

Increasing Our Evangelistic Passion

Acts 4:23-31 on January 26, 2025

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Please read Acts 4:23-31 before going further in this transcript.

Acts 4 inspires us to reflect on our own personal evangelistic passion. It begins with some people who are bothered by Peter and John's bold public witness for Christ, so they throw them in jail. But the next day, when they have Peter and John brought before them, their boldness for Christ is more than they can handle, so they let them go with a strict warning....¹

Acts 4:18-20 records the heated exchange, "18 Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! 20 As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." Is that how you and I feel about Jesus? We just can't help speaking about Him!? For me personally, there are certainly times when I feel exactly this way, fired up in my faith and filled with evangelistic passion. But, I've got to admit, there are also times when my evangelistic passion wains, when my spiritual fervor isn't all that fervent.²

Romans 12:11 comes to mind, "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord." (Another word for "fervor" is "passion," so we could read the end of verse 11: "keep your spiritual passion, serving the Lord.")³ But how? How do we "keep our spiritual passion"? How can we make sure that we're "never lacking in zeal"?⁴ Today's message is on the topic of "Increasing Our Evangelistic Passion."

¹ I urge you to take some time this week and read all of chapter 4. This account is filled with faith and conviction, as well as persecution and opposition to the gospel. Peter and John get thrown in jail, just for telling people about Jesus. But rather than teaching them a lesson, and intimidating them into silence, Peter and John are released from jail and their more fired up for the gospel than ever! These men were filled with God's Spirit, and people could tell that they'd been with Jesus.

² Consider Romans 12:11.

³ Being that this fervor is "spiritual," maybe this is something that only God's Spirit can do within us, and we can't drum it up on our own. However, it seems to me that we still have a responsibility as deeply devoted followers to prayerfully pursue a greater passion for God, rather than just waiting around for His Spirit to prompt us.

⁴ 2 Timothy 1:6-7 also comes to mind, "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands." These are the Apostle Paul's words of advice to a young believer named Timothy, whom Paul had been discipling in the faith. Now, he doesn't explain exactly what he means by "fan into flame," but he does urge him to do it. This suggests that perhaps there are times when we need find ways to increase our passion for God and our service to Him. Also consider 1 Timothy 4:14.

Acts 4:23-24 says, “23 On their release [*from jail*], Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. ...” As I read this passage this week, as well as the surrounding context, I was watching for clues as to the secret of their evangelistic passion. One thing that stuck out to me, is that other than perhaps the miraculous healing earlier on in chapter 3, there’s nothing going on here that’s any different from our faith today. In other words...
...just like them, believers today raise our voices together in prayer to God.
...just like them, believers today are filled with the Holy Spirit.
...just like them, believers today know that salvation can only be found in the name of Jesus.

Acts 4:29-31 concludes, “29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. 30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” 31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.” To be clear, all of the events in the book of Acts aren’t necessarily normative for today, meaning that these healings, and signs and wonders, had a particular purpose in God’s salvation history; they were meant to lend credibility to the ministry of the Apostles. That’s not to say that God doesn’t still heal today, or that He no longer performs signs and wonders, but rather that miracles like these served a different purpose back in the early church, than they do today. Be that as it may, we’re not talking about healing today.

For today’s message, verses 29 and 31, give us some pertinent details about “Increasing Our Evangelistic Passion.”

> Verse 29 makes it clear that the LORD is the one who enables us to speak with boldness. He is the One to whom we should PRAY for greater boldness in our evangelistic witness.

> Verse 31 makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is the means by which they spoke God’s Word with boldness. Again, the same Holy Spirit that filled them, also fills believers today. So as believers in Jesus Christ, we have access to all that we need for gospel boldness and evangelistic passion.

