



Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

**ACTS 8:4**

# EVANGELISM

ISSUE 9

## **Editorial**

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# INTRODUCTION

*Jim Donohue*

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**D**uring these last three decades, I have been trying to help Christians find ways to share the gospel with those around them. It hasn't been easy for me, or for most Christians. And it's not easy for Sovereign Grace churches.

In my travels, I've found that many pastors aren't sure how to help their churches fulfill and obey that part of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20). We live with the greatest news that exists on this earth: In love, Christ died and rose to forgive our sins and reconcile us to God. We're freed, changed, and joyful people. But somehow, sharing this life-changing news is one of the hardest parts of being a Christian and obeying God. What can we do about this?

That's where this journal comes into play. We've asked our growing number of evangelists to contribute strategic articles, designed to help you equip your churches and grow in reaching the lost. Jeff Schlieder starts with an insightful article on our theology of evangelism. Jeff challenges the idea that our lack of evangelism comes from the typical factors of fear, unpreparedness, or selfishness. It actually comes from not thinking about God enough. Jeff's article has the potential to reorient the way we look at the task of evangelism and to reshape our motivation.

In churches where evangelism is thriving, you will almost always find an evangelist or an elder who is responsible for evangelism. I wrote an article that is designed to help us think through this important gift from the risen Christ (Eph. 4:11). Timon Lau has written an important article about strategies for smaller churches. You will benefit from the things he has learned over the last couple of years and come away with practical tools that are easy to implement. I also wrote an article which gets at an often-neglected ingredient that is essential to help lost men and women come to know Christ. There are other helpful articles and book recommendations designed to encourage and equip you.

I couldn't be more excited about this journal and how God is growing Sovereign Grace in evangelism. May God use it to give us the heart of Christ for the lost and practical ways to equip our churches in evangelism, so that more and more people may come to Christ.

# OUR THEOLOGY OF EVANGELISM

*Jeff Schlieder*

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**L**ike any other worthwhile aspect of the Christian life, a pursuit of evangelism faces many obstacles. However, there is one big problem that underlies all other evangelistic obstacles. And there is one powerful remedy that will treat all these missional maladies. There is a way forward to resolve the internal struggle, fuel the fire of our hearts in a lasting way, proving to be eminently practical. We need a theology of evangelism. That is, a missiology that flows out of our theology.

## *Missiology without Theology*

Without sound theology, evangelism strikes fear into our hearts, filling us with guilt. It washes over us with feelings of inadequacy and incompetence, coming across like dutiful drudgery we feel obligated to do, but seldom desire to do. Or perhaps, it meets us in the midst of apathy. We manage to live the Christian life busy with “this” and occupied with “that,” convinced that the task of evangelism is for someone more gifted than we are.

The Apostle Paul wrote, “So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome” (Rom. 1:15). But if we’re honest with ourselves, most of us struggle to say the same about those who are in our cities. Why aren’t we more eager to evangelize?

As we’ve already mentioned, the thought of evangelism occasions all sorts of negative emotions in us, all of which impact our approach to the task. Coupled with this reflexive aversion is our tendency to relegate evangelism to a peripheral, secondary, or next-level activity for super-Christians.

We often do not consider evangelism as essential to our joy and growth in Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, our human propensity is to move toward the practical, which prompts us all too quickly to begin filling our hands with tools before we've filled our hearts with what they need most in order for evangelism to be faithful, joyful, and enduring. We might get started down the road of mission, but without fuel in our tanks, we'll stall out quickly. We need something that can fuel our missiology for the long haul.

### **Theology for Our Missiology**

We're often encouraged to look at the grand story of redemptive history in order to have our hearts moved as they are caught up in the mission of God being worked out in the world. This is right and good. But how often do we consider the Author of that story? It's true that evangelistic motivation flows out of our biblical theology—the study of the progressive unfolding of God's saving purposes in time. But we need to develop a missiology that flows out of Theology Proper—our doctrine of God. We should cultivate an eagerness for evangelism that is shaped by contemplating who God is and what his purposes are in the creation of all things.

This takes us into the heart of our problem and its remedy. Ultimately, our lack of eagerness to evangelize is not because of the challenges it poses. We do not lack apologetic arguments or methods for sharing our faith. We lack eagerness not because we're unconcerned about the grave predicament of the lost or even because we're thinking about ourselves too much. We lack eagerness because we're not thinking about God enough.

In their book, *God Shines Forth: How the Nature of God Shapes and Drives the Mission of the Church*, authors Daniel Hames and Michael Reeves make the

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1. This attitude can take on both individual and corporate expressions: something our churches will get to once more stable or "in a good place" with the upward (worship and doxology) and inward (discipleship and community) aims of doing church. Yet we know there's no end to the task of growing in these aspects of our life together.

challenging assertion that, “The problem at the root of all our struggles with mission is almost certainly right at the beginning: with our view of God.”<sup>2</sup> The argument is that if we see God wrongly, find our eyes glued to ourselves, our strategies, and our deficiencies, or neglect to contemplate the God of the gospel, our eagerness to share the gospel will suffer.

Hames and Reeves drive this point home, contending that, “Unless we honestly find God to be beautiful and enjoyable, we’ll have nothing worth saying to the people around us. Until we see him aright, we’ll have no genuine desire to fill the world with the knowledge of our God.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, when it comes to evangelism, the most foundational question is not “How do I tell others about my God?” But, “What do I see when I gaze upon my God?” The aim of this article is to fix our eyes on God in order to rekindle a desire to “proclaim the excellencies” of God (1 Pet. 2:9).

### ***Mission and a Right View of God***

So what should we see when we see him aright? We should see a God who is altogether glorious (Isa. 6:3; Ps. 145:3). One who is eternal (Ps. 90:1–2), unchanging (Num. 23:19), entirely self-sufficient (Ex. 3:14), dependent on no one (Rom. 11:34–35), lacking nothing (Acts 17:24–25), perfect (1 John 1:5), happy (1 Tim. 1:11; Ps. 115:3; John 15:11), and blessed forever as “the one true God who eternally exists as three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. . . who enjoy a fullness of fellowship and love.”<sup>5</sup> And we’re barely scratching the surface.

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2. Daniel Hames and Michael Reeves, *God Shines Forth: How the Nature of God Shapes and Drives the Mission of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 20.

3. *Ibid.*, 21.

4. In 1 Timothy 1:10–11, Paul speaks of those who assert what is “contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed [or happy] God. . .”

5. *Statement of Faith*, The Holy Trinity. See also passages that demonstrate God’s delight in himself, especially the Father’s joy in the Son (John 17:24–26; Isa. 42:1; Matt. 3:17). From eternity past, the Father has loved the Son in the Spirit.

The Scriptures reveal that from before the beginning of time this God desired to be glorified through the possession of a people for himself. To this end, “he chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved” (Eph 1:4–6). As Jonathan Edwards puts it, “the whole world was created so that the eternal Son of God might obtain a spouse.”<sup>6</sup> That’s the whole point: God’s grand purpose in creation and redemption! He aims to have a people who would worship and enjoy him forever through his Son, by his Spirit, all to the praise of his glory. He created the world and decreed the fall with this glory in mind.

God created this world as a theater for the public display of his infinite worth. Like a fountain overflowing from its fullness, he did not need to do it, but freely desired to do it. He placed man in the center of it to celebrate him forever. Yet man would fall in sin and face exclusion from this communion. So God purposed to send his Son in order to show forth the fullness of who he is—his goodness, love, and beauty, his holiness, justice, and might—and redeem a people for himself who would never be lost, never be exiled, never be kicked out of the garden again.<sup>7</sup> This people would exalt him as Creator and Redeemer to the praise of his glory without end. He’s been about this mission since before the beginning of time.

### ***God’s Chosen Instrument for His Chosen People***

This grand pursuit connects itself to us in the here and now because our evangelism is God’s chosen instrument to possess this people for himself. If you can believe it, he’s purposed our very ordinary, always imperfect, sometimes bumbling sharing of the gospel to bring desperately estranged men and women out of exile and into communion with him. Through the scattering of gospel seeds by laborers like us, he gathers a people from every tribe, nation, and tongue. We were lost but have now been found. And this glorious God

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6. Jonathan Edwards, *The Church’s Marriage to Her Sons, and to Her God: The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 187.

7. See Isa. 42:5–7; John 6:37–40, 10:27–28; 2 Tim. 1:8–11; Titus 1:2–3.

uses found people to reach out to seek and save the lost.

This should cause us to marvel and be amazed. Our communicating the gospel message and calling for a response is the means by which the glorious grace of God breaks into the lives of those Christ died and rose again to save (Titus 1:2). The grace “promised before the ages began” rescues those who had fallen short of God’s glory, causing them to live for it forevermore (see Rom. 3:23, 6:23). And all of this through faithfully sharing the gospel.

This means that evangelism is not secondary, peripheral, or something to get to once we have the time. Far from it. Mission should be central to us because God’s mission to glorify himself is central to him. And the highest peak of God’s glory shining forth is his unprompted, unmerited, and extravagant goodness extended not just toward creatures to whom he owes nothing, but to sinners who deserve only judgment. In grace, he gives his very life and very self to those who earned the wages of death. Through Christ, he most fully and finally reveals who he is and ransoms us from sin to enjoy everlasting life with him.

The God of the gospel is after his glory most wonderfully expressed in working his people’s good. When we behold him, our hearts become aligned with his. It then becomes our ambition to make him known as he truly is. Evangelism serves as the means by which we pursue his glory. The natural, if not inevitable response to his self-giving goodness is to share the good news of all he is for us in Jesus.

