

Share Your Faith

*Natural evangelism
for ordinary Christians*

Volume 1:
Co-operating with God

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Introduction

Invitation

The problem

Many Christians find it hard, if not impossible, to talk about what they believe with someone who does not already share their faith. Some feel guilty about this; others excuse it because “I’m not an evangelist”; while others have grown tired of trying, and finding it doesn’t work for them, have just given up.

Unfortunately, evangelism is not an optional extra for Christians. “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” (1 Peter 3:15) This is a command from Peter to everyone in the church – not just the evangelists!

More importantly, when people feel they cannot talk about their faith, this leads to other problems. A faith you can’t talk about easily can easily become a hidden faith, a double life: not admitting to what you believe, not standing up when faced by moral pressures.

Many Christians feel that their faith has been seriously compromised by their failure to openly admit to what they believe, and this has serious consequences for their spiritual and emotional health.

The answer

Fortunately, you don’t have to be an evangelist to be able to share what you believe with other people in a way that is:

- clear, simple and attractive,
- natural and comfortable for you, and
- enjoyable for the people you are sharing with.

I believe that every Christian is able to do this. It takes a little work, but not much.

You might be surprised by how much your faith is strengthened when you are able to be honest about what you believe, when you can communicate it confidently and attractively, and when you are not worried by the questions other people might ask you.

Evangelism and church life

Evangelism is one of the most basic activities of the church. Of the five ministries listed in Ephesians chapter 4, it is the one that has the most direct relevance to the lives of ordinary church members.

The church will not survive – let alone grow! – without effective evangelism. Sadly, most of our evangelism is ineffective and inappropriate. An approach to evangelism that reflects the character of God will help the church not only to grow, but also to grow in a healthy way.

It is comparatively easy to build a big congregation if you are prepared to compromise and water-down the gospel. The challenge is to help people respond to a gospel message that includes dying to self as well as eternal bliss. Getting the message right is vital.

The church desperately needs to find an approach to evangelism that wins souls who go on to be part of God's solution to the world's problems, instead of sitting around and remaining problems.

Evangelism and the ordinary Christian

Along with most Christians, you are probably not called to be an evangelist. But you are called to evangelise – to share your faith – when the situation requires it.

What do you need for effective evangelism? Not much: usually, it's just the anointing of the Holy Spirit and good, solid preparation. The two go together.

Some people argue against preparation on the basis of texts like Matthew 10:19 – “But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say...” This passage promises that, if you are suddenly arrested and have no time to prepare your defence, God will give you the words you need. But you can't rely on Him giving you the words in an exam you failed to prepare for.

Sometimes, by God's grace, we are ‘just given the words’, but the reality is that loving and Spirit-filled Christians, when given an opportunity to talk about their faith, are all too often left tongue-tied and feeling they have let the Lord down. God does inspire and anoint us for ministry, but He generally inspires what we have worked on in advance. In God's economy, faith and work go together.

It is a great boost to your faith to be able to share what you believe with other people. Or, perhaps, it works the other way: not being able to share your faith is a serious handicap that too many Christians carry around for too long. Christians who discover how to share their faith often go on to serve the Lord in all kinds of other ways as well. The joy of seeing the Lord touch other people's lives through you is a life-changing experience.

The course: addressing real problems

The purpose of this course is to address the real problems and difficulties Christians have – difficulties in doing it, and difficulties in just getting started.

Have you ever felt uncomfortable about evangelism? After a good few years talking with people in many different churches, I have discovered that most Christians seem to feel uncomfortable – and often, quite a bit guilty – about the evangelism they are doing. Or, more often, the evangelism they are not doing.

People tell me about their problems with evangelism. They say a number of different things, but it often boils down to one or more of the following:

- I know I ought to be doing more (they mean ‘some’!) evangelism, but there is something wrong with me – something gets in the way.
- Who am I to tell other people what to believe?
- I don’t know what to say – I don’t have a dramatic conversion story.
- I am afraid... of rejection, of looking foolish, of appearing different, of not having all the answers.
- I want to tell people about Jesus, but it never seems to be quite the right time to say something.

These problems are real. Fortunately, they have real answers.

Getting you started

The aim of this course is to get you started doing effective evangelism in a way that works – in a way that works for you, and a way that works for the people you meet.

The Biblical pattern is for on-the-job training. This involves two steps:

- You start to do something that is worth doing.
- As you continue to do it, you learn how to do it better.

This course will not tell you everything you want to know. It certainly will not tell you everything you eventually will need to know if you keep growing and learning. But it should enable you to get started, it should ensure that what you do is worth doing, and it will help you to keep learning as you go.

In order to keep learning, you need the right attitude, and a little discipline. You need the attitude of “I’m still a learner”, and the discipline to use the opportunities for learning that present themselves. This course will encourage the right attitude, and should help you to recognise and use the opportunities you find.

The key principles

Everything that follows is based on two key principles.

- People come first.
- Our method and message must be consistent.

People come first. The main focus of this course is not on you, or on the message you want to get across, but on the person you are wanting to communicate with: who they are, what they need, and what they are looking for.

Our method and message must be consistent. If we are going to tell people about a God of Love, we must demonstrate His love in the way we go about it.

Many people are put off the Christian faith because Christians fail to apply these two principles. They may think they are doing God's will in spreading the gospel, but they often act in an uncaring way because they put the need to communicate the message in front of the need to express love for the individual. But, if you think about it, 'speaking the truth in love' is the only way to speak a message of love.

What we do not cover

Books on evangelism often cover many other areas, and sometimes only briefly touch on evangelism itself. The assumption seems to be that if you are on the path of Christian discipleship, practising various spiritual disciplines, have a rich devotional life and are learning to be a mighty prayer warrior, then evangelism will come naturally to you, and all your efforts will prove to be fruitful.

I should point out that I am very much in favour of worship, discipline and prayer. However, I have known deeply spiritual people, who far exceeded me in each of these areas, but who were quite incapable of talking intelligibly to anyone who did not share their core beliefs.

Let us assume for the sake of what follows that worship, discipline and prayer are all good things: if you wish to grow as a Christian, you will develop in each of these areas. Moreover, if you wish to see God at work in your own life, and the lives of the people around you, then prayer is essential; and a healthy prayer life cannot be sustained without self-discipline and worship.

But there are many books on these subjects. Here, we are only looking at the subject of sharing your faith.

Everyone is welcome

This course is primarily designed for Christians who want to share their faith more effectively. Such an individual is (for most of the time) the 'you' in these pages, the person being addressed. This is why I use quotes from the Bible, as such people are generally familiar with the Biblical material and regard it as, in some way, authoritative.

But this course is also intended to be helpful to two other groups of people.

Firstly, it is intended to be helpful to folk who are not yet clear about their faith, who have doubts or questions, and want to know more. It provides a safe environment in which you can ask questions about matters of faith, and voice objections and alternatives to the standard Christian beliefs. You are very welcome to express these questions and objections during the course: I only ask that they are questions that genuinely matter to you. Our aim is to be relevant and helpful, and this means we need to talk about the questions and issues that really matter to the people present.

Secondly, this course is open to those who work alongside Christians, and who would benefit from understanding more clearly what they can and should expect from these Christians in their behaviour and standards when dealing with matters of faith. You are invited to participate as fully as you feel able, and to ask questions and raise genuine objections. There are no secrets or hidden agendas in authentic Christianity: what you see (and what you hear) is what you get.

What to expect

This course will not give you a script. It will not tell you what to say when you want to ‘do’ evangelism. Everyone is different, and what you say to each person will be different. What you say to someone will be different from what I say to them.

Let us assume that you have been praying for your neighbour for several months, and one day he asks you why you go to church – what do you say? Or he mentions that he is afraid his brother might have cancer – do you use this as an opportunity to talk about God?

I can’t offer a definitive answer to these questions. But, by the end of this course, you should be able to find an appropriate response for you and your neighbour.

The basic components of any evangelistic encounter are fairly obvious:

- You
- The person you are talking with
- The message you want to communicate
- Your understanding of what you are attempting to do
- Your knowledge and experience
- Your individual personality, style and character

What we are aiming to do is to help you put these things together in a reasonably coherent way, so you can find what works for you and for the people you are with.

Personality

Your personality matters. Some folk are very outgoing, and enjoy an active approach to sharing their faith; others are much quieter, and prefer a more passive approach. Both approaches are perfectly fine, as is something in the middle.

But this is not to say that anything and everything is acceptable. You can see the ‘active’ and ‘passive’ approaches as points on a continuum, with extremes at either end. The fuller scale is like this:

Aggressive.....Active.....Passive.....Inactive

When it comes to evangelism, most Christians tend to veer to one of these extreme positions or the other – they either do nothing, or they adopt an aggressive approach which annoys or upsets the people they spend time with, and eventually puts them off the whole enterprise.

Whatever your personality, there is a way to avoid the dangers of the two extremes, and find a place in the middle which works for you.

The Three Steps

Good evangelism

I sometimes talk about things like ‘good evangelism’ and ‘sharing your faith well’ and so on. To be absolutely clear: I am not talking about evangelism that conforms to a certain model, pattern or denominational bias.

By ‘good evangelism,’ I mean evangelism that is good for God, good for you, and good for the person you are talking with. In other words:

- it is theologically sound;
- you enjoy and learn from the experience;
- and the other person enjoys and learns from the experience, and wants to repeat it.

Of course, every denomination and each Christian will have their own understanding of what is theologically sound. But I want to offer an approach which can be used with integrity by Protestants and Catholics, by Pentecostals and Evangelicals alike.

The alternatives

The two alternatives to good evangelism are bad evangelism and no evangelism. Many books and people discuss the problem of no evangelism. The problems with this are fairly obvious: the church becomes a self-sustaining clique, and eventually dies out.

But very few books on evangelism or evangelistic training courses deal with the problems caused by bad evangelism.

Bad evangelism hurts people and creates barriers. Folk who used to be interested are put off the Christian faith by bad evangelism. Christians who were enthusiastic about their faith are discouraged and put off sharing their faith, either because they were being asked to do bad evangelism, or because they did not understand what they were being asked to do, and it turned out badly.

Offence

We need to make a brief side-track, as someone always needs to raise an issue at this point. Folk who used to be interested in the Christian faith are put off it by bad evangelism. It is also true that some folk who used to be interested in the Christian faith are put off it by good evangelism. This does not mean that there is no real difference between them.

The problem we are seeking to address here is the problem of people being put off the Christian faith through offensive and insensitive evangelism. I do not want to misrepresent Jesus, either in my words or in my behaviour.

But, on the other hand, the fact that someone has been put off the Christian faith does not mean that I got it wrong: there is something commonly called the 'offence of the gospel.' The gospel message can be clearly, sensitively and attractively presented, and still be rejected. This does happen, but it happens far less frequently than many Christians imagine.

Not all evangelists

We need to resist the idea that all Christians are called to be evangelists. This places an unfair pressure on many good Christians, who feel they are failing in their Christian walk, when they are actually being far more obedient than they realise.

After all, we do not say that all Christians ought to be preaching, or that all Christians ought to be leading worship, or that all Christians ought to have a ministry of pastoral care.

We recognise in all these other areas that you need a calling, and you need some training. A ministry of evangelism is no different.

All called to witness

So, not all Christians are called to be evangelists.

On the other hand, all Christians are called to be witnesses.

A witness is someone who gives a true account of what they have personally seen and heard. It does not matter whether the story is a dramatic one: what matters is that it is true. The other common name for such an account is a 'testimony.'

All Christians are called to be witnesses - to testify to what God the Father has done, and continues to do, in their lives, through the teaching, example and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and the working of the Holy Spirit. We are to give, when asked, 'a reason for the hope that is within us.'

A calling

But, remember, this is a calling, not a present reality. For many, it will be a goal or a target – something to aim for.

It is perfectly all right to be called to do something, but not be doing it yet. What matters is that you are moving in the right direction. The question is: what do you need? What will help you get there?

For everyone

While it is true that only some Christians have a ministry or a specific calling to function as an Evangelist, all Christians must be able to lead someone else to Christ when the opportunity arises.

After all, you may not have a ministry of healing, but if you are the only Christian around and God wants to heal someone, then you are the one who needs to pray.

The main difference is that most Christians can manage to come up with a suitable prayer for healing ("Dear God, please heal this person." works quite well...) but many would panic if they were presented with someone who wants to become a Christian. The usual reaction is to try to find a minister. But you don't always have a minister to hand when you need one, and many ministers have never actually led anyone to Christ themselves, so they may not be much help after all. Sometimes, it is down to you.

So, it is probably safe to assume, from time to time we may all be called upon to take part in some evangelism. The question is: will we do it well, or badly?

The three steps

When we look at the subject of evangelism, there are three main steps that Christians need to take. We can summarise these three steps as follows.

- Step one: *identify*
- Step two: *testify*
- Step three: *multiply*

I know those headings are a bit painful. But there's a chance you might remember them.

I constantly and permanently identify myself as a follower of Jesus. When it is appropriate, I testify to God's work in my life. And when I am invited, I tell others about God's offer to them of eternal life.

Each step is characterised by a particular aspect of Christian life and practice. Step one is about confession; step two is about testimony; and step three is about evangelism.

Before anyone asks: no, there is no step four, and no, it is not about Discipleship. There are aspects of discipleship in all the three steps. Neither is it about 'training others' or 'passing it on' – again, training and equipping others should be seen as a vital part of each of the three steps.

Outline

In essence, this course is very simple. God's truth is always simple...

- **Aims.** We need to be clear about this: what are we seeking to achieve in our evangelism? And what methods are consistent with these aims?
- **Conversations.** How do we start to talk with people about Jesus and the things we believe?
- **Content.** What are we supposed to tell people? How do we communicate the gospel message, and how much of it do they need to understand?
- **Questions.** How can we respond in a helpful way to their questions, concerns and objections? It's not as difficult as many people fear!

This course will not (on its own!) turn you into a top-rate evangelist. But it should enable any ordinary Christian to start sharing your faith – and enjoy it.

If you enjoy sharing your faith, and the people you are talking with enjoy it too, then it's likely to happen. And if you continue to share your faith, the chances are that you will gradually get better at it. It may never become the main thing you do, but that should not stop you from enjoying the experience of seeing people come to know Jesus through you.

1. Step One: Identify

1 a. The Context

Aims

There is a belief in many parts of the evangelical church that we need to get more church members engaged in evangelism. Ideally, it seems, all of them should be doing it.

I am often asked to be involved in making this happen. The requests are phrased in different ways, such as: “We want our members to stop talking about evangelism, and start doing it,” or, “We want you to inspire them to get out there and start evangelising their friends and workmates.”

However they are phrased, most of these requests share three common ideas: (1) the church members are currently engaged in little or no evangelism, (2) they all should be doing it, and (3) they need some suitable encouragement or inspiration to get them started.

We can note in passing the assumption that these Christians already know what they are supposed to be doing and how to do it; they simply need to be encouraged or inspired to ‘get out there’ and start doing it.

I’m not too sure about that first idea: I suspect that many Christians are actually sharing their faith far more than the church leaders realise. This may well be part of the problem...

But ideas two and three are generally very unhelpful. Not all Christians are called to be evangelists, and what most Christians need is not encouragement or inspiration but suitable, relevant and helpful training.

Good evangelism

If we are to do step one well, then we need to understand not only this first step, but also the wider context – what it is the first step towards. To get this step right, we need to understand the nature of good evangelism.

We described good evangelism at the beginning as evangelism that is:

- good for God;
- good for you; and
- good for the person you are talking with.

Good for God: evangelism has to work in the context of God’s Kingdom. This means, of course, that people get saved. But it means much more than this: they must be responding to a Biblical gospel – one that includes a cross as well as glory, that spells out the cost of discipleship as well as the benefits.

Good for you: evangelism is not undertaken for your pleasure and entertainment. But, being realistic, unless you enjoy sharing your faith to some extent, you are unlikely to continue doing it for long. And, as well as being enjoyable, it should also be profitable – you should gain from doing it: discover new things, get to know people better, and grow as a human being and as a Christian.

Good for the other person: evangelism has to work for the person you are talking with – on their terms. We may be telling people the gospel, but if the people we are talking to come away with the conviction that Christians are crass, arrogant and insensitive, they are unlikely to respond to the message, however persuasive we may be. If, on the other hand, they enjoy the encounter and look forward to the next opportunity to spend time with you, then (a) there may actually be a next time, and (b) it is more likely to be productive.

Evangelism is difficult

Evangelism involves dealing with some of the deepest issues of human life. It requires tact and discernment. You can't just trample over someone's deepest hopes and fears. You can't just dismiss their beliefs and values as worthless. When you touch important and sensitive subjects, you have to be gentle.

Sometimes, Christians don't share their faith because they know they can't handle the deep issues it is likely to raise. In which case, they are not being disobedient – they are being responsible.

In other words... maybe, sometimes, when Christians are not busy sharing their faith, they might be making the right choice.

For these Christians, they don't need more sermons telling they ought to be reaching their friends and families for Christ: they already know this, and feel bad about not doing it. And they don't need to be taught a set of words to use as a sort of evangelistic hand-grenade to throw at people: they usually have too much integrity to do that. What they need is some training that will enable them to handle both the theological and the personal questions that arise when you start to talk about matters of faith.

Confession

Step one is all about confession.

Perhaps we need to reclaim the word. For some people, it presses the wrong buttons. But it is accurate, and it is the traditional Christian term for what we are being called to do.