Take a look at the green and white infographic on the last page of this manuscript. This summarizes our church’s new Strategic Ministry Plan: our Mission, Vision, Core Values, and Discipleship Pathway. Last year our church appointed a team of 18 people to come up with this plan, not just this infographic, but also the details behind it.⁵ Then, at our October

⁵ The Strategic Leadership Team was composed of a group of deeply devoted followers of Jesus. They all love E-Free Bemidji, and they all have her best interests in mind. This team worked hard from January through August of 2024. Their names include the following: Mark Carlson – Chair, Brandon Mustful –

Congregational meeting, we affirmed this plan together, and we got behind it as a church. The elders are now working hard at developing the next steps for how to implement this plan in 2025, which we'll talk about more later today at our Annual Celebration and Vision meeting.

We went through this infographic in detail, in a sermon series last fall, and those sermons are all available on our website in our sermon archive.⁶ So we're not going to rehash all of that today, but we did want to put it in your hands again, in order to keep it front and center in our thoughts and prayers. Hebrews 10:24 exhorts us, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." Our Strategic Ministry Plan is a good way of considering how to do that. The very fact that this verse talks about "SPURRING one another on" suggests that there may be times when followers of Jesus and local churches need a bit of a kick in the pants! The fact is, when a church reaches 100 years old, there can be a tendency to begin resting on our laurels, and coasting a bit.

In fact, let's think about this:

- > We have an established, steady attendance on Sundays/Wednesdays.
- > We have a beautiful building with a mortgage that's just about paid off.
- > We have great ministry programs for all ages.
- > We have healthy financial reserves in the bank.
- > And we could go on...

All of these are reasons to celebrate God's amazing goodness and faithfulness to us. Even so, they're also reasons to prayerfully consider our responsibility to steward these blessings well. These blessings aren't just for our benefit, they're tools and resources that God has entrusted to us for His gospel purposes. Our mission statement is on the upper righthand corner of the infographic: "Becoming Deeply Devoted Followers of Jesus Together."⁷ The very first step in this process of becoming a deeply devoted follower is coming to faith in Christ by placing our trust in Him. The rest of our strategy then carries our MISSION forward through our Vision, Core Values, and Discipleship Pathway.

Our Discipleship Pathway is on the bottom righthand corner of the insert; it's the 4th and final part of our infographic. It contains 4 G's: GATHER, GROW, GIVE, GO. (*I invite you to say them aloud.*) These 4 G's summarize our church's strategic plan for "guiding disciples toward maturity

Lead Facilitator, Amy Graf, Barb Capes, Bill Oakes, Dan Evans, Dan Frost, Deb Brown, Douglas Daube, Eric Nygren, Holly Howes, Jerry Johnson, Karl Salscheider, Kay Sue Eriksson, Ken Wold, Laura Engelstad, and Mandi Buchan.

⁶ <https://efcbemidji.org/sermon/our-discipleship-pathway-part-1-gather/>

⁷ Learn more here: <https://efcbemidji.org/sermon/what-do-we-mean-by-becoming-deeply-devoted-followers-of-jesus-together/>

in Christ.” So once we’ve come to faith in Christ, this circle guides us in the ongoing process of spiritual maturity. These 4 Gs are all built around the gospel, which is imbedded in the very center of our pathway.⁸ So you might say that all 4 of these G’s are gospel G’s:

- > We GATHER around the GOSPEL, in the name of Jesus Christ.
- > We GROW in the GOSPEL, in spiritual maturity as co-followers of Christ.
- > We GIVE toward the GOSPEL, our time/talent/treasure for Jesus’ sake,
- > We GO with the GOSPEL, taking it out in Jesus’ name to make disciples.

Now here’s the main point in terms of today’s message: Local churches tend to be especially good at the first 3 Gospel G’s. We’re very good at GATHERING, especially when there’s good music, and good teaching, and good food! We’re particularly adept at having lots of ministry programs that help believers GROW in their faith. And we’re often quite generous in GIVING through our acts of service, and worshipping through our tithes and offerings.

However, more often than not, GOING with the gospel, the 4th and final gospel G, gets less of our energy and attention as a church.⁹ And this is understandable, because the things we do in this building are mission critical. And they’re incredibly wholesome and rewarding for us. And, if we’re brutally honest with ourselves, the things that we do inside our building are simply much more convenient and comfortable for us. GATHERING, GROWING, and GIVING are generally easier for us to do, and they come to us more naturally.

