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Honest Evangelism by Rico Tice

Discussion Guide

Foreword by D.A. Carson

1. The author identifies some of the current cultural trends in Western society:

- Rising biblical illiteracy
- Honor is considered old-fashioned
- Truth is flexible (relativism)
- Cruelty and vengeance are often glorified

Worth noting: Christians are not the only ones who feel alienated in this world. Society is increasingly fragmented, and many people feel isolated and alone.

2. The author also identifies some of the negative views toward Christianity in a secular society:

- Christians are intellectually inferior (superstitious)
- Christians are narrow minded
- Christians are intolerant of other religions
- Christians are hate-filled bigots who should be ignored, and perhaps suppressed

3. The Western Church may have earned some of those criticisms:

- Charismatic *extremes* are often identified as the “Christian” religion (superstitious)
- Gay hate speech often comes from so called “Christians” (narrow minded and intolerant)
- Christianity claims that Jesus is the *only* way of salvation (exclusive)

Worth noting: We should recognize that not all self-proclaimed Christians *are* Christians. And not all self-proclaimed churches *are* churches. Much of the hostility isn’t actually aimed at Christians and Christianity; a lot if it is aimed at false religions that have associated themselves with Christianity. However, there is rising hostility toward the ideal of absolute morality (a.k.a. absolute truth)—which is a core belief of the Christian faith.

4. The author identifies the encouraging side effects of increasing hostility toward Christianity:

- The percentage of nominal Christians is declining
- The percentage of Christians with conviction is gently increasing
- The church will grow stronger because it will be comprised of stronger Christians

Worth noting: The truth can be received in one of two polarizing ways: a life-giving aroma or the stench of death (2 Cor. 2:15, 16).

Summary: Many people harbor hostility toward Christianity. As hostility has increased in the West, the number of nominal Christians has declined; but the number of strong Christians is gently increasing. In a culture of deceit, the truth is either a “life giving aroma” or the “stench of death” (2 Cor. 2:15, 16).

Introduction

1. The author relates the Parable of the Lost Sheep to evangelism:
 - There is great joy and rejoicing (on earth and in heaven!) when one sinner repents
2. Ultimately, there is one Being responsible for the salvation of lost souls:
 - God is the great evangelist, the great seeker and finder of people

That is a huge relief for us:

- A person's salvation does not depend on us—it depends on God

But that doesn't excuse us from personal evangelism:

- God uses believers (us) to bring non-believers to faith
- If we don't respond to God's call—to evangelize and make disciples—then we are resisting the will of God
- Spiritual growth requires an ever-increasing level of obedience

Summary: There is no greater joy on earth than to see a sinner repent and follow Jesus. Ultimately, God is the great seeker and finder of people—not us. We share our faith because God calls us to share our faith. If we don't obey God's call, then we will miss the opportunity to participate in His work, and our spiritual life will stagnate.

Chapter 1: Two halves of the story

1. There are some freeing messages attached to the gospel:
 - You don't have to prove yourself
 - You will never be good enough, and you will never need to be good enough
 - Christ has accomplished the decisive victory on our behalf
2. There are also some messages in the gospel that could be considered offensive:
 - Jesus is the only way to know God (exclusive)
 - The cross is the only way of salvation (exclusive and gruesome)
 - Everyone will be judged with finality
3. The author makes three guarantees regarding our efforts to share our faith:
 - We are going to get hurt
 - It's going to sever some relationships
 - It's going to provoke people
4. The author uses a phrase to describe the "tipping point" of sharing our faith:
 - He calls the tipping point of sharing our faith the "painline"
 - He calls it the "painline" because it represents a point of awkwardness and uncomfortability—it's a point where we don't know what the response is going to be

5. The author lists three good reasons for crossing the painline:

- We have an answer to death
- We have an answer to sin (human suffering)
- We have an answer to the meaning and purpose of life

“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves.” —[Matthew 10:6](#)

6. The author relates evangelism to the Parable of the Tenants (Mark 12:1-5), and draws some significant comparisons between that situation and our present situation:

- The “vineyard” is the world; the “tenants” are the people of this world; and the “messengers” are believers sharing the message of Christ (evangelists)
- As a fallen race (i.e. the tenants), we naturally resent God because we desire self-governance
- As a fallen race, we hate gospel messengers because the messengers expose our sinfulness

Worth noting: Without a new nature, we also would find the message of the gospel foolish and even offensive. We need to expect what Jesus tells us to expect—hostility toward the gospel and its messengers.

“And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” —[1 Corinthians 2:1-5](#)

7. The apostle Paul was excellent at reasoning, but he relied on something else for effective ministry:

- Instead of relying on his ability to reason, he relied on the power of the Holy Spirit

8. As we think about evangelism, 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 is important to understand:

- Our reasoning and persuasiveness mean nothing without the power of the Holy Spirit—evangelism is about *God’s power* not *our influence*

9. When we cross the painline, we will likely encounter two responses:

- Hostility and hunger

Worth noting: If we are unwilling to cross the painline then we’ll never encounter hunger for the gospel.

Summary: In the gospel, we have the answer to some of life’s most challenging questions. The gospel certainly contains offensive messages—at times it *will* provoke hostility. But we have to “cross the painline” in order to encounter hunger for the message of the gospel. Our best efforts and most persuasive qualities are meaningless without the power of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 2: Is it worth it?

1. We tend to view our faith in a negative light:

- Like going to the dentist—necessary but undesirable

There are reasons we tend to view evangelism this way:

- We haven’t experienced the joy of participating in a person’s conversion
- Our understanding of evangelism is inferior—i.e. our expectations of God are too low

2. Three truths have helped motivate the author to continue sharing his faith:

- The glory of Jesus
- The guarantee of new creation
- The grim reality of death and hell

“To hallow his name is to be overwhelmed by the sweetness of his sacrifice.” *—pg. 27*

“He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.” *—Isaiah 53:5*

3. Considering the immense sufferings of Jesus on our behalf, we should certainly experience a heartfelt response:

- A deep sense of gratitude

There is a reason we often lack this deep sense of gratitude toward Christ:

- We are spiritually distant from Him

“The closer I got to him, the more integrity I saw.” *—pg. 28*

“The closer you get to Jesus—the more you read of him in the Bible and see him at work in your life—the more glory you will see, and the more you will long for him to be treated as he deserves.” *—pg. 28*

“If only our eyes were opened to see his glory, and if only we felt wounded by the shame of his public humiliation among men, we should not be able to remain silent. Rather would we echo the apostles’ words [in Acts 4:20]: “we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” *—John Stott, pg. 30*

Worth noting: If the glory of Christ isn’t motivating us to cross the painline, then we aren’t seeing the glory of Christ as we should. “But let’s pray that the Lord will keep us from apathy about his name.” *—pg. 31*

4. In the Bible, we find two recurring themes as we read about our eternity with God:

- 1. Unmatched intimacy—the bride goes to her bridegroom
- 2. Complete security—a pain-free, peaceful, and perfect environment

Worth noting: We need to spend time meditating on the promise of eternity with God, and how spectacular that will be. If we are truly excited about our eternal destiny, then we’ll have a genuine motive for sharing our faith with others—we’ll want them to experience that same sense of joy.

