

Gospel Snacks

What are “Gospel snacks” you ask? “Gospel snacks” are personal stories one to two minutes in length (no more) that are intended to create spiritual thirst, keep the dialogue going, and demonstrate the relevancy of Christ in the day-to-day areas of our lives. They represent “keeping it real” stories of how God has shown up in tangible, relevant ways since we have come to know Him. Like a custom piece of jewelry, they are interjected into our conversations after we have taken the time to listen and understand which of our “gospel snacks” might best fit in the particular conversation we are having.

In Matthew 5:6 Jesus tells us that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled. It sure would be nice, if we bumped into those kinds of people, everyday. That's not my experience, how about yours? "Gospel Snacks" serve as an appetizer to stimulate their spiritual palate. If so, then less is truly more! That's what I'm finding in my relationships. I need to notice what's going on with others around me, find common ground, ask good questions and listen for the opportunities to share God-stories.

Before I offer my snack, I always ask for permission. I always keep it short (unless they want me to "Biggie Size it") I always relate it to the conversation we are having. When I am walking in this light, I have found that most people thank me for the stimulating conversation and look forward to the next time we can do it again. In "The Message" Proverbs 18:20 says that "Words satisfy the mind as much as fruit does the stomach; good talk is as satisfying as a good harvest."

In “The Message” Proverbs 18:13 says that “Answering before listening is both stupid and rude.” Listening insures that we are not offering unappetizing snacks that are passed over due to the disrespect we demonstrate by offering something that was not asked for, or something that does not relate to the conversation we’ve been having. This coincides with the truth found in I Peter 3:15, 16 which challenges us to always be prepared to share when someone asks you but to do so with gentleness and respect. Let’s apply the big ideas found in these verses to our concept of “gospel snacks”.

If you embrace the idea that effective evangelism starts where people are not where we would like them to be, I think you will find the concept of “gospel snacks” quite filling. I stumbled onto the idea several years ago in my work with Athletes in Action (the sports ministry of Campus Crusade). For many years, one of my roles in AIA’s ministry was to walk athletes through the process of writing their testimony of how they came to know Christ. While I still see the value in this, I began to realize that in most conversations we have with not-yet Christians, the testimony can be more than the conversation, or the person is ready for. It also might not address the needs of the person we are talking to. If we are not careful, the testimony can become our spiritual monologue.

In “The Message” Proverbs 25:11a says the right word at the right time is like a custom-made piece of jewelry.” My wife tells me that women enjoy jewelry parties because they offer the opportunity for women to make something that has the right look, color, and feel to match the outfits they already own. “Gospel snacks” offer the same opportunity

when we learn how to share the right God story at the right time rather than a one size fits all piece of jewelry, which is often what a testimony can become.

Frequently at our house during the dinner hour the following question is often asked; “what was your favorite part of the day”? My boys, (David age 7, and Jonathan age 5), usually respond with the typical answers. As you might have guessed recess is still a big hit, gym class never fails, and computer games are huge, but snack time hits the highlight charts most often. Is it any wonder that our culture has “snack-itis” that strange ailment that strikes people at different times of the day causing them to run to a vending machine, deposit the appropriate amount of money, in hopes that a quick fix will take care of the munchies? Look around, our culture is inundated with snack offerings. We have snack (gas) stations to make our trips more pleasant, snack bars that satisfy those snack attacks at the movie theatres, snack carts that insure golfers will make it through their round of golf, and isle after isle of snacks at the local grocery store. Our culture has become so sophisticated about snacks that we have come up with other names like munchies, goodies, and my favorite: “appetizers.”

You would think in this “snack-crazed” culture that the Christian community could not possibly miss the obvious. Most people love a good snack! Unfortunately, as I interact with the people who come to the workshops I do on, “Irresistible Evangelism,” most Christians admit that when someone shows the least bit interest in the faith, we don’t offer snacks, but a full blown smorgasbord. Small inquiries get “Biggie Sized” answers. All the not-yet-Christian was looking for was a snack, but they got the full meal deal instead. In a day and age of information overload where people are weary of words, sales pitches, and info-mercials, we need to make some paradigm shifts in the ways we export the faith to others or we will continue to contribute to the, “talk to the hand because I’m not listening,” kind of responses that dominate the evangelical landscape.

In a snack crazed culture, being a Christian vending machine might actually make sense. Let's grab a snack and talk about it sometime.

Preparing Your Snacks

Always being prepared seems like an integral part of being a worker in God’s Kingdom. Being ready in season and out of season demonstrates a commitment to make the most of our opportunities which is what we are urged to do in Colossians 4:5. Preparation usually requires a process! I have noticed that when this idea is presented to some in the body of Christ, they revolt. Those who resist the notion of preparing for anticipated gospel conversations, do so because they prefer “winging it in the power of the Holy Spirit”. There is certainly enough scriptural evidence to indicate that the Holy Spirit will do this through us, but arguably this should be the exception, not the norm. Two of the fruits of the spirit are discipline and self-control. James 1:6 assures us that the Holy

Spirit will grant us the wisdom we need in our preparation. so that you might articulate what He has done in our lives in ways that others might understand (See Colossians 4:4).

