

“What’s Your Story?”

John 4

I don’t know about you, but I am a big fan of hearing the stories of people.

*When I have time to **read books**, apart from my **study and preparation**, they tend to be **biographies**.*

I’m not a huge **fiction fan**, but I am a student of **history and people**.

I am always interested to learn how setbacks and even tragedy can shape a person for better or worse. How they handle **failure as well as success**.

I think **everyone loves to hear a story**.

And YOU have a story to tell, especially when it comes to *sharing your faith*.

One of the most effective tools in your Evangelistic Toolbox is your personal testimony.

A testimony is a **bridge-builder**, a way to connect with your listener so they can see **how you came to be who you are and why you believe what you believe**.

In fact, sharing your own story can be a powerful way to preach the gospel without getting in someone’s face, while allowing the Holy Spirit to work as you recount what God did for you.

So, what’s your story?

Here before us in John 4 is the story of a woman who had her life changed by Christ.

He invaded her world with love and compassion and brought her to Himself.

She immediately **went out and began to tell others**.

*In her story, we learn some important elements about **how to effectively share your Testimony** or story of **how you came to Christ**.*

By the way, every testimony is valid.

Some are **quite dramatic**—drugs, alcohol, gangs, prison, etc.

*Others are **less dramatic**, but **they are just as significant**, where a person may have been **moral, hard-working, professional, successful**, and even **church-going** but **without Christ**.*

Sin is sin if it traps you by **vices** or **blinds you with personal morality and religion**.

The bottom line is everyone’s Testimony is ESSENTIALLY THE SAME, regardless of what our past was.

- *We ALL were empty, lonely, guilty, and afraid to die.*

- We were **ALL without Christ and headed to hell.**
- We were **ALL forgiven of the wrongs we had done and given purpose in life.**

So what's your story?

Before we look at that, let's review what we have already learned.

We have been talking about the **Who, Where, Why, What, When, and How of Evangelism.**

Let's start with the WHO.

1. WHO is called to "go into all the world and preach the gospel?"

Answer: WE ARE.

Matthew 28:19-20 (NKJV): "Go therefore and **MAKE DISCIPLES** of all the **nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them** to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

In the original language, these words are addressed to EVERYONE.

Not just pastors, evangelists, and missionaries, but EVERYONE.

*Also, in the original language, they are a **COMMAND.***

2. WHERE are we to preach the gospel?

Answer: EVERYWHERE!

In Mark, we have a variation on this Great Commission. (Mark 16:15)

Mark 16:15 (NKJV): "And He said to them, 'Go into **all the world** and **preach the gospel** to every creature.'"

*"Go into all of **YOUR WORLD** and **preach the gospel,**" into your family, your workplace, your campus, your sphere of influence.*

3. WHY are we to do this?

Because **God's primary way of reaching people is through people!**

1 Corinthians 1:21 (NKJV): "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the **foolishness of the message preached** to save those who believe."

But there is another reason as well.

*Because **WE CARE.***

4. WHAT are we to preach?

Answer: *The gospel!*

The gospel is the message that we are all **separated from God** because of our sin.

The result of this **sin** is ***an emptiness, an ever-present guilt and a certain fear of death.***

But because God loved us, in spite of our rebellion, He sent His own Son to Die in our place and bridge the gap between Him and ourselves.

*I must **turn from my sin** and **put my total faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior** and I will be **forgiven, justified, and have the hope that when I die, I will go to heaven.***

4. WHEN are we to do it?

Answer: *Always!*

Sometimes, people want to out on a **“Soul Patrol”** and engage in a **search-and-destroy mission, so they can get some notches on their Bible.**

That is not to say there is not a place for going out with the express purpose of sharing your faith. Our SWAT team does it all the time and they have led hundreds to Christ.

But we must always be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. You never know when the **“door of opportunity” will open.**

2 Timothy 4:2 (NLT): *“Preach the word of God. Be persistent, whether the time is favorable or not.”*

Another translation says, “Be on duty at all times”

1 Peter 3:15 (NIV): *“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. **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.”*

5. HOW are we to do this?

Now here is where the **rubber meets the road.**

- There is **no better example** of how to **do evangelism than Jesus Christ Himself.** He was the **Master Communicator.** And one story that shows this beautifully is **Jesus and the woman at the well.**

Read John 4:3-10

He left Judea and departed again to Galilee. But He needed to go through Samaria. So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. **It was about the sixth hour (or noon). A woman of Samaria came to draw water.** Jesus said to her, **"Give Me a drink."** For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, **"How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?"** For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. **Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."**

John 4:4: "He needed to go through Samaria."

