

# EVANGELISM

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## **EVANGELISM**

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## **THANK YOU**

I believe in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15), and I believe in the “Perpetual Commission” (2 Timothy 2:2). I am grateful to the elders of the Point Pleasant church of Christ for the opportunity to teach and the parents of the teenagers who desire their children to be life-long faithful members of the Lord’s church. While these lessons were designed for the high school Bible class, the principles are applicable to all Christians, young and old. I pray that you will be encouraged in your work in the Lord’s kingdom.

Additional study materials are available, free of charge, at [www.ConcerningJesus.com](http://www.ConcerningJesus.com).

# THE GOSPEL PLAN OF SALVATION

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“What must I do to be saved?” How would you answer that question? If you are engaged in a spiritual discussion with a close friend, and they ask this question, do you know what to say? This is the most important question any person could ever ask, but it is not a question that someone is going to ask out of the blue.

When the question is asked in the New Testament, it is because people are motivated to ask. On the Day of Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2, the apostles are speaking in languages they have never studied. Peter tells the crowd that they are witnessing the fulfillment of prophecy! Joel had foretold the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, and the wonders and signs and the coming salvation. Peter says, “But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel!” He then talked about Jesus, and how David pointed to Jesus, and how they had crucified Jesus. Peter declared, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” The Jews listening to Peter “were cut to the heart,” and they asked him the most important question ever: “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

Acts 9 tells of Saul of Tarsus, who was traveling to Damascus on a religious mission: he was going to identify followers of “the Way” and bring them bound back to Jerusalem. Along the way, something happened. A bright light from heaven caused him to fall to the ground, and he heard the voice of the Lord ask, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” Saul realized that he had been on the wrong path and asked, “Lord, what do You want me to do?”

Saul of Tarsus became Paul the apostle, and is known for his evangelistic efforts among the Gentile world. Luke writes in Acts 16 about Paul and his teaching companion Silas getting arrested in Philippi. They were in the jail, singing and praying, when an earthquake hit. All the chains fell from all the prisoners, and they were free to go! When the jailer realized this, he drew his sword to take his own life. But Paul called out and prevented him, saying, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.” The jailer, trembling, asked Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

Three very different situations, all leading someone to ask the most important question. What’s the answer?

The answer is one that all Christians should memorize. We are commanded by the inspired apostle Peter, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15). Do you know the answer to the question, “What must I do to be saved?”

- 1) Hear (Romans 10:17)
- 2) Believe (Mark 16:16)
- 3) Confess (Acts 8:37)
- 4) Repent (Acts 3:19)
- 5) Be Baptized (Acts 2:38)
- 6) Be Faithful (Revelation 2:10)

Many Scriptures can be used in place of the ones listed. You might see different wording, or some may put repentance before confession, but the answer is generally the same. Even if you do not memorize the text of each verse, at least memorize the reference so you can find it quickly. It is not our aim to share our opinions on the matter of salvation, but to point honest hearts to what the Scriptures reveal.

## Discussion and Action

1. Will everyone respond in a positive way? What are some of the objections your religious friends may have to this answer?
2. Memorize the six steps of the gospel plan of salvation and where you can find Scriptures for each step.
3. Take an index card and write the names of three non-Christian friends. Include them in your daily prayers, and look for opportunities to turn your discussions with them to spiritual matters.

# WHAT IS EVANGELISM?

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Sometimes we use a lot of big words in a religious context. Benevolence, edification, sanctification, justification, propitiation. We often hear the word “evangelism,” but what does it mean?

An evangelist is simply “a bringer of good news.” The gospel is the good news of Christ, thus the evangelist is one who brings the gospel. In fact, “evangelist” and “gospel” come from the same root Greek word: εὐαγγελίζω.

The command to evangelize following Christ’s resurrection was first given to His closest followers. He told His disciples, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Matthew’s goes into a little more detail. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20).

The form of the verb “go” in these verses would be better translated, “as you are going.” The early disciples were expected to spread the good news of Jesus Christ as they went about their business. At work, at school, at home...preach it, and make disciples. As you make disciples, baptize them. Then continue teaching. The job is not done when someone gets in the water; it has only just begun! Teach them to observe ALL things commanded by the Master. You know what that includes? The command to go and make disciples!

