

How Should We Share the Gospel with Others?

There are many ways to approach preaching the gospel. All are governed by scriptural principles. How do we apply these principles to human relationships?

Some time ago my wife Jan and I were on a diminutive jet airplane bound from London Heathrow to the Isle of Man. Almost from take-off we became seriously engaged in an enjoyable, interesting and stimulating conversation with a fellow passenger. That is until he asked me why we were flying to the Isle of Man. 'I will be giving a theological lecture there,' I answered. That one-sentence reply poured icy cold water on the conversation. This gentleman had nothing further to say to us.

Why does our flow of speech often dry up when religion enters the conversation? Often the fear of ridicule or rebuff will effectively deter even believers from bringing up the Christian gospel.

Why preach the gospel?

True Christians have a responsibility. Christ's last command to His apostles while still in the human flesh was: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 28:19-20; compare Matthew 24:14; emphasis added

throughout). After real conversion, we become bond-servants of Jesus Christ. Truly we have been bought at a very steep price – the precious blood of God's perfect Lamb (1 Corinthians 6:20; 1 Peter 1:18-19). We are not our own any more.

Where Christ leads we must follow. We take up on our own cross daily as we imitate Him and follow His lead. He fervently desires a productive spiritual harvest (John 4:35-36).

However we must be very cautious about trying to persuade others where they have no interest, or those whom you feel should be living their lives differently. It usually doesn't work!

Your example is paramount

The most powerful way of witnessing is the example you set by the way you live your life according to God's way. Then those who see this example may ask about it.

Many have been added to God's Church through the personal examples and the discreet conversations of

Christian brethren. If you are a Christian, you will not be able to hide your faith indefinitely, despite rightly doing your good works with as little fuss as possible. Questions about your faith and beliefs will inevitably arise.

Hear the written words of Peter: 'Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and *always be ready to give a defence [or answer; KJV] to everyone who asks*

We are not our own any more. Where Christ leads we must follow.

a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear' (1 Peter 3:15). Our general approach should begin by relying on God for wisdom and discernment. An instant silent prayer will help.

The apostle Paul adds: 'Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside [of Church fellowship], redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, *that you may know how you ought to answer each one' (Colossians 4:5-6).*

Jesus Christ strongly cautions us: 'Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces' (Matthew 7:6). Christ sometimes spoke *in strong metaphorical language* in order to effectively get an important point across. King Solomon puts it in plain language. 'Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he [or she] will despise the wisdom of your words' (Proverbs 23:9).

The Proverbs of Solomon

The book of Proverbs is chock-full of relationship admonitions – solid principles to follow in effectively speaking with and dealing with others. We gradually learn, sometimes through hard experience, when to speak up and when to say nothing. We learn that 'a soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly' (Proverbs 15:1-2).

In contrast, 'A fool utters all his mind, but a wise man keeps it in until afterwards' (Proverbs 29:11, KJV).

On occasion we may venture to say too much and add too many points in replying to a simple curiosity question about our faith. Sometimes just addressing the one question of a curious person will suffice.

Also we could be drawn into an embarrassing trap by a clever religious conversationalist. 'A prudent man foresees the evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished' (Proverbs 22:3; 27:12). This particular proverb has been repeated for emphasis.

We should all pray for wisdom and discernment (James 1:5). There is a time to answer a foolish individual and a time not to answer him (Proverbs 26:4-5). Solomon sums it up by stating: 'To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.

A time to keep silent and a time to speak' (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7).

But we shouldn't hesitate to speak when the inevitable occasion does surface. 'A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise rebuker to an obedient ear' (Proverbs 25:11-12). The wise rebuke usually emerges from the lips of a mature Christian (Galatians 6:1). A mature Christian is one who is putting on Christ and who sets a right example of Christian living (1 John 2:6).

Staying close to God in prayer and

Our good examples often prove a far more effective persuader.

