



# ADVANCE GROUP MENTORING GUIDE

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# CONTENTS

<b>WELCOME TO ADVANCE</b>	<b>5</b>
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<b>SESSION GUIDE</b>	<b>11</b>
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<b>1. WELCOME TO ADVANCE</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2. THE IDENTITY OF THE EVANGELIST</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>3. THE MESSAGE OF THE EVANGELIST</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>4. THE TASK OF THE EVANGELIST</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>5. THE POWER OF THE EVANGELIST</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>6. THE DEVOTION OF THE EVANGELIST</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>7. THE SUBMISSION OF THE EVANGELIST</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>8. THE CHARACTER OF THE EVANGELIST</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>9. THE OPPORTUNITY OF THE EVANGELIST</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>10. THE COMMITMENT OF THE EVANGELIST</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>11. THE INSPIRATION OF THE EVANGELIST</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>12. RETREAT</b>	<b>53</b>

## **BONUS SESSIONS AND RESOURCES** **57**

---

<b>BONUS SESSION: CONVERSATIONAL EVANGELISM</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>BONUS SESSION: APOLOGETICS</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>APPENDIX: GOSPEL DOCTRINE</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>APPENDIX: GOSPEL NARRATIVE</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>APPENDIX: TEN-MINUTE YOUTH GOSPEL TALK EXAMPLE</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>APPENDIX: GOSPEL METHODS</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>RECOMMENDED READING</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTIONS</b>	<b>69</b>

**WELCOME  
TO ADVANCE**

# ADVANCE GROUPS PROMOTE AND DEVELOP THE CALLING OF EVANGELISTS BY SUPPORTING THEM IN THEIR COMMITMENT TO PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL.

Advance grew out of a vision from evangelist Andy Hawthorne (The Message Trust, UK) to gather twelve preaching evangelists in order to develop and sharpen them and to encourage other experienced evangelists to do likewise – with those being mentored eventually taking on groups of their own.

Through monthly meetings those in a group receive teaching, sharpen one another through discussion, and share openly about personal and spiritual life. Updates are sent regularly to each other between group sessions (using WhatsApp or something similar) about opportunities and engagements they have to share the gospel, and to encourage each other with the fruit from those opportunities.

After one year in an Advance group, each evangelist finds another twelve who they then mentor in the same way. Advance sees evangelists developing evangelists, to lead to a huge increase around the globe in the number of Christians who will unashamedly share the gospel – whether from a platform or through daily encounters with family, friends and strangers.

As it multiplies around the world, Advance is a direct response to a need for passionate, unashamed communicators of the gospel of Jesus Christ to be equipped, encouraged and supported.

## FIVE PRINCIPLES OF THE MOVEMENT

As you establish your Advance group, there are five non-negotiable principles that must be in play.

### 1. REGULAR MEETING

Monthly meetings should be made a diary priority by group members. It is essential that when people join a group, they commit to the meetings. Groups should be encouraged to treat these sessions as sacred – members shouldn't let a speaking engagement or meeting that appears 'more important' to draw them away. Nothing can be more vital than making sure they are committed to being prepared for the work God has called them to do.

### 2. SHARPENING

A commitment to studying the Bible for a deeper knowledge of the gospel takes up a significant part of the session time each month, and also includes opportunities for healthy critique of one another's understanding and application of evangelism and the gospel, primarily through discussion.

### 3. ACCOUNTABILITY

Honest self-evaluation via feedback questionnaires and open sharing within the group time is designed to ensure that we live accountable and holy lives as we attempt to be faithful to living and sharing the gospel. Vulnerability and honesty in your group can take time to develop, but should be encouraged and led by the example of the group leader.

### 4. COMMUNICATION

Keeping each other up to date with preaching engagements, prayer requests and stories of salvation via email and/or group text messaging ensures groups support each other as a community of evangelists. Staying connected between sessions also creates a more familial dynamic in the group.

### 5. MULTIPLICATION

A commitment to explore the idea of multiplication with a view to group members taking on their own group (while continuing on in the original group) within 12-18 months of joining. Not all who are in your group will start their own, but by using this resource and being intentional about it, many can and will – ensuring that the equipping, empowering and encouraging of Christians committed to evangelism continues to grow and spread across the world.

## IS IT FOR ME?

Whether you have opportunities to preach from a platform or are passionate about reaching those you encounter interpersonally day by day, these three simple questions will help you decide whether starting (or joining) an Advance group is for you...

### FAITH

Do you have faith that the gospel has lost none of its power, and is the only way by which a person can know true life and salvation?

### CLARITY

Do you desire to communicate the gospel with clarity, through personal conversations or preaching from a platform?

### INVITATION

Do you long for opportunities to offer an invitation to receive the hope of the gospel, and see people move into eternal relationship with Jesus?

If you can answer 'yes' to those questions, then look to gather others who can also say yes to them and use this Advance Group Mentoring Guide to begin the journey together.

## THE SESSION GUIDE

This guide includes twelve sessions that will take you through your first year of journeying together as an Advance group. If you are an experienced evangelist and/or confident in leading this kind of thing, you may want to use the sessions as a jumping off point, adding and adapting the content to meet the needs of your group and utilising your own experience. If you are new to all this, then feel free to follow the sessions word-for-word and instruction-for-instruction – you'll have all you need to grow together as a group.

The twelve sessions are designed to give an understanding of the gospel, evangelism, and the character of an evangelist. The sessions are split into sections that cover these five characteristics of an evangelist, which begin after the introductory session (Session One).

# CORE CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EVANGELIST

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## **BIBLE-TEACHING EVANGELISTS: KNOW THE GOSPEL DEEPLY (SESSIONS TWO, THREE AND FOUR)**

We must know the message we proclaim as deeply as possible. To do this we must be committed to the reading and study of God's word, so that our proclamation is not based on our own ideas and assumptions about the gospel, but in what the word of God teaches. The commissioning words of Jesus in Matthew 28 call us to make disciples of all nations, teaching people to obey what Jesus has commanded. We are called not merely to be evangelists, but Bible-teaching evangelists, sharing truth rather than opinion. These three sessions will consider the gospel and evangelism in light of what the Bible teaches us about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

## **PRAYERFUL EVANGELISTS: ACT IN THE SPIRIT'S POWER (SESSIONS FIVE AND SIX)**

We are to submit to the power of the Holy Spirit for the task of evangelism, for it is not our power but the power of God which brings salvation. So, we commit to living prayerfully, asking God to provide opportunities to share our faith and see lives transformed as a result. These sessions explore the spiritual life of an evangelist and provide opportunities to explore our devotional lives and the direct impact they have on our evangelism.

## **ACCOUNTABLE EVANGELISTS: LIVE A HOLY LIFE (SESSIONS SEVEN AND EIGHT)**

Holiness is at the heart of the gospel. Sharing the transforming power of the gospel in an authentic way means living accountable lives, where our 'on-stage' matches our 'off-stage'. Cheering each other on in success and standing with one another in failure is crucial as we seek to grow as holy people sharing a holy message. These sessions focus on the holiness of the evangelist, affirming the need for accountability and the

position of humility as a chief characteristic of those who serve Jesus.

## **COMMITTED EVANGELISTS: BE INTENTIONAL IN THE TASK (SESSIONS NINE AND TEN)**

Intentionality is key to evangelism. We must be aware of – and seize – everyday opportunities to share God's love, not simply sharing the Jesus story but inviting those who hear it into the new life it offers, and helping to start them on a discipleship journey. These sessions explore two key criteria that can be distinctive in evangelistic gifting: increased opportunity to boldly share the gospel every day, and a willingness to call people into the kingdom at the climax of each gospel opportunity.

## **INSPIRATIONAL EVANGELISTS: STIR THE CHURCH TO WITNESS (SESSION ELEVEN)**

As we share the gospel message with a world who needs it, we must also stir the church to do the same. Evangelism is the business of every Christian, and so encouraging and stirring the church to the task must also be a commitment of any evangelist. This session explores the evangelist's role as an encourager for the church to keep Christian witness central to who we are as followers of Jesus.

The Advance year comes to an end with Session Twelve which works best as a retreat of some kind, giving your group the space to reflect on all they have learnt, all that has been done in and through you by God, and to look ahead together at what's next.

# RUNNING A GROUP

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Encourage a group of up to twelve people (single gender groups usually work best for accountability) to meet once a month for around two hours. During this time the group leader will facilitate the session – including prayer, teaching, discussion and accountability. This guide gives you everything you will need to run a group each month for its first year.

## SESSION BREAKDOWN

Each session guide begins with a very brief introduction and the **Session In A Sentence**.

The **Session Background** section offers some teaching upon which the session is built. You will want to read this *before* leading a session as it will help give you a deeper understanding of the overall shape of the session. Feel free to incorporate any of this material into the session if you have time to do so and think it will be helpful, but it is primarily there to aid you as you prepare to lead the teaching that follows.

From here you can follow each session guide, from the content to the timings (in brackets next to each section of the session), as closely or loosely as you feel helpful so long as the main point of the session is presented clearly and accurately, and there is space made for prayer and accountability. However, it's a good idea to stick as close as possible to the session guides so as to get the best from the material.

Each session starts with a time to **Catch Up**. In the early sessions this is about getting to know each other and exploring how the group will work. As the sessions progress, more time is given to sharing stories with each other and feedback from the previous session's Application.

Then, it's time for **Prayer**. There is no guidance on how long this should take, and no real right or wrong way to do it. You could pray as a whole group or with partners, for a short or extended time.

The main **Teaching** section follows and includes scripture references, quotes and **Question** points for discussion. This is where you'll most need to keep an eye on the clock. There is still more discussion time ahead, and crucially, you will

need to leave space for the accountability section at the end of the session. Don't let that time get squeezed by slaving over a teaching point a little too laboriously! (Also note that the timings for this section vary from session to session, so be sure to pay attention to the suggested timings and adjust accordingly).

After the Teaching section is the **Discussion** section, which includes a few questions and a quotation relating to the topic of the session. You likely won't have time to discuss everything there, but we've included more content than you'll need so you can pick and choose what would be most helpful. Don't feel like you have to rush through this section to get it all done – instead, just focus on a few elements.

Each session features an **Application** section towards the end, which is something to be done between now and the next session in line with the teaching. Feel free to come up with your own – as long as it supports the teaching and will help your group to grow in that area.

Another **Prayer** time follows, this time with some guidance on what to pray for in light of the session, but how you go about this and for how long is up to you.

Finally, each session ends with a time for **Accountability** where self-evaluation sheets can be completed, shared, and prayed over. You can make photocopies of the sheets from page 69 or download a PDF version from [advance2020.org/accountability](http://advance2020.org/accountability).

If you haven't already set a date for the next meeting, be sure to do this before the end. It will be much easier to communicate this in person than over email a few days later!

## OPTIONAL SESSION ELEMENTS

### SPECIFIC PRAYER FOCUS

Take the time for the whole group to pray for a few individuals within the group each session – praying over their lives, family, ministry and anything else they suggest. Try to get through everyone every three meetings or so, and then start again.

## PRACTICAL EXERCISES

You may want to head out onto the streets for an hour and put some of the discussion and prayer to use in personal witness, or some other practical expression of evangelism. The groups are designed to help us prepare for evangelism, but time can be given to actually practising evangelism if you desire. Be sure to give time for debriefing and feedback from these experiences.

## GUESTS

If you have access to a speaker or guest who could contribute to the teaching and discussion time and bring different experiences or something fresh to the group, then invite them along to share with your group.

Books such as John Stott's *Basic Christianity*, Rico Tice's *Honest Evangelism*, and Ben Jack's *The Simple Gospel* are short, subject-relevant books that could function as 'homework' reading – either following chapter by chapter each month, or used for group content and discussion after finishing the sessions in this guide.

# HELPFUL TIPS FOR RUNNING A GROUP

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Schedule group meetings as far ahead as you can and keep those dates as sacred (six+ months ahead if possible). Use something like **doodle.com** as a handy tool for this.

**WhatsApp** or a similar messaging app is perfect for group communications, prayer requests and salvation stories between group times. As the group leader, attempt to keep this going by contributing as much as you can. Share your stories, ask people for their prayer requests, give links to resources, podcasts and YouTube clips. If you lead the charge, others will engage with it.

