

VISION 4: Sharing the abundant life of God (1 Peter 3:8-15, John 4:27-42)

Recap – looking at vision – previous weeks – value of vision, what is abundant life, seeking it and now: SHARING.

Admit at start that sharing doesn't always come naturally – 2 words you never have to teach a child are 'no' and 'mine'. Looking at ads, often reinforced: Gary Lineker refusing to share his crisps. BUT NOW mood changing – internet all about sharing. Share feedback all the time – good or bad experience, straight up on trip advisor or Amazon. Share photos, experiences, tips, recipes, how to do Rubik's cubes, play a ukulele or fix a strip light. Sharing is 'in'. It's the new Friday. As T-mobile's recent campaign said: 'life is for sharing'.

That's point we often miss when come to today's theme. What are we sharing? We are sharing 'life' – not just verbal message, an invitation to life. Often miss that – Jesus gives people an invitation to life. It's not a series of intellectual propositions or doctrines, or a set of cultural norms – at its heart, it's an invitation to life. And as they say, life is for sharing. How?

Bless – 1 Peter 3 v9 – 'bless to inherit blessing' – what does it mean to be people who bless? – back to August last year – confer concrete benefits. We are to *be* good news before we can *tell* good news. Like passage says, people of blessing are sympathetic, compassionate, humble, overcome evil with good – they make a real positive difference in the lives of others.

Think back on your life – who has influenced you most? How did they influence you? Probably more by their example than what they said – or perhaps what they said had special influence because you saw how they lived. Works both ways – example can be positive or negative. Either way, faith is caught more than taught.

That's our challenge for this year – 'build up the walls' i.e. making our faith visible, signs of God at work. Why we've launched MK50/50. ([Why making plans for reshaping our 4th Sunday to begin with worship and then get out into community running practical projects which bless people.](#)) We want to be people who bless, who *are* good news.

Thinking about mission, Lesslie Newbigin (one of great thinkers of last century) said this: '*The only **pattern** of the Gospel is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it. The church is to be the primary agent of mission and if it does not exhibit evident community and transformed lives then any amount of evangelistic events and church projects will have limited credibility.*'

Challenging (repeat last line) – but let's see it as encouragement not condemnation. MK50/50 is designed to give us those ways of showing transformed lives. Also we all have more testimonies than we realise. Loved hearing them on 4th Sunday ([at St Mary's](#)), story of people's journeys with God – all very different but all very real. We do have a history with God, examples of his faithfulness – just need to remember them and continue to live out that gentle transformation that God is working in all of us.

If looking for another reason to sign up to MK50/50, there it is – to be people who bless and therefore inherit a blessing. Actually 2 reasons: reminds us of change in our lives, how far we've come – AND promise of God's blessing READ v12a.

So how do we share – first of all, regardless of anything else, we bless. That part is non-negotiable.

But doesn't stop there – often quote Francis of Assisi – 'preach gospel all the time and use words if you have to.' Usually emphasise first bit, but mustn't forget second bit. Assumption in 1 Peter 3 – if we do live this kind of life, people will ask us why live like this. They will see a love, a purpose, and maybe be intrigued, or interested or even attracted. What do we do then: READ v15. Very simple – **we ANSWER**. We bless and then, when we're asked, we answer. Note not rocket science: 'give the reason for the hope that you have.' Why do you believe it? Doesn't have to be an intellectual answer – it's your answer, and it's real because it's your faith, it's fuelled your life.

3 tips: be prepared. Think about what you would say. If you're someone who gets tongue tied, practise. Have a 20 second thing you can say which says clearly why you believe it. Learn it, say it in front of the mirror. On the other hand, if you have the gift of the gab, make sure it's not too long! Main thing is that it's your testimony, it's real, it's heartfelt.

'always' – may be asked at any time. Don't agitate over that, but that's why you have something up your sleeve, we may get asked in unexpected situations. Because of my job now I have to be ready always, but when I worked in an office, I would pray most days 'give me grace to represent you well today' – I wanted to be ready, I was a Christian in my office every day, and you can't predict when others are going to put a challenge in your way. So we invite Jesus' love into our hearts every day, we're always ready.

Practical – *how* do we answer – **'with gentleness and respect'**. Respect what other people believe (even if it is a bit daft), and share your story gently. Your job is not to convert anyone – God does that. Your job is to answer gently, respectfully and let God do the work in their hearts. Sometimes the conversation will stop there, sometimes it will continue and develop – and of course if it does, let's follow it up.

But we must always remember that we're bringing people to Jesus, and it's his love that changes a human heart. He can take our simple words and do something amazing with them. He may already be speaking to someone – you just never know.

Share story of Shaun? (Alise faith, Chloe school, asking questions, 'give it a try' – personal faith)

Bless and answer – pattern most of time. One more lesson which can learn from other story in John 4. Recap story of last week – how does woman respond? READ v28-29. She goes back home and says **'come and see'**. **3rd word is invite**. Bless, answer, invite. Again, it's very simple isn't it? Woman hardly knew anything about Jesus – she'd only just met him. She didn't know the 4 spiritual laws or the 39 articles – she just knew she'd met someone special. How could she respond: 'Come and see, come and see.'

We can all do that, can't we? We don't need fancy words, but we can issue an invite: come and see for yourself. Give it a try. Doesn't have to be Sunday church, there are events happening all the time, the appropriate for each person might be slightly different – in fact that may be the one thing where it's worth putting some thought in – what particular thing would it be best to invite someone to? But point remains the same: we're bringing people to Jesus, all we have to do is say: 'come and see'.

Look at the effect it had on this village – Jesus abandons his plans and stays for 2 whole days. And as people meet Jesus, look what happens: READ v42. Rely less on what we say and what is doing in their lives. Come and see, come and see.

So how are we going to share the abundant life of Jesus? It's very simple. We bless – we live lives which point to Jesus. We answer – we're ready, we're respectful and gentle. And we invite. Jesus does the hard work in someone's heart. All we have to do is live lives which reflect his love in our hearts and then say: Come and see, come and see....