

Creating confident Christians



Dr Mark Griffiths has a PhD in Child Evangelism and runs the MA Specialism in Children, Young People and Families at St Padarn's Cardiff. Here he considers how to help young people to share their faith.

I came to faith shortly before my sixteenth birthday. I'd never been to church. My family just didn't go. I didn't know many people in my small Welsh terraced street who did. My experience was probably a little more extreme than most: I'd never even been to a wedding or a funeral. My family thought funerals weren't suitable places for children and young people to be seen, and my dad had worked out that if we went straight to the wedding reception and dodged the church part, nobody ever noticed. So, church had simply never featured in my life.

The first church I attended was a Pentecostal church with a corrugated iron roof, where the preacher had to shout when it rained. That wasn't really a problem. This was passionate preaching, and shouting was something of a default. It was the sort of church where, if there had been chandeliers, people would have swung from them. Everyone owned a tambourine – with ribbons. I loved it.

I went because a couple of people in my school invited me. Nothing dramatic or confrontational. Just a simple, 'We go to church on Sunday evenings – would you like to come?' And so, I did. That first night, most of the 80 people present talked to me about Jesus. One of them invited me back to their house afterwards, because that's where the young people gathered. Over the next six months I became part of a Christian community and began to grow in faith.

Everything was new. I'd heard a few Bible stories in RE lessons, but this was different: a Jesus who came and lived among us, and who died a brutal death so that heaven could be possible for me. I listened. People noticed me. They invested time and care. I didn't have the language for it then, but they disciplined me. It was going well. I invited others, and they came too. The youth group grew. We met on Friday evenings. We sang, talked, learned, and grew as followers of Jesus.

And then the classes started. 'How to Be an Evangelist.'

This was new territory. We did openair services, standing on street corners and shouting at people – at least, that's how it felt to me. Then came street evangelism, which involved approaching complete strangers and telling them they needed to become Christians or they wouldn't go to heaven. Rather than becoming more confident in sharing my faith, I became anxious and awkward. At school, people mocked the 'mad Christians' who shouted in town centres. Somewhere along the way, I had moved from gently inviting friends – and watching them come – to quite spectacularly putting people off.

It took a few years for me to reflect on that journey and realise something important: I was never more confident in sharing my faith than I was before the church tried to teach me how to do it 'properly'.

There are plenty of books exploring different evangelistic styles, and most arrive at a similar conclusion. Not everyone is called to the same approach. You might not be a street preacher – and that's okay. It doesn't mean you can't share your faith. The key is discovering where you feel most at home. That's the place of confidence.

In school I was part of debating teams. When the subject was God, Jesus, or Christianity, I thrived in that space. I resonate deeply with the encouragement to be ready to give a reasoned answer for the hope we carry, doing so with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). That feels natural to me. So does inviting people into Christian community and letting faith be encountered through relationships. Both have remained part of my story.

And that's the point. Faith sharing is meant to feel natural.

Confidence in sharing faith is grounded in knowing who we are. Where do I feel most comfortable? Is it in thoughtful conversation? In personal storytelling? In explaining faith from the front of a church? In showing kindness and patient love? For some, it really will be standing on a street corner proclaiming Jesus. But confidence grows when we operate from the place where God has gifted us.



This is especially true for young people. Their confidence in sharing faith is not formed by copying someone else's style, but by recognising their own identity. When we push young people into expressions of evangelism that don't fit who they are, we don't stretch them – we silence them. Confidence is never produced by performance. It is born out of identity.

Our task, then, is not to manufacture confident evangelists, but to nurture confident Christians – young people who know who they are in Christ, and who are free to share that faith in ways that are authentic, relational, and true to who God has created them to be.

Find out more

 As part of our new podcast series on helping young people share their faith, listen to the podcast in which Mark discusses with Melanie how to let young people be their authentic selves in witnessing to others.
www.rootsforchurches.podbean.com

SoStock/istockphoto.com

imgorthand/istockphoto.com