Bible study will go a long way to knowing when and what to say and do. When a Christian's faith is really challenged by a hostile governmental body, God promises to intervene on his or her behalf. 'But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you' (Matthew 10:19-20).

This basic principle of reliance on God applies to everyday life occasions. 'Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. *In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths*' (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Between husbands and wives

Humanly speaking, our spouse is probably the most important person in our Christian lives. Our life's partner also becomes the number one neighbour we should love. So we have to be even more careful how we speak within the husband and wife relation-

ship, especially if one of the parties is an unbeliever. Trying to persuade an unbelieving husband or wife to follow the principles of the Christian faith can prove a perilous task.

The apostle Peter advocates a right approach. '... Even if some do not obey the Word, *they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives*' (1 Peter 3:1). Our good examples often prove a far more effective persuader than our good words and fair speeches. 'Husbands likewise, [should] dwell with them with understanding [or knowledge, KJV], giving honour to the wife' (verse 7).

The apostle Paul adds: 'For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband . . . For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife' (1 Corinthians 7:14-16). (For further understanding, request or download our free booklet *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension*.)

Practical advice in spreading the gospel

What about giving booklets to family and friends? This constitutes a great way to give out the gospel if they have a ready mind to receive this information. Sharing your literature with others often works very well. Yet sometimes people we know are obviously breaking fundamental laws governing the Christian life and we naturally want to straighten them out – on occasion perhaps by sending in their names directly to our Church office (without their permission) to receive a subscription to *The Good News*. This practice often results in an irate request for cancellation.

If you wish to make a request for *The Good News* on behalf of someone else, please let us know this, and we

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Can We Know When Jesus Christ Will Return?

Serious students of the Bible know full well that the return of Jesus Christ and the establishing of His Kingdom of God represent the culmination of this human age. But should we be speculating about the exact timing?

Followers of Christ eagerly desire and anticipate the second coming. As Christians we are urged to maintain a sense of spiritual urgency – constantly overcoming and focusing on daily, continuous transformation in becoming more like God our Father and His Son, our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ.

With such an intense focus on the return of Jesus Christ to this earth – this time as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:16) – it can be tempting and even easy to begin to speculate when exactly Jesus might initiate this long-awaited event. This is especially true when the Bible itself provides many prophetic markers and trends that will presage the end of this age (not the ‘end of the world’) and the second coming of Christ.

But My Father only

But even as Jesus emphatically instructed His disciples to ‘watch’ – to prepare themselves as a spiritual Bride to be collectively bonded to Christ for all eternity (Luke 21:34-36) – He also immediately said ‘*You do not know what hour your Lord is coming*’ (Matthew 24:42, emphasis added throughout). Earlier, after outlining specific trends that would be obvious before His return, Christ noted concerning the actual date of His return, ‘Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only’ (verse 36).

These and other Bible verses make plain that not even Jesus Himself knows the precise day and time when He will return. Asked one final time by His disciples about the divine timetable for prophetic events, Jesus declared: ‘*It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority*’ (Acts 1:8).

Avoid setting dates

Accordingly, as directed by Jesus, the living Head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23), the United Church of God does not set prophetic dates or times for future events. This has been a hard lesson for some, as during the past 2,000 years a number have violated this teaching of Jesus. They have unfortunately set specific dates and times for the return of Christ, reaping a whirlwind of contempt and ridicule when these dates passed with no prophetic results.

Consider this historic example: In 2011, Harold Camping, a religious figure in California, attracted international attention with his unequivocal prediction that Jesus would return on May 21 of that year. Of course, nothing prophetically significant happened on that date, earning Mr Camping and his failed prophecies a considerable amount of public scorn.

Choose life

This leads us to an interesting question: Why did God send prophets with a message about the Kingdom of God if we can’t know the date upfront when it will come? As the Bible clearly shows, many prophetic outcomes are the result of either obeying or disobeying the word of God. God reveals that many blessings will come to humanity if it yields itself to God’s way of life.