Hames and Reeves helpfully capture this connection between this display of God’s glory in the gospel and our desire for evangelism:

God’s glory is not only the fuel of mission in the sense of being its grand objective. God’s glory—his own naturally overflowing life, showcased in his Son—is mission’s rationale and its motor. In whatever sense mission is about our going out into the world to make God known, it is only ever our being caught up in the already gushing tide of blessing that flows from the heart of the Father in the Son. Charles Spurgeon said, “When I think of God I am led to see his glory in the outgoing of his great heart; for he

is altogether unselfish and unsparingly communicative.<sup>8</sup>

Reeves writes to the same effect in another place:

The eighteenth-century New England theologian Jonathan Edwards put it strikingly. God's aim in creating the world, he said, was himself. But because this God's very self is so different from that of any others, that means something utterly different from what it would mean with other gods. This God's very self is found in giving, not taking. This God is like a fountain of goodness, and so, he said, "seeking himself" means seeking "himself diffused and expressed" in other words, seeking to have himself, his life and his goodness shared. His very nature is about going out and sharing of his own fullness, and so that is what he is all about. In contrast to all other gods, the exuberant nature of this God means that his pleasure "is rather a pleasure in diffusing and communicating to the creature, than in receiving from the creature."<sup>9</sup>

Our God loves to share himself with the world. He's made himself known to us not begrudgingly or indifferently, but with joy and exuberance. When we see him as he really is, we'll desire to share in his joy by making him known to others. Finding ourselves richly satisfied in him as he is glorified in, by, and through us in the proclamation of the gospel and salvation that it brings.

### ***Fuel for our Evangelism***

I believe that experiencing this kind of satisfaction will come to us with what 19th century pastor, Thomas Chalmers called "the expulsive power of a new affection."<sup>10</sup> This new affection can drive our missional misgivings far from our hearts. A zeal for God's glory in the salvation of our neighbors and the joy that comes to them and us through the rescue of Jesus Christ expels the

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8. Hames and Reeves, *God Shines Forth*, 37–38.

9. Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 47.

10. Thomas Chalmers, *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 49.

feelings of fear, apprehension, self-condemnation, and dutiful drudgery that we can have toward evangelism.

It's my prayer that as the pastors and members of Sovereign Grace Churches see God aright, perfectly blessed, self-giving, and desiring to glorify himself through the redemption of a people to the praise of his glorious grace, wrong affections will burn up and fall away as our hearts are inflamed with a renewed ambition for his glory. This ambition not only provides the motivation to get us moving but the fuel to keep us going along the road of mission.

So we should give ourselves to cultivating a theology of evangelism. A missiology that's shaped by the wonderful revelation of who God is that leads us to conclude: "Mission is no clunky add-on [or unpleasant detour] to your own delighting in God. Instead, it is the natural overflow and expression of the enjoyment you have of him, so that *like him* you gladly go out to fill the world with the word of his goodness [the gospel]."<sup>11</sup>

Our faithfulness in sharing the gospel will come from an enduring and enchanting vision of the God of the gospel. Before we "pass Go" in the task of evangelism, let's set our sights on the beating, throbbing heart that gives life to our evangelism: the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

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11. Hames and Reeves, *God Shines Forth*, 21.



# DOES YOUR CHURCH VALUE THE ROLE OF AN EVANGELIST?

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**E**vangelism is one of the most difficult areas of the Christian life. I should know—I've been a full-time evangelist for almost 30 years at Covenant Fellowship Church. With the culture growing increasingly hostile, divisive, and intolerant, it's much easier to avoid this awkward calling, give in to fear, and keep the good news of the gospel to ourselves.

Because of these pressures, many churches are adding members almost exclusively through transfer growth (Christians leaving one church to join another). Far fewer are growing due to conversion growth (unbelievers coming to Christ). While we celebrate when a Christian finds a church that is a better fit and stronger in its mission, God wants us to reach the lost and see them added to the church (Luke 19:10). How can we better align our growth to be in keeping with this pattern?

## *The Role of the Evangelist*

Paul gives us one way in Ephesians 4: Prioritize the role of an evangelist.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes (Eph. 4:11–14).

In my travels to many different churches throughout the U.S. and beyond, I've noticed that most don't have an evangelist or even an elder on point for evangelism. This prevents the growth we long for in spreading the gospel because the evangelist is called to equip the members of our churches to reach out to the lost.

One of the keys for growth in this area is to establish, or reestablish, the priority of local church evangelism and the importance of the role of an evangelist. Ephesians 4:11 declares the gifts that the risen Christ has given to build his church. These gifts are men called to equip and build up the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. These roles or offices are critical for the church to become what God wants us to be. Yet, the role of evangelist is often overlooked.

While the evangelist must be personally effective in evangelism, there also needs to be a teaching and training component to his role. That's why the office of evangelist ought to be reserved for men. Women can certainly lead in particular evangelism outreaches or be on point for leading a specific evangelism ministry. However, because God has embedded a significant teaching and training component in the evangelist's role, men should be the ones appointed to it.

### ***The Value of Evangelism***

Though there is great impact when the role of evangelist is established, God calls every pastor to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5). Evangelism itself is a particular challenge for most pastors, who spend the majority of their time caring for the members of their churches. To be among those who do not believe, the pastor needs to make purposeful choices to pursue evangelism personally.

But God is calling the pastor to more than just a personal example. He's calling the pastor to equip others to do evangelism. He calls them to do the work of an evangelist. This falls under the overall call given to pastors to equip the saints for the works of ministry (Eph. 4:12).

Beyond that, God gloriously calls all of his people to the work of evangelism. We are all given the good news with the expressed purpose of giving it away to someone else (see Matt. 4:25). And this brings us full circle. The entire Body of Christ is called to evangelism, but is meant to be equipped for the work through the role of the evangelist.

### ***What Can This Look Like in My Local Church?***

In the churches where I see the most conversion growth and fruit in evangelism, there is almost always an evangelist. If you're a pastor who wants your church to grow in reaching unbelievers, I would strongly encourage you to identify an evangelist—someone who can dedicate at least five to eight hours a week to this area. Ideally, this is an elder, but a gifted deacon or church member can do this as well.

One church that I am working with in Arizona has one full-time elder and two bi-vocational elders. They recently asked one of the bi-vocational elders to be their evangelist and to dedicate the bulk of his time to leading their church in this area. This man focused applied effort to being equipped through books, messages, and mentoring. In a short time, he has done an amazing job jumping into the role. His church has already seen conversions and fruit from these initial efforts.

Another church in Texas decided their evangelistic investment was too small, so they rearranged their staff to enable one of their three elders to dedicate 40% of his job description to evangelism. We are praying for similar results there. When churches invest time, prayer, resources, and finances into reaching the lost, fruit will come.

One of the reasons we have seen consistent conversion growth in our church is that the elders have made evangelism a priority. They have set me apart so that I can give most of my time to reaching the lost and helping equip our church to do the same. I have invested countless hours in reading, strategizing, developing programs, and spending time with unbelievers. God has seen fit to bless these efforts, bringing us the lost and renewing our joy in the gospel.

I've heard pastors tell me that evangelists are very rare and hard to find, but I don't think that's true. We don't have to find the next Billy Graham. If any pastor would spend the kind of time that I do in evangelism, I'm certain that he would see significant conversion growth.

It can be difficult for a pastor to find time for evangelism when you consider all the pastor needs to do: preaching, counseling, administration, and pastoral caring. However, Andreas Köstenberger and Peter O'Brien remind us that, "... the divine plan of extending salvation to the ends of the earth is the major thrust of the Scriptures from beginning to end."<sup>1</sup>

### ***Where Do We Begin?***

Starting small is still starting! You could begin by making sure one of your elders is on point for evangelism. Write it in his job description. Or maybe you are the only full-time elder and you can only give two hours a week to this task. That's okay! In those two hours, you could read a book one week, spend time having coffee with a non-Christian the next week, have lunch with your evangelistic lay point person the next week, and spend time in prayer for evangelism the fourth week. That will make a difference! If you're not a pastor, you could share this article with your pastor and pray for an opportunity to work with him in carrying this out.

You may not feel uniquely gifted in the area, but you can "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. 4:5) by bringing leadership, resources, and encouragement to your point person who may be more gifted. Just as importantly, your church will follow your example as you prioritize reaching the lost.

We often get out of things what we put into them. So let's invest not only leaders and time into evangelism, but let's also invest our finances. The more time and effort and energy and resources we put into this, the more we will see unbelievers coming to Christ.

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1. Andreas Köstenberger and Peter O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), 263.

Let me close with one more honest thought for pastors about evangelists. We evangelists can be hard to handle. We tend to be bold, black and white, and not strong on self-awareness or subtle pastoral sensibilities. We can be a bit scary, and there can be a tendency to want to lock us up in a closet so we don't do too much damage. But God has gifted us to love and reach the lost. He's designed us for the task. The truth is that you need us and we need you. Our job is to help you and the church be faithful in reaching out. Your job is to be patient with us and position us well, being faithful to strengthen us in our weaknesses as you leverage us in our strengths. It may feel a little risky, but following Jesus often is.

Jesus has called and gifted men as evangelists. Some of them are elders in our churches, some are deacons, and some are members in the church. May God give us the wisdom and faith to position them in our churches "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).



# THE MOTIVATION OF ETERNITY ON EVANGELISM

***Bob Donohue***

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In the movie adaptation of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, the climactic scene shows the unlikely hero, Frodo Baggins, perilously hanging by one hand from a stone precipice over a molten pool of lava inside Mount Doom. His loyal companion, Samwise Gamgee, comes to his rescue once again, this time reaching down, clutching Frodo's hand just in time, and pulling him from the fiery destruction below. The two hobbits then narrowly escape the lava erupting from the volcano, taking momentary refuge on a rocky outcrop on the side of the mountain.

There, after having finally destroyed the Ring of Power, they resign themselves to death. Like many times throughout their long, arduous mission, they dream of home one last time—the fresh air of their idyllic Shire, the taste of summer strawberries, outdoor parties complete with Gandalf's fireworks, and, for Sam, the sweetheart he longed to marry: Rosie Cotton. The scene closes with the protagonists unconscious from exhaustion and their hopes unrealized.

When they next open their eyes, they have been wondrously and safely delivered to the mystical city of the Elves. When Frodo awakens, he is clean, healed, and dressed in a white gown, with the fellowship of his friends gathered around his bed. They welcome him with uncontainable elation, filling the room with jubilant celebration.

## ***Rescue from Destruction and Arriving Home***

Such a dramatic ending epitomizes the inspiration behind the many characters' heroic sacrifices and the tireless endurance that permeates the entire film—rescue from destruction and finally arriving home. Those motivations

encapsulate some of the most powerful human drives we experience: saving those we love from pain and perishing and delivering them to a place of protection, prosperity, and even paradise.