We generally think of the preacher as THE evangelist, but the Scriptures reveal a much different picture. Paul wrote to the young preacher Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:5, “But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” So certainly, the preacher does bear some responsibility in the work of evangelism. But is evangelism the job of the preacher alone?

The book of Acts is a history of the early church, specifically the work of Peter and Paul in conversion. In Acts 8, we are told that the church was being heavily persecuted following the stoning of Stephen. Luke writes, “At that time, a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles” (Acts 8:1). Skip down just a few verses and we read, “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4).

The apostles were the first ones given the commission to go everywhere preaching. But in Acts 8, the apostles stayed in Jerusalem while “those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” Evangelism was not considered an apostolic duty exclusively in the first century, and it should not be considered the preacher’s duty exclusively in the twenty-first century!

The apostles were the original recipients of the Great Commission; Christians today are under the “Perpetual Commission.” Paul wrote, “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2).

## Discussion and Action

1. How would you define evangelism?
2. Who is generally seen as “THE evangelist” in the church today? Is this good or bad?
3. Who should be an evangelist?
4. Recite the six steps of the gospel plan of salvation and where you can find Scriptures for each step.
5. Memorize the text of one of the verses for the gospel plan of salvation.
6. Remember the index card with the names of three non-Christian friends? Did you have a chance to talk to them about Jesus? Keep praying for them looking for opportunities to discuss spiritual matters with them.

# PREPARE YOURSELF

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1 Peter 3:15 says, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” We need to be prepared to answer questions, but there is another way in which we must prepare ourselves.

Our behavior is important when we consider our influence on others. The Scriptures say, “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:13-16).

If you act like a fool with no hope, if you are disobedient yourself to the Bible, and if you live as the world lives, why should anyone listen to what you say about Jesus? If He doesn’t impact *your* life, why would you think that He would impact someone else’s?

We need to be a positive influence on the people we come into contact with. Classmates, co-workers, neighbors, friends, even the person taking your order at the fast food joint. Don’t you have good news? The best news ever? Don’t you have a reason to smile and rejoice?

Jesus said, “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16).

What did Jesus do for you? Doesn’t that make you ecstatic? Shouldn’t that make you glow with His love? “A city that is set on a hill CANNOT be hidden.” God has exalted you, His child, and His love should shine so brightly it blinds everyone around you! DON’T TRY TO DIM IT! Don’t put it under a basket; put it on a lampstand! Let everyone see the light! Let everyone glorify the Father! Let everyone experience His love!

It does not matter how young you are. If you have experienced the saving blood of Jesus, you let your light shine! “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12). Don’t give anyone a reason to say a single bad word about you.

Be an example in word. “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29). Don’t be telling dirty jokes or cursing. Use your words to encourage others in the church. It doesn’t cost a penny to give someone a compliment.

Be an example in conduct. Recall what Peter wrote about obedience and holiness. Our character should reflect Christ.

Be an example in love. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. Can you substitute your name for the word “love” in that passage and it still ring true? Are you patient, kind, humble, and selfless?

Be an example in spirit. Paul said in Philippians 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” Our attitude is so important when we consider evangelism. If you’re always angry, or present a “woe is me” disposition, it will be difficult for people to take you seriously when you give them the good news of Christ.

Be an example in faith. Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He has saved you, and that salvation is available to all? Show it! “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Romans 1:16). Believe it? Show it!

Be an example in purity. This is so difficult in the twenty-first century, but we must do our very best to avoid sinful situations that will not only compromise our influence but also endanger our eternal souls! How do we do this? Inspiration does not leave us guessing! “Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22). Replace the bad (youthful lusts) with the good (righteousness). Surround yourself with people who want to go to heaven, and who want you to go to heaven with them!

How does this all relate to evangelism?

“Everyone hates hypocrisy. Once someone believes you to be preaching one thing and practicing another, all hope for a receptive ear will vanish. You will be tuned out and completely minimized. For you to be a natural evangelist, you need to align your hidden behaviors with your public message. Of course, you are not going to be perfect. You will sin and make mistakes, but blatant hypocrisy will be detrimental to God using you in His mission” (Matthew W. Morine, *Natural Evangelism*, p. 18).