God also reveals that many prophetic curses will come if humanity rejects this way of life, particularly if it is laid out in front of them in advance. That is why God declared first to the ancient Israelites and today to us: ‘I call

‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority’ (Acts 1:8).

heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing, therefore choose life’ (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Because erroneously predicting tragedies reflects a spirit of disobedience to God, the United Church of God recognises that it is the duty of the Church to make plain the dire consequences of doing so. God and Jesus are quite clear: If we keep God’s commandments and produce spiritual fruit

that reflects the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit, then we are promised many good things, both in this life and in the life to come. If not, then we come under a curse of our own doing.

One of the major roles of the Church that Jesus founded is to demonstrate – in this present life – a taste of the coming Kingdom. God's way of life works! This is why Jesus thus commanded His disciples: *'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven'* (Matthew 5:16). People who quietly but effectively live God's way of life strengthen the prophetic message of the Bible. (See our free booklet *Making Life Work*.)

'Let no man take your crown'

So what if you find yourself in one of these groups that unfortunately likes to set dates? The Bible is plain: God is a God of mercy and love. If such a person humbly recognizes that they may have fallen under a deception, well-intentioned or not, and want to move on, then the path opens for them to receive mercy, be pardoned, and restore their relationship with the living Head of the Church, Jesus Christ and His Father, God Almighty. We are all called to repent – even daily as a continuous act of spiritual transformation – to change, receive mercy and grace, and to advance toward the future Kingdom of God (Acts 2:37-39; Romans 12:1-2).

Don't allow any man or any organisation to 'steal your crown' (Revelation 3:11) by violating the clear teachings of Jesus Christ. If you'd like more information about what the Bible really says is the exciting and vibrant future for humanity, request or download our free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.

Dennis Luker, President of the United Church of God

Spreading the Gospel

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will then include a letter with an introductory issue of *The Good News*, telling the party that a friend wishes to share the magazine with them. If they then return the enclosed coupon, we put them on our mailing list to continue receiving subsequent free issues. This constitutes a far more effective approach.

What about asking the Church office to send our booklets directly to family and friends? We usually advise that our readers ask them to request the booklets for themselves. A number of booklets are advertised in every *Good News* magazine.

Of course, we seek to respond to reader requests with appropriate discernment, applying the spirit of our policies, rather than always following the strict letter.

The United Church of God takes the gospel to the world in writing through *The Good News*, *Vertical Thought* (for youth), the *Bible Study*

Course and our free booklets. Article reprints are primarily used to answer questions from our readers. We also have web sites on the Internet and air the *Beyond Today* TV programme. Everyone is free to read, listen and watch – or decide not to.

God made us in His own image as free moral agents with the matchless privilege of choice (see Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

We cannot convert or talk anyone into accepting salvation (especially spouses and family members). God has to call people individually (see John 6:44, 65; Acts 2:39). Setting the right example in our personal lives can be the best advertisement for true Christianity.

However, all this cautionary advice does not mean that we should always play it safe and timidly shrink from genuine speak-with-your-neighbour outreach opportunities. *Pray for discernment and courage!*

John Ross Schroeder

The Olympic Legacy

While one cannot depend on 'feel good' factors for very long, there is no doubt the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics have generated excitement, pride in British sporting achievements and a desire to forget the gloom of the present recession. In spite of the pre-game concerns about security, events passed off very well without any obvious hitches. All in all it was an excellent example of British organisational skills.

But where do we go from here?

Feel good factors, while invaluable at times of national stress, or distress, tend to be short-lived. Before long we will be heading back into winter and memories of this year's 'golden' summer will fade with the autumn leaves. Some of the newly built venues will continue to contribute to the lives of those able to utilise them, but it is the way of physical things that they rarely satisfy for long – needing constant maintenance to retain their appearance and usefulness.

