

**Text: James 5:19,20**

19. My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back,

20. Remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover a multitude of sins.

**Introduction:** A few weeks ago Charlie preached on Romans 3 and his application was, "Love the Gospel, Live the Gospel and Share the Gospel". I immediately felt I'd like to give you all **tips on how to Share the Gospel**. The next morning I received an invitation from Charlie to preach today and he was delighted with the topic I immediately gave him. The aim of this message is to encourage each of us to be the ones who bring people to the truth - and back to the truth - in order *to save them from eternal death and a life of sin*. Our Lord Jesus illustrated so many truths with stories, and I intend to do the same today. These will be punctuated with many Scriptures, and I really want you, where possible, to say to yourselves, "**I can do that, I can say that!**" It's a kind of 'on-the-job' training which, we know, our Lord Jesus did with His first disciples.

**Body:**

**First Tip: Your personal testimony is a powerful way of sharing the Gospel.**

**My testimony** - 1st April 1970 - Ken Tahoven - C of E evangelist preaching Christ and His cross in a combined church outreach to our town. An appeal was given to believe in Christ, believe He paid the penalty of our sin on the cross, invite Him into our lives to forgive our sin, to be our Saviour, and to surrender our lives to Him. My friend Trevor Downham was sitting next to me and I invited him to join me, and we walked up the aisle together. One of the evangelist's helpers prayed with us what we affectionately call 'the sinner's prayer' and the great transaction between Saviour and sinner happened for both Trevor and I. We were shown verses from the Bible to assure us that we were now His and He was ours. We were on that evening *saved from eternal death and a life of sin*. We both went into His ministry!

About six months later I invited my best friend **David Taylor** to watch a Billy Graham film called "The Wire-tapper" (Scammer). The next day I visited him and said, "David, you know that I am a Christian?" He replied "Yes, I know that John.....and I would like to become one too!" I shared the Lord Jesus Christ with him - as I had learned from Ken Tahoven and my evangelical C of E that I was now a part of. David wanted a personal relationship with Jesus and together we prayed the same 'sinner's prayer' that I'd prayed on 1/4/70.

**"I could do that!" I hope you're saying!!!! "Yes you can!"**

I came away from David's home on cloud 9! I then asked the Lord Jesus that I could do this for the rest of my life.

Just before I went to university my pastor asked me to preach for the first time. The day before I received a phone-call from my friend from my previous school - **David**

**Bradshaw**. His family were visiting our town and he wondered if we could meet up the next morning. I told him I was preaching my first sermon in church that morning - and he asked if he could come. After the service I sat down with him and asked him what he thought. "I would like to become a Christian," he replied. I offered to refer him to my pastor and he said, "No - I want you to help me become a Christian!" So I prayed with him 'the sinner's prayer', and another person was *saved from eternal death and a life of sin!*

**"I could do that!" I hope you're saying!!! "Yes you can!"**

**When I was a young pastor**, Peggy Ogden asked me to visit **Trish Daykins** at the Knaphill Nursing Home in Harare. I made an appointment. When I arrived I checked in at reception and was directed out into the garden and told that Trish was in her wheelchair under the Msasa tree. They offered me a plastic chair to take with me to sit on. I was warned that Trish was blind as well as quadriplegic.

“My name is Pastor John Henson, Trish, and I was asked by Peggy Ogden to visit you.”

All I received in reply was a grunt. Although I pleaded in my heart that God would give the words to say, I found talking to Trish was like wading waist deep through treacle. After about 15 minutes of getting nowhere I said, “I need to go now Trish, but before I go, may I ask you whether I could pray for you?”

**Second Tip: Prayer from your heart is a very powerful witness to a personal relationship with God.**

“OK, if you like,” she replied.

I discerned that she agreed more out of politeness than faith. I prayed from my heart and said goodbye.

“How did you get along with Trish?” asked Lynn, the owner and nurse-in-charge of the home, who happened to be at reception when I returned.