## Discussion and Action

1. How has your behavior affected another person’s perception of the church?
2. Identify your strengths and weaknesses of your example as it relates to 1 Timothy 4:12, and make a plan to improve your weaknesses.
3. Recite the six steps of the gospel plan of salvation and where you can find Scriptures for each step.
4. Memorize the text of another verse in the gospel plan of salvation.
5. Take out your index card of three friends. Add two more names to the list. Keep praying for them looking for opportunities to discuss spiritual matters with them.



# IDENTIFY PROSPECTS

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No one likes to waste time. The sad fact of the matter is this: most people will reject the truth. Jesus said, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are **many** who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are **few** who find it” (Matthew 7:13-14). Despite this fact, we still bear the responsibility of taking the gospel to those around us.

Our duty is to obey God without regard to how people respond. You never know how a kind word or deed will impact a person, and in fact, you may never see that impact. Paul and Apollos worked together in spreading the gospel; Paul said, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:6).

“Perhaps many of you have heard the story of the gospel preacher who a number of years ago held a meeting in a country school. He thought the meeting was a failure because during the meeting only one little freckled faced girl obeyed the gospel. This little girl grew up and married and reared five boys and all of them because gospel preachers—the Dunn brothers—who have led many people to the Lord through their faithful preaching of the Word of God” (Otis Gatewood, *You Can Do Personal Work*, p. 177)

We must scatter the seed. Jesus tells the parable of the sower in Luke 8:5-15. The sower was not concerned with the quality of the soil; the Scriptures simply state that he “went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside...Some fell on rock...And some fell among thorns...But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold.” What’s the lesson? Wherever you are, whoever you’re with, spread the seed.

We can then start to identify prospects by seeing how others react to the Word. Jesus identifies four types of soil in this parable.

First, “the wayside.” The seed there “was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it” (Luke 8:5). He later explains that the wayside represents people “who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved” (8:12). These are the non-believers. Remember that the seed must be sown before we write anyone off. What is the first step in the plan of salvation? Hear! Without first hearing the message, there is no possibility for belief (Romans 10:17). Once they have heard it, if they reject it, then they are in “the wayside.”

Next, the “rock.” The seed, “as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture” (Luke 8:6). There are going to be people who will gladly listen to what you have to say, but they don’t allow roots to develop, “and in time of temptation fall away” (8:13). Mark’s parallel account sheds more light on the “temptation” under consideration. Mark quotes the Master Teacher as saying, “Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word’s sake, immediately they stumble” (Mark 4:17). Some may expect the Christian life to be easy, but one must make painful sacrifices and face trials in this life (Matthew 16:24-26; 2 Timothy 3:12). Despite the pain we may experience in this life, there is joy that rests in the hope of everlasting life (Mark 10:29-30).

Third in the parable, the “thorns” which “sprang up with (the seed) and choked it” (Luke 8:7). Jesus says, “Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go

out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity” (8:14). Does the evangelist bear any responsibility in this? Possibly. Consider in the Great Commission recorded by Matthew, Jesus said to “make disciples...baptizing them...teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). We need to make disciples and baptize, but keep on teaching after they put on Christ! Some will find the draw of the world too strong, and their desires for the temporary pleasures of sin will outweigh their desire for God. This is possibly what happened to Demas, who forsook Paul because he “loved this present world” (2 Timothy 4:10). The distractions of this world are many, and we must be on guard against materialism (1 Timothy 6:6-10). Still, the church must make an effort to keep the saved saved.

Finally, the “good ground,” in which the seed “sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold” (Luke 8:8). “But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience” (8:15). They will hear, believe, confess, repent, be baptized, and be faithful. Can we predict who these individuals will be among our friends? Sometimes, maybe. However, we must be cautious that we do not pre-judge and present the gospel to only those who *we* think are “good ground.” Until that seed is sown, we do not *know* how someone will respond! Sow as you go, wherever you go!

