

FIELD GUIDE

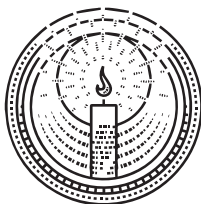
Personal Evangelism



CHRIST COVENANT

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Personal Evangelism

INTRODUCTION

All Christians are called to make disciples. Jesus very clearly told His followers that, as they were going about their lives, they were called to make disciples (Matt. 28:18–20). An important part of the disciple-making process is evangelism, where Christians take part in sharing the good news of Jesus with unbelievers. But before you can become a faithful disciple-maker, you have to know who you are in Christ. Most Christians think their contribution to the advance of the gospel is to attend a church service, give, volunteer once a month, and occasionally invite their friends to church to hear the gospel from “professional Christians” like preachers and worship pastors. The reason most Christians believe this is because that’s basically what church leaders have told them their whole lives. However, the Bible says something much different.

Our problem is that we have often understood the church as an event that we attend rather than a living organism or body of which we are members. According to Scripture, the local church

is not something that people attend. Rather, the local church is a local group of believers joined together for the glory and mission of Jesus. Sometimes those believers are gathered in the same place, but usually they are scattered throughout the city or local area in a variety of roles and responsibilities. It's important to realize that even when the church is scattered, it is no more or less the church. If this is true, we have to ask the following questions: 1) What is the primary purpose of the church gathering? and 2) What is the primary purpose of the church scattering?

First, the primary purpose of gathering for corporate worship is that the followers of Jesus would worship together and, in doing so, remind one another of who God is and what He has done for us in Christ. Pastors, elders, and other church leaders carry the responsibility of leading the church to understand the beauty and the mystery of the gospel more deeply. This is not to say that evangelism does not happen when the church gathers for corporate worship. Proclaiming truth to the lost certainly happens during the worship service; however, the primary target audience is the group of believers who make up the church.

Second, the primary purpose of the church scattered is that the glory of God, the power of the gospel, and the kingdom of God would go out to a world that has been separated from God by sin. This is done so that God might restore all things to Himself through the proclaimed gospel of Christ. This means that the primary purpose of pastors, elders, and other church leaders is to equip the church to that end—that the church would be mature and ready to make an impact in the world for Christ (see Eph. 4:11–16).

The Bible calls all believers to be bold ambassadors for Christ as God Himself makes His appeal through them (see 2 Cor. 5:20). Therefore, it's important that when Christians gather for corporate worship, the church is strengthened and equipped to scatter well. As we scatter as kingdom ambassadors, we are charged by Jesus to have disciple-making relationships that begin with personal evangelism. The Christians who are most active in personal evangelism are the ones who are most intentional. But

true evangelistic living does not depend on special evangelistic programs; rather, it's the fruit of ordinary people doing ordinary things with gospel intentionality. To that end, we are equipping you with a tool called Table Talk to help you grow in gospel intentionality and impact in disciple-making relationships.

A Table Talk is an intentional relationship-building meeting (a coffee, a lunch, a dinner, a walk, etc.) where you talk, build a friendship, and hopefully share the greatest news ever—the gospel of Jesus Christ. We call it Table Talk as a nod to the time in church history when Martin Luther would gather people in his home to talk about spiritual things, and because a table is a great setting for these conversations. Sitting at a table for a meal or coffee is conducive to great conversation, though it's certainly not necessary. The following are some guidelines for how to make Table Talk a useful, intentional, and regular part of your life.

HOW TO DO TABLE TALK

1. Pray

Write down the names of three people you will regularly pray for. Pray specifically that they would come to know and treasure Jesus. Don't underestimate the power and importance of regular and consistent prayer. Put the list in a place where you will see it every day as a reminder to pray.

2. Create a rhythm

The goal of Table Talk is that you would create an intentional rhythm in your life when you connect with people that don't know Jesus. For example, you could take an unbeliever out for lunch every other Monday or one Monday per month. You could invite someone who isn't a Christian to coffee every Thursday afternoon. You could invite one of your unbelieving neighbors over for dinner every other Tuesday. You may also approach something that is already a rhythm in your life (like a workout group or a book club) with particular evangelistic intentionality. Don't just go work out or attend the book club; engage as an ambassador for the Lord, seeking to give an

answer for the hope you have in Christ (1 Pet. 3:15).

