

MAKE SPORT YOUR MISSION SERIES

# The Sports Stadium

How to share your faith in the world of sport

**Graham Daniels  
& J Stuart Weir**



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# 1 Pray Play Say

*John was a quality bloke. I watched him closely',*

David, London University student.

*'I just prayed for John and answered his questions...'*

John

You know the feeling. You wake up and think, 'Yes, I've got a game today' There are several hours before the kick-off but it will never be far from your thoughts. As a Christian you know that the purpose of your life is to please God and to serve him in all aspects of your life. But you have been born to play<sup>1</sup> and you believe that the sports field is in a real sense the arena in which you are called to serve God.

If God is the creator of all things then that must include sport, our ability to play sport and love of it. If God has given us our sporting gifts, then let us use them to the full. However our motivation must be to use the gifts to worship and glorify him, not to bring glory to ourselves. The words attributed to Eric Liddell in the film, *Chariots of Fire*, 'God made me for a purpose but he also made me fast and

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller discussion of giving your sporting gifts to God, see *Born to play*, Graham Daniels and J Stuart Weir, Frampton House Publications, Bicester, 2004.

when I run I feel his pleasure' sum it up well. If you feel that you have been born to play, go out and do it but 'as working for the Lord' (Colossians 3:23).

Moreover you believe that Jesus' great commission – to go into all the world and make disciples applies to you and applies to the world of sport. So as you focus on the game your thoughts are also on your sports friends who need to hear the gospel. That makes you a little nervous for you are not sure how to share your faith with them.

If you resonate with those thoughts then this book is for you!

Your mission as a Christian in the world of sport might be summed up by the three words pray, play and say. Look at Colossians 4v2-6.

*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

Paul urges the Colossians to pray. Prayer is a major commitment and one to be undertaken expectantly and with appropriate gratitude to the Lord who answers. They are to pray too that 'God may open a door for our message so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ' (v3) and that when such opportunities arise, he 'may proclaim it clearly' (v4). For Paul, it is critical that believers pray both for openings to explain the good news of Jesus Christ and clarity in explanation when that opportunity arises. God calls us, as well as the Colossians, to pray for an open door for the gospel message. Will you do that for your friends and colleagues in sport?

In addition to praying, God calls the Christians in Colossae to live a holy life and to represent him in their world. The way we live is important. Paul tells the Colossians to 'be wise in the way you act towards outsiders' (v5) and that their lifestyle (translated 'conversation' in the NIV but indicating behaviour as much as words) is to be 'full of grace, seasoned with salt'. It is then that 'you might know how to answer everyone' (v6). The Colossians will earn the right to speak of Christ as a consequence of attractive and winsome behaviour.

The Christian's life should reflect all these qualities amongst their sporting friends and if we live like

this then friends and colleagues will want to know how we manage it! In the context of sport, it's the way we play, both on and off the field that will earn us the right to speak of Christ. You are God's representative in your sports club - in the competition, in training and after the game. God can be honoured in the way you play and relate to others.

It is a challenge for the Christian to live wholeheartedly for Christ knowing that people who are thinking seriously about the claims of Christ are watching!

This is why it's so important for people with sporting gifts to stay in the sports culture. The longer you stay in the culture the deeper the friendships and the greater the opportunities to represent Christ in word and deed.

But there is a price to pay. You have to be intentional about it and make spending time with your sports friends a priority in your life. Don't go off straight after the game or training. It's worth thinking about how to invest time in the relationships that you develop through your sporting life. Maybe the Christian should often be the last to leave the bar after the game, because she's so busy just being there to talk, to get to know people!

In this context it would be mad to feel guilty about putting time into sport. You might think sport is OK but not important. But this is a world that God has enabled you to be a member of by the gifts he has given you. It is a place where you can become really good friends with colleagues who may, because of your lifestyle, wonder if Christ is relevant to their lives.

The third thing to draw attention to is that in v4 that Paul also asks for prayer that he may 'proclaim it (the gospel) clearly, as I should'. Prayer is the foundation upon which he should take the opportunity to say what Christ came to do. It is incumbent upon Paul to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, to tell others the message that has brought him salvation and a new life! He wants the Colossians to do likewise. We have observed earlier how he urges them on to speak of Christ, 'be wise in the way you act towards outsiders, make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you might know how to answer everyone' (v5-6). He wants them to take the chances they get to share the good news which they have discovered for themselves. Those who pray are more likely to get to say!

What an opportunity to tell your sporting

colleagues about Christ! The world of sport is perhaps the biggest mission field in the world, with huge numbers involved in sport in every country of the world. We want to encourage people to stay in their sport. The church is crying out for the chance to relate to people who don't belong to it. As a sportsperson you are in a position to do it very naturally, week in; week out! We have relationships that are close because of our common experience in, and love of sport. It is from such friendships that we are asked to explain the good news about Jesus Christ. This book aims to help you to explain the good news of Jesus with your sports friends.

A recent survey revealed that 80-90% of Christians in the UK haven't seen any of their friends or family become a Christian. This isn't necessarily because they don't want people they care for come to know Christ! Often it's because they don't know how to explain the good news!

We hope this book will help in a small way. We are all called to be pray, play and say! If we can pray and live with integrity as a sportsperson in the sports club it can make a significant impact, one from which we may get to explain the greatest message the world has ever known.



## Thought

Friendship with a Christian is the major factor that leads to people becoming Christians.



## Question

What changes do I need to make to my lifestyle if I am to become intentional about representing Christ in my sports club?



## Action

Identify three people in the club and pray for them every day and aim to develop a close friendship with them in which you can naturally explain the gospel. [You may find it useful to use the Christians in Sport prayer card in which you write the names of three sporting colleagues and keep the card somewhere where it will act as a reminder to pray].

## 2 Telling our friends

*I became a Christian through the netball team at University. One of the team was a Christian. We became friends. She took me to church. I had long chats with her about her Christian faith. I realised she knew a very different Jesus from the one I thought was Jesus. I started going to the Christians in Sport prayer meeting. They prayed for their team mates and for me. I prayed for good weather. Then I went to the Christians in Sport New Year conference. On my first night, in the first Bible teaching I asked God into my life and was converted.*

Katie Jack

Jesus mandate to His church as He left this earth to return to His Father in heaven is given in Matthew 28:19-20: 'Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you'. This is the mission statement of the Christian church.

To be committed to sharing Jesus with people we need:

- to understand how much people matter to God;
- to believe in the reality of hell.

### Lost people matter to God

In Luke 15 Jesus tells three stories about lost items – a coin, a sheep and a son. The stories give us a picture of God's attitude to the lost. When the coin or the sheep is lost, there is an all-out search. All other activity stops. When the shepherd loses a sheep, he takes a huge risk in leaving the other 99 sheep on their own.

When the coin, the sheep and the son are found, there is an all out celebration. The point of these stories is that lost people matter to God and so they should matter to us. If we are to be God's people we need to match God's heart of love for lost people.

Telling people about Jesus is important to God and therefore it should be important to the Christian. God is pre-occupied with the lost, it is where his mind wanders all the time.

Has someone in your family ever lost the car keys? When it happens, you start looking, almost out of a sense of duty. When someone loses car keys, you help them look – that is what you do! If they

don't turn up and you ring the garage about a replacement set and you discover that the cost of a replacement set of keys would be £250, it gives an urgency to your search! When we realize how much our friends are worth to God, it will give us an added urgency to our desire to tell them about Jesus.

God sent his Son, Jesus to search us out and do whatever it takes to bring us back to the Father – even dying on a cross. He sacrificed everything!