Jesus uses those primal impulses—the desire to safeguard our loved ones and to secure blessing for them—as incentives for evangelism. The ultimate destruction of hell and the everlasting joys of heaven are meant to move us toward bold, courageous sacrifices and perseverance in proclaiming the good news to those around us. In the gospels, Christ regularly leverages the terrors of everlasting perdition where the “worm does not die and the fire is not quenched,” (Mark 9:48) to instill sobriety and fear regarding what is at stake for ourselves and others. Jesus also holds forth the gladness and greatness of the reward that is heaven, emphasizing how attaining it is worth selling and surrendering all we have—not just for our own benefit but also for others, that they may be welcomed as well.

In Luke 16:19–31, the story of the rich man and Lazarus vividly combines these motivations of danger and promise related to eternity, making a strong case for why we should be urgent and unshakable in our call and commission to evangelize.

“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my

father's house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

### ***The Sin of Indifference Toward the Needy Around Us***

The contrast between the rich man and Lazarus is extreme. The former wore the most extravagant, royal-colored attire, dined on the most decadent foods, and hosted holiday-like banquets daily. The problem was not his wealth, but that he spent his abundance only on himself. The rich man was indifferent to the needs of those around him, ignoring—and perhaps even stepping over—the starving beggar laid at his gate.

The callousness of the well-moneyed miser is not just a sober warning to those who neglect the physical needs of those around them but, even more so, a warning for overlooking the spiritually impoverished and perishing. The rich man did not realize that he himself was in that very condition spiritually and he discovered too late that after death, there was nothing he could do to warn his loved ones. In turn, we must recognize the wealth we possess as recipients of the gospel. If we hoard such treasure to ourselves instead of sharing it with others, we are replicating the rich man's indifference to the needs of the starving souls on our doorsteps.

Furthermore, the comparison of the affluence of the rich man to the pathetic condition of Lazarus illustrates how destitute the lost are and how utterly incapable they are of healing and helping themselves. The misery in the story is almost unbearable to process. Lazarus is not only penniless but also without the ability to walk, being carried and then dumped at the entrance to the rich man's estate. His clothing is not the protective, fashionable wardrobe of his wealthy counterpart. Instead, he is diseased and debased, lower than the unclean dogs that lick his oozing sores. Lazarus longed to eat the scraps that fell from the rich man's table, but it was the mongrels who scavenged what they could from his putrid wounds.

## *The Grace of Heaven We Yearn to Share with Unbelievers*

In verse 22, both men died. Though Lazarus was shown no compassion on earth, he is carried by angels to the gates of heaven itself in the afterlife. There, he is welcomed into Abraham's embrace as well as all the joy, safety, peace, abundance, and comfort it represents as a precursor of the final glorified state.

When the (formerly) rich man begs Abraham for mercy, the patriarch's response seems to advocate a reversal of fortunes: "Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish" (v. 25). But the larger context in Luke shows that the gospel is not about balancing social inequalities. The poor are not saved because they are poor physically but rather because they recognize they are poor spiritually and respond to the invitation of Isaiah 55:1: "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." The inability of the destitute to provide for themselves materially is a metaphor for their poverty of soul. It sets them up to receive the free grace of the gospel to meet their greatest need—the forgiveness of sins.

There are clues in the story that suggest Lazarus exercised such saving faith. The first is in the meaning of his name, which, from its Hebrew roots, translates to *Helped by God*. This beggar cannot walk a step or work to lift himself up. His wounds would cause law-abiding Israelites to avoid him because of his uncleanness. Nevertheless, he is helped by God himself, carried not to the gate of a callous king by indifferent individuals but escorted by angels through heaven's gates into its mansions of glory. He is welcomed into the family of God. The only explanation for what brought him to such rest and rejoicing was the undeserved grace of God.

The reference to Lazarus being carried to Abraham's side is another allusion to such amazing grace, as he is the father of those who believe God and are credited as righteous—not by works, but by grace alone through faith alone. That grace lifted Lazarus to heaven, makes heaven glorious, and is our message to our neighbors, coworkers, and relatives. We long to share the good news that destitute beggars, who cannot move themselves closer to God and whose

sins defile and disqualify them from being in his divine presence, can be carried into his arms, welcomed home into his family, by the grace of the One who helps those who cannot help themselves.

### ***The Unalterable Torments of Hell Must Compel Us to Reach the Lost***

While Lazarus received grace in death, the rich man received justice. His punishment was incarceration in Hades, the realm of the dead. This is similar to Abraham's bosom, as it is not the final state but a holding place until the final judgment. However, both are precursors of what eternity will be like, and the first and ultimate description given of hell is that it is a place of torment. Such severe punishment should rattle us, as it is shown to be the divine justice owed for not trusting Christ. Such unbelief bears fruit like the rich man's: not caring for others and for ignoring or avoiding the pain and suffering of those around us.

The Lord designed us to be merciful and responsible for loving our neighbors, but we can become so preoccupied with our own pursuit of pleasure that we become pitiless. When we do, we distort and misrepresent the generosity and kindness of God, in whose image we are made and of whose blessing we are the recipients. Such miserly and selfish ways must receive a just punishment.

The torment in Hades is as extreme as the bliss of heaven. In verse 24, the no-longer-rich man is in such anguish that he pleads with Abraham for Lazarus to wet his finger and just touch his tongue, furnishing only a moment of relief from the choking heat. The hypocrisy should not be missed; he wants Lazarus to alleviate his pain, though he had never lifted a finger for the thirsty man begging at the entrance to his palace.

The physical agonies of hell are next augmented by inescapable psychological despair. Abraham informs the rich man now turned beggar with these harrowing words in verse 26: "And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us." The happiness and wholeness of heaven is coveted from hell, but nothing can be done to span

the chasm that forever prevents the damned from escaping or in any way alleviating their hopeless station. That is torment.

But what may be the most disturbing aspect of perdition is that there is no repentance in Hades. The doomed man never expresses remorse for his sin but only regret for his dire consequences. He also continues to view Lazarus as beneath him, despite the one *helped by God* is now exalted to Abraham's side. Although condemned, he wants Lazarus to fetch him water as if he still had butlers waiting on his every wish, and in verse 28, he insists that Lazarus be dispatched as a messenger to warn his relatives of their coming calamity.

Abraham denies his pleas again, as the man's five brothers, like him, have been warned repeatedly by Moses and the Prophets. Not used to being denied, he argues further with the patriarch in verse 30: "No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." The debate and the account then end with these words: "If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead" (v. 31).

Just a few chapters earlier, in Luke 13, Jesus declares of hell: "In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out" (Luke 13:28). Although in eternity every knee will bow to God, judged sinners will only do so begrudgingly—weeping in self-pity and gnashing their teeth in anger that their coup to be king has failed, that God is right, and that he reigns sovereign and supreme over them.

The terrifying existence for unrepentant transgressors is that they will continue in enmity and rebellion against God in the afterlife and will, of righteous necessity, be the objects of his holy wrath forever. That unending physical and psychological torment of the lost in hell is meant to trouble us until we are moved to reach them, to offer them the salvation that is available by grace. Even the hardened man in hell, in what is his only selfless thought, longs to prevent his siblings from joining him in the place of agony and makes every effort and appeal he can for their reprieve.

## ***There Is Still Time to Warn of Destruction and Welcome Others into Glory***

In this story, Jesus gives us a glimpse into eternity. He motivates us to rescue others from perpetual ruin so that they might reach the gates of heaven and the glory of being added to God's covenant family. The story itself culminates there, in the evangelistic application captured in the damned man's haunting last words: "Send Lazarus to warn them." Send someone to warn his family, "lest they also come into this place of torment."

But they have God's Word. If someone will not believe God's witness to his holiness and grace in Scripture, then no supernatural sign, even resurrection, will convince or convert. In the Law of Moses, Yahweh thunders down cautions at Sinai, concluding the book of Deuteronomy with dire warnings of covenant curses and lavish promises of covenant blessings. All the prophets plead with God's people to flee divine judgment, take refuge in the Deliverer, and experience the splendor of his coming kingdom.

Then, with the advent of that Savior and King, the Bible records in Jesus' teaching God's ultimate warning to avoid the horrors of hell and his invitation to receive the joys of heaven through his atoning sacrifice on the cross—the only means of escape. Christ suffered the wrath of hell in the stead of sinners and conquered death through his victorious rising from the dead as the first fruits of resurrection that we will reap in union with him. That gospel message has been entrusted to us and is what the Spirit sends us forth to proclaim, as it is the power of God that cleanses the defiled and what carries broken beggars home to heaven.

The good news of free grace in Christ is the centerpiece of God's Word and the means by which he not only warns the world, through us, his messengers, but saves them by grace through faith.

The irony is that the rich man functions as an evangelist speaking from beyond the grave. His dire pleas warn those who are ignorant or ignoring the destruction they are hurtling toward. As believers, it is not too late for us to testify to the lost about the eternal, permanent destinies of Lazarus and the rich man.

The same destinies await each one of us at death. Luke 16:19–31 captures our highest motivation to warn unbelievers of the torments of hell and to offer them the hope of heaven through the gospel—while we still have time.

# A WINNING RECIPE FOR EVANGELISM

*Jim Donohue*

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**Y**ears ago, as I was going for the Dad of the Year award, I got the bright idea to make my children buckwheat pancakes. I was sure they would be healthy and delicious. However, the children didn't agree. In fact the pancakes turned out to be disgusting and inedible.

I faced several problems. First, I didn't know all of the ingredients that needed to go into pancakes. Then, second, I didn't know how to cook pancakes. These desert-dry spheres of buck and wheat were so bad they could not even be swallowed with gallons of maple syrup. Maybe I missed an ingredient. Or added one. Or mixed one up. (Was I supposed to use baking powder or baking soda?)

There is a moral to this story. Wrong ingredients can wreak havoc, in a pancake recipe and in evangelism.

## *Add Ingredients*

In my study of the Bible and practice of evangelism over the past 30 years, I've seen how different modes of evangelism each provide unique contributions to a comprehensive strategy in reaching the lost. The Bible doesn't present one way of doing evangelism but a more holistic approach that utilizes different ingredients to accomplish this mission. Let's look at three key ingredients that God lays out in his Word for a comprehensive approach to evangelism.

### **Ingredient #1: Go and Tell**

In this method, often referred to as direct evangelism, we take the initiative to tell those outside our natural relationships the good news of the gospel. Jesus' evangelism ministry primarily centered around "Go and Tell" evangelism as

he trained and deployed his disciples—the twelve and the seventy-two (Luke 9:1–6 and 10:1–13). Maybe it’s offering to pray for a waiter before we eat and continuing the conversation after the meal. Maybe it’s asking the person beside us on the train if they’ve ever been to church or drawing out someone we meet at the park about their spiritual history.