At the end of the day, it is only what stems from God that retains its lustre. Man's ultimate destiny is so far beyond anything that this physical world can offer, or what most people can even imagine. To learn much more, please request our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?*

Sing Yourself Healthy

What would you think if you went to your doctor feeling slightly under the weather, and the prescription stated that you should join a choir? Bizarre as this may seem, this course of action could improve both your mental and physical health.

Research in the past 10 years has been investigating the health benefits of singing, and particularly group singing. One such study, published in the *Journal of Behavioural Medicine*, looked at the effect of a 60-minute rehearsal of Mozart's Requiem on members of a choir (Kreutz, et al, 2004). The research team took saliva samples before and after the rehearsal, and found dramatically increased levels of immunoglobulin A and hydrocortisone in the samples taken afterwards. Immunoglobulin A is a protein that protects against respiratory infections, and hydrocortisone is a hormone that reduces stress levels.

The tests were then repeated, but with the singers only listening to a recording of the same piece for 60 minutes. This time there was no change in the level of immunoglobulin A, and the level of hydrocortisone actually decreased. This shows that the physical act of singing can have a positive effect on physical and mental health. The research team concluded: *'These results support the hypothesis, that choir singing influences positive emotions as well as immune function in humans'* (2004: 631, emphasis added throughout).

Singing and Scripture

As medical knowledge and understanding have increased in recent years, many biblical principles and commandments have been discovered to have positive health benefits. One example is God's instruction for us to 'come before His presence with singing' (Psalm 100:2). References to music, and specifically singing, in the Bible, show how important harmonious sound is to God. Primarily, the Bible shows us that songs should be used to praise and

thank God. Indeed, the first mention of singing in the Bible is Moses' hymn of thanksgiving to the Lord for delivering them from the Egyptians (Exodus 15:1-21).

Singing also played an important role in the worship services that the Levites performed in the temple. God instructed that 4000 Levites (approximately ten per cent of the priestly tribe) were set aside solely as instrumentalists and singers (1 Chronicles 23:3-6). The Bible reveals how God favoured their musical offerings: 'When the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD . . . the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God' (2 Chronicles 5:13-14).

To put this into perspective, a modern symphony chorus (of the type seen at the BBC Proms) would consist of

around 100-200 singers; the sound created by 4000 musicians and singers must have been awe inspiring!

Learning through song

The Bible shows that singing can also have an educational purpose. Colossians 3:16 says: 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, *teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.*' A well-known mnemonic device is to turn something that you want to remember into a song: for example, there are songs to help remember the alphabet, the periodic table, and the Ten Commandments.

Words by themselves can be quickly forgotten, but human brains can retain music for much longer, and therefore a tune can be used to jog your memory. A biblical example of this is in Deuteronomy 31, when just before Moses died, he directed that the Israelites be taught his final instructions

Another Musical Study

Stephen Clift and Grenville Hancox (2010), looked at the well-being of 1124 choral singers from England, Germany and Australia. This research found that participation in choirs had a positive effect on mood, and helped to focus attention and to relieve stress. The deep breathing that singing requires also helps to increase lung capacity, and the increased oxygen intake can help to improve circulation. Positive benefits were also found from the social support and regular commitment that is involved with being part of a choir.

The researchers suggested that there should be 'greater public investment by local government and health authorities in community music and singing provision in the interests of promoting well-being and health' (2010: 94).

Interestingly, on the strength of research carried out in this area, there have been a number of choral programs that have been set up by health authorities and health charities (such as Singing for the Brain, Singing Medicine, etc.).

from God to as a song, so that they would remember.

The Spanish writer Cervantes is recorded as saying: 'He who sings scares away his woes.' Science has now shown that Cervantes' observation was right, as singing releases endorphins, which help promote feelings of happiness. Many Psalms also associate the act of singing with gladness, and James 5:13 recommends: 'Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray.

Is any merry? Let him sing psalms.'

In United Church of God services, singing hymns is an important part of our worship. The Bible shows that God wishes us to thank and praise Him in this way, and it is an opportunity for congregations to truly become united, as many voices join to become one voice. It does not matter how good a singer you are, as long as you are praising God and making a 'joyful noise.'

