

Way of Discipleship Small Groups

Sharing with people of other faiths



Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

What is your experience of sharing faith with people of other faiths?



Understanding the information (25 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

How do we share faith naturally with people of other faiths? Andrew Smith's book, "Vibrant Christianity in Multifaith Britain" sets out from a Birmingham context many of the issues we might face in sharing faith with those of other faiths.



He acknowledges the anxiety this might cause: "...For some people of different faiths the very act of evangelism is deeply problematic, if not sinful....for many families, particularly Muslims I listen to, the issue is not necessarily joining Christianity but leaving Islam. The objection might not be that a family member has become a Christian but that they have left the faith of their family."

While being sensitive to these issues he says, "One concern is that people of other faiths, and usually that means Muslims, will be offended if we speak about the Christian faith. In my experience nothing could be further from the truth; the vast majority of people are not sitting around waiting to be offended by Christians talking about what they believe but are quite happy to chat about faith."

He offers some principles as a way of engaging well.

Holding together being confident in loving people and being confident in loving God.

"I have met Christians committed to interfaith work who are intensely focused on loving their neighbours of different faiths, but when I mentioned my belief in Jesus as the son of God, they complained that I'm causing tensions and difficulties by raising beliefs others don't subscribe to.

They are obeying the commands to love their neighbour but at the expense of holding fast to God. Somehow we have to find a way constantly to obey both these commands.”

He argues that loving people of other faiths involves being able to share faith with them: “We are called to love our neighbour of any faith and at the same time to be faithful in loving God. A friend of mine who is a leader in the Sikh community often says that if we want to do interfaith well, then we should do faith well. We should make sure people are rooted in their own faith so that they can contribute well in interfaith settings.”

Loving people enough to go to them where they are

“It's worth reminding ourselves every now and then just how much God loves the Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and others living near us or appearing on the news. However much we might learn to love our neighbour, it will never be as much as God loves them. The more we are confident in our love for God, the greater love we can have for a neighbour, as we see them as made in the image of God and loved by him.

When the disciples followed Jesus, they found that it meant following him to places where they were likely to meet Samaritans. Jesus didn't avoid them; In fact, he deliberately sought them out. From the start, discipleship meant following Jesus into some uncomfortable places to meet all sorts of people whom one didn't usually mix with.

So, this raises the question - are we pleased to see people of other faiths living in our neighbourhoods? Do we love them enough to think, “Oh good, I'm glad you live here?” Do I want people to listen to me talk about my faith? If the answer is yes, then I need to do the same to them and listen to them talk about their faith. Do I want people to visit my church? If so, then I need to be willing to visit their gudwara or mosque.”

Being genuine, equal in relationship and honest

“Loving our neighbour is a key concept in how we relate to people of other faiths, and we have to do that while continuing to love God faithfully. When we love in this way we start to treat people not as a threat, or a project or a target for evangelism, but as people. People sometimes ask me how they can start a conversation with their Hindu friends. I say start by asking, “How are you?” Treat them as people, be interested in them, love them. We are not at one end with everything to give and nothing to gain from others. We are on a par with others, at times helping, at other times being helped, just as a servant benefits from those they serve.

As an aside while sharing our faith can be an act of love, I question whether it always feels like that. For an act of love to be genuine, the recipient has to be able to see it as that. As a Hindu friend of mine once said, “Why would I invite you to my house when you think I'm an idol worshipper, a sinner and need to convert?””

Sharing faith positively and humbly

Believing that, “I firmly believe that the gospel is good news, so it can be proclaimed as good news without our having to criticise other beliefs for being bad news,” Andrew has worked with others across Birmingham of all faiths to produce some guidelines for ethical witness (see handout). They include “Sharing our faith should never be coercive...We will speak of our faith without demeaning or ridiculing the faiths of others...We will speak clearly and honestly about our faith, even when that is uncomfortable or controversial.”

He summarizes his approach to sharing faith with others in a story:

“I was once at a meal with some young adults of different faiths. During the meal the issue of conversion came up and a Sikh friend turned to me and said, “I understand that if you saw someone who had no faith and was down on their luck, homeless and a drug addict, that you'd want them to become a Christian, but do you want me to convert?”

My answer was this: “I think being a Christian is the best thing ever; I find it gives me hope and purpose and an assurance of salvation, so I'd love everyone to find that too. So, yes, I'd like that for you, but no more than for anyone else; you're not a target. But also it's optional. I'm not going to force you to convert; you're allowed to say no. And another thing: if you want me to shut up about my faith I will.”

Discuss: Which of these principles helps you the most? Why?

Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Acts 17: 16-34 which describes the way Paul shares with people of other beliefs.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:

What does this passage teach me about God?

What does this passage teach me about people?

How does this passage call me to obey God?

What might I do in response to this this week?



Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

There is no video, but you are invited to discuss your experience of engaging with people of other faiths.



Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, “What might God be showing me and how might I respond?” They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, “Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?”



Group prayer (5 minutes)

Lord Jesus,

Feet are rarely admired, But you call them beautiful
When they carry your gospel.

As I step out in faith and obedience, Would I find myself surprised
That people consider my words, My manner, And my message,
To be Hopeful, Truthful, And beautiful.

Amen.





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