## Discussion and Action

1. Have you noticed any of these attitudes in your friends when you talk about spiritual things? What are some of the negative reactions you have had to the gospel? What are some of the positive?
2. Identify types of “times of temptation” or persecutions that can cause a person to fall away.
3. What about the “cares, riches, and pleasures of life” that choke out the truth?
4. Recite the six steps of the gospel plan of salvation and where you can find Scriptures for each step.
5. Memorize the text of another verse in the gospel plan of salvation.
6. You should have five names on your index card. Have you talked to them about the gospel? Are you still praying for them? Don’t ever give up!

# GET INVOLVED...NO EXCUSES!

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All too often, people make excuses to avoid doing the Lord's work. We need to take an honest evaluation of our own personal involvement in the work of evangelism and be sure we are not using excuses to neglect our duties.

One of the greatest examples of excuse-giving is presented in Exodus chapters 3 and 4 when God called Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. We can learn a lot from God's responses to Moses.

God called Moses' attention to the suffering of the Hebrew slaves, saying, "'Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt'" (Exodus 3:9-10). How did Moses react to God's call? Did he feel honored that God had chosen him to be the one to deliver the people? "But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?'" (Exodus 3:11).

Inspiration reveals that Moses was a humble man, "more than all men who were on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3). If this was the only objection Moses offered, perhaps we could view it simply as him not seeing himself worthy of this opportunity. As we continue to examine these events, though, we see that it is not humility that prevents Moses from accepting the task immediately.

God's response to the first excuse is found in Exodus 3:12: "So He said, 'I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.'" Didn't Christ say the same thing when He commissioned the apostles in Matthew 28? "'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen" (Matthew 28:19-20). When God commands us to do something, He expects us to obey, but He is not going to turn His back on us in the process. Moses, go to Pharaoh! Christian, go into all the world!

"Then Moses said to God, 'Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?'" (Exodus 3:13). Moses is basically saying that he doesn't know enough about God to answer the Israelites' questions about Him. But God reassures His prophet, "And God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And He said, 'Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14).

God tells His prophet, "You don't know the answer? I'll tell you!" We need to accept the fact that God's "divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). Anything that you *need* to know has been revealed by inspiration! "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Is evangelism a good work? Yes! Guess what? God has given us the Scriptures to equip us to evangelize!

“Then Moses answered and said, ‘But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, “The Lord has not appeared to you.”’” (Exodus 4:1). God promised to perform signs through Moses to encourage belief: turning his rod into a snake (4:2-5), turning his hand leprous and restoring it (4:6-8), and turning water into blood (4:9).

Moses demonstrates a fear of rejection, and that is a legitimate fear that we must face still today. Many of the people we talk to about the gospel will not believe. But we do have evidence for the veracity of the gospel, and we have the signs recorded in the Scriptures. “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30-31). Faith comes through hearing the Word (Romans 10:17); let us do our part in spreading that Word!

Jesus recognized that some would not accept the truth. He told the twelve when He sent them out initially, “And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet” (Matthew 10:14). If they don’t want to hear it, take it to someone else who does. There are people in the world that want to know the truth; the Lord needs His people to take the truth to them.

“Then Moses said to the Lord, ‘O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since you have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue’” (Exodus 4:10). I don’t have the ability to do what you are asking me to do, God. “So the Lord said to him, ‘Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say’” (Exodus 4:11-12).

There is a saying that God does not call the qualified, but He qualifies the called. All Christians are called to share their faith, and through His Word all Christians are qualified to do just that! It is not our ability that will convert a lost soul to Christ, but the power of God that resides in His gospel (Romans 1:16). Paul wrote, “And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

Moses’ final appeal is found in Exodus 4:13: “But he said, ‘O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send.’” In essence, Moses is saying flat-out, “I don’t want to do this. Pick someone else.” What is God’s reaction to this request? “So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses” (Exodus 4:14). God will accomplish His will, with our help or without it. When the Jewish race was threatened in the book of Esther, Mordecai told the queen, “For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14).

Do we want to make God angry? He has commanded us, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Will we accept Jesus’ command, or will we perish in rebellion? There are people in your life right now who need the blood of Jesus. It is your responsibility to share with them the good news of Christ’s love.