On the flip side, leaving our comfort zone to go out into the broader community feels risky, and it takes considerably more courage and boldness. And that my friends is why it’s important for us to consider ways to “Increase Our Evangelistic Passion.” This is also why I’m so encouraged to see that our infographic includes not only a focus on building up believers, but also a focus on reaching out to those who are not yet believers.

For example, the last 2 bullet points of our vision say this:

We will be a church who...

- Welcomes all people and cares for our neighbors
- Personally shares the gospel locally and globally

And the last 2 bullet points of our core values include...

- Connecting with the community
- Evangelizing the lost

⁸ Apart from the GOSPEL of Jesus Christ, and our focus on becoming His deeply devoted followers, these 4 G’s would not be very impressive. In fact, I suppose just about any organization could use these same 4 G’s to lay out any number of plans.

⁹ A statement that we’ve talked about in my evangelism class is, “Evangelism evaporates every 30 days.”

So as crucial as it is for us to build one another up in the faith, it's equally important for us to reach out to those who've not yet found faith. In 1 Corinthians 9:19 Paul challenges us: "Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible." Now some of us may be thinking to ourselves, "well, that's just fine for people like Paul, but I am not a bold person; I'm a more private person, and I prefer to keep to myself, with just a few close church friends." Believe it or not, even though I'm a pastor who regularly stands in front of hundreds of people, I can actually relate to that very feeling. I'm more of an introvert than most people might think, but God hasn't called us to be comfortable, He's called us to be faithful with the gospel.¹⁰

Now, that being said, most of us reading this manuscript haven't been called or equipped to go and stand on the street corner with a bullhorn and try to convert total strangers. In fact, I'm guessing when some of you saw the bulletin cover today with the trumpet picture, you may have said to yourself "yeah right! That's not gonna happen!" Well, to be clear, that's not necessarily what we mean by "Increasing Our Evangelistic Passion." Most of us are much better suited for sharing our faith 1 to 1, in a more relational way with our friends and neighbors, and our classmates and coworkers.¹¹

With this in mind, let's spend the remainder of our time considering some very practical...

Ways to increase our evangelistic passion, and embolden our Christian witness.

First of all, we can...

1) Pray, daily, for 2-3 non-Christians within our circle of influence.

One of the tools that we used in my recent evangelism class was an acronym called FRANCES. It stands for **F**riends, **R**elatives, **A**cquaintances, **N**eighbors, **C**olleagues, **E**nemies, and **S**trangers. The idea here is to write a few names of specific non-Christians with whom we come into contact, and then care about them enough to pray for them. To be clear, you don't have to have a name behind every FRANCES category, just let these categories prompt your thinking in order to come up with 2-3 names. And obviously if someone's a stranger to us, we don't know their name, so we just pray for "the guy who does my oil change" or whatever. (By the way, if you're reading this manuscript today as a non-Christian, we're SO GLAD that you are checking things out. It's our prayer that you would find salvation and new life in Christ.)

¹⁰ One of my favorite sayings is that "ships are safe in harbor, but that's not what ships are for."

¹¹ As I mentioned last fall, the strength of our local witness is that most of us are locals, so we're the resident experts on the local culture, and language, and lifestyles. Hunting and fishing and thriving in 30-below-zero weather is no problem for us.

Now if after a few minutes, we can't think of any non-Christians in our circle of influence, then our homework this week is to go out and make some new friends! Once you have 2-3 names, commit to praying for them daily for one month. That's it, "just" pray, and see what God might do. See what He might do in their lives, and also see what He might do in your life.

A 2nd way that we can increase our evangelistic passion, and embolden our witness is to...

2) Recall our own salvation story by writing out our testimony and then sharing it with someone.