**Food** can be a great way to bring people together and connect, so you may want to run these sessions over an evening meal.

Get your group thinking about **starting their own groups** early on, and when other potential group members are too late to join yours you can connect them with the new groups that launch from your own.

Meet in a space where people will be comfortable discussing, praying and sharing during the accountability time. A public space like a coffee shop works great for some, but others need more privacy as they journey, so consider your meeting space carefully.

# SESSION GUIDE



# SESSION ONE: WELCOME TO ADVANCE

**This first group meeting should be used as an opportunity to get to know each other, establish the framework for what the group will be, and begin a dialogue about what evangelism is and the five characteristics of the evangelist.**

## SESSION IN A SENTENCE

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Through Advance we will grow together in five evangelistic characteristics, encouraging and equipping each other as we rely on God's empowerment for the task.

## SESSION BACKGROUND

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A good place to welcome people to the Advance journey and to start a discussion of evangelism is to remember that the call to evangelism is *personal*. Look at how Jesus calls Andrew and Peter to follow him at the start of Mark's gospel (Mark 1:16-18). He calls to the young fisherman from the shore and asks them to lay down their nets (their trade) and follow him, for he will teach them how to fish for people. Does God call you using those exact same words today? Unless you share the same career path as the brothers to whom Jesus called, it is unlikely. Jesus called out to Andrew and Peter personally, using the fishing metaphor as a connection point.

God calls each one of us personally to be an evangelist, by connecting our passions to opportunities to make sense of who God is. Whether you're a musician, artist, scientist, nurse, business owner... whatever your vocation or gifting, God can use it to create opportunities to proclaim his good news.

The goal of evangelism is to connect people to God's good news. More fully though, the message of evangelism is a call to faith in Jesus Christ - to trust and be obedient to him, that we would turn from our rejection of God to an acceptance of his Lordship. When we recognise that we are created for him, we understand what worship is, and experience the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. People know wholeness when we turn our lives into living expressions of worship through obedience, sacrifice, faith and love (Galatians 5:13-26).

In Exodus 8:1, God instructs Moses to go to Pharaoh and tell him to 'Let my people go...'. Today, God desires to set captives free from sin. Like Moses, we are asked to go into the world and declare a message of freedom - that there is no need to be enslaved any longer for God has made it possible for us to live in freedom through Jesus and by the power of his Spirit (Romans 8:2). The purpose of evangelism is as it was for Moses and the people of Israel - worship.

'Let my people go, so that they may worship me'

We are to be worshippers who witness so that others may come to worship and witness.

## SESSION GUIDE

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### CATCH UP (20-30 MINS)

*Take the time to introduce everyone in the group and begin getting to know one another. You might decide to do some kind of ice-breaker activity, or just go round the group and ask people to share some basic information about themselves. After this, present in your own style or read through the Introduction section on page 6 as a way of explaining what the group will be and how it will run in the coming months.*

## PRAYER

*Pray to commit the time to the Lord and over any situations, positive or challenging, arising from the catch up time.*

## TEACHING (20-30 MINS)

*Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.*

• However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.

### ACTS 20:24

Put simply, ‘to evangelise’ means to ‘proclaim good news’. The good news in question is the gospel of Jesus Christ: that sinful (rebellious) humanity has been reconciled to God through the saving work of Jesus. We can know eternal life and enjoy a perfect relationship with God because Jesus took the death we deserved.

Look at the following two definitions of evangelism:

• ‘To evangelise is to **present Christ Jesus** to **sinful people** in order that, through **the power of the Holy Spirit**, they **may** come to put their **trust** in God through him.’

### J. I. PACKER

• ‘The **proclamation** of the **historical, biblical Christ** as **Saviour and Lord**, with a view to **persuading** people to come to him **personally** and so be **reconciled** to God.’

### BILLY GRAHAM

**Question:** What can we learn about the task of evangelism from these short summaries (some words highlighted for specific discussion)?

Evangelism involves a proclaimed message, a presentation of the risen Jesus, and an attempt to persuade the listener to receive and accept

the good news. But as essential as words are to evangelism, we must go beyond verbal communication.

David Watson said that, ‘Unless there is a demonstration of the power of the Spirit, the proclamation of the gospel will be in vain. It will not be evangelism.’ Evangelism is a spiritual activity, effective only when God moves in power. If evangelism was just about changing people’s minds, we could rely on persuasion alone. But evangelism is about salvation: through our message, the Spirit of God convicts, gives faith, and begins transformation of hearts. Evangelism without the power of the Spirit is merely marketing. On the other hand, as Leonard Ravenhill said, we can be confident that ‘any method of evangelism will work if God is in it.’

The purpose of evangelism is to form disciples – worshippers who worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:23). So evangelists must too be authentic worshippers. It’s been said that worship and evangelism are two sides of the same coin, and it’s true that our witness to the world is an act of worship – an act of obedience and devotion to the king.

These Advance group sessions will help you to mature as an authentic worshipper and see you grow in five core characteristics of an evangelist.

### BIBLE-TEACHING EVANGELISTS

We must know the message we proclaim as deeply as possible. To do this we must be committed to the reading and study of God’s word, so that our proclamation is not based on our own ideas and assumptions about the gospel, but in what the word of God teaches.

### PRAYERFUL EVANGELISTS

We are to submit to the power of the Holy Spirit for the task of evangelism, for it is not our power but the power of God which brings salvation. So, we commit to living prayerfully, asking God to provide opportunities to share our faith and see lives transformed as a result.

### ACCOUNTABLE EVANGELISTS

Holiness is at the heart of the gospel. Sharing the transforming power of the gospel in an authentic way means living accountable lives, where our ‘on-stage’ matches our ‘off-stage’. Cheering

each other on in success and standing with one another in failure is crucial as we seek to grow as holy people sharing a holy message.

### COMMITTED EVANGELISTS

Intentionality is key to evangelism. We must be aware of – and seize – everyday opportunities to share God’s love, not simply sharing the Jesus story but inviting those who hear it into the new life it offers, and helping to start them on a discipleship journey.

### INSPIRATIONAL EVANGELISTS

As we share the gospel message with a world who needs it, we must also stir the church to do the same. Evangelism is the business of every Christian, and so encouraging and stirring the church to the task must also be a commitment of any evangelist.

**Question:** Consider these five core characteristics. Where do you identify your own strengths and weaknesses in each area?

## DISCUSSION (15 MINS)

Explore the following questions and/or the discussion quotation:

- What is our role in evangelism and what is God’s role in evangelism?
- How do we ensure we are authentic evangelists *and* authentic worshippers?
- How do you hope to grow in the coming months through this Advance group?

• ‘If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for.’

• **CHARLES SPURGEON**

## APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Come up with a biblically-sound definition of evangelism (preferably with references to scripture) to bring to the group next time for discussion and critique. The recommended reading on evangelism might help!

## PRAYER

Give thanks to God for his amazing gospel. Thank him that he chooses to make you part of his saving work in the world. Pray he would empower you to be his messengers in word and deed, as you worship him in spirit and truth. Ask him to help you to grow in the five characteristics of an evangelist as you move forward and grow together in this Advance group.

## ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.

## MESSAGES AND DATES (10 MINS)

Close this first session by asking everyone to download and log into a messenger system that works for everyone in the group. WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger are both free and work well. Create a group that you will use to communicate between sessions, with updates, prayer requests, testimonies and so on.

Finally, set the dates for as many of the upcoming sessions as you can. Six months in advance is ideal so that everyone can commit to the dates early and make them a diary priority.

# SESSION TWO: THE IDENTITY OF THE EVANGELIST

**In this second group meeting you will explore the identity of an evangelist as it relates to the identity of God himself and his gospel story.**

## SESSION IN A SENTENCE

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The identity of an evangelist is rooted in the identity of God the Father: we are his messenger children.

## SESSION BACKGROUND

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At the peak of Billy Graham's ministry, Christian young people were inspired to follow his example and become preachers of the good news. Over the last twenty years there has been a perceptible shift in the aspirations of Christian young people. Where once the role of an evangelist was seen as the pinnacle of Christian service, the more common aspirations for Christian young people today are often to become a worship leader, youth worker or church pastor.

The church has certainly benefited from talented musicians, film-makers and other creatives using their gifts to facilitate others in personal and corporate worship, and God has been celebrated and glorified through the efforts of these faithful people. However, before somebody can become a true worshipper – a worshipper in spirit and truth (John 4:23) – they must have heard and responded to the gospel (Romans 10:14-17).

Similarly, the role of pastor or teacher is essential to discipleship and is not to be sidelined. But the pastor will have no congregation to look after if the seats become empty due to a lack of missional engagement and evangelism into the world.

Bringing people to a place of true worship requires us to explain the gospel to them, and with that in mind none of us should shirk our responsibility to share the good news with the world, by witnessing to our faith in Christ to all people in the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:8). The Bible teaches that *all* believers are called to *do the work of an evangelist* (Matthew 28:19, 2 Timothy 4:5), yet there are those who are specifically called to *be* evangelists (Ephesians 4:11). For these people, preaching the gospel isn't only day-to-day witness, but the primary focus of their lives.

## SESSION GUIDE

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### CATCH UP (20-30 MINS)

*Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Ask the group to share their biblical definitions of evangelism (Session One: Application) and discuss them together. For smaller groups this can be done as a whole group exercise, for larger groups you may want to split into smaller groups for discussion. It may also be worth covering the basics of how the group works for anyone who missed the first session.*

### PRAYER

*Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, arising from the catch up time.*

### TEACHING (20-30 MINS)

*Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.*

• ‘In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.’

• **2 TIMOTHY 4:1-5**

What does it mean to be *called* to be an evangelist? Aren't all believers called to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the world? Jesus' great commission in Matthew 28 appears to be a blanket call to *all* of his followers to go into the world and make disciples. But then we come across a short passage in Ephesians 4 (vv. 11-12) that highlights the specific role of the evangelist alongside that of pastor, teacher, prophet and apostle, which are each to be used to build the body of Christ. We also encounter a man named Philip in Acts who is given the specific title of evangelist (Acts 21:8). So what are we to make of the calling of the evangelist? Is it for everyone or for a specific few?

You may know the words of 2 Corinthians 5:17, where Paul talks about becoming a new creation through Christ. You've almost certainly used this verse when you have preached the gospel. However, we don't often go on to quote the rest of the passage:

• ‘Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his

• appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.’

• **2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-20**

God is in the business of reconciling creation back to himself and wants us, his reconciled people, to be ambassadors for his transformational message. This is not just for 'professional' evangelists, this is a call for all believers. However, this ambassadorship can look very different from individual to individual.

Think about it like this: in a football team, every player is pursuing the aim of winning the match. However, the strikers are those who are specifically tasked with scoring goals. This doesn't mean that other players can't and won't score from time to time, but the primary function of the striker in the team is to score. Likewise, as the church we are all pursuing the aim of the restoration of God's perfect kingdom. For this reason we all have a role to play in witness and evangelism. But there are some who are specifically called to prioritise preaching the gospel, possibly at the cost of other pursuits. These are the evangelists, like Philip who we read about in Acts 21:8.

If some of the following statements ring true with you then the calling of the evangelist could well be upon your life:

- You long to see the lost saved.
- You are compelled to preach the gospel in season and out of season.
- You persevere in the task no matter what hardships come upon you.
- You will not compromise the integrity of the message you share no matter what the itching ears of your audience may want you to say.
- You are utterly single-minded in reaching the lost with this powerful, transformational, saving message of the gospel.
- You have had prophetic words spoken over you about being an evangelist.
- You are willing to go wherever the gospel takes you.

**Question:** Spend some time talking through these statements and whether some or all of these things ring true for you. Share (or ask one or two people in the group to) about how you came to the realisation that God has called you to be an evangelist.

The Bible tells us that God desires no-one to perish (2 Peter 3:9). The evangelist is compelled to go into the world having the same heart as the Father. We do not preach because we have to (from a place of duty or fear), we preach because our hearts are in line with our heavenly Father's. Our identity is not found in being an evangelist, but in being a child of God, having become his heirs through the very gospel we now proclaim (John 1:12).