This method of sharing the good news can make us nervous. For many of us, it feels too direct and bold. However, it has important benefits. First, it reaches people who may have no Christian connections. It doesn’t assume everyone already has a good Christian friend or family member. Second, it’s effective in training us in how to share the gospel. What do we say first and second and third? Sharing the gospel is the best way to learn how to share the gospel. It’s easy to ask someone you are training to join you in meeting strangers and showing them how to engage lost people. Then third, it burdens our hearts for the lost like almost nothing else can as we see how people have little understanding of the salvation we have in Christ.

## **Ingredient #2: Care and Connect**

Sometimes called friendship evangelism, Care and Connect happens when we forge meaningful relationships with unbelievers in our lives. We see this in the story of Jesus when he befriended and ate with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10). We should see this in our own lives as well. Pursuing friendships with those who don’t know Jesus is a wonderful bridge to gospel conversations. This doesn’t mean our only motivation for these friendships is evangelism, but it should be a goal we prayerfully pursue.

One of the challenges we encounter in the “Care and Connect” approach is that it can be difficult to press beyond comfortable topics and actually get to the gospel. We fear it runs the risk of damaging relationships. However, genuine friendships often provide the relational equity needed as we explain the hard truths of the gospel. Historically, the gospel has spread most rapidly and effectively through these types of friendships.

### **Ingredient #3: Come and See**

We might call this method of evangelism the “corporate witness.” There is power in the gathering of believers to demonstrate gospel transformation. It happens when we invite non-Christians to come into our Christian community and experience the Christian love among us. In John 13:35, Jesus said that non-Christians will know we’re Christ’s disciples by our love for one another.

This is a powerful ingredient in evangelism. Your neighbor or co-worker may write you off as an exception, just one of those “nice guys.” But when they encounter a roomful of people transformed by the gospel, they take notice. The “Come and See” ingredient is at work when we include unbelievers in our game nights, dinner parties, church services, evangelism courses, or really anything we do with other Christians.

The challenge of “Come and See” is that it only impacts those who get close enough to join us. Some people will not be interested in hanging out with Christians or attending a church event. Nevertheless, it’s a powerful ingredient that deserves consideration.

### ***Mix Thoroughly***

Evangelism works really well when all three of these ingredients are mixed together. Think back to when you became a Christian. Perhaps you heard the gospel from someone you didn’t really know. Or, you may have had a friend or family member reaching out to you. In either case, you were likely invited at some point to come to a meeting with other Christians. When these three modes are in operation, we often see the Lord move in power to save souls.

In my travels to numerous churches, I’ve noticed that many Christians and entire churches miss this healthy mixture. They tend to focus on a single ingredient to the exclusion of others. Some think it’s all about “Go and Tell”—we have to be bold and brave and proclaim the gospel to everyone, so that’s all we do. Others focus on Care and Connect but would never dream of starting a conversation with a stranger. Still others excel at inviting people to church events and focus all their strategies and resources on that.

Of course, all of these can be effective. God can and does work through them! But we should be careful not to pit these modes against one another. Evangelism works best when all three ingredients are mixed thoroughly.

### ***Watch for Expired Ingredients***

As I have conducted evangelism training in various churches, the most common ingredient that's missing is "Come and See." Early in the church's life, they were inviting people to various meetings with great enthusiasm. But their enthusiasm has grown stale and the invitations stop.

Sam Chan says,

One of the major reasons our friends aren't Christians is that they don't belong to a community of friends who also believe in Jesus. It's not primarily because they haven't heard the gospel (they probably haven't, but they already think they know what you believe). It's not because there's not enough evidence for the Christian faith (because no matter how much evidence you produce, they'll explain it away). In many cases, the number one reason our friends aren't Christians is that they don't have any other Christian friends.<sup>1</sup>

If that's true, and I think it is, how can we fix it? How can we bring our non-Christian friends into our gospel communities? It used to be that this would happen most naturally on Sunday mornings. We could invite neighbors or coworkers to church and assume they would come and see the power of the gospel that transformed our lives. They would see the compelling corporate witness of a joyful community dedicated to Christ, and the Lord would use that to draw them.

I do this all the time, and God's Spirit does indeed draw and save people in Sunday morning services. But sadly, this pattern is becoming less common. In today's post-truth society, the likelihood of a non-Christian visiting church is

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1. Sam Chan, *How to Talk About Jesus (Without Being That Guy)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 8.

becoming more and more rare. It's estimated that 40 million Americans have left church in the last 25 years. It's called the great dechurching of America and represents the largest shift in church attendance in American History.<sup>2</sup>

One of the reasons Americans are staying away from church is that our services are not designed for them; they are designed for Christians. Think about our services from the perspective of an unbeliever. They see expressive worship where people raise their hands and even shout. They listen to long expository sermons filled with theology. They observe the spiritual gifts in play, which can seem foreign to them. They have to interpret Christian lingo.

On top of that, many of our beliefs are offensive to the culture: salvation through Christ alone, the exclusivity of male eldership, lifelong marriage between one woman and one man, and more. Ephesians 4:18 says that an unbeliever's mind is darkened and they are hostile to the things of God.

The idea that they would give up a Sunday morning and come to church to watch us sing and then listen to a complex, 40-minute monologue is unlikely. And if they do come, it's difficult for them to get a lot out of our services. The Holy Spirit can draw the lost and regenerate them, but our services aren't created to introduce people to Christianity even though they provide a powerful corporate witness.

I list these challenges simply because I've talked with countless unbelievers who have shared these exact perspectives with me. Does it dampen my enthusiasm for the glorious church of God expressed in local bodies like our Sovereign Grace churches? Not at all! The church is designed by God to build up the body of Christ and bring Him worship and glory. It should not and will not ever be replaced. God is at work in his church! But the Sunday service, though essential, doesn't have to be the only expression of the Body of Christ.

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2. Jim Davis and Michael Graham, *The Great Dechurching* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2023), 22.

## *Recipe Notes*

At the risk of carrying the recipe analogy too far—and I probably already have—I encourage you to evaluate your ingredients. Are there new and fresh ways to incorporate “Come and See,” the corporate witness? As I mentioned, there are countless creative options: barbecues, game nights, playgroups, watch parties, book clubs, and pickleball tournaments. It can be anything that brings Christians and non-Christians together.

One effective tool we’ve found to express the corporate witness is The Bridge Course<sup>3</sup> because it provides non-Christians with a front row seat to the power of the gospel that has transformed our lives and joined us together into a wonderful body. Each week our guests see the deep and loving friendships we have with each other. They observe firsthand the joy and unity that motivates us to gladly serve and care for people we have just met. And they experience the generosity of a church that is supporting all the different aspects of the course like food preparation, childcare, administration, and tech support.

In addition, The Bridge Course effectively combines all three ingredients. During The Bridge Course, people are hearing the gospel message taught: “Go and Tell.” They are building friendships during dinner and discussion: “Care and Connect.” And they are experiencing the body of Christ when they see the love we have for one another and for them: “Come and See.”

They might not believe what they hear in the talks right away, but they are often drawn because of the growing friendships and the transformed, joyful lives of the Christian community. In addition, Bridge is designed for non-Christians from start to finish and provides a great context for lost men and women to explore the big questions of life without pressure. It’s an accessible environment for unbelievers and easy to use. To find more information, you can visit the website at [bridgecourse.org](http://bridgecourse.org).

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3. This may appear self-serving since I am the author of The Bridge Course, but God has used many people and pastors to help create the course so that it reflects the doctrine and values of Sovereign Grace. In addition, I don’t receive any compensation from The Bridge Course. We are also indebted to the Alpha course for much of the methodology that we have adopted into Bridge.

Whether you use Bridge, another course like it, or other methods that work for you and your church, let's find ways to combine all three key ingredients in our outreach recipe. As we do, we will find that God delights to make himself known to those who are his enemies, to redeem souls from their sins, and to adopt them into his family as beloved sons and daughters.



# THE ROLE OF THE SPIRIT IN EVANGELISM

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**T**he gospel is good news. It is beautiful news. It is powerful news. Contained within the gospel is the “power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16). Only through the gospel, the completed work of Christ on sinners’ behalf, can anyone be saved.

That is weighty. And that weight is contained in the mission God has given us. You see, not only has God saved us through the power of the gospel, he also has enlisted us into his service to spread the good news. (See Matt. 28:18–20; 1 Pet. 2:9.)

Evangelism is a glorious task, full of honor and excitement and privilege. However, it is also a challenging one. Despite our great love for Jesus and our desire for others to know him, evangelism can still seem daunting at best and impossible at worst.

The call to evangelism drives us into our weakness. We doubt our ability and our gifting. We fear the world’s opposition and resistance. And we face an enemy who regularly tempts us toward losing heart. We doubt that we have what it takes, and we wonder if God will provide the help.

Brother or sister, the task of evangelism is not meant to be faced in your own strength. God has given us the Spirit for this task. Confidence in who he is and what he does is essential for faith and courage in our evangelism where perhaps there was once only fear, dread, and lingering questions.

## ***What We Must Know about the Spirit***

The Spirit of God is exactly who we need to take us from timidity and uncertainty towards confidence and joy in evangelism. He is the all-knowing, all-powerful, ever-present, holy, just, wise, and loving third person of the Trinity.

He existed eternally before the world began (Gen. 1:1). He comprehends the very thoughts of the unfathomable mind of God (1 Cor. 2:11). He is holy (as he is fittingly named), and to sin against him warrants judgment (Acts 5:3). He raised Jesus from the dead with power and with that same power he raises dead souls and bodies to immortal life (Titus 3:5; Rom. 8:11). He is also the one who reveals the character, works, and glory of God to humanity in written Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). He is the Helper, Advocate, or Counselor sent from the Father (John 14:16) who brings comfort to the Church (Acts 9:31). He intercedes on behalf of believers (Rom. 8:26) and continually fills them with his presence to accomplish all he calls them to do (Col. 1:29).

And this Holy Spirit is not a force or an idea of a set of theological truths; he is a person—a person we can experience, know, speak with, and be indwelt by (John 14:17). He brings God's power and his personal presence into our days and conversations. And he is masterfully at work in our evangelistic efforts from start to finish.

