

The Rim and Tire

Keep the Rubber Side Down series

by Bill Aumack

As an engineer. Don't you love it when I start that way? You're like, Oh no! He's going to talk about math again. As an engineer, you learn to break things down. Complicated things break down into smaller, complicated things. To smaller, to smaller, and eventually it's something I can deal with. Take, for example, your average jumbo jet airliner. I think we'd all agree fairly complicated. But what that is, it's a system of systems, right? And there's a system for the landing gear to bring it up and down and close the doors and sensors to tell whether it's up or down. And that's its own system. And the engines, big, big airline engines, you know, they're huge complicated. But again, it's a system of systems. There's a starting system and a fuel system and a lubrication system. You go inside the plane, you've got the system to call the stewardess. We like that system. We've got the air conditioning system. We have a lighting system. We've got an entertainment system on the seat in front of us. Everybody in the plane is watching a different movie, right? And so you start breaking it down into systems you can understand. And eventually that big complicated thing just becomes a bunch of systems I understand.

And we've been talking about the wheel. Granted a little simpler than your average jumbo jet, but it's a system of systems. Right. And we talked about the hub. It's the center and it's got an axle and some points to connect it to the bicycle frame, and it's got some bearings to help it turn. And in our metaphor, that's represented Christ and this church body keeps a centralized, keeps us go and helps us to turn and make progress. But that's not the whole wheel, right?

We've got the spokes that connect and keep us true and straight. Have you ever ridden a bike where the spokes are out of true and the wheel wobbles? Right? It's kind of hard to ride the bike when the whole thing's wobbling down the street, Right? Those spokes keep a straight and true, but it doesn't work without a rim and the tire.

You need the whole system together. And so that rim holds those spokes in place and it transfers that center movement into a much larger movement so that we can make good progress. Imagine how long it would take to get anywhere if you were a little tiny wheels instead of big wheels, right? The rubber makes it so we have some traction, right? If you're riding around on the rim, it's kind of slippery and sliding. And, you know, you've all we've all watched the police chases and they flatten the tires and when the car gets down on the rim, the chase usually doesn't last too much longer. It's over.

And sometimes we use the term where the rubber meets the road. You heard that? What's that mean? That that means it's where the rubber meets the road. What happens? That's where it becomes real. That's where the theoretical becomes real. You might have an idea for this nifty little gadget you want to make, and sell. The masses are going to buy it at \$29.99, and you're going to make a fortune. But until you actually can mass produce it, get it in stores and get people to spend \$29.99 on it, it's pretty much theory, right? It's not until the masses start buying. It's not until the rubber meets the road that that becomes real. Do you ever had a sleepless night and you watch late night TV and all those infomercials? There's a lot of things out there where the rubber never quite meets the road. I remember watching one one time and I watched it in horror because I couldn't believe it was true. They were selling a basket that you hung right here so that you could put stuff in it as you walked around. I felt like a little 12 year old girl's bike with the tassels and a little basket on it. You know, All I needed was a bell. Ding, ding, ding, ding. I could walk.... Not good. Right. So we need the theory to become real.

And so that's what we're talking about here today at church. And in our metaphor of evangelism and sharing the faith, this is where the rubber meets the road. Because sometimes we come to church and we talk about evangelism and we talk about sharing our faith. And we know the Great Commission go forth and tell everybody. And we read about the disciples telling everybody and rah, rah, rah, and then we go home. Ain't no way I'm doing that! Pastor is nuts if he thinks I'm going to do that! Right? We don't do so well.

