

Sharing Our Lives

Leading others to Christ involves much more than just delivering a message. Unless they can see that we are *personally* invested in their welfare, they won't listen.

“So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us” (1 Thess. 2:8).



Scholars use the term “social capital” to describe the network of relationships within a community that allows its members to thrive and prosper. In communities where social capital is strong, people depend on each other for support and guidance, and everyone generally does well. Where social capital is thin, people are on their own trying to navigate life’s pathway, and usually don’t do a very good job of it.

All of which is to say, socialization is a key component to human happiness. The God who created us knows this and has incorporated social connections as part of His plan to save us from our sins. The gospel is the “good news” of salvation, but that message depends on human agents to render it personally engaging.

This principle is highlighted in our opening text. Let’s start by looking at the Greek word translated “impart.” It involves not just *giving*, but a spirit of *sacrifice* behind the gift. It’s the same word that John the Baptist used to explain repentance: “He who has two tunics, let him *give* to him who has none” (Lk. 3:11). Likewise, we

are to work with our hands that we “may have something to *give* to him who has need” (Eph. 4:28). It’s for this reason that several versions render this word using a more genial “share”; thus, “we were delighted *to share* with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well” (NIV).

Think about this. Paul *shared the gospel* with these people—we still use that expression today as a metaphor for evangelism—but he also *shared his life* with them. That is, he got to know them on a personal level, with all their baggage and problems. He knew that unless he invested social capital with the people he taught, his message would come across as cold and pedantic. They felt the warm embrace of a human touch in Paul’s work, and that compassion made all the difference in securing their conversion.

Paul’s explanation, “you had become dear to us,” lays bare the motivation behind his humanitarianism. He saw these people not as prospects, but as friends. Here, as in other places he worked, he visited them in their homes and did manual labor by which he could help those in need (Ac. 20:26, 34-35). The message of a crucified Savior became real to listeners who could see a living example of that sacrificial spirit laboring alongside them.

This principle of “sharing our lives” with others is the missing ingredient in modern evangelism. The value of the gospel is obscured when it is presented as a collection of sterile facts and commands. The message is paramount, yes; but the character of the messenger is the bridge that inspires the sinner to listen and respond. How often does that happen in our outreach efforts?

Americans once enjoyed a high level of social capital, with widespread involvement in churches, fraternities, associations, and other civic organizations. In recent years, involvement in these networks has plummeted, accompanied by a decline in psychological health across vast swathes of the population. More and more, the people around us are isolated and lonely. This disease has even infected God’s people, who rarely see each other outside a church building. We must resist this cultural virus and learn what it means to treat others, including strangers, as “dear to us.” We must open up our homes, develop genuine friendships with outsiders, and truly “share our lives” with those who could benefit from what we have to offer.

— David King