

# **Jeff's Jottings**

## *Stories*

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The print was big and bold, the message dramatic. **Almost Half of Practicing Christian Millennials Say Evangelism Is Wrong.**

At least, that's how the Barna Organization, a well-known Christian research firm (think Gallup with an evangelical lens) interpreted the results of a study it conducted last year and released this week. It certainly caught my attention.

But read more, and the picture becomes a little less clear. The question from which the headline was drawn read like this: "It is wrong to share one's personal beliefs with someone of a different faith in hopes that they will some day share the same faith." Well, then ... that seems like a loaded question. I wonder what the results would have been if there has simply been a period after the word, faith. Especially when, in the same survey, at least 95 percent of respondents in all age groups said yes (strongly or somewhat) to the statement, Part of my faith means being a witness about Jesus.

To be clear: Barna, like most organizations (and most of us as individuals), has a certain frame of reference. They come out of the evangelical, non-denominational Christian world, and they talk with those folks a lot. So take these results in that light.

But don't dismiss them, even if you (like me) don't always like the way they frame their questions. Because lying just beneath these results is something pretty important: how do we acknowledge the place and role of faith, of God, of Jesus, in our lives, whether in actions or in words? If someone asked you, what difference has your commitment to your Presbyterian church made in your life, how would you answer.

At its meetings this year, the Presbytery has been focused on the theme, “Nurturing thoughtful expressions of God’s mission in the world.” In November, Jimmie Hawkins gave us a very explicit “make a difference” lesson, by inviting us to consider the place and role of faith in the public square. In January, Danielle Ayana James provided a deeply relational way to engage others with her six “S’s” ...

1. Where have you been using your STRENGTHS?
2. What has moved in the STATUS of the ministry/ project?
3. What has been a SURPRISE?
4. Where are you feeling STUCK?
5. What is the next STRETCH?
6. What SUPPORT do you need from me?

Next month, master storyteller Rebecca Anderson will help us explore the craft of “telling the stories essential to the church’s life,” true stories that save lives. Stories that help us describe our authentic selves. “*So-what*” stories, I call them — stories that help us name the difference our faith has made in our lives — rather than *so that* stories — ones we tell only to change others.

When somebody in the crowd asked Jesus the first century version of what faith is all about (“Which commandment in the law is greatest?”), Jesus summarized and linked the commandments in a way that had never been done before — love God with everything you are, and love your neighbor as yourself. And then he told a wonderful story to illustrate.

We can tell that story, too, can’t we: a story that centers our affection and our self, first on God and then toward the other. A story with a radical inclination toward the world and people Jesus loved.