And I know I'm early in the sermon and I'm too early to do this, but I'm going to step on a few toes right off the top. I'm going to be blunt. Okay. And I'm talking to me because I have done this. So I'm talking to me. I'm not calling anybody out,

but I'm talking to me. You ever heard somebody say, well, evangelism is not my spiritual gift, right? I have the gift of helps or administration or hospitality or whatever it is. I don't have to do evangelism. Not my gift. Pastor's job, he's the evangelist. That is a line from the father of lies! Not the pastor is an evangelist. Not that part. We're good with that part, but the part that we don't have to do evangelism. It is a lie from the father of lies. Right? You may not be called to stand up at a tent meeting in front of 10,000 people and preach. Fair enough. But we're all called to tell our friends and our neighbors, our children, our family. Right? None of us are exempt from this. We can't get out of it by saying, Oh, I don't have the gift of evangelism. Imagine how ridiculous that would be if we applied it to anything else. If somebody said, You know what? I don't have to administer my bank account because I don't have the gift of administration, we'd say, you're an idiot. You have to take care of your checking account. What if you said I don't have to clean up my house and make people feel nice when they come over. I don't have the gift of hospitality. Really? When someone comes over. What do you do? You clean the house. You clean places where they're not going to go. You will be upstairs scrubbing the shower. Why? People are coming over. Are they going to take a shower? Why are we doing this? Right? So to say that I don't have to do evangelism because it's not my gift is just wrong. All right, so we're done stepping on toes.

Two things I want to share here a little bit to terms we need to learn. One is the unchurched and one is the nones. Not Catholic nuns, but N-O-N-E-S, Zero. Nones. Okay, so the unchurched group this is in our studies that people use. These are people who don't go to church. They don't seem to have any relationship with God or Christ. They don't go to church. They don't attend church. Now, in America, 46% of the unchurched people say they're Christian. Okay, so this doesn't have anything to do with whether you think you're Christian. This is about your activities and whether you go to church or not. Okay? And so they would be Islamic people would be part of the unchurched because they may be very faithful going to their mosque, but they're not going to a Christian church. Right. So we have this group and it's about 46% of the population of America.

Right. Okay. The Nones is a different group. It's like a subset of the unchurched. The Nones are people when they ask them surveys and say, What religion are you? They put none. They self-identify as not having religion. Okay. And so that's

a smaller group. It's about 30% of the population, 29% of the population in the US. So we have the Nones, we have the unchurched. We're talking about them.

And I wanted you to understand the unchurch is a little bigger group. The Nones is a little smaller group. Okay, so two studies, we're going to look at. First one is from Lifeway Research, and they did a survey of 2000 unchurched people, people that aren't going to church. Okay. And this is what they found out. 47% of them say that they would discuss religion freely if someone would talk to them about it.

47% of unchurched people are open to a discussion about religion. 47% Now, we always think that, you know, the Christians are shrinking and maybe they are. We're scared to talk and about 47% want to talk to us. Additionally, 47%, another 31% said they would listen to the discussion. That's 78% of the people, 78% of unchurched people would discuss it or listen to a discussion about religious topics. That kind of sounds like there's people out there that are ready for this. 78%. Okay.

Now, they also said they'd be more willing to listen to it if Christians lived out their faith in public settings. So I encourage you to keep living out your faith.

A third of the unchurched say they admire the faith of their Christian friends. 33% said they admire the faith of their Christian friends. 18% say they were kind of neutral about it. So that's 51% are either neutral or very positive about your faith. These are good numbers for us. These are excellent numbers for us. If we were trying to sell that little gadget you wanted to sell for \$29.99 and we had 78% of the people were interested in it, that would be a huge win. We'd be millionaires. Okay, so this these are good, good numbers for us. Okay. So 33% say they admire the faith of their friends. Some 13% say they give they ignore it. Only 1% says they give their Christian friend a hard time and 1% says they actively try to get their Christian friend to change his faith. Okay. So 2% of the people are the problem children. Just 2%. That's good odds. That's good odds. Okay.

