



HOW THE  
**GOSPEL**  
MOVES FROM  
**FRIEND**  
TO  
**FRIEND**

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**CITY  
GATES.**

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*1<sup>st</sup> edition January 2013.  
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# WHY FRIEND-TO-FRIEND IS BETTER

## All believers are called to be faithful friendship evangelists

**All** Christ-followers are called to be fishers of men.<sup>1</sup> **All** those scattered from Jerusalem shared the Gospel.<sup>2</sup> **All** those reconciled to Christ have the ministry of reconciliation.<sup>3</sup> Simply, God calls every single believer, not just the preachers, to faithfully share the Gospel with others.

The book of Acts shows people crossing the line of faith in two main ways: through **public preaching**<sup>4</sup> and **personal sharing** of the Gospel. Regarding personal sharing, the Gospel was sometimes shared with a complete stranger (like Philip did on the street to the Ethiopian politician<sup>5</sup>), but more commonly it was shared on the back of a pre-existing friendship.<sup>6</sup> For example, Epaphras shared the Gospel with the Colossians through friendship;<sup>7</sup> Paul shared it with the Thessalonians through friendship,<sup>8</sup> and Cornelius coming to faith caused his whole *household* to come to faith,<sup>9</sup> as did Lydia's conversion, as did the Jailer's conversion.<sup>10</sup> In those days "household"<sup>11</sup> referred to an entire social network – immediate and extended family, servants and their families, business associates and neighbours. Clearly, the Gospel must have spread through these social networks from **friend to friend**.

## Which is better: "preaching" or "personal"?

The Bible records people coming to faith through both means of sharing the Gospel, so both ways are valid. But the "best" one is the one that works best in your context. In the context of today's modern Western

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<sup>1</sup> Mk 1:17

<sup>2</sup> Acts 8:1-4

<sup>3</sup> 2 Cor 5:19-20

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Peter preaching in Acts 2

<sup>5</sup> Acts 8:27

<sup>6</sup> Such as in 1 Thes 2:7-9

<sup>7</sup> Col 1:7

<sup>8</sup> 1 Thes 2:7-8

<sup>9</sup> Acts 10

<sup>10</sup> Both in Acts 16

<sup>11</sup> The Greek word is *oikos*.

cities, “preaching” alone is not cutting it, and friendship evangelism is needed more than ever before for three reasons:

**Firstly**, modern Western city dwellers place an extremely high value on authenticity, and are **suspicious of all things institutional**, especially when it comes to faith. As a result, they are more open to receiving spiritual truth from a **trusted friend than a stranger** such as a preacher.

**Secondly**, due to an increasingly secular world, most unbelievers have a **minimal grasp on the basic aspects of faith**. This means that they are unlikely to understand and receive the Gospel through a one-off sermon or conversation, rather needing many conversations and exposures to the Gospel, which is best achieved through a steady friendship with a believer.

**Thirdly**, due to our modern Western obsession with logic, unbelievers today tend to be quite thoughtful, and have several **presuppositional objections** that unless addressed, will prevent them from seriously considering Christianity. Objections such as “there cannot be only one way to God”, or “the Bible is not reliable”, or “how can a loving God let bad things happen?” all need some kind of response before they will be able to approach the line of faith. Again, addressing these objections is not easily done in a one-off sermon or conversation, but they can be over time through a friendship with a Christian.

All this means that the process of approaching and crossing the line of faith tends to take a longer time now, and is best done through a meaningful friendship with a believer. But here is the rub: whilst friendship evangelism is needed more than ever before, it is **not popular**. Church leaders don’t like it because they can’t control it; they can’t “make” their people do it; they can’t “programme” it. And, church members don’t like it because it requires some effort, training and taking responsibility because they can no longer outsource evangelism to the clergy.

Preaching moments such as Sunday preaching, Carol Concerts, Easter Productions, Crusade Meetings, Alpha Courses and the like can be valuable, but must be done to **assist** friendship evangelism, rather than

**replace** it. The enquirer will only usually come to one of these programmes if invited by a trusted believing friend, and will not usually respond to the Gospel at the first event he comes to so will need to keep discussing the Gospel with a believing friend, and even if he does positively respond to the Gospel at the event, a meaningful friendship with a believer is essential to see him established in the faith.

Simply, churches and believers in westernised cities need to **recalibrate** to friendship evangelism.

### **How can I do friendship evangelism?**

I recommend 3 Steps and 4 Tools.

The 3 Steps are:

1. Pick. Pray. Prioritise.
2. Naturally engage on spiritual things.
3. Draw them into your church community.

Think of these steps as three aspects of the process more than three steps to be taken in exact order, but it is usually a mistake to jump prematurely to Step 3. Build the friendship first.