Hell is real

God has given us the task of proclaiming the good news and a part of that good news is that if you believe in Jesus you do not have to go to that terrible place, called hell. As Christians we are to have the mind of Christ! He believed in hell – no-one spoke of it more than Jesus!

Luke records the story Jesus told of Lazarus who had an awful life but then went to heaven and a rich man who had everything imaginable on earth but finished up in hell.

What Jesus is telling us is that hell is real and that it is a place of total suffering and total separation from God. Jesus, the tender hearted, caring and

most loving man that walked the earth, warns us of the destiny of people who do not listen and obey the word of God.

As we read the story of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16 we notice the following points

- Hell is a real place;
- Hell is a place of agony and torment;
- Hell is a place of punishment;
- Hell is a place of separation;
- Hell is a place where friends don't have to go.

When Jesus teaches about heaven and we gladly listen and embrace it. To say there is no hell would be to call Jesus a liar. How can we believe what he teaches about heaven if we do not listen to his teaching on hell?

The Bible is clear. Those who choose to ignore God – his word and the warnings - will pay for the sins themselves instead of letting Jesus take it on the cross, will endure conscious agony after they die! Hell is outer darkness – hell is not part of the cosmos of beauty and law and goodness! It is a place where the very essence of God is not.

Jesus believed in hell. He came to seek and save the lost. Do you care enough for your friends to warn them of hell?



## Thought

**If we truly believe in telling our friends about Jesus we will tell them the whole truth of the gospel.**



## Question

**Do I really believe that hell is real and that my friends are going there?**



## Action

**Read Luke 16 and other Biblical references to hell to check out the accuracy of this teaching**

## 3

# God's part and our part <sup>2</sup>

*Gareth Lippiatt struggled a little as a Christian at university – the two people he shared a house with did not know that he was a Christian! After university Gareth came to Cambridge to join the Christians in Sport Academy.*

*The Academy was planning an event to which members' friends who were not yet Christians were to be invited and Gareth was thinking about who he could invite. There was no one in his new football team who was showing any interest, so he thought about people he had been at university with. He plucked up courage to contact one of the people he had shared a house with at Loughborough, Colin Wells, and told him what he was up to and invited him to come along to the event. (When the Academy had all committed to pray for an unbelieving friend, Gareth has chosen to pray for Wellsy.)*

*Wellsy replied saying. 'I had no idea you were a Christian. When I was young I used to go to a*

<sup>2</sup> Much of this section is based Christianity Explored, Rico Tice and Barry Cooper, Paternoster, 2002, PP 34-36

*Christian youth group'. Gareth invited him to lunch and within a year Wellsy was a Christian. It happened because Gareth had the bottle to send him an email.*

It is difficult to be confident in any team situation if we don't know exactly what's expected of us and what other team members' jobs are. The principle is as important in the Christian life as it is in any team game! If we are unsure about what is and what is not expected of us in helping our friends come to faith in Jesus, we will always be apprehensive of sharing our faith. What is our role and God's role in the process?

Let's look at 2 Corinthians 4:1-6.

*Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the*

*image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:1-6*

My aim and God's aim

Verse five explains that we are to aim to 'preach Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as servants'. It's that simple! We don't need to aim at anything else.

God's specific aim is also very clear when we look at verse six. It is 'to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.' God's aim is to enable people to see and understand how glorious he is by seeing and understanding who Jesus Christ is and what he has done for us.

I can't do anything to achieve this. Only God can bring spiritual sight to people in the dark, only God can bring an understanding of what Jesus has done for us and so bring us to a place where we are amazed and grateful enough to trust in him.

My job is simply to tell this message, God's to enable the human heart and mind to understand and believe it.

Know your job and know God's job. It brings a great relief; it takes a great weight off your shoulders when you realise you cannot bring anyone to faith in Christ, that this is God's role and his role only.

How God and I achieve our aims

Verse two explains that we achieve our aim of telling people the good news.

It is sometimes tempting to choose parts of the Bible to highlight and other parts to hide when we explain God's message. That's tempting because we so want our friend to believe it! But Paul's words are plain here. We must not 'use deception, not do we distort the word of God'. We must make sure that we do not keep some truths back from our friends.

Rather 'we must set forth the truth plainly' When we explain the good news of Jesus Christ we must do it in a way, which is uncomplicated and easy to understand. Communication in a conversation is less about what we say and more about what is understood by the listener. We need to explain the message clearly and simply!

By doing that 'we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God'. Our behaviour and our words need to have integrity.

Sometimes people say 'she practises what she preaches' or 'she walks the talk!' We play our part by ensuring that we live lives consistently with the good news we are telling others.

How does God achieve his aims? Verse six explains that he makes Christ known 'by making his light shine in our hearts' And in order to explain to the reader how powerful an act this is, he prefaces it by quoting the story of the creation of the world in Genesis 1:3, 'For God who said, 'let light shine out of darkness made his light shine in our hearts...''

Shining the light that gives spiritual sight into a human's life demands the same kind of power that was required to create physical light at the world's creation. Now that is powerful!

Indeed, we must contextualise this from verse four. There we read, 'the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God'.

For someone to become a Christian, God must open their blind eyes. God must perform a miracle of re-creation in the heart, in order to get us to recognize that Jesus is God. We cannot make anyone a Christian, no matter how many times we

tell them the gospel, or however consistent our lifestyle.

Clearly then, it requires a miraculous power to bring light into the darkness of the human soul. Yes, it truly is a miracle that we are enabled to see who Jesus Christ really is. That's why only God can play this role in the process!

Realizing this should clarify our thinking and free us from both vanity and any guilt. My role is a limited one. Tell of Christ truthfully, plainly and live consistently. God's role is to perform the miracle of opening blind eyes. We don't know where, when and for whom he will do it. If we are there, what a privilege! If not, so what, it's his business! Just play your part in this team! And be spurred on to pray that God will open the eyes of our friends. Our role is to tell people the good news about Jesus. We are messengers or signposts pointing to Jesus.

Have you ever seen the running races for partially sighted or blind competitors at the Special Olympics? The competitor is supported by a sighted guide, who acts as their eyes in navigating the race. The guide is linked to the competitor by a short rope, but ideally the runner has to listen for the gun and start independently – with the guide running alongside.

It won't be helpful if the guide is too far forward or too far behind – it could mean the guide is dragging the competitor along, or is holding them back. This is particularly important at the start, where the competitor is most likely to lose balance and maybe even have to give up the race.

The guide's main job is to run alongside, helping the competitor to follow the course, warning them about dangers ahead, and encouraging them throughout. There is a physical bond between them as they run, in the form of a rope (or similar). However, the partnership normally goes much deeper than that, and a huge element of the relationship is trust.

The guide needs to be able to keep pace with the competitor. That means they will not be able to do their job properly if they are not fit enough to compete. Training is essential for both people, both individually for their individual fitness and working together to improve their partnership and to push each other to greater heights.

Fundamentally – the guide should be someone who can see!! A blind person should ideally not be leading another blind person if the competitor wants to get to the finish line.

At the finish line the guide is not allowed to cross

the line first – it must be the competitor that breaks the tape (or the competitor is disqualified!).

As Christians we can not cross the finish line for our friends, all we can do is help them as much as we can to get to the tape, but it is not our job to take that crucial step of faith for them. Only God can take them across the line!