Confession is simply about telling the truth. It is often used in the context of telling the truth about a sin or a crime you have committed, but it is not limited to this context. According to the dictionary to confess is to acknowledge fully, to own or admit, to make known.

In step one, the vital step is to admit that you are a Christian: to identify yourself as a follower of Jesus and to own your allegiance to Christ.

This is absolutely vital, and (in ‘normal’ circumstances) non-negotiable. Of course, if you live in a Moslem country, where you and your family may be killed for converting, it is reasonable to be somewhat careful about who you tell. But for those of us who are fortunate enough to live in Western democracies, there is very little excuse.

Paul presents this as an essential part of conversion: “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:9) You have to *confess* Jesus with your mouth in order to be saved.

And it is not simply a question of telling one person on one occasion. If you refuse to confess the truth, you are denying it - and Jesus described the consequences of denying Him in very clear terms. Refusing to confess your commitment to Jesus is equivalent to rejecting Him. In this area, there is no middle ground.

It ought to be very easy and straightforward, but the sad truth is that many Christians do not manage to make the fact of their faith known to their friends and colleagues at work.

Enjoy it

The purpose of these sessions is to help you take all three steps, so that you can discover how to delight in identifying yourself as a Christian, testifying to God’s work in your life, and talking about what you believe with people who do not share your faith – and to do this in a way that you are comfortable with, that you enjoy, and the people you talk with also enjoy.

I want to give you what you need to be confident. Not confident that you have all the answers, but confident that you know what God wants you to do in this area, that He has all the answers you need and that He wants to use you to draw other people to Himself.

Take Part

These sessions are not just a set of good ideas: they are also an opportunity for you to participate: to talk, to express what you believe, to ask questions, to explore possibilities. To benefit fully, you need to take part.

Evangelism for ordinary Christians

I am not aiming to turn you into an evangelist! I don’t want to persuade you to devote most of your time and energy to evangelism. There are many good things you can be doing, many ways in which you can be serving Jesus and

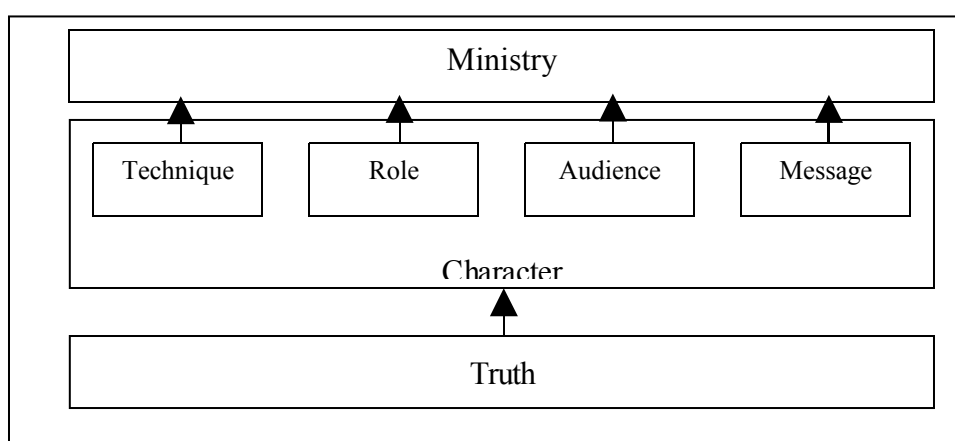
helping to build His Kingdom. Apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers are also essential in the church.

But when it is time for you to do some evangelism – when you are the person on the spot, when God puts His finger on you and says “I want you to talk with this person” – then I want you to be able to share your faith as well as possible.

Christian Ministry

Four key areas

Any Christian *ministry* can be seen as *truth* operating through *character*. It always involves a person making themselves available to God, and available to other people.



There are four key areas, each of which has a vital impact on the ministry. We are thinking about evangelism here, but the principles are the same in all Christian ministry. They are ‘TRAM’ (Technique, Role, Audience and Message): the techniques we have available to be used; how we understand our personal role; how we understand the audience or recipient of the ministry; and the message we are seeking to communicate.

We will touch briefly on all four areas in this course. There is much more that could be said about all these areas, but – remember – the aim is to get you started.

These four areas are affected by our character. Our character and our understanding of these four areas are both shaped by what we know and understand of God’s truth – found in the Bible, but also from other sources.

Prayer

Prayer is essential in evangelism. We are looking for the miracle of new birth to take place, for divine revelation to be granted to the spiritually blind, and so on. Spiritual warfare is a natural part of this territory.

But prayer is essential for *all* Christian ministry. Preaching is ineffective without prayer, as is all other Christian work. The principles of effective prayer are the same in evangelism as they are in the rest of our Christian lives.

Lifestyle – the importance

Whatever we do as a Christian, we will hit problems if our lifestyle does not match the faith we claim. Integrity in your life is a vital part of evangelism – but then pastoring people without a basic level of integrity in your life is not such a great idea, either.

Lifestyle – the excuse

The good news is: we don't have to be perfect before we do anything for God – thank God! He chooses to use weak, fallible, sinful people – which is fortunate, because He doesn't have any other people to use.

We need to have a basic consistency between our *message* and our *life*. But this does not mean that the key to successful evangelism lies in a specific lifestyle. There are many reasons why we need to be holy, but ***holiness does not qualify us for Christian service***. We are to get on with the job of being God's people while we grow in faith and sanctification.

All Christian ministry is about forgiveness and grace: about receiving them, and about communicating them to others. Knowing we are not perfect does not prevent us from telling others about God's love – in a sense, it is what qualifies us to tell others. We know that God is good to people who don't deserve it, because He is good to us, and we do not deserve it.

Lifestyle – the choices

Lifestyle is important. We can and should live a life that reflects the gospel in all its fullness. We need a commitment to ecology, fair treatment for women and minority groups, racial justice, cancelling third world debt and ending the arms trade. But this is not evangelism. Much of the time, when people talk about lifestyle in the context of evangelism, it is either an excuse (“I can't do any evangelism today because my lifestyle is not up to scratch”) or a side-track (“I'm too busy with these other issues”).

All these issues are important. So are many others. But there are thousands of charities in this country. I cannot give my time and energy to each one; I cannot even give some money to each. We are not called to do *everything*: we

are called to do *something*. That is (at least part of) what the Body of Christ is all about.

It is not inconsistent to believe that some issues are important but do nothing to actively promote them. It is what everybody with half a conscience does.

Jesus did not take up many of the important issues that faced Him, such as slavery and the need for a just government, for example. Instead, He remained focussed on the few issues that were His priorities. Our choice in this area is between following His example with a clear conscience, or following His example while feeling inadequate and guilty.

We have to trust that the God Who calls us to active involvement in some areas will call other people to an active involvement in the other important areas. We are part of a body: none of us can do everything, but together, if we each play our own part, everything that matters can be done.

What is evangelism?

One of the basic underlying problems people have with evangelism is the understanding they have about what evangelism is – what it involves.

When we talk with our fellow Christians, what do they generally understand by this word, ‘evangelism’? It seems to go something like this. You...

- listen to sermons about the need for evangelism
- feel really guilty about not doing it
- pounce on the first victim you can find when the guilt gets too bad,
- get them into a corner and make sure they can’t escape
- stare them straight in the eyes so they know this is really important
- tell them everything you know about the gospel, the second coming and the evils of Sunday trading
- summarise the more sensational aspects of your testimony
- tell them they have a choice: they can either accept this message or burn in hell for ever
- let them go when they promise to ‘think about it’
- watch them run like crazy and never see them again
- feel really disappointed by the lack of results
- wonder why God has let you down, and
- decide evangelism is for other people

Of course, the *really* scary thing is when people go through this process, and *don’t* decide that evangelism is for other people.

Evangelism is NOT about...

Many of our problems arise because we have a wrong understanding of what evangelism involves.

... forcing your ideas onto other people.

“Have you ever noticed how the people who want to share *their* beliefs with *you* never want *you* to share your beliefs with *them*?”

Evangelism does not work when we think of it as a method of forcing our beliefs onto other people. Of course people don't respond very well! I don't warm to people who do this to me, whether they believe in double-glazing or Transcendental Meditation.

Simply dumping your beliefs onto someone else is close to being abusive. It does not treat them with dignity and respect. It certainly does not show love.

... telling people they have to believe in Jesus

They don't understand this message, and they would have no reason to act on it even if they did understand. Talking about belief in Jesus makes it sound like He is in doubt, like the existence of UFOs or the effect of certain vitamin supplements.

It is so easy for Christians to use Christian jargon, and it gets easier the longer you are a Christian. The traditional terms, like 'sin' and 'salvation' either don't mean anything to most people these days, or they mean something to us that is very different from what others hear when we say the words.

Much of what passes as evangelism consists mostly of Christians explaining and defining Christian terminology to people who don't believe it and who have no interest in it.

... making people feel bad about themselves

The key verse for Christians about evangelism is John 3:17. You can all quote that, can't you? *God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world.*

The temptation is to try to make people feel bad about themselves so that they will want what we have to offer. We want to convince them they have a problem so they will want the answer we have to offer them. It almost always results in an un-winnable argument: “You are a bad person.” “No, I'm not!”

... quoting the Bible at people

Christians often seem to treat the Bible as a kind of magical book. They think that if they can quote enough passages from it, the other person will

suddenly start to believe. Or they think that if they can convince their victim that some idea can be found in the Bible, that will prove the idea is true.

The Bible may be an important book for most Christians, but we have to remember that most other people think of it as archaic and irrelevant to the modern world. You can reasonably quote from the New Testament as evidence of what the early Christians believed, but you can't just quote from the Bible and think that this closes the argument.

People do not become Christians because they believe the Bible is inspired and authoritative; they believe the Bible is inspired and authoritative because they have become Christians and have learned to trust what it says. Of course, not all Christians believe the Bible is inspired and authoritative – but those who do, believe it because they have met Jesus, not the other way round.

Yes, Christians do believe that God's word has power. But any power in God's word does not depend on us telling the other person that this is a quote, or where in the Bible they can find it. You can use quotes ("God is love" is an excellent example) without making a song and dance about it. If they want to know, you can tell them where it comes from.

At some point, it is helpful for people to get the idea that the things you are talking about are believed by Christians and found in the Bible, and are not just the result of a brainstorm you had five minutes ago. But the time to talk about this is when it matters to the other person. And if your opening line is: "Did you know it says in the Bible...?" then it is unlikely you will ever reach that point.

Evangelism is about...

... loving people

Loving people is the key to evangelism. But loving people more is not the key to better evangelism! Loving people in an appropriate way is what counts. *More* is not the same as *better*. Sacrificial love for your family is one thing; sacrificial love for your postman or the sandwich lady at work is quite different. Remember: *unconditional* love is not the same as *unlimited* love.

It has to be said... ***we are talking about the need for genuine love*** here. This is not just acting in a loving way so that I can talk about my faith. Whether or not they ask the question, folk need to know the answer: "Do you want me to be saved because you love me, or do you love me because you want me to be saved?"

... asking questions

Have you ever noticed how many questions there are in the Bible?

Finding out about the people you are seeking to reach for Jesus is vital. How can you love someone you don't know? How can you get to know someone without asking questions? You cannot pretend to love people if you have no interest in them, how they feel about things, and what they believe.

... co-operating with God

There are many definitions of evangelism. For the time being, let us describe evangelism as a deliberate and active participation in the process by which God draws people to Himself. Evangelism is what we do in order to see people saved and become disciples of Jesus Christ.

God is engaged in drawing people to Himself, and He sometimes chooses to involve us in a part of this process. Seeing people receive salvation is not something we can achieve. We don't do it, we are simply called to play a part in what God is doing. This takes the pressure off us: I don't need to convince anyone that they need a Saviour.

Salvation is both an *event* and a *process*. We often concentrate on the event and ignore the process. The Bible says a great deal about the process. Everyone who seeks (process) will find (event). If we want the event, we need to understand the process that gets you there!

One of the best ways to help people understand the process of evangelism is to study the Engel Scale. We will look at this in more detail later. We need to learn to 'get under the skin' of people at each point on the scale – at each stage in their journey.

1 b. Understanding the Process

Types of Evangelism

Proclamation evangelism

This is what most people think of as evangelism. It is what Billy Graham and Open Air Campaigners do. You stand in front of a crowd of people and announce – proclaim – the good news.

Most people are scared by the prospect, and feel sure they are not called to do this sort of public preaching. In fact, it's not as difficult as it looks, and most of the useful parts of it are based on relationships anyway.

Possibly the most important benefit of doing proclamation evangelism is that it gives Christians some practice at telling others what they believe. For most of us, it is hard to articulate our faith. If we do not *practice* one way or another, when the chance comes (when the neighbour we have been praying for finally says “Okay – so what *do* you believe, then?”), the chances are that we will fluff it.

Friendship evangelism

Friendship evangelism is where you reach out to your friends and family, and seek to win them for Christ. This is clearly a great idea, but if you look at most teaching about ‘friendship evangelism’, it is easy to be confused about whether it is, for the most part, evangelism at all. Most friendship evangelism is about two things – being a normal person and a good Christian. These are, of course, worthy aims!

As a normal person, you have hobbies and interests outside the church. You do ordinary things with friends who are not saved. You attend football matches or the opera, take part in amateur dramatics and pub quizzes. The sad thing is that after a couple of years in most churches, most Christians need to be reminded how to do all these normal things.

As a good Christian, you will pray and read your Bible. You will pray for your friends, witness to them, and invite them to appropriate social and evangelistic events, where the ‘real’ evangelist tells them the gospel and invites them to come to Christ.

It is all good stuff we ought to be doing, and it could just about count as evangelism – in the same way that lending someone a book could count as teaching. But there is so much more!

Incarnational evangelism

There are different ways to describe this: ‘natural evangelism,’ because (for the most part) it feels natural and comfortable to the people involved; or ‘God-centred evangelism,’ because the focus is not so much on what we have to do as on what God has done and is already doing. Possibly the best (most theologically accurate!) term is ‘incarnational evangelism’.

God works in many ways. But the most important – and often the most ignored – is through incarnation. God makes Himself present in and through people. This happened fully in the person of Jesus Christ, but through Him, God is present in you and me. We could usefully spend the rest of our time together looking at this subject.

With this approach, we focus not on ourselves but on Jesus: not what we have to do, but on what God has already done. We do not focus on things to be done, but on who we are in Christ. We seek to allow God to be Himself in us and through us. And as He expresses Himself and lives His life, He touches the lives of the people around us. That’s what He is like!

It is normal for life to produce life: the Spirit gives birth to spirit. Life comes naturally when we co-operate. When we share our faith, it is a matter of co-operating with God, and co-operating with the other person. When we do that, it all becomes much easier.

Building Blocks

Walls and bridges

Traditional evangelism often involves teaching Christian jargon so that they can then understand our message. But when God decided to communicate as fully as possible with us, He became human. He chose to speak in our language, so that the things He said would make sense to us.

Every student in the 1970s had at least one Argos poster on their walls. At one point, I lived in a communal house, and on the dining room wall there was a poster that said: “People are lonely because they build walls, not bridges.” And underneath, one of my housemates had written: “People are chilly because they build bridges, not walls.”

When we talk about techniques, I want you to think about walls and bridges.

Traditional evangelism requires a lot of walls to be built. I am saved; you are not. I believe the truth; you believe lies. I am going to Heaven; you are going to

Hell. We think we are establishing the difference between *them* and *us* so that they will want what we have.

But how does Paul approach his task in Athens? He builds bridges with his hearers. How do you build bridges? Ask questions! Ask yourself questions, and ask them questions. Here are four good ones:

What do they believe?

“He who answers before listening – that is his folly and his shame.” (Proverbs 18:13). This is the starting point. If you wish to be understood, seek first to understand.

Christians often find this hard to grasp, but different people really do believe different things from us. Take as an example the beliefs people have about the afterlife – think for a moment about the difference it makes when someone believes in reincarnation: how it changes the way they see life, and the way they see death. We need to understand world views (as well as religions) that differ from our own.

Why do these beliefs seem right to them?

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.” (Proverbs 16:25)

If you listen to some preachers, people outside the church are on the road to Hell because they are bad, because they are sinners. But this passage in Proverbs reminds us that, for most people, they are on their current path, not because they are evil, but because it ‘seems right’. It seems to them to lead somewhere good, even if in reality it is leading to death.

When you know which road they are travelling on, you can seek to understand why. Why does their road appear to be good to them? What truth are they responding to?

Where do we agree?

The last two chapters of Proverbs (30 and 31) were written by non-Israelite teachers. They spoke the truth, so their words are recorded as part of scripture. Paul quoted the poet Epimenides in his sermon on Mars Hill (Acts 17: 28).

Look for the truths you agree on, to build bridges with the other person. There is a lot of truth and wisdom in the writings of other religions, so respect it! If you respect what they value, they may show respect for what you value.

How can they come closer to Jesus?

“By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established.” (Proverbs 24:3)

You have sought to understand where they are – what they believe and why they believe it. Now you need divine wisdom to know how to build something of eternity in their life.

God loves this person and wants to bless them. He wants to draw them one step closer to Himself. You are there, available and ready to be used. What does He want to do? This is where the Engel Scale can help you understand what is needed.

Barriers

The messenger is the message

Marshall McLuhan told us that “the medium is the message” – but this is only partly true. However, the person who is communicating, and the way you communicate both make a vital difference to the message you are communicating.

This is important in any context, but even more important when dealing with spiritual matters. God works through incarnation. His message is communicated through you and me: through who we are, as well as what we say.