Then, the 4 Tools are:

1. Personal Testimony
2. Answering Objections
3. Concise Gospel Presentations
4. Helpful Resources

Again, these are Tools can be used in any order as and when they are needed, but will probably all be needed in some way to help your unbelieving friend across the line of faith.

### **A word of provocation**

The task is urgent. The great evangelist Charles Spurgeon said, "If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. If they will

perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees. Let no one go there unwarned and unprayed for.”<sup>12</sup> Not a moment to lose.

### **A word of encouragement**

From the moment Adam and Eve sinned, God has been on an unrelenting mission to “seek and save the lost”.<sup>13</sup> So don’t feel that your friendship with your unbelieving friends is impotent. God *Himself* is making *His* appeal to unbelievers through you.<sup>14</sup> The magnet of God is drawing people to Himself through you. You’re the pipe and He’s the power. That’s a strong team. And remember that ultimately only God can save people, not you. So be motivated, be urgent, but rest in Him.

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<sup>12</sup> Spurgeon to Pastors

<sup>13</sup> Lk 19:10, cf. 1 Tim 1:15

<sup>14</sup> 2 Cor 5:20

# STEP 1

## PICK. PRAY. PRIORITISE.

### Pick them

The first thing is to choose a group of people that you will consider your priority group of friends to help across the line of faith. Think of these friends as being in the “incubator”, steadily warming to the Gospel. You can, of course, adjust this group as time goes by, and it certainly doesn't mean that you neglect other friends, but the point is if you shoot at nothing that is exactly what you will hit.

Think about the different social networks that you are already part of:

- Family and relatives
- Neighbours
- Colleagues (co-workers, co-students etc.)
- Those with shared interests (sports, hobbies etc.)

The category of “friends” usually consists of those who naturally rise to the top of these four groups. So, choose 1-3 people from each of these networks who do not yet know Jesus, with whom you feel that you could grow a meaningful friendship, or with whom you are already in a meaningful friendship. Don't worry if one or more of these networks is non-existent in your life at present. Start with those people that God has *already* placed you amongst. List their names here:

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### Pray for them

Then, start to pray regularly for this group. Prayer is mighty and can move the Holy Spirit to work in their lives. Pray for the various aspects of their life and challenges that they are facing. Pray that they would increasingly be open to the Gospel. Pray that you would be a faithful and excellent friend to them, and that God would use you to help them encounter Him.



## Prioritise them

Now that you have picked them and are praying for them, you must ensure that you prioritise your friendship with them. Life is busy and Satan is at work to distract you from starting and developing decent friendships with them, so you need to make a **Missional Living Plan** that ensures you can start and develop these friendships, build trust and credibility, and generally be an excellent friend to them. Developing a Missional Living Plan is more about learning to better use your **existing rhythms of life** rather than becoming more busy. Here are some examples of how to do this. Once you have read these ideas make a note of action points for yourself:

**Gym.** If you go to gym, in order to meet more people, go at the same time each day and you will begin to see the same people. After nodding at them a few times, it will feel natural to say hello, and in due course to strike up a friendship. Or, to build on an existing friendship with someone in your “incubator” group, could you go to gym with them regularly?

**Hairdresser.** If you went to the same one regularly, could he/she become an incubator friend?

**Work.** How could you better spend time at work, especially your lunch hour to start or develop meaningful friendships with your incubator friends?

**Students.** Join a study group to get to know other people, and/or deepen friendships with your incubator group.

**School Parents.** Think of your kids’ friends’ parents. How could you leverage that connection to either become friends or develop an incubator friendship?

**Sport, watching sport and hobbies.** Could you switch from running solo to running with a running club? If you are already watching the game on TV at home, could you invite people to watch with you, or could you invite yourself round to your friend’s house? What hobbies do you have that can be used to start and deepen friendships?

**Meals.** You have 21 meals per week. How could you use these to make friends and deepen friendships?

## STEP 2

# NATURALLY ENGAGE ON SPIRITUAL THINGS

Once you are in a meaningful friendship, you need to begin naturally to engage on spiritual things. Think of the following tips as necessary aspects of the process more than steps to be taken in exact order, but it is usually a mistake to jump prematurely to Number 6.

**Firstly, let them know you are a Christian** in a natural, unforced way.

**Secondly, live an attractive life.** This doesn't mean a perfect life, but if you are annoying, grumpy, and high maintenance then you will likely repel rather than attract them to Christianity.

**Thirdly, ask them about their faith, and just listen.** You might say, "Are you a person of faith? What does that look like for you?" Don't show disapproval if you disagree with what they believe. Ask questions and listen with interest. This is not only an expression of love, respect and humility, but it will help you understand them better. It may also mean that in due course they are more open to hearing your view of faith.