So we could easily say that most of the unchurched folks are willing to talk about faith to their Christian friends, but here's the sad part. 29% say only 29% say that somebody has actually shared faith with them. Only 30%. That means 60% have

never had anybody share their faith when faced with them about the same amount, say 33% say somebody told them the benefits of being in a local church or the benefits of being a Christian. It's four in ten of the unchurched say they never had a Christian explain any of these things to them. 40% of the people have never had a Christian tell them the benefits of being a Christian. Now we're all about evangelism and we give money to places that go out and build radio stations so that people living in the way out beyond the beyond right can hear the news. And that's good. But chances are, if you look at the person that lives on the right side of you, the left side of you and across the street, the two of them have never had anybody tell them about the benefits of being the Christian. We don't have to go to Timbuk3 to find people they don't know about being a Christian. They live right next door. They live right next door. Another study from Pew Research Center was talking about Christians, and that [graphic] has got some small words. Don't worry about the words. Can you see the red line and the grayish line at the bottom? All right. So starting on the left side, 2007 to 2021. Okay. So at the top on the red, you see 78% of the population identified as Christians, 78%. By 2021, it was down to 63%. Okay. So we lost that many people that identify as Christians from 2007 to 2021. That bluish grayish line is the Nones that started out 2007. 16% said they had no religion. Now 29% say they have no religion. So if these keep going the same way, what's going to happen? Right. Those lines are going to cross eventually. Okay.

So we've got an opportunity to make a difference here, right? To change things up a little bit. All right. And so we find ourselves living in a society where the number of Christians are dwindling, the number of nones are growing, and yet the majority of those nones are willing to have a discussion about religious issues. But only one third of Christians ever share their faith. We're not doing a good job. We're not doing a good job as Christians. Okay, So it's not a place we want to be. So let's look and see what the Bible says about this. Open your Bibles with me to the Book of Acts. We're going to look at two different passages, both in the Book of Acts this morning, Acts chapter five versus 17 to 21. We can look at any one of about 100 verses about this, but we've chosen these two for this morning. And if you've been around church at all, you probably are familiar with both of these stories. Acts 5:17 to 21, everybody there?

It says then the high priest and all his associates who are members of the party of the Sadducees were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put

them in the public jail. But during the night, the Angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out to go stand in the temple courts, he said, and tell the people all about this new life. At daybreak, they entered the temple court as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

Okay, now if we read more about this story above and below, there's a whole lot going on. The disciples are talking about Jesus. They've got Jerusalem in an uproar. People are starting to follow these disciples and the priests are filled with what? Jealousy. Why? Because the people are supposed to listen to us. Not to stupid fishermen. I'm the one with a degree. I got my MDiv [Masters of Divinity] from Andrews. They're supposed to be listening to me. I don't have an MDiv from Andrews, by the way. And so they're just throw them in jail. For what? We don't know. For what? We'll figure it out tomorrow. They go home. And that night the angel come lets them out tells the disciples, Go back to the temple courts and tell everybody. In the morning, if we read farther on and that's left for you to read this afternoon, it's a comedy story if you can do little voices in your head. Because the Sadducees come back in and they're all worked up and get those disciples in here and they send the guards to go get them. And the guards go to talk to the guards at the jail. But the disciples aren't in there. They unlock the door and open up, and Ummmm, they were in here. Well, did you let them out? We didn't let them out. We were here all night. It's like a Laurel and Hardy sketch, right? And they have to go back and tell the priest that the disciples aren't in there and everybody's mad. They're arguing and blaming each other, and there's fighting going on.

And then somebody shows up, You know those guys you're looking for, they're in the temple. The priests have a fit. Send the guards to go and get them out of the temple. The guards are now afraid because they don't know what's going on and they don't want to be on the wrong side of whatever's going on. But they've got a job to do. So they go to the disciples. They don't grab them and take them back to the priest. They go to them and say, Can you please come with us? We'd really appreciate it if you'd accompanying us back to go see the priest, because they were scared about the people, about what was going on. They knew those people were locked up and somebody's letting them out and it wasn't them. Okay, so there's a whole lot going on here.

But the part I really want to focus on is that sentence that the angel says, Go stand in the temple courts and tell all the people about this new life. Now, if you're standing in the temple courts, who are you talking to? They are Jews, right? What do we know about the Jews at this time? They were very proud to be Jews, right? Their whole identity is in being Jewish. They can trace their lineage back through their tribe back to Father Abraham. Right. And we've been Jews. And, you know, sometimes you hear people say, well, you know, my mommy and daddy were Catholic and my grandma and grandpa were Catholic and my great grandma and grandpa were Catholic or whatever. Right. Jews could do that for centuries. We come from this line, from this house, from this tribe, and they can trace it back. Jews are God's chosen people. What does that make everybody else? Not God's chosen people. And so I'm, you know, and you're down there and I'm up here because I'm God's chosen people and you are less than. And they openly discriminate against people that aren't Jewish.

