclaiming the gospel, they gathered the people of God together to pray to the highest authority. Observe verses 23 and 24: the first thing they did was to gather the believers and to lift their voices together: ‘Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them’.

It was prayer that the early church was committed to from the outset:

- We see this in Acts 1:14: “All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer” (also in 2:1, 42)
- The early church followed regular patterns of prayer and prayed when decisions had to be made.
- The Apostle Paul was regularly exhorting the churches to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17), to be constant in prayer (Romans 12:12), praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication (Ephesians 6:18)
- If we desire to be fruitful in Bible sharing, we need to pray for the Word that goes out (2 Thessalonians 3:1), that God may open a door (Colossians 4:3), and that words may be given to boldly proclaim the mystery of the Gospel (Ephesians 6:19).

If we desire to raise up an army of labourers (Bible Sharers) marching on their knees, they are raised up by prayer, sustained by prayer and made fruitful by prayer. And so we must pray, both in the quiet place and in the company of faithful friends.

Here are a few initiatives that we might help us to embed this principle:

- Encourage your church family to each be praying for five people, asking that God might open opportunities for them to read God’s Word together. It is what we call ‘Praying for the FANS.’
- As well as your regular prayer gatherings, why not develop ‘Homes of Prayer’? This is when multiple church members throw open their homes at

various times in the week, month or year for a fixed hour of prayer in their home. The church can advertise these for the forthcoming week – I know of one church that used restaurant-style drop down blackboards!

- In preparing to ask people if they would like to read The Word One to One with them, think about using the ‘PAPA principle’: Pray and then Ask – and should they say no, then continue praying for them until another opportunity arises to ask again. If they say yes, then Pray and Act, putting a date in the diary to begin reading together.

2: Model

Today, there is a great need for church leaders and for those mature in their faith to serve as an example for others to follow, as we model what it is to share the Bible with others.

Many of us will know people who excel at this – and if we reflected for a while, we could measure the impact their modelling had on ourselves or others. However, many of us would acknowledge with a repentant heart that we have not always led the way and served as a great model to others.

As church leaders we create, for better or for worse, the health of the evangelism culture in our churches; and as we seek to have others draw alongside us in discipleship, they should observe, learn and grow from our example.

In Acts 4, not only do we see this wonderful example of immediately calling the people to pray and their prayerful confidence in God’s sovereignty, but in verse 31 we read, “And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.”

Now, we are not apostles – so I am not necessarily assuming the place will shake! However, I am anticipating that we will be Holy Spirit-filled believers who model what it is to ‘speak the word of God with boldness.’

This was the basic premise of Robert Coleman’s classic book on evangelism, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. It seeks to address the question, *what was the evangelism strategy of Jesus?* In it, he outlines eight principles of the methodology of Jesus in winning souls. It is hardly surprising that people thought the book should have been called the Master Plan of Discipleship as the principles are rooted in the discipleship method of Jesus.

As we read the gospels, Jesus demonstrated to His disciples how to live, including how to pray, how to use Scripture, and how to win souls. At one level, His method was Himself: He was always real, practical, natural with them, and He never required them to do something He had not done Himself.

This modelling of how to live for the glory of God and how to be about our Father's business ought to be part of the Christian life. If we long for a culture of Bible sharing within our churches, those of us who are called by God to lead must serve as role models to our wider church families.

Paul, writing to the church at Philippi, says: "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you" (Philippians 4:9).

Evangelistic living flows from those who have been taught the gospel – Peter, John and Paul had a teaching ministry that equipped people with a clear understanding of the Bible's message, a clear understanding of the gospel and a clear understanding of how to model that message in what they taught and in what they practised.

All of this is essential for creating a culture where Bible sharing becomes an essential part of everyday Christian living. The fruit of it is that we, as leaders and the people God has called us to lead, should then go and prayerfully look for the opportunities in the week ahead that God has prepared for us (Ephesians 2:10).

When we do this, we should share our experience with others: not only will it keep us accountable and generate prayer, but also it will serve as an example that others can follow.

I know what it is like, in the busyness of pastoral ministry, to struggle to find the space to model the outworking of the preaching in practical evangelism.