**Fourthly, listen to their problems;** maybe offer to pray for them.

**Fifthly, share your problems with them.** Ask for their advice. Share how your faith helps you in your struggles.

**Sixthly, as opportunity arises, use the various tools** mentioned at the back of this booklet, which are all ways of explaining the Gospel message to a friend. You will need these tools as they naturally become more inquisitive about spiritual things, or as a crisis of some sort makes them reach for spiritual truth, such as fear of death, sickness, mid-life crisis and so on. Remember, crisis doesn't create their need for God as much as reveal it. Also, remember that as people get older life's challenges generally increase, so be a faithful friend, hang in there, and guard your credibility for when the moment is right. But before studying and preparing

these four tools, here is the third step in building a friendship that can carry the Gospel to a friend:

## STEP 3

# DRAW THEM INTO YOUR CHURCH COMMUNITY

Think of a two-part process: firstly, help your unbelieving friends **make friends** with your believing friends from church, then secondly, **invite them along** to suitable church events.

Exposing your unbelieving friends to your church friends should happen naturally as the friendship grows. A good place to start is by organising social times where your **church friends and unbelieving friends can naturally begin to mix** in a casual setting. This is usually a powerful way of exposing them to the Gospel, because Jesus said:

*"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35; 17:21, 23).*

Jesus is saying that the social interaction of God's people proclaims the Gospel to unbelievers. **Our corporate witness enhances our individual witness.** Without the Gospel even being verbally spoken, it gets proclaimed through our lives lived together and love demonstrated to one another, and interest in the Gospel message is created. Tim Chester says, *"To reach the many people today who have rejected church we need to take church to them by doing mission in the context of ordinary life. As people hang out with us, eat meals with us, do chores with us they will encounter a disparate group of people who somehow are family together, a community that challenges their priorities and provokes their questions."*<sup>15</sup>

The other great thing about having a group of believers befriending your unbelieving friend is that there are now more of you in the mix to "do" Step 2, namely begin to naturally engage on spiritual things. Remember, **your church is your Mission Team.** We are not called to fish alone. In

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<sup>15</sup> Tim Chester is a leader in The Crowded House.

Jesus' era fishing was done in teams, with nets being put out and hauled in by a group working together, not by a solo fisherman with a rod. Your church fishing team has **different people with different expertise**. In Mark 2 it took a team of four friends to get a mutual friend to Jesus, and it is often just like that today. You may be the one to draw an unbeliever into your friendship circle, but it might be another one in the group who helps respond to their objections to Christianity, and another who demonstrates God's love to them by helping them through a tough time, and still another who actually articulates the Gospel to help them over the line of faith.

At some stage it will feel natural and appropriate to **invite them along to a church meeting** or event. The number one reason why people say they do not go to church is because...no one has ever invited them. Be relaxed about it. Say, "I would love to see what you make of it", or maybe, "We are in a series at the moment about...", or, "Let's get a bite to eat afterwards". Or, "A mutual friend is getting baptised and I reckon we should support him". Or, "Our church is doing something cool for Moms on Mother's Day...."

All this presupposes that the church you are part of is suitable for unbelievers in terms of the vibe, the people and the meetings that it has. If you are not confident that your church will assist you as you work to reach your friends with the Gospel, **then you need to change church to one that is geared for unbelievers**. I guess you could stay on a bit and try to change the church to be more seeker-sensible, but unless you are the church leader, you will probably fail. Leave with a clear conscience – think about it, **a church not suitable for unbelievers is like a hospital not suitable for sick people**. Mission is at the heart of God and at the heart of the Church, so join a church that is deliberately missional. If a church seems perfect in every other area but is casual about advancing the Gospel to unbelievers, then don't be part of it. You need a church that is missional in its strategy, events and Sunday meetings. And importantly, it must be a church that continuously **trains, equips and provokes you to friend-to-friend evangelism**.

# TOOL 1: PERSONAL TESTIMONY

Andrew said to Peter, "I think I have found the Messiah." The woman in John 4:29 told her friends, "Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did." The man born blind said, "Since I met Jesus I can see".<sup>16</sup> This is what it means to give your testimony. Testimony means "**to bear witness to**". You are now able to "bear witness to" what Jesus has done for you.

You need to prepare a **30-second** and **3-minute** version, both of which can be useful depending on the company and conversation that you are in.

Note that your testimony must be **Gospel-centred**. This means that you must major on **belief** not **behaviour** or **benefits**. Although many things in your life will have no doubt improved since coming to Christ, make sure that your testimony helps reveal the actual Gospel (belief and forgiveness) not the consequences of the Gospel (beneficial changes in life). Also, although behavioural change has happened in your life since coming to Christ, do not major on that as it reinforces the prevailing faulty belief that Christianity is a list of things to do rather than a gift to be received.

