Evangelism

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Sometimes Christians have spoken about evangelism as though it depends on our programmes, methods, or ability to persuade. Yet Scripture tells a different story. Before anyone seeks God, God is already seeking them. Before a person begins asking questions about faith, the Holy Spirit is already at work. As Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 3.6, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow."

Recognising who is doing the primary work has profound implications for how we understand our role. We are not bringing God to people. We are helping people recognise the God who is already present, already active, and already drawing them to himself. Growth and transformation belong to God.

AS YOUNG PEOPLE SHARED THEIR FAITH STORIES, IT BECAME CLEAR THAT COMING TO FAITH WAS SELDOM STRAIGHTFORWARD

Recent research conducted by Scripture Union among young people reinforces this truth. As young people shared their faith stories, it became clear that coming to faith was seldom straightforward. Their journeys were shaped by relationships, questions, conversations, experiences, insights, and encounters with God's grace.

What was striking was how spiritually open many of them were. They were asking profound questions about meaning, identity, purpose, hope, and belonging. At the same time, many had little understanding of Christianity. As we listened to these different stories, a consistent pattern emerged evoking imagery of how a braided river moves through many pathways. The channels separate, reconnect, disappear, and re-emerge, yet together form one living river. It is a fitting image for Aotearoa New Zealand, where braided rivers are such a distinctive part of our landscape.

Faith journeys are much the same. People rarely come to faith through a single conversation or event. More often,

God works through multiple encounters and influences over time. As we reflected on these stories, five recurring pathways became clear, through which God's grace seemed to flow.

Encounter. People need more than information about God. They need opportunities to encounter Jesus for themselves. Our task is not to manufacture spiritual experiences but to create space where people can recognise God's presence and activity.

Relationship. Every significant faith story included someone who cared, listened, encouraged, and walked alongside them. Relationship is not simply a strategy for evangelism. It reflects the way God himself relates to people.

Invitation. Jesus frequently invited people with simple words: "Come and see." Authentic evangelism finds a path between silence and pressure. It creates opportunities for people to respond without coercion or manipulation, while still clearly and confidently sharing the good news of Jesus.

Journey. Faith develops over time. In a culture that values immediate results, God's work is often slower, quieter, and deeper than we expect. Rather than asking, "Will this person become a Christian today?" a better question is, "What step is God inviting them to take next?"

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Dignity. Every person bears the image of God. They are not projects, statistics, or evangelistic outcomes, but people with stories, questions, hopes, and struggles. Genuine evangelism honours that dignity.

Like a braided river crossing the land of Aotearoa, God's grace flows through all these channels. Our role is not to direct the river. Our privilege is to help keep its pathways open, trusting that the God who begins the work of transformation will also bring it to completion.

In the end, evangelism is about faithfully participating in what God is already doing. It is about journeying alongside young people as they encounter Jesus, follow Him, and experience the transforming life that only He can give.



**Braided river art by Laingholm Baptist Church*

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