5. Eternal life is a positive message attached to the gospel; but there are also negative messages attached to the gospel:

- The grim reality of death and hell

6. According to Scripture, people end up in hell for a very specific reason:

- According to Scripture, the inhabitants of hell *deserve* hell because they *reject* Jesus

“...you’ve got to decide whether those shark signs are there to save you or ruin your fun. You’re of age—you decide.” *—pg. 38*

--The following is an excerpt from John Piper--

<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-willingly-do-people-go-to-hell>

In this excerpt, Piper is responding to the idea that some people might actually prefer hell over heaven.

“When there are only two choices, and you choose against one, it does not mean that you want the other, if you are ignorant of the outcome of both. Unbelieving people know neither God nor hell. This ignorance is not innocent. Apart from regenerating grace, all people ‘suppress the truth in unrighteousness’ (Romans 1:18).”

“The person who rejects God does not know the real horrors of hell. This may be because he does not believe hell exists, or it may be because he convinces himself that it would be tolerably preferable to heaven.”

“But whatever he believes or does not believe, when he chooses against God, he is wrong about God *and* about hell. He is not, at that point, preferring the *real* hell over the real God. He is blind to both. He does not perceive the true glories of God, and he does not perceive the true horrors of hell.”

“...what sinners want is not hell but [their] sin. ...hell is the inevitable consequence of unforgiven sin [but that] does not make the consequence desirable. [Hell] is not what people want—certainly not what they ‘most want.’ Wanting sin is no more equal to wanting hell than wanting chocolate is equal to wanting obesity. Or wanting cigarettes is equal to wanting cancer.”

--End of excerpt--

Worth noting: People choose hell when they reject Christ. They don’t *want* hell, but they don’t realize that hell is the only alternative to Jesus Christ. A natural question to follow is this: “What about people who have died without hearing the gospel?” In Romans 1:20, Paul answers that troubling question: “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they [all of mankind] are without excuse.” Conclusion: No one is judged by what they *do not* know. We are judged by what we *do* know. Paul says that creation itself convinces mankind of God’s existence. So, the denial of God is a conscious rejection of Him—as is disobedience. God judges people only by the knowledge they possess. If a person dies without hearing the gospel, they will be judged by the understanding of God that they *do* have.

“I’ve always said that I don’t respect people who don’t proselytize [share their faith]. I don’t respect that at all. If you believe that there’s a heaven and a hell, and people could be going to hell and not getting eternal life, and you think that it’s not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward... how much do you have to hate somebody not to proselytize? ... I mean, if I believed, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that a truck was bearing down on you, there is a certain point where I tackle you. And this is more important than that.” *—Penn Jillette, pg. 38*

7. Many of us live as functional atheists:

- Those who believe the gospel message, but live as if they don’t actually believe it

“My willingness to tell people about the gospel is a test of my love for them.” *—pg. 39*

Summary: Sharing our faith is a privilege, but we tend to view it as an obligation. We need to learn to view evangelism as a privilege. There are tangible ways to encourage that attitude: (1) to meditate on the sacrifice that Christ made for us, (2) to grow closer to Christ through greater obedience to His word,

and (3) to meditate on the realities of heaven and hell. As we prioritize those three things, we also need to focus on repenting of functional atheism—living like we don’t actually believe what we say we believe.

Chapter 3: Why we (still) won’t evangelise

“There has to be something in our hearts that we make the most important thing in life, and to which we sacrifice other things to have or keep [that most important thing]. If that something isn’t God, then it’s an idol. Idols can be good things that God gave us to enjoy; the problem comes when we elevate them to divine status—when we love them more, and feel that we need them more, than him.” —pg. 42

“Money, reputation, power, career, family, and so on—these are all good things that we can turn into ‘god things’. Our hearts get kidnapped.” —pg. 43

“And the seed that fell among the thorns stands for those who hear [God’s Word], but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.” —Luke 8:14

1. The author uses an analogy to describe the way we often treat God:

- We treat God as a *divine waiter*. We call him when we want him, we tip him when the collection plate is passed, and we get mad at Him when we feel that He hasn’t delivered. —pg. 43

Worth noting: The reason we choose not to share our faith is because we are serving a greater desire—an idol. Only when we find our identity, assurance, purpose, and satisfaction *in Him* will we cease to serve our idols.

2. The author lists four questions we can ask to help identify the idols in our lives:

- What do I daydream about (what are my future aspirations)?
- What do I have nightmares about (what do I fear losing)?
- What do I pray about (is there something *I want* more than *God wants* for me?)
- What do we feel that we need to have established *before* we can start serving God to our fullest capability?

“... but unless I have identified and am uprooting the idols of my heart, I still won’t actually get across that painline and tell people about Jesus. And neither will you.” —pg. 45

“For years, I thought the reason why I hadn’t spoken to my grandmother was a lack of love (it was), but I had no idea that the idol of family approval drove that lack of love. To see this idol for the first time was sobering and shaming; but it also meant I could move forwards.” —pg. 45

“Whoever does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.” —Luke 14:26

Worth noting: Once we can name our idols, and see them working, we can confess them, and ask others to pray for us, and keep us alerted to them.

“If we’re going to share Christ, we need first to love Christ! We need to ask the Spirit to go to work in our hearts with the gospel, so that we’ll love Christ more and more, and he’ll displace our idols; and so when we talk about what we love, we’ll be talking about him.” —pg. 46

Summary: Idolatry is the root cause of our disobedience. We don't share our faith because something else is more important to us. We need to constantly identify and root-out these idols. Only by constantly repenting of our idols will we serve Christ in an ever-increasing capacity—which includes sharing our faith. (See *Experiencing Faith* and *Personalizing Scripture* for more on spiritual growth.)

Chapter 4: What must I remember?

1. In 2 Corinthians 5:20, Paul describes a shared responsibility of every believer:
 - Every believer is an “ambassador” of Christ
2. The author cites a primary indicator of a “category two” Christian (a non-flourishing Christian):
 - A non-flourishing Christian is one who always remains on the safe side of the painline
3. The author lists three truths that can motivate us to cross the painline:
 - God's sovereignty
 - God's Grace
 - God's Power
4. If we understand and reflect upon God's sovereignty, it can motivate us to share our faith:
 - We know that God has orchestrated our lives as well as our interactions with other people
 - God brings us into contact with specific people so they can hear the gospel (ambassadors)
 - As we share our faith, we know that God is presently at work through our obedience (assurance)
5. As a result of God's grace, we have been adopted into God's family—we are His children. That reality can motivate us to share our faith:
 - We recognize that our acceptance in God's family has nothing to do with whether we share our faith or not—God will never relinquish our acceptance into His eternal family.
6. By God's power men are saved. That knowledge can embolden us to share our faith:
 - An individual's salvation does not rest on our shoulders. Our role, as ambassadors, is to pray for the lost and share the gospel with them—and leave the rest to God.

Summary: If we understand that *every* believer is an ambassador of Christ, we will also understand that it is *our* responsibility (and privilege) to share the gospel with others. Our reluctance to share the gospel can be overcome if we learn to rely on God's sovereignty, grace, and power.