It is one of the reasons why I found *The Word One to One* to be invaluable. It meant I could simply meet with one or two unbelievers weekly, taking them to the Word and allowing the Word to do its work in their lives.

When leaders lead the way in modelling how to share their faith and teach others to do likewise, their people not only follow their good example, but find themselves incredibly encouraged by it.

Question:

- Stop for a moment, and think about the person who has inspired you most in sharing the gospel. What was it that inspired you?
- What sort of a model are you being to others, intentionally or unintentionally?

3: Declutter

It is often a danger that our lives and our churches can have so many good programmes and activities happening that we find ourselves over-busy and exhausted. If that happens, the last thing we have the energy for is to find the space to invite someone to have a look at the Bible with us.

While these activities are good and often necessary, they often do not revolve around evangelism. Much of the time, we do not critically examine them to see if they could become opportunities for us to communicate the gospel intentionally.

Prior to the pandemic, when I was pastoring a church in East Kilbride in Scotland, I often had a longing for us to press pause on all that we were doing and to assess how effective those activities were in sharing the gospel. Of course, we were not brave enough or wise enough to press pause until the pandemic did it for us!

Decluttering is the art of clearing away the stones and debris of unfruitful activity that keep us from planting the life-giving seed of God's Word into people's lives.

When Jesus called His first disciples to follow Him, they were given a clear call to leave the nets behind and become a fisher of men in Matthew 4:19–22. They immediately responded to Jesus' call to leave behind their former lives and follow Him.

As Jesus' disciples, they were with Him as He taught and modelled what their lives' priority ought to be.

“Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?” (Matthew 16:24-26)

In our personal lives, we need to think honestly about the things we prioritise and that can end up possessing our hearts.

In his book *Counterfeit Gods*, Timothy Keller writes:

“[An idol is] anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, and anything that you seek to give you what only God can give.”

Our churches can often be busy places, but it is good to ask tough questions as to whether we are busy with the right things. It is remarkable how ministries can start with great, gospel-centred intentions, but with the passing of time lose their edge. They will remain blunted unless we diligently review and realign them around a clear gospel purpose.

The disciples had to do this after our Lord's ascension when a dispute arose in the early church over the serving of tables in Acts 6. Notice how they were set apart (verse 4) for prayer and the ministry of the Word, but note that those who were given the role of table serving also shared the gospel as they served tables, and this is clearly seen in the life of Stephen.

In the Bible there is no gift of evangelism, only the gift of the evangelist. They should be an equipper of the body (Ephesians 4:11, 12), but all of us are called to be witnesses (Acts 1:8).

One of the ways in which we can promote a healthy culture of evangelism in our churches is to equip our people to know the gospel, love the gospel and then set them free in the place where God has uniquely placed them to share the gospel.

This will involve prioritising the decluttering of our personal lives, but it may also involve doing some deep thinking about what ministry activities we should be running in our church. It should also include us being pastorally sensitive to the number of ministries our people serve in.

If we would like our people to cultivate friendships with unbelievers and to invite them to read *The Word One to One* with them, then we need to ensure they have the space in the normal flow of weekly life to do so. We invite a person to read the first eighteen verses of John's Gospel, but this often results in people reading the whole of John's gospel together and that involves a significant weekly time commitment. It's a time commitment that they will struggle to meet if all their available hours taken up with other activities.

Reflection:

- Write out a list of your regular weekly activities. As you study them, is there something you need to put down to create space to invite someone to read *The Word One to One* with you?
- If you are a church leader, do the same exercise with your church's activities.

4: Cultivate

One of the values of decluttering is that it creates space for each of us to **cultivate** friendships with those God has put in our lives. This could be our family, our friends, our neighbours, acquaintances, colleagues, or even a stranger. However, the aim of spending time with them is not simply to deepen the friendship, but to **sow** with confidence the seed of the gospel in their hearts and, in God's suitable time, **reap** a harvest for his glory.

I have seen people engaging in friendship evangelism, where they have joined a local sports club or interest group but, as they developed friendships, they failed to do any evangelism.