Regardless of gifting or calling, no-one has the power to save themselves or anyone else. We can only be the messengers for it is God alone who saves. He invites us to share in his heart for the lost as we grow to know him more fully as our loving heavenly Father and reveal his saving power to the world.

## DISCUSSION (20 MINS)

Explore the following questions and/or the discussion quotation:

- Is there a difference between personal witness and evangelism?
- If all are expected to *do the work* of an evangelist, why are there those who are called to *be* evangelists?
- How do we develop in ourselves the Father's heart for the lost?

• 'He who is called to and set apart for the work of an evangelist is to devote his time and effort single-mindedly to this God-given task. He is not to be distracted by anything likely to deflect him from this. Persecution will not weaken his resolution. The persuasion of others will fall on deaf ears. Only the clear leading of God will cause him to change his ministry.'

**BILLY GRAHAM**

## APPLICATION (5 MINS)

We do not share the gospel because we are 'evangelists'. We share the gospel because we have been transformed by the Father's love, and with him we desire for the world to know him as we do.

Over the next month, work through the gospel of Mark in your daily devotional time and pay attention to one of Mark's main themes – that Jesus is the Son of God, a servant who has come to do the will of the Father. As you read and re-read the gospel with this perspective, ask God to affirm your identity in light of who he is.

## PRAYER

Give thanks to God, our heavenly Father, that he desires for no-one to perish and has made the way by which all can be saved, through trust in Jesus Christ. Spend some time praying for each other that God will bring more clarity to your calling as an evangelist, that he might provide more opportunities to share the gospel, and that you would have more boldness as you do so.

## ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.

# SESSION THREE

## THE MESSAGE OF THE EVANGELIST

**In this session we explore the message of the gospel itself. What is the gospel? Do we have a sufficient understanding of the message we preach to communicate it clearly?**

### SESSION IN A SENTENCE

.....

The message of the evangelist is Jesus Christ – Christ come, Christ crucified, Christ risen and Christ returning.

### SESSION BACKGROUND

.....

St Augustine famously declared, ‘You have made us for yourself O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.’

The gospel moves people from despair, darkness, brokenness and hopelessness, into joy, light, love and hope. The gospel moves restless hearts to fulfilment in their creator. But tragically, it seems that many followers of Jesus have lost confidence in the power of the gospel today. There are many reasons why believers don’t share the gospel with others – fear, feelings of inadequacy, and hoping someone else will do it all play a part. In essence though, these reasons all find their root in the same place – a lack of understanding about what the gospel actually is and a lack of trust in its power.

In Romans 1 Paul boldly declares, ‘I’m not ashamed of the gospel’ and then immediately goes on to qualify why this is so: ‘because it is the power of God to bring salvation to everyone who believes’ (Romans 1:16). Understanding that the gospel as the power of God to bring salvation is to understand something of who God is, what he has done, and what that means for the world. It’s all wrapped up in the reality of who Jesus Christ is. But this is not detached or abstract philosophy

with no significance beyond the lecture hall or debate room. For one thing, understanding the gospel helps us to approach foundational questions about our existence and the identity of the God who created us. Questions such as:

#### WHO AM I?

Everyone asks this question in some way. What is the meaning of life? Is there purpose? What is my identity? The answer is that you are a child of God, created and loved by him.

#### WHO IS GOD?

There are so many religions in the world. Even if God exists, how can we possibly know who he is and that we are worshipping the right one? God has made himself known through creation, through the Bible, through the experiences of Christians all over the world, and through the person of Jesus Christ. He is the creator and sustainer of life, the king of the universe, a perfect and loving heavenly Father who longs to bring a broken and rebellious humanity back into relationship with himself.

#### WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

The most compelling figure in all of human history. Few historical scholars doubt that he existed, but who was he? A wise teacher? A con man? A mad man? Actually, he is who he says he is: the saviour of the world who, through his life, death and resurrection, has made it possible for a person to become a child of God.

While these types of question can serve as a starting point for a conversation about the gospel, they don’t necessarily lead us to a fully sufficient understanding of what the gospel means. Rather, they are connection points on which we can begin to build a relationship. And so we must dig deeply into scripture to ensure that through these questions we can point to the full and powerful gospel of Jesus Christ.

# SESSION GUIDE

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## CATCH UP (15-25 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Ask the group to share about their journey through the Gospel of Mark over the last month (Session Two: Application). Use this time to explore and affirm the identity of the evangelist again in light of Jesus as the servant son of God.

## PRAYER

Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, highlighted in the catch up time.

## TEACHING (25-35 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

• ‘And so it was with me, brothers and sisters.  
• When I came to you, I did not come with  
• eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed  
• to you the testimony about God. For I  
• resolved to know nothing while I was with you  
• except Jesus Christ and him crucified.’

**1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-2**

Paul shows his commitment to the truth and power of the Jesus story by declaring, ‘I decided while I was with you to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified.’ This is the heart of the gospel: that God himself stepped into the mess of our world in the person of Jesus Christ, lived a perfect life, died upon a cross to take the death we deserved, and rose again three days later, breaking the curse of death once and for all. Salvation and true life is found through faith in him alone. We share this truth not merely to bring about changed minds, but to bring about new life – a transformation that can only be achieved by faith in Jesus Christ.

**Question:** Much of this session will explore what the gospel is. Use the following sections (found in the appendices) to spark discussion about what we believe the gospel to be.

### GOSPEL DOCTRINE (PAGE 64)

The systematic layout of the gospel.

### GOSPEL NARRATIVE (PAGE 65)

Broadly speaking, the same gospel is presented here as in the more systematic approach, but here there is more emphasis on a narrative explanation that reads more like a story.

### YOUTH GOSPEL TALK EXAMPLE, THE 4POINTS EXAMPLE, THREE CIRCLES EXAMPLE (PAGES 66-67)

These examples can be used to critique a specific method of gospel presentation. Pick one (or more if you have time) and look at how the gospel is explained. What works well here and what is lacking?

Frank Turek said, ‘What you win kids with, you win them to. If you win them with emotion, you win them to emotion...’ If our gospel messages are watered-down, one-dimensional attempts to appeal to the heart of the listener, we might see lots of hands up ‘responding’ to the message, but to what have they really responded?

The gospel message brings with it some incredibly challenging ideas. It describes us all as ‘sinners’ and claims we are broken beings who deserve death. The good news of the gospel is so good because it is in light of a human condition that is so bad.

Our concept of how loving and gracious God is will hinge on how much of a problem we think our sin is. People struggle with the idea of a God who judges us for our sin and the thought of a loving God who would send people to hell. It’s easy to be tempted to play down these aspects of the gospel, or to ignore them completely, but this won’t do. The evangelist has a responsibility to unpack the problem of sin so that the power of the cross and the hope of the resurrection is understood for what it really is – the undeserved

grace of God given lovingly to his children and the only hope for humanity.

Sin is a great problem solved by a greater God. To water down one is to weaken our perception of the other, and so we must commit to the truth no matter how challenging it seems.

Another area that can easily be missed is the idea that we are to die to our self-centredness, to take up our cross and follow Jesus with everything we have (Matthew 16:24). The call to a life defined by sacrifice is often minimized in favour of a 'God will make you happy' message. Matt Chandler puts it this way:

• 'The spiritual power in the gospel is denied when we augment or adjust the gospel into no gospel at all. When we doubt the message alone is the power of God for salvation we start adding or subtracting, trusting our own powers of persuasion or presentation.'

We must present the full gospel clearly, for a deficient gospel will lead to deficient Christians.

Prioritising daily Bible study is essential for every believer, but especially for those who are communicating its truth on a regular basis. How can we claim to have revelation from scripture if we are not allowing it to feed our lives on a daily basis? We are called not only to be evangelists, but Bible-preaching evangelists.

## DISCUSSION (20 MINS)

*Explore the following questions and/or the discussion quotation:*

- How would you describe your own understanding of the truth of the gospel?
- What are the challenges of explaining the gospel well today?
- How can we create connection points with contemporary listeners?
- What does it actually mean to be a 'Bible-preaching' evangelist?

• 'The gospel is the lifeblood of Christianity, and it provides the foundation for countering culture. For when we truly believe the gospel,

• we begin to realise that the gospel not only compels Christians to confront social issues in the culture around us. The gospel actually creates confrontation with the culture around – and within – us.'

• **DAVID PLATT**

## APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Encourage every member of the group to start or continue a daily reading plan using the YouVersion phone app or other Bible reading notes. Our engagement with scripture is essential if we are to grow as followers of Jesus and understand the gospel deeply so that we can share it simply.

Using the material about the gospel in this booklet and your Bible, produce a concise explanation (3–5 points) of the gospel with supporting Bible verses that you can share with the group. Next time, these will be critiqued for their theology and for their effectiveness as a piece of communication.

## PRAYER

Thank Jesus that he came and lived a perfect life, that he took your place upon the cross, and that through his resurrection we can each share in new life. Ask him to help you to trust in him and to grow in his love. Ask him to help you to understand his word more fully, to know his gospel more deeply and to be able to share it simply and truthfully with those around you. Thank him for the opportunities he gives you, and pray that you would be equipped to be faithful to those opportunities as you spend time in his word and in his presence.

## ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

*Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.*

# SESSION FOUR

## THE TASK OF THE EVANGELIST

**How important is preaching for an evangelist? This session is an opportunity to explore the theme biblically and encourage each other to develop and sharpen our communication and preaching skills in complete submission to the Holy Spirit's power for the task.**

### SESSION IN A SENTENCE

The task of the evangelist is to proclaim the gospel as revealed through God's holy word by the power of the Spirit.

### SESSION BACKGROUND

According to tradition, St Francis of Assisi once said:

• 'Preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary use words.'

This is a popular quotation for illustrating the importance of living a life marked by the gospel. There are two problems here though. Firstly, there's no real evidence that St Francis said it at all – at least he never wrote it down.

Secondly, and more importantly, it simply doesn't hold up as a statement. While it's right that our lives should demonstrate the good news about God's kingdom in the same way as our words, the preaching of the gospel is by very definition a word-based process. The sentence could be reframed more helpfully as:

• 'Preach the gospel at all times, and, *because* it is necessary, use words.'

Indeed, the words 'preach' and 'proclaim' carry with them an inseparable link to the spoken

word – they are verbal declarations. After all, you may live a perfect 'gospel' life, but if you never articulate the hope you have in Jesus then how will the world know that the reason for your life being lived as it is?

• 'To remain silent and let others interpret our actions is wrong; God himself did not do this. The pivotal points of God's redemptive action in history are accompanied with verbal revelation.'

• WILL METZGER

Preaching was crucial to the spread of the gospel as recorded in the New Testament (Acts 2:14), yet there are some today who believe that preaching is old-fashioned and no longer the best way to communicate the gospel to the world. We surely want to be creative in our preaching and engaging in our communication (perhaps exploring other avenues of communication, such as film-making, or songwriting), but the Bible compels us to hold onto preaching as a central element of the task of sharing the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:21, 2 Timothy 4:1-2).

For an evangelist, *preaching* the gospel is central to the task to which they have been called. This preaching must both explain the good news of Jesus Christ in such a way that the listeners can understand, and also offer them an invitation to respond to what they have heard by choosing to follow Christ (Mark 1:17, Luke 9:23). However, words alone will not do. Words spoken from an unsubmitted life will ring hollow and hypocritical, and words separate from the power of God's Spirit lack any power to bring salvation.

# SESSION GUIDE

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## CATCH UP (10-20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Ask one or two volunteers to share their gospel presentation (Session Three: Application) and offer feedback. Don't forget to be positive!

## PRAYER

Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, highlighted in the catch up time.

## TEACHING (20-30 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

• If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved... for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

• **ROMANS 10:9, 13-15**

There's a lot of talk about proclamation in the Bible - Tim Keller identifies at least 33 different Greek words that we usually translate as 'preaching' or 'proclaiming'. In this passage of Romans, we find Paul using the word in reference to sharing the good news. For Paul, preaching is vitally important, and he tells Timothy to keep preaching a priority (2 Timothy 4:1-2). We see at Pentecost an example of how God chooses to use it - thousands were saved not merely by encountering supernatural signs and wonders (tongues of fire, speaking in other languages),

but through hearing Peter's Spirit-filled proclamation.

