



For
now

– *being the church
in unusual times*

For now – sharing our faith

Just now: Revisiting the focus of our witnessing life

Toddler groups, bowling clubs and uniformed organisations have been at the front edge of local outreach within PCI congregations for decades and yet for many churches the current and ever-changing restrictions mean they are unable to take place safely at present. The same can be said for much of what we might have considered the outward focus of church life. With so much time and energy taken up making arrangements for Sunday services and attending to pastoral needs, it can be easy to see why sharing our faith may have slipped down the agenda. Perhaps, for now, our focus needs to shift from activities and programmes to what simple steps we can take to sharpen the impact of our witness to those with whom we have regular contact and engage in conversation in our everyday lives.

Watch a short introduction to the session by [clicking here](#)

Read: Acts 19:8-10. [Click here](#) for the passage

Talk about: *Sharing our faith with others*

These verses have a lot to teach us about what regaining outward focus as a congregation might look and feel like against the backdrop of continuing restrictions, as we concentrate on being a personal witness to our family, friends and neighbours.

1. Paul had been teaching about the kingdom of God to his own people, the Jews, in the familiar surroundings of the synagogue for months. However, opposition arose and restrictions meant he was no longer allowed to use the building (vv8-9). How might Paul have felt about this? In what ways can we relate this to our experience of feeling restricted in the use of our buildings for witness for now?
2. Verse 10 tells us that Paul's new location and setting for witness enabled a much wider audience to hear the good news. What new forms of bearing witness to others have you found as a congregation either in your local community or online during the period of the pandemic? How might these present an opportunity to witness to a wider audience who were previously beyond the reach of your normal church activities?
3. Verses 8-9 highlight a change of tone from 'arguing persuasively' in the synagogue to 'discussions daily' in the lecture hall. Why might the tone of our witness need to change if we are to effectively share our faith with others for now? What words would you use to describe what that tone should be? What kind of simple questions might open up a fruitful conversation?

4. The audience might be different and the tone more gentle, but Paul's message of the gospel remains the same (vv8,10) and many chose to follow Jesus (read on to verse 26). What particular aspects of how the gospel helps us to make sense of suffering and personally navigate difficult times might most connect with people at this time? What parts of our own story of experiencing the period of the Covid-19 pandemic as followers of Jesus might be most helpful to share?

Consider: *Ways to develop a more effective everyday witness*

- **Noticing** – a starting point to knowing anyone is noticing them. This is not only the first step in becoming aware of another person, but also in paying attention to God's activity in our world. By paying greater attention to others, we create an opportunity to get to know them, and recognise them as treasured creations of God.
- **Praying** – pray for those we meet in our day-to-day life and ask God to show us what he wants to do to bless them. By doing so, we become more invested in their lives and more compassionate and loving towards them.
- **Welcoming** – welcome people by valuing their presence so that they feel comfortable with us. This is a way of living. We do it well by maximising the following welcoming aspects:
 - Our face: our smile might be hidden behind a mask for now, but warm eye contact can go a long way to making people feel welcomed and comfortable.
 - Our space: make people feel at ease in your presence. Even with social distancing, try to limit any awkwardness by finding common ground in conversation.
 - Our place: the ever-changing restrictions present difficulties in showing hospitality, but as things ease, seek to provide a comfortable place that allows people to feel more relaxed and accepted.
 - Our grace: accept people as they are and build relationship at an appropriate pace. Walk alongside others and admit your own flaws and need for God's grace.
- **Loving** – genuinely love people and see them through God's eyes. Remember that 'love may sometimes feel, but it always acts' (Romans 5:8).

Try: *Tips for faith sharing conversation*

- **Watching** – pay attention to current news items or regular conversation topics that might offer connection in conversation to the better story of Jesus. What stories picture brokenness, offer hope, contrast with the gospel message, or seem to mirror it? As these stories come up in conversation, be ready to ask a subtle question, or offer a different perspective, that moves towards a faith perspective.
- **Listening** – listen to others with genuine care, interest, and empathy and do not rush to offer your own opinions too quickly.
- **Questioning** – be more curious in your conversations, drawing others out with gentle questions that invite a more meaningful conversation. A natural order of questioning that deepens relationship might explore:
 - History e.g. how have you been managing since the start of the pandemic last March?



- Journey e.g. what have been the major turning points, both ups and downs?
- Present e.g. where do you find yourself now?
- Hopes e.g. what are you longing for and looking forward to in the days ahead?

Pray: About what God is leading you to do for now to share God's good news with others.

Follow up?

Explore more about how we can be more aware of God's prompting to be his witness in our everyday lives and relationships by watching this [clip](#)