The messenger is the message. People will not believe in a God of love unless they encounter God’s love through us. They will not believe in a God of grace unless they receive graciousness through us. Remember the old quote from St Francis of Assisi: “Preach the Gospel by all means available. When necessary, use words.”

Motivation

Evangelism touches on some of the deepest issues of human existence: salvation, Heaven or Hell, our ultimate destiny – questions don’t come any bigger than this. But we are not philosophers looking for the biggest challenge we can find; neither are we to be motivated by the importance of the issues. Rather, we should be motivated by the love we have received, and the love we have for the people we meet.

For some people, the most important motivation to do evangelism is their desire to spare people from the horrors of Hell. I don’t want to stop anyone from sharing their faith, but our motivation does colour our message. People can tell if you love them.

Consistency

One source of much of our difficulty is the vast inconsistency between six quite different things:

- what we are taught to believe;
- what we say we believe;
- what we really believe;
- what we are taught to do;
- what we say we do; and
- what we really do.

We *say* we love people, but we often *act* as though we have no interest in them as people. We are taught we ought to love everyone, but we are also taught (or think we are taught!) that evangelism means we must ignore their personality and beliefs. Of course, we are not taught this explicitly, but that is what it comes down to. We are taught that we must ‘make friends’ – but only so that we can hit them over the head with the gospel. We are taught that we must ‘build bridges’ – but only so that we can drive home the message of salvation.

We need to remember that bridges carry traffic both ways. Friends need to be friends, whether we can evangelise them or not.

Qualifications

Many Christians feel they are not good enough, and this is the reason why they cannot share the gospel message properly. We have to admit that we are still sinners, lazy, uncertain in our faith, neurotic and unreliable. And all the rest. *But this is not the problem we have with evangelism!* This is what qualifies us to speak on the subject. We *know* that God accepts and forgives sinful people, because that is what we are!

Our message is not just that we can’t get to Heaven by our own efforts. We also believe that without God, nothing in life works the way it should. If our lifestyle were perfect, we would not need to be saved, so let’s stop worrying that we are less than perfect and start worrying about the things we are told to be concerned about.

The right to speak

We worry about the strangest things. We ask: do I have the right to speak to this person? We worry about establishing the right to speak about Jesus. We worry about our credentials: are we consistent enough? Loving enough? Spiritual enough?

If you are the only person in a burning building who knows where the fire escape is, you do not worry if you have the right to share this information with the people around you. You don’t ask if your lifestyle qualifies you to tell them something of such importance.

I know many Christians find this hard to believe, but many people actually want to talk about things that matter to them. Many people are tired of the glib superficiality of their lives. Many people really appreciate the chance to talk about issues that are important and meaningful to them.

People do not want to waste their time with a religious crank, but a lot of people will enjoy the opportunity to talk about the things they believe are important in life, and to find out what other people think about these subjects.

Expectations

We have a fixed set of expectations: we know how we expect God to act. We may not know *if* He will act, but if He does, we usually know *what* we think He will do. We are often wrong.

The Bible is full of people who thought they knew what to expect, and then discovered that God did something different. How often did Jesus surprise the disciples?

One expectation in Evangelical circles is that people will first believe, then they will learn to behave correctly, and then they will properly belong with us. And it does sometimes work this way. But, for many people, if it works at all, it works the other way round: they first start to belong to the group, then they start to behave as the group expects, and finally they come to believe.

This is a vital issue. Many evangelicals are, in effect, trying to sell a ‘pig in a poke’. Believe this message. If you believe it, you will then be committed to this bunch of people you don’t really know, your identity will be bound up in this group, and much of your social life will happen within the group. But, until you believe, you cannot belong – you cannot find out what we are really like, you cannot tell if you will fit or if you will always feel like an outsider.

Most normal people want to find out if this is a bunch of people I can relate to, before deciding whether to throw in my lot with them.

It does matter whether the gospel message is true or false. But the gospel message creates the Church, and one valid test of the gospel message is whether it creates a Church that is loving, and that accepts people who are different from us.

Putting it into Practice

Step one is fine

One factor that sometimes holds people back is the belief that all Christians ought to be sharing their faith with all the people they spend time with. So they hold back from identifying themselves as Christians, fearing that once they do, they will need to start talking about their faith and converting others.

We need to make it clear to people: step one is absolutely fine. It is perfectly okay to be there, and you can remain there for as long as you need. You stay there until you are ready to move on to step two. All you have to do right now is to let people know you are a Christian.

Well... maybe not all. Maybe you can also pray for the folk you work and socialise with. Maybe you can try to help them in practical ways. Maybe you can show them love, and forgiveness when it is needed.

But in your conversations, all that is expected of you is to be honest. Anyone can do that.

Letting people know

How do you let people know? There are many ways.

When working in an office, I always used to wear a little silver fish on my lapel. People asked what it was, and I told them that it is an early symbol of the Christian faith, one that does not identify me with any particular branch of Christianity: a crucifix would suggest I was a Catholic, while an empty cross would suggest I was a Protestant, but a fish embraces all Christianity and all my fellow Christians. That opened up many conversations.

It is also easy on a Monday to talk about your weekend – what did you do? Just the usual: shopping on Saturday, church on Sunday morning, then a really muddy family walk in the afternoon. You don't have to make a big thing of it. It is you, it is a part of what you do, along with supporting your football team and those obscure Italian films you enjoy.

Of course it is much more important than football, but you don't have to say that: people know. They also appreciate knowing that you go to church – if they find out later, they are often upset that you hid this detail of your life from them. And they very much appreciate your tact in not making a big thing out of going to church, as that is often interpreted as an implicit criticism of them for not attending.

The sooner you let people know you are a Christian, the easier it is – within reason. You don't want to go up to your new workmates and say, "Hello, I'm Bert, I've just joined your team, and I'm a Christian." But when you sit down for a coffee, or go out for lunch with members of your new team, and someone says, "Okay, tell us all about yourself," if you don't say something at that point, you may well regret it later.

What you say I sup to you. You do not have to say "I am a Christian." You most certainly do not want to say "I am a born-again Christian," or however you describe yourself to other Christians. Your new friends are probably not interested in the subtle distinctions that mean so much to us.

You don't even have to say "I go to church," but, if you do, less detail is usually better than more: "I go to an evangelical church that is mildly

charismatic in its theology but we don't practice 'singing in tongues' in the services" is probably too much detail. "I go to a small, friendly church near our home," or "the big one on the corner opposite that supermarket" is often an appropriate level of detail to start with.

It is often easier to slip in a reference to Christian or church activities. You can say things like: "I have a fairly active social life – most of it revolves round our local church, one way or another," or "We went there last year – we were on holiday with another couple from our church." This is not a cop-out. If you make a reference to church or Christian activities up front, and the occasional passing reference thereafter, they will connect the dots: this is a part of your life. That is all they need to know.

Remember, you are not seeking to convert them in step one. Simply letting them know you are a Christian is all you need to do.

Integrity

There are numerous benefits which flow from this first step. Possibly the most important is the simple matter of integrity.

In a society where most people do not attend church or have a meaningful faith, the assumption will generally be that you are like 'the rest of us' and are either agnostic or have not thought enough about the issues to say what you are.

If you do not admit to having a faith, you are misleading the people around you. Not telling people may not technically be the same as telling them a lie, but if you allow them to continue to believe a lie about you, the distinction is fairly meaningless.

Even if you forget the Christian dimension, if you want to function well alongside other people, retaining a basic level of integrity matters. If you omit to tell people, who feel they have the right to know, some important details about yourself, they will feel cheated and deceived.

Holding firm

Being honest also protects you from the pressure to compromise. They will look at you as a Christian, and watch what you do. The challenge at this point is not to talk, but to live. You do not have to be perfect, but you do need, most of the time, to be reasonably consistent. What matters is that you try, to the best of your ability, to live as a follower of Jesus. And they will watch you, to see what it is like.

This may be a bit scary, but it is much less difficult than the alternative of trying to live a lie.

Witness

Much of our our witness is not spoken. People watch the way you live. They may not immediately make the link between your lifestyle and your faith, but if they know of your faith, then that connection becomes possible.

When people talk about the story of their journey to faith in Jesus, a common theme is to hear that they kept finding themselves spending time with Christians, and it slowly dawned on them that the people they respected, and the people they enjoyed spending time with, were all Christians. It often got the people thinking: maybe their faith is what they all have in common... maybe that is what makes a difference to their lives...

Other possibilities

When people know you are a Christian, and have seen that you faith makes some kind of difference to your life, they may choose to talk to you when things get difficult in their life.

In a group, most people are very happy to joke about Christians and to ridicule the church. It's often easy to ridicule. But they rarely poke fun at Jesus. And they may laugh and joke as part of the group, but on their own with you, there may well be thoughtful questions and shared difficulties. Especially if they have noticed that you don't make fun of people who are different or struggling, and you don't gossip – you are possibly one of the few people at work who it is safe to talk to when things get difficult.

Of course, simply because people may share their problems and ask you questions, that doesn't mean you have to come up with answers for them. Just listening carefully to them is often a significant service. And you may know someone who might be able to help. And you can offer to pray – you might be surprised at how thankful and touched people often are when someone offers to pray for them.

All kinds of benefits and blessings flow – to you, and to the people around you – if you simply admit that you are a Christian.

2. Step Two: Testify

2a. Conversations

Introduction

Step two is all about testimony.

The definition of ‘testimony’ in this context is fairly precise: it is telling people what God has done for you.

To be clear – I am *not* talking about standing up in a church service or evangelistic meeting, telling people what a dreadful sinner you were, and how the Lord moved in miraculous ways. Of course, that does count as a testimony – assuming it is true! – but a testimony does not have to be given in public, or tell about your conversion, or include racy details of your former life, or recount God’s miraculous dealings with you.

A testimony does need to be true. And, by ‘true,’ I mean more than just factually correct. I mean honest – not misleading. It must be honest factually, and honest emotionally.

To be helpful, a testimony also needs to be appropriate – based on a solid understanding of what constitutes good evangelism. It needs to fit the needs of the people we are with, and also fit the character of the God we are telling people about.

Conversations

A lot of the friendship evangelism training helps get you to the point where you can have conversations. The two objectives of friendship evangelism (to be a good Christian and an ordinary person) work to achieve the two basic requirements for a decent conversation: you have to be *credible* and *approachable*.

- **Credible.** People have to think you have something worth saying about spiritual matters, and be willing to listen to your views. This is where your lifestyle matters: if you are constantly late for work, unreliable, or stealing from your employer, they are unlikely to be interested in hearing about your ethical principles.
- **Approachable.** There is no point in being credible if people can’t relate to you, or think they couldn’t possibly attain your level of spirituality or holiness. You might be surprised by the assumptions people often make about you if they know you go to church!

Starting Conversations

Prayer is always a good starting point.

- **Begin with prayer.** If you are planning or hoping to do some evangelism, pray before you go out. You won't always have that luxury (sometimes evangelistic opportunities 'just happen'), so do pray when you get the chance.
- **Pray specifically.** Pray that God will guide you, that He will give you 'divine appointments', that He will direct your conversation, and touch the life of the people you meet.
- **Expect answers.** When you meet someone, expect that God is doing something on the inside while you are talking to them. You and He are working in partnership – that is what you have prayed for, isn't it? And, remember, God is probably keener to see people come to faith than you are. He knows them and loves them more than you do, anyway.

Guidance does not always come as a voice from Heaven. Often it is very simple and pragmatic: if there is only one free seat on the bus, maybe that is where God wants you to sit.

Be friendly

The best way of starting a conversation is just to be friendly. You could ask a few of the obvious questions. These will vary according to context, so you might want to give some thought to possible questions before you start to talk with someone. You could ask how they feel about some recent event or piece of news. You could ask them if they know the latest news about something of interest to you. You could ask them about where they are, what they are doing, and how they feel about it.

Establish common ground

In your questions, you are trying to find a subject which is of interest to both you and them. It helps if you have a common interest, such as football, or politics round about election time.

Listen to what they have to say, and ask them about what they have said. It takes the conversation forwards, and demonstrates to them that you are really listening to them, and interested in what they say. For many people, this is a novel experience!

Once you have listened to them, then you have earned a right to speak about something which concerns you, such as your faith. Many people open up about their needs and hurts. You may not be a trained counsellor, but allowing yourself to be a sounding board is invaluable. Depending on your disposition some people find it easier to talk to those they don't know, whereas others find it easier to talk with those with whom they have had longer term contact.

Be yourself

Don't pretend! Most people can spot fakes a mile off. Don't claim an interest in greyhound racing unless it is genuine. But you can still express an interest by finding an angle that interests you: I have friends who are keen bird-watchers; is your bird-watching all done locally, or do you sometimes travel to do it?

If you are sensitive to the other person, it is a good idea (within limits!) to talk about things that interest and matter to you. It is a way in which you can share something of yourself.

Be open

You will be asking the other person to be open, honest and vulnerable with you, if the conversation goes well, so you need to establish the right environment. You don't have to lay all your deepest hurts on the table at the very start, but you need to display a degree of emotional honesty and vulnerability.

Moving the Conversation On

Many people find it fairly easy to start conversations, but hard to move a 'normal' conversation onto the desired 'spiritual topics.' Simply launching into a spiritual subject does not work ("You're right: the Referee must be blind. So, have you ever thought about what happens to us after death?") – it simply means you are (a) totally inept socially, (b) a religious nutcase, or (c) both.

Follow the Spirit

Before you try to move the conversation onto spiritual matters, pray and find out if this is where the Holy Spirit is leading you.

You are under no obligation to make every conversation into a thrilling example of spiritual warfare and vibrant testimony. Sometimes it is okay to talk about the activities of your favourite soap opera characters, or debate the relative merits of different makes of crankshaft.

If you turn every conversation into an opportunity to share your faith, people will soon learn to avoid you. Anyone who can only talk about one thing is automatically boring, and probably a fanatic. I don't want to spend time with people like that – why should anyone else?

Go deeper

If it is right to move the conversation on, you can often go deeper with the current subject. You can generally find questions about morality, value and purpose raised by any area of human activity.

And once people are talking about these issues, you can start to ask where they get their morality, values and purpose from? What are their decisions based on? Of course, it helps if you can answer these questions for yourself!

Show an interest in their beliefs

Here is one useful tip: don't worry too much about telling other people what you believe. Ask them what they believe. Ask them questions about it. Show an interest in them.

Actually, this is more than just a tip: it expresses a fundamental principle. If evangelism is primarily about collecting scalps, then all we have to do is persuade people we are right. But if it is about communicating God's love, a different approach is needed.

I find it hard to imagine saying to someone, "God loves you, but I don't," or, "God cares about you, but I am not interested in you." And it would seem a strange sort of love that does not care what the other person thinks and feels. Far too often in the past, I have offered people truths before I understood where they were or what they needed to hear. Of course, sometimes God guides you to say the right things anyway, and fundamentally this is not something we can work out and piece together for ourselves – but that does not excuse us from trying.

I will sometimes say the wrong thing when I am trying to express love, and sometimes say the right thing when I am not. But human failing and God's grace do not set aside the command to love, or relieve me of the duty to apply the little I understand about how to communicate His love.

It comes down to the old challenge: do you love me because you want to see me saved, or do you want to see me saved because you love me? Is this genuine love, or just a tool you use?

Ask questions

Asking people questions can be just another evangelistic trick or technique. But it can also be a genuine expression of a sincere desire to love this unique individual. People don't like to be interrogated, but will very often appreciate being asked the occasional direct question. Where possible, follow up the answers they give: at the very least, it shows you are listening to what they say! And if you start several strands of conversation that all lead nowhere, the chances are that they don't really want to talk right now.

Asking questions is just one way to do it. It is sometimes easier to find out what people think by throwing out ideas and seeing how they respond. Or, especially if they are at home, you can ask them about some of the personal items you see around.

If you ask people questions about what they believe, you will find one that of two things often happens. They may, out of politeness, start to ask you what you believe. In which case, you can answer their questions. Or they may start to discover that the answers they give you don't sound so convincing when they say it out loud, and they may start to express uncertainty, in which case you can gently offer to show them a way of being sure. Not sure about what you believe, but sure about the God in whom you believe.

Don't Bible bash

As I suggested earlier, be very careful about your use of the Bible. There is no point in quoting it as an authority if the other person doesn't yet recognise its authority! And don't get sidetracked into trying to persuade the other person that the Bible is inspired, infallible, or whatever. Our aim is to introduce people to Jesus, not to get their theology of Biblical interpretation correct.

When you do use the Bible, it is generally sufficient to paraphrase the passage. It is rarely helpful to quote chapter and verse (but knowing them, in case you get asked to find the passage, is helpful). If you want to establish the origin of a quote for some reason, use normal language: "As a friend of Jesus once said..."

Arouse interest

When dealing with the woman of Samaria, Jesus kindles her curiosity through the unusual things he says to her. The result is that she asks Him questions.

He also arouses her interest because he has the courage to break social conventions and taboos: it is sometimes costly to listen to other people, and treat their opinions with dignity and respect. It is never easy.

Establish credibility

The woman of Samaria did not simply think that Jesus had some interesting things to say: she rapidly came to respect Jesus' opinion about spiritual matters. His words were not only interesting – they were important.

Our words also matter. Part of the discipline we need to learn is how to refrain from expressing half-baked ideas about every subject under the sun. If what we say has been clearly thought-through, if our facts have been researched, if the negative consequences have been honestly faced – then our words will have weight. And we want our words to have weight, don't we?