But preaching is a challenge today, and there are many who don't believe that preaching the gospel is the best way through which the world can receive the good news. Personal sharing, friendship evangelism and social action projects have become popular ways to share faith in what seems like a less confrontational way. However, we can't deny that there is power in preaching, and the Greek word from where we get 'evangelism' essentially means to *proclaim the good news* - an inherently verbal activity. If we never offer an explanation for the way we live or the hope we have, how will anyone ever know the truth about Jesus (1 Peter 3:15)?

**Question:** If we know that preaching is important to the task of being an evangelist, how do we ensure that the message of the gospel is communicated clearly enough for listeners to understand it and have an opportunity to meaningfully respond to what they have heard?

Knowing our audience and their context is important as it helps us to think carefully about illustrations and connection points that may help them engage with and understand what we share. If we're preaching the gospel to a group of teenagers, we may use different words to if we're sharing with a group of elderly people. The message of the gospel itself doesn't change, but the way we articulate it, the illustrations we use and the cultural references we employ can be tailored for the people in front of us. *What* we preach does not change, but *how* we preach does.

This is why an evangelist must spend time in preparation. If we only rely on the same old gospel talk every time we get up to preach we are likely to become stale and lazy preachers. First and foremost, we should approach our preparation prayerfully, asking God to speak through us by his Spirit and give us the words to say. We should also be preparing talks that take into consideration the audiences who will hear them.

**Question:** Look at the following six tips for preaching the gospel and think of some examples in your own ministry that may help to bring these ideas into focus.

We should preach:

- **Simply:** Clarity is essential in good communication. To explain simply we must first understand our message deeply.
- **Boldly:** We must preach with conviction and with confidence in the truth of our message.
- **Spiritually:** For dead hearts to receive our message and come to life, the Spirit of God must be at work – so our preaching must be in submission to the Spirit’s power for the task.
- **Uniquely:** Christ must be presented as unique before all others, and remain central in our preaching.
- **Lovingly:** We are not winning people to our own ideas and wisdom, but to the singular reality of Jesus Christ. We should preach with humility, giving respect to the one we share about (God), and with compassion for those we share with (his children).
- **Personally:** We can demonstrate the truth of the gospel by sharing about its impact in our own lives, building bridges to the listener and their circumstances.

As helpful as these practical tips may be, it is important to remember that no amount of skilful articulation will actually bring someone into the kingdom of God.:

• ‘It is one thing to learn the technique and mechanics of preaching, it is quite another to preach a sermon which will draw back the veil and make the barriers fall that hide the face of God.’

• **DAVID WATSON**

Our preaching must make space for the Holy Spirit to move in power. While it’s important to think carefully about how we communicate the gospel, ultimately we are looking for God to take our spoken words and produce the miracle of new life. In the last session, we looked at Paul’s

commitment to know and preach the Jesus story in 1 Corinthians 2. In the very next verses, Paul goes on to share his commitment to proclaiming the Jesus story in the power of the Spirit so that new faith might rest on God rather than human reason:

• ‘My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.’

• **1 CORINTHIANS 2:3-5**

We long to worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:23) and our evangelism should be no different. We declare his truth in the power of the Spirit as worshippers giving testimony to the one we worship so that others may come to worship him.

## DISCUSSION (20 MINS)

*Explore the following questions and/or the discussion quotation.*

- Is preaching still relevant today?
- How can we stay sharp as preachers of the gospel to a diverse world in need?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses as a preacher/communicator?
- How do you prepare for gospel presentation?

• ‘The difference between good preaching and great preaching lies mainly in the work of the Holy Spirit... We should do the work it takes to make our communication good and leave it up to God how and how often he makes it great for the listener.’

• **TIM KELLER**

## APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Find a suitable YouTube clip of a gospel preacher who you could critique, both in terms of style and content. Ask the group to watch the clip between sessions, make notes, and be ready to discuss next time.

## **PRAYER**

Pray together for the Spirit of God to work through your humble offering of communication. Give thanks that God has chosen to make you a mouthpiece for his message, and ask him to help you to live the gospel authentically so that the words from your mouths are not detached from the state of your hearts. Pray for those who will hear your preaching – that God would prepare their hearts and move them to a place of revelation from which they can chose to trust in him.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)**

*Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.*

# SESSION FIVE: THE POWER OF THE EVANGELIST

**As evangelists we long to see spiritually-dead hearts revived. This session explores what it means to be spiritually-empowered through prayer, leading us to an authentic revival in our own hearts that in turn we can offer to the world.**

## SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Prayer is the bedrock of evangelism and it puts the power where the power belongs – not in human effort but in the hands of God.

## SESSION BACKGROUND

The Presbyterian minister and missionary Arthur Tappan Pierson made this striking assertion: ‘There has never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality that did not begin in united prayer.’

We’d be hard-pressed to find an example that contradicts his statement. It describes God’s mandate to his people throughout scripture and the promise of what will follow. To take just one example, during Solomon’s reign, God speaks to the rebellious Israelites and offers them hope in the face of their chaotic disobedience and the inevitable disastrous consequences that follow:

‘...if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.’

**2 CHRONICLES 7:14**

In the same way, the gospel of Jesus is an opportunity to humbly relinquish lordship over our own lives, submit to Christ, confess that he is Lord and allow him to bring us healing and new life. We move from rebellion (our sin), to revelation (of God’s truth), to repentance (faith

in God), to revival (transformation that offers transformation to others).

The word ‘turn’ used in 2 Chronicles is the same word we translate in the New Testament as ‘repent’. Jesus began his preaching ministry with a call to do exactly that (Mark 1:15). The Israelite problem in this story is the same as our own today – we too frequently look to other gods (including ourselves) in an attempt to command our own destiny. This disobedience can only lead to death, brokenness and chaos. God has been calling us to turn back to him from the moment we turned away. The gospel reveals that despite our rebellion, hope is found in the grace of God, and our humble response to him.

Pleading with a judge usually involves a plea of innocence in the hope of being exonerated, but here we are told to bow before the eternal judge and admit our guilt – only then can we be pardoned. Justice demands punishment of our guilt in light of the appalling reality of our rebellion against a holy king, but God instead extends pardon to us via the perfect justice of the cross. Instead of death, we are offered healing, restoration and life. God *revives* the humble.

Another example of the power of prayer and unity (with God and each other) for revival is found in the story of Job. The turning point for Job is not when he gets a heavy perspective check from God, but when he obediently prays for the friends who had been part of the problem of messing up his perspective in the first place. At this point in the story, Job lifts his eyes from his own circumstances, graciously prays for others (who have wronged him), and is restored.

Revival starts with one person choosing obedience to their heavenly Father, declaring their allegiance to the kingdom of peace. It just takes one person to declare that Jesus is Lord in word and deed, relying on the Holy Spirit to empower them to be born again. By the grace of God, revival starts with us – and by that same grace revival can spring up anywhere that a once rebellious people unite in humility to call upon the power of God to heal the land.

# SESSION GUIDE

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## CATCH UP (15-25 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Use this time to talk about the video preaching example (Session Four: Application). What did people find helpful or unhelpful? What have we learned from the example that will help us to grow as proclaimers of the good news? Avoid being too critical or commenting only on whether you like or dislike a style of preaching, but dig deeper into the content: was it a successful explanation of the gospel? Was the message communicate appropriately to the gathered audience?

## PRAYER

Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, highlighted in the catch up time.

## TEACHING (20-30 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- 'I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.'

**1 TIMOTHY 2:1-4**

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul gives his protégé some clear instructions for the worshipping life of the church in Ephesus. Paul tells him to give priority of time to prayers and intercession for all people, because it pleases God. It pleases God because he wants all people to know the peace of his kingdom. Prayer is the way by which we call upon God to do what only

he can do – bring peace in chaos and bring life from death.

Prayer is the bedrock of evangelism and it puts the power where the power belongs – not in human effort but in the hands of God.

Edmund P. Clowney writes:

- 'The Bible is God's Word; it is his story of his work in bringing rebellious men and women back to himself. It tells, not of man's seeking a lost God, but of God seeking lost men. The Bible does not present an art of prayer; it presents the God of prayer, the God who calls before we answer and answers before we call (Isaiah 65:24).

United States Founding Father Benjamin Franklin once said, 'By failing to prepare you are preparing to fail.' We must prepare our hearts for evangelism through prayerful submission and petition to God. We could reframe the saying as:

- 'By failing to prayerfully prepare for evangelism, we are preparing to fail in evangelism.'

Even with faithful prayer and a spiritually-empowered gospel message, people can still choose to reject the gospel. But the power of salvation is God's alone, and we can trust God to be at work through our prayers even when we don't always see an outcome we hope for in the moment (Ephesians 6:18-20). The outcome of our evangelism is in the hands of the one who hears our message and God himself. So our success and failure in evangelism isn't measured by how many people are saved, but by our obedience to do what God asks us – to pray and to proclaim.

Our primary motivation to pray is that God commands us to do so. However, this motivation should mature from responding to God's simple command as we grow in relationship with our heavenly Father, that we would lovingly desire to glorify him and seek his goodness and blessings for our own lives and for those we pray for. We discover God's will more clearly as we know him more fully. The more we pray, the more we know God. The more we know God, the more we desire to pray so that his will may be done on earth as in heaven.

So what is the state of our prayer lives? For some, prayer comes naturally. For others, it takes more effort. Preachers could ask themselves this question to self-evaluate: 'Do I find it easier to preach or to pray?' How often would you happily continue to preach beyond your allotted sermon time, and how frequently do you continue to preach beyond the limits of your regular devotion/quiet time?

If we want to be effective, biblical evangelists, we need to be prayerful people – whether it comes naturally or not. The length of our prayers doesn't matter, but their sincerity does. As we continue to sincerely petition the Lord for his transforming work in our own lives and the lives of others, we find that our capacity to spend longer in his presence will grow and this time will honour him, be good for us, and be a blessing to others.

**Question:** The Westminster Shorter Catechism describes prayer as 'an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies.' How does this description shape your understanding of prayer, specifically in relationship to evangelism?

Beyond offering to pray for others as part of our evangelism, we can understand and apply prayer in three ways when it comes to preparing ourselves to share the gospel:

- First, as the way by which we, as evangelists, can grow in maturity as a child of God and as an obedient disciple of Jesus Christ.
- Second, as the way by which God's power can bring opportunities to witness *and* work through us and shift our evangelism from merely marketing the Christian faith to stirring hearts from death to life (Colossians 4:2-6).
- Third, as the way by which we can be equipped with spiritual armour to defend against the attacks of the enemy as we go onto the front lines of spiritual battle (Ephesians 6:18).

Just as Paul did with Timothy, let us urge and encourage each other to be prayerful for *all*

people, and that it would be pleasing to God as we submit to his power in the hope that the world would come to know and submit to his saving truth.

## DISCUSSION (10 MINS)

*Explore the following questions and/or the discussion quotation:*

- What prayer habits and disciplines do you have before preaching the gospel or engaging with a specific witnessing opportunity?
- Do you use prayer within the task of your evangelism? If so, how?
- How do you understand and deal with the issue of 'unanswered' prayer, and how would you help someone understand this idea if asked while sharing your faith with them?

• 'The coming revival must begin with a great revival of prayer. It is in the closet, with the door shut, that the sound of abundance of rain will first be heard. An increase of secret prayer with ministers will be the sure harbinger of blessing.'

• **ANDREW MURRAY**

## PRAYER (20-30 MINS)

*Devote extra time to prayer in this session, praying in three different ways.*

Spend time praying for each other. Pray that God would help you to be a humble people who grow daily in your relationship with him.

Spend time praying for your community, town or city. Pray for the lost to be saved and ask God to heal our land. (Broadly: God, give me opportunities to share today; God, stir hearts to life today).

Spend time praying for yourself. Pray to be equipped in the full armour of God as you head out onto the front line.