## Thought

**'My job is to tell people the gospel and leave the Spirit of God to convict them of its truth'. Rico Tice**



## Question

**Why should we be not be surprised when people reaction to the gospel with scorn or apathy?**



## Action

**Pray for your three friends, that God would open their eyes to see his truth.**

## 4 Barriers to belief

*After winning the US Masters in 1985 Bernhard Langer had made it in golf. He had fulfilled his ambitions and was world Number 1. 'I had all the money I needed and a beautiful young wife – I had everything! And yet it wasn't enough. It was like, "Well, where do we go now". It wasn't what I thought it would be and there was still something missing, a feeling of emptiness. There must be more to life than this.*

*'The Tuesday of the next week I played a practice round at Hilton Head with Bobby Clampett and must have shared some of this with him because he said to me, "Why don't you come with us to the tour Bible study tomorrow night?" I had grown up as a Roman Catholic, so I knew about God and felt comfortable with the idea, so I said, "Sure, I'll come along".*

*'I figured I had it all together; I believed in God. I always thought just being a good person and keeping the commandments would hopefully get me to heaven. I didn't steal or kill and I tried not*

<sup>3</sup> Bernhard Langer. My Autobiography, Hodder, London 2002, Pages 49-50.

*to hurt anyone on purpose. But as I got more and more successful, I thought I could do it all myself. I also wanted to know more. As an altar boy in the Catholic Church, I had seen the priest with the Bible but I had never had my own.*

*'The leader of the study, Larry Moody, was speaking from John, chapter 3. Jesus told Nicodemus that he had to be born again. I had never heard this before, but it was exactly the message I needed to hear. Larry went on to explain what it meant in practical terms. I was amazed to realise that the only way to have eternal life was through Jesus Christ – that he died for our sins. And that it was not through worthy deeds or good behaviour that one received eternal life, because we can never live up to God's standard. We will always fall short.*

*'I talked to Larry again. I had a lot of questions. I got my own Bible and read sections of it. After a period of time I began to realise that I had to make a choice. As I understood that God loved me so much that he sent his only Son to die for my sins, it was natural for me to ask the Lord into my life. Basically I just had to trust in him to forgive my sins. I had to make him the number*

*one priority in my life, do everything to please him and not try to do it all myself.*

*'When I realised that Jesus had died on the cross for my sins, for everybody's sins and I had to give over my life to him, I just recognised that this is the most important step or most important decision that I would ever have to take'.<sup>3</sup>*

For most people coming to faith is a journey. You don't go from knowing nothing about Jesus to being mature Christian disciple overnight. It is a spiritual journey. Now of course, God is sovereign and the Holy Spirit can convert someone the first time they hear the gospel. But most of the time it does not happen like that. Most people come to faith over a period, often with a friend or family member playing a significant part.

Some people say that the average person in the UK needs to hear the gospel seven times before they respond. Others say it takes as many as thirty-two encounters with the gospel – whether formal proclamation, informal witness, reading something etc – before the person comes to faith in Jesus Christ.

The important point here is that it is a process. We should not become discouraged if we do not see

instant results. Remember too, if you are going to do gospel ministry, you need to have an infinite capacity for disappointment and an infinite capacity to press on. If you do not grasp that, you will soon be discouraged and give up.

While everyone's story is different, some commonality can be found. At each stage of the spiritual journey there are barriers that block the unbeliever from proceeding unless they are overcome.

A lot of people have misconceptions about Christianity. They think it all about rules and regulations or just for a certain type of person. People often don't realise that right at the heart of Christianity is a relationship with Jesus Christ.

What stops people becoming Christians? In many cases it is because they have a distorted view of Christianity. People have many misconceptions. In the UK it seems that there are four main misconceptions (or barriers to belief). In other parts of the world, the misconceptions about Christianity or the reasons why people don't become Christians may be completely different. But in the UK they seem to be an impression that:

- Christians are weird
- Christianity is irrelevant

- Christianity is untrue
- Christianity is too costly

Let us unpack those misconceptions. In the UK less than 10% of people attend church regularly. .

When you tell your friend that you go to church, believe the Bible and want to live by its standards then you will seem weird. Many will never have met a real Christian. Their presuppositions are that Christians are not normal. Christians are odd. They cannot be trusted. Frankly you would not want to have anything to do with any of them.

Nothing that they see in their neighbour – nor in their experience of school assemblies and church weddings makes them think that church and Christianity has any relevance to their lives. Life is about getting a job, earning lots of money, buying a house and a car and having a good holiday. How will going to church help with any of that?

In a postmodern world you can believe whatever you like but start talking about truth, let alone absolute truth and you will seem as if you have come from another planet!

Yet if we are going to make disciples, we are going to have to help people get over these barriers.



## Thought

**In Christian ministry you need to have an infinite capacity for disappointment**



## Question

**What do you think stops your friends from becoming Christians? Are weird, irrelevant, untrue and the cost the barriers that hinder them?**



## Action

**Pray for your 3 friends that God would show you how to help them overcome their barriers to faith.**



**UNTRUE**

*"I think Christ is the only truth!"*

Front of the stands



**TOO COSTLY**

*"Jesus is Lord."*

On the blocks

1

2

3

4

5

6

## IRRELEVANT

*"Perhaps Christ could make my life better!"*

Back of the stands



## WEIRD

*"Christians are OK!"*

Outside the stadium

## BORN TO PLAY

*"Pray, Play, Say"*

In the race



# 5 The Sports Stadium: Overcoming the barriers to belief

If it is true that there are misconceptions or barriers about Christianity which prevent our friends from becoming Christians, how do we help them progress beyond those barriers? To explain the process we are using a concept called the sports stadium.<sup>4</sup>

The sports stadium sets out a way of helping us to see how our friends' misconceptions of Christianity can be addressed in order to enable them to see properly what Jesus has done on the cross.

In this model we seek, over time, to help people move from outside the stadium, into the spectator stand, to the starting blocks and then into the Christian race and to follow Jesus.

Once in the race the aim is to help people become experienced runners in the Christian race; indeed

<sup>4</sup> The sports stadium concept was thought up by Rev Andrew Baughen, vicar of St James' Church, Clerkenwell, London and is used by permission. See his forthcoming book, *The Because approach*

to train them to become capable coaches of others who are considering coming along to the stadium. The goal is to help them develop into mature Christian workers.

Of course the sports stadium, like any model will prove inadequate as people are not linear. Particularly in a post-modern world people will approach the barriers in a different sequence. Someone may be convinced that Christianity is true but not see its relevance or may see that 'it works for you' but of course it isn't true. The model also falls down in its assumption that people who begin as spectators and end up as competitors! While acknowledging the caveats, I believe the model will help you to understand the process of sharing the good news of Jesus with your friends.

This spiritual journey can be illustrated by reference to the Sports Stadium as shown in the diagram. It is just a way of expressing the journey from first contact to commitment. In talking about outside the stadium, the back of the stand, the front of the stand, on the blocks and in the race it is a concept which helps you plot where a particular person is on their spiritual journey. The concept can be put into practice in many different ways. You can have a formal 'Back of Stands'

event for 200 people. But you can equally do it one to one with a friend or in small groups, over a coffee or a bite to eat in someone's house. The key is that the idea just expresses where a particular person is on their journey and how you are helping them progress.

### Outside the Stadium

The purpose of pre match hospitality is primarily to encourage those who don't yet believe in Jesus to get to know committed Christians other than you. The aim is to help overcome the barrier that Christianity is weird by introducing them to Christian sportspeople other than the one they already know, trust and don't think weird (hopefully!)

The idea comes from going to a sporting occasion such as a cricket match or golf tournament as a guest of someone. You meet together, maybe have a drink, meet old friends, chat and just have a great time before watching the game together. Even if you there for the first time you would soon feel at ease and realise that the others are just like you and have the same interests. They have a similar life to you and perhaps the same hopes and ambitions.