Chapter 5: What do I say?

1. The author shares one of the most fruitful ways to engage other people:
 - Listening to them
 - We should learn to ask good questions and display genuine interest in the lives of other people
2. The author cites a crucial component which authenticates our Christian witness:
 - The way we live our lives
3. How can our lifestyle influence our ability to share our faith:
 - If we're living a life of service, we'll be able to invite others to serve alongside us
 - When skeptics encounter genuine Christian compassion, it often creates fertile soil

4. If we are growing in our faith, then we can simply begin verbalizing our Christian experience. The author uses two phrases to illustrate that practice:

- Chatting our faith
- Asking pain-line questions

“By chatting our faith, what I mean is that we need to make Christianity an everyday, natural part of our conversations with people.” —pg. 61

“By raising an aspect of your faith in conversation—even if that conversation then moves on to other subjects—you have shown the person you’re speaking to that Christian faith is [1] relevant to real life, [2] that it’s important to your life, [3] and that you’re open to them asking you about it.” —pg. 61, 62

“Second, though, I have discovered that I need to come up with a ‘pain-line question’ for people I want to talk to about Christ.” —pg. 62

5. We tend to view hunger as positive and hostility as negative. However, hostility is not necessarily a negative response:

- Even if our effort to share our faith is met with hostility, the friendship can remain intact
- Many times, people need to be bothered by something before they will seriously address it

6. We should always be prepared to give an answer for the hope that lives within us. As we share our faith, our main objective is stated in 2 Corinthians 4:5...

- Our goal is to proclaim Christ

7. The author remembers three words to ensure he clearly and comprehensively proclaims the message of Christ?

- **Identity**—who Jesus is (i.e. the *person* of Christ)
- **Mission**—why He came (i.e. the *work* of Christ)
- **Call**—what He calls us to do

“[Recognize that the individual] ...is a person, not a project, so that [we] talk about Jesus relationally and lovingly.” —pg. 64

“In a sense, then, evangelism is a journey of gospel chatting. It’s a dialogue, rather than a download.” —pg. 64

“Each aspect of the gospel requires us to cross the pain-line.” —pg. 71

Identity: Jesus is the Christ—a human, and God; our King.

Mission: Jesus came to die to take our punishment and remove our guilt so that we can be part of his eternal kingdom, now and beyond death, enjoying life with him forever.

Call: Jesus calls us to follow him as our king. This is hard, but infinitely and eternally worth it. —pg. 71

“Evangelism is not about saying everything, or saying it eloquently. But it is about saying enough.” —pg. 72

Summary: We cannot learn to speak about Christ *naturally* if we are not closely walking with Him on a day to day basis. Sharing our faith is not a one-time download of information; it’s often a recurring dialogue. Even if our efforts are rejected, a meaningful friendship can remain intact—and we don’t know

what God will do with the seeds we've sown. "Evangelism is not about saying everything, or saying it eloquently. But it is about saying enough."

Critical Questions:

1. How can we learn to share our faith in a natural way?
 - Be growing spiritually
 - Practice verbalizing our ongoing experience (see *Personalizing Scripture* and *Experiencing Faith*)
2. How can we prepare ourselves to communicate the fullness of the gospel if an opportunity arises?
 - Practice sharing our testimony while incorporating the three major themes of the gospel: the *identity* of Jesus, the *mission* of Jesus, and the *call* of Jesus

Chapter 6: Be yourself

"It was [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up."

—Ephesians 4:11

1. The author distinguishes between evangelism and those possessing the *gift* of evangelism:
 - Evangelism is for everyone—i.e. we are *all* called to share our faith with non-believers
 - However, those possessing the gift of evangelism are called by Christ to *enable believers* to share their faith with increasing boldness, joy, and clarity
2. Three key components of evangelism have been covered up to this point:
 - Why we should do it—Christ calls us to share our faith (obedience)
 - What to expect—hostility and hunger
 - What to say—who Jesus is (identity), why he came (mission), what that means to us (call)
3. As we think about evangelism, we often have self-criticizing thoughts. For example:
 - We don't possess the qualities of a good evangelist
 - We're not confident, outgoing, or good at answering questions

"If you're going to take the gospel out to people, you've got to be yourself." —pg. 75

"God knows who you are, and he knows what he was doing when he made you. He gave you particular skills, temperament, intellect, fears, likes and dislikes. We are all different, and we are all wired to serve God in a unique way." —pg. 75

"You don't get a free pass out of evangelism because God didn't make you to be an evangelist." —pg. 76

4. The author uses four biblical examples to describe differing styles of evangelism:
 - Peter, Paul, the ex-blind man, and the woman at the well
5. Peter's evangelistic style:
 - Peter was confrontational

“Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs... and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross... Be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.” —Acts 2:22-23, 36

“...some people will never come to Christ until someone has really confronted them.” —pg. 77

The author cites some cautions surrounding the confrontational style of evangelism:

- Individuals with using this style should pray for wisdom and sensitivity
- Don't assume everyone needs to be confronted or that it's the only way to approach evangelism

6. Paul's evangelistic style:

- Paul had an intellectual approach

“Paul's approach was thoughtful, connected, logical and reasoned. He presented the gospel clearly to people. He defined it and he defended it. His was the kind of make-up that could sit down and write (or dictate) the book of Romans, that great, complex explanation and defense of the gospel.” —pg. 78

The author has some recommendations for those who favor an intellectual approach:

- Use resources to become very familiar with Christian apologetics
- Learn to listen well, think well, and point to Christ in a logical and considered way

7. The ex-blind man's style of evangelism:

- The ex-blind man had a testimonial approach

When the Pharisees try to lead the ex-blind man into a debate about whether Jesus is a sinner, he responds very intentionally:

- He refuses to engage the debate, but instead speaks of what he knows

“Whether he [Jesus] is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”

—John 9:25

When the Pharisees, again, try to lead him into debate, he responds the same way:

- He points, once more, to his own experience, and then finishes with a pain-line question

“I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do want to become his disciples too?”

“A lot of people won't respond to confrontation or argument—they're not wired that way. But they will be struck by an authentic change in someone's life and by someone speaking of that change.” —pg. 79

The author lists three good questions to ask when forming our testimony:

- (1) What was I like before? (2) What did Christ do for me? (3) What difference does he make?

If we came to know Christ very early in life, then we may want to focus on the following three questions:

- (1) Why is my faith significant for how I view my present and future? (2) How did I grow in this relationship? (3) What do the cross and resurrection mean to me now?