## Discussion and Action

1. Which of Moses' excuses do you believe is most common among members of the Lord's church and why?
2. Which excuse have you used in the past, and what can you do to overcome it?
3. Recite the six steps of the gospel plan of salvation and where you can find Scriptures for each step.
4. Memorize the text of another verse in the gospel plan of salvation.
5. Review the five names on your index card. Have you used any excuses to avoid talking to them? What opportunities have you taken advantage of this week to share the Scriptures with them? Keep praying, keep shining your light.

We have discussed the gospel plan of salvation, the definition of evangelism, the importance of righteous living, the extent to which we should scatter seed and thereby identify prospects, and God's responses to common excuses we might make to avoid teaching others. Now that we have some of these things set in our minds, let us look at what to do when we find that good and honest heart that is searching for the truth.

There are numerous systems of teaching within the brotherhood. Ivan Stewart's "Open Bible Study," which became popular in the 1970s, is still a good tool that Christians can use in teaching their neighbors. There are a handful of lessons with mostly "yes" or "no" questions. Brother Stewart published a book entitled *Go Ye Means Go Me* that is very useful in helping one with the "Open Bible Study" system.

A newer workbook was designed by Stephen Rogers of Evansville, Indiana. The student workbook is called *The Gospel Made Simple*, and the teacher's textbook is *Evangelism Made Simple*. His materials are mostly fill-in-the-blank and the topics are thoroughly discussed.

Another tool that many have used successfully is *Muscle and a Shovel* by Michael Shank. This is a recounting of brother Shank's conversion in 1988; he was led to the truth by conversations with a co-worker in Nashville. It is not only a tool for converts, but also for evangelists. The attitude of the teacher in the book, Randall, is one that should be emulated by those hoping to reach and teach others.

These are only a few of the tools that can be used by Christians in the work of evangelism today. But here's the thing—they are only *tools*. The authority for all things comes from Jesus Christ and the revelation of the Holy Spirit in the written Word. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). When we talk to our friends about spiritual matters, if we have nothing but the Bible at our disposal, we have all we truly need. All the programs mentioned above—as good as they may be—are merely tools used to learn what the Bible teaches.

Inviting friends to worship with us is good, but it is usually not enough. We must be willing to talk to them about the Lord, and to do that we should have a basic understanding of the authority of Scriptures, the power of God, the deity of Christ, the gospel plan of salvation. We need to use this understanding to engage with the good soil in spiritual discussions. Those who have been receptive to the seed, keep watering.

Consider the example of the apostle Paul. He did not travel around the known world inviting folks to worship services. He went to where they were and started conversations with them based on their knowledge and understanding. In Acts 16, Luke writes about the conversion of Lydia, a woman who woman who "worshiped God." (Acts 16:14) Notice how Paul and his traveling companions came into contact with her: "And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there" (Acts 16:13). They went to where spiritually-minded people were gathered!

Even in Athens, a city overrun with pagan idolatry, Paul started with the same approach. "Now while waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the

city was given over to idols. Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there” (Acts 17:16-17). Nearly everywhere Paul went, he started with the people at the synagogue, or where worshipers were gathered. When the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers heard his preaching about Jesus, they decided to take him to the Areopagus, “(f)or all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing” (Acts 17:21).

Paul used his surroundings to build a lesson, pointing to one of the altars there. “Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you’” (Acts 17:22-23).

These people were not Christians, but they were religious. They were interested. And Paul used that interest to teach about Jesus. What was the result? “And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, ‘We will hear you again on this matter.’ So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them” (Acts 17:32-34). Despite their pagan background, they had good and honest hearts and believed the truth when it was taught. We never know how someone might respond until they are given the chance to hear and believe.

Will talking about Christ cause awkwardness at times? How did Felix feel when Paul talked to him? “But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of the Way, he adjourned the proceedings and said, ‘When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case.’ So he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and let him have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him. And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, ‘Go away now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.’” (Acts 24:22-25).

When Paul spoke before Festus and Agrippa, how did they respond? “Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, ‘Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!’ But he said, ‘I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe.’ Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘You almost persuade me to become a Christian’” (Acts 26:24-28).