The ideal outcome of taking your friend along here is that they go away thinking 'Christians are OK'.

### Back of the Stand

From the pre-match hospitality you move to the back of the stand. From that position in the stadium you can see the track and what happens on it but you are still a distance away.

The misconception being addressed here is that Christianity is irrelevant. To overcome this you need to help your friend to realize that although you in many ways you are the same as they are – you are not weird or odd – there is something different about you that they could have as well, something that could be very relevant to their lives.

You might share the story of how you became a Christian or the difference God makes in your life, this week. You want your friend to be thinking, 'Alex is just like me but he is saying that this guy Jesus means something to him and makes a difference in his life. As we are similar in lifestyle and interests, if Jesus means something to him, perhaps he might be relevant to me as well'.

At this point you are hoping that your friend will go away with the thought in their mind, 'Perhaps

Christ could make my life better’.

#### Front of the stand

At the front of the stand one is very close to the track. You can feel the atmosphere! One step over the fence and you’d be in the action yourself.

At the front of the stand the goal is to explain the truth and urgency of Christ’s claims. Once fellow sportspeople know that they can enjoy the company of Christians, trust them and feel at home them, we can impress upon them the claims of Christ and their very real need of the good news Christ offers.

At this stage you are praying that your friend will recognize that Jesus is the only truth.

#### On the blocks

At this stage our friend may have the courage to step on to the track and move onto the blocks. This is a scary move. This is where we aim to encourage enquirers to come and have a closer look at Christ and his claims. Often this will be a chance to discuss thoroughly the claims of Christ and to ask questions of what it is to follow him. This will be a time to study the Bible pretty closely. Courses like Christianity Explored and Alpha are

often used at this point to consider closely the Bible's claims about Jesus Christ. This is the point where the person comes to a saving personal faith in Jesus.

The purpose of this stage is get your friend to the point where they are ready to say, 'Jesus is Lord'.

In the race

When a person moves off the blocks and into the race, they need a coach! In stadium terms at this stage they need to be trained in the basics of the Christian race as a Christian sportsperson, particularly in getting a clear understanding of the wonder and consequences of God's grace to us. The goal of this coaching is to produce mature Christians who become capable of coaching others as they consider coming to the stadium!

Getting in the race means that the person is now ready to play sport for the Audience of One, to pray for team-mates and to look for opportunities to tell them about Jesus.



## Thought

For most people becoming a Christian is a process. Our job is to help them along on their spiritual journey.



## Question

Think about your three friends. At which barrier is each of them currently stuck? How can you help each of your three friends overcome their particular barriers?



## Action

Plot your friends in the stadium and begin to think how you can help them progress.

## 6 Outside the stadium: Christians are weird

*Originally I thought Christians were wet and boring but meeting and fancying Simon (now my husband) changed that as did meeting and playing hockey with Jill Ireland. My biggest barrier was: What would people think of me if I became a Christian? Would they think I was weird? Would I lose all my friends who would think I was barking mad? Wendy Gundry,  
Oxford Hawks Hockey Club*

In the UK we live in a post-Christian, post-modern world. The days when everyone knew the facts of Christianity are long gone. Many young people have never set foot inside a church. What is more neither have their parents. People may be two or three generations away from regular involvement with a church. We have to deal with what Oliver Barclay has called the ‘biblical illiteracy of our generation’.<sup>5</sup>

The days are equally long gone when people who

<sup>5</sup> Oliver Barclay, *Evangelicals in Britain, 1935-1995*

would not call themselves Christians, would still accept the Ten Commandments and Christian standards. Today a lie is not a lie if you can get away with it. If you get away with being dishonest with your expenses, you'd be mad not to. The Christian view of sex is bigoted and old-fashioned.

When you tell your non-Christian friend that you go to church, believe the Bible, think that sex outside of marriage and all homosexual activity is wrong – then you will seem weird. Many non-Christians will never have met a real Christian. Their presuppositions are that Christians are not normal. Christians are weird. They cannot be trusted. Frankly you would not want to have anything to do with any of them.

Many times over the years I have heard of coaches being alarmed that one of their players has become a Christian because it will result in the player becoming a 'holy Joe' and losing their edge. By becoming a Christian the player will by definition be a less focused and less useful player.

When the non-Christians find themselves in a church for a wedding or a funeral, they feel out of place. They cannot understand what is going on. They see men in dresses with their collar the wrong way round standing at the front. They don't

belong. They feel as awkward as we would feel in a mosque or Hindu temple.

Non-Christians often think Christians are a bit weird, not normal. If they are to become Christians this barrier will need to be overcome. The good news is that if you play sport the breaking down of this barrier tends to happen pretty naturally as you play and socialise with your team.

We need to try to bring our friends into situations where they meet other Christians. There is no real spiritual input here. It is just about building relationships and letting your friend meet other Christians and see that they are just normal people. If you play sport that tends to happen naturally without being planned as you socialize with your team.

In sports stadium terms this means meeting them outside the stadium for pre-match hospitality. You want to put them in a situation where they meet people they know to be Christians but who seem quite normal. You want your friends to soon at ease and realise that the others in the room are just like you and have the same interests.

The purpose of pre-match hospitality is primarily to encourage those who don't yet believe in Jesus to

get to know committed Christians. The idea comes from going to a rugby match or golf tournament as a guest of someone. You go into the room, have a drink, meet old friends, chat and just have a great time. Even if you there for the first time you would soon feel at ease and realise that the others are just like you and have the same interests. They have a similar life to you and perhaps the same hopes and ambitions.

When I was about 14 I was picked for the school cricket team. Now Gwyon Jenkins

was captain of cricket. In my first game for the school team we were playing at Cowbridge about 50 miles away. After the game, I was one of the last to get on the mini-bus and I got in, found a seat and Gwyon got on and sat next to me.

We begin talking about the game at school, but it is a long journey. So to keep the conversation going I ask him about himself. This was a Monday so I asked him if he played cricket at the weekend. He told me he played for a local club on Saturday. I asked him who he played for on Sunday. He said, 'I don't play Sundays. I go to church'.

Now in Wales at that time a lot of people went to church (or chapel) but most young people had

stopped by their mid teens. So I said to him, 'You are nearly 18. Does your mother still make you go to church?' He said, 'No, I want to go to church. You see, I am a Christian. I follow Jesus'. So here I am thinking, 'What a nightmare. Still 40 miles from home and I am sitting next to a Bible-basher.'

Out of that developed a friendship and Gwyon prayed for me until I was converted at the age of 21. Nevertheless, out of that developed a friendship and Gwyon introduced me to some other pretty cool sporty Christians. His wife told me that he prayed for me every day until I left school. After that he prayed for me every Saturday at 3.00pm – kick off time. He was the first person I met who shared my passion for sport and followed Christ. And he shared Christ with me.

Gwyon Jenkins was the first person I met who shared my passion for sport and followed Christ. He helped me start the journey by helping me to see he was not weird, and that other Christians were not weird. That's why I thank God that I met him.

When you play sport with someone you could be the first Christian they've ever met! As you get to know each other it ought to become apparent to them that Christians are not 'weird' (you hope!)

These are relational experiences. This is the first stage of sharing your faith. As you share a dressing room with them, gradually they see that you are quite normal and the first barrier – the belief that Christians are ‘weird’ – is broken down. In due course, you can take the opportunity of using sports events or activities to invite them to meet other Christian sporting friends in a comfortable environment.