We want to encourage people to lovingly connect with the unbelievers in their lives, to listen to them, to get to know them and in gentle and winsome ways to be looking for the opportunity to share our hope in Jesus.

It is truly remarkable how often we are so preoccupied that we do not notice the people that cross our paths every day, people that potentially God might use us to have an influence in their lives for His glory.

Cultivating is about noticing people, befriending people, showing kindness to people, engaging in conversation with people and, where possible, showing hospitality to them.

Think about Jesus with Zacchaeus in Luke 19, or with the woman at the well in John 4. In the letter to the Hebrews, we are warned not to 'neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unaware' (13:2). In response to the question 'which is the great commandment in the law?' Jesus replied 'you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind: and then added the second is like it 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Matthew 23:34–40).

Three great questions to challenge ourselves to repeatedly ask of non-Christians we are cultivating relationship with are:

1. Would you like to come for dinner? Lunch? Coffee?
2. Would you like to come to church?
3. Would you like to look at *The Word One to One* with me?

My home church is challenging its people this year to **Pray, Host, Invite** and **Follow**.

That means: to be praying for some of the people who they have a relationship with and don't know Jesus; to host them in their homes, or for a dinner or coffee; to invite them to some evangelistic event; and to follow this up by seeking to read *The Word One to One* with them or attend something like a *Hope Explored* or *Christianity Explored* course.

We find these courses are very complementary to all that we are doing in *The Word One to One*, and as we cultivate a relationship with a friend and invite them to read the Word with us, they are often open to attending an explorer-style course. It is also the case that after attending this type of course, people are often looking for more – and an invitation to read *The Word One to One* is a wonderful follow up.

These are fantastic sowing and reaping ministries, and in order to maximise their potential, it is essential for us to cultivate friendships with the people God has put in our lives, so that we might share the good news of Jesus with them.

Reflection:

- Take a few moments to think about one or two people you would like to cultivate your friendship with. Then, make some plans to meet up with them for dinner, lunch or coffee.

5: Equip

Rico Tice often says, 'evangelism is a subset of faithfulness,' and we can strengthen our faithfulness as we experience helpful discipleship events that equip us for service.

Discipleship is an equipping activity, and we gain confidence in sharing the gospel and in being an effective Bible Sharer in the formal classroom, through regular practice and in the context of accountable support.

When we think about the principle of equipping, we are tapping into that rich reservoir we acknowledged earlier as we thought about the master plan of Jesus and the modelling of Paul. However, we are also thinking about increasing the effectiveness of our witness as a fruit of training, practice, and mutual encouragement.

It is our desire at The Word One to One to not only deliver a high-quality resource, but also to feed into 'resourcing that resource', so that those using it are constantly encouraged and equipped.

We do this through key deliverables:

- In-person training events – delivered at churches, conferences, and training colleges
- Digital training suite – Three online modules with helpful video training, demonstrations and supporting training manual
- Webinars aimed at church leaders – thinking about embedding using the Word One to One into our local church culture of evangelism
- Webinars to equip and encourage Bible Sharers – regular provision of online training in how to use the material, how to get started, and keep going.
- Online Community Catch-up events where Bible Sharers can mutually share and encourage one another

"Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

The Word One to One website is set up to provide Bible Sharers with everything they need to share God's word, including the opportunity to have free access to the resources in a PDF download format, episode walkthroughs and incredibly encouraging stories from other Bible Sharers.

The double-yield of *The Word One to One* is that not only is it being fruitful in the salvation of souls, but as believers read the Word with unbelievers, the believer themselves grow in their faith. This discipleship growth through faithful evangelistic Bible sharing also results in generating a disciple making disciple understanding in those who are new to the faith.

This resourced resource designed for equipping the people of God in Bible sharing is easily integrated into and can add health to the local church culture of evangelism. It is our hope going forward that we can review, revise, and refresh them going forward. Let me encourage you to engage with us in using this resource to this end.

Action:

- If you are a church leader, ensure that your regular discipleship programme incorporates some regular personal evangelism training for church members.

6: Inspire

There is something immensely powerful that happens in the body of Christ when we share the accounts of our wins and losses, our successes and failures, because as we do so, all of us grow.