## ***How the Spirit Helps in Our Evangelism***

From desire to delivery and from prayer to proclamation, the Spirit is working. He gives us a longing to obey Christ, he empowers us, he emboldens us, he helps us articulate the truth, and he prospers our work in evangelism. In other words, there's not a point in the process of proclaiming Christ where he is not powerfully present.

## **He Gives Us Evangelistic Desire**

The Spirit's work begins long before a conversation takes place. He powerfully works at the foundation of our hearts. God is the one who works in us to *will* (desire) and to *work* (do) for his good pleasure (Phil. 2:13), though we bear

responsibility to cultivate our joy in obeying. Growing in the skill of evangelism, memorizing tools, or asking for greater zeal are all brought about as the Spirit of God works in our hearts.

And he is the one who enlarges our hearts for the lost. When we are moved by the state of their souls, by the destination they're headed toward, by the needless pain they bear, that is a sign the Spirit is at work in us, spurring us on to love the lost.

### **He Empowers and Emboldens Our Witness**

The challenging task of evangelism requires power and boldness. Customary conversation stays light and avoids weighty topics. However, evangelism involves talking to people about sin and hell. It requires the declaration of God's love shown through Christ as well as Jesus' ultimate authority over the lives of every person he's made.

The early believers in Acts were tempted to halt in silence. Imagine your pastors being arrested, questioned, threatened, and released. You too might be inclined not to say another word about Jesus. Though our experiences may not be identical to theirs, we do still face the challenges of external persecution, internal unbelief, and spiritual opposition. The early church is an example of how to respond to these pressures as they prayed for power and boldness. When they did, God answered. The Holy Spirit filled them, giving supernatural boldness to go on faithfully bearing witness to Christ (Acts 4:23–31).

### **He Helps Us Articulate the Gospel**

When Jesus was preparing his disciples for the trials they'd experience, he gave them an important assurance, "And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit" (Mark 13:11).

Jesus provided us with a window into the spiritual realities happening when the good news is proclaimed. The Holy Spirit, in real time, helps us articulate the gospel in each situation because he is the one speaking through us. It

may not feel as mystical as it sounds, and we aren't puppets. Instead, we are ambassadors through whom God speaks. Remember, God himself is the one making his personal appeal to people to be reconciled to him (2 Cor. 5:20), and he powerfully works to help us articulate the truth so his appeal comes through clearly.

Being nervous or afraid does not disqualify you from being a witness. Paul tells a bit of his own experience with fear. "And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:3–5). Paul was trembling! His speech was *not* eloquent or the most rhetorically persuasive. The Spirit worked in power through signs and wonders, yes, but not before he brought the Corinthians to faith in Christ through Paul's trembling words!

The Spirit's help in articulating the gospel message shouldn't deter us from healthy practice and preparation for sharing the gospel. Evangelism should involve some of our hardest work and best preparation. However, even with our best preparation we must have space in our understanding of evangelism for the help and leading of the Spirit.

## **He Prospers Our Evangelistic Efforts**

I once heard someone say that "success" in proclaiming the gospel is in the proclaiming, not the response. We long for people to be saved by believing this message. In fact, that's one of the chief hopes we have in speaking of Christ to any unbeliever. But even in rejection and scorn, we are still bearing witness to Christ and what he has done. We can't force the difference between someone treating the gospel like words of folly versus the words of salvation they so desperately need (1 Cor. 1:18). What we can do is proclaim, and that's what we are responsible to do in obedience to Christ with the help of his Spirit.

Since the Spirit is the one who helps us succeed in proclaiming Christ, we then pray and watch to see if the Spirit prospers our work further by granting someone faith. We set our expectations properly by acknowledging that

many will remain on the path that leads to destruction and few will find the narrow gate (Matt. 7:13–14).

So we pray and anticipate that some may hear the voice of their Shepherd and follow him. We may rejoice at seeing our very own Lydias, Sauls, Ethiopian Eunuchs, Corneliuses, and Philippian jailers. They may be the hardened family member, the long-time neighbor, the apostate friend, the littlest of our own children, the stranger at the bus station, or the new coworker. These may hear of Jesus from our lips, for the first or one hundredth time, and have their eyes opened to his glory by the mighty Spirit of God and be saved (2 Cor. 4:6). What a miracle it is for the Spirit to work with such power through the gospel.

Therefore, in our evangelism, we pray along with the psalmist, “Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!” (Ps. 90:17). If he does, God receives the glory because apart from him there would be no prospering power.

### ***Relying on the Spirit in Evangelism***

Since God supplies us with his Spirit who is at work in every aspect of evangelism, we can approach this task with fresh faith, looking for the difference he can make in our hearts and in our practice.

Prior to the moment of Jesus’ ascension, he assured the disciples that the coming Spirit would bring power for the task of being his witnesses in all the earth (Luke 24:25b–49; Acts 1:8). Directly after these words came the unprecedented events of Pentecost when the promised Spirit was given to the Church for all time.

While Pentecost was a unique event, one of the chief ways we rely on the Spirit for evangelism is acknowledging that we too are witnesses to Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection along with the forgiveness found in him. We are removed from the apostles by 2,000 years, yet we join as fellow-witnesses. We too have a share in the Spirit’s presence and his promise of heavenly help in our evangelism. When we ask for help, boldness, and power, we’re asking from him who is still fully available to us (Eph. 1:19).

For this reason, we must rely on the Spirit by not only asking for greater skill and boldness in sharing the gospel, but for greater spiritual filling and power. God the Father, like a compassionate and expert gift-giver, will not give us something harmful or unhelpful when we ask for his Spirit (Luke 11:5–13). He will give his Spirit if only we ask him!

Without the Spirit, we are spiritually powerless and thus utterly ineffective in evangelism (John 15:5). By contrast, *with* the Spirit we have all we need to be faithful witnesses of Christ. Indeed, the Spirit himself bears witness to Christ's glory (John 15:26–27). With his help and power, he propels us to join him in bearing witness to others that Jesus is the true Savior of the world (John 14:16–17). We couldn't ask for a more powerful, effective, and present Helper upon whom we can rely.

### ***Faith for the Task***

When I consider God's powerful presence with us, the Lord often brings to mind the words of Hezekiah, the king of Judah, as he braced the people of Israel for a battle with the mighty Assyrians. Perhaps what he said came in the form of a high-adrenaline motivational speech. Perhaps it was instead a calm, steadying word of hope. Either way, his address is inspiring:

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him, for there are more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles.” And the people took confidence from the words of Hezekiah king of Judah (2 Chron. 32:7–8).

We share the gospel knowing we may face all manner of opposition and rejection. We desperately need strength and courage. But strength doesn't arise from a pep talk and courage isn't an injection we take before a conversation. Strength and courage spring from the guarantee that God goes with us and fights for us. How does he go with us except by his Spirit? How does he fight for us except warring over our hearts and the hearts of our hearers by his Holy Spirit?

Believe that he is with you. Believe that the Father will give the Spirit if you ask. Believe that he will truly help you in this. As we believe, we must act on that faith. When he prompts us, we follow. When we need his help, we pray. When we are afraid, we rely on him to give supernatural boldness (even for the seemingly “small” steps). When we speak, we trust him to work through our words and in the hearer’s heart.

May God’s Spirit and his powerful presence change how you and I approach evangelism. May we be moved beyond dismay to confidence before the horde of unseen enemies and fickleness of our hearts. Truly, there is one with us greater than our own unbelief and any spiritual opposition we’ll face in our praying, preparing, and proclaiming—he is none other than the Lord our God.



# EVANGELISM STRATEGY FOR SMALLER CHURCHES

*Timon Lau*

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**W**ho among us would not want to see the life-giving power of the gospel unleashed through the people in our local churches into our communities? To see hell-bent sinners snatched from the fire, transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of His beloved Son (Col. 1:13)? To see image-bearers restored to relate to God rightly and reveal Him to the world? Yet evangelism can be the most fear-inducing, shame-producing area of obedience in our churches.

“It’s scary.”

“I don’t have the time.”

“Where would we even start?”

“I’m terrible at it.”

At its root, evangelism is simply “taking the initiative to share Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God.”<sup>1</sup> It is embedded into our faithful obedience to the risen Christ (Matt. 28:18–20). It is the God-ordained means by which the kingdom of God advances throughout all the nations. Yet it remains one of the most challenging disciplines and practices for many Christians.

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1. Michael Richardson, *Amazing Faith: The Authorized Biography of Bill Bright* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2000), 131.

For smaller local churches, there are distinctive, additional challenges to being faithful in evangelism. Perhaps a church has an overwhelmed solo pastor who cannot bring leadership to this area. Perhaps the small budget limits creativity. Perhaps the already overworked volunteers are weary and cannot do another thing. Perhaps there is a rich, gospel-centered culture in the small church and there is fear for how too many new people might affect that.

There are real costs to be sure. Yet, the mission of our Savior to evangelize remains unchained. In our pursuit of faithfulness in evangelism, there are challenges which our smaller churches in Sovereign Grace face, but they are not insurmountable barriers. And they ought not prevent us from sharing the gracious words of the gospel to our unbelieving family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers.

Rather, our smaller churches have a unique opportunity to embrace being a blessing to our God-ordained communities with the gospel of Jesus Christ. What we preach—*who* we preach—is the same regardless of the size of our church. We are uniquely positioned for evangelism to not just be one of our many ministries, or an exclusive activity for the extroverted, but for evangelism to be intricately woven into the DNA of our churches when they are smaller. Our perceived weaknesses in lack of resources and isolated locations only serve to magnify the empowering grace of the Spirit necessary for faithful obedience.

God's grace in our weakness is what we experienced in our small church in rural Canada.

### ***Our Story: Inspire***

In God's kindness, he has given us twenty years together as a local church. However, for the majority of those years, evangelism was a glaring weakness for us. Our pastors came to that humbling conclusion a few years ago during one of our leadership retreats. The musical worship during our Sunday gatherings was rich and joyful. People were captivated by the gospel-centered preaching. We excelled at caring for one another in a gospel-revealing community. But our evangelistic endeavours and zeal (or lack thereof) had been weighed in the balances and found wanting. Evangelism seemed like that necessary but nagging task in the long to-do list that small churches tend to never quite get to.