The following table gives examples of 30-second Gospel-centred testimonies that can be expanded to give longer, more colourful 3-minute versions. The 3-part structure that is helpful in preparing and remembering a compelling testimony. Read all of them (left to right) to see how although different, each one is Gospel-centred. It is likely that one of these may match your testimony, or you can apply elements of these testimonies to yours. Make sure your testimony is **gritty and honest** not super-spiritual, sleazy, cheesy, or holier-than-thou.

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<sup>16</sup> Jn 9:25

	<b>A key aspect of your life before believing</b>	<b>The process leading to belief</b>	<b>An aspect(s) of your life since believing</b>
Kim	I regarded myself as something of an intellectual, and rejected Christianity based on the lack of factual evidence.	Then I started coming across highly intelligent Christians. I began to investigate the rational basis for Christianity and was won over.	What started as cerebral has now moved to my heart. I am now enjoying the transforming work of Jesus in many aspects of my life.
Bill	I had a significant fear of death.	When I heard that believing in Jesus meant receiving the promise of eternal life, I leapt at it.	Since then I have realised that Jesus is not just about a ticket to heaven but about transformation on earth, and knowing God right now. I am enjoying the ride.
Rob	I was a hard-working, moral guy who was better than most and I just assumed that God would accept me on the basis of my morality.	Then a mate of mine explained that the Gospel was not a code to live by, but rather a gift of forgiveness to receive. It was about believing rather than doing.	I am gradually getting the Gospel idea that good works are done in <i>response</i> to salvation not as a means of <i>gaining</i> salvation.
Abby	I thought I was a Christian because I went to church, gave money away, read my Bible and prayed. I was even a Small Group Leader in the church.	I read the Parable of the Two Sons and to my horror realised that I was the older brother who assumed he was accepted by God because he was a do-gooder. But he was actually rejected by God!	I am relishing in the reality that I am accepted by God, not on the basis of my "good" life, but on the basis of Jesus' perfect life that is now credited to me. I am less critical of others, less driven, and more secure.

Jill	I went through a tough time.	I was amazed at the care of some Christian family members and friends. My heart softened towards God and I became aware of my sin and I asked Jesus to forgive me.	I am learning to keep applying the Gospel to different areas of my life. Most recently, I realised that my stingy attitude to money was based on fear that God would not look after me. But in the Gospel He gave His life for me, so I reckon He will look after me just fine going forward!
Ali	I went through a tragedy.	I came to realise that the tragedy didn't create my need for God, but rather revealed it.	What began as a "help me God" project is growing into a deep relationship with God.
Ozo	My life was boring.	I went to church and heard this preacher say that serving Christ was the greatest adventure ever. So I thought I would give it a go.	And I have found it to be true. The thrill of God inside me, changing me, the fight against sin and the thrill of telling my mates about Christ is epic.
Bo	I became friends with a Christian.	I gradually met his church mates, started to hang out with them and eventually responded positively to the Gospel at a church meeting.	I think the biggest challenge since believing that Jesus is Lord is to really get that He is Lord of every area of my life. I seem to have a lot to repent of, but I am secure in His unconditional love.



Ric	I was living flat out for my career. I thought that the recognition of success and the big bucks would be the secret of happiness. I told my Christian friend that I was not a worshipper like him. He replied, "Of course you are. You just worship something different."	I asked him what he meant. He explained that we "worship" (direct our energies towards) the thing that we think will make us feel complete. I realised that success and money would never quite do it...	I now worship Jesus. I still love my job but I am not looking to that as my saviour (the thing that makes me feel "saved" and good about myself). I now look to Jesus as my Lord and Saviour.
Al	I was living a life of crazy sin and to my amazement a Christian mate never, ever told me to change the way I behaved. When I asked him why he didn't, he replied "Because until you get the power of Jesus in you, you will have no motivation or power to live differently."	I was intrigued by this non-critical response and watched a sermon DVD he gave me called <i>A Dog's Faith</i> about how to become a Christian. I then went through a book called <i>Gospel Revolution</i> with him during our lunch hours. Somewhere through that process I believed in Jesus.	I am only feeling new bit by bit. I guess it is like driving into a new country: your passport gets stamped "new life" but the landscape only changes gradually. But I am thrilled that I am a completely righteous child of God, although learning to live righteous is taking a while!

## TOOL 2: ANSWERING OBJECTIONS

Thoughtful enquirers into Christianity sometimes have some questions that need answering to some degree before they feel able to seriously consider Christianity. Here are some common objections and some bite-sized responses. They are not complete responses or the only responses, but they should point you in the right direction.

