

# Everyday Evangelism



How living out your faith can bring others to Christ.

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# Getting the Job Done

Wanting to spread the word wasn't enough to take away my fears.

*by Janine Petry*

I have to admit, the topic of evangelism hasn't always been on the forefront of my mind. Like most things that terrify me, I've tried to avoid thinking about it. I bury myself in "my world," and focus on the reasons I have for not reaching outside. I'm not proud of that, but it's true.

Lately, however, my fear of missing out on God's greatest work on Earth has precluded my fear of witnessing. I keep imagining myself on heaven's doorstep learning that I missed a chance to join him in bringing people into his kingdom—the whole point of why we're not already there right now. I've decided that I want to be about my Father's business.

But sadly, my desire alone hasn't transformed me into the fearless evangelist I wish I was. The doubt and timidity are still there. But there's something new there too—honesty. I've started admitting my fear to the Lord, my desire to join in, and that he is able to work in me, though I don't feel convinced of that. Now I can see that my short months of honesty have accomplished more than all my years of guilt-motivated evangelism. My heart is beginning to change, and from beginning to end, all of the glory for reaching the lost is his.

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I'm thankful that Jesus didn't put a guilt trip on us. He didn't tell us to muster our courage, get out there, and make it happen. Instead, in Luke 10:2, Jesus instructed us: "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." My job is to "ask"—to pray, first and foremost. So I do, knowing he is able to get that job done. And as I've been praying, he's been mustering the workers—starting with me. Now, not only do I ask that he'll send out laborers, but I ask him to send me too; he's getting the job done.

I'm glad you're taking the time to learn more about sharing your faith and reaching the lost around you. This resource will help guide and encourage you, as it has me. In it, you'll find valuable information and practical tips about how to reach people around you through the simplicity of your everyday life. We've also packed plenty of other resources inside to help you go even farther in learning to sharing the Good News of Christ. As you do, I'll be praying for you.

Blessings,

*Janine Petry*  
*Contributing Editor, Gifted For Leadership*  
*Christianity Today International*

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THE HEART OF THE ISSUE

# Good News Indeed!

You don't need a soapbox or a tract to share your faith.

by *Suzy Ryan*

I hate to admit it, but sometimes I'm afraid to open my mouth to tell others about Jesus. Oh, I love the Lord and want all my friends and family to know him—but when I try to witness, sometimes I feel as though there's a sock stuffed down my throat.

Perhaps you've felt the same way. You're just not comfortable with witnessing tools like tracts, but you feel guilty about not sharing Jesus' love with others. If you can't relate to traditional methods, there's another option I've found successful in leading several of my neighbors to Christ—*lifestyle evangelism*. I let my natural personality show neighbors the love of Christ as I walk with Jesus moment by moment.

Scripture tells us “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (John 6:44). This basic backdrop of truth to witnessing relieves me of the burden of perfectionism. It's God doing all the work—I'm just the vessel. As I align my life with him according to his Word, I can more easily share how the Lord has intimately changed the flawed woman I am into a usable woman. Here are some steps I've found helpful in sharing the Good News with those around me.





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**Pray for opportunities.** The Bible tells us that “the earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results ” (James 5:16, NLT). So I ask the Lord whom he is drawing to himself, and within that parameter, how he can use me. You can do the same—then make a list of those he brings to mind and pray that God will soften their hearts and give them faith to believe in him. Pray for their salvation and petition Jesus to help you meet their needs and reveal himself through your actions. When God nudges you to share your faith, say a silent prayer for him to give you his words. If all goes well, the Lord receives the glory. If disaster occurs, he takes responsibility. No pressure!

**Obey God’s promptings.** Several years ago, I invited an unchurched friend, Marion, to our church. Unfortunately, the Sunday she and her husband attended, our church was going through an intense fundraising drive. Marion wasn’t interested in going back. But the Lord prompted me to invite her to go with me to a Bible study. I adamantly replied, “No way!”

I still remember the battle in my mind. I arrived home from the Bible study and heard the Holy Spirit prompt, *Invite Marion*. I argued, *She already gave church a try. I can’t!* and *Who am I to ask her?* But no matter how I tried, I couldn’t shake the words, *Invite Marion!*

Finally I picked up the phone. When Marion answered, I literally held my breath and said, “I feel God telling me to ask you to my Bible study. If you can’t go or don’t want to, I understand, but I can’t get you out of my thoughts.” Surprisingly, she agreed and has been attending ever since (this is her fourth year). She accepted the Lord and now has more Bible knowledge than most lifelong Christians!

Watching Marion love the Lord so intensely has touched my very being. This precious soul mate has filled empty holes in my own life with her love and encouragement. To have the privilege to introduce her to Jesus is an unbelievable honor because she’s an absolute treasure for a confidante. Being obedient to the Holy Spirit—even when you feel awkward—can reap unexpected blessings.

**Walk the walk.** One of my neighbors, Melissa, used to push every one of my buttons. She constantly judged my actions and belittled my faith. Her son spent a lot of time at my house playing with my son and would tell his mom, “We prayed today at lunch for good behavior. I also learned God can change bad men into good men, like he did with Paul in the Bible.” In a rush of anger, she once stormed into my house

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lecturing, “My child is not to pray. If you want to teach your children to depend on a God who lets innocent babies die and earthquakes kill people, fine. But I will teach my child all he has to depend on is himself. Your religion is for the weak.”

Many nights, I cried out to the Lord, “Bring someone else to minister to her!” But the Lord continually reminded me, *With my power, I can give you genuine affection for Melissa and her family.*

My patience was tested the eight years they were our neighbors. But before they moved, God laid it on my heart to speak to Melissa one last time. Obediently I offered, “I know you don’t understand and share my faith, but I want you to know that if you ever get to the place where you want to know God personally or have any questions, please know my door is always open to you.”

