

Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Session 6

Podcast Audio Overview

Evangelism and Introduction

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So you want to learn more about evangelism in the book of Acts? Well, I do. We dug into lectures, Bible passages, even personal stories. Yeah, to give you the need-to-know stuff.

We've got excerpts from Dr. Craig Keener's lectures. Oh, he's a leading scholar on Acts. Yep.

Get ready to see how those early Christians spread their message. What they can teach us today. And what it all means for sharing your own beliefs.

You know, whatever they are. One thing that stands out... Yeah. ...is that the early church didn't have like a one-size-fits-all approach to evangelism.

Right, like no social media templates or anything back then. Exactly. So Dr. Keener really emphasizes that diversity of approaches.

Like you wouldn't use the same pitch at a science conference that you would at a poetry slam, right? Exactly. Context is key. Yeah.

And he brings up a good point about the balance between what he calls clergy-led initiatives. Oh, okay. And whole-body ministry.

So not just the pastors doing the work, but the entire community. Yeah. Everyone has a role to play.

Right. Whether it's sharing their faith or something else they're passionate about. Okay, now this is where it gets really interesting.

Okay. Networks. Yeah.

Dr. Keener talks about how early Christians used, you know, existing systems like synagogues, public forums, to spread their message. Smart. Use what's already there.

Right. But they were also masters at leveraging what we might call today relational networks. Yeah, think about it.

No Facebook ads back then? No. In a world without mass communication. All right.

Thank you. Personal connections were everything.

Everything. So it wasn't just about preaching from a pulpit. It was about living it out in those everyday interactions.

Exactly. And then they were strategic about it too. Oh, yeah.

Dr. Keener explains how they tapped into those existing social structures. Oh. Like the Roman patron-client relationship.

Okay, so for our listeners, that means, you know, individuals with higher social standing. Yeah. Provided support and resources to those below them.

And in return, they gained loyalty and access to a wider network within the community. Brilliant. Pretty clever, huh? It would.

There are no megaphones, no internet. Yeah, but they still created this ripple effect. Right.

And Dr. Keener argues that these principles still apply today. Oh, for sure. I mean, we have our own networks, right? Yeah, absolutely.

Family, friends, online communities. It's all about understanding the power of connection. Think about your book club.

Oh, yeah. Or an online gaming group. Even just catching up with family at a barbecue.

These are all potential networks where your personal story can lead to some, you know, meaningful conversations. Court groups too. Yeah.

Imagine someone sharing how their faith has helped them through a tough time. Right. In the right context, that can be powerful.

Really powerful. Because it's authentic. It's not some canned speech.

It's real. Yeah, it's real life. Now, let's talk about something that just blew my mind.

Power evangelism. Ah, yes. The healings, the miracles, the dramatic... Spectacle.

Displays of God's power in the Book of Acts. Yeah, but it's not like every prayer was answered with a lightning bolt from heaven, right? Right. It was more like a glimpse into what's possible.

A foretaste of God's power. More like a sneak peek of what's to come. Yeah.

Offering hope, reminding people that even in the midst of suffering, there's something bigger at play. Okay, but those stories, I mean, they would have been huge back then, right? Oh, absolutely. They're at the market, and you hear that someone was cured of blindness.

Word would spread like wildfire. That's going to make you think twice. Yeah.

Especially in a world without the constant information overload that we have today. Totally different context. Yeah, and Dr. Keener shares this personal story that really brings this concept home.

Oh, okay. He was praying for this woman named Mabel Cooper, who had a painful knee condition. So he prays for her, and her knee is healed.

Just like that. Wait, really? That's how he tells it. And then Mabel asked Dr. Keener to pray for her lungs.

Oh, wow. Because she was worried about having lung cancer. So this is getting serious now.

It was a serious situation. Yeah. It led to this deep conversation about faith.

Oh. And eternity. And Mabel decides to follow Jesus.

Wow. So he prayed for her healing, and according to him, she never coughed up blood again. Wow.

The doctor later said she didn't have lung cancer after all. Okay, so this wasn't just about physical healing. Right.

It was like a gateway to something deeper. Exactly. Yeah, not about showing off, but showing something beyond ourselves.

It's about pointing people to Jesus, not just focusing on the miracle itself. But not every story is a miracle, is it? No, definitely not. Dr. Keener also talks about God orchestrating these situations for evangelism in more subtle ways.