1 Peter 3:15 says, "But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." There was a time in every believer's life, when we didn't believe, when we were not yet saved. And it's helpful for us to recall how God's mercy rescued us from our sin. Recalling our own salvation story can increase our evangelistic passion to share the gospel with others, because we've all been there: "I once was lost, but now I'm found." So I recommend writing out your testimony this week, and then sharing it with someone. In fact, if you turn to the second page from the end of this manuscript, you'll see that we've included some "***Helpful Hints for Writing Out Your Testimony.***"

Once you've written it out, you could obviously then share it with a non-Christian, but you could also share it with a fellow believer. Either way, recalling our own salvation story stirs up gratitude within our hearts, and it also stirs up our passion to see others find salvation. Furthermore, it helps us to be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope that we have. (*When that opportunity arises, the one we're praying for, we'll be ready!*)

By the way, I should mention, there's a great testimony on last week's Deeply Devoted Podcast! You won't want to miss it!¹²

A 3rd way that we can increase our evangelistic passion is to...

3) Let our struggles and tragedies fuel the message of hope that's found in eternal salvation.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 says, "17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."¹³ Our deepest struggles and our

¹² <https://youtu.be/Z-MswJm2xFg?list=PLGx0nhkaptGly4GlyjO9-OyUBFBM-EqX5>

¹³ In the words of the old hymn: Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face, And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, In the light of His glory and grace." Here are the verses: Verse 1: O soul, are you weary and troubled? No light in the darkness you see? There's light for a look at the Savior, And life more abundant and free. Verse 2: Through death into life everlasting He passed, and we follow Him there; O'er us sin no more hath dominion For more than conquerors we are! Verse 3: His Word

greatest tragedies are sober reminders of what really matters in this life. The temporary nature of life in this world, causes us to rightly focus on matters of eternal consequence. Psalm 90:12 offers this simple prayer: "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."¹⁴ Ecclesiastes 7:2 says, "It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart."

Most of us have probably attended a number of funerals. It's an incredibly appropriate time for us to embrace the hope that is found in the message of eternal salvation. And it's incredibly moving to hear the Good News about Jesus proclaimed on days like that. I've been at funerals where a close friend or family member was so filled with evangelistic passion that they began to share the gospel during the eulogy. Some of the quietest and shyest people I've ever known, have suddenly become bold behind this very pulpit. Mind you, I'm not talking about trained speakers, but just everyday lovers of God who felt compelled to speak up and declare the hope that's found in Jesus. It's powerful because they say what needs to be said, even though it's way out of their comfort zone. They stand up here in front of 100+ people, and they express how deeply comforted they are knowing their loved one is with the Lord. And, they're also laser-focused on the hope of salvation for anyone in the room who hasn't yet trusted Christ.

So whatever struggle we may be going through today, let's allow it to fuel our focus on eternal salvation, and embolden our witness. Let any tragedy remind you, of why heaven will be so much better than life on this earth. Rather than letting the desperation and brokenness of this world, drive us to frustration and despair, let's allow it to motivate us to tell others about the hope, that's offered through faith in Jesus Christ.¹⁵

We're going to close with one final way that we can increase our evangelistic passion. This is perhaps the most important one, because it lends support to all the others:

4) Find a fellow believer with whom you can be mutually accountable for your witness.

Proverbs 27:17 says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." If you're anything like me, you may begin with the best of intentions to increase your evangelistic passion. But then, Monday morning will hit like a ton of bricks... and this priority will be crowded off of your plate

shall not fail you, He promised; Believe Him and all will be well; Then go to a world that is dying. His perfect salvation to tell!

¹⁴ Also consider Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 and Deuteronomy 32:29.

¹⁵ In heaven, we'll no longer be able tell people about Jesus. 2 Corinthians 6:1-2 says, "As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. 2 For he says, 'In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.' I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation."

by the tyranny of lesser things. One of the best ways to keep yourself on track, and to embolden your Christian witness, is to have an accountability partner who will check in on your progress, and who will ask you to do the same for them.¹⁶

¹⁶ If I'd had more time, I would have liked to share a 5th way to increase our evangelistic passion: **5) Schedule 30 intentional minutes, this week, with a non-Christian.** Matthew 5:14-15 says, "14 You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house." There's not much point in being the light of the world, if our light never comes into contact with someone who's lost in darkness. Now I realize that for some of us, *scheduling* 30 minutes in our week sounds a bit ridiculous. Here's the thing though, for some of us, this is exactly what it will take to get us started, and it's the only way that this priority won't get crowded out by a million other things. It doesn't matter whether you meet for coffee, or have a texting conversation with someone, or whatever else it may be; just make sure to be intentional about this. Don't let all of the other busy things in your life keep you from prioritizing those 30 minutes! Your light for Christ will only have an impact if it comes into contact with someone who needs the light.

