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EDIFYING
ENCOURAGING
EQUIPPING
CHALLENGING

July 2007



YOUTH WITH A MISSION
ENGLAND

■ Giving account of what we hope for

"but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to give account to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame." 1 Pet 3:15-16 (ESV)



Carl Tinnion
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I am being challenged constantly these days to evaluate my approach to evangelism and how I actually share the message of the gospel. If someone comes up to me and asks, "So why are you a Christian?" what would I say? The reality is I will only have a few sentences to answer the question. Will I be clear and concise? More importantly, will I communicate the hope that I have in me?

We usually feel a pressure to be fruitful or to defend our faith in these circumstances. In so doing we can very easily miss the whole thrust of the message.

Love.

In giving an account of the hope that I have, I am in essence sharing my hope that is in Jesus. I am opening a window into my life that communicates something of my relationship and love for Him. In today's world I often wonder if people are more impacted by the actual manifestation of Jesus in someone's life than just words that trip off the tongue. The hope that I have is in a relationship with Jesus, a relationship founded in love. That love changes me forever and causes me to want to love others in the same way.

Love affair

The Christian message is not a scientific formula that we can magically pull out of a hat; it is a romance with God, the Creator of the universe. How do you describe a romance or a love affair? The reality is, it is very hard because it calls upon the need to use emotion expressed through metaphor, stories, or poetry. Do we feel free to use story and metaphor in describing the hope that we have in Jesus?

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I don't know about you but I always feel the need to give all of the truth in one short sitting. And then I wonder why I sound so confusing to people.

I am consoled by the fact that Jesus nearly always used stories and metaphor when speaking with people. He knew that complex theology was a hard pill to swallow, and so his stories were thought through and had longer-lasting impact. People remembered them ... but more importantly, they remembered Jesus.

In today's culture, people are watching us to see if what we say matches up to how we live our lives. For every one time that someone asks me to give account of my faith, my hope is that they will have seen Jesus in me ten times over. That is what changes people or causes them to pursue more of God. I heard someone say the other day that

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she was compelled to follow Jesus by the love the people at a church had for her, and in experiencing that love she knew Jesus' unconditional love towards her in return. I was amazed at this and deeply inspired. Think about it, to be compelled to love God by experiencing God's people loving you! That is powerful.

Always

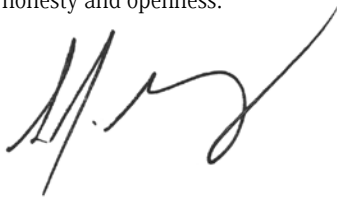
The scripture in 1 Peter 3:15 says, *"always be ready"*. Always be switched onto the possibility that someone is watching you, wanting to know you, to see if you truly are authentic in your faith. Always be ready to express love to those around you because it communicates the true power of the gospel. Someone tested me on this the other day, saying, "All right Carl, tell me what being a Christian means to you." And so I went off on a verbal journey of my intense passion for the Lord and how He has led me, looked after me, the feelings I have for Him when I find myself in the darkness ... I don't know if I used eloquent words or not. I suspect that I did not, but out of my mouth came the overflow of my heart. The end-result was that the girl began to cry. Who knows what was going on for her, but for my part I was just honest.

It is so important that we approach the sharing of our faith in a relational way. In a loving way. Verse 16 of 1 Peter 3 follows on to say:

"yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame." (ESV)

Gentleness and respect suggests humility to me, an attitude that says I am not perfect but I am following Jesus and working it out along the way. It is not entering a discussion hoping to win it or prove someone wrong. Hopefully it suggests the beginning of a longer-term friendship where the tenets of our faith unfold over time. The challenge to us is to seek out those people around us and to continue to be Jesus to them in all areas of life. Always be ready to give account and, in the midst of our accounting, love *all* people, be gentle, and respect people as if we were loving our very own neighbour!

May the light of Jesus shine through you, may your love for Him be transparent and infectious. People might well come into relationship with God on account of your honesty and openness.



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