Her reply brought tears to my eyes. “Suzy, I’ve watched you, and you really live your Christian faith. It isn’t something you just talk about. I’m beginning to think more about religion, since my son is curious on this subject.” Her words encouraged my soul—and made me realize anew that people on my street are watching me.

Your neighbors will notice if you still go to church in bad weather. They’ll notice if you forgive a friend who treats you poorly or exercise self-control with an out-of-control child. They’ll note if you choose not to complain about your absent, working husband or opt out of gossip sessions concerning a mutual acquaintance. When you choose to represent the Lord, you must hold yourself to a higher standard.

**Meet others’ needs.** Analyze pertinent ideas to help friends. Do they need an encouraging note? Why not have your children make a picture with a treat attached? Can you offer to babysit for a weary mother or make dinner for a working couple? Or maybe you can think of a book or tape that’s appropriate to encourage a harried mom, a woman irritated with her husband, or a friend grieving a loss. Why not furnish welcome baskets for new neighbors, with Bible verses attached? Meet your neighbors’ needs as you impart God’s Word, making it come alive by your consistent conduct of unconditional giving.

Unconditional love without expectation is a powerful testimony. And God has blessed me with the opportunity to implement all these suggestions. However, one word of warning: Know your limits. Since I have three children five years and under, my garage door shuts at 2

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p.m. for naptime, and I hang a “Do not disturb” sign on my door. Start by praying where God would like you to begin, and obediently listen to his voice. He will not stretch you past your limits.

**Be willing to be inconvenienced.** “To live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). God can’t work through you if you’re filled with self. To be an effective witness, you may have to drive out of your way to pick up a friend for church, but will losing a little sleep really kill you?

If you’re discussing a controversial topic, how about giving up the last word for the Lord? Remain steadfast in your commitment to basic biblical truths, but don’t cram them down another person’s throat. If a friend wants to discuss abortion, compassionately listen to her point of view. Agree to disagree. These healthy dialogues actually solidify the position in your own heart. Don’t apologize for your opinion, but respect hers. Admit more Christians should support unwed mothers. If the neighbor wants to discuss hypocrisy in church, confess that it is rampant, but that God remains true and trustworthy. My secular companions know where I stand on social issues, but I never allow myself a defensive or holier-than-thou attitude.

**Practice patience.** Cultivating the right to share your faith means building respect. Sometimes this seed is sown for years, but many times it’s overnight. Pray where God would like you to embark, and then ask questions. “How can I pray for you?” might help console a depressed friend.

Several months ago, a friend and I started praying God would bring Christians into our neighborhood. The day we prayed was the day Troy and Susan’s family bought a house on our street. Although they weren’t yet Christians, Susan expressed her desire to find a church to attend with her two young daughters, so I immediately invited them to our place of worship. Basically, all I did was extend the request—and the Lord graciously used me as the vehicle for this precious family to get to know him. Today they’re attending church, their children are in a youth program, and she attends a Bible study.

There’s another neighbor, Lisa, who moved in six months before Susan. At first she seemed interested in the Lord, even asking me for an explanation of salvation. But she backed away after we went to church together. I’m waiting patiently, praying for her. I don’t request her presence at Christian functions anymore, because she’s made it clear she needs space. Discernment is key in every situation, and God liberally provides this gift. When he is ready for me to start the invitations again, he’ll let me know.

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In the end, lifestyle evangelism's really about allowing the Lord to change and use you when you make your life available to him. There's no greater pleasure in life than to introduce someone else to God's grace.

*Suzy Ryan is a freelance writer who lives with her family in California. This article first appeared in the September/October 1997 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*

## Thought Provokers

- *Contrast “traditional methods” of evangelism with the author’s description of “lifestyle [or relational] evangelism.” What are the strengths and weaknesses of both?*
- *Why is it important to “pray for opportunities” to share Christ with others? What is the result of failing to pray for these? How is this related to “obeying God’s promptings” in sharing your faith?*
- *How are you “walking the walk” in view of those around you? Why is this important to being able to “meet others’ needs”? How are these two practices forms of relational evangelism?*

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GETTING DEEPER

# Start Spreading the News

Why it's important to reach outside your Christian clique.

by John Ortberg

A few years ago, while I was visiting my parents in California, I decided I needed a haircut. So I went to the shop where my mom goes to get her hair done. As Jim, the owner, trimmed my hair, we started talking about spiritual things. The more we talked, the more intrigued Jim became, and the more of my hair he cut. I ended up with very short hair, but our conversation about what I believed about Jesus Christ was worth it! Later I suggested to my mom, who knows Jim and his wife, Pam, that the next time she got her hair cut, she should invite them to the church group my parents host.

“There’s no way they’d be interested. Not a chance,” my mom replied. “Jim and Pam lead a pretty wild life. I don’t know two people who are further from God than they are.”

But I persisted. So the next time Mom went to the salon, she shot up a silent prayer: *God, I don’t think these people are interested in you. So if you want me to say anything to them, you’d better make something happen.* Right then Pam, who was styling my mom’s hair, said, “Jim and I understand you’re in a group that talks about spiritual things. We’d like to come.”

Pam and Jim started going to the group and eventually prayed with my folks to give their lives to Christ—all because of a conversation prompted by a relationship that had developed over a series of haircuts!





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Unfortunately this kind of interaction rarely happens. Most Christians spend virtually all their time with other Christians. They're not significantly connected with people who are far from God.

