



FIVE

How to Share Your Faith, by Rod Cosgrove, Lead Pastor

What are you excited about in life? If I give you a chance to share about something that you're passionate about, something that you really enjoy and love to share with people, what would you say?

I have many things that get me excited: learning new things...especially in my faith, biking, gardening, travelling, camping, backpacking, mountaineering, Univ. of Colorado sports, my wife, kids and more. But lately, I've been having a great time restoring a little 1955 aluminum fishing boat that I bought last summer with my brother-in-law. It used to be a beat up red and white but after much work, it's now gleaming silver on the bottom, with gold sides and black accents on the way. I can't wait to finish it. Just ask me, and I'd be thrilled to tell you all about it.

Now when it comes to sharing our faith with others, wouldn't you hope that we'd all be as excited to talk about it with others as I am to talk about this boat? You'd think so, but for many of us, that's just not the case. We like what we've received from Christ – a sense of what makes the world work, help in trial, belonging to a people and an eternal hope for the future, but quite honestly, lots of us have little to say when it comes to sharing all this with unbelievers. In fact, we're afraid. Most of us can't point to one single other person who knows Jesus today because of our witness. It's my hope to encourage us to change that story.

Matthew 26:26

As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "Take this and eat it, for this is my body."

When preparing for communion, most churches refer to this event that happened in the upper room in Jerusalem, during the week prior to his death. This makes sense, for as one of the two "ordinances" in our faith tradition – baptism being the other – we find it helpful to remember the Last Supper as an example, as well as a sacramental baseline in which to receive the body and blood of Christ. So rightly so, we often quote this passage and remember how Jesus gave of himself and what he said.

But there's more going on here than we typically notice, especially as it relates to sharing our faith, and my hope is that you will forever think of this passage as more than just dealing with the Last Supper. With thanks once again to Henri Nouwen for his observations, I'd like to point out four key action words in this short verse which summarized the life of Christ as well as the lives of those who follow him.

The first action word is "took." Jesus reached out and *took* the bread on the table. For the purpose of understanding this passage in terms of the Christ-life, I want you to imagine that you-me-we are that bread. In the same way that Jesus *took* the bread, he has also *taken* us. Each of us can say, "I have been TAKEN..." God has taken me from the lostness of this world to become a new people for himself. Perhaps "chose" is a better word that implies the same idea. "You-me-we have been *chosen*."

Has it sunk in for you lately that you have been *taken*, or chosen, by God? There is no other one like you and out of all the people that have ever lived or will ever live on this planet, God made you, he loves you, and he claims you for his own. The Apostle John says that Jesus was the "**Chosen One of God.**" We also are chosen for God's purposes. In Peter's letter to the churches, he referred in the same sense to people who reject God's offer of eternal life and what they are like. And then he said,

1 Peter 2:9

But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

This can be a simple, but difficult truth for us to receive. We think a variety of things like, "How could I be chosen by God?" Or, "That's cool that I'm chosen, but what about that other guy? Why not him?" But this is to make a logic jump that isn't true in terms of the Gospel: just because you have been chosen, doesn't mean that others aren't chosen. Every snowflake that falls from the sky is a uniquely shaped work of God, yet when many unique flakes show up together, they present to us as "snow." We don't seem to have a hard time recognizing the wonder of snow, yet we marvel that every, single snowflake is unique.

Church, God TOOK you...he CHOSE you.

*See the land so black and barren,
God will choose it for His garden:
Fruitfulness where once was parchedness,
light to break into the darkness,
upper springs and nether springs
in the field that Father's given.*

Reflections on Judges 1:14-15; Numbers 24:1-10; Psalm 126:3-4

The second verb Jesus uses in this passage is "blessed." In the same way that Jesus *took* the bread and *blessed* it, setting it aside before God as holy and honorable for his special purpose, he also blesses us, conferring upon those who trust him the sacred sign of his favor. So, we can say, "I have been BLESSED..."

To be "blessed" in this case doesn't so much mean that we have nice things or a good life, like the way we may say it so often in our culture, but that Jesus gives us his "benediction." This word comes from the Latin "bene," meaning "well or good" and "dicere," meaning "to speak" or "words." A *benediction* is a "good word." In the same way that we close our worship with a benediction, *a good word*, so also does God speak his "good word" over Jesus when he rose out of the baptismal waters of the Jordan: "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy." But here's the thing: he also speaks his blessing over you and me. At the end of the creation sequence in Genesis, when he had created the man and the woman as the pinnacle of his effort, the narrative tells us:

Genesis 1:28, 31

Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it..." Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!

God spoke his *benediction* over creation. Meanwhile, God has continued pouring out his good on us! As the Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

Ephesians 1:3

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ.

Church, God speaks His BLESSING to you.

*In the dry and desert places
Jesus is our souls' oasis.
He will bless us with His plenty,
fill the vessels once so empty,
pour His waters on the ground,
living waters gushing round.*

Reflections on Judges 1:14-15; Numbers 24:1-10; Psalm 126:3-4

So, to briefly review, we have been *taken*. We have also been *blessed*. But that's not all. After Jesus took the bread and then blessed it, the narrative tells us that he *broke* it. It was a sacramental act signifying not only the division of the physical bread into pieces for everyone to receive some, but it was a direct symbol of his willingness to be broken for all humankind and his expectation that we would follow in that same brokenness. In the same way that Jesus willingly gave himself for us in sacrifice, so also are we as his followers broken for others. We can all therefore say, "I have been BROKEN..."