## **APPLICATION (5 MINS)**

Write a list of at least five friends, family members, colleagues or even strangers that you are aware of who do not yet know Jesus as Lord. Keep this on your phone, in your wallet, in your Bible or somewhere accessible where you will see it every day. Faithfully pray for these people every day, asking God to revive them and bring them to trust in him.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)**

*Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.*

# SESSION SIX: THE DEVOTION OF THE EVANGELIST

**As evangelists we must ensure that our 'on-stage' matches our 'off-stage' life. How do we maintain authenticity in our lives and our evangelism? Building on our exploration of prayer in the previous session, here we explore the importance of the full devotional life in our Christian walk and our evangelism.**

## SESSION IN A SENTENCE

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Devotion moves us to a place of holiness as we spend time with our holy, heavenly Father, which in turn prepares us to be effective ambassadors of the kingdom who carry a message of hope on our lips that is shown to be authentic by the transformation of our hearts.

## SESSION BACKGROUND

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Returning from their annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover festival, Mary and Joseph realised that Jesus was missing. After three days, they were eventually reunited with their son, finding him with the teachers in the temple precincts. Jesus was sat among the wise teachers, learning from them, but also contributing and astonishing them with his remarkable understanding of scripture at just twelve years of age. When Mary asked Jesus why he had worried his parents by wandering off, Jesus appears confused by her question.

Jesus is confused because you can only be lost or missing if those trying to find you don't know where you are. But how could they not have known that he would be in his Father's house? This is the natural place for him to be. It's like looking everywhere *except* the White House when trying to track down the US president, and then being baffled when you find him at his desk

in the Oval Office, asking him exasperatedly, 'Where have you been?'

Luke recounts specific language in Jesus' response to Mary that reveals his claim to a unique relationship to God: 'Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?' (Luke 2:49). There seems to be no equivalent to this statement anywhere in scripture, apart from when Jesus is speaking. Jesus' first recorded words see him declaring that he is the Son of God.

The work of the cross means we can be adopted into God's family, and are given the right to be called children of God – so the question becomes: how natural is it for us to spend time in *our* Father's house?

It is in the place of devotion that we discover more fully who we truly are. We grow. We are refined. We are emboldened. We are convicted of our wrongdoing. We are instructed in our purpose. We are fulfilled in our existence. Through devotion we are made holy as he is holy. Devotion is central to the Christian life because it forms holiness, and it is crucial to the task of evangelism because the gospel is to be lived and proclaimed by a holy people.

God is asking us, not with exasperation, but delight: 'Where have you been?'

## SESSION GUIDE

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### CATCH UP (10-20 MINS)

*Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Talk about your lists of five people (Session Five: Application) and anything*

*you have experienced by faithfully praying for them every day.*

## PRAYER

*Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, highlighted in the catch up time.*

## TEACHING (25-35 MINS)

*Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.*

- ‘Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.’

### • MARK 1:35

We ‘devote’ ourselves to all sorts of things in life. We might devote ourselves to family and friends, to upholding positive values, to pursuing dreams. Or, we might be devoted to a hobby, a sports team, or getting a high score on whatever the latest mobile gaming craze may be.

Jesus was devoted to his family and friends too. He was surely devoted to learning the family trade from Joseph. He was devoted to his friends, seemingly spending more time in fellowship with them than preaching to the multitudes. He was devoted to his mother, and ensured that the apostle John would take responsibility to care for her after Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension.

What, then, does Jesus mean when he says he came to set families against each other (Luke 12:53)? We can make sense of it in light of his *primary* devotion to his Father in heaven, a devotion which came at the cost of all other devotions, no matter how virtuous they might have been. Jesus was not saying that it is wrong to love your parents, or that he specifically wanted to tear families apart for the sake of it, but Jesus knew that anything that takes your primary devotion away from God will ultimately lead to unholiness. It is in our devotion to God that we are made holy.

**Question:** What are some things that easily pull your devotion away from God? Talk especially about things that are not bad in-and-of themselves, but can easily become distractions from or barriers to submission to God.

It is possible to become more devoted to evangelism than to Jesus himself! But we exist to worship the king, not our ministry. We must be grounded in spiritual living that listens effectively to God.

No matter the demands of his ministry or earthly relationships, Jesus prioritised his personal relationship with his Father above all, taking the time to retreat, pray and listen. For Jesus, being with his Father was the most natural place for him to be. Mark’s gospel tells us of three such occasions of retreat – spend some time reflecting on these passages:

- Mark 1:35–39: Rising early to pray in a solitary place  
*What does this teach us about receiving instruction from God?*
- Mark 6:45–46: Retreating to the mountaintop to pray  
*What does this teach us about being refreshed by God?*
- Mark 14:32–41: Praying in Gethsemane before being arrested  
*What does this teach us about bringing the weight of our circumstances to God?*

Informal and spontaneous prayer throughout the day is great, but setting aside intentional time to pray and read the Bible is crucial. Some are great at praying and not so good at opening the Bible, others have a great Bible study ethic but come unstuck when it’s time to pray. It can be really effective to combine the two by reading a chapter or more of scripture and then praying over what the passage says and how it can be applied to our lives. It’s also important to spend time adoring and offering thanksgiving to God, and bringing your requests and your needs to him.

Jesus had no need to confess any sin, but confession is a central part of the prayer he teaches his disciples: ‘Forgive us our sins...’

(Matthew 6, Luke 11). Psalm 51 is a great resource for repentant prayer and reflection.

Our first step towards holiness is recognising that God is holy and that we are not. We need him, and as we take the time daily to step into his presence, the transforming power of his love will ensure that we are never the same again. It is this transformation that stands as the strongest evidence that the gospel is true and has the power to save. As we proclaim the goodness of God and share the Jesus story, those we reach can grow in confidence of the authenticity of our gospel message by examining the work of God through our wholly-devoted lives.

Jesus has made the way for us to be holy through the saving work of the cross, calling us to die to our old life and put our trust in him. As we walk into new life, Jesus has shown us what it looks like to pursue holiness through daily devotion to the Father.

## DISCUSSION (20 MINS)

Explore the following questions and/or the discussion quotation:

- How would you describe your prayer and Bible study time?
- Do you notice a correlation between the health of your devotional life and the quality of your evangelism?
- How can you open yourself up to more instruction, refreshment, perspective and repentance through intentional devotion in the coming weeks?

• 'The purpose of [spiritual] Disciplines is freedom. Our aim is the freedom, not the Discipline. The moment we make the Discipline our central focus we will turn it into law and lose the corresponding freedom... Let us forever centre on Christ and view the spiritual Disciplines as a way of drawing us closer to his heart.'

• **RICHARD FOSTER**

## APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Begin praying through the Psalms, spending a few minutes every day reading and praying on top of any other Bible study and prayer time. If you can, stretch yourself to keep it up for a whole month or an entire year. You can do this by simply opening your Bible and working through the Psalms one by one, or by following a devotional plan such as Tim Keller's *My Rock; My Refuge: A Year of Daily Devotions in the Psalms*.

## PRAYER

Give thanks to your heavenly Father that he desires relationship with his children. Commit prayerfully to a life of devotion that moves you from being spiritual tourists to being children who dwell in the Father's house and in his presence. Ask God to help you become holy as he is holy, and that the transformation of your lives would be the foundation upon which your evangelism is built.

## ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.

# SESSION SEVEN

## THE SUBMISSION OF THE EVANGELIST

**In this session we will expand upon the idea of holiness explored in the previous session, specifically as it relates to the identity of God, the hope of the gospel and the life of an evangelist. We will look at accountability as being crucial to the journey of a disciple.**

### SESSION IN A SENTENCE

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God desires for his people to be holy as he is holy, and it is through submission to the Holy Spirit and accountability in community that we can grow in holiness.

### SESSION BACKGROUND

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The words **holiness** and **holy** appear more than 900 times throughout the Bible – more times than the words **love**, **faith**, **forgive** and **pray** combined! Holiness is a central theme of the Bible, and God desires for it to be a central reality of our lives.

God is holy, which means he is set apart. He is perfect, sovereign and unique, and there is no other like him. We are not holy: every single one of us has fallen short of the perfect standard of our holy God.. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that only the holy will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14) and Jesus tells us that the pure of heart will see God (Matthew 5:8). Our lack of holiness is a major problem for humanity if we are going to have any hope of a relationship with God. How can the unholy become holy, acceptable to the Lord and able to dwell in his kingdom?

The good news is that Jesus has provided the way by which an unholy people can enter the presence of the perfect holy God and dwell with him forever (Ephesians 5:25-26). Those who put their trust in Jesus share in his holiness, stepping into a brand-new life. True life is holy life.

Holiness is also the theme of Jesus' message about saltiness in Matthew 5:13. In the same way that salt is useless if it loses its flavour, our message is hopeless if we lose our distinctive holiness. Even though our lives are an unfinished work this side of eternity, we are called to live differently so that the world might recognise the authenticity of the message we proclaim.

The gospel is a holy message, testifying to a holy God who acted in a holy way to make it possible for an unholy people to be restored to their true identity – as the holy people of a holy kingdom.

### SESSION GUIDE

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#### CATCH UP (10-20 MINS)

*Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Ask the group to share about their experiences of reading prayerfully through the Psalms (Session Six: Application).*

#### PRAYER

*Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, highlighted in the catch up time.*

## TEACHING (30-40 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation. There are three core scriptures for this session.

### 1. GOD ALONE IS HOLY

‘I will make known my holy name among my people Israel. I will no longer let my holy name be profaned, and the nations will know that I the Lord am the Holy One in Israel.’

**EZEKIEL 39:7**

The Bible reveals who God is so that we can know and worship him in spirit and truth. As we read we discover that he is the one true God. He is indivisible, expressed in triune nature, (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). He is perfect. He is eternal. He is king.

But what the Bible makes especially clear about God is that he is holy. Holiness is the primary characteristic of God. It means that there is no-one like him and that he is set apart from all others: no other being can match up to his identity, to his character, or to the reality of who he is. And it is this characteristic God desires for his people – that we would become a holy people, set apart in our worship and obedience to him, a people of righteousness and purity (Leviticus 11:45). Our lack of holiness – our rejection of God’s holiness – has created a catastrophic problem for humanity. God’s kingdom is a perfect kingdom, but we have chosen imperfection and exclusion from his presence.

### 2. THE HOLINESS OF JESUS MAKES POSSIBLE THE HOLINESS OF HIS PEOPLE

‘...but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest truly meets our need – one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins

of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.’

**HEBREWS 7:24-27**

We are made in God’s image and have the potential to be a holy people, but our rebelliousness gets in the way. If God were to allow even the smallest fragment of imperfection into his kingdom, it would cease to be perfect. So, our rejection of holiness excludes us from the holiness of God and the blessings of his kingdom.

The gospel tells us that Jesus stepped in to be our substitute on the cross, taking the death that we had chosen for ourselves. He was able to take our place because he is perfectly holy (without sin or blemish). The unpayable debt of the world’s rebelliousness has been charged to the account of the perfectly obedient Jesus. He has settled the debt that we could never have paid through the inexhaustible treasure of his holiness. Now, when God looks at those who put their trust in Jesus Christ, he sees not the imperfection (unholiness) of man, but the perfection (holiness) of Jesus.

Think about it like this: Can you think of a time when you wore a piece of clothing that made you feel especially good about yourself? Perhaps you were getting dressed up for a special occasion, and as you stepped out of the house you felt a little more confident. When we put our trust in Jesus, the Bible tells us God credits the righteousness of Jesus to us and we are *clothed* in his perfection (Romans 5:18, Philippians 3:9, 1 Corinthians 1:30).

Paul tells us that instead of gratifying the desires of the flesh, we should ‘clothe ourselves with Christ,’ literally wearing his goodness (Romans 13:14). Compare this to James, who implores his readers to rid themselves of (better translated ‘take off’) all moral filth (James 1:21). We are to take off the former things that were against God and give them to Christ, and in a great exchange he replaces them with his own righteousness.

Have you ever been turned away from somewhere because you didn’t meet the standard of the dress code? The entry requirement for God’s perfect kingdom is perfect holiness, which we do not possess. But as an imperfect people we can enter his perfect kingdom because we now fit the ‘dress code’

through Christ. Nothing less than perfection will do, but nothing less than the perfection of Christ is offered for us to wear. On the day we finally enter the full reality of the kingdom, we won't be bringing our imperfection with us, but the clothing of righteousness.