**Objection: Christianity is exclusive and intolerant. There can't be only one way to God.**

**Answer: Any other view is equally exclusive and intolerant.** Insisting there are multiple ways to God is exclusive and intolerant of those who believe there is just one way to God. If you claim that Christianity doesn't have a monopoly on spiritual truth then you are simultaneously claiming that you do have a monopoly on spiritual truth, because you would need to, to know that Christianity doesn't. Or to put it another way, Christianity claims that Jesus is the only path that leads to God, but others claim there are many paths to God. But, to know there are multiple paths, you would have had to see the whole map, the very thing that you are frustrated with Christians for claiming to be able to do.

**Objection: Christianity is a straight jacket that will remove my freedom. It is too confining.**

**Answer: Freedom is not the absence of restrictions.** Being free to do whatever we like sounds like freedom until you stop to think more carefully. Defining freedom as the absence of restrictions is shallow. Financial freedom is only attained through submitting oneself to the "restriction" of working hard to make money. An athlete restricts herself to training so that she might enjoy the freedom of success. A fish might look jealously at a bird in the sky and, craving that freedom, might leap out onto the beach. Now it is "free" from the restriction of water, is it actually free? More like dead. Clearly, freedom isn't the absence of restrictions;

rather it is choosing to live within the restrictions that actually free us. The restrictions of Christianity are for our true freedom and good.

**Objection: I can't agree with Christianity because it is responsible for so much injustice.**

**Answer 1: That doesn't mean Christianity is wrong.** Yes, wrong things have been done in the name of Christianity, but this doesn't mean that Christianity is wrong; it means that some people have done wrong things in the name of something that is right.

**Answer 2: We don't use that logic for other issues.** Violence in the name of a good cause isn't restricted to Christianity or even religion, as wars have been fought in the name of race, politics, and even human reasoning. Does that make those things wrong?

**Objection: The Christian God can't be loving if he sends people to hell.**

**Answer: People choose hell.** The Bible does teach that hell is a reality, but it teaches that in one sense, hell is for those people who have chosen it. When a person on earth rejects God, he owns that decision into eternity, which is hell. C.S. Lewis referred to hell as the "greatest monument to human freedom". He wrote, "There are only two kinds of people: those who say 'Thy will be done' to God and those to whom God in the end says 'Thy will be done'. All that are in hell chose it. No soul that seriously and constantly desires God will ever miss it."<sup>17</sup>

**Objection: Christianity is false because the Bible is full of errors.**

**Answer: Please show me some, and I will get back to you.** This is a serious answer to the objection because many people just assume the Bible is full of errors, but haven't ever actually looked into it. If they can point out some apparent errors, ask your church leaders for help and then get back to your friend, or to give them Tim Keller's book *The Reason for God*, which deals with this objection and many others.

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<sup>17</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*. Pg. 116, MacMillan, 1961, and *The Great Divorce*, Pg. 69, Macmillan, 1963.

**Objection: God can't exist because if he did he would stop evil and suffering.**

**Answer 1: The issue is actually us.** Ask the person what kind of suffering they mean. If they say something like a fatal car crash due to a drunk driver, point out that they are actually asking why God allows people to make evil choices. Then you could ask if they have ever made any choice that has caused suffering to another person. Yes. So, someone else is saying, "God, why did you allow that person to do that to me?" You are part of the problem. To remove the problem would be to remove you. Is that preferable to a world without evil? Are you willing to own such a "solution"?

**Answer 2: Definition of evil points to God.** Although reconciling the presence of evil and suffering to the existence of God is a challenge, it is a bigger challenge to reconcile it to there not being a God. Think about it: evolution tells us that disease and death are just part of natural selection, and so we should accept these "evils" as a natural part of life. But this is no answer at all, because everything inside us screams that these things are not natural. From where do we get our sense of natural and unnatural, right and wrong, good and evil, if not from God? Reflecting back on his atheist days, C.S. Lewis said, "My argument *against* God was that the universe seemed cruel and unjust. But how then had I got this idea of just and unjust? What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?" He's saying that our very definition of evil and suffering is more of an indication *for* God than *against* God.

**Answer 3: Our minds are finite.** Within this objection lies the assertion that if evil and suffering seem pointless to *me* then they must be pointless. This is a fair boast in one's cognitive abilities! Remember, if you have a God powerful enough to be angry with for allowing evil and suffering, then at the same time you have a God wise enough to have good reasons for allowing evil and suffering.

**Answer 4: Why the cross?** If God is a bad God, then why did He come earth to die on the cross, one day to bring about an end to all evil and suffering? One thing that we can't say after seeing the cross is, "God doesn't care about evil and suffering."

**Answer 5: A blessing in disguise.** The “blessing” of evil and suffering and death is that it forces us to face the reality of death, and causes us to think about God in a way that we otherwise probably wouldn’t. What if God allowed earthly calamity to come our way to save us from the greater calamity of an eternity without him? Would that not be the action of a loving God?