- *A little **historical background** here will help us to understand some important things here.*
- ***No Orthodox Jew** would ever go to **Galilee through Samaria**. In fact, he would go out of his way to **avoid Samaria altogether**.*

The reason most Jews chose the longer route over the more direct one was prejudice, pure and simple. The Jews did not want to associate with the Samaritan people, and would rather endure the long, uncomfortable road than let go of their bigotry.

But Jesus chose the Shortcut.

Not because it was **easier**, but because **"He needed to."**

*In spite of the fact that **there was a strong prejudice** between these two peoples, and that **the roots of prejudice went deep into history**, being passed from generation to generation, **Jesus had to go!***

- *The **love of God** knows no **racial, economic** or **sinful boundaries**.*

Long before the creation of the world, it had been settled in eternity that **He was to meet a burned-out, immoral Samaritan woman** that day.

She did not realize it at the time, but she *had an **appointment with God***.

*By this **detour of Jesus** into enemy territory, we see a **very important truth**.*

1. We have to go where the people are!

- *So often, we are trying to **get away from nonbelievers**.*

- We want to **ISOLATE**, when we ought to **INFILTRATE**.
- That is **your mission field**—the grumpy neighbor, that inquisitive co-worker, those unreceptive kids, that mom or dad who does not yet know Jesus.

Jesus did not say that “the whole world should go to church,” but that “the church should go to the whole world!”

Here at Harvest, we seek to do that in every way possible—Church, Crusades, Radio, TV, Internet, etc.

It would do us all well to remember that it wasn't all that long ago that we too were separated from God.

I am just one beggar telling another beggar where to find food.

I am not better than anyone, only better off.

God wants us to **take this gospel to all people.**

- **They may be younger.**
- *They may be older.*
- *They may be a different race.*
- **There is no room for bigotry, no room for prejudice, no room for bias in the life of the child of God.**

God may lead you to share your faith with someone you are not comfortable with.

We tend to want to speak to **people that are the same as us.** But we need to be open to reach that category that God invites to believe—**whosoever!**

“Whosoever believes in Him should not perish . . .” (John 3:16 NKJV).

2. We need to use tact.

Jesus, the Master Evangelist, used something many Christians seriously lack—**tact.**

Notice that **Jesus** did not start out with **some statement like these:**

- *“Are you **saved?**”*
- *“Did you know you’re **going to hell?**”*

This was a dialogue, not a monologue. He spoke and listened.

*One of the best ways to share your faith is to **listen** for a while to the person you're speaking to. Everyone's favorite subject is **themselves!***

Ask them their opinions.

- This is not about **winning an argument, but winning a soul.**
- Sure, there is a place for **point and counterpoint.**
- Yes, we want to be able to **defend our beliefs** (more on this next time), but no one has ever been **argued into the Kingdom of God.**

We should be using a tactful, friendly, engaging approach.

Like **Philip with the man from Ethiopia (Acts 8:30 NKJV):** “Do you **understand what you are reading?**”

Or Paul on Mars Hill, after looking at thousands of idols (Acts 17:22 NLT): “Men of Athens, I notice that **you are very religious!**”

Again, tact is what we need.

I read about a **barber** who was a **young Christian** and had attended a meeting where the speaker stressed the need to **share the gospel with others.** *He knew he was lacking in this area* so he determined **he would speak to the first person** who came into his shop. **The next morning,** after the customer had been seated and the apron tucked around his neck, the barber began to **strap his razor vigorously.** Testing the edge, he turned to the man in the chair and asked, “**Friend, are you ready to die and meet God?**” The man **looked at the razor** and fled out the door, **apron and all!**

This barber lacked tact!

Story of Guy in Hawaii with Sign “The Wages of Sin are Death.”