### **3. SUBMISSION TO THE SPIRIT AND SELF-DISCIPLINE PRODUCE HOLY LIVING**

• 'You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.'

• **EPHESIANS 4:23-24**

God desires for us to grow in maturity, not repeating the same mistakes over and over as we live for him today (habitual sin). We are covered by his grace, but the evidence of sincere and authentic faith is transformation and growth (discipleship). We must not be content to wear the righteousness of Christ as a get-out-of-jail-free card, but choose to honour the cost of the righteousness we wear by living in obedience to the one who paid for us. This is our discipleship journey: moving from our initial moment of new birth (justification) to an ongoing development of new life (sanctification).

Not only does this give us an assurance of the future eternal perfection that awaits us, but it gives us the means by which we can live differently today.

The transformation that takes place in the life of a disciple is powerfully expressed by Paul's exploration of the spiritual fruit that flows from the life of a true follower of Jesus (Galatians 5:22-23). The final facet of the fruit mentioned is self-control, or self-discipline. God, by his Spirit, empowers us with self-discipline – but we have to partner with him (Philippians 2:12-13).

With this in mind, here are four practical things we can do to grow in holiness and obedience to God:

#### **DEVOTION**

The more time we spend in God's Word, the more we will know who God wants us to become.

Likewise, by spending time in prayer we can also ask God to help us overcome our weaknesses and temptation. To spend time with Jesus is to learn what it means to be holy while being empowered to become so.

#### **SELF-AWARENESS**

As we read the Word, so the Word reads us, helping us to examine our own lives and become increasingly self-aware. This self-awareness helps us to recognise our weakness, and means that we can begin to deny ourselves the things that cause us harm.

#### **COMMUNITY**

Being watchful of the life that we live is not only achieved through self-awareness. By committing to Christian fellowship and community, we open ourselves up to loving examination by those around us. Investing in community breeds opportunities for others to speak into your life, and for you to do likewise. Being open with others might bring challenges, but the risk of vulnerability should not deter us from the biblical ideal of journeying graciously together to grow as individuals and as the family of God.

#### **CONFESSION**

James tells us to confess our sins to one another, not for absolution but accountability (James 5:16). Finding a group of trusted friends with whom you can be completely honest and transparent about your struggles, temptations, and failures is essential. The enemy wants to keep your struggle in the dark where he can twist it into shame, but God is calling us to journey together, helping to hold one another to account by bringing our failures into the light where he can restore and redeem. Failure need never be final with God: accountability is a way by which we can deal with our struggles in humility and submission to his grace.

As evangelists, the message we proclaim is not just about seeing responses but creating disciples who grow and mature – a holy people (Colossians 1:28-29). It is authentic disciples who will carry this message effectively, with integrity and power, into the world. It is a holy task for a holy people.

## DISCUSSION (15 MINS)

Explore the following questions and/or the discussion quotation:

- How would you describe the holiness of God to someone who doesn't know him?
- How do we 'clothe ourselves' in Christ?
- What helps you to be or hinders you from being authentically accountable to others?

• 'If you think you can walk in holiness without keeping up perpetual fellowship with Christ, you have made a great mistake. If you would be holy, you must live close to Jesus.'

• **CHARLES SPURGEON**

## APPLICATION (5 MINS)

If you don't already have a small group of trusted friends (separate to the accountability we do in these Advance groups) that you meet up with regularly and to whom you can be completely honest, open and accountable, think about who you could do this with and get something organised as soon as possible. If you are already doing this, share with someone else who isn't why it is important for you and help get them set up with any advice, encouragement or tips you can offer.

## PRAYER

Recognise and celebrate God's holiness in prayer. Seek his forgiveness for your rebellion, and give thanks that because of Jesus' saving work you can share in his righteousness. Ask that God would continue to work in your life to make you holy. Commit to living with discipline in submission to the Spirit's power as you seek to grow as disciples and become ever more fit-for-purpose as a holy people with a holy message.

## ACCOUNTABILITY (25 MINS)

Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.

*Take extra time in this session to think deeply into the questions on the form, to offer honest feedback and to devote time to prayer over these things.*

# SESSION EIGHT

## THE CHARACTER OF THE EVANGELIST

**The most holy Christians are the most humble, so what does it look like to have humility in our evangelism?**

### SESSION IN A SENTENCE

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Humility is the chief virtue of an evangelist: modelled for us in Jesus, refined and empowered within us by the Holy Spirit to the glory of the Father.

### SESSION BACKGROUND

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From the moment the angel Gabriel tells Mary she is expecting a child, humility – a central theme of the Jesus story – emerges. Mary worships God and gives thanks to him that he has been mindful of her, his servant, in her humble state. In other words, she says, 'I'm just an ordinary girl... Why would God want to use me?'

Have you ever wondered why God would use you?

Sometimes we can become self-assured in our gifts and talents, believing that God chooses to use us because of these things. God's call is for our character, not our talent, and the character that pleases him most has humility at its centre. Mary continues in her praise by singing of how her holy God scatters the proud and lifts up the humble. As a young Jewish woman, her knowledge of the Old Testament would have supplied her everything she needed to make this claim about God with confidence. And now she was experiencing this reality for herself. God has always chosen to use the humble for his purposes in the most unexpected ways, defying the wisdom of the world and revealing his power and

grace through the least likely people. The first step towards being used for great things by God is in realising our total reliance upon him.

Jesus' birth couldn't have taken place in more humble circumstances. The king of kings was born in a lowly stable and placed into a manger – an animal feeding trough! The riches of the birth of a king were replaced with the poverty of the birth of a nobody. Our reconciliation to the creator of all things was initiated in staggering humility.

Wherever we look in scripture – whether it's Isaiah 53, where we hear about the suffering servant of the Lord who will be pierced for our transgressions, or Jesus' declaration about coming to serve rather than be served, or the washing of his disciples' feet, or his submission to his Father's will in the garden of Gethsemane, or his allowing himself to be beaten, mocked and crucified when, with a single word, he could have wiped out anyone who caused him harm – the Bible presents a portrait of a servant king who defeats the curse of human pride by the power of holy humility.

God rescues his people in the very way he intends for them to live. Pride led us to destruction, and humility will bring us back.

.....  
'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.'

.....  
**2 CORINTHIANS 8:9**

# SESSION GUIDE

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## CATCH UP (10-20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. For smaller groups, ask each person to share one win and one struggle since last meeting. For larger groups, select four or five people to share specific testimony since last meeting.

## PRAYER

Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, highlighted in the catch up time.

## TEACHING (25-35 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

• ‘Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

• In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

• Who, being in very nature God,  
• did not consider equality with God  
• something to be used to his own advantage;  
• rather, he made himself nothing  
• by taking the very nature of a servant,  
• being made in human likeness.  
• And being found in appearance as a man,  
• he humbled himself  
• by becoming obedient to death—  
• even death on a cross!’

• PHILIPPIANS 2:3-8

Commenting on humility, C.S. Lewis wrote: ‘True humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less.’

The Bible doesn’t ask us to be self-depreciative or have low self-esteem. You are cherished and loved by God – and called his precious child. But there is a fine line: thinking too highly of ourselves puts us in danger of the kind of pride that got humanity into the sin business in the first place. To think too little of ourselves is to reject the identity that God has bought for us, and to think too much is to fail to recognise the sovereignty and kingship of God.

Pride sits at the heart of all sin. Proverbs tell us that, ‘When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom’ (Proverbs 11:2). The Bible’s wisdom literature repeatedly affirms the virtue of humility as the opposite posture of pride, and celebrates the blessings that flow from it.

We live in an age of self-promotion. Can you imagine if David had slain Goliath today? The temptation for a blood-still-fresh, severed-head victory selfie would be strong! Many of us would surely welcome songs to be written about our achievements, movies to be made and titles to be bestowed, and yet – as D.L. Moody points out in a classic sermon on humility – that not once in all of David’s Psalms does he mention his victory. Today, at the first sniff of greatness we are encouraged to champion ourselves, to build our status and our platform. But God does not ask you to build a ministry or to elevate yourself to a position. He’s far more interested in your character, and how you might be elevated to his purposes through humility (Luke 14:11).

Jesus took the lowly road, the position of the servant. He is the king who came not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45). Notice what John says about Jesus immediately before the washing of his disciples’ feet:

• ‘**Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power**, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.’

• (JOHN 13:3-4, EMPHASIS ADDED)

Knowing that all things were under his power, and knowing the fullness of his identity, Jesus chose to be a servant to demonstrate the will of his Father. You may have done a Bible study on this which involved actually washing one

another's feet. Yet washing someone's feet today doesn't quite do justice to the full significance of what Jesus was showing his disciples. It's hard for us to comprehend just how uncomfortable it would have made them to have had their rabbi – their messiah – undertaking this duty as a mark of his humility and servant heartedness.

Think of it like this: You hear a knock at the door to find the ruling monarch of your nation on your doorstep. They proceed to come into your house, pick up your baby and begin to change its very full nappy. The stench is awful and you look on in horror as your baby's waste makes contact with royal hands. And yet the monarch looks completely at ease with the situation, enjoying their time with the child even, in this unpleasant but necessary activity.

Don't forget that as Jesus was washing his disciples' feet, he knew that Judas was about to betray him. He knew that Peter was going to deny him. He knew that his followers were still often prideful and weak men, and yet in his power and majesty he humbled himself before them, setting an example for them to follow. Not merely were they to wash each other's feet, but they were to become humble servants in all things.

There's a well-known anecdote about Charles Spurgeon, who, upon seeing one of his preaching students step up to the pulpit with a little too much arrogant swagger only to come down afterwards crestfallen at how badly the sermon had gone, supposedly remarked: 'If you'd gone up the way you came down, you might have come down the way you went up.'

No matter the grandeur of our calling, the impressiveness of our gifting, the size of our opportunity, or the reputation of our ministry, we are powerless to save anyone. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), but the wages of humility is life (Proverbs 22:4). Through the humble suffering servant who took our punishment on the cross, we can now place our trust in him and take up our own cross by humbly dying to our old prideful existence. We can move from death to life. Humility is not merely a virtue, it is the only appropriate response we can make to Jesus when we recognize he is Lord.

- 'For the LORD takes delight in his people; he
- crowns the humble with victory.'
- (PSALM 149:4)

Humility in evangelism does not mean that we pander to people, water down the gospel, or back off from sharing the truth where it might cause offence (and the gospel is often an offensive message). Equally, boldness in evangelism does not mean that we ram the gospel down people's throats with little consideration of how we might help them to truly understand the hope we carry. Humility in evangelism means at least these four things...

**Question:** Take some time to talk through these four areas of humility in evangelism. How might you apply these principles in your own ministry?

#### **HUMBLY SERVE THE LORD**

Our primary responsibility and desire should be to serve God, however challenging, uncomfortable or costly it may be. Are we willing to put on the nature of a servant and be obedient to our master?

#### **HUMBLY EMPTY YOURSELF**

Humility involves emptying ourselves so that we can be filled with the Holy Spirit. This is a humble act in itself, but when we invite the Spirit to take up residence in our lives, we move from being committed to humility to being empowered for it.

#### **HUMBLY ACCEPT HIS WORD**

Humble yourself before God's word. Learn to read it well and accept it on its own terms, not forcing it to say what you want it to say to suit your needs. Humbly seek to hear God's truth, no matter how challenging it may prove to your preconceived or culture-shaped ideas. Discovering God's truth and applying his wisdom requires humility.

#### **HUMBLY SERVE THOSE TO WHOM WE EVANGELISE**

Proclamation is essential, but we must also love the world. We must serve those in need. As we

aim to love people well we must listen to them well. If all we ever do is speak at them, then we are likely to miss important connection points between the gospel and their lives and minimize the possibility of a meaningful relationship with them.