The elders instructed me to dedicate my time and attention to this task, to help the church rightly prioritize evangelism. Yet, change was slow in coming. We continued an annual outreach-focused summer music camp for a couple years. But nearly all the attendees were already churching individuals. I preached a sermon series on God's people being on mission (i.e., a biblical theology of missions) which also yielded little tangible fruit. Our pastors regularly addressed unbelievers directly in sermons, calling them to repentance.

Even in the face of these efforts, virtually all of those who were added to our church were believers who had transferred from other churches. I was confronted with my own weakness and sense of failure. Although I had spent a couple years overseas sharing the gospel with university students every day and trained others to do the same, I did not know where or how to start bringing that into a local church context—as one of the pastors no less.

But God's power was—and continues to be—made perfect in my weakness. A key moment of change happened when we sent two dear brothers from our church, Jireh and Sam, to a Regional Evangelist Retreat led by Jim Donohue. Upon their return—like the apostles with the gospel—they could not but speak of what they had seen and heard. (Much of it you are reading in this volume of the journal, I'm sure.) As they shared their many insights with all humility and gentleness, they tacitly asked the question: "So what are you going to do about it?"

I am so grateful for these two faithful brothers. We started meeting together twice a month to pray for the lost, and to pray for growth in evangelism in our church. We studied how Jesus did evangelism. We challenged one another in our personal evangelism, encouraging one another through our fears and missed opportunities. We prayed over and crafted a vision statement for how we hope to see evangelism woven into the DNA of our church:

At Sovereign Grace,<sup>2</sup> sharing the gospel with unbelievers is a celebrated and normal component of our joyful, Spirit-empowered obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ.

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2. The name of our church in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

We began to honor and celebrate the smallest steps of faithfulness in one another, both in public and private contexts:

“Thank you for inviting your friend out for coffee even though you were scared. That’s faithfulness in evangelism.”

“Thank you for sharing the gospel with your neighbour, even though you fumbled over the words. Who knows what God will do with the seed you’ve planted?”

We reminded one another often of the gospel so that the joy of our salvation would readily overflow from our hearts as we spent time with unbelievers. Our pastors, with faithful courage, had me shift my focus to dedicate 40% of my time to evangelism: reading about it, praying and planning for it, doing it, and equipping others to do the same.

By God’s grace, we’ve seen our church grow in faithfulness in evangelism. It has completely been the Lord’s doing—and it is marvelous in our eyes (Ps. 118:23).

We have now hosted several evangelistic Bridge courses. We’ve had the special joy of seeing multiple people saved from their sins, be baptized, and added as members into our church. We’ve preached sermon series equipping our people to engage with unbelievers by exegeting our culture and following the example of Jesus.

We now put together our Easter and Christmas services specifically with unbelievers in mind, with a team of people going out into the community to invite them. We have a weekly outreach-focused karate ministry with a wonderful team of volunteers that builds bridges between our church and our community. We’re hearing more and more stories of people engaging their unbelieving family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers in spiritual conversations. These endeavors are driven not by guilt, but rather by faithfully obeying Christ as an outflow of the joy of their salvation. These are small beginnings, but the Spirit is empowering us despite our inherent fears. The gospel continues to be the power to save.

## ***Your Story: Ideas***

How is your church doing when it comes to engaging the lost in your community? Perhaps evangelistic zeal has been a constant roaring fire at your church. Your pastor is a humble, model evangelist. You are regularly praying with your brothers and sisters for boldness (Acts 4:24–30), and the Spirit powerfully answers your prayers with fear-conquering boldness. The Lord is saving many, adding to your local church—building his church—through your faithful witness. If so, praise God! This is wonderful evidence of his grace at work in and among you.

But perhaps you are where we were a few years ago. Your church has not seen a conversion in several years. The upward (worship) and inward (sanctification) dimensions of your church are healthy, but the outward (evangelism) needs serious growth. Your fellow saints are treasuring Christ and growing in Christ, but rarely proclaiming Christ. You’ve been hoping and praying that your pastor would lead in this area of obedience, grow in this area. Perhaps you are that pastor, and now feel discouraged and a sense of failure.

Brothers and sisters: do not lose heart. As one of my fellow pastors often says, God gives grace for what He commands. We are to appeal to unbelievers to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:20), that they may experience the same joy we already have in being reconciled to God (Col. 1:22). We are to urge condemned sinners to flee from the wrath to come by running to Christ, hiding in Christ (Ps. 27:5). As his redeemed people, we are to proclaim his excellencies to a world perishing in darkness (1 Pet. 2:9). We may have fear but he has graciously given us all we need for life and godliness in his Son, our risen Savior and reigning Lord (2 Pet. 1:3).

So where do we start? Let me offer some suggestions:

### **Start with humility**

Admit your fears, your weakness, your failings to the Lord. Confess your lack of gospel-rooted zeal for the lost. This will especially be painful if you are a pastor, tasked with doing the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5). But God gives more grace. Receive his grace as you ask for his forgiveness and help in

this area (James 4:6). Be freshly overwhelmed by the gospel of Christ. Bask anew in the joy of your salvation. Commit to moving forward by abiding in him, for without him you can do nothing (John 15:5).

Look for help within your church. Find someone in your church who is naturally evangelistic. Spend time with them. Let their evangelistic zeal rub off on you. They might even invite you to go share the gospel with them. Talk to your pastor: “I want to grow in being a faithful witness for Christ. Will you guide me?” I can already see the tears of joy on your pastor’s face.

Look for help in our family of churches. If you are a pastor of a small church, living out your new conviction, building a culture of evangelism can be overwhelming with all your other responsibilities. Find out who the Regional Evangelist is for your region. These men are passionate about equipping our pastors and churches to reach the lost in our communities. Ask them how to start The Bridge Course. Invite Jim Donohue to your church for a weekend. He served our church so well in his preaching and equipping on evangelism.

### **Start small**

Identify one manageable action. Find a short book on evangelism (e.g., *Evangelism* by Mack Stiles) and invite a couple people to read it with you. During your daily time with the Lord, begin praying that he would increase your love for the lost. Pray for opportunities to share the gospel with those around you. Pray for a few people you know who are unbelievers: your family, friends, neighbors, coworkers. Challenge a few people in your small group to do that with you. Arrange a meal at your home for everyone, so those who are not yet believers can see how Christians interact with one another. If you are a small group leader, begin your meetings by asking your group members: “Has anyone had a good conversation with an unbeliever this week?” This begins to communicate that evangelism is a normal part of our Christian lives along with the Word and prayer.

### **Start with your story**

Everyone loves a good story. Regularly rehearse your story of how the Lord personally saved you—another aspect of preaching the gospel to yourself.

(Brother pastor, encourage your people to get good at telling their story within The Story). Your joy in Jesus will well up. You may not be comfortable doing the apologetic dance with an unbeliever or presenting a cogent Christian worldview. But you can tell the old, old story to others: how the Lord drew you into it and drew you to himself. That restored joy, the reality of relationship with the Redeemer, is a powerful gospel entry point for those who are apathetic, or for those not as easily swayed by logical arguments. Imagine what could happen if many in your church started doing this same thing.

### **Start celebrating**

Find every opportunity to highlight each instance of evangelistic faithfulness, no matter how small. Keep your eyes and ears open. Celebrate a father inviting his neighbour over for dinner; a child telling his friends at school about Jesus; a young mother sharing the gospel with a friend in crisis; a young adult praying for evangelistic zeal. (These are all stories from our church). Do it in your small groups, during prayer meetings, from the pulpit, during your members meetings. Celebrate these evidences of God's grace in others—normal, expected faithfulness.

### **Start now**

Don't only take up and read; go and do! Have that conversation with your pastor. Do it with the exemplary gentleness that Jireh and Sam did with me. Find that book and read it. Set up that call with your Regional Evangelist. Don't wait.

### ***The Story: Imagine***

King Jesus continues to build his church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18). Each local church is a part of that victorious gospel advancement, heralding the good news, until that day when the Bride of Christ is safe in the arms of her faithful Bridegroom. What would it look like for the small churches of Sovereign Grace to eagerly, faithfully, participate in telling that story?

My friend Cale, a pastor at Sovereign Grace Church in Dayton, has been praying the following for his church: “Lord, would you make it so that in a year’s time, our church would be unrecognizable because of our new evangelistic fervour and the number of conversions.”

That’s what it looks like. That is a faith-filled, dependent prayer. I’ve followed his example and I have been praying that for our church as well. I encourage you to do the same for your local church.

As we step out in courageous faithfulness, Lord-willing, we will see our smaller churches change and grow as God saves sinners. We will celebrate together as we see baptisms. We will see our future generations aflame with evangelistic zeal, because of our conviction to seek and save the lost like our Good Shepherd. We will see some of our churches remain small, because they are sacrificially engaged in the thrilling work of church planting. We will see more and more souls around the world enjoying the goodness of our sovereign God in Christ.

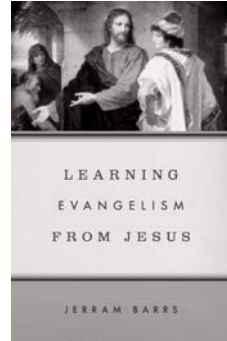
Friends, let’s be faithful to our risen Lord. May he give us wisdom, courage, and zeal to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth.

# RECOMMENDED READING



# LEARNING EVANGELISM FROM JESUS

By JERRAM BARRS



*Matt Gray*

*Lead Pastor, Living Hope Church (Fayetteville, AR)*

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I'VE ALWAYS BEEN FASCINATED with studying people who have excelled in their particular field and what separated them from others. Michael Jordan documentaries, for example, invariably highlight his superior athleticism, unmatched work ethic, and aggressive competitiveness. Michael Jordan was designed by God to play basketball!

Now the interesting thing is that we do this same sort of thing in the church, and in particular in the field of evangelism. When someone we know has success in reaching the lost, we often attribute it to superior giftedness, unusual boldness, and unmatched fearlessness. We're eager to send these "super Christians" out to reach the lost while the rest of us "normal believers" hold down the fort back home.

But there's a problem in this missiological approach and it's found in the words of Jesus: "As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18).

Christ's call to reach the lost lays claim on every Christian's life whether we're that bold, fearless, courageous person or not. Is there any hope for us normal, fort-holding-down types of people that don't have superior giftedness?

