

INTRODUCTION TO:

MORE
READY
THAN YOU THINK

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PUTTING ON YOUR SHOES OF READINESS

My shoes were brand new! How on earth had the shoeshine guy convinced me they needed a polish?

I was in the bustling Johannesburg airport, with people, young and old, rushing to get to their boarding gates. Bumping, jostling, some were casually window shopping, while others stared at the elevated screens, checking their flight status. And there I was sitting in the shoeshine chair.

He had stopped me just as I made it through security. Smartly dressed all in black, with a big beaming smile, he was both enthusiastic and persistent.

‘Sir, let me shine your shoes. I’ll make them good.’

‘No, thank you; besides, I don’t have any cash.’ I responded politely fully expecting the conversation to end there. After all, I needed to find my boarding gate for the connecting flight to Cape Town. I was hoping to squeeze in that desperately needed coffee after my twelve-hour flight from London.

‘Not to worry, sir. Let me shine them. I promise I’ll make them really good.’

‘Honestly, I don’t have any cash on me, and they are only trainers!’

‘Sir, look here, see this scuff mark,’ he said pointing to a grey smudge on the shiny white sole of my right shoe. ‘Let me make it good for you, don’t worry about the money’ he persisted, still with his big beaming smile.

I gave in. His enthusiastic persistence broke through my resolve, and I traded that coffee for a shoeshine I didn’t really need. As I sat down it dawned on me that it was only yesterday that I had bought this pair of shoes, yet somehow this guy, Mr Enthusiasm, had

persuaded me into a shoeshine.

His friend joined us, and to my surprise began polishing my canvas bag. I was about to object but then thought better of it: I was curious. I started asking questions about their lives. Effortlessly, and naturally, the conversation steered towards their beliefs about God. Mr Enthusiasm seemed distracted, clearly thinking about the next customer he could persuade to his throne-like, shoe shining chair. But Mr Bag-polisher was becoming quietly vulnerable and shared his struggle with alcohol, and how he'd like to believe in God but thought God wouldn't be interested in someone like him.

I asked if anyone had ever explained to them who God is and what He's done for us. Mr Bag-polisher shook his head. 'Would you like me to?' With both responding with a firm yes, I briefly explained the good news of Jesus: what He's done for us, and our need to be saved from our sin. I shared the vision of God's glorious Kingdom. I outlined one or two key Bible passages and clarified the critical eternal choice we all need to make. Finally, I offered the opportunity for them to pray and accept Jesus's glorious gift of eternal life.

Mr Enthusiasm politely declined and headed off in pursuit of another customer. But, Mr Bag-polisher was curious, though not yet persuaded. He said he was not ready, but asked if we could keep in touch. I gave him a gospel tract and we exchanged contact details.

At 4:14 a.m. the next morning I received this message on my phone: 'Morning Frans...it's me from airport the shoe cleaning guy...I will like to take the journey with you to know Jesus.'

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What started as a reluctant, travel-weary conversation, ended in two precious people hearing the good news of Jesus, and one of them making a decision of eternal consequence.

How ready do you feel to have a conversation like this?

I want to propose, that if you don't feel very ready, that with God, you are more ready

than you think. Whether you feel ready or not, the harvest of lost souls, like the two shoeshine guys, is more ready than we may think (John 4:35). There are people all around us, ready to journey towards Jesus, or even ready to commit their lives to Him. Jesus is inviting us to join Him on a journey to seek and save those who are lost.

What shoes do you own? Whether you have many or few, every pair of shoes you have are designed for a purpose. If they're for football, they will look very different to a pair of high heels or smart leather shoes for the office.

In Ephesians 6, the apostle Paul writes to a group of believers in the city of Ephesus, encouraging them to put on the full armour of God. He talks about weapons for fighting God's enemy the devil, and defensive gear, such as shields, breastplates and helmets. It's all to help us stand strong and advance God's glorious Kingdom, but here's what he has to say about shoes: 'And, as **shoes** for your feet, having put on the **readiness** given by the **gospel** of peace' (Ephesians 6:15 English Standard Version, my emphasis).

Interesting. The gospel is associated with shoes, not protective armour, or swords and belts, but *shoes*. And notice there is also mention of *readiness*. But why shoes? Shoes make you mobile. They are used for walking or running or to enhance an activity.

There are two insights I'd love for you to take away from this introduction and keep them in mind while reading through the pages of this book.

1. The gospel needs to be mobile.
2. Readiness is something you put on.

THE GOSPEL NEEDS TO BE MOBILE

The apostle Paul writing to believers in Rome stated: 'How beautiful are the feet of those

who bring good news!’ (Romans 10:15). Did you spot the connection? Feet and good news! Feet need shoes of readiness to take the good news where it needs to go. But interestingly, before that in verse 14, Paul points out that people won’t know the good news unless they hear it. Isn’t that stating the obvious? He adds further, how will they hear unless someone tells them? While it’s obvious, it’s something we may not be conscious of unless it’s pointed out to us. But hopefully when we realise just how incredible and life changing the news is, and that people need to hear it to respond to it, we will embrace our role as proclaimers of this gloriously good news!

