



WORKTALK WEEKLY

20 SEPTEMBER 2010

Welcome to WORKTALKweekly

In Between Times 15: Qualification

Do you know what you are talking about?

I am going to introduce you to an 'in between time' which flags up an apparent contradiction. At the heart of the story lies a question 'How long does it take to know what you are talking about?' Of course there are number of 'it depends' built into the answer - it depends on the subject - it depends who you are - it depends how much time you can devote the subject - and so on.

When you look at whatever job you are doing, how long do you think it has taken, or will take you, to become competent, or even an expert in your field? Given that there is always more to learn, it is quite possible that you can come up with some key rites of passage, which you can point to, as significant in your qualification process.

There is another factor which has to be taken into account in human journeys, namely, that it is possible to say accurate and knowledgeable truth about your subject way before you know what you are talking about. Sometimes you can articulate information without realising the full meaning of that information. So you can appear to know what you are talking about, but in fact do not.

Far more common is the experience of thinking that you know what you are talking about and realising later that what you said was inaccurate in the light of subsequent learning.

What about when it comes to matters of the Christian faith? How long does it take before you can speak with authority and knowledge to anyone about the queen of disciplines: theology? How long before you can be trusted to teach accurately?

Here is the contradiction. From the moment you become a Christian, you are encouraged to share your faith with others - inviting them to come on the same meaningful journey. Yet you are advised not to presume to be a teacher and to learn to handle the Word of God well.

One of the first people to be trusted with explaining the Christian faith to significant numbers of people was Saul of Tarsus, later named Paul. Although he testified to his experiences as soon as he became a follower of Jesus of Nazareth, he knew his big task was to understand and interpret the Christian message for the non-Jewish world. The method would be via great journeys of teaching, covering long distances. That was to be his vocation.

So how long was it before he knew what he was talking about enough to do that? The best estimates of the time between his Damascus road spiritual revolution and his first teaching road trip is 14 years.

He was already a religious expert and lawyer before his change, he was already a scholar and learner, but he was not let loose until 14 years later. He had worked in smaller, local contexts, he had undertaken some exploratory journeys, but he was not commissioned to go on the road till he was ready.

What was he doing for 14 years? According to him, he was receiving revelation from Jesus Christ. He was learning the heart of the Nazarene's message, he was figuring out the pure

content, so he could learn to customize the formats for various audiences.

Paul learnt that the Christian message was both simple and complex. It was fixed and flexible - it contained non negotiables as well peripherals. He was learning that to present something well, he needed to have a sophisticated understanding of the intricacies of the wisdom, so he could distil that wisdom into accessible nourishment for hungry souls.

He was learning how to illustrate his themes with relevant concepts which integrated with the central truth. He was learning how to handle tough questions and make good points. He was learning how to apply the powerful energy of God to his own confused human nature and live with thorns in his body while recommending peace to his fellow travellers.

He was learning what mattered and what did not - so he could rant against a practice if he thought it was being used as a substitute for trusting Jesus, yet practise that same thing, if he felt it would help people listen to Jesus.

It takes enormous skill to be able to do this and I have only touched on his toolkit here.

So what can you take from this? First, the fact that it takes time to be good at anything worthwhile. If you are in such an 'in between time', don't resent it or attempt to shorten it. It takes years to be good, qualified, or expert in any field.

Second, if, like Paul of Tarsus, you want to communicate the Christian message powerfully, then it takes time to learn how to do that. I, for one, I am tired of suffering under the words of sincere, but unskilled messengers in pulpits or media platforms, or online who simply haven't done the time necessary to articulate the faith well. So Christianity gets hijacked by the latest social or political cause and harnessed to the wrong manifesto.

More positively, it is an absolute delight to hear or read a well-crafted, skilled apologia for the complex, intricate and sophisticated legacy of wisdom left us by the Nazarene teacher. If you think I am being esoteric, remember it took Paul 14 years to figure it out, so who are any of us to attempt to short-circuit the process?

Paul's expressions were not contained in his first blog to the Corinthians or his Tweet to the Romans (even though I am in favour of blogs and Tweets). There is a challenge before of us all to do the hard yards of becoming equipped in whatever field we serve.

Unless, of course, I don't know what I am talking about.

In between now and the next WORKTALKweekly, do feel free to email us your thoughts to wtw@worktalk.gs or leave a comment on our [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#) profile. You can also visit our [YouTube](#) channel - get inspired and share the Worktalk's vision with others.

Work well
Geoff Shattock

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BIBLE SECTION

Acts 9:30

30When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

Acts 13:1-3

1 In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. 2While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

Galatians 1: 12

12 I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

Galatians 1: 20

20 I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. 21Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. 22 I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ.

Galatians 2: 2

2I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain.

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