

Little, Paul E. *How to Give Away Your Faith*, rev. ed. Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1988. 192pp. \$12.00

Most Christians would agree that sharing one's faith through witnessing is an essential part of the Christian life. Christians who desire to be faithful in sharing the gospel must be properly and thoroughly equipped for the work. Paul Little, in the revised edition of his classic work *How to Give Away Your Faith*, seeks to bring to light many of the topics and difficulties involved in effective Christian witnessing. The purpose of the work is to answer the questions, "How can we witness? How can we explain clearly to this world that Jesus Christ is a right and relevant solution today? On what grounds can we approach those who touch our lives and expect to be heard – and believed (21)?" This brief review of *How to Give Away Your Faith* will evaluate whether Little accomplished his task of equipping the reader to give his faith away.

Summary

Although implicit, Little divides *How to Give Away Your Faith* into three major divisions. The first major division, chapters one and two, cover the call and character of Christian witnessing. The second division, chapters three through seven, discuss in detail the content, defense and practice of witnessing. The final division includes chapters eight through ten, where Little lays a foundation for Christian *living*, which is the ground upon which our testimony will be evaluated by a skeptical and watching world. The evangelist's life must give evidence to the hearer that the gospel being proposed is real, relevant and worthy to be believed in.

In his first division, Little begins his work by reminding the reader that in order to be an effective communicator of Christianity, one must be a Christian. He clarifies the essential "ingredients" for genuine faith (29) after dispelling what many think to be faith, but turn out to be nothing more than indoctrination and/or conformity to one's cultural environment. Believing facts is not enough and there are no halfway Christians (32). Little goes on to define witnessing as "that deep seated conviction that the greatest favor I can do for others is to introduce them to Jesus Christ (36)." Christians are Christ's ambassadors, appointed to be his messengers. An

ambassador is to be enthusiastic (37), transparent (39), and courageous (41) when sharing with others about God. God's children are to be "true diplomats" and serious about representing Christ, who is the Evangelist (20).

The second division of Little's work begins with eight pragmatic suggestions on how the reader can share his faith. These are based on Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well in John 4. Little then seeks to prepare his readers to "hurdle" social barriers that might otherwise hinder gospel proclamation. Barriers covered include language (73, 82) humor (77), public prayer (78), entertainment (79) and peer pressure (80). The content of the gospel is outlined in chapter five, which is arguably the most important of the book. Little defines the gospel as "Jesus Christ himself" (88) and proceeds to unpack this definition by explaining Jesus' person, work, death and resurrection. Several Scripture guidelines are given to help the reader faithfully present Jesus Christ as the good news (96-97). Little then equips the reader to respond with integrity to eight common questions "thinking" unbelievers may ask before they place their confidence in Jesus. This division of the book ends by demonstration that Christ is relevant today regarding emptiness (135), purposelessness (136), fear of death (138), inner peace (141), loneliness (142) and self-control (143).

The final section of *How to Give Away Your Faith* covers some of the basics of the Christian life, beginning with a discussion on worldliness. If the life of the evangelist is no different than the unbeliever's, the message of change that is proclaimed will be nullified by the lack of evidence in the evangelist's life. However, if the evangelist's life gives ample evidence of holiness (146), i.e. change brought about by God, then there is now an existential ground upon which the unbeliever can trust the gospel message. Little builds on this by explaining what a life looks like when it is lived by faith (163). When the evangelist lives life by faith, he is confident in God's saving provision, giving additional evidence to an unbeliever that the gospel is real. The book concludes with a discussion on spiritual disciplines, which gives further evidence of a changed life as well as serving as an important part of empowering one's practice of evangelism (190).

Critical Evaluation

There is good reason why there are one million copies of *How to Give You Faith Away* in print. It is written for a wide audience of Christians who desire to take their faith seriously, but

have not been introduced to theology proper. The work, therefore, is written in a succinct manner and avoids theological terminology. For an example, rather than giving a lengthy technical definition for the act of witnessing, Little defines witnessing as a deep seated conviction to introduce Jesus Christ to others (36). This definition could be criticized for being too reductionistic, not taking into consideration the spirit, content, power and purpose of evangelism. However, Little does not forsake these essential components, but contextualizes them for his intended audience. Little speaks of compassion as the spirit of evangelism (19), provides the content of the Christian's message (Chapter 5), explains that the Holy Spirit does the work (57, 84, 127) and that the sole purpose is to bring glory to God (153). Little knows his audience and he knows well how to communicate to the reader.

Little effectively uses Scripture and concrete examples to support or explain how the reader is to be a witness. Though his work is practical, it is not pragmatic. He allows Scripture to inform his methods of sharing the gospel rather than the other way around. Little reminds us that we are to follow the methods of Christ (20, 50), for the Lord guides us by his example (1 Peter 2:21). This is in contrast to many contemporary books on evangelism that focus merely on the methods of sharing one's faith.

Another distinguishing mark of *How to Give Away Your Faith* is Little's commitment to call Christians to *be* a witness in all of life, both in word and deed. Little desires the Christian's life as a whole to be a credible witness, not just the act of sharing a few bible verses to an unbeliever. It was refreshing for an evangelism author to distinguish between what Christians *do* and who they *are* in Christ (58, 87-88). Not only this, but Little spends a great deal of his work encouraging the reader to be thoughtful to apply and defend the whole gospel in every situation. His chapter on why we believe was outstanding and deserves careful reading.

Due to fact that *How to Give Away Your Faith* was first written in the mid-sixties and the revised edition in the late eighties, some of his examples are clearly dated and are not as relevant to contemporary society. Though the examples are dated, the principles given to overcome social barriers still stand. Little tells the reader, "to get close enough to gain a hearing for the message of reconciliation through Jesus Christ" and "Do not condemn the other person and do not compromise your own convictions (74-75)." Contemporary readers will acknowledge the dated material, but can still apply these principles into their own context.

Given the wide scope of the intended audience, it would have been advantageous of the author to expand his examples beyond that of student life. It is clear that Little's immediate context is the University. However, a good number of life situations were completely overlooked. Readers desire to know how they can share the gospel to their lost family members and co-workers. It would have been a tremendous help and would have widened the influence of the work if Little took the time to speak to these situations.

A reader might be tempted to conclude that chapters eight through ten are not cohesive to the first two-thirds of the book. Although this is not true, it would have been beneficial for Little to have explicitly stated his purpose for this last part of the book. The reader must make the connection that holiness, living by faith and exercising daily spiritual disciplines throughout all of life play an important part in sharing one's relationship with Christ. As mentioned before, too often Christians think of witnessing as only sharing a few bible verses to unbelievers. The Christian life is one of word and deed. Being holy and living by faith through all the mundane tasks of life build a consistent, daily, often-silent witness before a watching world. The way we live will validate for the hearer whether or not the gospel has merit. Let the reader be reminded that our actions often speak louder than our words.

Conclusion

Overall, Little accomplishes the task he set out to achieve. He explains with clarity how one can witness, how Jesus Christ is relevant today and on what grounds we can approach others and expect to be heard. This work truly is a tremendous help in witnessing. In spite of a few outdated examples, readers who desire to be faithful witnesses to Jesus Christ will be well equipped for the task upon their completion of *How to Give Away Your Faith*.