“Difficult!” I admitted, “I would however really like to know more about her. Are you able to fill me in?”

“Trish is now 39-years-old,” Lynn replied, “Two years ago she went in to have a sterilization operation. The gynaecologist cut the tubes from her kidneys to her bladder instead of the tubes from her ovaries to her womb. She went into a coma, and another surgeon re-operated to fight for her life. Her condition now is the result.”

“That is just so tragic!” I exclaimed. “Does she have a husband and children?”

“Her husband has a mistress! Trish has two young children. They very rarely visit.” Lynn said.

“What about parents?” I asked “Do you think they would mind if I contacted them?” I had this growing feeling that God wanted a return visit, and this time I’d be much better informed and prayed up. Lynn willingly gave me Tom and Kay’s phone number and said, “I know you will like them. I imagine Trish was really lovely too, before this tragedy!”

I visited Tom and Kay the following evening. They adored Trish but harboured deep bitterness towards both the gynaecologist and Trish’s husband - and importantly, they could not understand why God had allowed all this to happen to their beloved daughter.

“You’ve seen her, Pastor Henson,” said Tom. “She is a broken person. She is now so bitter and moody. On some of our visits she just grunts when we talk to her.”

The next day I revisited Trish who was in her wheelchair under the Msasa tree. I pulled up the plastic chair to sit next to her and said, “Trish, this is Pastor John Henson, I have come back to see you.”

Trish began to cry, and soon she was sobbing. It caught me completely off guard. I had never anticipated such a reaction.

Then, to my great relief, she composed herself and said, “I am crying because you are the first church minister to ever come back to see me.”

**Third Tip: A return visit is a powerful way to share the Gospel**

“I came back because I have been to visit your wonderful parents. They told me all about what has happened to you, and I have felt compelled to return to assure you that despite the tragedy and injustice of it all, you are greatly loved by God.” I sensed that a truly amazing thing was happening right there and then. I remembered how in the Book of Acts the Bible says “*God opened Lydia’s heart.*” God Himself was opening Trish’s heart!

“Please tell me about God’s love,” said Trish with not a trace of cynicism.”

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“The greatest proof and indeed the greatest demonstration of God’s love is found at the cross of Calvary,” I began. “You see, Trish, God in the Bible gave us laws to keep, laws such as *‘to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and to love our neighbours as we love ourselves’*. We have all failed to keep those laws. Now, no law is any law unless there are penalties for breaking that law. The penalty for breaking God’s law is eternal exclusion from His presence. The only way God could satisfy Himself that that penalty should not be borne by you and me is if He paid the penalty for our sin. So on the cross of Calvary He bore your sin and mine and was punished in our place. When that happened He cried ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’ Before He died on that cross, He cried with a loud voice *‘It is finished!’* which was a colloquial term meaning ‘It is fully paid!’ His resurrection from the dead on the third day is proof of that! He wants us to believe that. You can tell Him that you believe by inviting Him into your life to be your personal Saviour. If you will confess you are a sinner Trish, He will forgive your sin, God will make you His own child, and He will give you His life, which is everlasting life. You will then enjoy a relationship with Him whereby you will know He is really with you through all your trials and hardships. You’ll be able to talk freely to Him anywhere, anytime and about anything.”

God had indeed opened her heart, and Trish was very eager to pray with me the “sinner’s prayer” inviting the Lord Jesus Christ into her life and yielding her life to Him. After that prayer I said to her “The Lord Jesus said ‘Behold I stand at the door and knock, if anyone opens the door, I will come in.’ You invited Him in, didn’t you Trish - so where is He now?”

“In my heart,” she replied.

“The Bible says that if we confess our sin He is faithful and just to forgive our sin. You confessed your sin, Trish, so what has happened?”

“He has forgiven me!”

“The Bible says that ‘to as many as receive Him, to them He gives the right to become the children of God’. You have received Him Trish, so what are you now?”

“A child of God!!”

“The Bible says ‘He that has the Son of God has everlasting life’. You have the Son of God, Trish, so what do you also have?”

