

EXPLAINING THE GOSPEL AND WELLBEING AMONG CHRISTIAN EVANGELICALS

The objective of this study was to evaluate the impact on a subject's well-being if they explain the gospel* to non-believers or keep the gospel personal. Subjects were surveyed on questions related to: well-being that appear in Scripture; activities or held biblical beliefs that help guide the Christian faith; and fear. There were 370 participants. They had high ratings for well-being (contentment, personal peace, joy, and sense of purpose). Almost all (96%) feared explaining the gospel to others because they do not know what to say (56%) or they might offend a non-believer (28%). Participants who indicated they explained the gospel once a month or more had better well-being ratings ($P < 0.007$). This study showed practicing Christians have high well-being. Although Christians may fear explaining the gospel with others, those who do display better well-being than those who do not share.

*Defined as having obtained salvation by receiving forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ sacrifice on the cross.

RESULTS

Participants - 370 subjects participated of whom 92% were Caucasian, almost equally split between male and female, with an average age of 47 years. The majority were full-time or self-employed (51%) with 63% having a college degree or higher. The vast majority described themselves as 'born again' Christians (87%). See Table 1 for full demographic information.

Well-being ratings - Generally, participants had high ratings of personal characteristics that would indicate good well-being including: contentment, personal peace, joy, and sense of purpose (score of 4.6/6.0 rating or higher).

Attitudes towards explaining the gospel - Almost all (96%) participants said they feared "sharing the gospel" but thought they should explain it more (5.1/6.0 rating). Participants confessed to some guilt in not explaining the gospel (3.0/6.0 rating) and disclosed a need to exaggerate how often they did share (4.9/6.0 rating). These findings are summarized in Table 2. The fear of explaining the gospel appeared mostly related to not knowing what to say (56%) or that they might offend the non-believer (28%). Hesitancy in explaining it also was noted from an inability to answer objections (36%). The participants expressed hesitancy although they overwhelmingly believed that the Bible is true (42%). These findings are summarized in Table 3.

Ratings of adherence to the faith - Participants demonstrated generally high adherence with the more personal aspects of their faith including prayer, praise to God and association with other believers. However, lower numbers taught others about their faith (36%) or explained the gospel (31%, both once a month or more).

Non-verbal messages in explaining the gospel - Many Christians believed in alternative non-verbal methods of spreading their beliefs mostly by lifestyle (78%) or prayer (71%). These alternative nonverbal methods are found in Table 4.

Explaining the gospel and well-being - Participants who indicated they explained the gospel once a month or more had better well-being ratings (being content, at peace, having joy and purpose) after the Bonferroni correction ($P < 0.007$, Table 5). In addition, those who more frequently explained the gospel were more apt to be adherent to other measures of their faith (study the scriptures, praise, teach, $P < 0.0012$). We evaluated two of the well-being variables (joy and purpose) by multivariate regression analysis and both showed that explaining the gospel was associated with greater well-being after other variables of adherence were taken into account (RR=0.0018 and 0.012, respectively).

Table 1: Demography

Question	Level	N	%
Race	Caucasian	342	92%
	African American	8	2%
	Native American	7	2%
	Other	9	2%
Religion	Born-again Christian	322	87%
	Cultural Christian	39	11%
	Other	7	2%
Gender	Female	192	52%
	Male	177	48%
Age		47.0 +/- 17.2	

Employment	Full-time employed or self-employed	188	51%
	Retired	74	20%
	Full-time homemaker	37	10%
	Other	70	19%
Education	College graduate	147	40%
	Post-graduate degree	85	23%
	Some college	90	24%
	Other	46	13%

Table 2: Fear questions (scale 0-6, with 6 showing most agreement)

Question	Score	N
I fear mentioning any aspect of my personal faith to unbelievers.	4.4	362
I suffer anxiety in social situations.	3.7	364
I feel guilty thinking that I do not share the gospel enough.	3.0	361
I should share the gospel more.	5.1	361
I sometimes feel the need to exaggerate how much I share the gospel.	4.9	346

Table 3: Most common reasons for fear (multiple answers allowed)

Question	N	%
The reason(s) why you fear sharing the Gospel?		
I might not know what to say.	209	56%
I might offend the unbeliever	105	28%
I might be rejected socially by the unbeliever.	55	15%
Other	39	11%
Are there other reason(s), apart from fear, that might limit you from sharing the gospel?		
I don't know how to answer objections.	133	36%
I do not know how to explain the Gospel.	65	18%
It is not my spiritual gift.	38	10%
Other	53	14%
What phrase best describes your confidence in the truth of the Bible as it relates to telling unbelievers the gospel?		
I believe the Bible is completely true so I do speak with confidence to unbelievers.	161	44%
I believe the Bible is true but I don't know enough about it to speak with confidence to unbelievers.	115	31%
I believe the Bible is true but I'm afraid someone may disagree with me.	41	11%
Other	26	7%

Table 4: Most common methods to share the Gospel

Question	N	%
I normally share the Gospel by doing any of the following (choose all that apply):		
Lifestyle example	288	78%
Praying for others	263	71%
Encouraging others	260	70%
Loving others	251	68%
Verbally communicating the elements of the gospel message	110	30%
Other	199	54%

Table 5: Well-being ratings compared to verbally sharing the gospel monthly or more

Question	Share	Do not share	P-value
Content	4.8	4.5	0.007
Peace	5.0	4.5	0.0004
Joy	5.0	4.4	<0.0001
Purpose	5.3	4.8	0.0001

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