When people are offended, some like to say “*Blessed are they who are persecuted.*” *Look, you are not being persecuted for “righteousness’ sake,” but because you are WEIRD!*

- You are **unnecessarily offensive.** Granted, there is an offense in **the gospel message,** but many times **people never even get that far.**

For starters, they can’t even decipher our language, or “Christianese.”)

“**Friend, are you saved, washed in the Blood, sanctified and part of the Body of Christ?**”

Notice how tactfully and gracefully Jesus engages this woman.

After asking for a drink of water, and her initial surprise at that request, Jesus says (vv.13-14):

“Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but **whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst.** But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”

Jesus was using the well and its water as a metaphor for her life.

- *The reason she came to the well at **noon** (the hottest part of the day) was because she was **an outcast** (others would come in the evening, when it was cool).*
- *She had been married and divorced five times, and this was before they actually celebrated this type of thing.*

With a water pot on her head, she spied this Jew sitting by the well and braced herself for another confrontation.

- *An ordinary Jew would have thrown the cup to the ground if a Samaritan offered it. Instead, Jesus surprises her, asking for a favor, a drink of water.*
- *He was appealing to her curiosity, to her inner spiritual thirst.*

He was, in essence, saying, “You are looking to men to fill a void you have in your life.”

She had come to the well for **personal fulfillment** five times, hoping to meet the “**perfect man**” who would fulfill **all her desires**—A “**Prince Charming**” who, time and time again, turned into **A FROG!** *Or so it seemed.*

Her response to Jesus was flippant and sarcastic.

In other words, this woman was not really paying attention. **So Jesus zeroes in on WHY she needs the gospel.**

3. We must adapt to the situation.

John 4:15-19 (NKJV): “The woman said to Him, “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw. Jesus said to her, “**Go, call your husband, and come here.**” The woman answered and said, “**I have no husband.**” Jesus said to her, “You have well said, ‘**I have no husband,**’ for **you have had five husbands,** and the one whom you now **have is not your husband;** in that you spoke truly.” The woman said to Him, “**Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet!**”

BINGO! Jesus got her attention!

As I already said, a person cannot fully appreciate the Good News if they don't know the bad.

So, someone might ask, “If I become a Christian, do I have to stop getting drunk or sleeping around?”

The short answer: YES!

Some might say, **“Well, let’s not get into that yet.”**

No, let’s **be upfront with people** and let them know **there IS a cost in following Jesus.**

- Remember, Scripture teaches that **BELIEF includes repentance.**

You remember Jesus and the Rich Young Ruler.

Jesus told him “to give up” what he had and he would have treasure in heaven.

- Jesus never said that in particular to anyone else, but the point was **He showed him the cost.**
- We sometimes want to **make this TOO EASY, and end up watering it down.**
- **When Peter preached on Pentecost and the people were “stabbed in the heart,” they cried out, “What shall we do?” Peter told them to REPENT!** (see Acts 2:38)

Jesus was straightforward with her, yet loving. He told her, **“You are never going to be satisfied drinking from the ‘well’ of sex. Look, you’ve already tried marriage five times!”**

At this point, she is very uncomfortable and tries to get him off the subject.

John 4:20 (NKJV): *“Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and YOU JEWS say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.”*

This was an ongoing debate between the Samaritans and the Jews about *where God was to be worshipped.*

For the record, the right answer was the one Jesus gave. The Samaritans had this all wrong.

But Jesus did not labor that point. Instead, He put it in context with the big picture—
“Lady, it’s not about what kind of building we worship in or even where we do it. God is a Spirit, we must worship Him in Spirit and Truth.”

What this woman was trying to do was get Jesus off the subject. *This often happens in a dialogue about the gospel. They’ll ask things like, “Why are there so many denominations out there?”*

People will try to take you down endless rabbit trails that are secondary, at best. I try to address the issue they are asking about, and then come back to the core issue, that being the gospel.

As far as those questions, like “What about this?,” or “Why does God allow that?,” I will deal with this in our next message, “Answering Difficult Questions.”

Again, Jesus was having a dialogue not a monologue with her.

- This is very important in **one-on-one evangelism**. You **ask questions**, and then you **actually listen to the answers**. Then appropriately **apply the gospel to their situation**.

It's like using different bait with different fish.