But when it comes to the important matters of life, people don't usually put themselves in the hands of strangers. They listen to people they trust. This is especially true when it comes to the ultimate issue in life—our spiritual destiny. If people are going to be reached for Christ, for the most part, they won't be reached by strangers but by friends.

I have one friend whose kids are in the “soccer years.” She's developed friendships with nonbelievers at her kids' practices, and struck up meaningful conversations by caring for people while she does what she'd be doing anyway. It can be that easy.

Try cultivating a relationship with somebody who works at a restaurant you frequent. Meet people at your health club. Have the neighbors over for dinner. Get to know them. Pray for them. Developing relationships with non-Christians is possible. As you follow Christ's example and learn to befriend people who don't know God, there are three things to remember.

**Never say “no” for anyone.** Jesus reached out to people everybody else gave up on—tax collectors, lepers, sinners, Gentiles. The religious folk of Jesus' day were sure these people would say no to God, but they surprised the religious establishment by saying yes. We never should say no to God for these people because we never know what the Holy Spirit can do.

I was at a banquet once and this slick guy sat down by me. We talked about a variety of topics, including religion. He said his family stopped going to church when he was 12. He seemed disinterested in church now, and I was hesitant to invite him to my church, but I did. Imagine my surprise when he ended up visiting the next week. He started reading the Bible and soon began to contemplate accepting Jesus as his Savior.

The last time I saw him, he was with a friend, and he introduced me as “the man who led me to Jesus.” I wouldn't have missed that for anything! The sad thing is, I almost deprived him of the opportunity to become a Christian because I erroneously pegged him as someone who wouldn't be interested in Jesus.

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Think of your world. Is there anybody so far from God you're ready to give up on them? Maybe it's someone in your extended family who ridicules your faith. Maybe it's an old acquaintance who's resisted for years. Maybe it's somebody so deep in sin you think there's no hope.

Don't ever say "no" for anybody when it comes to spreading the good news of the gospel. You never know when someone's heart will soften and how God's Spirit will work.

**Put yourself in the shoes of the person you invite to a Christ-centered function.** A few blocks from my parents' home in California is the largest Buddhist temple in America. I went once to check it out and received amazing insight into how intimidating it can be to go into a place of worship as a stranger who doesn't know the customs. So when you invite someone to a Christian function, offer to pick her up instead of just telling her where it is. The likelihood she'll come is much higher if you suggest going together.

Offer to go eat or have coffee afterwards. That's a gesture of friendship, and it gives you a chance to discuss what's taken place.

**Be the hands and feet of Jesus.** In Mark 1:40–45, a leper approached Jesus and begged to be made clean. The law said lepers couldn't have contact with non-lepers. They had to cry out "Unclean!" and stay outside the village. But when this leper came to Jesus and asked, "Would you make me clean?" Jesus didn't turn away.

To everyone's amazement, Jesus touched this man who hadn't been touched in years. Jesus didn't have to do that; he could have healed the man through the spoken word. But instead, he touched the man, then said, "Be clean." Was Jesus infected by leprosy? No, it was the other way around! Jesus was so full of life and health that he "infected" the leper with the good news of the kingdom of God. Jesus was more contagious with God's power and love than the leper was with his disease.

If the Spirit of God lives inside you, you're like that. You, too, can be a contagious Christian who infects others with God's power and love. Take a look at your hands for a moment. How often are they extended in service to someone who's far from God?

The kingdom of God never has spread primarily through preachers speaking to unconnected strangers. It's never spread primarily through the mass media. God's kingdom is spread by the same method it's been

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spread for 2,000 years: through Christ-followers so convinced the life Jesus offers is the pearl of great price that they reach beyond their circle of Christian friends, develop meaningful relationships, and bring people to Christ—one life at a time.

*John Ortberg, a pastor, is the author of If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat (Zondervan). This article first appeared in the July/August 2002 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*

## Thought Provokers

- *Evaluate your lifestyle: Do you spend most of your time with Christians or with those who are far from God? Why?*
- *The author writes, "When it comes to the important matters of life, people don't usually put themselves in the hands of strangers. They listen to people they trust. This is especially true when it comes to the ultimate issue in life—our spiritual destiny. If people are going to be reached for Christ, for the most part, they won't be reached by strangers but by friends." Do you agree or disagree? Why?*
- *How often are your hands extended in service to someone who's far from God?*





PRACTICALLY SPEAKING

# Invite Them into the Kitchen

Even those wary of church can be drawn into God's family.

*an interview with Andy Stanley*

If ever anyone was destined to lead a big church, it is Andy Stanley. The son of Charles Stanley, Andy grew up with firsthand exposure to his dad's ministry at First Baptist Church of Atlanta.

Early on, it was clear that the younger Stanley had inherited a gift for communicating. After graduating from Dallas Seminary, he served as youth pastor at First Baptist for 10 years and had regular opportunities in the pulpit.

In 1995, Stanley and a handful of others launched North Point Community Church. Unable to find a permanent meeting place for three years, the church met every other Sunday evening at different locations. When the 1996 Olympics came to town, the church couldn't meet for nine weeks because its usual gathering spots were booked. Still, the church grew. In September 1998, North Point's 1,500 attenders moved into an impressive, 110,000-square foot building in Alpharetta, a growing suburb north of Atlanta.

Today, more than 5,000 people attend North Point's two Sunday morning services and another 2,000-plus singles meet on Tuesday nights. LEADERSHIP editors Marshall Shelley and Edward Gilbreath visited North Point to ask Stanley, 41, about preaching to contemporary audiences comprised of both skittish seekers and mature believers.