## Thought

**People’s perception that Christians are weird, means that they cannot see the facts of Christianity and give them a fair assessment.**



## Question

**Who sees you as I saw Gwyon Jenkins?**



## Action

**Be intentional about getting your three friends to meet other Christians.**

# 7 Back of the stand: Christianity is irrelevant

*I became a Christian in a crisis. First my father died and then my brother not long afterwards. I was aware of God graciously caring for the family. Without the help of God we could not have coped with my brother's death.*

*I have been fortunate enough to make it, to play in first division, to be picked for the Spanish team, to play in the Champions' League and the World Cup - maybe some of the biggest things that can happen to a person.*

*But when you achieve these things, you really realise that they are not important things, and that they are not worth anything if your life is still empty. These things are not really worth anything if you are not happy – if your heart is not filled with God. As well as my successes, I have also experienced some bad moments and God has always been with me, and it is not necessary to end up being somebody in life to be happy, you just need to have God.*

Juan Carlos Valeron, Deportivo La Coruna and Spain

Most people in Western society are not particularly against Christianity, they just think it is entirely irrelevant. Life is about money, power, sex, about pleasing myself. As the British athlete Kriss Akabusi once said, 'The winner is the one who dies with the most toys' Christianity, which – as people perceive it – is about keeping the rules, stopping doing everything you enjoy, going to boring church services and believing irrational things, is utterly irrelevant.

Most people's view of the church is more based on the comic television character the vicar of Dibley and the Rev Timms in the children's programme Postman Pat than on the Jesus Christ of the gospels. In any case, what possible relevance could the life and death of a Jew 2000 years ago have to my life today?

If your friend no longer thinks Christians are weird, the first barrier has been overcome. However, Christianity may still seem irrelevant. It may be OK for people who are weak, inadequate and who need an emotional crutch but I am in the prime of life, playing sport, having fun. What relevance does religion have to my life? This misconception forms a barrier, which prevents them from seeing the real

6 The Ultimate Goal Video, Athletes in Action, 2002

Jesus, and what he has done for them. The barrier needs to be overcome before a person can come to faith.

In terms of the stadium, we move from pre match hospitality to the back of the stand. From there you can see the track, you can see what happens on it but you are still a long way from it.

To overcome the 'irrelevant' barrier, you need to help your friend to realise that although you are the same as they are – you are not weird or odd – there is something different about you that they could have as well.

This barrier is challenged in as simple a way as telling the story of how you became a Christian or explaining the difference God is making in your life. You want your friend to be thinking, 'Mary is just like me but this guy Jesus means something to her and makes a positive difference in her approach to life. As we are similar in lifestyle and interests, if Jesus means something to her, perhaps he might be relevant to me as well.'

The friend knows you and likes you so has overcome the idea that Christians are weird. You are the same as you're your friend yet somehow different and it is that attractive difference that

makes your friend wonder if this Christianity might just be a bit relevant after all. As they see that your experience of Jesus is real and for today, they may be attracted to taste that difference for themselves.

At this point in the stadium the aim is to reveal the fact that Christianity has real truths to teach about issues that are relevant to us all. A good way to do this is to invite a Christian in sport to hear somebody discuss issues like injury, success, getting dropped, anger, disappointment and victory in the light of their own faith in Christ. On another occasion it might be even simpler, to hear a sportsman tell the story of how they came to believe in Jesus Christ.

The aim is to show that Christ has the answer which sport cannot provide. Such an event encourages enquirers to come to think through the relevance of the Christian faith to the life of a fellow sportsman, in the hope that they may transfer that comprehension to their own lives.

As people get to know you, they stop thinking that Christianity is irrelevant because they notice that your faith makes a difference in your life. They begin to think, she dealt with that situation well

because she is a Christian. Perhaps they go a stage further and begin to ask, 'Could being a Christian help me in my life?' Would Jesus be relevant to my life and even be able to meet some of my needs?

Before I was a Christian, I sometimes went with my friend Gwyon to a meeting and remembering hearing people tell their story about how they had become a Christian, or sometimes a story about how Jesus was making a difference to their life right now, today. And often, at the end of the night I would find myself thinking that perhaps Jesus might be relevant to my life – not just to my friend's. He may have something to say to me personally.

If we are going to see people come to Christ, Christians are going to have to show their friends that Christianity is relevant by sharing their story and their life experience. Telling your story when asked is perhaps the most compelling tool for addressing the relevance of Christ to a team mate or fellow competitor. Don't underestimate its power!

If someone says to you, 'How did you become a Christian?' it's really helpful to them to be able to

tell your story concisely and in a compelling, interesting and non-threatening way. Not to be able to do so means you are missing a great tool for sharing the good news in a way that will help someone overcome the weird and irrelevant barriers.

In the light of the stories I've told you about Gwyon Jenkins in this chapter I would say something like this:

*I was mad on sport at school but didn't understand exactly what a Christian was. Then I met a bloke at school who was really good at rugby and cricket, a brilliant guy, and he followed Jesus. For about seven years he used to keep in touch with me. When I left home he would phone me, write to me and even send me books. When I became a pro footballer, I played in the biggest game of my life and scored but over the next few days the excitement slipped away like sand going through my fingers. I had worked for that moment for about 13 years, I had achieved it and afterwards I felt completely empty. I just thought of that school friend, who certainly wasn't empty! I got a Bible and started reading it. I read it for three months and came to believe the message in it about Jesus Christ. One night I just said, 'Lord, I*

*think you died for my rebellion against you and that you have risen from the dead. I think it is true' I gave my life to Christ. That was 20 years ago. It has been hard some times. You are the odd man out sometimes. But it was the best thing I ever did. I wouldn't change my relationship with Christ and my security in the face of death for anything.' Does that make any sense to you?*

That is concise and I hope it is compelling. It certainly and deliberately leaves a number of unanswered questions. It gives people a chance to respond at different levels – like 'What game was that?' or 'What do you mean by "gave your life to Christ"?' Equally, it gives them the chance to say 'Oh! That's interesting. Who else was in that team?' You don't want to finish with the person thinking, 'What a nightmare. I wish I had never asked that question'. Make it easy for them to change the subject and equally easy for them to ask another question!

If the situation is not one where sharing your story of coming to faith is paramount, then alternative conversations may take place. Consider this scenario. Your team's playing in the local championship final and you've been pretty much a regular in the team this season but your form has

not been great for the last couple of weeks. The team is announced at training on Thursday evening and you're on the subs' bench. You congratulate the person picked in your place, though both of you know how disappointed you are! Then you give it all you've got in training; no pouting!

As you sit on the sidelines during the big match, dying to get on, you still urge the team on to victory. When the game's won without your assistance, you join in the celebrations wholeheartedly. Mind you, the team would expect nothing less; this is typical of your attitude! You've trained and played with them, week in, week out, for four years. This time it didn't go your way, but they've been there the many times when you were the star performer when you were pretty modest about it all, concerned to involve everyone in the squad in the victory. Win, lose or draw, they know that they can trust you to give it your best shot on the field, to be a great person to have in the dressing room, whatever the circumstances.

You know how tough this is to achieve and you and they know you've blown it a few times! Nevertheless, your team mates are in no doubt that being a Christian is very relevant to your life

and maybe some of them are beginning to wonder if Jesus Christ could have the same impact in theirs!

Whether you play for a team in a league or during the lunch break at work, the principles are the same. You represent Christ to the others who play with you. What a privilege!

Another way to help people see that Christianity is not irrelevant is by using explaining the Christian response to some issues they face by opening the Bible with them. Show your friend that what the Bible says is relevant to their life today. For example if someone says to you, 'I have been with my boyfriend for two years. I thought this was it but now he has chucked me for this other girl' Perhaps you could help them understand more about what the Bible says about relationships and how relevant it could be to their lives if they were able to live in such a way.