The author shares some helpful suggestions with regard to sharing our testimony:

- We should practice sharing it in order to become familiar with it, and to make sure it's clear
- We want people to be struck by the way we talk about *Jesus*, not ourselves

8. The style of evangelism of the woman at the well:

- The woman at the well told others to *come and see*—she was invitational

“The woman went back to the town and said to the people, ‘Come see a man who told me everything I’ve ever done. Could this be the Messiah?’” —[John 4:28-29](#)

The author shares some ideas surrounding the invitational evangelistic style:

- Organize events that incorporate non-Christians into the Christian community
- Invite someone to a Christian event with you
- Invite people to attend church with you
- Invite people into your home
- Invite someone to study the Bible with you

9. The author stresses one final emphasis in this chapter in regard to effective of evangelism:

- Ultimately, the church is a crucial component of evangelism
- Individually, we are narrow beams of torchlight; together we are “a lighthouse: a great, wide beam of gospel light, illuminating the surrounding darkness.” —[pg. 83](#)

“One of the most forgotten, most crucial words of the Christian life is ‘together’.” —[pg. 82](#)

“Stand firm in one spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel.” —[Philippians 1:27](#)

“God has placed the parts of the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.” —[1 Cor. 12:18](#)

The author shares two short-sighted views concerning the church, and then he shares a more complete view:

- (Incomplete view) The church is simply our *campaign headquarters*, where we go for direction
- (Incomplete view) The church is our *field hospital*, the place we go to get bandaged up
- (More complete view) The church is a *loving community* of Christian brothers and sisters
- Emphasis: Our faithfulness to God and each other is a powerful validation of the gospel message

“Indeed, [the church] is God’s intended medium for his message. There is a sense in which witnessing to Christ can only happen if it is happening corporately—together.” —[pg. 83](#)

“The local church cannot evangelise, proclaiming the gospel of love, if it is not itself a community of love.” —[John Stott, in the book Our Guilty Silence](#)

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” —[John 13:35](#)

Summary: Christ calls every Christian to share their faith. God has endowed each of us with unique personalities and experiences, which means that we’ll each share our faith differently—but we have to do it! Maybe we favor one of the four styles covered in this chapter: Peter (confrontational), Paul (intellectual), the ex-blind man (testimonial), or the woman at the well (invitational). It’s very likely that our approach to sharing our faith will vary depending on each person and each circumstance. In any case, it would be foolish for us to try reaching the lost apart from the local church. We need to practice sharing our faith in order to embrace our personal style of evangelism—and also to learn when it’s appropriate for us to move from one approach to another.

Important Question: What practical steps can we take to begin sharing our faith?

Assignment: Share your testimony with one person (it can be anyone) before we meet next week.

Chapter 7: Getting started (or re-started)

“The content of our Christian witness never changes. But the context of our witness does.” —pg. 85

1. In 1994, the author encountered four significant roadblocks in the United Kingdom that prevented people from exploring Christianity:

- Christianity is weird
- Christianity is untrue
- Christianity is irrelevant
- Christianity is intolerant

2. According to the author, something specific needed to happen in order for those obstacles to be overcome:

- People actually needed to meet Christians in person
- In that context, people were introduced to changed lives, genuine love for others, and answers to their intellectual issues

3. According to the author, the attitude toward Christianity in the U.K. has changed:

“Today, just over twenty years later, people are on a totally different road. John Stott said, not long before he died, that our culture is defined by tolerance and permissiveness. Culturally, we’re such a long way from biblical Christianity that people don’t object to faith having engaged with it; they simply dismiss it. Jesus simply isn’t on the agenda; he isn’t even an option to be considered. People hardly ever think about why they don’t agree with your beliefs; and if they ever do, they put it in the ‘it’s fine for you, but it’s not for me’ box in their head. The culture is teaching people not to consider Christianity even when life goes wrong, or when there seems no point to anything, or when a loved one dies.”

—pg. 87

4. That development in the U.K. is important for us to consider here in the U.S. because...

- Historically, cultural developments in Europe tend to drift into the United States over a span of about two decades

5. Is the current cultural climate in the U.S. closer to the 1994 description of the U.K. or the present description of the U.K.?

- It largely depends on the region
- Liberal hotbeds (e.g. university campuses, metropolitan areas, etc.) tend to be closer to the present description of the U.K.
- However, there is still a vast population of U.S. citizens who were raised in a “religious/Christian” environment—and this demographic is more likely to engage in a faith-based conversation without immediately dismissing the ideas

Worth noting: Although many people in the U.S. have a “Christian” background, they often lack a *biblical* understanding of Christianity.

6. According to the author, the prior observations need to influence our present approach to sharing our faith:

“First, witnessing takes time and effort. The days when you could go from zero to gospel in a single conversation are not the norm...” —pg. 87, 88

“Witnessing is a long-term commitment to invest in a relationship, to pray tirelessly, and to speak the gospel over and over again, patiently and persistently. It is a journey of gospel conversations. It really takes effort.” *–pg. 88*

“Second, it takes *you*. It’s harder and harder to take people to hear the Bible taught; you need to take the Bible to them. People who would never consider stepping into a church will feel far less threatened reading and talking about the Bible with a friend.” *–pg. 88*

6. One-to-one evangelism has always been extremely important:

“Because it takes account of the truths that evangelism takes time, and evangelism takes friendship. The great benefit is that it enables us to meet people where they are at (both geographically and spiritually), rather than expecting them to come to where we are.” *–pg. 89*

“Your friends won’t open the Bible with Rico-the-pastor, and why should they—they don’t know me, they don’t trust me. But they do know you—they’ll open up to you. And it’s flexible: it can happen at a time and place that’s convenient and non-threatening.” *–pg. 89*

7. A one-to-one approach to evangelism is often very intimidating to us:

“You’re no longer saying: *Come and listen to an expert at my church*. You’re saying: *Sit and chat about the Bible with me*.” *–pg. 89*

“...you’re needing to commit your time and energy, as well as risk being vulnerable.” *–pg. 89*

“We aren’t all called to be Bible teachers; but we can all be Bible sharers. And in the culture we live in, we will need to be.” *–pg. 89* (Read the author’s anecdote about sharing the Bible on page 92)

Worth noting: The methods of one-to-one Bible sharing are numerous. It’s important for us to *personally* explore them, and find one that we’re comfortable with.

8. According to the author, four qualities are necessary for effectively sharing our faith?

- Character—are we personally growing in our faith?
- Conviction—do we really believe in the sovereignty, grace, and power of God?
- Competence—practice, practice, practice... if we don’t practice then we’re just making excuses.
- Courage—are we willing to face rejection and mockery in order to proclaim Jesus as our Savior?

Summary: Sharing our faith requires a deep level of personal commitment and vulnerability. Today, most people aren’t interested in listening to a third party talk about Jesus—but they will likely to listen to someone that they know and can relate to. We need to approach evangelism in a very personal and relational way. In today’s social climate, a one-to-one approach is very important. Faith has nothing to do with our ingenuity or personality; faith requires the power and movement of God.

Inviting people to read the Bible with us is a very non-threatening yet powerful way to share our faith. It brings people into contact with the Spirit of God through the Word of God. Are we willing to be vulnerable and share our faith in very personal ways? Are we willing to share our faith with someone as a long-term, relational commitment—as opposed to a one-time delivery of the gospel? Faithful evangelism will require both of those components—vulnerability and long term, relational commitment.