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### **How conscious are you of the diverse personal situations represented among your listeners on Sunday morning?**

I'm very aware. I'm a relational person. When a member introduces me to a visitor and then whispers to me, "You know, he's not a believer" or "This is the guy I've been trying to get here," I find myself preaching with them in mind.

### **How specifically do you address that person?**

I'm not preaching at them, but I feel like I'm sitting at the table with them. It's an invigorating thing for me because I'm partnering with our members in reaching that particular person. They may have spent four or five months trying to get this person here, and what they're saying is, "Andy, here he is. You'd better deliver."

### **Is your sermon the pivotal event in the service?**

Not necessarily. I often tell our people, "The sermon starts in the parking lot. You are the introduction." In other words, if our members haven't created a positive impression and if they haven't been won in our worship, by the time I get up there, our visitors have pretty much determined if they're going to listen or not.

Most people come to church for the first time trying not to like it. They want three excuses why they don't have to go back. So we do what we can to disarm that. I tell my pastor friends, "You don't introduce your sermons; your folks do. And if they're not trained on how to do that, then you have a problem."

### **Does this "outsider focus" reflect your personality?**

I'm very involved in relational evangelism. I know what I want the experience to be like when my friends finally show up. So we'll go to just about any length to tear down all the walls and to say, "If you're going to be offended, we want you to be offended by only one thing: the gospel." After all, that's supposed to be somewhat offensive to a sinner.

But we don't want anyone to be offended by something that happened in the parking lot, or by some off-the-cuff remark about a social issue. For instance, we don't allow groups to pass out voter guides, and we discourage bumper stickers. We chase people out of the parking lots all the time who are trying to put Christian stuff on people's windshields. This is about partnering to win souls.

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### What's the overall strategy at North Point?

Our church is built around three kinds of environments:

- The foyer environment, where people are made to feel welcome as a guest.
- The living-room environment, where they're treated like a friend.
- And the kitchen environment, where they're made to feel like family.

Everything we do hangs on one of those hooks, or we just don't do it. The goal is to move people from the foyer to the living room to the kitchen.

Our worship service is a “foyer event.” We expect guests. I instruct our people: “When you have guests in your home, there are certain things you don't do, certain things you don't talk about. You don't abandon your belief system when you have guests, but as a gracious host, you know certain subjects are best left for family or maybe for friends.”

### Do you avoid “kitchen issues” on Sunday mornings?

When I am forced by the text—which I think has to rule in preaching—to talk about “family issues,” then I say to our guests, “If you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, this next part is going to sound awfully strange to you. In fact, what I'm about to say may be one of the reasons you don't go to church.”

I don't avoid topics, but I let them know that I know how this might strike them. This gives them permission to say, “Okay, they at least understand. Maybe we aren't on the same page in terms of what we believe, but at least they know we're not on the same page.”

I don't pull punches, but I qualify a lot of things, because from the world's perspective, we Christians believe some strange stuff. Sometimes preachers are not sensitive to that, and so people are afraid to bring their friends to church because they feel like they have to sit real close and explain, “Here's what he meant,” or they're thinking, *I hope he doesn't talk about that today.*

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### **In a sense, then, you are providing a service to assist members in their evangelizing.**

We put it this way: “We want to partner with you in the evangelism process. You do what you do best; we’ll do what we do best. We can present the message with color, humor, music, video, all the bells and whistles. But your relationship is the most important part.”

We summarize our whole evangelism strategy as “invest and invite.” You invest in a life of an unbeliever, and when they’re ready, you invite them to a “foyer” event. And in that environment they’re going to be presented with the gospel in a relevant way. But then it’s back on you as the inviter to pursue that relationship.

### **How do you keep this vision before the congregation?**

Every once in a while I mention in a sermon that this church isn’t for everyone: “We don’t want any more people who are just coming to take notes and buy tapes and go home and do nothing.” We’ve tried to position ourselves for people who want to reach people—and for the people they are in the process of reaching.

### **How do you encourage community in a large-church setting where most people don’t know one another?**

In every message, I try to celebrate community. We encourage and equip people to pursue three vital relationships: intimacy with God, community with insiders, and influence with outsiders. That’s our strategy.

But community is not going to happen on Sunday morning in a church this size, and we don’t even try to make it happen there.

Sunday morning is a foyer event; it’s only one part of our overall strategy. Which means preaching is only one part of our overall strategy, but it’s an important part.

What I’m doing on Sunday morning is gathering in all the potential people who one day can experience community. I bait them through teaching and stories and through presenting our strategy over and over until they’re willing to take the next step.

### **Lots of planning goes into your services—music, multimedia, and sermons all work together. So how do you plan your preaching?**

We start with Easter. That’s the beginning of the preaching calendar year because that’s when the most people come for the first time. So we ask ourselves, “What new series can we announce on Easter that’s most likely to bring an Easter visitor back?”

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That's likely to be topical. But we also need to balance topical themes with more directly Bible-oriented material. So we do a Bible-book series usually toward the end of the year as we head back into Easter. We think of it in terms of a maturity cycle. It's not perfect. People pop in and out, but you have to start somewhere. So far it's worked.

### **Where do you get the “hook” for your sermons?**

I always think in terms of relationships, because that's where all the tension is. Take, for instance, the topic of money. What's the tension with money? It's a relationship. Everything goes back to some sort of relationship, either between you and God, or you and another person. With money, you may resist giving away your money because you fear God may not take care of you.

You can take any topic and pinpoint where the tension is and how it affects a person relationally. And when you start talking about that, most of your audience will connect.