Don't go too far

Remember the Engel Scale, and don't try to do too much. One step closer to God is a major victory.

Look at Jesus' dealings with people. How many times did He offer them the 'whole gospel'? Or look at the sermons in Acts, and think about all the important things they *don't* say.

Do not condemn

We cannot expect non-Christians to have the same morals and principles as us. The question is not whether they live up to our standards (what we think of as God's standards), the question for them is whether they live up to their own standards. But even when they fail to do this, it is not our job to condemn: given the space, their own heart will do that well enough.

It is worth remembering that non-Christians will often feel that they have higher moral principles than we do, especially in the area of prejudice and discrimination. Christians are often portrayed in the media as closed-minded, petty, interfering homophobic killjoys, and some Christians seem determined to reinforce that image!

It is also worth remembering *why* God is against sin: it is not that He enjoys smiting sinners, but He loves us so much He wants us to have the fullest, best, most enjoyable and fulfilled life possible, and sin is what prevents us and other people from enjoying life to the full.

But you can ask challenging questions

When they say what they believe, you can ask if they live accordingly. What do they do with failure and guilt? Do they have a place for forgiveness, and, if so, where does it come from?

Continue expressing love and acceptance

The Samaritan woman felt love and accepted by Jesus. This is important for everyone, but is especially important for people who often feel ignored and rejected.

When you start talking about spiritual matters, people become very vulnerable. At this point, any small insensitivity can seem very significant and act as a distraction.

Exercise judgement

People want to talk about things that matter to them, but it's not easy to do so, they get very little practice, and there are a lot of distractions and pressures on people not to do so.

So you have a choice. You can simply make space for people to talk, or you can be more proactive. The difficulty comes in judging when 'proactive' becomes pushy. Your friends and family sometimes appreciate being encouraged to do things when they are hesitant. Most of us are unsure about unfamiliar experiences, and find it helpful to have someone to hold our hand at such times.

Exactly the same questions and principles apply whether someone is unsure about going to an opera for the first time, or talking about their understanding of life after death for the first time. Okay – maybe there are a few differences. But there are a lot of similarities, too. Maybe the difference between an ordinary evangelist and a great one is the ability to encourage people to talk about things when they really want to but are nervous, while not twisting their arms.

Listen with compassion

Listen prayerfully and with compassion, sensitivity and empathy. Listening in this way can be a ministry in itself. If someone is aggressive or angry, you need to make a special effort to stay calm.

If you listen with sensitivity, people will talk to you. They will talk about things that matter to them. Try not to let them down by trivialising or dismissing what they say, or suggesting trite answers. Sometimes the stories people have to tell are heartbreaking, and the only appropriate response is to cry with them. Your tears may achieve more than any number of sermons.

Listen with discernment

You don't have to believe everything you hear – and you don't have to express any doubts you may have. You can pray while you are listening: "Lord, what do You want me to hear, to understand?"

Listen to what is not said

What people do not say is often as important as what they do say.

What are they not saying, and why? Listen to their longings, fears, frustrations, burdens, aspirations and emptiness. Ask whether something God has done in your life will be of particular relevance of help to them – but be careful not to turn their opportunity to talk about something that matters to

them into an excuse to talk about yourself. Sometimes, even if you have a relevant experience, it is best to keep quiet about it.

Telling Your Story

Prepare in advance

As part of your conversation with someone it is often helpful to naturally bring in some testimony about how God has worked in your life, or in the life of someone you know. It is helpful to prepare for this in advance: summarising in a few words the most life-changing events you have experienced is not an easy thing for anyone to do. But it can be incredibly powerful.

Preparing in advance can help you stay honest. Listen to what you say – write it down and read it. What might someone else take from your story? What could they assume and be mistaken about?

Be flexible and relevant

Preparing your testimony in advance does *not* mean you decide on a set of words about a particular set of events and stick to them no matter what. A testimony does not have to be about how you came to faith: it can be about how God answered a prayer or brought about a significant change in your life (remember – *significant* does not have to mean *big*).

It is hard to define what it means to be ‘relevant’. Any testimony to God’s love and care is relevant to anyone, whatever their circumstances. Sometimes it is wiser to be less relevant. You don’t have to say “God did this for me, and He will do the same for you” – people will hear it, anyway.

The standard structure

A traditional testimony of how you became a Christian can be broken down into three parts.

- What you were like before you came to Jesus.

Try to think of one or more concrete events, problems or issues that illustrate how things were for you.

- What happened when you became a Christian.

Provide some concrete, understandable context for what happened, not just a theological description of what took place: “I was talking with some friends after a football match, and my mate Bob said...” rather than, “I was taken out of the kingdom of Satan and given a glorious inheritance with the children of light...”

- How things are different now you are a Christian.

You will probably be able to give an example that contrasts with your experience beforehand. For example, if you lived with an acute fear of death, you might say that you are now not afraid of death because you know that you will go to be with Jesus.

If you were brought up as a Christian, the traditional structure will not work too well for you. But most people will have some point in their life where things came to a head spiritually: where their faith was tested and confirmed, or where their faith was restored or renewed after a period of doubt or disobedience. So you should be able to talk about two important aspects of your life:

- A time when your Christian faith was particularly important to you;
- And the difference your Christian faith makes to your life now.

Praying With People

Offer

It is almost always right to offer to pray with people. They are generally much more ready to have a Christian pray for them than the Christians are to pray.

We have a real problem here. We don't mind praying silently, or alone, or with a group of other Christians, but we are rarely keen to pray with people who don't know Jesus yet.

If you are going to pray about something that is difficult or private, try to find somewhere quiet where you won't have other people listening to every word. But you can easily be sufficiently alone in the middle of a busy pavement. Remember: you don't have to close your eyes to pray.

And remember that if you go somewhere quiet, you should generally aim to have two people praying as well as the person wanting prayer. You need to think about your personal safety, especially if you are female, as well as the possibility of being accused of improper behaviour if you are on your own.

Be careful with your hands

Ask before you touch: Christians may be used to people praying and the laying on of hands, but it can freak out someone who is not expecting it. For many people, touch is a very powerful means of communication, even if there is no sexual content or intent.

Be careful with your words

Don't pray beyond your faith. They may not be used to people praying, and may not be used to making allowances for the strange things we say in our prayers.

The problem is not just the jargon we start to spout when we talk with God. The more important problem is unrealistic expectations. You may be used to praying for your Christian friends that God will bless them in every area of their lives, but think how that could be heard. God will fix my toothache, make my partner come back to me, make the courts allow my child to live with me again, make sure I get enough money to live comfortably...

If people think you have promised that God will do all this (and do it *now!*), it is hard for them not to feel let down and cheated if their life is not immediately sorted out.

Expect God to answer

This is not the place for an extended discussion of the role of 'signs and wonders' in Christian ministry. But it is really important to remember that God does answer prayer, that His answers are sometimes clearly miraculous, or at least ridiculously unexpected, and that the most spectacular answers to prayer are often given when Christians pray with and for people who do not yet know Him personally.

2b. Understanding the Journey

The Modified Engel Scale

Background

In 1975, James Engel and Wilbert Norton, wrote a book which profoundly changed many people's idea of evangelism. The book, *What's Gone Wrong With The Harvest?* (published by Zondervan) introduced a tool which has become widely used and known as 'the Engel Scale'.

The Engel Scale has been used to introduce many Christians to a new understanding of evangelism. In the past, people have often seen evangelism only in terms of people being converted. Understood this way, most of our evangelism must be counted as pure failure. Few people can live with that level of failure, and few survive as evangelists, or even as effective witnesses, for long.

The Engel Scale completely changes this picture. If you understand something of the journey a person must take in order to discover God, then you know that helping someone take one more step towards God counts as a success in evangelism just as much as helping them over the final line does. The Engel Scale helps people to understand this journey.

Evangelists have long known the truth of this, but it has not often been taught and understood. Almost everyone who makes a commitment to Jesus has a story to tell of people and events in their lives bringing them closer and closer to the point of total surrender. Some figures indicate that the average length of the journey, from the time people start looking for God to the time they find Him, is four years. However reliable that figure, and whatever it means, it is clear that for most people the journey to God is a long one.

So the Engel Scale can help us. However, the scale as traditionally used has a number of drawbacks, both in the description of the journey and in the way people have tried to use it. I offer here a modified scale to answer the first problem, and a brief description of the stages and some further thoughts to help answer the second.

The Modified Engel Scale is a tool designed to help any Christian share their faith in a way that fits what God is doing in the lives of the people they meet.

The scale is, of course, a vast over simplification of the series of miracles that transform an unregenerate sinner into a child of God. Each one of us is

called individually and responds in a unique way. But the scale contains enough detail to be useful, and the details can be seen working out often enough in real life to make it relevant.

And the more we allow ourselves to be sensitive to what the Spirit is doing in the lives of the people we meet and speak with, the more fruitful our conversations will be, whatever the outcome.

Overview

The fundamental message behind the scale is that salvation is a process. God is doing different things at the different stages, and we need to modify our behaviour and prayers accordingly. We therefore need to be sensitive to where the person is, and what God is doing right now. People sometimes move through the stages quite quickly, and sometimes more than one stage at once (Paul moved from -7 to 0 in a few seconds on the Road to Damascus) but this does not happen very often.

Before looking at the stages in detail, it is interesting to note that the twelve steps between -11 and 0 fall naturally into four groups of three. In each of these four groups, we have an experience followed by an intellectual step followed by the corresponding personal or emotional step. This is the way God usually works: experience, message and response. Or, if you prefer: from feeling through intellect to the will.

The last three steps, from +1 to +3, do not entirely follow the same neat pattern. It is true that *functioning*, *growing* and *serving* can be seen as an experience, the learning that results from that experience, and the response we make as a consequence, but all three stages are present in embryo in stage 0: the whole of the Christian life consists of discovering, experiencing, exploring and learning to use what we have already been given in Christ.

God continues to teach us through the same repeated pattern of experience, message and response, over and over again; but from this point He takes us along diverging paths.

God's work in human lives

God's work generally moves from experience through the intellectual to the personal application. First He gives us the experience, then He grants an understanding of it, and then He expects a response. He initiates contact with an *experience*; He enables us to *understand* the experience; and He then asks us to *do something* with it.

When God speaks, it is not simply in the abstract. The experience He gives is not simply to attract our attention: it is also part and parcel of the message. The message flows out of the experience, out of real life. Theology is always grounded in reality.

In making contact with the realities of our present experience, God often gives us first the application, and then the theology. In the context of worrying about what we will eat (the experience of worry), Jesus says, “Fear not, little flock,” (application) Why? We are to fear not because “it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom” (theology). (Luke 12:32)

Theology gives rise to action. You know what a person really believes by seeing how they behave. This is what Jesus taught: by their fruit you shall know them. “Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.” (Mat 12:34) What you say and what you do reveals what you believe.

We have a slight problem here. We are too used to deception. People are often dishonest, even with themselves, about what they believe. Time and time again, people say they believe one thing, think they believe it, and then go off and do something completely different. But the kind of belief the Bible tells us about is the type that results in action.

Religion has become a ‘spiritual’ activity. It is seen as an inner activity, a search for peace within. Society today approves of that kind of mysticism. People are familiar with terms like ‘peace’ and ‘inner light’. They are not familiar with a faith that says ‘because God loves me, I do what I can to feed the hungry and bind up the wounded.’

The Modified Scale

Level	Description	God Is	Our Task
-12	No God framework	Confirming	Prayer
-11	Experience of emptiness		Presence
-10	God framework	Revealing	
-9	Vague awareness and belief in God		
-8	Wondering if God can be known		Preparation
-7	Aware of Jesus	Guiding	
-6	Interested in Jesus		
-5	Experience of Christian love		Proclamation
-4	Aware of the basic facts of the gospel	Convicting	
-3	Aware of personal need		
-2	Grasp the implications of the gospel		Power
-1	Challenged to respond personally	Converting	
0	Repentance, faith, Holy Spirit and baptism	Transforming	Encouragement
+1	Functioning as a member of the local Church		Support
+2	Growing in character, lifestyle and service	Empowering	
+3	Serving through gift and ministry		

The characteristics of our task are cumulative: at stage -9 for example, we are to pray *and* reveal God's presence. For the sake of clarity (and space!) this has been omitted from the diagram.

The Stages

No God framework (-12)

God is confirming; our main task is to pray.

People at this stage have no place in their mental picture of the universe for God to fit into: they live in a world totally devoid of any supernatural element. They cannot even ask the question ‘Is there a God?’ because their belief about the nature of the universe makes such a question meaningless. For them, it is not only the case that God *does not* exist, it is not even possible that He *might* exist.

They may talk – often very intelligently – about God, His Nature and Attributes. But such talk is very misleading: when they say ‘God’ they mean a myth, a construct of subconscious desires, or a tool of political manipulation. In the same way, I can talk about dragons: they form part of my cultural heritage, I have read stories in which they feature and so on. For people at this stage, God and dragons both exist – but only as myths, and as characters in stories made up by people. They may even enjoy such stories, but ‘know’ that they are simply fantasies which have nothing to do with the ‘real’ world.

This is regarded as the ‘scientific’ position by most people today. It is the modern orthodoxy. As with most orthodoxies down the centuries, far fewer people actually believe it than claim to.

God’s activity at this stage consists largely in confirming and clarifying the implications of such a position. He faces them, in essence, with the issue of personal integrity: if you choose to believe this, are you prepared to live with the consequences?

The single word summary of God’s activity: confirming is slightly misleading here. God is not confirming that such people are right; He is confirming and clarifying what the consequences would be if they were right. The point is that He is not, at this stage, questioning and challenging their beliefs, because they are not aware of their beliefs and so cannot receive any question or challenge.

People at this stage see themselves as living ‘in touch with reality’ or some similar phrase. This is the way the universe is, that is all. Other people may choose to believe all kinds of things, but they do not see themselves as having chosen a set of beliefs, or even (very often) having any beliefs of any significance. If they can see they have chosen to believe this, there is opened up the possibility they can choose to believe something different if the facts appear to support a change.

While our *main* task is to pray for these people, it would be very wrong to suggest this is all we should do. There is no harm in talking about God as a living presence in your life – it may do little to help at this stage, but the Holy

Spirit can bring such testimony to mind later, when it is more relevant. And it is always right to communicate Jesus' love in practical ways: again, it may be more directly relevant in an evangelistic sense later on, but it is always our Father's desire to bless people. 'Doing good' as an expression of God's love is always valid, whether it directly contributes to some evangelistic effort or not.

Experience of emptiness (-11)

God is confirming; our task is to pray and communicate His presence.

People often hold the position of 'No God framework' in their heads, but do not allow it to connect with them personally. At this next stage, that connection has taken place. Our first prayers for them have been answered. Understanding this point is vitally important, as it is one of the defining characteristics of the twentieth century.

If there is no room in your universe for a God, for any transcendent reality you care to put a name to, nothing more than the bare molecules, then life has no meaning, no purpose. Things like 'purpose' and 'values' only exist in our minds: we can pretend our life has meaning, that the human race is more than a cosmic accident, but this is mere sham. Life is totally empty and futile. Your life is pointless; all human life is pointless; the universe itself is pointless.

This is the position of 'modern man' as described graphically by the Existentialists: Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and their fellows. This is the source of the *angst* described in so much modern literature.

On a more popular and accessible level, Douglas Adams described this experience of emptiness in the *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. According to this work, the 'Total Perspective Vortex' is the worst torture any sentient being can possibly experience. That is a singularly profound observation, and remarkably close to the truth. Very few people can linger at this stage for long.

If a universe without God is such a barren, meaningless place, people start to consider the possibility that there may be a God after all. Perhaps they were being too hasty and dogmatic to rule out the possibility so quickly?

Some people object that we cannot communicate God's presence to someone who does not recognise the possibility that God exists. That is only partly true.

- Firstly, the experience of emptiness makes them open to more than they currently allow to be possible.
- Secondly, they can experience something of God's presence through you even if they don't believe in Him.
- And thirdly, they know in their heads that other people have a space for God *in their heads*. What they do not appreciate is that other people have the reality of God's presence *in their lives*.

They do not need arguments for His existence – something the Bible never offers or suggests – they need the assurance that for other people God is not just a theory, but is actually *real* in their experience. Without this – and the possibility that these people may not be completely deluded – they see no escape from the dreadful emptiness within.

God framework (-10)

God is revealing; our task is to pray and communicate His presence.

Most people, once they are faced with the reality of a universe without God, rapidly move to the point when they are willing to accept the possibility that there may be a God. It is hard to be totally dogmatic that the universe is meaningless, especially when so few people around you really believe it. So don't be dogmatic: leave the door open a crack. Allow the logical possibility that you may be mistaken, that there may be room in this universe for a God. After all, how can you be sure about such things?

Once God becomes a real possibility, you have a 'God framework'. Once people have a God framework, you can start to communicate not only His presence to them, but also something of His character. This can be very low-key: perhaps just let them know that you are sure He cares about them. And, as you tell them something of His character, God is usually revealing Himself to them in a very gentle and unhurried way.

Vague awareness and belief in God (-9)

God is revealing; our task is to pray and communicate His presence.

Once you believe in the *possibility* of a God 'somewhere out there' it is very difficult not to take the next step and believe in a vague way that He *does* exist. We find it hard to hold a position of simple 'not knowing' – the typical agnostic is deciding not to face up to these questions. Very few people can really hold to a position of 'I do not know' or even 'We cannot know' and leave it there.