Chapter 8: Two things to do

“When he [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” —*Matthew 9:36*

“The whole life of man until he is converted to Christ is a ruinous labyrinth of wanderings, harassed and helpless.” —*John Calvin, pg. 96*

“How do we see those around us, and how do we react to those around us? Do we see their success, their possessions, their confidence, all the things that are impressive? Or do we see that, deep down, they are harassed and helpless, wandering in a ruinous labyrinth that exists only into death? And do we react to people with compassion that will give everything and risk everything to bring them to their Shepherd?” —*pg. 97*

“Let me never fancy that I have zeal until my heart overflows with love to every human being.”
—*Henry Martyn, pg. 97*

1. These quotes emphasize two significant viewpoints:

- Without Christ, every person is harassed and helpless—like sheep without a Shepherd
- We need to fully embrace that view and cultivate a compassion for the lost

2. One of our priorities should be...

- Praying for lost souls

3. There are specific ways we can pray for lost souls:

- We can pray for an increasing compassion in our hearts for lost individuals
- We can pray for an increasing zeal to proclaim the gospel and see the lost find their Shepherd
- We can pray for more workers (including ourselves) who will willingly work the harvest by proclaiming the light of the gospel in a dark and dying world

4. In addition to prayer, we have another important priority:

- To personally go, and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to lost souls

5. There are many areas, in each of our lives, where the harvest is plentiful:

- Our workplace; our neighborhood; our clubs; our social groups; etc.

6. There are two thoughts that will help orient our thinking as we contemplate the work of the harvest:

“First, there is a Lord of the harvest, and it’s not you. This does not depend on you—it’s the Lord’s work, and he invites you to have the privilege of being part of it. And second, Jesus tells us the harvest is plentiful. So we can expect real hunger in the corner of the harvest field in which we’ve been placed, even if it’s not immediately obvious to us.” —*pg. 100*

7. The author lists two important questions that we need to ask ourselves in regard to evangelism:

- Are we available?
- Are we ready and willing to take risks and share our faith?

8. And the author lists three final reminders or us:

- There will be hunger as well as hostility.
- Jesus Christ is glorious; the new creation is wonderful; death and hell are real.
- God is sovereign; he is gracious; and he is powerful.

Summary: In reality, every lost soul is harassed and helpless—the lost are like sheep without a Shepherd. We need to see lost individuals from that vantage point no matter what their earthly circumstances may be. Jesus Christ is the Lord of the harvest—not us. We need to approach His throne of grace, and ask Him for the same compassion and zeal that He has for lost souls. We need to be prepared and available for the work of the harvest—the work of guiding lost souls to their Shepherd.

Question: Practically, how can we be prepared to proclaim the gospel of Jesus in any and every circumstance?

Answer: By embracing and practicing a model of *Relational Evangelism*.

Relational Evangelism

Know Your Purpose

What is our purpose? And why is that our purpose?

What: Our purpose is to fully proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who are lost.

Why: First, we can't be assured of our love for Jesus if we don't obey His commands. We cannot say that our faith is genuine without real evidence that our faith is influencing our actions. We are known by our fruit. That's our self-centered reason for sharing our faith—our hunger for personal assurance. Second, we can't claim to love people if we aren't trying to lead them to Jesus—the only source of salvation. Love is an action, and not merely a desire. If we truly love a person, then we will do whatever it takes to guide them to eternal security. We share our faith for personal assurance; and we share our faith for the joy of rescuing a lost sinner from the snares of death.

Critical purpose questions: Do we actually have a genuine desire to save lost souls? Are we personally engaged in a process of spiritual growth—i.e. are we conforming our lives to the Word of God and experiencing results? (See *Experiencing Faith* and *Personalizing Scripture*)

Understand that Timing Matters

When do we share?

Listening is a crucial component of sharing our faith. People don't care what we know until they know that we care. Often, it is important for us to wait. We need to show a genuine interest in the lives of other people. Listening is crucial. In a sense, we earn the right to be heard by hearing the other person. If we establish an ongoing relationship with a person, then the opportunities to share our faith will be numerous. There will still be a painline to cross, but that painline moment will have been preceded by a history of genuine sympathy and compassion. We listen first—which will communicate that we really do care for the individual. Then, when our genuine affection for them has been clearly displayed, we share our message of hope.

Critical timing question: Are we willing to patiently persist, and communicate a genuine love for the other person?

Understand that Method Matters

How do we share?

We covered four distinct approaches. Most likely, our interaction will be a combination of these approaches—and possibly every single one of them. (1) Peter was confrontational. He laid out the truth clearly and plainly—and made a direct call for repentance. (2) Paul used reason. He articulated the gospel in a comprehensive and compelling manner. And after he made his presentation, he called the listener(s) to embrace the truth. (3) The ex-blind man shared his personal testimony. He explained the transformation that he had experienced firsthand. And he followed his testimony with an inquiry: "Do you want to become his disciples also?" (4) The woman at the well was invitational. She invited those around her to come and see the man Jesus for themselves. Similarly, our invitation to others is to come and experience the power of Jesus through the Word of God and a loving Christian community.

Have a Simple Method of Evaluation

How do we know that we've fully proclaimed the gospel?

- Have we clearly communicated *who Jesus is*?
- Have we clearly communicated *what Jesus did*?
- Have we clearly communicated *how this impacts the way we live our lives*?

If we can answer yes to all three questions, then we can affirm that we have fully proclaimed the message of Jesus.

Final Notes: Jesus is Lord of the harvest, not us. We have to embrace a long-term, relational approach to sharing our faith. We need to pray, pray, and pray some more—and invite others to pray alongside us. The work of evangelism is never over. There is never a point when we can dust off our hands and say that's it—I've done all I can do. Have we counted the cost of following Jesus? Are we in this for the long-haul? Our resounding answer to that question should be... yes!

Chapter Review

Social Climate *(Foreword)*

Many people harbor hostility toward Christianity. As hostility has increased in the West, the number of nominal Christians has declined; but the number of strong Christians is gently increasing. In a culture of deceit, the truth is either a “life giving aroma” or the “stench of death” (2 Cor. 2:15, 16).

Purpose for Sharing Our Faith *(Introduction)*

There is no greater joy on earth than to see a sinner repent and follow Jesus. Ultimately, God is the great seeker and finder of people—not us. We share our faith because God calls us to share our faith. If we don’t obey God’s call, then we will miss the opportunity to participate in His work, and our spiritual life will stagnate.

What to Expect when Sharing Our Faith *(Chapter 1: Two halves of the story)*

In the gospel, we have the answer to some of life’s most challenging questions. But the gospel certainly contains offensive messages, and sharing it will sometimes incur hostility. However, we have to “cross the painline” in order to encounter hunger for the message of the gospel. Our best efforts and most persuasive qualities are meaningless without the power of the Holy Spirit.

Cultivating a Desire to Share Our Faith *(Chapter 2: Is it worth it?)*

Sharing our faith is a privilege, but we tend to view it as an obligation. We need to learn to view evangelism as a privilege. There are tangible ways to encourage that attitude: (1) to meditate on the sacrifice that Christ made for us, (2) to grow closer to Christ through greater obedience to His word, and (3) to meditate on the realities of heaven and hell. As we prioritize those three things, we also need to focus on repenting of functional atheism—living like we don’t actually believe what we say we believe.