### **Conventional wisdom would say that money is a “kitchen topic;” you don't talk about that in the foyer. How did you preach such a delicate subject to the spectrum of people in your congregation?**

We knew money would be a sensitive subject for unchurched people. It's one of the smokescreens they throw up. “I don't want to go to church. All they want is money.” So we had to disarm that mentality.

First, we handed out sealed envelopes to everybody in the congregation. I preached the sermon on the idea that everything in heaven and earth belongs to God. The point being that we're simply to be stewards of what he's put on loan to us. Then I said, “We're going to do stewardship practice. So, I want you to open your envelope.” And they opened their envelopes to find ... money!

Also in the envelope was a little green card that said: “I'm going to invest in God's kingdom by ...” Their assignment was to take the money and invest it in God's kingdom outside this church. They couldn't give it back to us. We asked them to turn in their cards and write on them, “Here's how I invested it in God's kingdom.” This was stewardship practice. They got to practice on us.

We got thousands of the cards back. I'd estimate the \$37,000 became a half-million dollars because of what people added and gave to a kingdom cause. And the stories are remarkable. Now, every Sunday, I get up and read a letter from a member about how \$5 became \$500.





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### **So, the issue isn't so much the topic as the way the topic is presented.**

There's no topic we can't talk about. We just have to take into consideration what the immediate negatives are. How do we disarm people? How do we do it in an authentic way?

The great communication issue for a pastor is NOT just about what I want them to know and what do I want them to do. That's the summary. The question that great communicators answer is, "Why do you need to know or do this?"

Most times, the answer is, "Because he's a good God and he loves you, and he wants what's best for you. You don't have to do it, but he's not just up there making stuff up." The heavier the topic, the clearer I have to be on the why behind the what.

### **We hear about the shorter attention spans of the contemporary audiences, that this A.D.D. generation can't handle more than 15 or 20 minutes of preaching. Yet you typically preach for more than a half-hour.**

My dad preaches an hour, and they can't get everybody in fast enough. The attention span thing is a myth.

We've all listened to communicators, and, number one, we couldn't believe the time went by that fast and, number two, we wish they wouldn't stop because they're great communicators. It has nothing to do with attention span. It has to do with the environment, the type of chair you're sitting on, what happened before, what your expectations are, the interest, the content, the visuals, the pace.

We have to be as clear as MUD—memorable, understandable, and do-able. Can they remember something? Do they understand it? Can they do it? Most of the time that means the preacher should just make one point, communicate one thing well.

### **How much of your effort to preach to today's listeners is a matter of style as opposed to content?**

In general, it's the style we use that gets people's attention. The method is what draws the crowd. The joke around here is we'd have a bigger problem if we changed our music than if we changed our doctrine. We can change our doctrine, and a few people would get upset and leave. But if we changed the music, we'd split the church. So, the method of communication takes precedence over content in terms of audience appeal. I don't think that's a good thing, but it would be hard to argue that's not the case.

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### **So just presenting the truth is not enough to connect with contemporary audiences.**

I talk to pastors sometimes who rationalize their church's lack of growth by saying, "I'm just preaching the truth. If they don't like it, that's too bad." But we're supposed to be a little more proactive than that. That would be like a salesman saying, "Well, you know, I made a few calls, but they just don't want to buy my product." That guy wouldn't keep his job very long. Preaching today should be less about defending the truth and more about applying the truth.

### **For ages, preachers have struggled to walk the fine line between wholeness ("God loves you just the way you are") and holiness ("but he loves you too much to leave you that way"). How do you balance those two themes in a seeker-sensitive setting?**

That was the brilliance of Jesus' ministry: he didn't try to balance those two extremes. He took them both and brought them together. That's the task we have as the body of Christ. We should reflect that paradox. We shouldn't try to find where we are on a continuum. We need to go to both ends, both extremes, and say, "You are fully accepted, but compared to the standard, you have a long way to go."

There's always the temptation in preaching to compromise at one end because you might lose somebody, or to make this sin worse than it actually is compared to other sins. But that's our challenge as preachers of the gospel.

*This article first appeared in the Winter 2000 issue of LEADERSHIP journal.*

## Thought Provokers

- *Andy Stanley teaches his congregants that "The sermon starts in the parking lot. You are the introduction." What does this mean? Do you agree or disagree with this philosophy?*
- *Stanley shared the church's philosophy on "environments" saying, "The goal is to move people from the foyer to the living room to the kitchen." How does this framework help you to understand relational evangelism? What are the strengths of using such a model to reach unbelievers? What are the weaknesses?*
- *When it comes to evangelism, what topics seem to you to be "off-limits"? How could you disarm people regarding the topic, in an authentic way, in order to build a new bridge for Christ?*

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How To

# Evangelism for Today

Reach people who think negatively about Christianity

*an interview with Brian McLaren*

**B**rian McLaren pastors inside the beltway at Cedar Ridge Community Church in Spencerville, Maryland, is author of *More Ready Than You Realize: Evangelism and Dance in the Postmodern Matrix* (Zondervan), and was featured speaker at the National Pastors Convention in February 2002. Here's what he had to share about a new shape for evangelism.

**How can we speak evangelistically to people today? Is it different from how we spoke to former generations?**

Much of our evangelism here in the United States was developed in a context of Christendom, in which just about everybody knew the basic information of Christianity and were favorably disposed to it. Evangelism got people to act on what they already knew and, in a sense, already passively believed. You could call people to commitment relatively quickly. You could also use pretty forceful persuasive techniques.

In dealing with postmoderns, you're dealing with people who do not know the basics of Christianity. If anything, they have a negative idea of what Christianity is. So it makes no sense to them if you come on too strong and quickly ask for a commitment. We should count conversations rather than conversions, not because I don't believe in conversions, but because I don't think we'll get many conversions if we keep emphasizing them.

