

20 YEARS OF SJI AND SOME GOOD HABITS

Andy Frost

ANDY FROST REFLECTS ON WHAT SHARE JESUS INTERNATIONAL HAS ACHIEVED AND, DRAWING FROM HIS NEW RESOURCE ON CULTURE, PROVIDES SOME QUESTIONS TO HELP US THINK THROUGH THE HABIT OF FAITH SHARING.

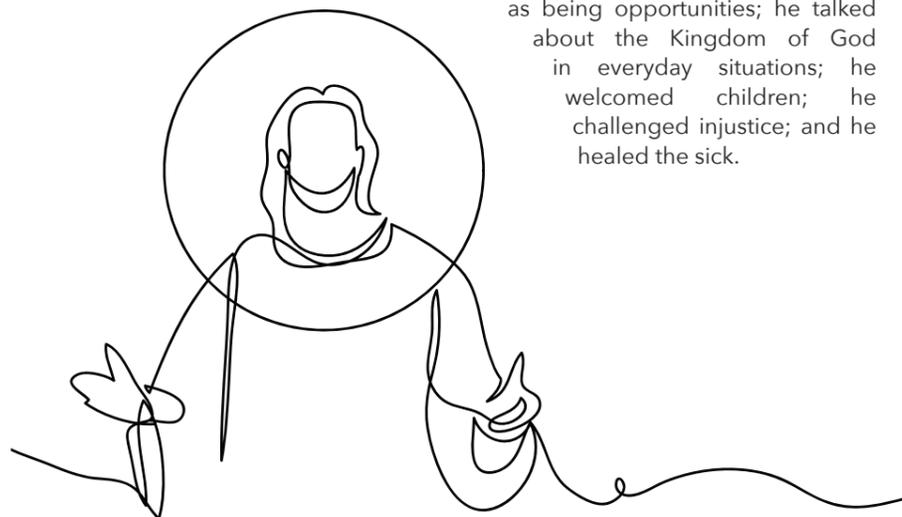
Twenty years! It is amazing to look back at what God has done over the last 20 years through Share Jesus International. There are the touring productions; the big festivals and events; the short term missions and intern programmes; and the multitude of resources and training programmes.

I became the director of Share Jesus after my father's death in 2007 and it's been a rollercoaster of a journey. As a small charity we often punch above our weight. And as we reach 20 years, it's given me a moment to reflect on the impact Share Jesus International has had.

It's often hard to measure impact. In local churches we often measure the A's, B's and C's - the attendance, the buildings and the cash flow, but these don't necessarily measure the D, discipleship. And in the third sector, we can look for similar measurable indicators. But as I look back on 20 years I don't just want to measure the size of our events or the sales of resources but ultimately how we

have sought to listen to God and see the Great Commission fulfilled.

This is much harder to measure because it is measured best in stories. I think of a recent conversation with a church leader whose faith came alive when she had her first taste of mission as a teenager. I think of a recent letter in which an evangelist shared how his time with us shaped his understanding of mission. I think of an email from someone who has joined our online Lent prayers this year who has been encouraged to keep sharing their faith even in these challenging times. These stories reveal that perhaps our greatest achievement as a charity has been helping to model what faith sharing look likes today.



CULTURE

As I've been reflecting on this, I have also been writing about culture and how we create a culture of faith sharing in the local church. We often talk about vision in church circles but as the adage goes 'culture trumps vision'.

Culture is often defined as the ideas, customs and social behaviour of a particular people or society. In the story of the early church, there was a clear vision, to make disciples. However on top of that, Jesus had created a culture with his disciples that enabled them to blossom. He had modelled a way of life. Just think about the way Jesus shared life with his apprentices - he valued relationship over itineraries; he took time to share meals; he saw interruptions as being opportunities; he talked about the Kingdom of God in everyday situations; he welcomed children; he challenged injustice; and he healed the sick.

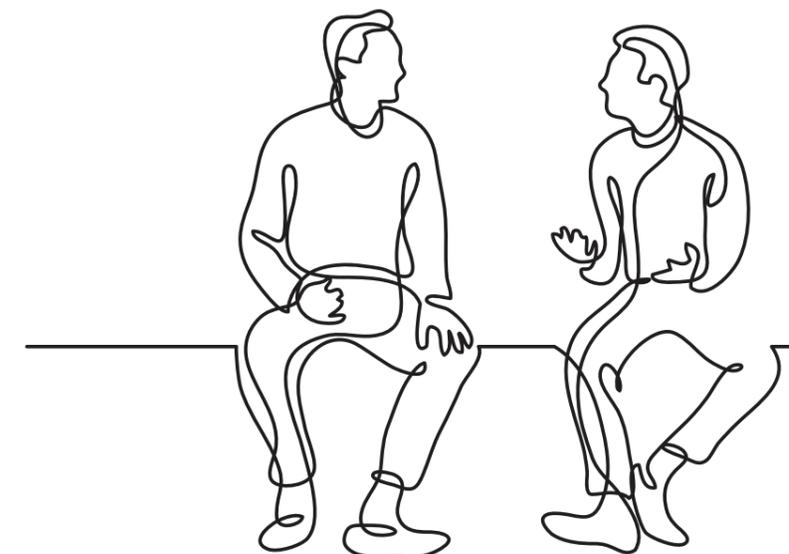


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The culture Jesus created was one of real freedom and learning for his disciples. He frequently took his disciples to one side to explain his parables and what was happening. He took risks on his disciples, sending them out in pairs on their first mission together with clear instructions. He modelled to them how to pray, giving them the Lord's Prayer as a template to engage with God.