When I was a student, I heard a preacher talk about farmers in desert regions who cover up wells so that others can’t get to them. Eventually these wells run dry, and worse still a person can die of thirst right on top of a hidden well, not knowing there is water within reach. There are people dying without the gospel because we have blocked our wells. We have living waters within us, but they need to flow, like a river. How will they know unless we go? We need to find those shoes, designed for taking the good news of salvation and restoration, to people and places ready to receive it.

READINESS IS SOMETHING WE PUT ON

What makes us ready for something? Readiness to tackle certain things often takes planning and preparation; it might even require training if a particular skill is needed. According to the Cambridge online dictionary ‘readiness’ is defined as ‘willingness **or a state of being prepared for something**’.¹

Preparation and willingness! When it comes to sharing your faith, how prepared do you feel? How willing are you?

The apostle Paul seemed to think that readiness, like a pair of shoes, is something you put on. If God was not part of the equation, then that would make no sense: you need

specialised training to be ready; how can you simply ‘put it on’?

God can empower you supernaturally to be His witness beyond your own immediate competency! Acts 1:8 says that when the Spirit comes upon you, you will receive power to be His witness. He also promises to give you the words when you don’t know what to say. With God’s presence and your shoes of readiness you are ready enough to step into your calling as a witness for Christ and to bring lost people into His Kingdom and help them as they join His family. And, with God on the journey with you, you will grow as you go!

YOUR READINESS, THE MESSAGE, AND A METHOD

As I had the joy and privilege of sharing my faith with the shoeshine guys in Johannesburg airport, my prayer for you is to have similar opportunities, and to have the confidence and competence to grab them boldly. I’m hoping my book will help you.

It consists of three sections. The first focuses on cultivating your willingness. Many of us, if we are honest, will admit to being unwilling to share our faith. The good news is we can develop our inclination. In this section I’ll show you how.

In section two, you will get clarity on the magnificent message we have the privilege to proclaim. Your life has been impacted by the good news of the gospel, but the details may have become fuzzy. In this section I will give you an opportunity to consider the gospel message more deeply and grasp it in its simplicity so that you can be confident and ready to share it with others.

And in the final section you will receive a simple, three-step plan for putting on those shoes to get going with getting the good news out on time.

I wish I could tell you that my shoes of readiness are always on my feet as they should be.

But unfortunately, they are not. For two years, I'd been praying for my neighbour, Trevor. Then one day, my wife Deb called out to me while I was working busily on something that seemed very important at the time. She pointed out that an ambulance was parked outside, and Trevor was waving goodbye to some of our other neighbours as he was wheeled towards it. She suggested I go and greet him and possibly pray for him. I considered it briefly but was too absorbed in what I was doing. I thought I would pay him a visit when he got back from hospital. About two days later we heard he had passed away. My heart broke. I sobbed. I'd had such a deep burden for him, and desired to have the opportunity for a gospel conversation. But, distracted by my busyness, the opportunity was lost. To this day, I don't know if Trevor went to be with Jesus or went to a Christless eternity; there were no indicators that he'd made a commitment to follow Christ. On that day, I did not put on the shoes of readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. It's a moment I can never get back. I will never know because I did not go. A person's lifespan is their only window of opportunity to make an eternal decision to be a member of God's family and a citizen of His Kingdom.

I never want another Trevor moment. I hope you don't have one either. If you have, receive God's grace to release you of any sense of guilt or condemnation. Instead, let the memory of that person and that moment motivate you to raise your readiness for the next opportunity.

Consider some people, or places where your shoes of readiness can take you. Think of someone right now who isn't yet saved. Picture them. Pray for them. God loves that person more than you can possibly imagine. He values them so much that He paid the ultimate price for them, he sacrificed His own life to save theirs.

Carl FH Henry, one of the founders of Fuller Seminary in California, and profound theological thought leader made this statement:

‘The gospel is only good news if it gets there in time.’

Think about that for a moment. There’s no question that we have good news for a world broken and devastated by the destructive evil of sin. Glorious image bearers of God are broken, bankrupt, thirsty souls in desperate need of the living waters Jesus offers. But time is of the essence; it’s very *bad* news if an unsaved person dies and hasn’t heard the good news. I will never know this side of eternity if the gospel reached Trevor *in time*; there’s the possibility that it did not.

Will you join me in putting on the shoes of readiness, cultivating your willingness and raising your readiness? Let’s join Jesus in the adventurous journey of getting the good news of the gospel where it needs to go and getting it there on time. Together, let’s avoid lost opportunities, and trust God for many shoeshine-guy encounters!

You are more ready than you think!