Helpful Hints for Writing Out Your Testimony

As you think about how to write out your testimony, keep in mind that your primary goal is to point others toward God. Non-believers will need you to share your testimony in such a way that it makes sense to them. Therefore, you want to help them understand how Jesus worked in your life in such a way that they can envision how He could work in their life.

It's usually easiest to write out your testimony in 3 parts:

Part 1 - BEFORE I TRUSTED IN JESUS¹⁷

a. What were you like before you started following Jesus?

(What did your life revolve around? What were your attitudes, needs, and problems? What did you look to for security, peace of mind, or happiness?)

NOTE: If you received Jesus at a young age, describe a turning point in your life when you became serious about your own faith.

b. What first got you thinking that Jesus could make a difference in your life?

Part 2 – HOW I CAME TO TRUST IN JESUS

a. If you can remember, share specifics of when you received Jesus: date, place, and occasion.

(If you can't remember, just share the general time frame. It's completely fine if you don't know specifics.)

b. What was it that finally motivated you to trust in Jesus personally?

(What was the turning point in your attitude? What mental barriers did you overcome? Try to explain how the gospel convinced you or changed your way of thinking.)

Part 3 – AS I'VE BEEN FOLLOWING JESUS:

a. How has your life been different since you trusted Jesus?

(What changes do you see in your life: actions, attitudes, and relationships? What does Jesus mean to you now?)

NOTE: If you trusted Jesus a long time ago, you may want to emphasize how your faith has deepened over the years.

b. What are some positive things that you've experienced because you follow Jesus?

NOTE: It's fine to admit that some things are still difficult. It's better not to give the impression that your life is now perfect and problem free.

Here are some ways to communicate your testimony clearly and effectively:

1. Be yourself and say things in your own way. This is your personal testimony and that's what makes it special.
2. Share one or two Scripture verses if you'd like. But only share verses when they fit in naturally. Don't force it or try to sound "preachy" or impressive.
3. Keep it focused and concise, roughly 400-500 words, 1-2 pages.
4. Simplify by reducing "clutter." Only mention the details which are necessary to your story.
5. Avoid religious words or Christian "jargon" that might confuse people who don't come from a church background. For example, rather than saying "born again," you might want to say, "began a new spiritual life." If you say "sin," you may want to clarify that sin is "not living God's way."
6. Don't say negative things about specific churches, denominations, or groups. This avoids causing unnecessary offense or confusion.

¹⁷ These 6 items are based on *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, Youth Ed. 2001, pp. 48-51.

STRATEGIC MINISTRY PLAN

EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH OF BEMIDJI



MISSION

What we are supposed to be doing as a church.



VISION

A picture of what the mission will look like when it is realized.

**BECOMING
DEEPLY DEVOTED
FOLLOWERS OF
JESUS TOGETHER.**

WE WILL BE A CHURCH WHO

- GLORIFIES GOD IN ALL OF LIFE
- IS TRANSFORMED BY GOD'S WORD
- SERVES AND CARES FOR EACH OTHER IN LOVE
- WELCOMES ALL PEOPLE AND CARES FOR OUR NEIGHBORS
- PERSONALLY SHARES THE GOSPEL LOCALLY AND GLOBALLY



CORE VALUES

The biblical beliefs that empower and guide our ministries.

GOD'S GLORY

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP

CARING FOR THE BODY OF BELIEVERS

CONNECTING WITH THE COMMUNITY

EVANGELIZING THE LOST

DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY



A plan to guide disciples toward maturity in Christ.