So, for most people, 'perhaps there is a God' becomes 'I believe there might be a God' and for many this moves on to 'I believe there probably is a God – out there – somewhere.'

Many people we talk to are here. Very few set out on a quest for God – they are too afraid of what they will find. This is about as far as people get 'on their own' (they are never really on their own, but of course to them it often seems that way) and it usually takes God to step in and do something, either directly or through His people, to encourage someone to move on from here.

As you continue to communicate His presence in your life, through what you say and do, they begin to appreciate that you not only seem to know about God, you seem to know Him personally. This prepares the ground for the next step.

Wondering if God can be known (-8)

God is revealing; our task is to pray, communicate His presence and prepare them.

This is in some ways the most risky step anyone takes. The possibility that there may be a God becomes personal. This is not an intellectual game: it now involves real risk. If I allow myself to wonder, I start to hope; if I start to hope that God can be known, if I try to do things to find Him, I risk deep disappointment if it turns out there is no God after all or I cannot find Him, or He turns out to be vengeful and unpleasant after all.

Most of us have encountered the deep bitterness and disappointment of someone who has fallen away from following a formal religion. This is the risk people are taking when they start to wonder if God can be known – can be known by them. It is a very fragile position, and people here need very careful handling.

God is revealing to them that He can be known, and there are ways to get to know Him. Our job here is to prepare people. Prepare them for what? Prepare them for the Gospel. And, for many people, the essential preparation at this stage is to help them overcome what is known in the trade as the ‘scandal of particularity.’

This is a dreadful phrase, but it describes the problem nicely. Up to this point, God is a sort of universal concept. He is probably understood to be ‘everywhere’ – but if He is everywhere, there is no point in going anywhere to meet Him, is there?

Aware of Jesus (-7)

God is guiding; our task is to pray, communicate His presence and prepare them.

Many people will have been aware of Jesus, or the Christian faith, long before this stage, but up to this point Christianity has always been thought irrelevant. This is a hard point for many Christians to grasp: there are people who are actively looking for God but it simply does not occur to them to try the Church. They may live next door to a Church building, they may have gone to Sunday School, but they simply do not make the connection between Church and God.

Once people start wondering if God can be known, they are then in a position to consider the possibility that the Christian faith may have something to offer. The church, for these folk, does not necessarily have the complete answer, but at least it contains people who have some interest in – and maybe a knowledge of – God.

People at this stage do *not* need to be told that ‘Jesus has all the answers’ or ‘Jesus is the only way to God.’ Such things appear to be dogmatic, to come

from a closed mind. They were (perhaps until very recently) dogmatic themselves, they had a closed mind against God: they do not want to retreat to that position of safety right away. They want to risk, they want to explore, they want to open up to the possibilities the world contains.

What they need to hear is that Jesus can offer them a way to get to know God better. He is willing to take them just as they are, just where they are, that He welcomes people with doubts and fears and uncertainties. They need to hear they do not need to be saints. They need to hear that the door is open for them to start exploring the Christian faith right now.

Interested in Jesus (-6)

God is guiding; our task is to pray, communicate His presence and prepare them.

Once there is a desire to know God, and the recognition that Christianity, or perhaps that strange historic character called 'Jesus,' may be able to offer some help, the person can then decide to do something about it and show an interest. The door to God is opened in a new way.

The danger for some people is that they stay here. They start coming to church out of interest, as a way of looking for God, and get taken up into the activities, the social events and the rituals of church life.

The church, as a human institution, relies on volunteers, and these people are often willing to volunteer, and they often have the time and capacity to contribute in various ways. It seems churlish to refuse their offers, and it can be very hurtful. To refuse their help is generally seen as a way of rejecting them as people, which of course we do not want to do. So they start to contribute to the life of the church.

They may well have a vague idea that they are doing 'their bit for God' in this way, and settle down with the idea that, having become a part of God's people, they have 'found God' as much as they are likely to. They learn to say their prayers along with the rest, and are accepted as part of the church. People at this stage can form the respected backbone of the local church.

That is what can happen when people get stuck at this stage. For many, spending a while here seems to be necessary. The person who is interested is not only gathering information about the Christian faith, but is very often discovering Christian culture. A lively church, to an outsider, is a weird group of people. It takes some getting used to. Many people (understandably) find it very difficult to commit themselves to a faith, and hence a group of people, if they do not feel they understand it well enough to believe they will 'fit'.

Experience of Christian love (-5)

God is guiding; our task is to pray, communicate His presence, prepare and proclaim the good news to them.

On the outside, almost all that Christians do and say can be understood in human terms. Church Prayer Meetings and ballroom dancing are both social activities, and going to church provides you with a bunch of friends and a structure to your social life in much the same way as joining the darts team from the local pub.

Many people think that what they see on the outside is all there is to the Christian faith. They can know all about what goes on, on the *outside*, yet have no idea of what is happening on the *inside*. And they do not know that they do not know, if you get the meaning.

Something must happen to step into their experience, to make them realise that there is more to the Christian faith than the outward activities. There is something real at the centre of it, something different, something which they do not share.

What often happens is they experience Christian love. It touches them on the inside, and they realise that there is something here they cannot explain, something beyond their experience. People are not capable of that kind of love, not ordinary people like this. There is something – and this can be a vital point of revelation – *divine* about that love.

So God is really there for these people, present in some way in their experience. He is a reality in their lives in a way I do not know or understand. Their talk about God is not just talk: it expresses something deeper. I am beginning to realise I want what they have got. I begin to thirst for God.

Of course, it is not always love which prompts this step – or perhaps, it is not always seen as love at the time. It can be a simple answer to prayer, or a direct revelation. The effect is the same: God is real, and I want Him.

Aware of the basic facts of the gospel (-4)

God is convicting; our task is to pray, communicate His presence, prepare and proclaim the good news to them.

Up to now, the Christian message for most people has been a mixture of sound ethical advice and a comforting mythology. Adam and Eve in the garden, Jesus being born at Christmas, the events of Easter: they are all powerful stories which resonate deep within. They *move* people, Christian or not.

But if God is real, then – wait for it – these stories must be true, in some sense, at least. A real God became a real human being to die on a real cross, outside a real town in the Middle East. Real people, like me, killed Him in a

horrible way. This can be quite a shock. What were just stories become frighteningly different when you realise they really happened.

At this point, someone who a few weeks earlier could have described the gospel message very well, might need to hear it for the first time. They do not need to be convinced; they simply need to hear the words said by someone who believes them to be true. This is the point where ‘Tell me the old, old story’ ceases to be sentimentality and becomes a vital necessity. Now they can hear – really hear – the basic facts of the gospel for the first time.

Aware of personal need (-3)

God is convicting; our task is to pray, communicate His presence, prepare and proclaim the good news to them.

This is in some ways the real crux of the issue. If someone does not feel their personal need of a saviour, they will never come to the foot of the cross. Many evangelists put most of their effort into convincing people of their personal need, and most of this effort is completely wasted.

If a person knows within themselves they are a miserable sinner and they deserve to go to Hell, you can tell them, they will respond and agree with you. If they do not know it within, you might be able to convince their head that ‘all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,’ but any profession of faith will be nothing more than a response to human pressure.

You are entirely dependant upon God’s Spirit working at this point. You can pray for them, and you can tell them they need a saviour, but until *they* know they need a saviour you can go no further.

Grasp the implications of the gospel (-2)

God is convicting; our task is to pray, communicate His presence, prepare and proclaim the good news to them with power.

It is a dreadful thing to be in fear of Hell. If they have spent more than a few minutes aware of their personal need, there will often be some strong emotions churning around inside.

A person at this stage *wants* to hear the gospel. The difficulty here is to keep it simple. They want to hear, and the temptation sometimes is to keep on explaining things you think they need to understand. You do not need to ensure their theological soundness at this point. Depending on how much they have gained at the earlier stages, you may need to say very little more than: ‘Yes, you are in a hole. That is why Jesus died – to provide you with a way out.’

The main point to check is that they understand the Lordship of Christ. The core gospel message is: Jesus Christ is Lord, and if you give your life to Him and submit to His Lordship, He will give His life to you, save you and keep you.

The gospel message is a very costly one. That is why people will only respond to it if they know the cost of ignoring it is even greater. Jesus emphasised the need for people to count the cost before they sign up, and we dare not presume to know better.

Challenged to respond personally (-1)

God is converting; our task is to pray, communicate His presence, prepare and proclaim the good news to them with power.

This is the classic ‘invitation’. The previous stage was ‘Jesus died so that you may have eternal life’, this stage is ‘What are you going to do about it?’ Of course, you do not have to put it as bluntly as that. In sales jargon, this is the ‘close’, but evangelism is not about selling Jesus to someone, and we can be misled by the similarities.

This stage and the previous one often go together, but this is not essential. There are two mistakes we often make at this point.

The first mistake is to give the invitation too soon. You are ‘so near, and yet so far’ – the temptation is to listen to your own enthusiasm or impatience rather than to the Holy Spirit for His timing. There is no rush. If God is at work in someone’s life, you will not ‘lose them’ if they go off and sleep on it.

A variation on the ‘too soon’ mistake is to pressurise people to respond. The only way to come to Jesus is freely. A person can only be saved if they want to be. Just saying the words of the ‘sinner’s prayer’ without meaning them is worse than useless. If someone is pushed into ‘accepting Jesus’ before they are ready, it is sometimes hard to tell later if they are really saved. It certainly causes massive problems. Giving your life to Jesus is a major step, and some people need time before they are ready to do it, even when they are sure they have to do it.

Of course, some people will try to put off the commitment as a way of avoiding it altogether. Every now and then you have to present the stark choice: either accept Jesus or reject Him. Choose Heaven or Hell. Sitting on the fence for ever is not an alternative: if you fail to choose God, you choose Satan. However you put it, sometimes the choice has to be presented as bluntly as this

The second mistake, of course, is to put off the invitation, or fail to give it altogether. You have been talking to someone for a while, and it is perfectly clear they know what to do. The strange thing is that many people know what to do, and yet do nothing until they are asked. So maybe all you have to do is ask. It doesn’t matter if they want time to think about it, to ‘count the cost’. If you ask politely and sensitively, you can keep on coming back and asking. You have lost nothing in the attempt.

Repentance and faith (0)

God is transforming; our task is to pray, communicate His presence, prepare, proclaim the good news to them with power, and encourage them to respond.

Repentance is turning around, turning to God. It is agreeing with Him that you have got it wrong up to now, and you want to go His way from now on. For some people, it is clearly a turning away from something that they have tried to put in the place of God, while for others it is more like coming home at long last.

Faith is sometimes made into something more difficult and complicated than it really is. You switch the kettle on because you have faith it will boil the water for your tea. You use a taxi because you have faith the taxi driver will take you where you want to go. Everything in life operates through faith.

Faith in Jesus works in exactly the same way. You ask Jesus to save you because you have faith that He is able to save. You want what He offers, you believe that He can supply it, and so you turn to Him. On this level, the only difference between Jesus and a kettle is that there are many ways of getting water boiled, but only one way to get eternal life.

Of course, there is the mystery of God at work in the life of the individual coming to faith, the mystery of regeneration. Spiritual forces and powers are at work, angels and demons watch in awe as the wonder of re-birth takes place. But you don't have to worry about all that. God does His bit, and we do not need to understand it.

What is the evangelist called to do at this point? As little as possible! Some people need no help at this point, so don't get in their way. Some people just need to be encouraged to pray, to talk with Jesus, and it all spills out.

Others are less clear. 'Yes, I want to be saved. What do I do?' For them, you explain, as simply as possible, that God wants them to repent and believe. Now is not the time for detailed theology – just offer the bare minimum to enable them to understand what they need to do, and let them get on with it.

For those who needed no help, it may be appropriate – after they have finished praying and calmed down a little – to check that they do understand about both repentance and faith. But that is all.

There is an optional short talk to give at this point, and 95% of the time it is given faultlessly. Most of us remember it very well because we were given the same talk when we became Christians. It goes like this. "Okay. You have been saved by grace. That's great, but don't imagine it will always be this easy. You have to keep the rules. You have to go to Church every Sunday. You have to get up early in the morning to read your Bible and pray. You have to join a Housegroup. You have to tithe. You have to..."

All right, I lie. It is probably more like 98%. I realise this is a vital message, that your new convert has to learn that most Churches operate on works rather

than grace, and that the best way to motivate Christians is through guilt rather than forgiveness. But do you have to hit your new convert with this right now? Why not allow them a few days to enjoy the experience of praying and reading their Bible because they want to? Why not let someone else have the job of turning this into a miserable duty? It's just a suggestion.

The home straight

We all need to be brought to the foot of the cross, and in a sense our journey finishes there. Certainly, we never 'move on' from there. There is no deeper teaching, no further revelation than that of the cross. The Christian faith contains no secret or hidden truth, despite the thousands of teachers who will promise to reveal it to you. Any attempt to leave the cross behind is not moving on but falling back, not deeper fellowship with Jesus but turning away from Him. All we have, all we could ever hope for, is present in the cross.

But in another sense, the foot of the cross is just the start of our life's journey. We cease the finite journey *to* God, and start the infinite journey *into* God. Salvation from the guilt of sin is complete, and salvation from the power of sin begins. We have been given a place in Heaven: now the work begins to make us fit for Heaven. In traditional terms, we have been justified, and we start to become sanctified.

We would never imagine that physical growth stops when a child is born: birth is just the starting point for life. Spiritual growth is the same: the New Birth is the starting point for the New Life. The whole lengthy journey to the foot of the cross is just a preparation: it brings us to the point where we can get started, where we can start to discover what real living is about.

The writings of Christian saints and mystics are useful to us, as are the many Christian autobiographies in the shops. They tell us "This is my experience of God," and we can learn from them. What we must not do is treat their writings as a road map.

The 'final' stage used to say "part of the team leadership in the Church"

How to Use the Scale

Alternative routes

The pathway shown is just one out of an infinite number of possibilities. It is unique because it is the only path that leads to eternal life, but to the people on it at each stage it appears to be only one of a range of alternatives.

There is a serious problem in trying to show some of the alternatives on a sort of map: you either show a route to Jesus from the alternative branches, or you don't. If you do, you imply that "all roads lead to God," and if you don't,

you imply that a person who has taken a wrong turning has to go back to the junction they missed before they can progress along the right road.

Sometimes there is a sense in which a person has to turn away from an earlier decision in order to keep travelling towards God, but this happens far less often than we think it should. You and I would probably have tried very hard to convince Saul that throwing Christians into prison was a bad idea. Fortunately, God knows better, and generally moves people on from where they are, not back.

Assist understanding

It should also be clear by now that the scale is not prescriptive. Using the scale does not tell you what to do or say. Every person is an individual, and the whole point of the scale is to help you be sensitive to where that person is and how to communicate with them.

The Modified Engel Scale is offered to assist evangelism: a tool to assist our understanding, to be used in our training. We are called as Christians to be ‘co-workers’ with God, and this requires of us both obedience and understanding. Use of the scale assists our understanding of what God is doing and what He wants us to do.

Not for presentation

Possibly the most important thing to remember is that the scale is *not* intended for presentation to your prospective convert! There are at least two good reasons for this.

Firstly, people do not like being labelled. They do not like to feel they are being categorised. The purpose of the scale is to help you treat them as individuals, and not just lump them together with all the ‘unsaved’ – and they will not appreciate your explanation that you are putting them into this box because it is much more helpful than the box you would have used before!

And secondly, if your contact is not completely put off by the concept of the scale, you will probably end up discussing the scale, justifying it, suggesting alternatives, comparing the strengths and weaknesses of the different options, and so on. Anything, in fact, except presenting Jesus. We are not called to explain the scale, we are called to present Jesus to them.

Present Jesus

We are called to present Jesus. Could this whole discussion be one big distraction from that simple object? Clearly, I do not think so. To present Jesus to someone, the pair of you have to speak the same language. You may be intending to present Jesus, but if you speak a different language your words are meaningless. You can explain the gospel to someone at level -12, but unless

God steps in and does another ‘Road to Damascus’ job, your words will be wasted: they are not in a position to understand what you mean. You need to pray and try to communicate the presence of God as a reality in your life – to communicate that He is not just a figment of your imagination or an externalisation of your subconscious desires.

Let in the light

We are called to present Jesus. We are not called to criticise, attack or demolish the alternatives to Jesus. Evangelism is inherently constructive, not destructive. We are not called to convince people that Islam or Buddhism or Communism or Materialism is evil, wrong or inadequate: we are called to offer them Jesus. Once they see Him, they can make up their own minds.

There is truth, some light in almost every religion and ideology that people cling to. Don’t attack the candle, just let in the daylight. No-one relies on the light from a candle when standing in the sunshine, but until people see the true light they would be foolish to give up their candle.

Diagnostic Questions

Here are some questions to help determine where a person is on the scale.

No God framework (-12)

- Is it possible there is a God?
- Do you believe God may exist?
- Are you certain there is no God?

Experience of emptiness (-11)

- Is there a purpose to the universe?
- Is life on Earth purely the result of chemical processes?
- Does the human race have a destiny to fulfil?

God framework (-10)

- Do you think you may be mistaken about whether God exists?
- Is it possible you may be mistaken in your ideas about God?

Vague awareness and belief in God (-9)

- Do you think there probably is a God?
- Do you think God is a person?
- Do you think God likes some things?
- Do you think God gets angry about some things?
- Do you think God created the universe?