**Objection: I believe in science, which disproves Christianity.**

**Answer 1: Science is limited.** Science cannot measure the supernatural world. By definition it can only measure or record the natural world. Trying to prove God through science is like trying to measure wind speed with a thermometer. And even then, science cannot measure much of the natural world. To say, “something is only true if you can measure it scientifically” is not true. For example, science can’t measure love. “My girlfriend loves me” cannot be scientifically proven. Rather, we believe things because they make the most sense of the world as we see it. We conclude our girlfriend loves us because that makes most sense of her behaviour. So the real question is “does belief or non-belief in God make *most sense* of the world around us?” This leads us into the second part of the answer:

**Answer 2: A world without God takes more scientific explanation than a world with God.** The intricate nature of creation, our awareness of good and evil, our conscience, the occurrence of miracles, the fact that God-awareness (in some form) is present in all cultures, all take more explaining (or are impossible to explain) if there is no God. Denying the existence of God causes science more problems than it solves, which is why through the centuries many famous scientists have been Christians.

**Objection: I am already a Christian because I try to live a good life.**

**Answer: Christianity is fundamentally not about moral living.** Whilst a Christian will hopefully live a “good life”, it is not what makes him a Christian, and to be clear, the Bible is full of stories of people living good lives who are rejected by God. In the Parable of the Two Sons, the Good Boy stayed at home working the farm, and the Bad Boy hit the road plunging into sex, drugs and rock ‘n roll. The shocking punch line of the

story is the Good Boy being rejected by God and the Bad Boy being accepted. If you rely on moral living to get right with God, rather than on His gracious mercy, the Bible says that you are cursed and severed from Christ.<sup>18</sup> Good people and bad people are equally undeserving of God's grace. The Gospel is not a list of *things to do*; it is a *gift to be received*.

**Objection: I am already a Christian because I was brought up in a Christian home.**

**Answer:** Being born and raised on a farm doesn't make you an animal. Being born and raised in a garage doesn't make you a car. Being born and raised in Christian home doesn't make you a Christian. God doesn't have grandchildren. Just children. You must respond to the Gospel for yourself.

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<sup>18</sup> Gal 3:10, Gal 5:4



# TOOL 3: CONCISE GOSPEL PRESENTATIONS

**Here are five different Gospel presentations** to help you explain the essence of the Gospel to a friend in a just a few minutes:

1. Eternal Life
2. The Great Exchange
3. World Renewal
4. Sin is idolatry
5. Grace vs. Works

## **Why are there five options?**

Although the essence of the Gospel is always the same, there are multiple ways of presenting it. Jesus used different presentations of the Gospel for different people: He used the metaphor of *rebirth* with Nicodemus in John 3, but the language of *satisfaction* to the Woman at the well in John 4. To the paralytic He spoke of *sin directly*, but to the Rich Young Ruler He spoke of the folly of trusting in *good works*. Clearly, we should present the Gospel in the way that works best for the person to whom we are talking.

## **Which presentation for which person?**

**Eternal Life** and **The Great Exchange** both deal with sin, forgiveness and eternal life, and are suitable for children, some teenagers, and those more traditional in their thinking. The strength of these outlines is their focus on the individual's need for forgiveness before a holy God.

**World Renewal** works towards the need for personal renewal within the greater context of world renewal. It presents the Gospel along the lines of Creation-Fall-Redemption-Consummation, and is suitable for hippies, tree-huggers, herbal-tree drinkers, and basically any modern person who has some kind of social conscience and admits the world is in a mess!

**Sin is idolatry** is suitable for the modern Westerner whose individualism and relativism has dulled his conscience to right and wrong, especially if



defined by someone other than him, even God. Because of his cultural conditioning, he is resistant to the head-on “you are a sinner” approach, but more open to the “sin is idolatry” approach, which is the most fundamental definition of sin. The Bible defines sin as “doing bad things” (or failure to do good things) and also “making good things ultimate things,” i.e. idolatry. When he hears that it is impossible to be satisfied and happy through building his life on anything other than God (such as career, money, relationships, pleasure), he tends to offer less resistance, because he is usually already aware of the anxiety involved in the pursuit of happiness from earthly things, and has probably already experienced the feeling of emptiness that comes soon after achieving a goal. Simply, due to his cultural conditioning, he is able to see sin more easily as “worshipping something other than God” than he is “doing bad things.”

**Grace vs. Works** is best for people who mistakenly think that they are Christians because they live a good life. Tim Keller calls this group “older brothers” after the do-gooder older brother in the Parable of the Two Sons who missed salvation because of his misplaced trust in his moral living.