3. Build the relationship

As these relationships begin, make every effort to develop them. The goal with Table Talk is not necessarily that you would share the gospel with someone at the first meeting but rather that you would build genuine relationships with people who don't know Jesus with the hope of sharing the gospel with them patiently and gently. These relationships will take time and intentionality to build. Though we hope that these relationships will give you the opportunity to invite people into the kingdom of God, the authentic love you show for your neighbors is also an opportunity to demonstrate (and experience) the beauty of that kingdom.

4. Share the gospel

If you are intentional about building relationships and useful in your areas of influence, the Lord will likely give you favor with people. Don't get lost in this favor and forget about who you are as an ambassador for Christ. Remember that the kindest thing you can do for someone is to share the good news of the gospel so that by God's grace, they might believe and be restored to fellowship with God through Christ. The simple gospel is that Jesus came to restore broken sinners like us into fellowship with God by His righteous life, atoning death, and life-giving resurrection. As we look to Jesus in a posture of repentance and faith, His righteous record is accredited to us, our sin is accredited to Him and to His cross, and the power of His resurrection gives us hope in Him for eternal life with God.

For more guidance on clearly explaining the gospel, see the appendix for the God, Man, Jesus, Response framework.

5. Follow up

Remember: our goal is not to just share the gospel. Rather, we are put here on this earth as Christ's body to make disciples. Inviting someone to church is likely not the first step in evangelism, but at some point, we do want people coming into the community of faith where their relationship with God can grow and flourish.



Repentance and faith are the *what* of the Christian life, but the *where* of the Christian life is the fellowship of believers in the local church. Inviting someone to church is not the final step in evangelism either, as if we have handed the person off to the “professional Christians” and our work is now done. Disciple-making is relational (see the Relational Discipleship Field Guide). There is great joy in walking alongside someone as they encounter Jesus and then grow in their faith (see 1 Thess. 3:6–9).





Appendix: God, Man, Jesus, Response

When it comes to evangelism, we often look to tools or easy methods, but the truth is that these are not always effective. What we need is an understanding of the gospel. We need gospel clarity. If we know the gospel clearly, we will be able to present it clearly to others. This allows us to tailor what we say to the person we say it to. Everyone is different, but everyone needs to hear the truth. With that in mind, we have written this short article to help you understand the gospel and how it relates to the people in your life. We have done this because we desire to equip you to reach your friends, family, co-workers, and neighbors with the truth that has radically changed our lives.

GOD

The first step in evangelism is God. Christians believe that there is a God and that He is the Supreme Being who has no beginning and no end. We believe that He has all authority, all power, all knowledge, all goodness, and all worth. We also believe that this God is not a mystery but that He has spoken, that He has revealed Himself specifically through the reliable and authoritative account of His character, nature, and plans in the Bible. In order

for someone to become a Christian, there are several important questions about God that people have to answer: Is there a God? Who is this God, and what is He like? How do you know this God?

How these questions apply in a particular person's life will differ based on the person. For example, consider two of my friends. The first is a guy I knew in high school who wanted to be a pastor, while I had no plans of becoming a pastor and was more interested in public service. So we went off to college and I became convinced that the best way for me to make a lasting impact on the world was by becoming a pastor, and he lost faith in God and went into public service, but he calls himself a happy agnostic. He doesn't believe the Bible is reliable, he doesn't believe that Jesus is God, and he doesn't even know if he believes that there is a God. My prayer for this guy is that he would begin to believe that there is a God and that he would see the beauty of the eternal Creator—a Creator who called all of creation into existence with a few sentences and who rules over the entire universe. That is what evangelism looks like in regard to him.

Evangelism looks different when I consider a second friend who is Jewish. He is a very committed Jew and is incredibly proud of his Jewish heritage, but he doesn't believe that Jesus is God. He believes in God, and he even believes in Moses and the Ten Commandments, but he doesn't see who God really is and what He is really like or how God has ultimately revealed Himself. My prayer for him is that he would see God in His fullness, that his incomplete perception of God would be changed, that he would see the love of God and the beauty of God and understand that God is actually pursuing him for relationship.