This is precisely what makes *Learning Evangelism from Jesus* by Jerram Barrs such a spectacular book for us all. It shows the reader the heart of Christ for sinners, and seeing his heart for the lost warms and softens our hearts towards the lost.

In this book, Barrs argues that Jesus is the ultimate evangelist. He carefully draws us close to Christ so we might learn from him.

As we draw in close, we see some incredible characteristics. We see how intentionally Jesus lived his life around the lost. We overhear the Lord asking an incredible amount of questions to people, softening their hearts as they felt seen and understood. We marvel at his commitment to show respect and honor to the unlovable. We are challenged by his hospitality towards the rejected, downcast, and poor.

This book takes you to heart of Christ to see, as Barrs says, how

To some he taught the gracious nature of God's kingdom; to some he taught the law; to some he spoke about the idolatry of money; to others he revealed his own forgiving love; to others he spoke of himself as the Messiah who would reveal all truth; to yet others he gave the challenge of the necessity of urgent repentance.<sup>1</sup>

So, who comes to mind when you hear the word "evangelism?" Is it someone else or is it you? Or, better yet, is it Jesus? *Learning Evangelism from Jesus* calls us all away from trying to be the stereotypical "evangelist." Rather, it points toward being more like Jesus, who was and still is the greatest evangelist.

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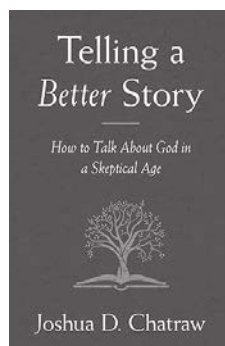
1. Jerram Barrs, *Learning Evangelism from Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 249.

# TELLING A BETTER STORY

By JOSHUA D. CHATRAW

**Rich Richardson**

*Lead Pastor, Center Church (Gilbert, AZ)*



OURS IS A WORLD where truth is increasingly curated, myths are prevalent, and the challenge of sharing the gospel has never been more pressing. Our time echoes of the need to heed Paul’s warning in 2 Timothy 4:3–4, when people are prone to seeking out teachers who tell them what they want to hear, turning away from truth and embracing myths. The myth that Christianity is dangerous has taken hold of the cultural imagination. Joshua D. Chatraw’s book, *Telling A Better Story*, offers a timely response to this skeptical age of ours.

Chatraw’s central argument is that Christians possess a superior narrative compared to the popular cultural stories of our day. However, the challenge lies in presenting this narrative in a way that resonates with a skeptical audience. He posits that

The need of the hour is a mature apologetics that is historically informed and theologically rooted in the gospel itself. This will require not only knowing how to give reasons for our faith, but also knowing how to stoke imaginations, model cruciform lives, and publicly confess both our own personal shortcomings and the failures of the church throughout history.<sup>2</sup>

Chatraw introduces the concept of “Inside-Out Apologetics,” which involves entering into others’ stories to understand their perspectives. This approach is simple yet profound. Instead of aiming for a decisive apologetic blow, we should genuinely seek to understand the person we are engaging before making

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2. Joshua D. Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story: How to Talk About God in a Skeptical Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 19.

gospel appeals. While this might seem like a recipe for compromise, Chatraw ensures that his framework remains grounded in truth.

In practice, “Inside-Out Apologetics” involves several key steps. First, we enter into another person’s story to identify aspects that we can affirm and challenge. We then map out where their narrative leads and assess its consistency—recognizing that no non-Christian story is fully coherent. From an external perspective, we highlight where competing views borrow from Christian themes and truths to find common ground. Finally, we thoughtfully point out how the Christian narrative fills the gaps or “plot-holes” in their story, demonstrating its superior coherence.

The book is structured into three parts: 1) presenting a better story of apologetics, 2) offering that story, and 3) addressing objections to it. Chapter 5 is particularly noteworthy as it provides the nuts and bolts of Chatraw’s “Inside-Out Apologetics.” By engaging with people’s personal stories and narratives, Christians can present the gospel as a more meaningful and hopeful alternative to the prevailing cultural myths.

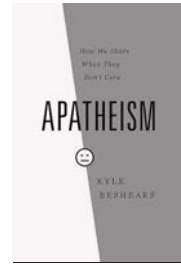
In conclusion, *Telling a Better Story* offers a fresh and practical approach to apologetics that is both timely and necessary. It encourages readers to engage deeply with others’ stories while staying true to the Christian narrative. The purposeful evangelist will be able to navigate the possible pitfall of too much post-modern story talk. With such discipline, *Telling a Better Story* provides a faithful guide for anyone seeking to share their faith in a way that resonates with the skeptical and frightened world in which we live.

# APATHEISM

By KYLE BESHEARS

*Jim Donohue*

*Pastor, Covenant Fellowship Church (Glen Mills, PA)*



A DISTURBING TREND EMERGED in the early 2000s. It was dubbed the rise of “New Atheism.” Led by Richard Dawkins, the “four horsemen of new atheism” denounced religion as superstitious and harmful to society. Their message dominated the internet and public discourse for over a decade. Not anymore. The era of the New Atheists has come and gone, but something else has taken its place.

Today, we live in a society that isn’t as aggressively hostile to our beliefs. Instead, it’s apathetic. Christianity doesn’t produce the same kind of fireworks that it did in the past. It now produces a collective yawn. People aren’t angry; they’re indifferent. They aren’t thinking about truth or worldviews or eternity or rational arguments. It’s all just irrelevant. God doesn’t factor into the picture anymore.

This makes evangelism really tricky. And this is the issue Kyle Beshears tackles in his book *Apatheism: How We Share When They Don’t Care*.

Beshears lays out four cultural conditions, stipulations, or assumptions that produce apathy in today’s society.

**1. Belief in God is contestable.** The scientific community has punched holes in the hull of Christianity and the boat is going down. Science now gives us all the answers to life’s biggest questions. We don’t need God when some of the best minds in society have dismantled an outdated Christianity.

**2. Belief in God is diverse.** Five hundred years ago belief in God was basically unchallenged, but now it’s one option among many, and certainly not the easiest to embrace. Expressive individualism has customized beliefs to

the point where there are now almost as many beliefs as there are people. All these options overwhelm the average person. How can anyone know the truth with so many “truths” out there?

**3. We’re too distracted.** We are the most distracted generation that has ever existed. Glued to our screens, we constantly snack on memes, tweets, and swipes with an ever-shrinking attention span. We’re trained to not think deeply about things and to focus what little attention we have on things that are trivial and temporal.

**4. We’re too comfortable.** We are also one of the most affluent generations that has ever existed. Most people get what they want when they want. We can eat what we want, watch what we want and listen to what we want, all at the touch of a button and usually without having to leave the comforts of our home. Who needs God when we have everything that we want?

These cultural conditions team up to make a formidable opponent when it comes to belief in God. They make atheism the easy way out. So what do we do?

Beshears lays out relevant and insightful advice on how to share the gospel with an apathetic world. He points out that atheism is not just a matter of the mind; it’s a matter of the heart. What we feel often controls what we believe, so we have to find ways to speak to disordered affections.

One of the best ways to do this is to talk about joy. Ask people where they find the most joy in life and where they think they could find ultimate joy. Beshears says,

Specifically, I hope to challenge atheists that their joy might not be as powerful and permanent as they think (a point of tension), and that the one thing they find irrelevant (belief in God) leads to a more powerful and permanent state of joy. The goal of these conversations is not conversion but consideration. I want them to doubt their sources of joy, to consider that they may be partial and fleeting whereas God as a source of joy is

robust and enduring. I want them to consider the shortcomings of their sources of joy, to consider the importance of God, and to consider the gospel.<sup>1</sup>

That's a great strategy for reaching out to the ever-increasing atheists in our neighborhoods, workplaces and families. Read *Apatheism* and be equipped to bring the gospel to a culture that has lost interest in the things of God.

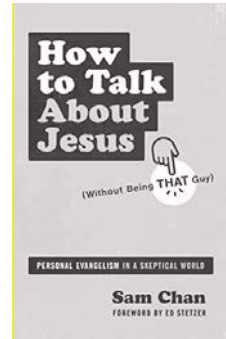
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1. Kyle Beshears, *Apatheism* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2021), 92.



# HOW TO TALK ABOUT JESUS (WITHOUT BEING THAT GUY)

By SAM CHAN



***Brendan Willis***

*Pastor, Sovereign Grace Church (Sydney, Australia)*

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IN THE SECULAR WEST, it often feels as though the tide is perpetually going out against Christians. Headlines reveal scandal after scandal in the church. New laws restrict Christian freedoms. Reports reveal dramatic declines in church attendance. For example, the North Shore of Sydney, Australia was once considered the “Bible Belt” of a nation where less than 5% of people attend church once a month or more. Right here, in my “Bible Belt” part of the world, church attendance has declined 30% in the past decade.

It can often feel as though just staying afloat as a Christian is hard enough. Thinking about evangelism can feel like a waste of time. Who would want to join “our team” when everyone is leaving?

Enter *How to Talk About Jesus (Without Being That Guy)* by Sam Chan. I love this book because it equips you to talk to others about Jesus by providing helpful and practical tips. I’ve seen it bear fruit over and over again.

## **Overview of the Book**

This book is not a theological treatise on evangelism. It doesn’t seek to defend the need for evangelism, discuss the role of prayer, or define the role

of evangelism.<sup>1</sup>

Rather, *How to Talk About Jesus* is based on the premise that *both* method *and* message matter in evangelism. The message of the gospel must never change. However, in light of the rapid cultural changes we've experienced over the past few decades, perhaps our methods do. It's worth re-evaluating our methods to examine if we're sharing the gospel clearly and effectively.

Chan suggests thinking like missionaries in foreign countries since we're seeking to reach a generation that increasingly has had no exposure to the Christian faith. He does this through eight practical tips, each with its own chapter, to help the reader engage the skeptical west more effectively.

1. Merge Your Universes
2. Go to Their Things
3. Coffee, Dinner, Gospel
4. Listen
5. Tell a Better Story
6. Tell Them Stories about Jesus
7. Become Their Unofficial, De Facto Chaplain
8. Lean into Disagreement

For the person feeling discouraged or unsure of where to start, these chapters are practical and filled with inspiring real-life stories.

## The Tips at Work

This book has helped me talk to others about Jesus.