So, let's get started! You might find the following recipe helpful in preparing your "gospel snacks" However, some of the best snacks I've eaten were created by someone who deviated from the recipe. So tweak the ingredients how ever you'd like; the end product is what we are after.

I have found that preparing "gospel snacks" happens best when created together with others. Your community provides accountability, a sounding board, and a jump-start to the creative process. I usually begin by asking each person in the community to share a specific area of their life that has been touched by God in some tangible way. I go around the circle until the group's well starts to run dry. This usually takes a while but the end result is a huge list of God stories. These usually bring to mind other stories later on and they always serve to encourage everyone in the process. (See sidebar for an example) After the large group experience, I encourage each person to find their own kitchen (a quiet place) where they can begin to prepare their snacks for consumption.

I've found that many older Christians need help in recalling stories from the past. Scrapbooks, photo albums, journals, diaries, or anything else that would stir up these memories can be helpful. Jot down the powerful memories of how God has changed you. Be mindful of the stories that you share already when you talk about your faith journey. If you have been a Christian all of your life, or do not have many non-Christian friends, get help from your Christian friends who have had strong conversion experiences. They will be able to sort through the parts of your story that might best connect with other not-yet Christians.

Working your way through the following questions will also help you identify ingredients God would have you add to the mix when preparing your "gospel snacks".

1. How would your family and friends describe your life before God showed up?
2. What prevailing patterns of thought characterized your life before you came to know God ?
3. How did you attempt to meet the needs in your life apart from God?
4. Did you have any strong drives that served as motivating forces in your life before you became a Christian?
5. Where did you find your sources of identity before you encountered the Bread of Life?

6. What or who did God use to awaken you to your need for Him?
7. What mental struggles, doubts, fears, etc. did you have about making a commitment to Christ?
8. When and how did you make your commitment to Christ? (Be specific!)
9. What caused you to know for sure that a spiritual rebirth had taken place in your life?
10. What kinds of “A-ha’s do you remember when you were awakened to God’s reality?
11. Jot down the changes that God began to bring about in your attitudes, actions, and your appetites?
12. As you look back over your journey to faith what misconceptions did you have about God and His people?
13. Are there any scripture verses or quotes that God has used to leave a lasting impression on you?
14. What life lessons do you feel like God has taught you along the way?
15. Is there one particular experience in your walk with God that left an immediate but lasting impression?

After you finish this process, it’s time to serve your snacks. The following ideas are meant to help you serve them in the most appetizing way. Your community offers a safe place to start. Take turns sharing your “gospel snacks”. Critique, give feedback, what connected, what didn’t, how long was it, etc. This will help people grow in their confidence and competence both of which are needed if people are going to start offering their snacks for daily consumption in their conversations. I have found that those who prepare most, share most because they have an array of snacks to offer.

Serving Your Snacks

1. Share your stories with confidence, and a warm friendly smile. No one can deny your experience!
2. Look the person you are speaking with, in the eyes when you are sharing. The Bible tells us that the eyes are the windows of the soul. If you are constantly looking at the floor or over their heads, it might call into question your confidence in the message you are sharing.

3. These are your “God stories,” so being genuine is essential. Share them in your normal, everyday tone of voice.
4. Make sure your language is understood or don't use it. Terms like born again, saved, washed in the blood, repented, etc. are often misunderstood by those who don't know Christ.
5. Remember this communication principal: First, there is what you said. Second, what you meant by what you said. Third, what each person heard you say. And most importantly, what each person took it to mean. If people are consistently ending up with the wrong message it might be time to get back in the kitchen again.
6. This is not a "preachimony" or an opportunity to get on your soapbox for God. Keep the focus on your life, and on what God has done. Be concise, if it takes more than two minutes go back to the kitchen and carve your meal into a snack sized proportion.
7. Never, never, never make negative statements about churches, denominations, or other people. The idea is to keep the spotlight on what God has done, not on the inconsistencies of His followers.
8. Be honest about your experience, but avoid glorifying your past or exaggerating details to make the life of a Christian seem problem free or completely fulfilled. Keep it real or keep it to yourself!
9. Ask God to give you wisdom about the timing of interjecting your story into a conversation and if you need to adapt any illustrations or language that might help you relate better to the person you are speaking with.
10. When you go to a party it's pretty easy to figure out which snacks are good or not. Look for the empty bowl. It's not quite that easy when you share your “gospel snacks” with others. The only way you will truly know if you connected is to ask if what you said made sense. You might go a step further by asking them to share in their own words what they thought they heard you say.

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