

The Shepherds Sharing
Luke 2:8-20

By Dave Urbanski

Someone I know personally is a fitness phenom.

In fact, this person has gone through a life transformation because of a devotion to fitness, and it's certainly a wonder to behold — and admittedly, quite inspirational.

I've also observed this person sharing frequent encouragements on social media for others to get in better shape. These "messages" can be subtle hints, such as photos of healthy meals or nutritious shakes just created — or direct appeals to exercise, such as videos of gym routines finally conquered and how much fitness has been a life-changer ... and "you can do it, too!"

This person's messages certainly have captured my attention. And they've also got me thinking about evangelism — because this person's messages are, in fact, "evangelical" as they pertain to the "gospel of fitness."

But ask yourself: "What is easier? Sharing the gospel of Christ ... or sharing the gospel of fitness?"

I think we all know the answer: It's MUCH easier to share the gospel of fitness. By far!

First off, science tells us that fitness is beneficial. It's a fact. It is beyond dispute. It stands as truth REGARDLESS of how acutely some of us may dislike fitness. And unlike sharing Jesus, no one can shoot back at a fitness evangelical and say, "Prove it to me that I need fitness in my life, and then I'll listen!"

Secondly — and arguably most significantly — sharing the gospel of fitness is not an affront to the hearer's core, moral sense of self. Because when we share the gospel of Christ, we're going way deeper into areas we likely aren't too welcome. We're literally confronting others with the truth that they (and we) — all of us — are sinners. That we've all gone the wrong way. Not just that we're imperfect and need Christ's

perfection to stand in for us in God's eyes — but also, and even more offensive, that we're all morally messed up.

That's the rubber-meets-the-road essence of sharing Jesus. We give the bad news before we tell others about the good news. And because of that, it's not easy to pull off.

It takes big-time guts and conviction for Christians to share with others (indeed, because we love them) that they are hopelessly lost without Jesus and cannot enter heaven after they die based on their own righteousness that's filled with filthy rags. Stack that against sharing with others (indeed, because we love them) that they ought to diet and go to the gym because fitness is crucial; that's easy by comparison and takes zero courage to do.

Nobody wants to hear that he or she is a sinner, obviously. And it's no wonder that proposing such a thing to others can make many Christians wince and hesitate. I know it's certainly a struggle for me; I readily confess that I've tended to keep my mouth shut way more than I've opened it over the course of my life in this respect. I wrestle often with this! I don't want to offend (or more accurately, I'm scared to offend), so I tend to not share.

Now contrast that with what Pastor Don told us from Luke 2:8-16 during our Christmas Day service. He spoke to us about the reaction of the shepherds in the fields who were visited by an angel of the Lord who announced the birth of their Savior followed by a host of angels — likely numbering "10,000 times 10,000" and filling the sky, as described in the book of Daniel — singing praises: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

Not unlike accounts regarding the disciples dropping everything when Jesus called them, the naturally excited shepherds did likewise, leaving their flocks "with haste" to go and find this infant King. Then once they found Jesus in the manger with Mary and Joseph by his side, the shepherds "made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child."

Pastor Don noted that this news surrounding Jesus, and that the shepherds saw him with their own eyes, simply "poured out" of these hardworking laborers. How could it not? They were BEYOND the fear of others. Beyond nervousness about being rejected.

Beyond discomfort over telling others they aren't worthy to enter eternal life with God based on their own merits, their own "good works."

The shepherds were the first evangelists for Jesus, and they had no special training. They weren't given a handout on how to share the "Four Spiritual Laws" – they just WENT, and then they opened their mouths and shared the good news.

Notice also that Luke doesn't say the angel gave the shepherds any instructions to go into Bethlehem or even to SAY anything – all the angel did was share the news with them, and then the angel disappeared. The result? The shepherds couldn't help but share it, too!

And how did folks react to the news from the shepherds? Luke tells us that "all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them."

Pastor Don noted to us that such a reaction is merely one of many possibilities we face today. All of us who've attempted to share Jesus know that opposition to the gospel is alive and well. Perhaps even MORE today! We certainly may experience hostility, anger, ridicule, and rejection.

But ask yourself: How does the notion of maybe experiencing a negative reaction after sharing the gospel compare to the joy you'd feel over even ONE person accepting the gospel? Pastor Don reminded us of the truth that none of us ultimately knows how our sharing will affect those who hear. Maybe folks will be hostile initially – but over time perhaps the scriptural truths we speak will stick with them and convict them later on in life ... maybe in a week, maybe in a month, maybe in a year ... maybe many years later! Perhaps others will not respond in any way we recognize but instead will be impacted greatly, in their hearts and souls, all the same.

Consider Mary's reaction to the shepherds: Verse 19 says she "treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart." The wondrous words of these field laborers quietly comforted the teenage girl God used to bring salvation into the world! That is SIGNIFICANT.

There are countless other POSITIVE possibilities we cannot comprehend that may result from our sharing the gospel. God can do whatever he wants with our efforts! All we have to do is speak and act ... and the rest of it is on the Lord to bring about.

Verse 20 adds that the shepherds then "returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them." How long do you think that lasted? No one can know for sure, but you have to believe they were telling others for awhile after such a world-changing revelation was given to them.

The bottom line, as Pastor Don shared, is that despite the difficulty that sharing the gospel may present — and how unworthy we are to present it — God invites us to be his modern-day shepherds from the fields all the same. They, too, were unworthy. And in truth, no one is "worthy" — to receive or to share. The difference is that the Lord has invited us to do both, so we get to join the party if we want to! Let us, therefore, dispense with any worry over our unworthiness.

Also remember that when we share the gospel, we have NO IDEA how it will impact those who hear our words. Pastor Don reminded us that God can and will use anyone at any time to do anything he pleases. So why not you? Why not me? Why not ... all of us? Our words will have power because of the Lord's power — and he has his own plans for them, and those plans are securely in his hands.

As the New Year approaches, ask yourself if you're willing to open up your mouth like the shepherds did and share the good news of Jesus with others? (I must confess, writing that question just now is personally convicting: I have my OWN doubts as to how willing I am!) If your willingness seems on the weak side — I can relate — let us turn to the Lord and ask him to strengthen our will — and then give us opportunities to share the gospel.

And may it be said of the believers from GraceWay Bible Church — just as it was said of the shepherds that first Christmas — that they just WENT, and then they opened our mouths and shared the good news.