Our Greatest Obstacle *{Chapter 3: Why we (still) won’t evangelise}*

Idolatry is the root cause of our disobedience. We don’t share our faith because something else is more important to us. We need to constantly identify and root-out these idols. Only by constantly repenting of our idols, will we serve Christ in an ever-increasing capacity—which includes sharing our faith. (See personalizing Scripture)

Remembering God’s Nature & God’s Promises *(Chapter 4: What must I remember?)*

If we understand that every believer is an ambassador of Christ, we will also understand that it is *our* responsibility (and privilege) to share the gospel with others. Our reluctance to share the gospel can be overcome if we learn to embrace God’s sovereignty, grace, and power.

Sharing Our Testimony *(Chapter 5: What do I say?)*

We cannot learn to speak about Christ *naturally* if we are not closely walking with Him on day to day basis. Sharing our faith is not a one-time download of information; it’s often a recurring dialogue. Even if our efforts are rejected, a meaningful friendship can remain intact—and we don’t know what God is

going to do with the seeds we've sown. "Evangelism is not about saying everything, or saying it eloquently. But it is about saying enough."

Finding Our Style (Chapter 6: *Be yourself*)

Christ calls every Christian to share their faith. God has endowed each of us with unique personalities and experiences, which means that we'll each share our faith differently—but we have to do it! Maybe we favor one of the four styles covered in this chapter: Peter (confrontational), Paul (intellectual), the ex-blind man (testimonial), or the woman at the well (invitational). It's very likely that our approach to sharing our faith will vary depending on each person and each circumstance. In any case, it would be foolish for us to try reaching the lost apart from the local church. We need to practice sharing our faith in order to embrace our personal style of evangelism—and also to learn when it's appropriate for us to move from one approach to another.

Be Personal; Think Long-term {Chapter 7: *Getting started (or re-started)*}

Sharing our faith requires a deep level of personal commitment and vulnerability. Today, most people aren't interested in listening to a third party talk about Jesus—but they will likely to listen to someone that they know and can relate to. We need to approach evangelism in a very personal and relational way. In today's social climate, a one-to-one approach is very important. Faith has nothing to do with our ingenuity or personality; faith requires the power and movement of God.

Inviting people to read the Bible with us is a very non-threatening yet powerful way to share our faith. It brings people into contact with the Spirit of God through the Word of God. Are we willing to be vulnerable and share our faith in very personal ways? Are we willing to share our faith with someone as a long-term, relational commitment—as opposed to a one-time delivery of the gospel? Faithful evangelism will require both of those components—vulnerability and long term, relational commitment.

Be Prepared; Be Available (Chapter 8: *Two things to do*)

In reality, every lost soul is harassed and helpless—the lost are like sheep without a Shepherd. We need to see lost individuals from that vantage point no matter what their earthly circumstances may be. Jesus Christ is the Lord of the harvest—not us. We need to approach His throne of grace, and ask Him for the same compassion and zeal that He has for lost souls. We need to be *prepared* and *available* for the work of the harvest—the work of guiding lost souls to their Shepherd.

Getting Practical

- 1) In this group, we'll have a chance to share our testimony. And we're also going to learn how to share the gospel within our testimony.
- 2) Name three people in your life (Christian or non-Christian) who haven't heard you talk specifically about your faith? Will you commit to sharing your testimony with at least one of those people by the end of this course?
- 3) As a group, we are committed to praying for the lost—that they might receive the gospel of Jesus Christ. Name one lost person with whom you'd like to share your faith. As a group, we are committed to praying for those individuals. *(Only ask for first names or pseudonyms. Keep a list of these names and periodically pray for them as a group.)*
- 4) As a group, we are also committed to keeping each other informed about our evangelistic struggles and successes—both for encouragement and *positive* accountability. Positive accountability encourages small steps in the right direction, celebrates progress, and never disparages shortcomings.
- 5) One way we'll implement positive accountability is by asking some pointed questions. For example: Would anyone like to share how they have recently applied what we're learning? Did you think or act any differently in your relationships? Did you have a chance to share your faith with anyone? How did they respond? *(After chapter 5, open each session with those kinds of questions.)*

(Ask the group: Do these practical suggestions make you nervous? Are they acceptable? Do we need to add or subtract from them?)

Experiencing Faith

1. Illumination & Renewal

We experience *illumination* when the Holy Spirit “enlightens our minds” so that we “understand spiritual truths” (read 1 Corinthians 2:9-16). A spiritual truth originates with the Word of God—whether it’s read or heard. It is possible to rationally or intellectually understand the meaning of God’s Word without experiencing illumination. Only when God’s Word impacts us at a soul-level do we experience the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. When these same truths impact us again and again it’s called *renewal* (read Romans 12:2; Titus 3:5). God’s Word is not only the instrument that brings us to faith, but God’s Word is also the primary instrument for growing our faith (see *Characteristics of Scripture*).

2. Transformation (*progressive sanctification*)

Transformation involves the gradual restructuring of our thoughts, attitudes, and actions. Once we have received the free gift of salvation, we begin to follow a new master (read Romans 6). Instead of following our own selfish ambitions we begin to follow Jesus. As we apply the Word of God to our lives, over time, we begin to notice changes in our thoughts, attitudes, and actions. The way we relate to people, God, and circumstances continues to evolve. We become more and more like Jesus Christ as our faith is tested and we persevere—i.e. as we continue to follow Jesus in the midst of our daily obstacles. The greatest sign of transformation is an increasing love and concern for other people.

Transformation is not a glamorous experience. Most often, it is a slow and painful process. We all pass through seasons of spiritual dryness and even waywardness. However, if those symptoms are constant and unchanging then we need to examine some fundamental issues: (1) Do we understand the gospel? And, (2) are we growing in obedience to the Word of God? See *Defining the Gospel* and *Personalizing Scripture* for more on those subjects. If the fundamental ingredients are present (knowledge and obedience) then transformation (i.e. spiritual growth) is happening—even if we don’t presently sense it happening. Growth is often realized in retrospect—i.e. as we look back over our experience.

3. Confirmation

We experience *confirmation* when the Holy Spirit affirms our spirit on a personal level. The apostle Paul explicitly refers to this experience on at least two occasions. Romans 8:16: “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (NIV). Romans 9:1: “I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit” (NIV). As we walk in obedience to God, there might be moments when the Holy Spirit *confirms* or *testifies* to the righteousness of our actions. Confirmation should not be confused with patting ourselves on the back for a deed well done.

Confirmation from the Holy Spirit transcends our own personal desires—and it often contradicts them. For example: We can make a sacrifice purely from a sense of obligation—we obey because we think we *need to* not because we actually *want to*. In those circumstances, the Holy Spirit may confirm our decision by giving us a sense of peace regarding our decision. Christian martyrs have expressed this sense of peace when deciding between Christ and freedom. They hated sitting in a prison cell and being cut off from their families, but the Holy Spirit *confirmed* their decision—and they experienced an inner sense of peace regarding the decision. Our experience may not be quite as dramatic, but the dynamic is the same—we make a hard decision and the Holy Spirit comforts and affirms us.