Wondering if God can be known (-8)

- Do you think a person can know God?
- Do you hope it may be possible to get to know God?
- Do you believe anyone in the past has known God?
- Can you name anyone who you think knows God or has known God?

Aware of Jesus (-7)

- Do you know who Jesus Christ was?
- Do you think Jesus was a historic person?
- Can you name a Christian who has shown something of God's love?

Interested in Jesus (-6)

- Do you think the life of Jesus has anything to show or teach us today?
- Do you think the Bible may have something useful to say to people today?

Experience of Christian love (-5)

- Have you met a Christian who has shown you something of God's love?

Aware of the basic facts of the gospel (-4)

- Do you think Jesus was the Son of God?
- Do you think Jesus was God and chose to become human?
- Do you think Jesus died to save us from our sins?
- Do you think Jesus really died on the cross?
- Do you think Jesus rose from the dead?

Aware of personal need (-3)

- Do you think that a life without God lacks something important?
- Is it important to you to develop a personal relationship with God?
- Do you believe you are responsible for sins you have committed?
- Do you feel in need of God's forgiveness of your sins?

Grasp the implications of the gospel (-2)

- Is it possible to become a Christian and continue to live as before?

Challenged to respond personally (-1)

- Do you feel a need to commit your life to Jesus?

Repentance and faith (0)

- Do you want to give your life to Jesus now?

3. Step Three: Multiply

3a. Understanding the Message

Communicating a Message

Step three is all about Evangelism. If we want to communicate the Christian message, there are two main 'do not's' and two main 'dos'. Don't force; don't manipulate; do create a space; and do provide an example.

In other words, you can't trick or push people through the door of the Church, but you can open the door for them, and you can lead them through it.

Don't force

Nobody ever wants to have someone else's beliefs pushed down their throats. Even when that person happens to be you.

Don't manipulate

People don't like feeling they have been tricked. So don't invite someone out for a meal and have them turn up at a Alpha Supper.

Do create a space

By your words and attitude, you can communicate to the people around you a few basic messages:

- Questions of faith and spirituality are important to you.
- You have something interesting and relevant to say about questions of faith and their relevance and application to everyday life.
- You are not interested in picking fights with people, or demonstrating why everyone who disagrees with you is wrong and stupid.
- You care about people, and seek to help where you can.

Most of the time, these four messages are enough. People are hungry and thirsty for spiritual reality, and if they think you can help, they will seek you out. They may make fun of the Church in group settings, but when they are alone with you the story is often very different.

Do provide an example

The example you provide goes back, in part, to the way you testify: you can talk about your beliefs, and you can be very enthusiastic about God, Jesus and your church family. It's very much a question of style and personality.

The Message

This section is about the message we want to communicate. But please, please remember the context. Our primary focus is not on the message, but on the person. There really ought to be a Public Health Warning on every page of this section: remember, it is all about people!

The message is Jesus

Not only is the activity all about people – the message is all about a person. In fact, the message *is* a person: Jesus. Which is why there is no statement of the gospel message that everyone agrees about: you cannot summarise a person in words.

But, since there is a message, we want to communicate it. If you want to communicate, you need to understand three things: (1) the message, (2) the audience, and (3) how to bridge the gap between them.

The three rules

- The message. ***Understand the message you want to communicate.*** Or, at least, understand it *well enough*. When we are talking about the gospel message, nobody understands it fully.
- The audience. ***Understand the audience you want to communicate with.*** Who are you speaking with? What are their concerns and problems? What are their priorities and values?
- The gap. ***Do something to help the audience understand the message.*** Generally, you will need words at some point.

You need to use language and concepts your audience will understand. Christians are trained out of speaking English. For most of us, it takes a lot of discipline and practice to avoid the jargon.

But merely saying words is not enough – you need to ask questions, and listen to the answers too. That's much harder!

Bridging the gap

Culture

The *meaning* of words depends on their *context* (“Fire!”), and the basic context in which we speak is a shared culture. The gospel message will never be effective if it is seen as foreign. Expressing *our* truth in *their* words and culture is the most difficult and most rewarding challenge.

Filters

We do not hear everything that is said, and we do not listen to everything we hear. Some of the remainder we ignore, dismiss or re-interpret. Everyone applies these filters. Communication is not about *speaking* – it is about being *heard* and *understood*.

Feedback

The only way to be sure you have communicated is to get feedback from the other person. What do they understand of what you are saying? The best way is to ask them to put your message into their own words.

So what?

Whatever we do needs to pass the ‘so what?’ test. What is its relevance to the person we are talking with? What difference will it make to them? They want to know: is this a waste of my time? It’s a fair question!

In open-air evangelism, you always pass this test because what you do is entertaining, and people decide for themselves if it is sufficiently entertaining to spend some time with you. In other areas of evangelism it can be more difficult.

Flexibility

We need to be flexible in responding to the other person while avoiding the sidetracks that distract us from the subject.

Knowing what you want to do...

Flexibility is achieved by having a clear message, a message you are confident about, and a loving God you are confident in.

You don’t need to be in control, as long as you know where you are going, and can trust God that you are part of a journey He is taking this person along.

... not how you want to do it

Christians often (mistakenly!) go into evangelism with a single pre-determined objective (such as getting them to pray ‘the’ prayer), and decide that the encounter is a success if they achieve this, and a failure if they don’t. But your objective is to be a blessing to the person you are talking to, and

responsive to what the Spirit is telling you He wants to do here and now. He may surprise you!

One temptation is to push the other person as far as possible, which means they will probably be glad to see the back of you. Remember the showbiz maxim and leave them wanting more – when you do this, they will be looking forward to the next time you can do some evangelism with them.

The Engel Scale helps us be flexible in helping us understand where the other person is, and helping them move on from there.

How much?

How much do people need to understand in order to be saved?

The problem is: nobody knows! Salvation is a spiritual event, not a doctrine people need to understand. The good news is Jesus, not a set of intellectual propositions about Him. This is really important: if you are not sure about it, shout now!

In order to communicate this point, I sometimes take people through an exercise. It works best with a flip chart, and takes about 20 minutes. I ask the group: what do you need to believe in order to be saved?

Usually, everyone agrees very quickly that there is very little you need to believe in order to be saved. We list the points on the flip chart. God exists. Jesus is the son of God. Jesus died for our sins. You have to believe in Jesus. You have to follow Jesus. The Bible is reliable... After about 20 minutes, I call a halt. So, we are all agreed that these are the things you have to believe in order to be saved? People nod. All of it? They look again at the flip chart, now crammed with writing. They look uncertain.

If there were such a list, don't you think someone would be teaching it?

Many people have boiled down the essence of the gospel message into a few simple points. There are some examples of these gospel summaries or outlines later. But they are not given for you to memorise – the important thing is that you find a way of summarising the message that works for you. They are ideas and suggestions, not a script for you to follow.

Not simplistic

We need to express the message in ways that are simple but not simplistic. This is possible – but only if you have a message you understand clearly, have thought about and are confident with.

Watch your language

If you want to communicate simply, don't introduce difficulties! Don't use words or concepts that are foreign to the person you are talking with.

If you look at what is really happening when Christians are (in theory) engaged in evangelism, much of the time it is really no more than a Christian teaching a non-Christian some Christian jargon. “The Bible says that everyone has sinned. Now, let me explain to you what the Bible means when it uses the word ‘sin’...”

Simple communication is not when you talk about things that seem simple to you because you are familiar with them – it is when you talk about things that are (or become) simple, clear and obviously true to the person you are talking with.

Using Tracts

Tracts are small, written presentations of the gospel message. They are sometimes just a few words on a tiny scrap of paper, sometimes a well-designed and nicely presented booklet in full colour, and often somewhere in between.

Use of tracts seems to be a cultural thing: some Christians have grown up with them, and believe they are an indispensable tool for evangelism, while others have never come across one and cannot imagine ever using such a thing.

When not to use tracts

Tracts are not a substitute for personal contact.

Do not give them out indiscriminately – if you treat them as worthless, why should anyone else value what they say? It is not a good witness to see hundreds of tracts littering the street, and it reinforces the idea that they are worthless.

When to use tracts

You may want to use a tract...

- when someone is showing a real interest, asking good questions, and you want to focus the conversation on some key truths.
- when some visual aids will be helpful.
- when you cannot spend enough time with them in person.
- when they need a reminder of what you have said.
- when they want to make a commitment and it contains a suitable prayer.
- when you want them to get in touch with you or your group again.

Think about the contact details you put on your tracts! Use an address where they will be able to reach you, but be sensible. You don't know what will happen to the tract after you give it away. If you are a married couple, you may be comfortable giving your home address, but if you are a single girl, *don't!*

If you use a church address, think about *when* people may get in touch. You may want to give the times of Sunday services and when the church office is open.

How to use tracts

Always make sure you know the tract before you use it! Don't disagree with the tract: if it says something you don't like, just skip over that bit.

Don't read the tract to them: talk them through it, following the outline, and explaining the meaning of the diagrams and illustrations.

First talk them through the tract, and *then* say they can keep it. This makes it personal and interesting. Don't just say you want to give them something – people are sometimes suspicious of free gifts.

The exception to this rule is when you have already talked about the gospel message, and explained the idea of salvation as a free gift. You then have a perfect link: God offers us eternal life as a free gift although it cost Him a great price; these booklets (don't call them 'tracts'!) are not expensive but they still cost me money, and I would like to give one to you as a free gift.

Be careful about asking people to read from the tract – the safest option is to ask if they mind if you read out loud to them from it. A surprising number of people are illiterate, or near enough for reading to be difficult. And many people have problems with their eyesight. They often don't like to admit to either problem.

Gospel Outlines

Before we start on the outlines, there are two more points.

Firstly, the gospel is about Jesus.

It is about a person, not a set of beliefs or religious practices. We want to introduce people to Jesus, and to encourage them to follow Him. Our aim is not to persuade people to believe a certain set of doctrines about Jesus, no matter how well-formed and important those doctrines might be. We are offering people a personal relationship with the God Who created the universe, and Who chose to reveal Himself in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Secondly, the gospel is God's revelation to us.

We are sometimes tempted to talk about the gospel as if it were the message of how a person can be saved – how people can become Christians. But the gospel is the good news about Jesus Christ: that God has stepped into history, and, through Jesus, offers to set us free from the things that oppress and distort and destroy us. People need to understand what is on offer; how they can accept the offer is one, possibly small, part of this larger message.

Evangelism Explosion

Here is a slight re-working of the Evangelism Explosion gospel outline

- **Grace.** We can receive eternal life only as a free gift. We cannot earn eternal life, and we could certainly never deserve it.
- **Man.** Not only do we not deserve eternal life, we behave in ways which deserve the opposite – we harm other people by the things we do and say, and we fail to help people when we get the chance.
- **God.** God loves us and wants the very best for us. He wants us to enjoy eternal life, but God must uphold justice and punish sin wherever He finds it.
- **Jesus.** God came to Earth in the person of Jesus Christ, who is fully God and fully human. On the cross, Jesus took the punishment for the things we have done wrong so that we can be forgiven and receive eternal life.
- **Faith.** Faith in Jesus is the means by which we receive eternal life. This means believing the things He tells us, following His example in the way we live, and accepting His total authority over our lives.

Four Spiritual Laws

This is the classic outline developed by Campus Crusade for Christ.

- God LOVES you and offers a wonderful PLAN for your life.
- Man is SINFUL and SEPARATED from God. Therefore, he cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life.
- Jesus Christ is God's ONLY provision for man's sin. Through Him you can know and experience God's love and plan for your life.
- We must individually RECEIVE Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord; then we can know and experience God's love and plan for our lives.

Faith in 5

A variant of the four spiritual laws. You can get some simple tools from their web site to help start conversations.

- God's Love
- Our Problem
- God's Solution
- Our Helper
- Our Choice

Plan and problem

This is another variant of the Four Spiritual Laws used by Philip Jinau in his ‘Winning Ways’ course: plan, problem, solution and response.

- **Plan.** God’s perfect plan was for us to be like Him and in relationship with Him. His intention was that we would know Him and love Him, with nothing separating us.
- **Problem.** The problem is that we have rejected God and His plan for us. We break His commandments, and the result of our sin is death.
- **Solution.** God loved us so much that He came to us in the person of Jesus. He came to show us that He would give everything – to show us that He would rather die than live without you. He died so that we might be forgiven and our relationship with God restored, and He came back to life to prove that this incredible claim was true.
- **Response.** God now gives us a choice. The way has been cleared for us to return to Him, but we have to choose to return. We do this in three steps:
 - A – Admit that I have sinned.
 - B – Believe that Jesus died for me.
 - C – Commit my life to Jesus.

Do and done

Religion is all about what you have to do.

Christianity, on the other hand, tells you what God has already done for you through Jesus Christ.

Jesus is Lord

This is possibly the simplest summary of them all:

Jesus Christ is Lord – *are you going to follow Him or fight Him?*

You can go on to explain and expand this summary as much as the other person wants.

The advantage of this approach is that you have already given the message up front, so you are under no pressure to keep hold of the person you are speaking with until you have got through the remaining n points of your outline.

A similar approach would be to start off with Jesus calling the first disciples:

Jesus told people, “Follow Me!” – and this is still what he says to us today.

Another advantage of this approach is that it gets the issue of Jesus' Lordship on the table from the beginning. It is generally better to present the cost of responding to the gospel early on, rather than making it look like an afterthought.

Relating to Jesus

Crisis Centre Ministries requires that all its volunteers are Christians, which requires a description of what the term 'Christian' is understood to mean...

There are many different ideas about what it means to be a Christian. Anyone can *call* themselves a Christian, so we need to explain what we mean by the term. If you wish to work as a volunteer for CCM, this is what we are looking for. We identify four key aspects of being a Christian in these following statements.

- I *believe* in Jesus as my God.
- I *accept* Jesus as my Saviour.
- I *follow* Jesus as my Example.
- I *obey* Jesus as my Lord.

We do not expect you to be perfect! You may be struggling with all kinds of uncertainties, confusions, doubts and fears. But if you can sincerely say these four simple statements, and are seeking to live accordingly, as part of a church family, then that is enough for us.

The Full Message

Presenting the cost

Whatever we use as an outline, it is vital that we give people the full picture – that we tell them the cost of following Jesus as well as the benefits. The integrity of our message depends on this, as does the health of our churches. Our churches are full of partly converted people.

The greatest problem with evangelism is not that too few are getting saved, but that too many are. Or, rather, too many are responding to half a gospel.

In the New Testament, Jesus is proclaimed as Lord. The Galilean peasant is revealed to have an authority that is far higher than that of any earthly King or Emperor. The message is clear: Jesus is Lord. You can choose to submit to Him now or later, but one day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. You can postpone, but you cannot avoid, recognising Jesus Christ as your rightful Lord and Master.

He is also our Saviour. He plucks me from the miry clay and sets my feet upon a rock. But why does he rescue me? Does He do it so that I can continue to live my life as before? No – He rescues me so that I can follow Him. He has saved my life, and my life now belongs to Him. He now has a two-fold claim on my life, both as the Lord of Creation and as my personal Saviour and Redeemer.

So – is there a catch? It can appear that this offer of ‘free salvation’ isn’t really free after all: the free gift turns out to cost me everything.

God wants to change our minds so that our lives will change. The objective is not to stop people sinning (that is a by-product of discipleship) but to get people involved in building the Kingdom of God. People see – and we so often describe – the Christian life as a series of things we don’t do, a set of things to avoid. But God’s will for our lives is active and creative.

The response that God draws out of us is far more exciting and demanding than anything He asks us to give up. Remember the quote from Jim Elliott: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” Yes, we are called to give up everything for Jesus, but the ‘everything’ we give up was worthless and we could never have kept it anyway, while what we receive in its place is infinitely precious and secure for all eternity.

Testimonies

A key part of our message is what we can personally tell about from our own experience. A testimony does not have to be dramatic to be valid and helpful! See the section on ‘Telling Your Story’ (page 46) for more about testimonies.

The Resurrection

Why are we Christians? Why choose Jesus out of all the millions of gods that people have worshipped over the centuries?

One approach is to look at each of the world’s religions and ask: why should I believe this? There are various types of religion: those based on prophets, those based on philosophy, those based on tradition (animism and new age) and a very few based on history.

The Christian faith is based on history. It stands or falls on the truth of the resurrection as a historic event.

Ambiguity

It is important to hold on to the ambiguity of the gospel message. We *cannot* present the whole gospel: it is too deep, too far-reaching. We have hardly begun to understand it ourselves. And we don’t want to give the impression that we have presented it fully, as that makes the message smaller and less powerful than it really is – too trite and trivial. If you can grasp it, it is not God.

On the one hand, it will take you a lifetime to discover the depths of the gospel message. On the other hand, it is simple enough to be grasped by a child: Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

Bob Mayo (*'Ambiguous Evangelism'*) explores this area in more detail.

3b. Answering Questions

How to Respond to Questions

Introduction

This is the part most Christians are most worried about. Questions are very double-edged. They can be difficult and they can challenge you, but every genuine question gives you the opportunity to say something important about what you believe. And you know that it is of interest to the person you are talking with, because they asked about it!

There are two main reasons why it is important to have answers to the main questions people ask. Knowing you have answers makes a big difference to your confidence and ability to talk with others. And having answers helps you grow in your faith, because it establishes that your faith is rooted in fact and reality, not fantasy and imagination.

Be confident

There is no reason for Christians to be worried about the questions people might ask: it is actually the easiest part of evangelism, once you get started. Bear in mind two simple points.