Sometimes it feels like God's a screenwriter, setting the stage for these incredible encounters. Like with Cornelius? Yes. The Roman centurion, and Peter, one of Jesus' disciples.

Yeah, they both have these separate visions. That led to Peter sharing the gospel with Cornelius. Yeah, and his entire household.

Talk about a divine setup. Wow. It makes you wonder if we're missing those divine cues all the time.

Right. It's like God's leaving these breadcrumbs, and we just need to be paying attention. Right.

It reminds me of this time we were having a casual church picnic. Okay. And out of the blue, this young woman comes up to me.

Yeah. And asks how to be saved. Wow.

And her brother wanted to know too. Wow, what a moment. It was like God had planned it perfectly.

Sometimes the most powerful moments happen when we're just open to God's leading and available to those around us. So be ready to share your story, even in those unexpected places. Absolutely.

Now let's shift gears a bit and talk about this idea of evangelism through lifestyle. Okay. What Dr. Keener calls a living testimony.

So actions speak louder than words. In a way, yes. In the book of Acts, people were drawn to the faith, not just by the miracles and the preaching.

Right. But by the way, the early Christians lived. Their lives were a testament to their beliefs.

Right. They were known for their love, their generosity. Yeah, even sharing their possessions.

Acts 2:47 talks about how people were being saved daily. Wow. Because they saw something different.

Yeah, something different, something real. In these believers. And it echoes Jesus' own words, you know, by this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

So it's not just about going to church. It's about being the church. Yeah, being the embodiment of your beliefs.

And that's a powerful message in any era. Right. But these early Christians were also strategic.

Oh yeah. About where they focused their efforts. Dr. Keener talks about the importance of discerning God's leading.

So not just throwing darts at a map and going wherever it lands. Right. Exactly.

He points to examples like Philip meeting the Ethiopian eunuch. Yeah. And Peter's visit to Cornelius.

Mm-hmm. These are both instances where they were guided by the Holy Spirit to specific people. And places.

Then there's Paul's journey to Macedonia, which started with a vision. Right. So sometimes it's about following those nudges, those prompts.

Even if they take you off the beaten path. Yeah. Trusting that God's plan might look different than our own.

But here's the thing. Following God's leading doesn't always mean smooth sailing, right? No. Not always.

Dr. Keener even acknowledges that it can involve, you know, suffering. Like when Paul went to Jerusalem, even though he knew the dangers. Yeah.

It's not about seeking hardship. Right. But being willing to face it if it's part of God's plan.

So are we willing to embrace discomfort, you know? Yeah. Maybe even persecution for the sake of what we believe in? That's a tough question. That's a heavy thought, but it gets at the heart of true commitment.

Yeah, it does. Now, Dr. Keener also talks about leveraging your existing connections and resources. Mm-hmm.

Kind of like Paul did. Yeah. Paul strategically focused on urban centers.

Oh, okay. And used his Roman citizenship to gain access to certain circles. Right.

It's like he was playing 40-chess. Yeah. While everyone else was playing checkers.

He understood the power of influence. Yeah. And he was also ahead of his time in recognizing the importance of popular culture.

Right. He often ministered in places that were like hubs for spreading ideas and trends. Mm-hmm.

Dr. Keener even draws a parallel to the internet today. Wow. Yeah.

You know? This vast platform for sharing beliefs. So instead of the Roman Forum, we have Twitter and Instagram. Right.

But there's a responsibility that comes with that. Right? Of course. Dr. Keener cautions us to be thoughtful about how we engage online.

Avoiding the pitfalls of misinformation. Right. And unproductive arguments.

It's like that old saying: you catch more flies with honey than vinegar. It's about representing your beliefs with wisdom and grace. Yeah.

Even in the digital world. And that's a challenge for sure. But what about the nitty-gritty of it all? Yeah.

The logistics of sharing your beliefs. Oh. Dr. Keener had some interesting insights about that too.

He talks about how early Christians often met in homes. Creating a more intimate and accessible setting for fellowship and discipleship. It's not just about the message.

Right. But the environment too. Yeah.

Makes me think about the rise of house churches today. Mm-hmm. Maybe there's something to that.

A more relaxed setting. Yeah. Where people feel comfortable asking questions.

It makes sense. And remember, back then, they didn't have church buildings or big budgets. No.

They had to be resourceful. It was like a startup. Right.

Yeah. You do what you can with what you have. They were also big on teamwork.

Oh, yeah. Dr. Keener points out how Paul often traveled. Mm-hmm.