4. Praise (*transcendence*)

Praise occurs when our knowledge of God evokes a sense of worship. The word *transcendence* means “beyond the ordinary.” When we consider *who God is* and *what He’s done*— these considerations (which are beyond the ordinary) often inspire a deep sense of awe and wonder at the greatness or transcendence of God. That internal sense of praise can be expressed externally (e.g. verbal praise, music, dancing, etc.). Praise can be triggered in many different contexts. We might praise God as we observe the intricacies of nature, or as we contemplate the mind-bending reality His infinitude, or as we meditate on the depth and richness of His love for us—and the list continues.

Praise is not something that only Christians experience. For example: An atheist can look at the stars and be inspired to praise their beauty. But when a theist (someone who believes in God) is inspired by the stars, it’s a very different experience. For believers, there is an acute awareness of the intelligence behind the beauty. Theists associate the awe-inspiring handiwork of creation with an intelligent and powerful Being. An atheist finds virtue in the object itself, but a theist recognizes the beauty of nature echoes the majesty, power, and creativity of its Creator.

Now, Christianity is distinct from other theistic religions—we have the truth of the gospel. Christians recognize the following: God (the one true Creator of all things) sent His Son to earth as a man, to die for our sins, so that we could be united with God forever. A higher knowledge of God evokes a deeper sense of praise. As followers of Jesus Christ, we can experience praise at its deepest levels—because we know the truth of the gospel. The greater our knowledge of God, the more we appreciate *who He is* and *what He’s done*. If the transcendent majesty of God has never evoked a deep sense of awe and adoration within our soul, then something is missing from our faith.

5. Presence (*immanence*)

When the Spirit of God feels very near to us, then we are experiencing the *immanent presence of the Holy Spirit*. God is always present, but we don’t always sense His nearness to us. That’s what immanence means—nearness or closeness. There are various reasons that God seems closer to us at certain times than He does at others. Scripture indicates that suffering is often accompanied with a strong sense of God’s nearness (Psalm 23). Christian martyrs have confirmed that reality. Upon release from hostile situations, martyrs have often expressed similar sentiments: “We don’t miss the suffering but we do miss how *near* we felt to Jesus.” There’s no formula for God’s nearness—we can’t force it. It’s a gift from God designed to comfort and affirm His children.

Conclusion

There is certainly a danger in focusing on the Christian experience. But there is an equal danger in ignoring our experience (e.g. a lack of genuine conversion). Experiences are highly subjective (personal). We shouldn’t our desire for an experience dictate or direct our pursuit of God. God gave us His Word as an objective and clear standard. God’s Word clearly teaches us that the only requirement for salvation is belief (John 3:16). No amount of experience can ever secure our faith. Faith is a *free gift*, initiated by God, and completely separate from our own actions or experience.

The reason we cover these experiences is because faith will show itself. If we want assurance that God is living in us and working through us, then we should look no further than our own experience. Is the transforming power of God evident in our own lives? If not, then something is missing. Either our knowledge is false or our obedience is lacking. A lack of experience should motivate us to examine our faith more closely (see *Personalizing Scripture*).

Personalizing Scripture

Purpose: This resource outlines a practical method for applying God's Word to our daily circumstances.

Theme Verses

"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves." —2 Corinthians 13:5 NIV

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do." —James 1:22-25 NIV

Summary: Learning to personalize Scripture will do two things: (1) it will help us apply the Word of God to our lives, and (2) it will give us a practical means of evaluating our growth.

Three-step Pattern

Step 1: Start with a verse(s) from Scripture. Throughout this process, it's very important to be as specific as possible. We need to choose verses that will require us to make some specific commitments.

Step 2: Once we've selected a verse(s), we need to write out a personal commitment. This can be done by forming an "I will" statement. When our personal commitments are rooted in biblical teaching, they can become a significant source of spiritual growth. At first, our personal commitments will require varying levels of self-discipline. But as we grow, these commitments actually become intrinsic values.

For example: Let's say we've been sexually promiscuous; but then we commit ourselves to sexual purity. That commitment will feel like an obligation at first—like something we're *required* to do. But as we experience greater fellowship with God as a result of our commitment to sexual purity, we now have a positive (instead of a negative) desire to remain pure. We choose purity not merely because it's "the right thing to do" but because we enjoy our sense of fellowship with God.

Commitments often begin as obligations (e.g. I *have* to do this because I made a commitment). However, the right commitments actually produce an inner passion (e.g. I *want* to do this because I *value* the result). Lasting passion (as opposed to momentary inspiration) is a result of self-discipline—we stand by our God-centered commitments, and they reshape the way we think, feel, and act (read Psalm 37:4 and Romans 12:2). It's very important for us to choose commitments that we know God is calling us to fulfill. Anyone can throw together a list of do's and don'ts—these commitments, by contrast, should be deeply personal.

Step 3: After writing a biblical commitment, it's also important to write out some strategic points of action. Those points of action should outline very specific and clear personal responses. Each point of action needs to be personal. It takes an intentional effort (and specificity) to apply God's Word in very practical and personal ways.

Summary: This resource is designed to help us *live* biblical principles—not just *have* biblical principles. We need to be very practical and specific with our examples or they *will not* become a source of growth. Our commitments can actually guide us into passionate obedience by constantly challenging our complacency. When our obedience begins to feel more like a privilege and less like an obligation, then

we know spiritual growth is occurring—we're growing closer and closer to Jesus by becoming more and more like Him.

Evaluating our Growth

This format also creates a practical tool for evaluating our growth. We can review our biblical commitments periodically to evaluate our progress. We can share our list with trusted friends or keep it personal. An examination *is not* legalism (2 Corinthians 13:5). We should never try to justify our failures—we are going to fail! As we recognize our shortcomings, we need to confess our inadequacy apart from the work of the Holy Spirit (Beatitude 1). We also need to pray that God's grace would become more and more evident in our lives (Beatitude 4). We will never reach perfection—that's why Jesus died! If we stay true to Jesus, by applying His Word to our lives, we'll eventually recognize growth.

Specific Prayers

One other benefit of using this format is that it will provide us with specific prayer requests centered on spiritual growth. Instead of being general and praying something like: "God, help me love other people more"—we can be very specific and pray for every point of action connected with that desire. We can always reshape, add and subtract from our list of biblical commitments—but they need to be on paper! If we're serious about growing spiritually, then we need to *personally apply Scripture* to our lives, and we need to *evaluate our progress*.

Three-step Pattern Illustrated

The simplicity of this three-step model makes it very easy to replicate. A crucial factor is selecting passages that call for our *personal* commitment. The more specific we are with our points of action, the better the method will serve our two purposes—which are: (1) applying Scripture to our lives, and (2) evaluating our spiritual growth. Listed below are several examples.

The following Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version (NIV).

Scripture

James 4:7: "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

Commitment

1) I will resist the temptation to sin by deliberately applying the following action points:

Action

- Daily approach God in prayer and ask Him for the power to defeat temptation.
- Choose think about how ungratified I will feel if I willing choose sin over obedience.
- Avoid isolation by confiding in someone else for encouragement and accountability.
- Choose a meaningful alternative (e.g. spiritual disciplines, hobbies, etc.).