“Everlasting life!!”

I cannot describe the exhilaration I felt as I witnessed “the great transaction”. The Lord Jesus came into Trish’s life, and He transformed it.

I visited Trish almost every week for about 18 months after her conversion. I will never forget how she used to giggle with excitement when she heard my footsteps on the gravel pathway leading from the car park to the home. I would share with her the Scriptures, and my Sunday sermon. I always ended my visit with a prayer for her, her parents, her children and the nursing home.

Then one morning Lynn called me from the home. Trish had gone into total kidney failure and was in a coma. I did not get to her in time to say goodbye. I know I’ll see her in heaven! She was a truly beautiful person, despite outward appearances. Her chief beauty came from the intimate relationship she enjoyed with Her Saviour and Lord. Lynn cried over the phone. “The light has gone out at Knaphill!” she said. “It was after your second visit to Trish that she was transformed. From then on she filled this home with her infectious joy and we will never be the same without her!”

I conducted Trish’s funeral. I delivered the eulogy in which I included Trish’s wonderful conversion story, repeating what I had said to her that led to her acceptance of Jesus Christ as her Saviour and Lord. I quoted what Lynn had said about the light and joy Trish brought to the home after her conversion. Lynn now heard what happened to Trish to transform her.

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I know that I was bold to say this to a packed out crematorium, but I said, "I dare to say to you all, based on what the Bible has to say, that unless you have a similar conversion experience to Trish, you will never see her again."

A year later, Kay phoned me. "Pastor Henson," she said, "this is Kay, Trish's mother."  
"Hello," I replied, "How are you?"

"Not very good, I am afraid. For a month now Tom has been asking me to call you for a visit. Yesterday Tom began to swell up all over. He is now at the Pariwenatwa Hospital, and I am desperately worried about him. Please could you visit him this afternoon?"  
I spoke to Tom first about his physical condition and then about his spiritual condition. I was afraid for him, as I felt sure that God had given him a premonition that he did not have long to live. I also remembered how I had warned the congregation at Trish's funeral to become Christians or else never hope to see Trish again. I felt that that warning had become a signpost that God had placed in Tom's heart to point him to Jesus Christ. I wondered how many others had that same signpost planted in their hearts at Trish's service.

I then asked Tom two questions that have so often helped open the door to share the Gospel.

"Tom," I said, "If you were to die tonight, do you know for sure that you will go to heaven?"

"No, I am not at all sure," was his honest reply.

"Tom, the Bible says that it was written that we may know that we have everlasting life. However, before I share with you from the Bible how we can know for sure we'll go to heaven when we die, may I ask you another question?"

"Sure, go ahead," he said.

"If you did die tonight, and God asks you, 'Why should I allow you into My heaven?' what do you think would be your reply?" I asked.

"I really do not know!"

I then shared with Tom the Gospel message that had brought his daughter into God's family.

Just then a nurse arrived to take a sample of Tom's blood, and to take his blood pressure, and temperature and the moment was lost. So I promised to visit him again.

That Monday morning the Henson household was all up early as usual. I usually took Michael to his nursery school but that morning a strange reluctance to do so came over me, so I asked Clare to take him instead. Tim went along for the ride.

Just as Clare drove out of the gate, the phone rang.

"Am I speaking to the Reverend John Henson?" asked the caller.

"Yes you are."

"I am calling from the Cardiac Care Unit at the Pariwenatwa Hospital. I have with me Mrs Vicars. Her husband is in a critical condition so I have asked her who her minister is, and she has given me your name and phone number. Please could you come immediately?"

I raced to the hospital, and to the Cardiac Care Unit. I was greeted by the nurse and shown to Tom's bedside.

Although Tom was in a coma I knew that the last faculty to go was his hearing, so I took him by his hand and said, "Tom, this is Pastor John Henson. I have come to pray with you so that you will find peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

I began to pray for him. "Lord Jesus!" I said from my heart, "Please do not allow Your sacrificial death on the cross for Tom to have been for nothing. Please save him by Your amazing grace. I praise You! Amen."