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### **So what does evangelism to postmoderns look like?**

When most people think of evangelism, the idea of “arguments” comes up—arguments for the existence of God, arguments for the uniqueness of Christ, arguments for the inspiration of the Bible. For postmodern people, anything presented as an argument is less persuasive because arguments suggest a message of conquest rather than a message of peace. Postmoderns are so assaulted by advertisements and political messages that for a message to be important and true, it must come in a form other than argument.

Also, we have become good at boiling the gospel down into little four-step outlines. Modern people love diagrams; it’s all about engineering. But postmodern people feel that truth comes as a mystery, a story, and a work of art; truth is more like poetry than engineering. This forces us to ask if we have a clear understanding of what the gospel really is. If, for hundreds of years, we have turned the gospel into a problem-solution mindset or series of arguments, we must ask how that may have distorted our understanding of the gospel. In many ways, the modern evangelical gospel is a message about how to not go to hell. When you step back and ask if that’s really the gospel from Jesus’ perspective, it’s pretty hard to answer yes. When Jesus talks about the gospel, he talks about the kingdom of God. That offers a whole realm of questions that are more important.

### **How do you train people to be authentic witnesses for the gospel?**

We don’t talk about having a missions department in our church. Instead, we tell people that what we do is missions. When we become a follower of Christ, we’re signing up for his mission. That involves doing good, caring for the poor, and giving out cups of cold water in Christ’s name, then telling others the story of the gospel and what God has done in our lives. We talk about being and making disciples in authentic community for the good of the world. We talk about that because, according to Jesus, one of the things disciples do is help others become disciples.

### **Besides showing kindness, how do you reach out without being pushy?**

We emphasize that to be a good member of our church, we must get to know our neighbors. We say: Throw parties. Have people over. Be nice to the children in your neighborhood. Be good people. Be good neighbors.





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That makes it easier to talk to people about your faith. You know that verse in 1 Peter 3 about always being ready to give an answer? Well, that implies that people are asking questions. To me, part of the issue is how we can help Christians live such good lives that people want to ask questions. If people aren't asking the questions, and we're teaching Christians how to talk rather than walk, we might just be encouraging them to be obnoxious.

### **What questions might people ask of Christians?**

Many would ask, "Is Christianity good, and can it make me into a better person, or will it make me a jerk?" They ask that because when they think of Christians, they tend to think of people who are narrow-minded, judgmental, arrogant, and angry. And they think, "Wow, I really want God, and I'd rather be a Christian than a Buddhist or a Muslim, but Christians look like jerks. I don't want to become like that."

They might also ask, "How can I be a Christian without becoming hateful toward people of other religions?" If we answer that question by giving reasons why other religions are wrong, we just prove that we're not the kind of person they want to become.

### **How can churches be more welcoming to postmodern non-Christians or new believers?**

To become this kind of church, we may have to accept people who don't dress right, don't talk right, don't smell right, and don't think right. If we're not willing to let them belong before they believe, they will never believe in our church. If a group says we will only accept you if you agree with us, it sounds like any other worldly group. What people are looking for is a group that accepts them regardless of whether they conform. That becomes one of the validations of the gospel.

*This article first appeared on **LeadershipJournal.Net** on August 1, 2001.*

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### Thought Provokers

- *Evaluate your personal style of evangelism. Using Brian McLaren's insights, would your style appeal more to "moderns" or to "postmoderns"? Is the style you use appropriate for those you are trying to reach? Why or why not?*
- *What do you think McLaren means when he says, "we should count conversations rather than conversions, not because I don't believe in conversions, but because I don't think we'll get many conversions if we keep emphasizing them"?*
- *As a Christian, how do you protect against sending the message that "we will only accept you if you agree with us"? In what ways are you accepting people the way they are, while pointing them to the truth about Christ?*

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BIBLICALLY SPEAKING

# Back to the Bible

How reading Scripture with spiritual seekers can help create Christ followers.

by *Laura T. De Gomez*

I'd heard through the grapevine that two coworkers, Martha and Maria Claudia, had expressed some interest in spiritual things. So I dropped by their office one day and said, "Hi! I've been meaning to ask you both: Would you be interested in reading the Bible with me?" They looked at each other, then back at me, and said yes. I was surprised by their enthusiasm. When I didn't get back to them as soon as they expected, they called me to find out when we could start!

From the beginning, they loved it. Their initial nervousness evolved into excitement as they discovered the Bible is relevant to everyday life. By the second or third week, they were captivated by Jesus. Within about eight weeks, they had a clear understanding of salvation by faith. That was eight years ago. Both continue to walk with Jesus today and remain my friends. And it all started with a simple invitation to read the Bible together.

Of course, not all my experiences of reading Scripture with non-Christians have been so dramatic. I've endured plenty of no-shows and disappointments. I've met with some non-believing friends for years, and they don't seem to get it. Nevertheless, I've come to believe looking at the Scriptures with non-Christians is one of the most powerful ways we can help them to see Jesus. Here are the main lessons I've learned about how to start reading the Bible with spiritual seekers.

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### First Impressions

When I first heard about reading the Word with non-believers in Jim Petersen's book *Living Proof*, it seemed like a strange idea. Wasn't the Bible for believers? I didn't think non-Christians would be interested in learning what it says. But when I experimented with the idea, I was amazed by what happened.

Reading the Bible with my non-believing friends fosters a level of spiritual interaction that falls somewhere between casual friendship and an invitation to church. It creates a comfortable environment in which they can begin to look at Jesus, ask questions, and talk about life issues.