Scripture

Acts 20:35: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Commitment

2) I will intentionally give my resources to honor God.

Action

- Budget a tithe of all monetary income regardless of circumstances.
- Gladly give greater portions than my tithe.
- Give sacrificially (i.e. beyond my comfort level) when circumstances call for it.

Scripture

Philippians 2:3: "...in humility consider others above yourselves."

Commitment

3) I will prioritize people above my own personal ambition.

Action

- Initiate conversations with the people around me—don't avoid introductions.
- By time spent, show that I value relationships more than my own personal goals.
- Choose not to gossip, criticize, or agitate in any of my conversations.

Additional Examples

Matthew 28:19: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..."

- 4) I will devote myself to the work of evangelism and discipleship.
- Share the gospel often.
 - Deliberately seek opportunities to share the gospel with people.
 - Pursue intentional relationships that are centered around spiritual growth.
 - Initiate Christian fellowship.
 - Eliminate distractions that might keep me from those priorities.

Romans 11:36: "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To God be the glory forever."

- 5) I will choose to honor God in all my circumstances.
- Devote time for the daily reading of God's Word in order to learn about His character and grow in my relationship with Him.
 - Pray first in all circumstances—God is omnipotent (capable) and immanent (very near).
 - Express thanks to God in the midst of hardship, recognizing that all things are for *His* glory.
 - Verbally give praise to God in public and in private.

Mark 12:30: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."

- 6) I will intentionally create space for prayer, quiet reflection, and the development of Christ-centered convictions.
- Start the day with a spiritual discipline.
 - Plan ahead for times of quiet reflection, study, and prayer.
 - Allot specific portions of the day or week for cataloguing new ideas and/or information.

Luke 6:27: "But to you who are listening I say: love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."

- 7) I will choose to love others unconditionally, even if my feelings are contrary.
- Ask for forgiveness from others.
 - Offer forgiveness to others unconditionally.
 - Serve those who mistreat me, as well as those who oppose me.

Romans 14:23: "But the one who has doubts is condemned if he eats because his eating is not from faith; and everything that is not from faith is sin."

- 8) I will not do something that I am ethically or morally unsure of.
- Do not hastily make an ethical or moral decision.
 - Pray for God's guidance and provision in uncertain circumstances.

- Gain insight by pursuing the counsel of others.
- When in doubt—don't do it (Romans 14:23).

Mark 9:35: "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."

9) I will choose to serve others unconditionally and without regard for personal gratification, but for the glory of God.

- Intentionally pursue opportunities to serve those in need.
- When an opportunity to serve arises, prayerfully consider it.
- Constantly ask myself the question, "How can I be serving those around me?"

2 Corinthians 10:5: "...and we take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ."

10) I will continuously strive, with all my effort, to subject my thoughts to biblical standards.

- When my emotions flare up, take a step back and consider God's perspective and insight.
- When temptations arise, refer to James 4:7 points of action.
- Experiment with different liturgies for daily worship.

1 Timothy 5:2: "Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with absolute purity."

11) I will treat those around me as if they were members of my own family.

- View the people around me through the lens of family.
- Never think of anyone impersonally.
- When making objective decisions, also consider the personalities involved.
- Do the best I can to ensure that people who might be negatively affected by my decisions, understand my reasons.

John 4:24: "...and His worshippers must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Eph. 4:15: "Instead, speaking the truth in love..."

12) I will promote the truth as an act of worship.

- Be devoted to uncovering the truth as it is revealed in Scripture.
- Be ready and willing to share the truth of God's Word with those who are willing to listen.
- Always speak the truth in a *spirit of humility*.

Romans 14:19: "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification."

Ephesians 4:3, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace."

13) I will actively seek to create unity among believers—never at the expense of truth.

- Intentionally seek common ground instead of criticizing differences.
- Refuse to criticize *individuals*, but only criticize *ideologies*—and only when appropriate.
- Only break fellowship with someone when I am certain it is God's will for me to do so.

1 Peter 4:10: "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."

14) I will exercise the use of my God-given spiritual gifts to their maximum potential.

- Continue the process of discerning what my calling is.
- Continue developing my convictions and sharing them with other people.
- Get feedback, guidance, and direction from trusted mentors.
- Continue to immerse myself in areas of service as part of the discovery process.

Charting the Course

Every group is different. But here are some general suggestions that should help you chart the course.

- This content was originally covered in twelve 60 minute sessions. 60 minutes requires a brisker pace with less time for dialogue. 90 minutes would allow for more discussion.
- The smaller the group, the more personal the discussion can become. A group of 15 or less has the potential to generate some very personal discussion. It's certainly fine to have a larger group, but the teaching will be more content-oriented and less of a group discussion.
- This particular guide is designed around group discussion. The more experience the leader or leaders have facilitating group discussions, the better.
- Read a question *and* its answer before opening a question up for dialogue. Always avoid “fishing for answers”—an ineffective and discouraging method for leading discussion.
- As a leader, we're not simply waiting to hear the right response. We want to know what people think and feel regarding each subject. Be willing and ready to share your thoughts and feelings *first*. If done well, sharing *first* will do two things: it will disarm defensiveness, and it will give people time to process the information and respond. Then, be silent and wait for responses.
- It isn't necessary (or practical) to stop at every topic for discussion. It may be helpful to think about stopping points prior to the group gathering. Always be ready to adjust according to the discussion. For example: If one question elicits a lot of discussion, allow it to fully unfold, and then cover a larger section before stopping for discussion the next time.
- Open and end with prayer. Before starting a new chapter, summarize the previous one. Constantly press the issue of personal and practical application. Foster an environment that encourages openness.

Suggested 12 Week Course

1. *Personal Introductions (Ice-Breakers), **Getting Practical**, and **Foreword*** (Be sure to ask the group if they will accept the practical goals. Ask if anything should be added or taken away from them.)
2. **Introduction and Chapter 1**
3. **Chapter 2**
4. **Experiencing Faith and Personalizing Scripture** (Cover these two resources, and discuss them.)
5. **Chapter 3**
6. **Chapter 4**
7. **Chapter 5** (Briefly share your testimony at the end of this class. Ask participants to come prepared to *briefly* share their testimony at the next gathering. Many people will dread this—encourage them. Try to find a person or two willing share *first*—this often emboldens others to share.)
8. **Testimony Sharing** (Be sure to validate everyone who shares. There's no such thing as a boring testimony—remind people of that. Take notes and share your feedback at the end of the sharing time. Be sure to balance constructive feedback with positive feedback, and thank everyone for sharing.)
9. **Chapter 6**
10. **Chapter 7**
11. **Chapter 8 and Relational Evangelism**
12. **Chapter Review** (As a leader, our goal is to help the group evaluate their learning. Write down some evaluation questions that will help people reflect on their learning. For example: How has this content impacted your thinking? Have you been able to apply any of this information? Do you plan to use any of the approaches we discussed? Which ones? Has this content challenged you? etc. Leave some extra time at the end of the session to pray together as a group. Be sure to thank everyone for participating.)