And now here come the disciples, and they're standing there in the temple. Go guess what, You've been doing it wrong. There's a new way to do this. And let me tell you about it. Now, how many of those Jews do you think we're interested in that? Man, that's a that's a tough audience, right? That is a tough audience. But the disciples were still making hay. People were still joining them, even in that tough of an audience. And I would dare say that what the disciples were asked to do is way harder than what we're asked to do, where 47% of the people say, Yeah, I talk to somebody about religious issues, religious topics.

So what do we learn from this, is we are not exempt from the command to share our faith because it might be hard. Just because it's hard doesn't exempt you from it. Right?

So think about everything you learned for the first time. It was hard. Ever watch a baby learn to walk? How many times do they fall over? An uncountable number, right? I mean, it's a lot. Hard, but we all managed it. Not too many of us walk around and all of the sudden sit down on our bums anymore. Of course, the older I get, the more that happens. But you know, when you were learning to drive the car, some of us had to learn to drive and the stick shift, that's pretty hard. Some of us that are old, remember that part of your driver's license you had to be able to parallel park the car? I could see some people shaking their head. It was traumatic experience for them, but that was so hard, they don't

make people do that anymore. Okay. But we all learned how to do it. You're not exempt from it because it's hard.

We all have to do it. All right. Let's turn over to Acts chapter 16. Just a few pages over Acts Chapter 16, verses 12 to 15. This is on, I think, their first missionary journey and this is the story of Lydia. Now, we don't know much about Lydia. In fact, it's only in these three verses, four verses. Let's see what we can learn here.

Everybody there? it says. From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony, and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there for several days. So Philippi, the book of Philippians, tie those together. This is in Macedonia, is an area of the world that we now call Turkey. And the significance of this is that Turkey is not in the Middle East. Turkey is in Europe. Right. So the word has now spread out of its homeland of the Middle East and is now moving into Europe. Okay.

So it says, On Sabbath, we went outside the city gate to the river where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message when she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. If you consider me a believer in the Lord, she said, Come and stay at my house and she persuaded us.

All right, so what do we know about Lydia? Not much, right? We assume then, that she didn't have a husband. We don't know if she was divorced or widowed, or maybe she never got married. But she doesn't appear to have a husband because she doesn't have to ask permission of her husband to invite the disciples over which in that day and age she would have had to do. And she doesn't do that. So we assume there is no husband. She's in charge of the house for some reason. We know that she's a dealer in purple. And as you know, purple was the color for royalty. Why? Because it was expensive. Because it was hard to make. Nobody wore a purple coat. You wore a coat with a purple stripe in it because purple was so expensive and so hard to make. And in fact, the way they made it was they collected these little tiny sea snails and they boiled them and got purple. I don't know how much purple. When you boil them, they die and turn

purple. I don't know, whatever. But that's how they get the purple. And in fact, if you go to this region of the world, in some areas, you can still find the mounds of these shells left over from where they were making purple. It was time consuming, it was expensive. It was hard to do.

And so Lydia, as a dealer in purple, what kind of clientele is she dealing with? Rich Right. Higher social, economic standard. So she's moving in these high economic circles, dealing with people that have money. Okay. She probably is making a good living doing this. She probably has a bigger house. She probably has more servants and staff to run her bigger house. Okay. And she's a follower of God. Now, we don't even know really what that means. You know, was she a follower of kind the way the Jewish religion did God? or has she heard about Christianity before? She doesn't appear to be a Jew or a Christian, but somewhere along the line she's learned about God and she was a follower of God. Whatever vagueness that means, we don't know.