Specifically, we can look at Jesus' relationship with Peter. Jesus called Peter out of the boat to walk on the water to him. Jesus rebuked Peter when he'd misunderstood what was going on. And after Peter's denial, Jesus cooked fish for Peter on the beach and asked three times, "Do you love me?" A beautiful picture as Jesus reinstates Peter. It's no wonder that it was Peter who got up to preach on the day of Pentecost.



turning on the radio as soon as we get in the car. Much of the time we are acting on autopilot. Interestingly COVID-19 had disrupted many of our habits and is partly why people have felt so disorientated when their normal rhythms of life are not possible. A habit is basically three things:

CUE ~ ACTION ~ REWARD

Before COVID-19, one of the most basic examples was that of the handshake. We meet someone new. That was the cue. We reach out a hand. That was the action. We shake hands. The reward was a sense of connection.

To unpack the concept of habit further, the cue is the prompt that leads us to an action. Charles Duhigg, in his book *The Power of Habit*, outlines that most common cues fall into five categories. Firstly, they can be a place. When you walk into your lounge, you may often sit in the same seat and when you sit at your desk, you might automatically fire up your laptop. Secondly, they can be a specific time of day, such as brushing your teeth just before you go to bed or saying grace just before a meal.

The culture that Jesus created was powerful - it was able to serve the vision of the early church and to see the world turned upside down. But the question is: How do we create this kind of a culture in our churches today? How do we help ourselves and our congregations to share Jesus?

HABITS

Culture is shaped by shared habits, the things that we do subconsciously. Social scientists believe that almost 40% of everything we do isn't a result of a decision but a result of habits.

We all have habits, whether it is a coffee first thing in the morning or

Thirdly, cues can be connected with other people. When I am with my children, by habit, I walk more slowly and when I am with my Polish friends, by habit, I slow my speech. Fourthly, they can be an emotional state. This is most commonly linked to negative emotions, so that when you feel tired in

the afternoon, we reach for a chocolate bar or when we are feeling fed up, we might indulge in some retail therapy.

Finally, the cue can be a preceding behaviour or action. For example, when your phone pings with a text message, the action is the preceding behaviour. You take your phone from your pocket but now your phone is in your hand, it acts as a cue to check Twitter and scroll through the latest news headlines.

In habits, the cue always provokes an action. That action can be as simple as smiling when someone smiles at us or as complex as reflecting on childhood memories when we smell a certain aroma reminiscent from childhood. Many of the actions I have used as illustrations are physical, but cues can also provoke mental or emotional actions too.

Then there is the reward. You somehow feel better having completed the action. Your teeth feel clean; the coffee gives you a burst of caffeine; the endorphins make the run worthwhile; you feel proud having received affirmation or you feel connected having hugged your grandchild.

It is this reward that helps to embed the habit into your life. It reinforces this behaviour. Your brain discerns that if this cue and action create this reward, then it is worth remembering for next time. The habit becomes part of your life.

Habits are powerful. When they emerge, the brain stops having to participate fully in every decision and lots of life is lived on autopilot. Just to point out here, there are obviously good habits but there are also bad habits!

One of the key ways in which we can change culture is by creating new habits. And as we look through the Gospel narratives, we discover Jesus had habits.

When a question (cue) was asked, he would often tell a story (action) and leave the listener challenged/ comforted (reward).

When a need was presented (cue), he would heal (action) and the person would be made whole (reward).

When he was busy (cue), he would take time out to pray (action) and would know what the Father was doing (reward).

So, here's my challenge; as I reflect on 20 years of Share Jesus, I am thrilled by the stories of people who have been encouraged and equipped to share their faith in so many different ways. I long to see the Church become better equipped to share Jesus. As we emerge from lockdown, I think we have an opportunity to create some new habits in our church families that will help us shift the culture in our churches and become more missionally engaged.

QUESTIONS

And so I leave you with for questions to think through:

- What habits do we need to create with our churches to disrupt the culture we have and to become more evangelistic?
- What are the cues that we need to be looking out for?
- What are the appropriate actions?
- And what is the reward for sharing our faith?

Andy Frost has been the Director of Share Jesus International since 2008, leading scores of projects including the Ekklesia conference. At the heart of all that he does, he wants to help people follow Jesus. He is married to Jo and has two daughters.



WE HAVE A GOSPEL TO PROCLAIM

Edward Joseph Burns (b. 1938)

We have a gospel to proclaim.
Good News for all throughout the earth;
the gospel of a Saviour's name:
we sing his glory, tell his worth.

Tell of his birth at Bethlehem -
not in a royal house or hall,
but in a stable dark and dim,
the Word made flesh, a light for all.

Tell of his death at Calvary:
hated by those he came to save,
in lonely suffering on the cross,
for all he loved his life he gave.

Tell of that glorious Easter morn:
empty the tomb, for he was free.
He broke the power of death and hell
that we might share his victory.

Tell of his reign at God's right hand,
by all creation glorified.
He sends his Spirit on his Church
to live for him, the Lamb who died.

Now we rejoice to name him King:
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.
This gospel-message we proclaim:
We sing his glory, tell his worth.