### **How can I start the conversation?**

Either you initiate or you respond. You could initiate by saying, “Hey, you know I’m a Christian, right? I have been meaning to ask if I could take a couple of minutes to show you what that is.” Or, they will say something in a conversation that gives you a way in. They might ask you directly what you believe, or they might say something like, “Of course, I try to pray and go to church but I don’t think I am cut out for religion.” To which you could respond, “Well that actually isn’t what Christianity is about. Let me show you a couple of verses that briefly explain what it means to be a Christian.”

### **How should I do the presentation?**

It can be done in a range of ways. The best is to get these five presentations into your head so that you are “always prepared to make a defence for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15). Having the various presentations in your head means you can direct any conversation about spiritual things towards one of these options. Ideally, if you can remember the Bible verses, you’ll be able to point your friend to where in the Bible

these things are said. Or, you could just give a print out of one of the presentations to your friend to talk through together, saying, "I have a few verses here that show what it means to be a Christian...".

Here are the five presentations:

# ETERNAL LIFE

**The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus. (Rom 6:23)**

## **Wage**

Wage means "consequence". We earn money from our boss for working, and death from a holy God for sinning. Before a holy God sin is that serious.

## **Death**

Death means being spiritually dead towards God in this life, and eternally dead to God in living hell when we die.

## **Eternal life**

God has a gift for us of eternal life. This is the exact opposite of the death that we have just talked about. It means becoming alive to God in this life, and living with God for eternity.

## **Gift**

Eternal life is a gift for us from God. Can you earn a gift? No. This gift cannot be earned through moral living, but only gratefully received as a free gift.

## **In Christ Jesus**

This is the key part. Eternal life comes in the "package" of Christ Jesus. So, if you want to receive eternal life you must receive Jesus. This is why people sometimes talk about becoming a Christian as "receiving Jesus". Eternal life comes "in Christ Jesus" because eternal life is only possible through the forgiveness of sin, and forgiveness of sin is only possible by gratefully believing that Jesus took your place and died for your sin. Because of your sin you must die. But on the cross, Jesus died as your substitute. He took your wage of death. If you gratefully believe that, and repent of your sin, forgiveness and eternal life is yours.

## THE GREAT EXCHANGE

**Jesus Christ, who knew no sin, became sin, that we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor 5:21)**

Martin Luther considered this verse to be one of the best portraits of the Gospel, and he called it, "The Great Exchange." The two characters in the plot are a **holy God** and a **sinful human race**.

God is altogether **holy**, and he abhors **sin**. Sin is so serious that not only can God have nothing to do with it, but He demands the punishment of death for all sinners. And the Bible is clear that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Note that God does not compare us to other people, but that everyone, from Hitler to Mother Teresa, has fallen short of His glorious **holiness**, and are **sinners**. Certainly, some people sin more than others, but just one sin is enough for us to fall short of God's glory.

God is not only **perfectly holy**, but He is **perfectly merciful**, and in love He hatched a plan to ensure that the full sentence of death against sin was carried out, but that there was a way of escape for sinners. The plan was the Great Exchange. Jesus the Holy One, took the sin of each sinner on Himself, and died on the cross as a substitute for all who would believe in Him.

**He** became what we are, sinners, so **we** might become what He is, righteous. **He** got what we deserve, death, so that **we** might receive what only he can give, life. When you trust in Jesus and His work on the cross, your sins are forgiven and you are declared righteous by God, the ultimate judge. The perfectly righteous life of Christ is attributed to you as if you lived it. The Gospel is not a record of good people earning God's blessing, but bad people receiving God's blessing because Jesus earned it for them. The Gospel is that God treated Jesus the way we deserved and He daily treats us the way Jesus deserved.

# WORLD RENEWAL

## **The world was once perfect**

God made the world good; with no evil, suffering, sickness or death.<sup>19</sup>

## **Then Man's evil ruined it**

Part of that perfection was giving Man the ability to choose, and in the Garden of Eden, and continuing now on a daily basis, Man chooses to live in a manner contrary to God. The inevitable result is a world in a mess, full of pain, injustice, and environmental destruction. As a result, "all creation has been groaning up until the present time" (Rom 8:22).

## **Then Jesus came to earth to begin the process of renewal**

Jesus not only preached about the Kingdom of Heaven, but demonstrated it by healing people, speaking justice, and bringing peace to relationships.

## **And Jesus will return to completely restore it**

God has placed a limit on this era of earth, and in due course Christ will come again to complete the restoration of all things (Acts 3:21 and Col 1:20), and create a new heavens and new earth that will be a place of perfect harmony, void of suffering, pain and death (Rev 21:3).

