



Bible & Life

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Reaching a Changing World for Christ

by David Dunlap

Witnessing for Christ is a way of life. By virtue of the fact that one is a Christian, one is a witness for Christ. I may or may not be a good witness, but nevertheless I am one. Jesus said, "...you will be witnesses unto me..." (Acts. 1:8). Our witnessing is important. We can have a considerable impact on those who do not know Christ. The question is not when to witness or where to witness? If we are Christians we are witnesses. But how can we become more effective communicators of the gospel? Knowing the truth is essential for an effective witness. "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). We live in a day of methods. By and large our evangelism has become method centered. Many have attended seminars on better methods of evangelism. Yet at the same time the church has become weaker in its understanding of the content of the message, and in her ability to communicate it. We have forgotten that the New Testament defines "to evangelize" as "to tell/declare/announce good news." Therefore, "News", by the very meaning of the word means content. Any presentation to the unsaved must have Bible-based content.

1. GOD—THE HOLY AND LOVING CREATOR: We can't assume that people today have a proper concept of God. We must make them see that He has an absolute claim on their lives. The concept that we want to drive home is God's ownership of each one of us. We should speak of a sovereign Creator who brought all things into being out of nothing, creating and sustaining us of His own will so that we are dependent on Him for everything (Genesis 1-2, Acts 17:25, Psalms 100:3). From this foundation come the two great pillars of His Being—light and love. Light speaks of God's majesty, truth, and holiness (1 John 1:5, 1 Timothy 6:15-16). But our God is also a God of love. Out of His love He created us in His image so that we could have fellowship with Him.

2. MAN—THE SINFUL CREATURE: Man disobeyed God and willfully rebelled. The Bible calls this sin. We must both define sin and state its consequences to a lost world. Sin is comprised of two parts: first, it is the attitude that I am my own god and therefore try to live as if God did not exist. Romans 1:21 portrays this attitude when it defines sin as not worshipping God. We thereby deny all that God has revealed to us about Himself. Second, sin is rebelling against God—breaking His law. Using the Ten Commandments in evangelism helps people feel the guilt of sin, and creates a desire for the forgiveness found in Christ alone. (See: Romans 3:12, James 2:10, Jeremiah 17:9) The consequences of sin is death. The Bible speaks of death as separation of the spiritual and physical. These two elements, when joined together comprise the essence of life. Physical death is separation from the body. The symptoms of disease and physical suffering in life

***“Lord, make
me a crisis
man. Bring
those I contact
to decision. Let
me not be a
signpost on a
single road;
make me a fork
in the road,
that men must
turn one way
or another in
facing Christ
in me.”***

Jim Elliot
(1927-1956)

indicates that physical death is near. Spiritual death is separation from God for eternity. Symptoms that one is experiencing this type of death is: hatred, war, alienation, purposelessness, guilt, and despair.

3. CHRIST—THE MERCIFUL REDEEMER: When you read the Old Testament, you see clearly that Jesus Christ came to fulfill three roles: prophet, priest and king. Evangelism over the last 100 years has tended to speak merely of His role as Savior. This has led many people to make superficial “decisions for Christ.” We must present Christ in all three roles—His perfect life, sacrificial death, and His victorious resurrection: As Prophet, He revealed God through His teaching and life (Deut. 18:15-19, John 1:14-18, 7:16-24). His perfect life qualified Him to be our substitutionary sacrifice. The Priest represented the people to God. We must present the cross not simply as a vague demonstration of God’s love, but as the place in history where, in the death of His Son, God dealt with the sins of the whole world. God is still just and holy, yet loves us through Christ, Who bore our sins (1 Pet. 2:24, Heb. 7:27, 10:10). We must speak of His office as King. The New Testament refers to Jesus Christ as “Savior” 24 times but calls Him “Lord” 694 times—more than 28 times for every reference as “Savior.” All who will have Jesus as Savior must, after salvation, also have Christ as their King. Jesus Christ now lives to rule His people in love and truth (Mt. 25:24, Acts 2:3-36, Rev. 5).

4. OUR NECESSARY RESPONSE FOR SALVATION: Since man’s only hope is to be saved through the finished work of Christ, how can man come to know Christ as Savior? We must urge the unsaved to acknowledge with their mind and heart that they stand guilty before God and deserve His judgement. They must acknowledge their rebellion against Him and turn from it, trusting in Christ's redemptive work. They must realize that they can do nothing to make themselves acceptable to God. We then invite them to trust in Christ and rest in Him as Savior (John 1:12, 3:16, Eph. 2:8-9).

5. KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER: *Use your Bible:* Have the person read the text himself, and have him explain to you his understanding of its meaning. Many times this has been a turning point in the presentation of the gospel. It prevents tangents and arguments, and confronts them with the God’s final authority. *Memorize Scripture:* Memorize verses and their references so that you can give the appropriate portion of God's Word to that person. *Pray:* Our message may seem foolish to the non-Christian, but if we really believe that only the Holy Spirit can make them respond, we will pray—before, during, and after our presentation of Christ to the sinner. *Communicate:* Communicate absolute biblical concepts clearly so that the person does not read his or her own ideas into them. Be careful to explain that you are speaking about absolute truth, not just your opinion. Your message should be faithful to the Word of God in content and emphasis. But be encouraged: God did not commission tape recorders to evangelize so He could have the “perfect message.” You will make mistakes. But if you seek to be faithful to God and His message, He will teach you on the job.