Reading together also exposes people directly to the power of Scripture. The God who encourages, convicts, corrects, and sometimes bowls you over with his Word can do the same in an unbeliever's life. Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord said, "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud ... My word that goes out from my mouth ... will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:10–11).

I don't know what all my friends go through, or what they think—but God does. And I've seen him use Scripture to meet their needs, quell their fears, and dispel their misconceptions.

As Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

Scripture can touch my friends' hearts in a way I may never be able to.

### The Invitation

How do you go about introducing people to the Bible? As I get to know a neighbor or coworker, I look for non-threatening opportunities to talk about my convictions and identify their source as the Bible. After I've told someone I rely on the Bible to guide me in life, I follow up by casually suggesting we read it together. That step may seem like a big leap, but I've found it's a natural progression.

With my neighbor and walking buddy, Flor, it went something like this: During a conversation about our husbands and marriage, I told her, "You know, Mauricio (my husband) and I love to read the Bible

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together. It's amazing how it helps us with our relationship problems. If you're interested, we'd enjoy reading it with you and Guillermo. We could light a fire in the fireplace, make some munchies, talk about what's happening in our lives, and then read a small portion of the Bible together and talk about it." So far they haven't taken us up on this offer, but I'm confident the seed I've sown eventually will sprout.

I've learned it's important to present this idea as "reading" the Bible, not "studying" the Bible. For most non-believers, the idea of studying Scripture sounds too intense. For nominally religious people, I ask if they would like to take a closer look for themselves at what the Bible says.

### **When You Meet**

When I meet with non-believing friends, we don't sing or pray, and I don't ask them to prepare anything in advance. We visit for a while, open our Bibles, read a passage out loud, and then talk about it. The first night we meet, I sometimes ask people to tell me about their spiritual journey.

Regarding what to read, I recommend focusing on the life of Christ in one of the four Gospels.

My favorite is the Gospel of John, because John presents Jesus as a multifaceted person and makes a strong case for his divinity. Briefly explain the mechanics of books, chapters, and verses, then go to the first chapter and read it out loud, taking turns if you like. After you've read a chapter together, you can begin to talk about what you've observed.

To help your friend grapple with the text, prepare ahead of time. I always spend time meditating on the portion we'll be reading, then I develop some thought-provoking questions to prompt my friend to look closely at the passage.

I know one man who asks simply, "What grabs your attention in these verses?" Someone else I know uses remarkable creativity. For example, for the fourth chapter of John, he asks, "If you were the director of a movie about this Samaritan woman, who would you cast in her role? Why?" Simple or elaborate, find a style of your own, and choose questions that work for you.

As I move from discussion toward application, I like to ask two questions at the end of every passage: "What do these paragraphs say about who Jesus is or what he's like?" and "If these things are true

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about him, what do you think a proper response would be?” These questions keep your focus on Jesus and help your friends formulate personal responses to the truths they’re confronting.

### Questions Versus Answers

The biggest obstacle to trying this is the misconception that you don’t know enough to read the Bible with a non-Christian. But it’s important to get out of the spotlight and believe “the word of God is living and active” (Hebrews 4:12). Once we get into Scripture, our job is to provide the questions, not the answers. You’ll be amazed at how God answers questions. He can clear away doubts. He can convince.

My friend Ana Maria asked recently, “If God is going to do his will anyway, why should I ask him for anything when I pray?” One response might be, “I’ve thought about that question myself. What do *you* think the purpose of prayer is?” If the passage has to do with prayer (in our case it didn’t), direct the person back to it. If the level of trust in the relationship allows, you also could probe by asking, “Do you feel God listens to you when you pray?” Remember, we aren’t the source of the truth; the Bible is. Our role is to create an environment in which our friends can discover that truth.

### Dodging Distractions

If your friend suddenly asks, “But what about all the people from the deepest jungle who never heard of Jesus?” Rejoice, but don’t answer the question. It won’t help her. It’s probably a sign she feels God approaching and wants to ward him off with a hard question.

I have one friend who brings up that question about three times a year. I tried to answer it several times before I realized she wasn’t really interested in my response; she was looking for an intellectual loophole, something to let her off the hook from what she was learning about Jesus. Since then, I’ve given up trying to answer—and she doesn’t seem to miss my words of wisdom.

I also refrain from discussions about the authority of God’s Word. I keep the conversation at the level of “What does this passage say?” When I move toward application, I phrase my questions like this: “If this verse is true, then how does that truth affect us?”

Without one word from me, the Holy Spirit convinces people that God’s Word is exactly that, *God’s* word. After a week or two, people still may complain that they don’t like or agree with what the Bible says. But comments such as, “This is just a book written by men,” or

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“This religion is basically the same as all the others,” seem to die away. My friends begin to take Scripture seriously and wrestle with the person of Jesus.

### **Practical Considerations**

I’ve discovered a number of practical considerations that may help you begin to read the Bible with non-believers.