Every one of us experiences deep anguish because of the pains and difficulties we have experienced. Whether caused by our own weakness or experienced in relative innocence, trials dig in. Being treated unfairly hurts. Our sins pile up. When people ridicule or dismiss us for following Christ and for believing certain things because of our faith, we know what it's like to be rejected. What do we do with all this? We must embrace it as brokenness, not denying it, but claiming it as the means of God to shape us for his good. On this sort of thing, Jesus said:

Luke 9:23-24

If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.

What's your cross? We can't make up a cross on which to crucify ourselves. We can't invent brokenness in a way that we think will impress God and others. It doesn't work. We also won't experience a broken and contrite spirit by trying to take up someone else's cross. That one is theirs to bear. But in Christ's infinite wisdom, he provides for each of us our own cross, the challenges or testing the Lord has set before each of us in following Christ. But remember: it always means dying in one way or another: **"Take up YOUR cross and follow me."**

There's one more important key here that's important for us: once we come to embrace our brokenness, our key vulnerabilities and our wounds as a personal signature of the pain of this world, by the grace and mercy of God we get to connect it to the blessing that God has already spoken to us. You see, if we think of our brokenness as only connected to the curse of sin, we will always default to self-loathing, saying "I'm a problem; I always screw up, I'll never amount to anything," and the like. But that's not true. God isn't so much angry with us for our brokenness as he desires that we will relent to him and allow him to deal with it. And when we do, when we can put our brokenness under the blessing of God, we will see that in Christ we are redeemed and useful in His hands.

Church, God works his blessing through our BROKENNESS.

*Every curse becomes a blessing
to the people of God's choosing.*

He who spoke it shall perform it.

*He shall bring on us the blessing,
though the enemy may fight.*

My Jesus has done all things right.

Reflections on Judges 1:14-15; Numbers 24:1-10; Psalm 126:3-4

So as followers of Jesus Christ, we have been *taken, blessed and broken*, but it doesn't end there. Finally, as a marker of those who love Jesus, serve in His name and speak of how he can redeem others, we must be willing to follow in his footsteps and say, "I have been *given*."

Here's where this sequence hits home when it comes to the matter of sharing our faith: We are not here just for ourselves, to bask in the idea of being taken and blessed by God, nor to wallow about in self-pitying sorrow over our brokenness. God is a missionary God, and his intention is for us to see others become disciples through our sharing of the Good News. When calling his first disciples to be with him Jesus said,

Matthew 4:19

"Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!"

And we shouldn't forget the command Jesus gave to his followers to share him with others and keep his mission going:

Matthew 28:19

"Go and make disciples of all the nations."

To do these things is to produce fruit out of our lives. And while it includes doing good for people and serving "the least of these," it must also include an effective verbal witness to Jesus through sharing His Good News with them. It requires the awareness of being taken, blessed and broken, but it comes to fruition in living in the reality of being given to the world. In this, our witness to Jesus comes as a fruitful overflow, a reproductive outpouring of God through our lives because sharing the Gospel is the key way we are given to the world.

*Satan tries, but cannot block it;
powers of hell could never stop it.
Darkness flees as Light is given.
God establishes His heaven
in our hearts, and in this place
people see the radiance of his face.
Reflections on Judges 1:14-15; Numbers 24:1-10; Psalm 126:3-4*

In sum, what I hope you remember today is that:

Life Truth: We are GIVEN by God to share His Good News with the world.

As much as I enjoy restoring that groovy old 1955 fishing boat, it's not what I'm to give my life to. As a Christ follower, my life is to comprise of giving myself for others, serving others in His name and witnessing to the opportunity everyone has to become a child of God...

DISCUSSION: How to Share Your Faith

1. What's something that you're excited about these days? A hobby, a relationship, a sport, gardening or? Why does that excite you?
2. When the topic of sharing our faith comes up, many of us suddenly grow quiet and ashamed, perhaps feeling that we haven't measured up to what we should be doing. Is this how you feel? Why or why not?
3. Consider the following Scripture:

Matthew 26:26

As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "Take this and eat it, for this is my body."

If we think of ourselves as the "bread," it says we have been taken (took), blessed, broken and then given. What do you think about this sequence? Which connects with you the most? Which repels you the most? Why do you answer as you do?

4. Consider the following paragraph: "As Christ followers, we have been given by Jesus to produce fruit out of our lives. While "fruit" includes doing good for people and serving people, it must also include an effective verbal witness to Jesus through sharing His Good News with them. It requires the awareness of being taken, blessed and broken, but it comes to fruition in living in the reality of being given to the world. In this, our witness to Jesus comes as a fruitful overflow, a reproductive outpouring of God through our lives because sharing the Gospel is the key way we are given to the world."

What do you think about this statement? What moves you positively; what makes you mad?

Suppose someone asks you one day how they could know Jesus as you do? What would you say? Do you think you could adequately represent Jesus or would you stumble along?

As you imagine what that could be like, how do you feel about your likely response?