If I were speaking with a person like this, I would appeal to **the emptiness** in their life and show them how **Christ could fill the void**. *I would clearly mention **why the void was there to begin with—sin—and that repentance and belief were required.***

But if I were speaking with someone on their deathbed, I would speak **more on eternity**.
Are you ready to meet God?

There isn't a "one-size-fits-all" approach to evangelism.

Jesus always **adapted to the situation**. He varied His **approach to meet the need of each individual**.

The conversation with the woman at the well is quite different than the one with Nicodemus.

These are case studies on **how to adapt** and, as **Paul said**, "**become all things to all men.**"

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (NLT): *"I have become a servant of everyone so that I can bring them to Christ. When I am with the Jews, I became one of them so that I can bring them to Christ. When I am with the Gentiles who do not have the Jewish law, I fit in with them as much as I can. In this way I gain their confidence and bring them to Christ. But I do not discard the law of God; I obey the law of Christ. When I am **with those who are oppressed I share their oppression** so that I might bring them to Christ. Yes, **I try to find common ground with everyone so that I might bring them to Christ.**"*

Let me illustrate this:

Jesus often answered a question with a question.

Going back to the **Rich Young Ruler**—"Good Teacher, **what must I do to inherit eternal life?**"—instead of giving this guy the gospel, **Jesus responds**, "*Why do you call me Good? There is not one good but God.*"
Jesus was **drawing him out** and giving him an **opportunity to believe**.

For instance, if someone says to you, "Why do you think Jesus was anything more than just a great moral teacher?"

You might answer a question with a question:

- “What makes you think **Jesus was a great moral teacher?**”
“Have you **read his teachings?**”
“What do you think is the **most important thing He said?**”

Their usual answer would be that they had never read His teachings and you could point some of them out.

- “What about the person who has never heard the gospel? Will God send them to Hell?”
“Why **do you ask that?**”
“Do you **believe in hell?**”
“Do you think anyone deserves to go there? If not, why?”

To answer that second question, God will judge us according to the light we have received. *No one wants a person saved more than Christ Himself, but here's **the bottom line—you have heard the gospel and you will be held accountable.***

There was the time the religious leaders tried to trap him on the tax issue—is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?

If He said it was, the **people would turn on Him** as they were **overtaxed.**

If He said it was not, the **government would turn on Him** as that would be **rebellion.**

Instead, Jesus asks for a Roman coin. Then He answers a **question with a question,** “**Whose image is on this coin?**”

They reply, “Caesars!”

*“Then give to **Caesar** what belongs to Caesar and give to **God** what belongs to God!”*
*Talk about **turning a situation around.** That is why we must **listen carefully and pray for wisdom.***

At this point, this woman is starting to wonder, “Could this be the Messiah?”

You might be speaking with someone and they are “**getting it.**” ***It's time to go to the next level.***”

Her initial cynicism has given way to curiosity and now it has become *belief!*

John 4:25-26 (NKJV): *The woman said to Him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ). When He comes, He will tell us all things.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I who speak to you am He.’”*

That was it! She believes on the spot.

4. Telling your story is a powerful bridge for the gospel message.

This woman, minutes old in the faith, immediately goes out and tells others.

John 4:28-29 (NKJV): “The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, ‘Come, see a Man who **told me all things that I ever did**. Could this be the Christ?’”

There is a lot of power in the simplicity of a changed life. Just like the man Jesus healed from blindness, “**Once I was blind and now I see.**”

Many people believed as a result of her testimony.

John 4:39 (NKJV): “And many of the Samaritans of that city **believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified**, ‘He told me all that I ever did.’”

That’s the power of a changed life!

The apostle Paul often used his personal testimony as he stood before government leaders, even though he was a brilliant orator and extremely knowledgeable about Scripture. It’s interesting to see how Paul used his personal testimony time and time again.

Here are a few tips in sharing your personal testimony:

1. Don’t glorify or exaggerate your past.

- **Accuracy** is important. So is **Truthfulness**.
- Some people’s “testimony” changes with time. It gets more dramatic with each telling.

Another problem is making your past sound more appealing than your present.

*“I had **money, women, and power** . . . but I gave it all up for **the Old Rugged Cross** . . . “*

If you have truly been converted, there is no way that can be the case.