And ministered with a whole crew of companions. Each person bringing their strengths and gifts to the table. So it's not a solo mission.

No. It's about recognizing that you're part of a larger team. We're stronger together.

Absolutely. And Dr. Keener talks about how important leadership is. Yeah.

As the church grew, they needed structure and guidance. So it's not just about being spontaneous. There's a need for organization and delegation, too.

It's about finding that balance. Right. And trusting in God's work.

Mm-hmm. Recognizing that you can't do it all yourself. Right.

And that story in Acts where the apostles appoint seven men to handle the distribution of food. Yeah. To the widows.

They realized they couldn't effectively preach the gospel and manage all the logistics at the same time. Smart delegation. Right.

It's about recognizing that different people have different gifts. Yeah. And trusting them to use those gifts to build up the community.

And they were also great at recognizing the value of diverse resources within the community. And not just money. Right.

But teaching skills, practical skills, everything. Dr. Keener even mentions a woman who was a drama major. Oh, wow.

And how her talents were utilized in the church. So it's not a one-man show. It takes a village.

It's a community effort. Yeah. And they were great at keeping their supporters in the loop.

Oh, that's important. Especially for those doing cross-cultural ministry. Makes sense.

People want to know how their prayers and support are making a difference. It's about communication, sharing stories. Keeping that connection strong.

Right. And then there's this whole concept of apologetics. Yes.

Which Dr. Keener talks about quite a bit. It's a fascinating topic. Apologetics.

So that's like defending your beliefs. Yeah. Presenting a reasoned case for what you believe.

Some people think we should just preach the gospel and leave the intellectual debates to the theologians. Right. But the early church saw the value in engaging with those who disagreed with them.

Absolutely. Think about Paul defending his faith before rulers and authorities. Powerful example.

Yeah. It's a reminder that we shouldn't be afraid to engage in thoughtful discussions about our beliefs. So it's not about shying away from those tough questions.

Nope. But being prepared to answer them. Yeah, with reason and evidence.

But it's not about winning arguments, is it? Not at all. It's about helping people understand. Yeah, seeing things from a different perspective.

It's like a respectful debate. Right. Where the goal is to enlighten, not conquer.

And Dr. Keener reminds us that this should all be done with grace and humility. So passion with a side of politeness. Exactly.

It's about representing your beliefs in a way that invites dialogue, not shuts it down. Now, those early Christians, they were definitely facing some challenges in sharing their beliefs, right? Oh, absolutely. I mean, persecution, opposition, even conflicts within their own communities.

Dr. Keener doesn't sugarcoat it. No, he's very honest about the difficulties. He says we shouldn't be naive about the difficulties that we might face when we step out and share our beliefs.

There will be times when we're misunderstood. Yeah. Rejected, maybe even ridiculed.

So it's not always going to be sunshine and roses. No, but the Book of Acts also shows us that God is faithful. He empowers his people to overcome obstacles.

Yeah. To persevere through trials and to see his kingdom advance, even in the midst of adversity. So it's a reminder that you're not alone in this.

You're definitely not alone. Even those early Christians, they had their struggles, but they kept going. They kept sharing, and the message spread.

It's about trusting that God is with you. Even when things get tough. Yeah.

And before we wrap up this part of our deep dive, there's one last thought from Dr. Keener that really resonated with me. Okay, what is it? He reminds us that God's ways are not always our ways. Oh, that's a good one.

You know, we might have our own ideas about how to do things, but ultimately it's about surrendering to God's plan, trusting that he knows best. Letting go of control, being open to the unexpected. That's a challenge for a lot of us.

It is. But it's also incredibly freeing. It is incredibly freeing.

It's recognizing that we're not in charge. God is. That's a good reminder for all of us.

No matter what we believe. Absolutely. Now, are you ready to dive into part two of this deep dive? I am.

Are you? We'll be exploring some even more practical tips and strategies for applying these principles to our lives today. It's going to be fascinating. I'm ready when you are.

Stay tuned, listeners, because we're about to uncover some real gems. Let's unpack a few more intriguing points from Dr. Keener's lecture. Okay.

He emphasizes the role of finances in the early church's mission. Oh, interesting. Which is something, you know, we don't always talk about openly.

It's like an elephant in the room, right? Yeah. We know money matters. Yeah, yeah.

But it can feel awkward to discuss. Definitely. But Dr. Keener points out that early Christians used their resources to support missionaries.

Okay. Help those in need and spread their message. It's like crowdfunding, but for ancient evangelism.

