



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

Faith Sharing Part I: Making Connections

By Matt Hook

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Acts 1:8 *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

Faith sharing matters. When you are a Christian, you are a witness for Jesus Christ. When you are a witness for Jesus, you are making a connection between your friend and God. Faith sharing matters. But it's hard. Have you ever tried to share your faith, and halfway into it, you feel as though there is no connection between you and this friend or family member of yours? You think about what you will say, and the next thing you know, it feels like everything conspires against you?...

Back to the Future Video Clip Dr. Emmett Brown, a research scientist and inventor of sorts, was in a bit of a pinch. Perched on a crumbling masonry ledge 50 ft. above the ground, he was trying as hard as he could to bring two electrical cords together. The upper cord, which hung just out of reach, ran up to the roof of the Hill Valley Clock Tower. There it was attached to a lightning rod where, in a few seconds, at precisely 10:04 P.M., a bolt of lightning would strike. The other cord, the one he held in his right hand, hung down across the courtyard and ran over to an exposed wire stretched ten feet high across the adjoining street.

Everything hung on Doc Brown's ability to connect the two cords in time. For as Brown wrestled in the wind and rain, a converted DeLorean sports car accelerated toward the cable. If the current from the coming lightning strike failed to reach the car the instant it passed by, then Marty McFly, the driver, would be stuck forever in 1955. And everything - lightning strikes, clock-tower bells, crumbling concrete, curious policemen, falling trees, balky starter motors - everything seemed to conspire against Marty's attempt to get back to the future where he belonged.

This is how I feel every time I step up to preach. (Some days I'm afraid it's how I look by the time I step down!) This is also what happens to you when you open up a spiritual conversation with a non-Christian friend in order to share Christ with them. The Holy Spirit has come in power - like a mighty rushing wind with tongues of fire revealing God's love and power, and God asks you to make the connection with your friends and family so they can experience his powerful love and forgiveness. If your friend is like most people, they are skimming through life at a breakneck speed. (Hello, McFly!) Nevertheless, Jesus said *“You shall be my witnesses in your hometown, to your neighbors, and to the ends of the earth.”* Jesus said it. We know we're supposed to share our faith. So why don't we? What interferes?

Over the next 3 weeks we'll be looking at faith sharing, which is an integral part of Christianity. Without faith sharing, you are starving yourself from seeing God's power in action.

For Doc Brown to make the connection, the interference was wind, rain, lightning strikes, crumbling concrete, curious policemen, falling trees, and balky starter motors. What is it for you? What keeps you from making connections? Fear? Politeness? Feeling of weakness? Lack of confidence? Lack of knowledge? Or

something more base: Lack of interest in other people. Inconvenience – I can't be bothered right now. I have my own problems to deal with. Or maybe you're thinking "Are you kidding? I'm the one driving 88 miles per hour in the DeLorean. If any of these is you, hear the Good News.

We've been handed power to change the world in a way the world has never seen because it is from beyond this world. Sometimes I think we Christians forget the magnitude of the power and the trust placed in us. We forget the power of that storm we need to connect people to. At the birthday of the church, it was a mighty rushing wind! In the institutional church today I'm afraid that we've reduced it to the wind you get when you use your bulletin for a fan. We miss the central fact of our faith: Christ changes lives!

- To know Jesus is to walk from darkness to light.
- To find him means to find meaning and purpose.
- To follow Him makes you realize it's not all about you.
- You begin to realize you do have a place in the universe.
- You see that you have value beyond what any other human can give you.

God is doing a great work in the life of a friend of mine who's been coming back to church recently: just a few weeks ago she told her boyfriend "Church is good for me, but bad for us." That's it, isn't it?

Opening your life to God's Holy Spirit doesn't make you better than anyone else. It simply makes you better than you were.

What's my story? I was living to be a rich and famous performer. But one afternoon I was sitting on a subway in NYC, I was looking around at all the people and wondering – "How many of these people have the confidence I have, knowing that the Creator of the universe cares about them personally? They need to know this. I'd better get started." I put my dream away and started living for a much bigger dream: Making connections between people and the Creator. My goal in life became to get to heaven and take as many people with me as possible. Church, we cannot keep this to ourselves! The power that came at Pentecost not only ignited the church that day. That power in all His fullness is available to you and me today!

So faith sharing matters, because Christ changes lives. Then why the hang ups about doing it?

Maybe we're like Jonah. Jonah may have been the first Methodist! God called Jonah to go faith sharing in Nineveh, and Jonah went the opposite way! Jonah's hang up was that he hated the Ninevites, so he tried to ignore God and get away to Tarshish. God finally got Jonah turned around, (and it took the world's first air-conditioned, underwater submarine ride to get there). The whale burped, and there was the missionary! And even after that Jonah was still reluctant to tell them God's message! Let me ask you today: Have you checked *your* attitude? Do you pray for lost people? Church, we'd better get started if Jesus wants us to start at home and share it to the ends of the earth.