I then addressed Tom. "Tom, I know that you can hear me. Please pray this prayer after me. 'Lord Jesus, I am so grateful that You came to save me from my sin. I believe that You took my sin and were punished in my place when You were crucified. I am so sorry for my sin and humbly ask You to forgive me. I surrender my life to You as I trust You now to be my Saviour. Please make me Your child and give me Your everlasting life. I now praise You, Lord Jesus, Amen.'"

Just as soon as I said "Amen," Tom began to gasp for breath. The one nurse exclaimed, "I think we are losing him" and she ushered Kay and I out of the room whilst the other nurse began working on his chest.

Then the door swung open and the nurse stood there with tears in her eyes as she said, "He waited for you to pray that prayer!"

Kay now swung around to hug me. "Thank you," she whispered, "I prayed the prayer you prayed with my husband, and I just know that we'll be with each other – and with our beloved Trish – for ever and ever! Thank you so very much! Thank the Lord!"

I gazed up towards the ceiling with tears flowing down my cheeks as I silently worshipped our Saviour for His saving grace that pursues a sinner to death's door! In my heart I sang that line from a famous old hymn *Hallelujah! What a Saviour!*

Kay became a faithful and joyful member of our congregation.

**Fourth Tip: Being confident about the Gospel of Christ - it is still the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.**

**My final story is about Jill, a prodigal child.**

I was returning home from visiting Kay when I passed a road I recognised led to Jill's home. Just then I felt strongly that I should turn back and visit Jill. My immediate reaction was to question the leading. I did not visit young married women on my own. She held a good job so why would she be at home now? She had not been back to church since she married Graham two years before.

By the time I reached the tee-junction the conviction was so strong that I turned around and made my way to her home. I rang the door-bell and within seconds the door swung open. There stood Graham! My mouth went dry, and I could not speak. How do I explain this visit?

"I cannot believe this," he said shaking his head. The tone was not angry but surprised.

"Come on in," he said, moving aside for me to pass him. "I cannot believe this!" he said again. "Just three minutes ago Jill told me that she wanted to see a pastor! You won't know this, but Jill has been bedridden with anorexia. We have booked flights to London for treatment for her, leaving tonight. She just expresses a desire to see a Pastor and in minutes you arrive. Incredible!"

Graham ushered me through to their bedroom, and there lay Jill. Seeing me, she burst into tears.

"You have no idea how much this means to me!" She began to explain that she had deliberately walked away from God. She was full of remorse, and she was amazed that God had not given up on her.

"Our Father in heaven wants you home, Jill, just like in the prodigal son story" I said. "You have been a wonderful Christian. You know how to ask Him to forgive your sin and come back into your life."

Without hesitation Jill closed her eyes, bowed her head, and talked to her Saviour. I stood there in tears as I witnessed this intimate transaction. I then laid my hands gently on her forehead and prayed earnestly for God's healing touch. I had such a strong sense that God would answer that prayer just as he had answered her desire to see a pastor. We talked for a while before I left. Graham thanked me profusely for coming, and I prayed silently that God would reel him in to His kingdom.

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A week later I met Jill's mother in town. "Have you heard from Jill?" I asked.

"Yes, John, and guess what?" she replied.

"What?"

"She ate the dinner and the breakfast on the overnight flight to London, and Graham did not have to take her for the treatment she went over there for! God has healed her of her anorexia!! I am so very thrilled – the nightmare appears to be over for us all!!"

And we all say, "*Hallelujah, what a Saviour!*"

**"I could do that!" I hope you're saying!!! "Yes you can!"**

**Conclusion: Are you the sinner today that needs, like myself, and the two Davids, and Trish, Tom and Kay to pray the 'sinner's prayer' that'll give you the assurance that if you died tonight you will go to heaven? Or are you the prodigal son or daughter like Jill who wants to tell our Heavenly Father that you are coming home?**

**Shall we bow our heads in prayer!**