Their response was not what Paul wanted, but he had no way of knowing how they would react without first presenting the truth. Notice, however, that he did not anger them with his teaching. In fact, they lamented that he was a prisoner, as he had done “nothing deserving of death or chains” (Acts 26:31).

When we teach others about Christ, let us strive to do so gently. Pray that you can lead someone to understand and obey, but even if their response is not immediately favorable, let us not burn bridges and prevent further influence and teaching.

## Discussion and Action

1. We often invite friends to worship services instead of trying to set up a private study. Essentially, while Christ tells us to “go,” we tell our friends to “come.” Do we have it backwards?
2. Are you familiar with any formal Bible study tools other than those mentioned in this lesson?
3. How might you interest a friend in a private study in your home?
4. Recite the six steps of the gospel plan of salvation and where you can find Scriptures for each step.
5. Memorize the text of another verse in the gospel plan of salvation.
6. You have identified five people over whom you have some influence that need the gospel. Over the past month and a half, how have you engaged them in spiritual discussion? Has there been any positive response?



# KEEP GOING!

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Your friend said he wasn't interested in hearing about religion. He doesn't need Jesus; he's happy in his denomination; he thinks, "We're all going to heaven, just taking different paths." We don't like rejection, but rejection is a part of evangelism. Does that mean we should give up?

"And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Galatians 6:9). As we discussed in our examination of the parable of the sower, our job is to scatter that seed. We cannot force someone to accept the truth, nor can we force them to even listen to it. However, we must take seriously our role as sowers, realizing there are many who will ignore the gospel but praying for those who will obey.

Jesus prayed for the people who would believe. He prayed for His apostles, then said, "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:20-21). If Jesus prayed for prospective converts, shouldn't we do the same?

We need to be watchful for opportunities to share God's love, even with those who have resisted it in the past. One who may not initially be aware of his need for the Lord can change his mind over time. A major event in life may disrupt a friend's status quo, and that could be a perfect opportunity to get him to think seriously about Jesus. His invitation is always open: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

Our attitude is extremely important in evangelism. Some people are very fluent in sarcasm, but we need to recognize there are situations that call for seriousness. If we never show that we can be serious, our friends will never confide in us when they are struggling. They don't want to be mocked, but comforted.

"Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers....Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:29,31-32). This applies to social media (written word) as much as the spoken word. When hateful, spite-filled memes dominate your profile, serious conversations will be difficult to come by. Kindness trumps bitterness.

"Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:1-2). Brother Kerry Williams asks a very thought-provoking question: "If we should approach a weak brother in such a way, how much more should we approach unbelievers with gentleness?" (Kerry W. Williams, *Fishers of Teens*, p. 37).

Consider how Aquila and Priscilla dealt with Apollos, and how he responded. "Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures,

came to Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 18:24-28).

Did Aquila and Priscilla stand up and interrupt Apollos? Did they shout him down? No! The Scriptures say that “they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.” There is an implication of gentleness. They didn’t want to embarrass him or diminish his zeal one bit. They simply wanted him to have the full story so he could lead others to the truth.

You likely have friends that are passionate about their religion. They may be involved in their church and active in service. Perhaps you can find an opportunity to take them aside and study the truth more deeply. Invite them over for dinner with your family. Highlight the areas wherein you agree...don’t diminish the fact that they do believe that Jesus is the Son of God! Encourage them to keep developing that faith through a study of the Word, and explore what His Word says about obedience, specifically the gospel plan of salvation. “Explain the way of God more accurately”...“in a spirit of gentleness.”

Why is it important for us to do this? Paul writes, “And to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

“Do you have a lost friend? Do you intend to try and talk to that person about Jesus? If not, then maybe you should ask yourself one final question. What kind of friend am I?” (Kerry W. Williams, *Fishers of Teens*, p. 39).

## Discussion and Action

1. What is going to happen to those who do not know and do not obey the gospel? Who is going to teach your friends if you don’t?
2. Can you think of opportunities that you have neglected? Learn from those missed opportunities and grab hold of them next time!
3. Keep working on memorizing the gospel plan of salvation and the verses that go along with each step.
4. This class is over, but don’t forget about the five names you wrote down. Will you be a true friend and teach them about the Lord?

# RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

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