1. When you invite someone to read the Bible, make sure she understands she isn’t signing up for life. You might invite her to a one-time reading and then follow up to see if she’d like to go further. Or you might ask if she’s interested in reading one chapter of a Gospel each week until you’ve finished it. Whatever you do, make sure you’ve clearly communicated a timeframe.
2. You can read with one non-believing friend or several at once. If you’ve invited several non-Christians to read the Bible with you, it might be wise to include a Christian friend as well—but no more than one. With Martha and Maria Claudia, I asked a Christian friend to join us. She listened, made a few timely comments, and redirected me when I missed something. It’s critical other believers clearly understand the group’s purpose: to help nonbelievers read the Word of God.
3. Short and sweet is best. One hour seems about right for most people. Better to leave them hanging than to wear them out!
4. If you decide to study the Gospel of John, Jim Petersen has included discussion questions in *Living Proof* that cover each chapter.
5. Be prepared for plenty of no-shows. Even if people are interested, it’s probably not the priority for them that it is for you.
6. Different meeting places offer different advantages. In your home, you can create a welcoming atmosphere. Meeting in a non-Christian’s place cuts down no-shows and creates a sense of shared ownership. A coffee shop or some other public space can create an effective “neutral territory.”
7. Have Fun! Perhaps the most unexpected encouragement I’ve received from reading the Bible with non-Christian friends is the fun. After the first day with Martha and Maria Claudia, they were smiling and fingering pages of their Bibles. One of them said, “I like this. It’s not what I expected. Let’s do it again.”

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I can't wait to watch God write more stories in others' lives as well. I hope you'll give it a try too, interacting with your non-Christian friends over God's powerful Word.

*Laura T. De Gomez lives in Bagota, Colombia, with her husband and two children. This article first appeared in the November/December 2004 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*

## Thought Provokers

- *What are your first impressions about reading the Bible with non-believers? Do you think this could be an effective way for you to reach out to those around you? Why or why not?*
- *Reread Isaiah 55:10–11. What does this mean? How does reading the Bible with non-believers fit into this?*
- *The author writes, "The biggest obstacle to trying this is the misconception that you don't know enough to read the Bible with a non-Christian. But it's important to get out of the spotlight and believe 'the word of God is living and active' (Hebrews 4:12). Once we get into Scripture, our job is to provide the questions, not the answers. You'll be amazed at how God answers questions. He can clear away doubts. He can convince." What are your biggest obstacles to trying a method like this? What verses in the Bible address your concerns and provide encouragement?*





# Additional Resources

More places for more help.

**A Spirit Fit to Lead**, a downloadable resource from GiftedforLeadership.com. When our souls aren't being nourished, it can be easy to bring unnecessary challenges into leadership situations—whether at church, work, or even at home. Maybe we aren't as patient as we could be. Maybe we seek conflict instead of peace. Maybe we ignore the promptings of the Holy Spirit when we should be focused on them.

**Homosexuals and the Church**, a downloadable resource from GiftedforLeadership.com. If we want to be effective about reaching people with the Good News, we need to be willing to reach out to everyone in our communities who needs it—and that means homosexuals just as much as anyone else. Even if the issues surrounding it are a bit “hot.” This downloadable resource sets out to temper that heat by offering a comprehensive look at the issues surrounding homosexuality and the church.

**Leading a Small Group Bible Study**, a downloadable resource from GiftedforLeadership.com. This resource pack from Gifted for Leadership offers good stories and solid information to help anyone do better at leading a small group. Get practical advice from these experts to help you make the most of your small-group leadership opportunity.

**Loving Hard-to-Love People**, a downloadable resource from GiftedforLeadership.com. This packet from Gifted for Leadership gives you wisdom for loving difficult people in your congregation, small group, ministry team, or workplace.





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**Leading with Confidence**, a downloadable resource from GiftedforLeadership.com. Learn to respond to the challenges God throws your way with confidence because of his strength. God often calls us to do things that at the very least stretch our gifts or at the most force us to step out on faith in unknown territory, depending on God alone to equip us with what's needed for the tasks. This download will help guide you in learning to lead with confidence in this way.

**Living Proof**, by Jim Petersen (NAV Press, 1989). Just witnessing with words is not enough, says Jim Petersen. We must demonstrate the gospel by living a natural, friendly, Bible-centered life—that is, by becoming living proof of our message. Petersen shows you how to develop relationships with the unchurched, empathize with their needs, model the Christian message, and eventually present the Bible's claim in a non-threatening way.

**Reaching the World**, a downloadable resource from the TodaysChristianWomanStore.com. Reaching the lost on the global level is an opportunity most Christians dream about, but for the majority it is a desire that remains unfulfilled. If you have the desire to be used globally, but don't think that you have the time or what it takes, then download this informative Life Guide. In it you will find practical ways to get involved through prayer, giving, or serving. We've even included contact information and web addresses so that you can learn more. It is never too late to be a part of something bigger than yourself.

**Religions of the World**, a downloadable resource from the TodaysChristianWomanStore.com. The following Life Guide gives solid information about other religions so that you can be informed and knowledgeable when it comes to sharing your faith with others. Gain a better understanding of their beliefs, practices, and idols. Articles include Islam, Buddhism, Scientology, and New Age. Learn how to relate to others tomorrow by educating yourself today.

**Spiritual Direction and Formation**, a downloadable resource from GiftedforLeadership.com. Learn what these terms mean and how to make them a part of your life. This downloadable packet from Gifted for Leadership explains what you need to know about spiritual direction and formation. The guidance offered will help transform your spiritual life.





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**Witness to Your Family**, a downloadable resource from the [TodaysChristianWomanStore.com](http://TodaysChristianWomanStore.com). If you find yourself hitting a brick wall or dodging questions when it comes to sharing your faith with family members, then this Life Guide will help. You'll find witnessing help and testimonies from others who have put their hope in Christ for the salvation of their loved ones. Remember that the Lord hears your prayers and that your loved ones' willingness to know the truth doesn't lie in your hands.





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# Do You Feel **Alone** as a Woman Leader?

**IF** you're a capable, called, and gifted Christian woman in leadership, join the conversation at **GiftedForLeadership.com**. This blog, along with downloadable resources, will help you safely converse with other women about the issues you face. You'll walk away feeling encouraged, supported, challenged, and definitely not alone!



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