Yeah, you could say that. So those early Christians were like putting their money where their mouth was. Exactly.

They were walking the walk. Yeah. And he gives the example of the women.

Okay. Who traveled with Jesus and his disciples using their own money to support the ministry. Wow.

It's a powerful reminder that financial generosity has always been vital for spreading any message, really. Right. Not just religious ones.

Exactly. Then there's the story of Paul receiving financial support from the church in Philippi. Right, which allowed him to focus more on preaching and teaching.

It's like a spiritual Patreon. You could say that. Yeah.

It highlights the fact that those who dedicate their lives to a cause often need that financial support. To make it work. Yeah.

And it's not just about giving. Right. It's about being responsible with what you have.

Being a good steward. Exactly. So no matter what you believe, being thoughtful about how you use your money is crucial for making a real impact.

Absolutely. Now, let's shift gears a bit and talk about apologetics. Okay.

Dr. Keener says this was a big part of how early Christians spread their message. Yeah, it's interesting because there's this debate today about whether apologetics is still relevant. So apologetics, that's like defending what you believe in a way that makes sense to others.

Exactly. Some people think you should just share your beliefs. Yeah.

And leave the intellectual stuff to the scholars. Right, right. But Dr. Keener argues that it played a key role in the early church.

He points to Paul's speeches before rulers and authorities. Oh, yeah. Where he expertly countered accusations.

Wow. And presented a strong case for Christianity. So it's not about shying away from those tough questions.

No, it's about engaging with them thoughtfully. Being prepared to answer them with reason and evidence. Exactly.

And remember, it's not about winning arguments. Okay. It's about helping people understand your perspective.

Right, having a respectful dialogue. Exactly. And I think for our listeners who like to really delve into things, you know, apologetics can be a way to go deeper.

To explore those complex questions that come up when you talk about your beliefs. It's about going beyond the surface. Right.

And really grappling with those challenging ideas. Okay. But let's be real.

Okay. Not everything goes smoothly. Right? Of course not.

Those early Christians faced their fair share of challenges and pushback. Yeah. Persecution, opposition.

Yeah. Even arguments within their own communities. It wasn't all like kumbaya and conversions.

No, not at all. So Dr. Keener, he says we shouldn't be naive. Mm-hmm.

About the difficulties. Of spreading a message. Yeah.

There will be times when you're misunderstood. Yeah. Rejected, maybe even ridiculed for what you believe.

So how did those early Christians deal with all that? Well, they found strength in their faith. Okay. They persevered through trials and saw their movement grow even amidst adversity.

So it's about pushing through those tough times knowing that you're not alone. Exactly. And the book of Acts shows us that God empowers those who believe.

So it's like those old war movies where the hero faces impossible odds. But you also know they're going to overcome them. It gives us hope.

Right. Hope that we can do the same. Now, as we wrap up this part.

Okay. I want to highlight one last thing from Dr. Keener. Okay.

That really hit home for me. It is it. He reminds us that God's ways are often different from our own.

That's a good one. We might have our grand plans and strategies. Right.

But ultimately, it's about surrendering to a higher power. Trusting that there's a bigger picture. That we might not fully grasp.

And for our listeners who enjoy connecting the dots and figuring things out. Right. Sometimes you have to be okay with not having all the answers.

Right. And trusting that things will work out. Yeah.

Even if it's not how we expected. Exactly. That's tough.

It is. But it's also kind of freeing, right? Yeah. It's about letting go of control and embracing the mystery.

Being open to new possibilities. Exactly. And trusting that things will unfold as they should.

So, it's not about forcing our own agenda. Right. But aligning ourselves with something bigger.

Wow. That's pretty profound. Now, are you ready to explore some practical ways to apply all this to our lives today? I am.

That's the exciting part. Yeah. Because the Book of Acts, it's full of wisdom.

It is. That we can use. To shape how we share what matters to us.

Right. Whether it's our faith or something else we're passionate about. Exactly.

Stay with us, listeners, because we're about to uncover some real gems in the final part of this deep dive. Okay. So, we've talked about the big ideas.

Yeah. The challenges. The historical context of evangelism in the Book of Acts.

Right. But how do we actually apply those ancient principles to our lives today? That's a good question. It can feel like a distant world sometimes, you know? Yeah.

It's like those early Christians, they were running around performing miracles. Right. Converting entire households.