For more proficient singers, there

is often an opportunity for additional choral contributions at the annual Feast of Tabernacles, when congregations combine to celebrate God's commanded Festival.

As well as honouring God, singing hymns can also be a useful tool to learn His law and sections of scriptures. Finally, singing hymns can make you happy, and could even make you healthier.

Laura Rowles

United Youth Camp Becoming a Team

Camp provides opportunities for sharing fun, friendships and developing a deeper knowledge of God's way of life.

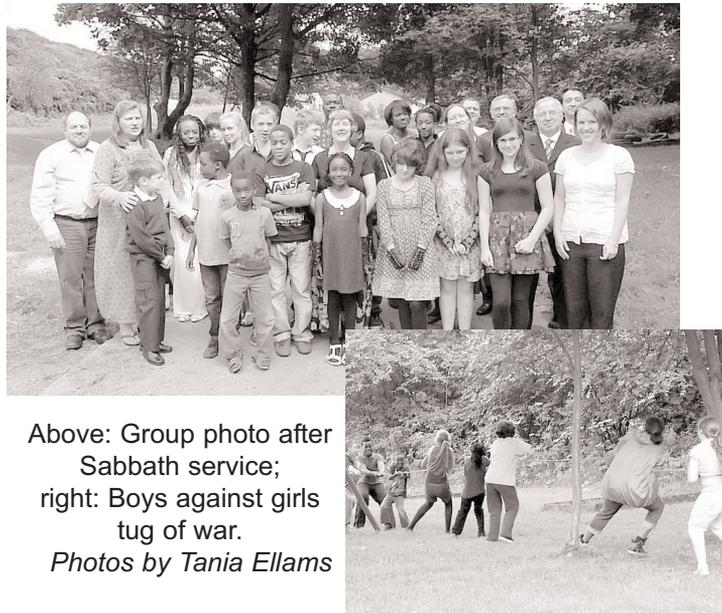
As one group of young people matures to adulthood, marry and have children of their own, a younger cohort inevitably takes their place at what we term Summer Camp. For this reason, the twin themes of Teamwork and the Golden Rule recur every few years. Camp 2012 comprised 11 youngsters who had never attended previously, and five 'old hands'. Since it was smaller than in recent years, it was possible for closer friendships to be forged than with a larger contingent.

Often overlooked, the Golden Rule can be found in Matthew 7:12 and reads, 'Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.' During Camp it is important for everyone to remember this and act on it, otherwise some would go hungry, others would never get a turn at the activities, and the quieter ones might be left on their own.

Another aspect of the Golden Rule is teamwork. Including everyone, sharing the load and suppressing one's own desires to be the centre of attention for the benefit of the rest all help to build individual character and a strong group spirit. However, nothing happens all at once, and Camp 2012 began a learning process that will continue over future years. The acronym 'Together Everyone Achieves More' was highlighted many times.

In addition to the usual sports, games and outings, there were several team-based activities, including one at the more formal dinner on the last evening when each dorm presented a skit or song related to their experiences at Camp.

Acts of service included setting the tables for meals, clearing away afterwards and washing up. Everyone



Above: Group photo after Sabbath service; right: Boys against girls tug of war.

Photos by Tania Ellams

assisted with the clean-up mid-week, before the Sabbath and on the final morning. One former camper who had arrived for the last weekend, proved invaluable with helping to stow away the bedding that had been used during the week.

Services were held on both the Sabbaths that fell within the nine days of Camp. On the second, a group of young ladies performed a song for the assembly. Often following a study of God's word, each evening closed with hymns and a prayer, the latter sometimes given by one of the campers, as was the blessing on the meals.

So, with some tearful goodbyes, Camp 2012 came to an end. However the friendships begun and the lessons learned will hopefully last a lifetime.

Barbara Fenney



pitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)' (1 Timothy

3:2-4). Paul mentions much the same thing in Titus 1:5-9.