6. WORK HARD AND KEEP AT IT: “Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Galatians 6:9). Many Christians give up too quickly at gospel work. They go out a few times and knock on a few doors during a weekend. When a few contacts are made, they tell themselves, “This isn't for me. I'm just not cut out for it.” No one is cut out for it: it's hard work! Satan will fight it at every turn. Keep at it, keep praying, scattering seed, and God will give the increase.

**“There is a
common
worldly kind of
Christianity in
this day, which
many have—a
cheap
Christianity
which offends
no one, and
requires no
sacrifice, and
costs nothing,
and is worth
nothing.”**

J. C. Ryle
(1816-1900)

7. BE AUTHORITATIVE: They said of Jesus, “He taught them as One that had authority, and not as the scribes” (Mark 1:22). A witness must be authoritative, but not arrogant. Some Christians witness with almost an apologetic manner. Generally this approach does not see many results. The unsaved will not have confidence in a message that is given in an unsure, indecisive manner. They need a “Thus saith the Lord.” Speak boldly—speak confidently—speak authoritatively.

8. LEAVE THE DOOR OPEN: If the person being witnessed to is not receptive, don't push. If the person makes smart remarks, never give an unkind remark in return. This can damage all the progress you have had thus far, or bar opportunities others may have in the future. Never argue. “The servant of the Lord must not strive” (2 Timothy 2:24). You may win an argument, but lose a soul for Christ. If a witnessing situation is beginning to heat up, stop! Apologize. Let the person know you don't want to argue, and that you are sorry for anything you might have said or done to be offensive. If the gospel is offensive, so be it. But if I'm offensive, that must be corrected.

9. DON'T USE DIFFICULT THEOLOGICAL TERMS: A witness must learn to think as the unsaved think. Put yourself in their shoes. Many have heard the term “born again” but don't know what it means. To talk about “propitiation” and “justification” may only confuse the issue. They will understand terms like “sin,” “forgiveness,” “heaven,” “hell,” and “judgment.” Keep it simple.

10. LEARN TO GIVE INVITATIONS: Truth not only informs but transforms. Many people will take up the offer when it is given. Learn to give people the opportunity to respond. Don't manipulate or force decisions, but do give the unsaved a chance to say yes to God. You never know the heart. An individual may be bursting with conviction inside without any indication or outward emotion. After you have explained the gospel and answered objections and questions, you might want to simply say, “Would you like to receive Christ tonight?” The biblical pattern is to call men and women to response after presenting the gospel. Paul said, “We...preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God” (Acts 14:15). Peter said, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19).

11. AVOID DETOURS: Don't get off on a tangent. If Satan can't defeat you, he'll try a detour. If a person asks a question that may be a detour, suggest that you first finish presenting the plan of salvation and then you will answer the question. Don't get into discussion about the doctrine of other churches, or the errors of prominent television preachers, Bible translations, etc. The main thing is that the main thing remains the main thing: presenting the gospel.

12. PRESENT THE ISSUE OF SIN: We must clearly and boldly press the issue of sin in their lives (Romans 6:23). We should present the love, grace and mercy of God, but we must present the judgment and consequences of sin. This is the biblical method. Note Peter preaching, “Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life.” (Acts 3:14-15).

“The preaching of the gospel must come with the understanding the messenger will not be popular and that he will be called to stand where Jesus stood before the world: to be admired by many, loved by a few, and rejected by the vast majority.”

A. W. Tozer
(1897-1963)



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13. GIVE A PERSONAL TESTIMONY: Learn how to give a brief yet clear account of how you were saved. Emphasize your need of salvation because of sin, and the change in your life afterward. You may want to open the conversation by saying, "May I tell you the most amazing thing that ever happened to me?" After a brief account, you can say, "I found it so wonderful to know that all my sins were forgiven and that I'm going to heaven, I had to tell others about it." Afterwards you can add, "Do you know for sure you are going to heaven?" "Can I tell you how you can be sure?"

14. USE THE WORD OF GOD: In answering the temptations of Satan in the wilderness, Christ used the Scriptures. In the preaching of the apostles in the book of Acts, the Old Testament was used. Jeremiah says, "Is not My word like a fire? saith the Lord; and like hammer that breaks the rock in pieces" (Jeremiah 23:29)

Many have used established methods of presenting God's salvation plan with great success. One of the best known is called "The Romans Road"—3:10; 3:23; 5:8; 6:23; 10:9. Many use this outline but add variations. It's good to have an outline to keep you on track; then other verses can be added to suit the individual's need.

One fatal mistake is to be accusative: "You need to know that you are a sinner." They will usually become defensive rather than receptive. Instead, have them read, "There is none righteous, no, not one" (3:10); "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (3:23). Then say, "We've all sinned, haven't we?" More will admit being a sinner when we include ourselves. Otherwise, they conclude that we think that we're holier than they, and unfairly judgmental.

Use illustrations for emphasis and explanation. For example, one way to illustrate the nature of sin: "Suppose we had a ten-gallon jug of pure water and someone poured a cup of poison into it. Would you drink it? Of course not. Sin is like poison. One small amount will pollute us, making us unclean and unfit for heaven."

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