How are we supposed to live up to that? Well, Dr. Keener acknowledges that. Okay. But he reminds us that it all starts with your own personal journey.

You can't authentically share something that you haven't experienced yourself. So, it's not about memorizing a script or like... No. Mastering some sales pitch.

It's about cultivating a genuine connection... Right. ...to what you believe. Whether it's your faith or something else that really drives you.

Exactly. That authenticity, it shines through. Yeah.

And people respond to that. It's like that saying: people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Right.

Exactly. And Dr. Keener, he emphasizes the importance of being sensitive to those...

Yeah. ...subtle nudges, those moments... ...where you feel called to speak up or reach out.

Like when you meet someone. Yeah. And it feels like more than just a coincidence.

Yeah. Yeah. Like it was meant to be.

He calls them divine appointments. Oh, I like that. Those seemingly random encounters that turn out to be strategically orchestrated.

Wow. And for you as a listener who enjoys analyzing and thinking things through... Uh-huh. ...sometimes you have to trust your gut.

Right. Those moments where you feel compelled to say something. Okay.

Yeah. Or take a chance. But what about those times where you feel like you need to have all the answers? Yeah, like you need to be a walking theological encyclopedia.

Exactly. Dr. Keener says that's not always necessary. Okay.

Sometimes the most powerful way to connect with someone is by simply sharing your story. Okay. So how did you come to believe what you believe? What difference has it made in your life? It's about being relatable.

Letting people see that you're a real person. Right. Not some perfect spokesperson.

Exactly. People connect with stories. Yeah.

Those authentic glimpses into your experience. So it's not about preaching from a mountaintop. It's about having a conversation.

Right. Sharing your journey. It's about letting your guard down a bit.

It's about being vulnerable. Right. Right.

But how do we create those opportunities for these conversations to even happen? Well, Dr. Keener challenges us to think creatively. Okay. About our existing resources and platforms.

He uses the example of Paul, who was a tent maker by trade. Right. He used that skill to support himself and to connect with people.

So like, what are your skills? What are your passions? How can you use those to open doors for those conversations? It's about finding those natural intersections. Yeah. Between your life and your beliefs.

Right. Let's say you're a musician. Uh-huh.

Could you host a music night and invite friends from different walks of life? Oh, that's a great idea. Or maybe you're a writer. Yeah.

Could you start a blog or an online community where you share your thoughts and experiences? And for our listeners who enjoy learning new things. Yeah. What if you start a book club? Oh, that's good.

And include books that explore themes related to your beliefs. Those are great examples. Right.

It's a natural way to spark those conversations. Yeah. It's about being intentional.

Thinking outside the box. But it all comes back to relationships, doesn't it? It does. Dr. Keener encourages us to be deliberate about building genuine connections.

With people who might not share our beliefs. So not just preaching to the choir. Right.

But reaching out to those who are singing a different tune. We're called to be a light to the world. Not just to our own little corner of it.

Yeah. It's like that idea of being a good neighbor. Really? A good friend.

A good colleague. Regardless of someone's beliefs. It's about showing love and compassion in tangible ways.

When people see that you genuinely care. Yeah. They're more likely to be open to what you have to say.

And then there's the power of prayer. Oh, yeah. It's easy to forget about that.

Yeah. And the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Dr. Keener reminds us to pray for the people in our lives.

Those who haven't yet found what we've found. Right. Asking God to work in their hearts.

To open their minds. The new possibility. It's like we're planting seeds and trusting that God will provide the sunshine and the rain to make them grow.

We might not always see the results. Right. But we can trust that God is at work.

In ways we can't always comprehend. That's the beauty of faith. It's about trusting in something bigger than yourself.

Something beyond what you can see or touch. As we wrap up this deep dive into evangelism in the Book of Acts, I'm left with a sense of hope and inspiration. Me too.

It's a reminder that even ordinary people can make an extraordinary impact. When they're connected to something bigger than themselves. Right.

And the Book of Acts, it's not just an ancient text. It's like a living, breathing blueprint. For how to share what matters to you.

With passion, authenticity, and purpose. Absolutely. We've explored the how, the why, and the what, but now it's up to you, dear listener, to take these insights and apply them to your own unique context.

To your own life. Yeah. What resonates with you? What will you do differently? Keep those questions in mind.

Yeah. As you continue your own journey of faith. And discovery.

And remember, you're not alone on this path. We're all in this together, seeking to make a difference in the world. One conversation.

One act of kindness. One story at a time. Thanks for joining us on this deep dive.