Similar qualifications are laid down for deacons a little later in 1 Timothy 3 (verses 8-13).

In the case of women, the model give is for them to run a home and where possible to have brought up children in that home. Older women were to be teaching the younger women (1 Timothy 5:9-16). This is repeated in Titus 2:3-5: 'The older women likewise, that they be reverent in behaviour, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things – that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.'

The principle is clear: Christians were intended to live in family units where possible.

Community living is *not* really found in the Bible as a lifestyle. The disciples spent three-and-a-half years being trained by Christ, yet during that time Simon Peter apparently lived in a family home with his wife and his mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-31). There

was also a short time, just after the coming of God's Holy Spirit, when the disciples shared their homes and substance with those who had come to hear the apostles preach the gospel (Acts 4:32-37). However, God allowed persecution to scatter them so that the message of Christ about the kingdom of God, and the forgiveness of sins for those who repent would be preached much further afield (Acts 8:1, 4).

On the night before His crucifixion, Christ prayed for His disciples. He did not ask His Father to take them out of the world but to protect them from Satan (John 17:14-16). In a sense community living may take one 'out of the world.' Much of the rest of the New Testament contains teaching on how to live godly lives according to God's instructions.

Of course, although God's Church is scattered, it has been set apart and where possible meets once a week on the Sabbath Day and on the annual Holy Days. But that is far from community living. (See our free booklet *The Church Jesus Built*.)

Community living may be a form of escape for those unwilling or unable to face the world. Any short-term benefits notwithstanding, it is not the ideal learning situation that God has ordained for His people. The family unit remains the model God gave us.

Nor does community living reflect either the millennial rule of Christ (for example, Zechariah 8:3-8), or the future new earth when God Himself will come down and dwell with His now spirit-born human family (Revelation 21:1, 3-7). Putting all the relevant passages together, it is clear that Scripture does not recommend community living.

Q Do you believe that Christian community living is the right place for a person who has a 'calling' to evangelism? Is this 'kingdom living,' or is it 'escapism'?

YM, County Wicklow, Ireland

A Thank you for your questions concerning community living. As with any Christian living issue, we must look for principles within the Scriptures.

The first directive from God is found in Genesis chapter 2 where no suitable helper was found for Adam, so God created Eve and stated: 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.' This then is the basic societal unit, with the assumption that children would usually be born into it, having male and female role models as their parents.

Those called to the ministry as elders or 'bishops' (literally 'overseers') are required to be, 'blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behaviour, hos-

How our literature is funded

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Important!



Autumn 2012

From the very beginning, the Kingdom of God was the focus of Christ's own ministry.

By attending these seminars you will discover what the Kingdom means to your personal salvation and why its message is critical to human survival.

The seminars will also help you understand the key signs Jesus Christ gave His disciples about His return and how the Kingdom of God will soon be established on earth.

The next installment of Bible seminars in the British Isles will take place during October and November. Each seminar consists of two presentations of approximately 45 minutes each with a refreshment break between the two.

You will not be asked to join anything, nor will you be asked for money.

To register, please go to
<http://www.ucg.org/live-events/all>

Or write to:
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- **Ballymena: 20 October**
Presentation 1: The Time is Fulfilled
Presentation 2: The Kingdom is at Hand
- **Douglas, Isle of Man: 27 October**
Presentation 1: Entering the Kingdom of God
Presentation 2: Believe the Gospel
- **Dublin: 24 November**
Presentation 1: Entering the Kingdom of God
Presentation 2: Believe the Gospel
- **London: 3 November**
Presentation 1: Entering the Kingdom of God
Presentation 2: Believe the Gospel
- **Sheffield: 24 November**
Presentation 1: The Time is Fulfilled
Presentation 2: The Kingdom is at Hand
- **Stirling: (provisionally 17 November)**
Presentation 1: The Kingdom : Man's Only Hope
Presentation 2: Repentance: Saying Yes to God