Now, what are the disciples looking to do on the Sabbath day? They go to the river and pray, right? They're looking for a spot to pray. They're in a foreign land. There's no temple to go to. There's no house church to go to on Sabbath. So they say, Let's go down to the river and we'll find a spot to pray. And they get down to the river and they find a group of women there. Now, why are the women at the river? I don't know that either. See, there's a whole story, and I don't know anything. Right. They might have been washing clothes, except Lydia would have had somebody to wash her clothes for her. So they could have been there doing chores. Maybe it was a picnic and it was a day out, and the ladies were gathered at the river and, you know, they were doing three legged races and I don't know. Okay, but these women are down by the river and the disciples could have walked past them and said, Oh, well, that's spot is taken. Let's go find another spot where we can pray. And if I'm being dead honest, that's what I would have done. Because once I get the idea in my head, I'm looking for a spot to pray. I would say, Oh, there's people here. I can't pray here. Turn goes somewhere else. I'm like that stupid Roomba vacuum cleaner. You know, you hit a wall. You just.... Okay, well, let's go this way. Okay. But the disciples say no. Let's talk to the women. And Lydia becomes the first documented convert in Europe. The first one that we know about that becomes a Christian in Europe.

What do we learn from this? You never know when the opportunity to share your faith will come. But the disciples did not go out. Let's go find somebody to

convert. Let's go preach, Let's go teach. They were looking for a spot to go pray. But God said, I got this lady, Lydia. She's ready. Go talk to her. And the meeting is arranged and it happens. Okay? And so we have to be ready at all times. We know that Jesus tells us in Matthew 9 that the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

I don't think Paul and company thought they were going to bump into somebody that was a follower of God here. Right. But the harvest is plentiful and some of you may be going, Yes, So what? I'm still scared and I'm still not going to do this because this is hard and I'm scared. I don't know what to do. I tell you what, if you don't know what to do and if you think there's something that would help you out, please talk to Pastor or myself. We will do our best to find out a way to help you. Okay. If there's classes, we could do some kind of training. We could do some kind of resource we could give you. I don't know. But we will do our best to try and help you out so that you can share your faith.

But there's three little steps. And this is not in your notes. You have to write these down. Three steps that I want you to do real quick. Okay. Number one, start with prayer. It's always a good place to start, right? Start with prayer. Pray to God and ask him to help. You know who you should share your faith with. So the first prayer is God, Who should I share my faith with? Second step, pray again and ask God to give you the courage and to know what to say. The first prayer is God Who? Second prayer is God give me courage and what do I say? Third step. Yes. Pray again. And this time ask God to let you know when is a good time. We already know the why we should be doing this. We know why. So ask God to help you with the who, what and the when. God. Who do I talk to? God What do I say? God, when is the right time to say it? And if you pray that prayer, you're going to be like the disciples that are out looking for a place to pray. And you're going to find somebody says, I'm looking to talk about God, and there's going to be opportunities available for you.

So our reflection, Have you been following in Jesus command to share your faith? If you have glory, hallelujah, Praise God, keep doing it. If maybe this is a weak point, this is an opportunity for us to grow a little bit. I'm really excited about our series that starts next month or next week is next month, so love your neighbor-hood. Okay. Not just love your neighbor, but love the whole neighborhood. How are we going to love our neighbors? What are we going to

do? How are we going to share our faith? How can we show love to our neighbors and be a good neighbor?

What's our challenge? Start with prayer and with prayer and sandwich a little prayer in the middle. Okay. Who, what, when? Easy. You can do it. God has faith in you. I have faith in you. Pastor has faith in you. This is something we can do. Amen.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father. Thank you so much for these stories that we have. The show us the way that we can make a difference. Lord, we may be scared. We may be very challenged by this. This is way outside our comfort zone Lord. But just because it's hard doesn't mean we shouldn't be doing it. So, Lord, help us to find the opportunities to share our faith. We ask that you be with us to show us who we should be talking to, help us know what to say and help us know when is a good time to share our faith or be with us this upcoming week. Bring us all back again. In Jesus name, Amen.