Showing someone that the Bible speaks today in a way that is relevant and current will help move past the 'Christianity is irrelevant' misconception.



## Thought

**You create the opportunity to share the gospel by the way you live your life in the team.**



## Question

**Why do people think Christianity is irrelevant?**



## Action

**Prepare a one-minute summary of what Jesus has done in your life, which is compelling, interesting and non-threatening.**

(See appendix 1 for more details on telling your story)

## 8 Front of the Stand: Christianity is untrue

*I grew up in a Christian family and went to church at Christmas and Easter but that was about it. I can remember from an early age having my New Testament by my bed and reading bits of it. When I was seventeen, I was walking to a good friend's house with her and she started questioning me about what I believed. It was the first time anyone had challenged me to think about spiritual things.*

Steph Cook, Olympic Gold Medallist in  
the Modern Pentathlon, Sydney 2000

Now we live in an age where people think that if something meets my need or makes me feel better, I will take it. It doesn't matter if it is true or not as long as it works. There are no absolutes. You have your truth and I'll have mine. If Christianity works for you, that's great but I have my own way of dealing with life.

Perhaps the Bible was valuable hundreds of years ago but now that science has explained everything how would you believe the Bible. It is a great book but it is just myths and legends. I wouldn't doubt that this guy Jesus lived but his significance has been exaggerated and blown out of all proportion. If you are looking for truth, you would not go to the Bible.

The Christian is obliged to talk about the truth of the gospel. It is not enough for it to be relevant. It has to be true as well. Thus we need both to convince people that there is such a concept as absolute truth as well as showing them that Jesus Christ is that truth.

A one to one conversation with you, a church guest service or a sports dinner would be the kind of setting in which your friend could be confronted with the truth of the gospel.

The Bible says that all of us have rebelled against God. We haven't done what God wanted us to do, and unless he intervenes to save us from the punishment we actually deserve, there is only judgment from God in store for us. However, if we accept Christ's death on the cross as a substitute for our rebellion, we can be saved and enter into a new relationship with God, to eternal life in the future and a life committed to idealism right now.

In stadium terms our friend has been comfortable in the pre-match hospitality and to sit in the back of the stand. Christians are no longer considered weird, Christianity has some relevance but is it true? The friend is ready for a front of stand activity at which the gospel is proclaimed.

Once fellow sportspeople know that they can trust us and belong among us, we can impress upon them the claims of Christ and their very real need of forgiveness. We are aiming to encourage enquirers to come on to the blocks to have a closer look at the race itself. In a front of stand event we would explain the cross and what Jesus did when he died on the cross.

The best way to help people to see that this is a misconception, which is blocking their view of Christianity is to introduce them to Jesus. Christianity is many different things to different people but right at the heart of it is this man Jesus.

There are three questions that need to be addressed if we are to help people decide if Christianity is true:

- 1 Who is Jesus? Is he a moral teacher, a charlatan, a madman or the Son of God he claimed to be.

2 Why did he come? Was he a political revolutionary, a misunderstood moralist or was he really the Son of God? When Jesus died was it a terrible tragedy, a disastrous end to a promising life. Or was it, as the Bible says, the God ordained rescue plan for all who would turn to him in gratitude for his death in their place?

3 What does Jesus ask of me? If Jesus really is the Son of God and if he came to rescue lost people, what does that mean to me? Can I just turn my back on it and carry on with my own life? Or must I turn my back on my own ways and submit my life completely to him?

CS Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*: 'I am trying here to prevent anyone here from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Jesus. 'I am ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher but I don't accept his claim to be God.' This is the one thing that we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let

us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.’<sup>7</sup>

We need to unpack what Lewis is saying. If Jesus claims to forgive sins, he is either a lunatic or he is God. He said he would rise from the dead. If he did not, he was lying. Or he was a lunatic because he thought he would rise from the dead. If he genuinely knew that he wasn't going to and he was sound in mind, then he was a liar. So Jesus is either a lunatic, a liar or the Lord. It's a question of truth!



<sup>7</sup> CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Collins paperback 1972 edition, Page 52-53



## Thought

**'The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried'. GK Chesterton <sup>8</sup>**



## Question

**If your friend said, 'If Christianity works for you, that's great but I have my own way of dealing with life' how would you reply?**



## Action

**Invite your friend to an event where the gospel is clearly proclaimed. The friend may not come. Don't worry. You are called to be faithful not successful.**

<sup>8</sup> GK Chesterton, What's wrong with the world, 1910, page i 5

## 9

# On the blocks

*Football was my priority. Attaining things my priority. All of a sudden I felt, something is wrong. You can't take these things with you. I started asking questions, 'what is my priority, what is after life. In what direction, am I going? Is there life after death?' For two years I was a soul-searching and I found the answer in the Lord, in Jesus Christ and in the Christian life.*

Cyrille Regis

The final barrier could be called the cost. When someone is about to take the last step to become a Christian – having has been convinced that Christianity is not weird, irrelevant or untrue – they often ask, 'What will it mean? What will my friends say? What will I have to give up? Can I be a Christian and still do this?' They may be a bit frightened.

The person may think, 'I have a great life, playing sport, going out with my team mates, having a few beers, having great sex. If I became a Christian, they would make me stop all that!' This may be the barrier that stops most people having a real honest

look at Christianity.

There is a cost to being a Christian. In some parts of the world the cost may be your career prospects – even your very life. While will not be the case in most Western countries, there will be always moral and social cost.

You may have to stop sleeping with your partner, to do your job with integrity, not just doing the minimum you can get away with. Such things may seem unattractive. You may have to make many other changes in your life. But when you begin to really understand the truth about what Jesus has done for us on the cross, that he has saved us from judgment for our sins and offered us eternal life from this moment on you see that the things that look unattractive begin to dwindle and get smaller. You begin to think, 'Of course I am happy to stop doing that or to change my life in this way because of the greatness of what Jesus offers'.

For some people Christianity seems unattractive because they feel they have a wonderful and fulfilled life. Ask them how they deal with threats to that perfect life. Ask them: 'What is the worst thing that you happen to you? What is the greatest threat to your life?' Normally people would say

something like, losing my job, my relationship breaking up and when taken to the limit, the fact that they or their best friends or family will die. If the greatest threat you have is death and there is nothing you can do about it. The Bible says there are two great threats – physical death, and you know how bad that is - but there is also spiritual death – and then God’s final judgment. Does anyone want that?

If a person has really understood the gospel then Christianity is attractive. If a person sees themselves as God sees them and recognises that they have fallen short of God’s standards, that they deserve hell as the just punishment for their sins, then God’s offer of forgiveness, mercy and eternal life starting immediately is a very attractive option.

The reason, therefore, that people find Christianity unattractive is that they have failed to grasp who they are and what Jesus has done!





## Thought

Jesus made it easy for people to say 'no' to him. We must never play down the cost of being a Christian.



## Question

What would you reply to a person who said, 'Christianity may well be true but the cost is too high. There would be too much to give up'.



## Action

Keep praying for your friend that God would open their eyes.

## 10 In the race

Having moved through the stadium, off the blocks and into the race, what happens now? How do you live as a Christian in the world of sport? If you love sport, keep involved in it. See your sporting ability – perhaps for the first time – as a gift from God. Go out and use your gifts for God's glory. Go out and play for him. Be his representative in your club.

In Chapter 3 we used the story of how Gareth Lippiatt had the bottle to invite his friend Colin Wells to hear the gospel. This is Gareth's own story of how he got in the race.