There is an adequate answer to every reasonable question.

The number of genuine questions is really quite limited, and they have all been asked before. And they all have at least one good answer, even if the answer is not easy, or easy to talk about in the circumstances.

People have been attacking the Christian faith since day one. And, also since day one, intelligent people have been examining and responding to these questions and objections. If there was a convincing reason not to believe the Christian faith, it's likely that someone would have discovered it before now.

You don't have to answer every question you get asked.

Of course, it's nice if you can, but you are not setting yourself up as an expert in a general knowledge quiz. Sometimes not answering a question is the best thing to do.

Always think and pray!

Don't jump in with an answer. Stop. Pray for guidance, even if you think you have the answer. It always helps if you appear to consider the question before bouncing back with an answer. Don't assume the other person has the same questions and issues as you!

Not all questions carry the same weight: questions can be absolutely vital, completely irrelevant, or anywhere between. It all depends on who is asking, why they are asking, and the context in which they are asking.

Your aim is to answer questions when they will help the other person. The difficulty lies in knowing when this is the case! You need discernment, and discernment comes from the Holy Spirit, experience and practice.

Sometimes you answer the question

Stop and deal with the question. Some questions you just have to stop and deal with in some way, especially if:

- they are opening up with some personal question or issue – something that matters deeply to them emotionally; or
- the question demonstrates that they have not grasped some vital part of what you have already said.

Build the answer into your message. Some questions take you exactly where you want to go (“Why were the disciples so convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead?”). In which case, there is no problem: answer the question.

Sometimes you don't answer the question

Admit ignorance. If you don't have an answer, and the question genuinely matters, be honest! The chances are that you will find other people with the same question, so you might as well do some work to research it.

You can respond along the lines of: “If this question really bothers you, I will try to find the answer, and then come back to you with it.” If they are really interested in an answer, they will generally be happy with this, and will respect your honesty.

Avoid the question. Some questions are almost always side-tracks, time-wasters or red-herrings (“What about the people who have never heard the gospel?” or “When did Cain get his wife from?”). Part of your strategy is to avoid answering questions that don't take you anywhere useful.

But remember that whether this question takes you anywhere useful depends on the person asking and their interests and priorities, not yours!

How to Avoid Answering Questions

None of these techniques are foolproof, but they do help.

Prevent

You can prevent – or, at least, discourage – some questions through what you choose to say (or not say!) and the order in which you say it. Here are two examples.

- Don't mention the Garden of Eden – not unless you really do want to talk about myths, creation and evolution!
- Don't talk about God's justice before you talk about His love.

Pre-empt

You can answer some questions before they are asked. This is a strong technique – it demonstrates confidence – but it has three drawbacks.

- It can introduce a side-track you would otherwise have avoided.
- It can create a problem where none existed before.
- It takes a lot of time, so you can only use the technique occasionally.

Postpone

You can postpone in either an active or a passive way.

Active postponement means you promise to deal with their question. If you use this approach, keep your promise!

- “I will be coming to that shortly.”
- “That's a very good question, and I'm planning to deal with it very soon.”

Passive postponement means you give them the responsibility of raising the question again. This is useful when you are not sure if the question is important to them.

- “Please ask me again at the end if this still bothers you.”
- “That's an interesting question, but it's not what we are talking about right now. This subject is also important, so why don't we deal with this question first, and then you can ask me again if it still troubles you?”

Answering the Right Questions

Questions are not always presented as such: they are often phrased as an objection or a challenge. If you decide that the question is genuine and needs to be answered, here are a few possible approaches to the common questions.

There are only four basic objective questions that people ask when you are talking about your faith.

- Science
- Suffering
- Salvation
- Scripture

But sometimes the question centres on the person you are talking with, and this requires a slightly different approach.

Science

“Science has disproved Christianity.” There is a great deal you can say in response to this one! What science are they talking about, done by whom and when? How is it supposed to have done this? Why are so many of the greatest scientists (both past and present) Christians? It is sometimes worth pointing out that modern science began and developed because of the Christian faith, not in spite of it.

“Evolution proves the Genesis story is just a myth.” Evolution is only a theory (that’s why even the science textbooks talk about the ‘Theory of Evolution’!) and it is a theory that cannot be proved because science cannot deal with past events. Many Christians find the theory of evolution compatible with their Christian faith, and many people (not all of them religious) find the scientific evidence for evolution to be very weak.

“Nobody believes in the supernatural now that science has explained the world we live in.” Both of the assumptions in this question are false, and in any case, there are vital aspects of the world that science cannot explain: origin, value and purpose. Science cannot address the question of where the universe came from, since any attempt will only raise the question: ‘And where did *that* come from, then?’ And no amount of scientific truth will give you any basis for accepting any moral values, or give you any purpose in your life.

Salvation

Is salvation only available from one religion, or are there many paths to God? A lot of these questions are introduced with “Are you telling me that...?”

“Are you telling me that God will send people to Hell just for being a good Moslem or Buddhist?” No, I don’t believe God will send anyone to Hell for being a follower of any religion. Nor do I believe anyone will get into Heaven by following any religion.

“Are you telling me that no Moslem will get to Heaven?” No, the Bible does not say that. But the Bible does say that the only way to be sure you are going to Heaven is by believing in and following Jesus.

“Surely all religions lead to God?” What on earth would make you believe this? Is there any evidence? Given the many ways in which the different religions all contradict each other, does it make any sense?

In considering other religions, it is worth thinking for a moment about which groups you consider to be Christian. The status of many religious movements is clear: Methodists are Christian, while Sikhs are not. But what about Mormons? My personal rule of thumb is that a group which believes in the Trinity and accepts that people from other Christian groups are fellow believers (they don't need to be converted!) is probably okay.

Suffering

“The suffering in this world proves that God is not loving.”

There are a few basic answers to this.

- Suffering is an inevitable consequence of free will: if we are free to make choices, we will sometimes choose wrongly, and suffer as a consequence.
- Suffering is caused by sin (either directly or indirectly), so you can't blame God.
- Suffering is a necessary part of our spiritual journey, enabling us to learn lessons we would otherwise ignore.
- God is present in the suffering – most clearly in the person of Jesus on the cross.

At a theological and philosophical level, it is interesting to note that nobody ever argues this point: they always assume and assert that suffering proves that God is either not powerful or not loving. But, while it seems to be self-evident to many people, the argument always dissolves when you start to spell out why this is the case. But this is hardly ever relevant.

It is vital to understand what is behind the question. Sometimes, you think you are doing evangelism and you suddenly discover an opportunity for pastoral care – you need to provide a shoulder to cry on, or a listening ear to the pain, not a glib answer.

Scripture

“How can you believe in the Bible when it is so old and contradicts itself?”

People like to make accusations of falsehoods and inconsistencies in the Christian faith. It is difficult to provide outline answers to these, partly because there are so many questions and accusations people can raise, and partly because the way you will want to answer will depend in part on your theological position.

“Which do you believe in – the Old or the New Testament? A God of love, or a God of hate?”

Many people like to portray the God of the Old Testament as a God of hate and revenge, cruel and vindictive, while the God of the New Testament is loving, gentle and caring. These are caricatures, of course, but you need to know how you understand and present the differences between the two testaments – or explain why there is really no difference, if that is what you believe.

For me, there is no difficulty. I follow Jesus, and believe in the God revealed in the person of Jesus. I also believe in progressive revelation: it was not possible for God to fully reveal Himself to us from the outset, so of course some details had to get changed or refined as the centuries progressed. But the consistency of the message is astonishing.

“What about the inconsistencies and contradictions”

There are many other apparent inconsistencies and contradictions in the Biblical text. How did Judas die? How many angels appeared at the empty tomb? Did Jesus clear the Temple at the beginning or the end of His ministry – or did He do it twice? And so on.

Many of these objections are very easy to answer. Differences are not the same as contradictions, and no account of any event ever contains all the details which could be mentioned. Every author selects from the facts the ones which best suit the purpose of writing, and the Biblical authors are no different.

However, some apparent contradictions do remain. How you respond to these questions will depend to a large extent on your understanding of Biblical inspiration and inerrancy. But whatever you believe on these matters, don't confuse it with evangelism! Once people believe in Jesus, they can start to consider questions of inspiration. But you don't have to convince someone of the verbal and plenary inspiration of Scripture before they can be saved. People believe in the inspiration of the Bible *because* they believe in Jesus, not the other way round.

“They made it up!”

Many people will offer the astounding suggestion that the early disciples ‘made it all up’.

Err... why? So they could make lots of money? Sell the film rights? The motivation for doing this is rather difficult to fathom. There are obvious problems with all the possible motivations that have been suggested over the years.

And even harder to understand is the obvious fact that not a single member of this alleged and complex conspiracy ever admitted the ‘truth’ – even when it would have saved their lives, and spared them from the most horrific deaths.

“The disciples stole Jesus’ body.”

There are lots of daft ideas about why the disciples believed the tomb was empty: they went to the wrong tomb; they stole the body; Jesus fainted on the cross and revived in the tomb; and so on. None of them stand up to the recorded facts. “*Who Moved the Stone?*” is still an excellent summary of the arguments, and the evidence for the resurrection, but there are many other helpful books covering much the same ground.

“*Religion makes people unhappy.*”

People often make vague, semi-abstract criticisms of ‘religion’. In Western Europe, this is almost always a criticism of Christianity, as that is the only religion most people know (or think they know) anything about. You hear people say things like, “Religion produces unhappiness because everyone is sexually frustrated,” or “Religion makes everybody feel guilty because they are failing to live up to the impossible standard being set.”

Bear in mind a few simple points.

- Agree where possible
- Don’t argue about the theory
- Show that it is not a problem for you.

Firstly, *agree where possible*. If you can’t agree, then disagree as gently as possible (something like “I’m not sure I can agree with you there,” for example) and introduce a positive angle. But try to agree: “I’m sure you are right. Religions tend to set impossible standards, and people feel guilty when they fail to live up to those standards. But Christianity is different...”

Secondly, *don’t argue the theory*. They probably don’t want to know their theory is wrong, anyway, so there is little point in pushing the point. Even if you have very solid grounds for arguing it, only tell them of your knowledge and experience, say that your conclusions are different, and move on. The argument always gets bogged down, and humiliating the other person never helps.

Thirdly, instead, show in concrete terms that *it is not a problem for you*: what they are telling you is a problem is not actually a problem in your own experience, or that of your friends – assuming that this is true, of course!. For example, “Actually I find it quite liberating to learn that I will never be perfect, but God loves me just as I am anyway.”

After a criticism of religion, if you have time, you may wish to explore what follows if the criticism is true.

Take the ‘atheist bus’ advert as an example: “There’s probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.” There are many useful lines of conversation which spring up from this short advert.

If there is *probably* no god, the obvious question then arises: just what is the probability of God (or a god) existing? How can you go about measuring or estimating the probability?

Saying that there is probably no god is a bit like saying that you are probably not going to die this week. It is rather a mixed message: on the surface, it sounds good, but it reminds me that I might die. This message reminds me of a risk. Do I want to take the chance? If there is probably no god, then there possibly is a god. And if it is a possibility, it is the biggest, most significant possibility in the world – maybe I need to think though the possible consequences?

Even more helpfully, if the probable non-existence of God means that I can stop worrying, then one of the common objections to faith is rather undermined. You can't argue that faith in God is wish-fulfilment if people would actually be happier not believing.

Personal

Sometimes the question is phrased in a way that makes it personal.

Much of the time, it is simply one of the standard questions phrased differently: instead of saying “a God of love is incompatible with all the suffering in the world,” they may say, “I can't believe in a God of love, when there is so much suffering in the world.”

In these situations, it is important to work out whether they are actually asking the objective question and saying that the question really matters to them, or whether they are telling you there is something in their circumstances or experience that creates a different or larger problem.

Very often, what they are saying is that they have a question which mattered only in an academic way before some event turned it into something of immediate relevance to them: their mother died, or their sister married a Buddhist. While being sensitive to their feelings, it is usually possible to help them see that their feelings about their personal situation do not affect the facts, issues and arguments. Painful though a parent's death may be, it is hardly a convincing proof of the non-existence of a God.

Sometimes they make it personal about you: “You believe because you want to believe.” Of course, it does sometimes happen that people hold onto a belief because they want to believe it. But people also believe things because they don't want them to be true. And, when you think about it, my motive for believing something really has no bearing on whether it is true.

The other type of personal question is about the individual's capabilities, often concerning faith. “I wish I had your faith!” is a common response, or “I would like to believe, but I'm not able to do it.”

These questions are a lot more straightforward on the personal level, but harder on the philosophical, and from this point it is easy to find yourself in an abstract conversation about the nature of faith.

The main difficulty in talking about faith is the confusion caused by the different ways in which the word is used. There are probably three main distinct uses you should be aware of.

- The ability to believe, in the abstract.
- A particular belief.
- Belief in the Christian God.

When someone says “I don’t believe,” you have to work out which of these they mean – or if they mean something different again.

It should be obvious that everyone believes, in the first sense. You go to work because you believe your boss will pay you at the end of the month; you get on a train because you believe it will take you to the advertised destination; and so on.

People will say things like “I only believe in what I can see or what I can test,” but it is easy to provide counter-examples: they will believe that their parents, partner or children love them; they will believe that killing people is wrong; and they will believe that Nelson won the battle of Trafalgar.

A big sticking point for many people is that they think religious faith is different in kind from other faith. They talk about religious belief as something you must accept on the basis of ‘pure faith’ as though reason and evidence have nothing to do with it. But all faith is based on reason and evidence, even religious faith.

People often confuse *evidence* with *proof*. They will say things like, “There is no evidence that God exists,” when they mean that there is no absolute indisputable proof that He exists. The anthropic principle is *evidence* for the existence of God, but not *proof*.

Answering the Questions Right

Be honest

If you don’t know the answer, say so. Don’t pretend you have a complete answer to every question. I certainly don’t! But I do have a sufficient answer to the relevant questions – enough of an answer to meet my needs right now. And I believe that God has all the answers you need right now, even if He doesn’t come up with all the answers you would like.

Be realistic

God does not promise us answers to every question we can dream up. ‘A fool can ask more questions in five minutes than a wise man can answer in a

lifetime.’ The Bible does not answer many questions, but it does contain answers to all the questions we need in order to live.

Be humble

Your church, tradition or denomination doesn’t have a monopoly on truth or godliness. And many people you disagree with on important subjects will have a richer prayer life, a more intimate walk with Jesus, and be more effective in drawing people to the Lord.

You may be right about all kinds of things, but your job is not to convince others of the correctness of your doctrines or the errors of other people’s – your task is to introduce them to Jesus. If you come across as arrogant or dogmatic, people will find it harder to respond to your message.

Be sensitive

You have probably worked out by now that evangelism should not be seen as an opportunity to express your opinions about a football team or political party. Don’t be rude about train-spotters – they might be one! But sensitivity covers much more than picking your examples carefully: you have to remember that the other person will have all kinds of issues and experiences that make them react to what you say in unexpected ways.

Don’t be so taken up with what you have to say that you miss the way the other person is reacting to it.

Be positive and creative

Attacking, criticising and running down other groups or beliefs is seldom worthwhile. ***Your aim is to light a lamp, not to curse the darkness.*** You do not have to tell people that Buddha is bad, only that Jesus is better.

There is not always a right answer. Sometimes you may have to answer a question with another question, such as “why are you asking this?”

Be gentle

In evangelism, you are talking about subjects that are very important to people – issues that touch deep fears and powerful emotions. Your words can have a much greater impact than you realise.

There is a temptation in evangelism to try and ‘make an impact’ – but the truth does make an impact. You should be on the side of the person you are talking with, trying to help them cope with the truth.

Retain responsibility

You don't need to be in control of the conversation, but you do need to retain responsibility for how you are spending your time. Keeping an evangelistic conversation going is not always the right thing to do!

A person who does not want to believe will often keep raising questions. As soon as they discover one subject does not throw you, they interrupt your answer and raise another issue. This way, they can claim you never answered their questions, and leave the encounter feeling justified in their ignorance.

Remain aware of what you are saying and why. Summarise the discussion so far, and ask if they are satisfied that you have answered the first question before you move on to the second.

Don't try to win

Avoid argument where possible. Remember what you are trying to do! Your purpose is to win a soul, not to win an argument. Crushing the opposition may be fun, but it doesn't work in evangelism.

It may help if you can remember (or imagine!) what it is like to be a parent playing a game with one of your children – you want to win, but you also want to give the child a good time and increase their skill and confidence.

If it helps, you might think of evangelism as the first stage of spiritual parenthood.

References

Relationships with other faiths

The Inter Faith Network for the UK was founded in 1987 to promote good relations between the faith communities in this country. This code, which can be found at <http://www.interfaith.org.uk/connect/code.htm>, is endorsed by all its member bodies.

In Britain today, people of many different faiths and beliefs live side by side. The opportunity lies before us to work together to build a society rooted in the values we treasure. But this society can only be built on a sure foundation of mutual respect, openness and trust. This means finding ways to live our lives of faith with integrity, and allowing others to do so too.

Our different religious traditions offer us many resources for this and teach us the importance of good relationships characterised by honesty, compassion and generosity of spirit. The Inter Faith Network offers the following code of conduct for encouraging and strengthening these relationships.