2. Don’t boast about what you gave up for Him but what He gave up for you.

I have heard people speak of the “**great sacrifices**” they made to **follow Christ**.

Listen to Paul’s words about how he viewed his past.

Philippians 3:7-8 (NLT): “I once thought all these things were so very important, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have discarded everything else, **counting it all as garbage**, so **that I may have Christ.**”

Another more contemporary translation puts it this way (THE MESSAGE):

*“Yes, all the things I once **thought were so important are gone from my life.** Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand, everything I **once thought I had going for me is insignificant—dog dung.** I’ve **dumped it all in the trash** so that I could **embrace Christ and be embraced by him.**”*

A word about “dog dung.” I don’t like it.

I walk my dog in the morning and have a little bag to pick up you know what. I take a deep breath and grab it. I often wonder, “Who is the Master and who is the Pet here?”

This is a pretty sweet deal—for the dog!

I don’t save my dog’s dung or poop. I certainly don’t talk about it to people or brag about it. I can’t get it into the trash quickly enough.

That is how we need to see our life before we knew Christ.

3. It’s not about you, but Him.

- *Don’t go overly long in **telling your story.***

*Again, it’s a bridge, not the destination. **The destination is Jesus, and specifically His story. His love for humanity, death on the Cross and resurrection from the dead.***

*Just give the big picture and **sum up how you “had your eyes opened, turned from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God.”***

*Your story is but a **bridge to His story (“Christ, and Him Crucified”).***

4. We must be patient in the work of sharing the gospel.

John 4:35-38 (NKJV): “Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both **he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.** For in this the saying is true: ‘**One sows and another reaps.**’ **‘I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.’**”

Conversion is the Work of God alone.

Yet, as I mentioned, He is **looking for laborers in the field and every one of us has a vital part to play.**

Yes, Evangelism is work!

You may just **sow a seed** or **water one someone else sowed**, or **reap** that which was primarily **sowed and watered by others**.

Paul used this line of thinking when he said in 1 Corinthians 3:6-8, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So neither he who plants is anything nor he who waters, but God gives the increase. Now he who plants and waters are one and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor” (NKJV).

You may not see the fruit of the seed you planted until much later in life, or even after your life on Earth is over!

It takes time and lots of it to plant, water, and harvest crops.

It doesn't happen overnight. You must learn to wait.

There is, as Ecclesiastes says, “A time to sow and a time to reap.”

Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NLT): “God has made everything **beautiful for its own time**. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the **whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.**”

I am, by nature, an impatient person.

- *I can't wait for the **pizza to cool down**.*
- *I go to the **12 Items-or-Less line** at supermarkets just to get out quicker.*
- *I weave from **lane to lane, trying move faster**.*

But we must be patient as we share the gospel.

2 Timothy 2:24-26 (NLT): “The Lord's servants must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone. They must be able to teach effectively and **be patient with difficult people**. They should gently teach those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people's hearts, and they will believe the truth. Then they will come to their senses and escape from the Devil's trap. For they have been held captive by him to do whatever he wants.”

The “seeds” we sow are like little “time bombs” that may not detonate today.

It might be **tomorrow, or next month, or next year**.

*I have seen people come to Christ at the **funeral services of faithful Christians**.*

Missionary George Smith may have thought his ministry was a failure.

He had been in Africa only a short time when he was driven from the country, leaving behind only one convert—a poor woman. Smith died not long after that, on his knees praying for Africa.

Years later, a group of men stumbled onto the place in Africa where George Smith had ministered. They also found a **copy of the Scriptures** he had left behind in Africa.

Then they met the one convert of Smith's ministry.

She led them all to the Lord.

The result of the encounter of these men with the Bible and George Smith's one convert was far reaching.

A hundred years later, a mission agency discovered that more than 13,000 converts had emerged from the ministry George Smith began.

So you just never know.

- ***Keep praying*** for those who ***don't know the Lord.***
- ***Keep sowing those seeds.***
- ***Keep looking for ways to build bridges to people who don't know the Lord.***

Keep sharing your story of what God has done for you.

It is not in vain!

Galatians 6:9 (NIV): "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up!"