*I first thought of Wellsy when at the Academy we each selected someone from our sports team whom we felt was a 'person of peace' that we would commit to pray for every day and challenge them on a regular basis. I think I'd only been at my football team for a week so didn't even know any names nevermind anything about their thoughts on life so I had to look elsewhere.*

*I hadn't heard from Wellsy for months until the previous week when he'd phoned me out of the blue - which was what made me think of him. I'd*

*seen a Bible in his room at university and he was a good friend who I cared about so he seemed a good choice. I think Wellsy was blown away that I'd changed so much in the year or so since we'd left uni and it must have been quite surreal for him that one of his drinking partners at university was now trying to convict him of his sin!!*

*We were encouraged to be pro-active in challenging these people we were praying for regularly so I sent him books, sermon tapes and letters explaining to him the reason I had changed and that I now had a real reason to live. I never knew that anything I was doing was had any affect on Wellsy but I now know that God was challenging him through the stuff I was sending him. I started praying for him in the September and everyone at the Academy invited the people they were praying for at Christmas to a meal. Obviously I invited Wellsy and to be fair to him he drove a long way to be there which told me something must be going on.*

*I think the main thing that affected him was just how genuine and friendly everyone was to him at the meal. There was no talk or anything even vaguely uncomfortable about it, we just sat down in a restaurant and had a meal as a group of*

*friends together. It was only when I gave Wellsy a lift back to his car that he opened up to me, got very emotional and it turned out that he'd actually lead a Christian Union at school! He knew he'd fallen away and all it took was God to use me to challenge him. It felt quite strange for me at that point in time but I then prayed for him in the car and encouraged him from that point on.*

*The main thing that the story brings out for me is that when I started praying for Wellsy, although I did it regularly and trying to believe it could really happen, it seemed a million miles away that he would take me seriously never mind make his own commitment. I was expecting him just to ignore what I was saying. Until he committed to come to the meal, I thought I was having no effect. I would have been nervous about explaining the gospel to him and answering any questions he may of had but that situation never arose and there was never any awkwardness involved. The only thing it cost me was the time to write to him, a couple of books and tapes and putting my own reputation on the line in order to share my faith with him.*

*The encouragement that I would pass on to others is that you never know where people stand in their relationship with God and the part you could play*

*in their coming to salvation. I was only the final piece of the jigsaw in Wellsy's case and God used me to challenge him. I had never brought anyone to faith in my life before him and if the fear of explaining the gospel or giving my testimony (which I was worried about sharing with him) had got the better of me then he may never have made his own commitment.*

If, like Gareth Lippiatt and thousands of others you would like to become more effective in the race, it would be worth starting by reading the first book in this series, *Born to Play* as well as going to [www.christiansinsport.org.uk](http://www.christiansinsport.org.uk) where you will find a host of resources to help you run!



# Appendix 1: Sharing your story

It's important to be able to tell your own story of the relationship you have with Christ. In the Bible there are two broad approaches to telling your story, which we shall summarise by using the stories of Paul and Samuel.

Before we consider both, it's worth pointing out a typical mistake that is made in thinking about a Christian's story. We tend to think more highly of stories which reflect Paul's more dramatic experience, thinking that it is somehow more exciting and glamorous. Often overlooked is stories which reflect Samuel's experience, the story of one who couldn't point to any particular moment or experience, but who knows that they have believed in Christ all your life and know him today! If you re-read chapter three of this book you will note the fact that 2 Corinthians 4:6 explains that it is God who opens blind eyes, and that miracle is equally impressive whether one knows the date it happened or not! All that actually counts is that he did it for us! This is why both types of

story ought to be told in public meetings!

Here are some tips for telling your story. Always tell your story honestly. Don't exaggerate because you think it needs to be made it more interesting. Be honest about the problems and struggles too. Be real. If you have had a Christian upbringing talk about the advantages and the disadvantages! And always made it up to date. Talk about what God is doing in your life this year, this week – not just the past.

a) Paul (Acts 22:1-21)

Rick Warren<sup>9</sup> points out that Paul used his testimony to share the gospel on six <sup>10</sup> occasions in Acts. Let's look at one of them. Paul, on the verge of being beaten to death during a visit to the Jerusalem temple, tells his assailants his story. He does so with reference to three phases of his life:

- Verses 2-5, his life and views before he became a Christian.
- Verses 6-16, the events surrounding his conversion to Christ
- Verses 17-21, the subsequent changes in his life

<sup>9</sup> Rick Warren, *The purpose Driven life*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2002, Page 291

<sup>10</sup> Acts 22-26.

This is a useful pattern to follow. If a person can trace their conversion to Christ to a certain time and place, then to learn to be able to tell the story in this way is a very useful skill. Underlying this approach is that one ought not to glory in the sin that was dominant before conversion, to be able to tell the story in normal language, in a succinct and compelling way; focussing on what Christ has done and continues to do for me.

b) Samuel (1 Samuel 1:27-28, 3:1,19f, 7:2-5)

Samuel knew God all his life. He grew up in a godly home and never wavered from his relationship with God. I can assure you that is the dream of every Christian parent for their child! Yet as we mentioned earlier, we rarely ask someone with such a story to tell it in public, preferring always the more glamorous Pauline story! Madness! In telling one's story in this context, the following might be helpful:

- Talk about the strengths about growing up in a Godly environment
- Describe some of the difficulties this brought you personally and socially
- Tell of the most ongoing changes you continue to experience as you follow him today

Again, underlying this approach is that one ought not to glory in one's failures in order to try and 'compete' with a more 'glamorous' story, to be able to tell the story in normal language, in a succinct and compelling way and focussing on what Christ has done, and continues to do for me.

To sum up, the way you tell your story should be consistent with these principles:

- Length around three or four minutes.
- Be flexible. Should be able to start or end at any section.
- Emphasise the aspects that most relate to your friend. You must be listening and not just talking!
- Avoid clichés and jargon.
- Put the ball back in their court with a question or by asking their opinion.
- Make sure Jesus is the central character.

## Appendix 2: Philip and Nathaniel

The following account of Philip's encounter with Nathaniel shows a Biblical example of barriers to belief and how they were overcome.

*The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, 'Follow me.' Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote - Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked. 'Come and see,' said Philip. John 1: 43-46*

Philip has just met Jesus. He finds his friend Nathaniel and tells him that he's just met the person the Jews called the Messiah, the saviour of their nation from all its problems, including bringing to an end the oppression of the powerful Roman Empire. Apparently Philip has met the man from God that his nation has been waiting to arrive for hundreds of years!

We're not told anything about Nathaniel's thoughts on this occasion, but it wouldn't be difficult to imagine that he probably thought Philip had gone mad, or been out in the sun too long that day!

On the other hand, the Jews lived in hope of the Messiah's arrival, so maybe he would not have dismissed the idea completely. Why not now? So he asked Philip where the person he had met came from. Nathaniel said he was from Nazareth, an obscure town in Galilee that is not even mentioned in the Jewish scriptures, whereas every Jew knew the Messiah would come from Bethlehem, as was prophesied by their prophet Micah in chapter five and verse two of his book.

Nathaniel responds to this rather scornfully, 'Nazareth, can anything good come from there?' (46) However, Philip doesn't take offence. He's confident in his information, and rather understatedly and without fuss simply says 'come and see'. How sensible! He didn't get cross or defensive. He didn't try and argue. He put the ball back in his friend's court. It's up to Nathaniel if he wants to find out more.

Don't you love that? If you believe that Jesus Christ really is the Saviour of the world, you don't

need to defend him! He can look after himself. Let people think things through at their own pace, don't pressure them. Stay cool, like Philip!