**Story #1:** I went to collect a coffee table my wife had purchased through an online marketplace. Pulling into the garage of the apartment complex, I noticed the woman had red, puffy eyes as though she had been crying. After

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1. For reading on the more theological and apologetic approach to evangelism, consider Chan's more expansive book, *Evangelism in a Skeptical World: How To Make the Unbelievable News about Jesus More Believable* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2018).

asking a few questions and listening to her story, I learned she had been recently scammed out of her entire life savings, had lost her home, and had been targeted by scammers again that day. I conversed with her and asked if I could pray with her. She was so affected that she messaged my wife to ask for information about our church. *(It's worth noting that I'm naturally a terrible listener but listening is one of the tips.)*

**Story #2:** I was working as a Physical Therapist when the wife of an elderly client asked me a challenging question. “Brendan, you’re not one of those Christians who believes I’m going to hell simply because I have a different faith are you?” Gulp! What should I say next? Chan reminds us that our unpopular beliefs (sexuality, judgement, etc.) are simply Jesus’ beliefs. So rather than being defensive, we can simply redirect people to Jesus himself. Thankfully, I’d just read this book, so I was prepared. “Oh, I just believe what Jesus does.” Curious, she inquired as to what that is. We read John 14:6 together and talked about Jesus’ teaching that he is the only way to God.

**Story #3:** I’ve been most shaped by learning that evangelism should be as much a community project as a solo pursuit. Steve had recently joined our running group. I asked him if he was religious and he proceeded to tell me something like, “I grew up in Northern Ireland during The Troubles. . . . Religion is toxic.” Though he turned sheepish when he discovered I was a pastor, we quickly became close friends. In fact, over the course of the next few years, he became friends with several couples in our church, started attending regularly, and gave his life to Christ. He was baptized on Resurrection Sunday in 2023.

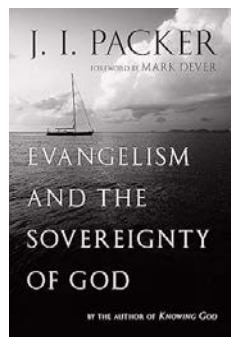
Sam Chan suggests that our skeptical culture finds the message of the gospel difficult to accept when separated from the fruit of the gospel—its effect on community. This was certainly the case for Steve.

Whether you are feeling discouraged in evangelism or simply looking for some ideas to reach more people with the gospel, I highly recommend you grab a copy of Chan’s book. It has helped me. I’m certain it will help you.



# EVANGELISM AND THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

By J. I. PACKER



## *Ryan Chase*

*Lead Pastor, Emmaus Road Church (Sioux Falls, SD)*

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IN SOVEREIGN GRACE CHURCHES, we treasure the glorious truth that God sovereignly saves sinners. This amazing reality should propel us with passion for evangelism. But does it? Is our engagement in evangelism consistent with the truth we profess?

In *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, J. I. Packer explores the relationship between God's sovereignty in salvation and the Christian's responsibility in evangelism. He has two aims: "to dispel the suspicion that faith in the absolute sovereignty of God hinders a full recognition and acceptance of evangelistic responsibility, and to show that only this faith can give Christians the strength they need to fulfill their evangelistic task."<sup>1</sup> This book is a rich and readable resource that will benefit concerned Arminians and convinced Calvinists alike.

## **Dispelling Suspicion**

Packer cogently articulates a biblical view of God's sovereignty in salvation. This will serve those who come from an Arminian perspective. In the first chapter, he demonstrates how every Christian already believes God is sovereign

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1. J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 8.

in salvation. In chapter 2, he addresses the apparent contradiction between God's sovereignty and human responsibility, introducing helpful concepts like antinomy, paradox, and mystery, while showing how to handle tensions in Scripture. In chapter 3, Packer deals with the extent of the atonement and unearths gems of truth that will comfort anyone plagued by fears that they might not be one of the elect.

The final chapter answers specific objections related to evangelism. Does the doctrine of election make evangelism unnecessary and remove our urgency? If Jesus died only for the elect, is it disingenuous to offer the gospel to those who might not be elect? How can God justly condemn anyone for not believing the gospel if God is the one who grants repentance and faith? Packer responds with truth, reason, and care.

### **Strengthening Evangelism**

For those of us who delight in God's sovereign grace, how do our convictions influence our evangelism? If our understanding of the doctrines of grace makes us apathetic in evangelism, we have not yet grasped their implications. Packer reminds us that the sovereign Lord has given us the responsibility to evangelize the world and promises to work through our witness. He writes, "Always and everywhere the servants of Christ are under orders to evangelize, and I hope that what I shall say now will act as an incentive to this task."<sup>2</sup> As Packer elucidates the glory of God's grace in the gospel, he succeeds in stirring our zeal for evangelism.

Packer raises key questions: What is evangelism? What is the gospel message? What is the motive for evangelism? By what means and methods should evangelism be practiced? His answers are biblical and precise, offering dazzling views of the glory of the gospel.

This book energizes us for evangelism by holding up the beauty of the person and work of Christ. It equips us for evangelism by clarifying our task, motive, message, and methods.

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2. Ibid., 9.

Evangelism would be a hopeless endeavor if not for the sovereign grace of God. At the same time, God's sovereign purpose to save sinners should make us bold, patient, and prayerful in evangelism. Packer's work aligns our heads, our hearts, and our hands. While evangelistic trends may change, the biblical truths Packer expounds do not, making *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* a timeless classic.

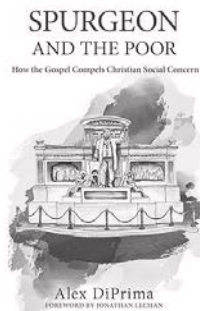


# SPURGEON AND THE POOR

By ALEX DIPRIMA

*Jared Mellinger*

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THE LIFE AND MINISTRY of Charles Spurgeon should be closely studied by pastors and Christians today. I recommend that Sovereign Grace pastors in particular read not just one book on Spurgeon and his congregation, but many. There are countless lessons to be learned from this giant in the faith, including lessons on Christian witness, evangelism, and the mission of the church.

Alex DiPrima wrote *Spurgeon and the Poor* because he finds in the ministry of Charles Spurgeon “a most compelling example of the proper wedding of faithful gospel preaching with earnest social concern.”<sup>1</sup> DiPrima is concerned that “Evangelicals have frequently failed to correctly understand the relationship between these two biblical burdens.”<sup>2</sup> I share his concern.

Spurgeon was, above all, a herald of the gospel and a winner of souls. At the same time, he understood that when the gospel transforms us, the grace of God creates a people who do justice and love kindness (Micah 6:8). When we encounter the needy and afflicted, we are called to respond with the compassion of Christ (Luke 10:25–37). The church is to do good, not only to those within the household of faith, but also to those outside the church as we have opportunity (Gal. 6:10). Such compassion and kindness reveal the heart of Christ and contribute powerfully to our witness in the world by adorning the gospel we proclaim.

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1. Alex DiPrima, *Spurgeon and the Poor: How the Gospel Compels Christian Social Concern* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2023), xxi.

2. *Ibid.*, xxi.

Part 1 of the book examines Spurgeon’s teaching. His preaching of the whole counsel of God included the church’s responsibility to do works of charity and justice. Yet his commitment to the gospel ensured that mercy ministry remained in its proper place and was carried out with sound goals.

Part 2 examines Spurgeon’s practice, showing how his convictions were implemented toward the needy and the oppressed, and how this contributed to the spread of the gospel. Obviously, Spurgeon’s setting, resources, and gifts were unique. And yet, his example in launching so many ministries of mercy in London while maintaining the centrality of the gospel is instructive and inspiring. Let his example envision you rather than discourage you.

In Spurgeon’s view, the church’s engagement in ministries of mercy and compassion did not threaten the gospel but promoted it. It was his conviction that “The benevolent ministry of the church has evangelistic appeal and apologetic power.”<sup>3</sup>

In *Spurgeon and the Poor*, we encounter an approach to mercy ministry that connected deed-ministry to word-ministry—“Practically every one of Spurgeon’s benevolences incorporated gospel proclamation in some way.”<sup>4</sup> Spurgeon distinguished between mercy ministry and politics in the mission of the church, promoting the former and guarding the pulpit from the latter. He was responsive to the burdens and gifts God had given those in the church, and was aware of the specific needs of his community.

Are you an evangelist who desires to see the gospel spread from your church? Are you involved in mercy ministry in the church? Do you want to guard against mission drift in the church? Then read this book. *Spurgeon and the Poor* will ignite a greater zeal for evangelism and for acts of mercy, and deepen our understanding of how these fit together in the church.

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3. Ibid., 57.

4. Ibid., 145.



## **Other Journals from Sovereign Grace**

Christ Our Treasure (Spring 2021)

A Christ-Centered People (Summer 2021)

Our Statement of Faith (December 2021)

Our Shared Values (June 2022)

Our Shaping Virtues (October 2022)

A Passion for the Church (March 2023)

Churches in Partnership (August 2023)

Books That Shaped Us (October 2024)



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CHURCHES  
for the glory of God.

Sovereign Grace Churches is a confessional community of congregations, united in theology, fellowship, and mission. We treasure the sovereign grace of God in Christ, and we are committed to gospel-centered doctrine, preaching, and living.

Our fellowship extends beyond mere denominational affiliation, to relationships that foster mutual encouragement, care, and a glad pursuit of Christlikeness.

We are continuationist in our pursuit of the Spirit and spiritual gifts, complementarian in convictions on gender, and elder-governed in our polity, with some carefully delineated areas of shared governance. Our passion is to see churches planted and nurtured throughout the world.

To learn more about our churches, including our Statement of Faith and how to join us, visit [sovereigngrace.com](http://sovereigngrace.com).



## Equipping pastors to keep watch over their life and doctrine.

The Sovereign Grace Pastors College exists to train men for pastoral ministry. We are a confessional institution, founded upon the beliefs and values of Sovereign Grace Churches. Our 10-month program combines careful scholarship, intentional discipleship, and practical training, all in the context of a specific local church.

At the Pastors College, students learn how to build their lives, families, and churches upon the gospel of Jesus Christ. This gospel produces a particular kind of pastor—joyful, grateful, servant-hearted shepherds who faithfully lead and care for “the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

To learn more, visit us at [sgcpastorscollege.com](http://sgcpastorscollege.com).



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