## **Individuals can become part of this renewal right now**

The message of the Gospel is that each of us can plug into this process of cosmic restoration<sup>20</sup> now. But being included in this renewal is not automatic – we need to make sure we're included. The Bible uses various phrases to describe our inclusion<sup>21</sup> with the most poignant being **born again** (Jn 3:3,7). All of creation will one day be **born again**, but God has begun this process by offering new birth to people right now, and those who accept this offer by faith not only enjoy God's life within starting now (2 Cor 4:16), but they are assured of a place in the perfect future age. And as renewed ones, they get to know God now, and get to participate in the process of restoration by working for justice, fighting poverty, and so on. Essentially, they get to bring something of heaven to earth now.

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<sup>19</sup> Gen 1:1,25

<sup>20</sup> Remember, this is a massive, comprehensive restoration of all things (see Mt 25:34 and Rev 11:15).

<sup>21</sup> Such as becoming citizens of heaven (Phil 3:21) and transferring to the kingdom of light (Col 1:12-13).

## **SIN IS IDOLATRY**

**Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? (Isa 55:2)**

Psychologists say our deepest need is to feel a sense of identity, purpose, and significance. Simply, we long to be satisfied. To this end we pursue (worship or idolise) things we believe will satisfy us such as success, money, career or a relationship. But we soon realise that these things can't satisfy us. Everyone knows that empty feeling that follows achieving that goal, that promotion, buying that car, getting that girlfriend, and so on.

**Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry." (Jn 6:35)**

In contrast to all these things that leave us still feeling empty, Jesus offers total personal satisfaction and fulfilment. Life satisfaction can only be found in Him because only the Creator can ultimately satisfy the Created.

**The First Commandment: You shall have no other gods before me. (Ex 20:2)**

Note that the most fundamental definition of sin is not "doing something bad" but looking for meaning and satisfaction from any place other than God. Making a good thing into an ultimate thing is idolatry, which is the essence of sin. So, what is the answer?

**You turned away from idols to serve the true and living God, Jesus Christ. (1 Thes 1:9)**

The answer is to turn from building our lives on these things and build them on God. "Turning" means to repent of giving your love and devotion to anything other than Jesus Christ, and to now worship him and look only to Him for identity, purpose and peace. This is what you were designed to do and how you were designed to be happy. This is what it means to become a Christian.

## GRACE VS. WORKS

**For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast. (Eph 2:8-10)**

From a young age we learn that we get what we deserve for what we do, whether it is which class or team we are in at school, or the level of our pay-grade. This causes us to think that God divides the world into *deserving* and *undeserving* based on the things that we do. And if we do more good things than bad things, or more good things than other people, then God will surely accept us. But this is not how the Gospel works. The Gospel is about **grace**, about getting what we don't deserve, not about getting what we do deserve. God's acceptance of us is a **gift**. It is **not by works**. We have nothing to boast about except God's mercy to us.

### **A shocking punch line (Lk 15:11-32)**

Whilst a Christian will hopefully increasingly live a "good life", it is not what makes him a Christian, and to be clear, the Bible is full of stories of people living good lives who are rejected by God. In the Parable of the Two Sons, the Good Boy stayed at home working the farm, and the Bad Boy hit the road plunging into sex, drugs and rock 'n roll. The shocking punch line of the story is the Good Boy being rejected by God and the Bad Boy being accepted.

If you rely on moral living to get right with God, rather than on His gracious mercy, the Bible says that you are cursed and severed from Christ.<sup>22</sup> Good people and bad people are equally undeserving of God's grace. The Gospel is not a list of *things to do*; it is a *gift to be received*.

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<sup>22</sup> Gal 3:10, Gal 5:4

## TOOL 4: HELPFUL RESOURCES

It can be helpful to give an enquirer a resource that they can read, listen to, or watch, especially if it is prefaced with, "I found this particularly helpful and I think you might too." Three important resources to stock up on and keep in supply are:

### **1. A resource that presents the Gospel**

You need a resource that clearly explains what it means to become a Christian. I recommend the booklet *Crossing the Line of Faith*, which can be downloaded from <http://citygates.ca/resources/>

### **2. A resource that develops the Gospel**

You need a resource that goes beyond simply presenting the ABC of Gospel salvation, and shows more of how the Gospel changes a person's life. I recommend *Gospel Revolution* for this, as it is useful for the unbeliever, new believer and seasoned believer. You could say to your friend, "This short book has helped me to access the power of the Gospel in my life. Let's each read a chapter a week, and do the study guide, and meet up for half an hour each week to discuss the learnings from that chapter." Download this from <http://citygates.ca/resources/> as well.

### **3. A resource that defends the Gospel**

There are a handful of objections to Christianity that the thinking unbeliever may need answering, or partly answering, before being able to cross the line of faith. Helpful books to give them include *The Reason for God* by Tim Keller, and *If God then what?* by Andrew Wilson. Another, more philosophical read is *A Shot of Faith to the Head* by Mitch Stokes.