BOOKS I HAVE READ: STORY BEARER

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So much of our training in evangelism stops after we have prepared people to communicate the gospel. However, the best evangelists arenâ€™t necessarily just expert speakers, but expert listeners. Sharing faith is not just about giving great answers, itâ€™s about asking great questions.
Category: Observations

Over the years, I've reviewed a good number of books on this blog and it is not unusual for me to say that lots of people should read a particular book. However, more than any other book that I have read and recommended, Story Bearer: How to Share Your Faith With Your Friends deserves an extremely wide readership. If you are a church leader or a youth worker and you do not read this book and encourage others to do so then, I won't say that you are not doing your job, but I will say that you are making your role far more difficult than it should be. Buy a copy, read it and then pass it on to a friend - even better, buy two copies...

It is a normal format paperback book of around 150 pages and will set you back a little over Â£7 at Amazon. The style is conversational and it is an easy read, though there are a few pages of notes and references at the end for anyone who likes that sort of thing.

So why is it so good? There are a few points that I'd like to highlight:

- It is a culturally sensitive book on personal evangelism, written for the British context today. This is highlighted by the book's insistence of building relationships and telling stories, rather than trying to convince people of propositional truths.
- It is eminently practical. The narrative breaks off at regular points to suggest that you think about an issue and make some notes. It suggests that you need to think through and practice your story, rather than just expect to be able to produce it on a whim.
- The overview of God's story, the Biblical narrative, is as good a short introduction to the Bible as I have read anywhere. It's worth the price of the book on its own.
- Although all of this messing around with stories might sound a bit woolly to some people, traditional values such as repentance and belief are still in there as essentials.
- The book builds on the need to start with God's story, but to show how our own experiences reflect and intertwine with what God has been doing through history. It's as good a practical outworking of the *missio Dei* as I have ever come across.
- Although the book is very positive and encouraging in its tone, it is not nauseatingly so. It is reflective, realistic and quite painful at times.

Did I mention that I reckon that everyone who is involved in a church should read this?

A few quotes:

> *This verse is not telling you to have an answer to any possible question that your mate might*

have about Christianity. It is not demanding you have a sermon prepared on the book of Romans or the history of religion. Peter is asking you to be ready to tell your story. The reason you need is for the hope that you have.

Our culture is crying out for authenticity. At a time when the phrase â€˜fake newsâ€™ is common vocabulary, when we see over 3,500 marketing messages on average every day and public trust in institutions, the media and religion is at an all-time low, we are desperate for what is genuine, true and real. Do not underestimate the power of your authentic story to cut through the counterfeit and speak truth to someone who previously thought religion was something you were born into, not a story or a person that changes lives. Your story of what God has done for you is real, credible and trustworthy. It has the power to make someone stop and rethink their life

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Donald Miller identifies the mistake thousands of businesses make in not hearing where others are coming from: â€˜Customers donâ€™t generally care about your story; they care about their own.â€™2 Our friends are not customers of God and we are not salespeople, but the principle is the same: most people want to tell their story before they hear somebody elseâ€™s.

What both Jesus and Paul demonstrate is that if we are to engage meaningfully with people we must engage meaningfully with culture. To paraphrase the theologian Karl Barth, preachers must hold the newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the other. In our modern world we might say that one should have our Bible app under one thumb and Twitter app under the other. Immersing ourselves in culture is not a new concept for evangelists and missionaries. sixteenth-century Italian missionary Matteo Ricci achieved extra- ordinary success in East Asia, building unprecedented relationships with Chinese philosophers, scientists and emperors. Crucial to his success was his cultural awareness and adaptation.

> *He was famously pictured in local dress, learned the language and used Eastern concepts to communicate the good news. Later missionaries, whether to Amazonian tribes, inner-city slums or middle-class suburbs, would spend years learning languages and customs before engaging in missional activity to ensure it was the most effective and relevant it could be.*

> *But to bind ourselves to Godâ€™s story requires a deep commitment on our part to be continually nourished, influenced and captivated by the Bible story. Reading the Bible is not about academic study, it is not a religiously bound duty to a holy book, it is how we hear the Authorâ€™s voice speaking to us today. It is how we allow the story of God to inspire us, instruct us and infect us with the contagious virus of holiness, truth, hope, love, joy and life itself.Â*

The publishers kindly provided me with a pre-publication electronic edition of this book in return for a review. I have not allowed this generosity to impact my thoughts. It really is very good. That being said, if you want me to be picky, I did get irritated when the author apparently confused perichoresis with choreography - the two words have different roots! /rant over