We looked earlier at Acts 4:31. Here, we see the fruit of the mutual sharing that had taken place, it was truly inspirational:

“And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness”

We need to share with others at every opportunity and in very natural ways our experiences of sharing the gospel or reading the Bible with others. The mutual encouragement and accountability this brings is a health giver to the culture of evangelism in our churches.

Recently, we have developed a new practice in our own church at baptisms. We have always invited the person being baptised in our credo Baptist context to give an account of their testimony. However, as a matter of good practice we have recently started to hear the testimony of the person/persons that God has used to bring the person to a place of repentance and faith.

The encouragement this brings to other believers is remarkable. Often it is this that will open their eyes to the wonder of the way in which God delights to use ordinary everyday people in the ordinary everyday scenarios to bring people to salvation through their ordinary everyday efforts to communicate the gospel. This is something we should celebrate.

Additionally, I always encourage folks to tell others when they are doing *The Word One to One* with someone or planning to invite someone to an event in the church. This not only brings extra prayer support, but it also can often be a catalyst to others pray and ask others themselves. As we seek to strengthen the culture of evangelism it is often good to have someone share in a regular service who they are sharing the Bible with, and this is often the inspiration or prompt that someone else needs to get started and or to keep going.

We often quote the words of Jesus in Luke 5:10: “Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents”. We often smile at the absence of joy in the life of the church over the same event. However, healthy celebration, which gives God the glory for all that He is doing and for the fact that He uses the likes of you and I, is a wonderful encouragement and often a catalyst to others.

Another area where we can encourage this type of inspiration is to have great evangelistic resources like *The Word One to One* visually displayed in prominent positions and readily available for our church members to pick up and use. It is remarkable how often great resources can remain hidden on a shelf simply because we have not been creative in our displaying them.

Action

- Contact The Word One to One for information and creative ways in which resources can be displayed.
- Ensure that you regularly celebrate evangelism and evangelistic activity if the regular gatherings of the church.

7: Sustain

When I became a Christian, it was not long before those in the church I attended taught me the importance of two disciplines: Bible reading and prayer. I am very thankful for those who taught me with great diligence the importance of reading your Bible every day!

However, I cannot recall anyone teaching me that sharing my faith, reading the Bible with others evangelistically, or getting involved in doing evangelism was also a discipline central to maturing in the Christian faith and growing in godliness. I did have people who took me on mission trips, who encouraged me to share my testimony, but no one taught me this as a discipline for my life.

In truth, among the numerous disciplines of the Christian life, evangelism is the most neglected and often not recognised as one of the disciplines at all.

Interestingly, we know from Scripture that evangelism is expected of believers – for example, the Great Commission (Matthew 28) or the Sermon on the Mount and

Jesus' exhortation to be salt and light (Matthew 5) – and we also know from Acts 1:8 that we are empowered for this purpose.

It has been my experience that one of the best ways to sustain my growth in Christ has been time in the Scriptures, time in prayer and to spend intentional time in sharing Jesus with others.

Interestingly, to grow in these disciplines, I need to make the time to do them. C.H Spurgeon said:

“If I never won souls I would sigh until I did. I would break my heart over them if I could not break their hearts. Though I can understand the possibility of an earnest Sower never reaping, I cannot understand the possibility of an earnest Sower being content not to reap. I cannot comprehend any one of you Christian people trying to win souls and not having results and being satisfied without results.”

Our principal aim at The Word One to One is to resource everyday believers in the local church to grow in confidence in making Jesus known by sharing His Word with others.

When we learn to view this as a discipline, we discover the sustainable way in which evangelism can become as much a part of our lifestyle as prayer and personal study already are for us as believers.

Most people who do not pray, don't pray because they don't make plans to pray; most people who don't read God's Word, don't read God's Word because they don't plan to read it; most people who don't evangelise, don't evangelise because they don't make any plans to evangelise.

Reflection

- Let us make plans to share God's Word with others by scheduling time as we would our quiet time for making it one of the regular disciplines we engage in as we seek to grow in godliness.