Or are we Lazarus? Lazarus was the brother to Mary and Martha, and a friend of Jesus. And Lazarus hang up was that he was dead! He was in the tomb, bound up by linen strips of cloth. Jesus had to call him... Lazarus?... Lazarus... Lazarus, come out! (Eddie Fox tells of preaching the Lazarus story at a revival in Indiana, when he finally shouted "Lazarus" the last time, a voice from the basement called out "I'm comin'!" The name of the custodian was Lazarus. Church was over.) We have to be fully alive to wake people up to show them Jesus. After all, the man broke up every funeral he ever attended! When Lazarus came out of the tomb, Jesus told the people "*Unbind him.*" We need to let people unbind us, to open ourselves up to telling His story.

Like Jonah, we need to get over *our* attitude. Like Lazarus, we need to be unbound from everything holding us back. Faith sharing matters. Don't leave it up to other people. And *don't* leave it up to Steve and me. When churches do that, it's like sending out the quarterback by himself to play against the whole other team. We'll get clobbered.

So, is the answer "Just try harder?" No. Our passage contains Jesus' final words in Acts 1:8. ***"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*** The whole rest of the Bible simply describes how the faith sharing happened.

Consider the Bible. The entire Bible, from Genesis through Revelation is a missionary book about a missionary God whose purpose it is to call and create a missionary people. Ergo, you become a missionary. This doesn't mean you necessarily move to Africa, although you could. Rather, there are plenty of mission fields right here. You and I live in a mission field. *Where we live our lives* is where God wants us to share our faith. In Cuba this past January, I witnessed Methodist churches where faith sharing is the norm. My translator Omar, who gave up a high family position in the Communist Party to become a Christ follower, shared how the Cubans were amazed that some Christian American high school kids had never led anyone to Christ before. In American Christianity, sadly enough, it's the norm. And what's happened? The Mainline churches became sideline churches, and many have become flat line. In the Cuban Methodist Church, though, the norm for every believer to have shared Christ with 5 or more people. And the church is doubling every year, and impacting their society for Christ.

Mission is God's idea. It is God's unswerving purpose. It's in the Bible we can learn how God does mission. Right away you see that God doesn't often call the ones who have all their acts together. Nearly everyone God called upon to share their faith had feet of clay. So that means if you are feeling apprehensive about sharing your faith, you may be right where God wants you. Instead of depending on good looks and a winning personality, maybe you and I will have to depend upon God, or else fall flat on our faces as we try to share the faith. After all, it's His idea. Remember Jesus' final words ***"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*** We'll talk more about this in the next two weeks. Consider our church as an extension of the Bible. The explosive power of that Acts 2 community has not changed.

Have the mind of Christ. Paul wrote to the Philippians in 2:5 ***"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus..."*** The mind of Christ is not an accessory. It is essential. Basically, Paul is saying You don't need to have a great mind, just have the right mind. You don't have to know everything. Having the mind of Christ lets you see people the way God sees them, with compassion and mercy. The mind of Christ lets you love the unlovable people, the strangers, the outcasts. That mind is yours and mine when we open our hearts to the power of the Holy Spirit. That's why we share our faith, to share the mind of Christ with others. God is much more interested in your availability than your ability. It's God's job. You just take the initiative and leave the results up to God.

Why talk about faith sharing on Pentecost Sunday? Listen to it one more time: ***"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; AND you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*** Notice it doesn't say "AND THEN you will be my witnesses..." In other words, you could reverse them: ***"You will be my witnesses in all the world AND you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit."*** I take this to mean that if you desire the Lord's power, then witness to Him. As you share your witness of faith in Jesus Christ, you will be strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit to be a Counselor, a Comforter, and a Helper. Thus we are never alone in faith sharing. God knows we can't do it on our own. Instead, God invites us to join Him in His work. You may be thinking "I can't do that; I don't even know what you are talking about. I'm unqualified." If that is you, then you are just where God wants you. God will work it out. You and I just seek to connect with those around us.

As we look at faith sharing, where are you? Will you commit to making connections? Owning your part in God's plan to reach out to someone who is lost? When people are racing back to the future, make sure it's God's future kingdom they're headed for. In this land of broken dreams, where people race through life at breakneck speeds, **can Christ count on you?** Even when interferences try to stop you from faith sharing, **will you do it?**

Let's take a moment to respond to what God is saying to us today in a practical way. Please find your bulletin...

There's someone you know who needs to hear the message of salvation, the message of new life. They need to know someone cares about them. On your bulletin, write the names of 5 people in your life. Pray for them. Pray for God to give you an opportunity to share your faith this summer.

Maybe you're Marty McFly, on the fly, speeding through life, not knowing your future. You need to respond to what you've heard for yourself. Jesus wants to unbind you. He's forgiven us. By the power of His Holy Spirit, He wants to raise you up again and make you whole, and send you into a glorious future of light and life and strength for living. Let's pray.