As you think about evangelism, you need to be able to diagnose where people are spiritually and where you should begin the conversation. Even right here in the Bible Belt, we live among people who have very different ideas about who God is or whether or not there even is a God.

MAN

The second idea that people need to comprehend in order to

understand the gospel and be a follower of Christ is the idea of man. Christians have traditionally used this term to refer to the belief that every person was created by God and that humans were created good but also freely chose to disobey God—what the Bible calls sin. When humanity sinned, we gained a knowledge of evil that has been infecting our hearts ever since. Sin separated us from God, and as a result, we choose to serve ourselves rather than to serve the One who has all goodness and worth. Since we have a knowledge of evil, not only do we fail to love God—we also fail to love one another. Therefore, Christians believe that the human condition is actually fatal. This has been proven throughout the history of the world because every sinful human has died. We also believe that because we have sinned against a holy, good, and eternal God, we deserve retribution—we deserve to be punished for that sin by that God.

In your presentation of the gospel, this is often the most difficult concept to present to people. This is something that everyone knows about themselves deep down but that no one wants to believe. Most people believe they are basically good, or at least they have convinced themselves that they are okay. It takes a miracle of the Holy Spirit called regeneration for our eyes to be opened to our own sinfulness before an almighty God. As Christians, we certainly have an obligation to show people the truth about their own souls, but when we do, we need to do it with grace. I have seen people who are passionate about evangelism confront people with their sin and really only make them mad. The truth of the gospel—the truth about our own sin—is offensive, but as we present these truths, we are commanded to be gracious. We don't approach sinners as self-righteous know-it-alls but as fellow sinners who, by the grace of God, have found the cure. This is the truth about all of us—we are susceptible to any sin. If left to ourselves and if the circumstances were right, every one of us could be guilty of theft, adultery, or even murder, but for the grace of God. So let's quit walking around with our noses in the air and start walking around with our heads bowed.

JESUS

The third stop in evangelism is with Jesus. Once people see who God is and how holy and how wonderful He is, and once they see their own condition before such a holy and wonderful God, then the good news of Jesus is such good news.

The passage that I always love to go for this is 2 Corinthians 5:21, where Paul explains, “For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” The first thing we must understand about Jesus is that He lived a totally righteous life. In other words, He achieved the righteousness of God in His life. However, God the Father took Jesus, who knew no sin, who was totally innocent, and God made Him to be sin. On the cross, Jesus took on our sin. All of our sin—the guilt of that sin, the shame of that sin, all of it—was transferred to Christ. Once Jesus took on the sin of the whole world, the Father punished Jesus by putting Him to a horrible death, so that the punishment (or the debt) for our sin was paid in full. Then Jesus rose from the grave, defeating death. And if you have faith in Him, if you believe in Him, if you follow Him, just as your sin was transferred to Him, His perfect righteousness is transferred to you.

It is because of the holiness of God and because of the depth of our sin that our only hope is that someone would save us. That is why Jesus is the only way, because only Jesus can be such a savior.

*“If all we need is a lawgiver,
Moses will do; if all we need
is a set of rules and a way of
devotion, Muhammad or Joseph
Smith will do ... but if we need a
savior, only Jesus will do.”*



Al Mohler once said, “If all we need is a teacher of enlightenment, the Buddha will do; if all we need is a collection of gods for every occasion and need and hope, Hinduism will do; if all we need is a tribal deity, any tribal deity will do; if all we need is a lawgiver, Moses will do; if all we need is a set of rules and a way of devotion, Muhammad or Joseph Smith will do; if all we need is inspiration and insight into the sovereign self, for crying out loud, Oprah will do; but if we need a savior, only Jesus will do.”

RESPONSE

If you come to terms with who God is—His glory, His weight, His holiness—and then your eyes are opened to see who you are in your sin before a holy God, and then you see that there is a Rescuer who has paid the price of your sin and called you to eternal life, then you must make a choice.

The last stop in evangelism is response. In evangelism, we call people to respond to the gospel. They must decide if they believe this is true. If the eternal God sent His own totally righteous Son to rescue your sinful soul and my sinful soul, then there is only one response. The love of God toward us demands our everything. If this is true, if Jesus is who He says He is, then He can’t just be a part of your life. He can’t just be a good moral teacher who you respect. He has to be everything. In the words of C. S. Lewis, “You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”