As members of the human family, we should show each other respect and courtesy. In our dealings with people of other faiths and beliefs this means exercising good will and:

- Respecting other people's freedom within the law to express their beliefs and convictions
- Learning to understand what others actually believe and value, and letting them express this in their own terms
- Respecting the convictions of others about food, dress and social etiquette and not behaving in ways which cause needless offence
- Recognising that all of us at times fall short of the ideals of our own traditions and never comparing our own ideals with other people's practices
- Working to prevent disagreement from leading to conflict
- Always seeking to avoid violence in our relationships

When we talk about matters of faith with one another, we need to do so with sensitivity, honesty and straightforwardness. This means:

- Recognising that listening as well as speaking is necessary for a genuine conversation
- Being honest about our beliefs and religious allegiances
- Not misrepresenting or disparaging other people's beliefs and practices
- Correcting misunderstanding or misrepresentations not only of our own but also of other faiths whenever we come across them
- Being straightforward about our intentions

- Accepting that in formal inter faith meetings there is a particular responsibility to ensure that the religious commitment of all those who are present will be respected.

All of us want others to understand and respect our views. Some people will also want to persuade others to join their faith. In a multi faith society where this is permitted, the attempt should always be characterised by self-restraint and a concern for the other's freedom and dignity. This means:

- Respecting another person's expressed wish to be left alone
- Avoiding imposing ourselves and our views on individuals or communities who are in vulnerable situations in ways which exploit these
- Being sensitive and courteous
- Avoiding violent action or language, threats, manipulation, improper inducements, or the misuse of any kind of power
- Respecting the right of others to disagree with us

Living and working together is not always easy. Religion harnesses deep emotions which can sometimes take destructive forms. Where this happens, we must draw on our faith to bring about reconciliation and understanding. The truest fruits of religion are healing and positive.

We have a great deal to learn from one another which can enrich us without undermining our own identities. Together, listening and responding with openness and respect, we can move forward to work in ways that acknowledge genuine differences but build on shared hopes and values.

Books

Where possible, I give the author, title, publisher, publication date and ISBN (International Standard Book Number). These details generally come from the edition on my bookshelf: some will be out of print, and others will be available in a later edition.

ACUTE. *The Nature of Hell* (Acute, London, 2000) 0-95329-922-8

ACUTE is the Evangelical Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals. A balanced summary of the main arguments about the nature of Hell.

Behe, Michael J. *Darwin's Black Box* (Touchstone, New York, 1996) 0-684-83493-6

Still the best statement of the biochemical challenge to evolution posed by the discovery of irreducible complexity.

Bell, Rob. *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith* (Zondervan, 2005)

A beautiful and challenging description, exploration and celebration of an attractive and authentic Christian faith. Buy two copies, and give one away!

Bowen, Barbara M. *Strange Scriptures* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1940) 0-8028-1511-1

A classic: explains various Bible passages that are confusing without an understanding of the culture and customs of the times.

Dan Brown. *The Da Vinci Code* (Corgi, London, 2003) 0 552 14951 9

Fiction: a thriller which takes ‘*Holy Blood, Holy Grail*’ as its starting point and manages to work many of the theories and claims of that book into the plot. Very inaccurate when it deals with the Bible or with Jewish and Christian history; slightly less inaccurate when it comes to architecture, and often accurate and interesting when it comes to art history and interpretation. An entertaining read if you don’t take it seriously – the trouble is, many people do. See also Simon Cox.

Carswell, Roger. *And some evangelists* (Christian Focus, Fearn, 2000) 1-85792-512-2

Strongly argues that local churches need to discover and develop local evangelists.

Chalke, Steve and Mann, Alan. *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Zondervan, 2003) 0-310-24882-5

A refreshing and inspiring re-examination of Jesus’ life and teaching. Don’t let the arguments about the book put you off reading it.

Cox, Simon. *Cracking the Da Vinci Code* (Michael O’Mara Books Limited, London, 2004) 1-84317-103-1

This claims to reveal which parts of the novel are true and which are fictional. While the Biblical references are not much help, it may clarify some other aspects of the conspiracy theory described in the book.

Craig, William Lane. *Reasonable Faith* (Crossway Books, Wheaton, Illinois, 1984) 0-89107-764-2

A comprehensive and clear statement of “Christian Truth and Apologetics”. For me, this is an excellent balance between the readable and the authoritative. It has a good section responding to Hume’s famous argument against miracles, an important chapter on the problem of historical knowledge, and a very helpful chapter by Craig Blomberg on the historical reliability of the New Testament.

Engel, James F and Norton, H Wilbert. *What’s Gone Wrong With the Harvest?* (Zondervan, Michigan, 1975) 0-310-24161-8

The seminal work on the process of salvation and how this affects our evangelism. Subtitled “A Communication Strategy for the Church and World Evangelization”

Forster, Roger and Marston, Paul. *Reason, Science and Faith* (Monarch Books, 1991) 1-85424-441-8

Not an easy read, but intellectually rigorous and comprehensive. The Intelligent Design movement is missed out, possibly because most of the material was prepared before it became well known.

Gaukroger, Stephen. *It Makes Sense* (Scripture Union, Bletchley, 2003) 1-85999-743-0

“The Handbook to believing” – a classic, regularly reprinted, and worth getting hold of. One of the most comprehensive of the short and readable books.

Gellman, Rabbi Marc and Hartman, Monsignor Thomas. *Religion for Dummies* (Wiley Publishing, Inc., New York, 2002) 0-7645-5264-3

An individual and quirky but very readable romp through a number of religious faiths and traditions. It's not the best way to find out about any individual religion but it does provide some interesting facts and raise some important issues.

Gilbert, Pete. *Kiss and Tell* (CWR, Farnham, 2003) 1-85345-285-8

"Evangelism as a lifestyle". Worth reading for his own story of 'Gangster Evangelism' (page 96) and the following exploration of 'what is the gospel?'

Hanks, Billie Jr. *Everyday Evangelism* (Word Publishing, Milton Keynes, 1986) 0-85009-097-0

Lots of useful ideas and helpful stories; also references to helpful Bible passages.

Harris, Doug, Hayward, Peter and Thomas, Mike. *Should Christians Apologise?* (Reachout Trust, 2004) 0-9513632-5-5

Something of a mixed bag, but contains a useful introduction to apologetics (how to give a well reasoned and factual reply to critics) and some useful material on explaining the trinity and the problem of evil.

Harris, Sam. *Letter to a Christian Nation* (Bantam, 2007) 978-0-593-05897-8

"A Challenge to Faith." The 'Christian Nation' of the title is, of course, America, but most of the content applies equally to the UK. This is the best of the popular books attacking the Christian faith, so well worth reading.

Howe, Mark (ed). *Open Air Evangelism* (CLC, Arlsford, 1991) 0-900284-61-7

The definitive work on open-air evangelism, which is not as difficult as most people think.

Hooykaas. *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science* (Regent College Publishing, 2000) 1-57383018-6

Demonstrates how modern science rests on a foundation of the Christian faith.

Hunt, Stephen. *Anyone For Alpha?* (DLT, London, 2001) 0-232-52404-1

A fair assessment of the Alpha Course, its strengths and weaknesses.

Hybels, Bill and Mittelberg, Mark. *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (Alpha, Carlisle, 1995) 1-898938-60-1

How to invest your life in reaching other people without giving up the day job. American, but very readable.

Jones, Merve. *The Universe Upstairs* (Frameworks, Leicester, 1991) 0-85111-315-3

A cartoon guide to world views. A brilliant and easily accessible introduction to seven key ways in which people understand the world and their place in it, based on *The Universe Next Door*.

Kellett, Arnold. *Isms and Ologies* (Epworth Press, London, 1965)

One of the many books on the market that provide a brief but helpful summary of the various religions and cults you may come across.

Law, Stephen. *The Philosophy Files* (Dolphin Paperbacks, London, 2002) 1-84255-053-5

A very readable introduction to some key philosophical questions. It is readable because it is one person's (fairly biased) view, so don't take it as representing what

philosophers all think. See especially chapters 6 (where do right and wrong come from?) and 8 (does God exist?) and try to spot the flaws in his arguments.

Legg, Steve. *The A-Z of Evangelism* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 2002) 0-340-78638-8

Subtitled, “The Ultimate Guide to Sharing Your Faith,” this book inevitably falls a little short of its promise, but it is well worth reading anyway. Steve knows what he is talking about, and shares it in an interesting and helpful way. The A-Z format doesn’t make the content terribly accessible, but just read it as a book and you will almost certainly enjoy and benefit from the experience.

Lewis, C.S. *The Problem of Pain* (Fontana 1957)

Somewhat dated, but still a classic.

Little, Paul. *How to Give Away Your Faith* (IVP, Leicester, 1971) 0-85110-354-5

Short, readable and helpful.

Mann, Alan. *Atonement for a ‘Sinless’ Society* (Paternoster, Milton Keynes, 2005) 1-84227-355-8

Not an easy read, but an important one, for people who are seeking to understand how the gospel story can be re-told – and make sense – for people living in a post-modern context.

Marsh, Clive. *Questioning Evangelism* (Grove, Nottingham, 1993) 1-85174-253-0

A theology of evangelism from a liberal perspective.

Mayo, Bob with Sara Savage and Sylvie Collins. *Ambiguous Evangelism* (SPCK, London, 2004) 0-281-05637-4

“Bob Mayo believes ambiguity is both inevitable and desirable. It is inevitable because people will often not understand what is intended when someone speaks of a Christian faith. It is desirable because if those people then become curious about Christianity they will want to explore it more deeply for themselves.”

McDowell, Josh. *Evidence that Demands a Verdict Vol. 1* (Campus Crusade for Christ, Reading, Berkshire, 1972)

This is a set of notes prepared for the author’s lecture series, “Christianity: Hoax or History?” along with some excellent guidelines on the use of apologetics in evangelism.

McDowell, Josh. *More Evidence that Demands a Verdict Vol. 2* (Campus Crusade for Christ, Arrowhead Springs, California, 1975)

More facts and quotes, this time focussing largely on establishing the intellectual credibility of evangelical approaches to the Bible, as opposed to liberal ones.

McDowell, Josh and Wilson, Bill. *He Walked Among Us* (Alpha, Cumbria, 1989) 1-89893-887-3

Provides masses of evidence for the accuracy of the Biblical record of Jesus, and the reliability of the New Testament accounts, with quotes from and references to ancient texts and modern scholarship.

Morison, Frank. *Who Moved the Stone?* (Faber, London, 1958)

Still one of the best summaries of the arguments for the historic truth of the resurrection, written by a man who did not believe it until he examined the evidence for himself.

Muhammad. *The Koran* (Phoenix, London, 1909) 1-84212-609-1

It is worth checking that your copy places the suras in their traditional order, and provides adequate footnotes as the translation and interpretation of many passages are problematic. Most Moslems will deny that the Koran can be translated, and many believe that the attempt should not be made. But that should not stop you from getting a copy and reading at least a part of it.

Polkinghorne, John. *The Way The World Is* (Triangle, London, 1992) 0-281-04597-6

Examines the central aspects of our faith from the perspective of a scientist. There is a great deal of helpful insight and comment – for example, on the relationship between Christianity and other religions. Interestingly, he demonstrates no need to deal with the question of evolution: it is not an issue for him.

Polkinghorne, John. *Quarks, Chaos and Christianity* (Triangle, London, 1994) 0-281-04779-0

Answering questions about science and religion.

Pollock, John. *The Billy Graham Story* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2003) 0-310-2512655

This is a very readable account of the life of the man who was, possibly, the best-known and best-loved evangelists of modern times.

Ruthven, Malise. *Islam: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997) 0-19-950469-5

It does what it says on the tin.

Sanders, J Oswald. *What of the Unevangelised and Effective Evangelism* (Christian Focus Publications, Fearn, Ross-shire, 1999) 1-85792-435-5

Two classic texts recently re-issued in a single volume.

Singlehurst, Laurence. *Sowing reaping keeping* (Crossway Books, Leicester, 1995) 1-85684-052-2

The best short introduction to evangelism in the market. It also provides a workable strategy for any church wanting to take evangelism seriously.

Snelling, John. *Buddhism* (Element, Shaftesbury, Dorset, 2000) 1-86204-764-2

An easily accessible introductory guide to Buddhist thought and tradition, including the main Buddhist schools.

Sookhdeo, Patrick. *A Christian's Pocket Guide to Islam* (Christian Focus Publications, Fearn, Ross-shire, 2001) 1-85792-699-4

This is a good and brief introduction to Islam.

Stannard, Russell. *Virtuopia* (Faber, London, 2003) 0-571-21700-1

A novel, probably aimed at teenagers, using the tool of virtual reality to allow people to 'play god' and discover that creating a perfect world is not as easy as some folk suggest. Easy reading, thought-provoking, and not too obviously apologetic.

- Stott, John. *The Contemporary Christian* (IVP, Leicester, 1992) 0-85110-973-X
 A monumental achievement: relating the Christian faith to the modern world, the message we bring and the way we live.
- Strobel, Lee. *The Case for a Creator* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2004) 0 310 25913 4
 Examines the scientific evidence for a creator in Physics, Astronomy, Cosmology and Biochemistry. Very readable, with a nice balance of facts and personal story and observation. Backed up with useful bibliographies and quotes from respected mainstream scientists.
- Walker, Mickey. *The Cross and the Sketchboard* (available from the author, or Operation Mobilisation)
 A wonderful resource, with evangelistic messages and object lessons – visual tools that illustrate our message.
- Warner, Graham. *The Evangelism Handbook* (Eagle, Guildford, 2000) 0-86347-368-7
 The closest approach to a complete one-volume guide I have yet found. Contains 131 evangelistic principles and 101 evangelistic ideas.
- Watson, David. *I Believe in Evangelism* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1976) 0-340-18103-6
 This book caused a sensation when first published. It is not easy reading, but well worth the effort.
- Wilson, Andrew. *Deluded by Dawkins?* (Kingsway, Eastbourne, 2007) 1-842913-55-0
 An excellent, short and readable response to ‘The God Delusion’ by Richard Dawkins. It summarises all of Dawkins arguments, and provides a polite but cogent reply to them all.
- Wimber, John with Springer, Kevin. *Power Evangelism* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1985) 0-340-38299-6
 Wimber presents a theologically grounded argument for the use of spiritual gifts in evangelism, backed up by his personal experience.
- White, Dr A J Monty. *How Old is the Earth?* (Evangelical Press, 1985) 0-85234-198-9
 A fairly typical example of the better end of creationist literature. Contains quite a bit I disagree with, but also some very interesting facts and figures. Check the details before you use them!
- Wood, The Rev. Maurice. *Your Suffering* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1958)
 Exploring the question of suffering from both a theological and a pastoral perspective.
- Wooderson, Michael. *The Church Down Our Street* (Marc, Eastbourne, 1989) 1-85424-031-5
 The story of how the author set up and ran an evangelistic team in his church, with lots of practical ideas, advice and examples.
- Wray, William. *Sayings of the Buddha* (Arcturus Publishing, London, 2005) 1-84193-209-4

An accessible introduction to the Buddha and his teaching.

Yancy, Philip. *What's So Amazing About Grace?* (Zondervan, 2002) 0-310-24565-6

Refreshing and readable, this has provided many people with a much-needed reminder of the foundation of our faith

Magazines

Discipleship

Published by the Navigators, the articles are consistently high quality and often helpful, with practical ideas and suggestions for evangelism.

New Scientist (published weekly by Reed Business Information, ISSN 0262 4079)

An excellent and readable source of news about what is happening in science. Frequent articles about the ways people are trying to patch the holes in the theory of evolution, and occasional comments on the relationship between science and religion.

The Internet

Access Research Network (www.arn.org). An excellent site, containing much of the evidence for intelligent design, along with related articles.

Apologetics Press (www.apologeticspress.org). A non-profit work dedicated to the defence of New Testament Christianity.

Evangelism Explosion (www.ee-gb.org.uk). Quite simply, the best training in personal evangelism available anywhere in the world!

Faith in 5 (faithin5.com). Some tools for using a simple five-point structure for sharing your faith.

Gitomer (www.gitomer.com). Email newsletter about business and selling. We are not selling the gospel, but there are many parallels. Jeffrey Gitomer places the emphasis on the customer, not on the salesman, and much of his wisdom and advice is very relevant and helpful.

Paul & Sue Hazelden (hazelden.org.uk). A wide range of articles, links and other resources, including:

An Interactive Gospel Message (hazelden.org.uk/ig/ig.htm). There are many creeds and confessions of faith already in existence, but most of them have been drawn up *by* Christians and *for* Christians. These links are designed to give people who are not already Christians the chance to explore what we believe and why.

I Believe the Bible (hazelden.org.uk/pt04/art_pt173_believe_bible.htm). What do we mean when we say this?

Introduction to Science and Evolution

(hazelden.org.uk/pt02/art_pt061_thoughts_on_evolution.htm). A simple but honest and robust approach to a much debated subject.

What Happens to Babies When They Die?

(hazelden.org.uk/pt01/art_pt001_what_happens_babies.htm). A difficult question,

but one we can't always avoid. Many people are pleasantly surprised by my conclusion.

What is the Fate of the Wicked?

(hazelden.org.uk/pt03/art_pt121_fate_of_wicked.htm). What sort of Hell do we believe in, and what does the Bible say on the subject?

Reachout Trust (www.reachouttrust.org). An international Christian ministry that upholds Biblical truth and builds bridges to those in the cults, occult, new age and new religious movements.

To The Source (www.tothesource.org). Articles and comment on contemporary culture. The American origin is sometimes obvious, but generally excellent quality material. They provide a weekly newsletter, which is worth subscribing to.

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