Since Philip and Nathaniel are friends Nathaniel takes seriously what Philip says to him, even if he's a little concerned for his mental health at this point! If it had been a man on the street corner shouting that he had met the Messiah, I am sure Nathaniel would have ignored it. But because it was his friend, he had to take it seriously.

*'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked.*

*'Come and see,' said Philip. When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, 'Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.' 'How do you know me?' Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, 'I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.' Then Nathanael declared, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.' John 1:46-49*

As we noted in the last chapter, Philip could have got uptight about Nathaniel's scepticism. Instead he just said 'come and see'. It's never a good thing to pressure people and anyone who knows Jesus understand that you cannot pressurise or

manipulate people to become Christians. When someone says 'yes' to Jesus Christ, he wants them to mean it for life. This is the best way to approach sharing our faith, and the only way if we understand God's part and our part in the process (see chapter three).

As a result of Philip's careful and calm approach, we read in verse 47 that Nathaniel goes to find out more about Jesus. We too need appropriately to encourage our friends to come and see Jesus. If they do, they may well find that he is the most relevant man who ever lived!

*Then Nathanael declared, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.' Jesus said, 'You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that.' He then added, 'I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.'* John 1: 49-51

That was a quick turn around! When we started this story in chapter six Nathaniel's reply to Philip's pronouncement that he had met the Messiah was the rather skeptical comment, 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?'

Then after some discussion where Nathaniel has become aware that Jesus is someone who has some very relevant insights into his life, knowing his hopes and dreams for a better world.

Now finally he says, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.' Nathaniel is convinced! Jesus is the Messiah! He wants to be a Christian.

This would surely be the perfect ending for the story! But Jesus won't let the story end there. He says to Nathaniel, 'you believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that. I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.' (50)

Jesus is talking to a Jewish boy so yet again he speaks a language that Nathaniel understand, using a story from the Jewish scriptures. Jesus point here is that though he may be thrilled that Nathaniel can see how relevant Christianity would be to him, he has still missed one thing. Christianity isn't just about having ones hopes and dreams understood. Relevance is not enough!

Jesus points Nathanael to the story of Jacob in Genesis chapter 28. Jacob was a devious man

who had betrayed his brother Esau. His brother Esau should have inherited their father's estate as he was the older son but Jacob pretended to his old and nearly blind dad that he was Esau and got this father to sign over everything to him. When Esau found out, Jacob ran away and Esau chased after him. Jacob was afraid.

One night as he was sleeping he has a dream and saw angels going up and down on a staircase to heaven. The dream meant that effectively God was saying to him, 'Jacob wherever you are and whatever you have done, I am never going to leave you!

Jesus is saying to Nathanael that Christianity is not just about feeling good or right or having your sadness dealt with by Jesus. He can do all those things. But most fundamentally it is about the fact that Nathanael was like Jacob – a rebel in his heart against God. Oh Nathaniel was an idealist, but this shouldn't mask the fact that like Jacob and all other people who ever lived, Nathaniel was a combination of good and evil, of Jekyll and Hyde. He was a sinner, he needed rescue! And until he would face up to this fact, he could never understand his need of divine forgiveness and so of the true nature of the Christian faith.

## Appendix 3: A Case Study

The following true story is a good example to how the barriers prevent people from coming to faith and how they can be overcome. About 10 years ago I used to go to the pub on a Sunday night with a group of friends. Many of us played for the village football team or for other teams. We would talk mainly about football. There would be lots of banter about who had done what on the Saturday. It was mainly football but now and again the conversation would turn to Christian things if someone asked a question.

Each week before going I would pray that God would open a door for me to share the gospel with someone. However such conversations were pretty rare. Then about a year after I had started going, we had a little run of about four weeks where we talked quite a lot about the bigger questions of life. Someone in the village had died young and people had questions about it, why did it happen and so on.

After the four weeks I was delighted but also concerned that some people would not want to talk about Christ and would stop coming and probably blame me. I decided to take action. Next week I said, I am very happy to answer anyone's questions but I am just concerned that some of you find this boring. But if you want to, some of us could come an hour earlier next Sunday and talk about life and death and God and so on and then for the rest of the evening we will just talk football as we used to.

Some people immediately said, 'Yes. You're on'. The following Sunday 12 lads came an hour early. I said 'I'll give you a talk for 10 minutes on 'Who is Jesus?' Then I will answer anyone's questions'. At the end of an hour, the discussion was doing well but I stopped it. Some people wanted to carry on but as we had agreed an hour, I felt we needed to stop.

I suggested that we meet again next week and asked if anyone fancied having it at their house. Then one of them – a local builder – let's call him Richard - said we could go to his house. We arranged Monday night at Richard's at 8. Five people came, including Richard and his wife Jane. I did 'Two ways to live' and over six weeks worked

through the six pictures. The format was 10 minutes from me drawing and explaining the picture then 50 minutes discussion. By the last of the six weeks there were only two left. Now it had taken me a year of going to the pub every week to get thus far and only two had lasted the course. But it is often like that in the UK – faithfully plodding on with few results.

The other person as well as Richard who was still there after the fifth week was the captain of his team and a real hard man – we'll call him Pete. Now he was interested. Often he would ring me during the week just to talk more or ask another question. At the end of week five, I explained that next week would be decision time. Either we made Jesus king or we keep our own crown on. I told them that I would ask them to make a decision. I said that it was just the three of us, three mates talking, so there would be nothing heavy, no pressure. If they wanted to say 'no' to Jesus that was their call.

On the day before the final meeting, Pete phoned me. He told me he had been thinking about it and looked at John 3:36 and looked at the diagram. Now Pete had left his wife and kids about three months ago and was living with another woman

called Mary. He said to me, 'Danno, if I want to follow Jesus I've got to leave Mary and I can't. So I'm not coming tomorrow'.

I appreciated his honesty and that he had thought it all through but inside I was gutted. Of the two people Richard was always asking clever questions like 'What about the dinosaurs? Where did they come from?' Pete, on the other hand, appeared to be really close and asking real questions.

I was really down. I had invested a year in the group. We were down to two and Pete was pulling out. Richard wasn't interested. Anyway I turned up at Richard's house and said, 'Just you and me. What shall we talk about, dinosaurs?' He was animated and said, 'Stuff dinosaurs, I have something to tell you. On Friday I am building a house right out in the country and I stop for a coffee and a sandwich and look round and the view is amazing. I'm thinking "Stuff the dinosaurs, Jesus made all this. If Danno is right and the Bible is right, Jesus made it all. I am tiny and so unimportant". Then he said to me, "Danno I don't need Two Ways to Live tonight for I gave my life to Jesus there and then on Friday"'. Jane became a Christian too.

Now what we learn from this is that with God you never know what is going to happen. I could tell you other stories about trying to get a group together and nothing happening at all. But the principle is that if you are trying to tell other about Him, Jesus is with you – and that does not depend on whether you are successful or not. And don't forget about the infinite capacity for disappointment.

What can we say about Pete? Though meeting me and playing football with me he got to know a Christian and saw that I wasn't too weird. When we talked about leaving his wife and so on he saw that the Bible wasn't irrelevant because it had things to say about marriage and human relationships. I think too that he was probably convinced that it was true.

So when he rang me that Sunday to say he wasn't coming to the final session, he knew Christianity wasn't weird, irrelevant or untrue. He was looking straight at the cross but felt that the price was too high.

But once someone gets over those hurdles they can see the cross and you can share the gospel with them. Pete was looking straight at the cross.

As far as I could tell he had understood my words. He knew what was involved but he could not repent and therefore believe. He knew Christians were not weird. He was convinced that Christianity was true and that it was relevant to his life but was unattractive. He was not willing to pay the price.

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