By honouring God, making space for his Spirit to work in us, and building upon the truth of his Word we can be effective servants into the world – who meet practical needs, listen well to people, and faithfully proclaim the Jesus story. If we want to be fruitful in our evangelism, our starting posture must be humility before the Lord. D.L. Moody puts it this way:

• ‘I have a pear tree on my farm which is very beautiful; it appears to be one of the most beautiful trees on my place. Every branch seems to be reaching up to the light and stands almost like a wax candle, but I never get any fruit from it. I have another tree, which was so full of fruit last year that the branches almost touched the ground. If we only get down low enough, my friends, God will use every one of us to His glory.’

• **D.L. MOODY**

## DISCUSSION (15 MINS)

*Explore the following questions and/or the discussion quotation:*

- Are there areas of your life in which you struggle with humility?
- Is there an inherent conflict between sharing the gospel with boldness and sharing it with humility?
- How can we lovingly address a lack of humility, or the presence of false humility, in others?

• ‘I am persuaded that love and humility are the highest attainments in the school of Christ and the brightest evidences that he is indeed our master.’

• **JOHN NEWTON**

## APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Think carefully about how you could serve and bless those around you in an unexpected and costly way. Does your church or ministry employ a cleaner? Tell them to take the day off to spend with their family or in spiritual retreat, and do their tasks for them. Be the first to make tea or coffee in the office each day. Tip your waiter generously after a meal, and write them a note expressing the love of God to them... Be creative and be intentional.

On the one hand, none of these things could capture the full effect of Jesus washing his disciples feet, but on the other, neither should they simply be so-called ‘random acts of kindness’. These are the intentional actions of thoughtful, loving and humble people who see opportunities all around to bless others in ways that point back to the suffering servant. We don’t do these things to win favour with God or look good in front of others (in fact, don’t go shouting about the things you do on social media!) – we do them as both as a way in which we can learn to grow in humility, and as a natural product of the humility that God is growing in us.

## PRAYER

Give thanks for the humility of Christ and his example of servant-heartedness. Ask God to help you see yourself as he sees you, and that you might grow in humility and wisdom daily. Pray for each other, that you would be bold and humble in your proclamation of the gospel.

## ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

*Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.*

# SESSION NINE: THE OPPORTUNITY OF THE EVANGELIST

**One mark of an evangelistic gifting is the ability to see – and a desire to seize upon – any and every opportunity to share the gospel with those around us. In this session we will explore how we can make the most of every opportunity.**

## SESSION IN A SENTENCE

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An evangelist should always be ready to seize upon any opportunity that comes their way, explaining the gospel with clarity in every situation and circumstance.

## SESSION BACKGROUND

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Peter tells us that we should always be ready to share the gospel with anyone who enquires about the hope we have (1 Peter 3:15). Paul tells Timothy to be ready to preach the gospel in every season and circumstance of life (2 Timothy 4:2), and writes elsewhere that we must make the most of every opportunity (Colossians 4:5). Jesus demonstrates a lifestyle of readiness to serve and share at all times. Sometimes that means looking in unexpected places to see an opportunity (as with Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10), being ready in socially-challenging situations (like with the Samaritan woman in John 4:1-26), being bold in places of privilege (remember the sinful woman at the Pharisee's house in Luke 7:36-50), sharing with social outcasts (like healing lepers in Luke 17:11-19), or declaring truth during your own suffering (as with the thief on the cross in Luke 23:39-43)... and so the list goes on.

Billy Graham's crusades – through which he preached to more people than any other person who has ever lived – were the most famous aspect of his evangelism. But this wasn't the only

way in which Billy shared the gospel throughout his life. Whether meeting with presidents or royalty, appearing on mainstream talk shows, bringing aid to areas hit by natural disaster, ministering to troops overseas, or sharing with individuals he met along the way, Billy was always ready, prepared and willing to share the gospel with those he met.

Billy Graham wasn't only obedient to scripture, or following through on a hyper-intense take on the great commission by going beyond the most obvious ministry opportunities. His motivation to see and seize upon any and every opportunity came from having truly understood, received, and submitted to the gospel.

An evangelist will have a (super)natural compassion for the lost that extends beyond the satisfaction of fulfilling an evangelistic engagement or preaching opportunity. An evangelist is desperate for everyone to hear and receive the gospel, and, even under threat of rebuke and harsh consequences, would not be able to stop themselves from talking about Jesus at every opportunity (Acts 4:18-20).

The remarkable true story of Desmond Doss, told recently in the Hollywood film *Hacksaw Ridge*, reveals a man who was compelled to enlist as combat medic during the Second World War, but who refused to pick up a gun under any circumstances because of his devout faith in God. Deployed to the Japanese island of Okinawa, Doss found himself behind enemy lines on 'Hacksaw Ridge'. Under heavy fire from the enemy, yet able to hear the cries of the wounded – both American and Japanese – Doss began to save anyone he could, which involved lowering them down from the ridge using a makeshift rope pulley system. Doss was shot in the arm by a sniper, and was later discovered to have seventeen pieces of shrapnel in his body, and yet he kept going for as long as he was able to save as many as possible.

Interviewed about this incredible feat years later, Doss explained that whenever exhaustion kicked in and he felt that he couldn't help anyone else he prayed, 'Lord, help me get one more.' Doss saved at least 75 men on that ridge.

Dodd's prayer is the cry of the evangelist. 'Lord, through every opportunity, however hard or costly, help me get one more.'

## SESSION GUIDE

### CATCH UP (10-20 MINS)

*Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. For smaller groups, ask each person to share one win and one struggle since last meeting. For larger groups, select four or five people to share specific testimony since last meeting.*

### PRAYER

*Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, highlighted in the catch up time.*

### TEACHING (20-30 MINS)

*Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.*

• 'One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer - at three in the afternoon. Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do

• not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

• **ACTS 3:1-6**

It's easy to miss opportunities. Many of the regrets people face in later life revolve around missed opportunities - the things they wish they had done if only they had had the confidence to try, or had they worried less about what people might think of them.

The world of social media has given rise to a new phenomenon - the 'Fear Of Missing Out' (FOMO). In a constantly-connected world, we can always see what other people are doing - and when it looks like others are having a better life experience than ours, FOMO can kick in. Generally speaking, FOMO is considered to be an unhelpful and often unhealthy side-effect of our connectedness, but how about when we read the Bible? Have you ever experienced FOMO as you've read about what Jesus disciples and the early church got up to in the book of Acts?

Reading about the Apostles in the New Testament can leave you feeling like you are missing out on the same level of adventure that they experienced in sharing the gospel. While most of us don't crave the scary stuff - like being stoned to death(!) - we would love to see and experience more of the signs and wonders that accompanied the apostles' ministry.

In Acts 3, Peter and John find themselves presented with an everyday situation: a lame beggar is asking them for some money. It would have been easy for the apostles to simply walk past this unfortunate man, or to have given a small donation and moved on.

Look at how specific the language is here: instead of moving on, Peter and John look right at him. The NRSV translation sees Peter and John looking *intently* at the man, who in turn *fixed his attention* upon them in expectation of receiving something.

**Question:** How intently are you looking at the world around you? How good are you at seeing and seizing upon the opportunities that arise to share the gospel that are outside your usual ministry (e.g. preaching the gospel from a platform)?

The lame man saw an opportunity to get the thing he thought he needed most – money. Fortunately for him, the apostles were paying attention to the opportunity in front of them, meaning they were able to give him what he really needed most – Jesus. It was a love for the lost that caused Peter and John to stop, not simply a compassion for his disability or social status.

The Bible tells us that he who honours God will in turn be honoured by God (1 Samuel 2:30). This is never more true than when we honour God in life's 'small things'. As we prove to be trustworthy in the secret place – in the smaller, less noticeable areas of life – God entrusts us with bigger things. That could be a bigger platform, but why settle only for a bigger audience? Better than a larger platform is a greater demonstration of the Holy Spirit's power in our lives. The full measure of the Spirit of the living God is available to you today as you submit to the Lord, but he seems to entrust it most fully and most often to those he knows will use it best for his service. Anyone in the Israelite army could have defeated Goliath with God's help, but it was David who stepped up and proved trustworthy in the specific task, and so the road to the throne was set.

If you want the full adventure, be faithful in the little things, the everyday opportunities, and see what God does. If you are struggling to get motivated about seizing those opportunities, ask God to take you out of your comfort zone and press on with *choosing* to be intentional even when you don't feel like it. If you are feeling guilty about missing opportunities and feel like you're letting God down, remember that God doesn't want you to feel guilty about missed opportunities, he wants you to love the lost out of your love for him.

Not one of us is perfect. Even the apostles made mistakes in their evangelism and surely missed opportunities along the way. The point is not to hold ourselves to an impossible standard that piles on the pressure, but to hold ourselves in the incomparable love of God that piles on the grace. It is from this reality that we grow, maturing to become increasingly faithful to the opportunity he puts in front of us day by day.

D.L. Moody once said, 'God has given me a lifeboat and said... "Moody, save all you can."' Your capacity to row, to see those drowning and

pull them from the water is found in your love for God, and his love for the world.

Here are three practical suggestions for how to become more aware of everyday opportunities and to be faithful in them:

### **1. JOURNAL**

There are many helpful aspects to keeping a journal. With opportunity in mind, write down details about your day. Who do you spend time with at work? Do you walk past the same homeless person regularly in your city? Who do you speak to at the school gates? Writing in your journal will keep these people fresh in your mind so that you can keep them in prayer, and it can also be used as a personal accountability check: are you being intentional about faith-based conversations with them over time? Have conversations been trivial for weeks, or have you made attempts to go deeper? If you feel able, you could also ask accountability partners to read your journal and ask you questions about these areas too.

### **2. CHALLENGE**

Why not set challenges for yourself if you struggle to seize daily opportunities? For example, 'This week I want to talk to at least one stranger about Christ.' The challenge can be practical as well as proclamational, and should stretch you beyond your normal practice of evangelism.

### **3. ADVENTURE**

Shift your mindset from duty to adventure. We have an evangelistic responsibility and we want to be obedient to what God asks us to do, but without love we are missing the point. Think of the opportunities in your week ahead not simply as a burdensome duty, but as the high point of adventure. Many people in the nine-to-five grind – even those who love their jobs – can't wait for the weekend to come. Could we be people who can't wait for the next opportunity to share Jesus with the same anticipation? If we can, we will begin to embrace the adventure with a healthy mindset, so that even when it's challenging, we can dust ourselves off and go again.

In the words of Martin Luther,

- 'If he have faith, the believer cannot be
- restrained. He betrays himself. He breaks out.
- He confesses and teaches this gospel to the
- people at the risk of life itself.'

## DISCUSSION (20 MINS)

*Explore the following questions and/or the discussion quotation:*

- Have you ever missed an obvious opportunity? What did you learn from the experience?
- What are the biggest challenges you face in seizing every opportunity to share the gospel?
- How do you intentionally *create* opportunities for sharing the gospel that otherwise might not be there?
- Discuss the three suggestions from the teaching (journal, challenge, adventure). Do you see the value of these things and could you implement them?

- 'Here is the principle - adapt your measures to the necessity of the people to whom you minister. You are to take the gospel to them in such modes and circumstances as will gain for it from them a hearing.'

**CATHERINE BOOTH**

## APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Be intentional this month about seizing opportunities that you might usually walk past or choose not to engage with. Is there an old friend you could reach out to? Could you take some extra time to sit and talk to a homeless person? Do you regularly get coffee from the same barista, and if so could you turn the conversation to Jesus?

It is almost certain that everyone in the group will be able to think of an opportunity in their regular week in which they could be more intentional about sharing Jesus. Commit to taking this opportunity between yourselves and hold each other to account for how you got on next month. Remember, this isn't just about

setting arbitrary goals and targets, but changing habits and patterns of behaviour. What starts out as intentional practice can develop into natural behaviour over time.

Consider starting a journal.

## PRAYER

Thank God that he provides you with opportunities to proclaim his gospel and share our faith with others. Ask him to provide some specific opportunities in situations where you have been hoping for breakthrough, and for general opportunities day by day. Pray for each other that you will be perceptive of the opportunities around you, and faithful to each one as it arises.

## ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

*Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.*

# SESSION TEN

## THE COMMITMENT OF THE EVANGELIST

**The Bible is the revelation of the invitation from God to turn away from our rebellion and into relationship with him, through faith in Jesus Christ. How do we ensure that we are not only explaining and presenting what the gospel is, but boldly calling people to respond to and act upon what they have heard?**

### SESSION IN A SENTENCE

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An evangelist is committed to proclaiming the full message of the gospel – which includes an invitation to the listener to change direction and experience true life through faith in Jesus Christ.

### SESSION BACKGROUND

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Imagine a bridegroom at the front of the church on his wedding day. He looks around the beautifully-decorated building, full of his excited friends and family in anticipation of the entrance of the bride. The woman of his dreams is due to arrive at any moment. Ten minutes go by and the bride hasn't arrived. 'It's customary for the bride to be late,' he thinks to himself. Twenty minutes go by and there's still no sign of his bride. He laughs nervously. Thirty minutes go by and there is *still* no bride and no word as to why she is late. Now he begins to panic a little as the murmurs of the gathered crowd begin to rise. Forty-five minutes go by, then an hour, and still no bride. The murmuring amongst the guests has reached fever pitch. What on earth is going on? Is she just running ridiculously late or has she done the unthinkable and decided not to come at all?

The groom's mind begins to race through all the potential reasons for why she hasn't arrived, and then, suddenly, his stomach sinks as the realisation hits him. He never actually asked his bride to marry him.

An invitation is essential if the opportunity you have for someone requires a response. The shortest version of Jesus' gospel message is recorded by Mark as follows: "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15).

The word 'repent' can cause a few problems – mainly because not many people know what it really means. It is often associated with a 'turn or burn' approach to gospel preaching, meaning that many hear in it a pronouncement of judgement. The word repent doesn't sound like a 'good news' word to many people today.

But when we properly understand it, the word 'repent' holds an amazing revelation of the truth of the gospel. It literally means to have a change of mind, to change the course of your life. 'You are going the wrong way,' Jesus is saying, 'but because of me you can go the right way – the way of truth that leads to the Father.' Repentance is really beautiful good news, because it offers anyone an opportunity to know life instead of death. We have brought judgement on ourselves by our rebellion against God, and repentance is both the fire alarm to alert us to this fact and the invitation to discover the hope of Jesus.

According to Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, repentance (conversion) has three elements:

- 'First, it is a turning *from* something, which
- includes specific sins, false gods, or simply
- a life lived for oneself (1 Thessalonians
- 1:9; Revelation 9:20, 21 and 16:11). Second,

• conversion is a product of the will of God and his gracious working in the world (Acts 11:18; Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 7:10; 2 Timothy 2:25; 2 Peter 3:9). Third, conversion is a turning to someone, a commitment of one's whole life to God in Jesus Christ (Acts 14:15; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 Peter 2:25). It is thus a total reorientation, whether spectacular or undramatic, sudden or gradual, emotional or calm, in which a person transfers his or her total allegiance to God."

The first preachers of the gospel were careful to include an opportunity for their listeners to respond to their message, just as Jesus did. An appeal for repentance was made as the climax of the preaching of the Jesus story (Acts 2:37-39; 3:25-26; 4:12; 5:31; 10:43).

The gospel extends an invitation for humanity to stop running away from God. Through faith in Jesus Christ we can turn around and face God - and as we do so, allow our minds to be changed by the truth of who he is, and see our lives transformed by the power of his Spirit.

## SESSION GUIDE

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### CATCH UP (10-20 MINS)

*Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Share about extra opportunities you encountered in light of the last session (Session Nine: Application).*

### PRAYER

*Commit the time to the Lord and give thanks for the opportunities you've had in the last few weeks to share the gospel. Pray for those who have put their trust in Jesus through those opportunities.*

### TEACHING (30-40 MINS)

*Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.*

• "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

• Peter replied, "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call."

#### ACTS 2:37-39

Invitation is as much a part of the gospel message as the cross itself. Having experienced the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter began to preach to the gathered crowd. Through the power of the Spirit at work in his preaching the audience was 'cut to the heart' as they heard the message of the gospel.

Can you imagine here the story taking a different turn? Just as the crowd are ready to put their trust in Jesus, Peter says, 'Thank you and goodnight!' and walks off for a well-deserved post-preaching meal with his friends. The crowd, left moved by his message but confused about how to apply it to their lives, wander off back to their lives with more questions than answers, having had no opportunity to put their faith in the Jesus Peter told them about.

Thankfully that's not what happened! Peter invited a response and called the crowd to repent - giving them a concrete way to act upon the message they have understood and to respond to the call of the Spirit they have experienced in their hearts. The full gospel includes an invitation to repentance, and an explanation of how to act upon what has been heard. The disciples were thoroughly committed to preaching the full gospel, and so must we be.

For those of you who regularly prepare sermons or talks, you'll know how important it is to include some ways to apply your message to everyday life. Jesus' preaching, and that of the apostles, was full of application. Jesus' first gospel presentation in Mark - a call to 'repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' - is pretty much all application: he is saying, 'You are going the wrong way, you need to turn around and experience a transformation!'

Throughout the gospels Jesus repeatedly extends an invitation: 'Come to me all who are weary' (Matthew 11:28), 'Come and see' (John 1:39), 'Come and follow me' (Matthew 4:19), 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink' (John 7:37), 'Come and eat' (John 21:12).

These invitations are not arbitrary or trivial, they reveal Jesus' identity to the world and have real consequences when taken up or rejected. The defining aspect of an invitation is that it demands a response. Even to sit on the fence is to reject the invitation, for only a 'Yes' brings acceptance of the invitation and the blessings that follow.

**Question:** Take a look at the following three biblical examples of invitation and discuss them as a group.

### **THE CALLING OF THE DISCIPLES (MARK 1:17)**

*The call of Jesus is personal*

### **THE CALL UPON THE RICH YOUNG MAN (MATTHEW 19:16-22)**

*The call of Jesus is costly*

### **THE CALLING OUT OF THE DEAD (JOHN 11:43)**

*The call of Jesus is powerful*

The opportunity to respond to the gospel is the most important aspect of our preaching. To proclaim the gospel authentically, we must always make room for an invitation to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

This can be tricky – and some gospel opportunities seemingly lend themselves better than others to inviting a response. So how can we faithfully 'invite' a response in our evangelism, whatever context and situation we find ourselves in? Whether from a platform or in a one-to-one setting, we should be committed to not simply asking people if they want to come to a Sunday church service (although do this by all means), but committed to inviting people into the kingdom of God. We don't find a step-by-step guide for this in scripture, but these principles offer a good place to start:

### **ASK DIRECT QUESTIONS**

Keep your questions direct and succinct. For example, having explained who Jesus is and what it means to follow him, simply ask: 'Would you like to put your trust in Jesus Christ today and begin your life in relationship with him?'

If you used an illustration or parable that connected with your audience, use this as a focal point. For example, if sharing from the story of the prodigal son: 'God is calling you home today. Do you want to come home into the Father's embrace, just as the prodigal son did?' This question helps you to see if the listener is open to saying yes to Jesus. Next, you can bring more clarity about their response, but your initial question should be direct, simple and connected to the message you have already shared.

### **TAKE THE TIME NEEDED**

When speaking to a crowd, wait for as long as you feel led to let the Spirit touch people's hearts. How long it takes (or how awkward it feels!) is largely irrelevant. What matters is that people have time to consider what has been shared, and that you allow the space for God to do what he wants to do. In one-to-one situations, it may be that the person needs time and space to think and therefore you can arrange to meet up again at another time to explore this again.

### **MAKE THE EXPECTATION CLEAR**

Explain what will happen if the person says yes and what they are being invited into. For example, explain that you will pray together, perhaps that you will give them a Bible and a reading plan, and that you will connect them with your/a church or follow-up discipleship group. Make it clear that their life may not instantly change for the better, but that through daily devotion to Jesus the fullness of the life that he offers will come into sharper focus. Explain something of the practical next steps, and the spiritual reality of the life of discipleship that follows our first response to Jesus.

### **CELEBRATE ACCEPTANCE, BE GRACIOUS OF REFUSAL**

As a person indicates they want to accept the invitation, be affirming and joyful. Don't let it be manufactured – if you are not genuinely joyful at this response you may be getting ahead of

yourself to be sharing the gospel in the first place! Equally, if the person says a qualified or outright flat no, be gracious and humble. Try to leave the person who refuses the invitation with an open-ended invitation that they can accept on their own should God reveal himself to them at another time, and if possible give them some contact details for yourself or a local church that they could connect with should this happen.

One of the most common reasons people don't respond to the gospel message is that no-one asks them to. One of the most common reasons evangelists don't call out a response is a fear that no-one will respond and then they (or the gospel) will look foolish. But the power of salvation is not yours, and even Jesus had people walk away from him and reject his invitation. We are simply called to be faithful to the gospel message, invitation and all, whatever follows next. In fact, the invitation of Christ is for us to come and die to ourselves, to take up our cross and follow him (Matthew 16:24). That means dying to ourselves in our evangelism too, whatever the cost and however foolish we may look.

Jesus and the apostles offered invitation as they preached the gospel, and so must we. Whatever the response, we can be assured that we have been faithful to the gospel message and its central call to repentance and trust in Jesus Christ. God will take care of the rest.

## DISCUSSION (15 MINS)

*Explore the following questions and/or the discussion quotation:*

- Is it possible to authentically preach the gospel without offering a response to faith in Jesus?
- What do you find easy/difficult about the response aspect of evangelism?
- What have you learned about how to help people to respond to the gospel as you have evangelised?

••• 'The gospel is God's summons, through the act of preaching, to the listener to make a decision which will usher him into a new dimension of existence.'

••• **MICHAEL GREEN**

## APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Be intentional about extending an invitation to respond to the gospel every time you share it. Perhaps you are a platform preacher who has been struggling in this area. Experiment with different ways of calling out a response and don't be afraid of looking foolish if no-one responds. Equally, you may be someone who is great at initiating and having conversations with people about Jesus, but are struggling to make a connection to the next steps. Step out in boldness this month and ask at least one person off the back of a gospel-centred conversation if they want to put their trust in Jesus.

## PRAYER

Give thanks to God for the invitation he offers us each to be reconciled to him. Ask him for boldness as you share the gospel, and that we would be clear and confident in calling people to repentance – helping them see not condemnation but hope. Pray that hearts might be receptive to this invitation.

## ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

*Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.*

# SESSION ELEVEN: THE INSPIRATION OF THE EVANGELIST

**As evangelists our job is not only to preach the gospel to the lost but to stir the church to evangelism. In this session we will explore how we can be fire-starters in the church to help encourage and equip those around us to be faithful to God in evangelism.**

## SESSION IN A SENTENCE

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Alongside proclaiming the gospel to the world, an evangelist will also be committed to stirring the church to evangelism by encouraging and equipping the saints for works of service.

## SESSION BACKGROUND

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Back in Session Two, as we were still in the early stages of the Advance group journey, we defined the identity of an evangelist as being the messenger children of our heavenly Father. With this in mind, what responsibility do we have as evangelists not only to the world, but to our own family, the church?

Since the development of social media a new form of celebrity has developed, the so-called 'influencer'. These are people who have developed such a following on a social media platform (particularly YouTube) that they are able to exert a mass-appeal influence over people. It's not an entirely new concept – celebrities from the entertainment and sports world have been telling us for years through advertising what to wear, eat, drink and smell like. But this generation of celebrities are arguably the first to have gathered a following for the purpose of influence itself.

Paul tells us in Romans not to conform to the influences of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds through submission to the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:2). As God's holy people, we are the original influencers, with a message that brings life, freedom and hope.

In Session Seven, we reminded ourselves that salt with no flavour is good for nothing. A social media influencer's power hinges on how many followers they have and how well those followers engage with whatever they promote. For the church, our distinctiveness is far more important, and to lose it is far more costly. A social media influencer may lose their fame and career as they fade in influence, but if the church fades in influence and loses its distinctiveness, the world will miss opportunities to see the gospel lived out and hear it proclaimed in a way they can understand.

Evangelists are passionate to see the world receive the gospel, but we must also be passionate to continuously stir the church to bear gospel influence in the world. After all, there is no 'Plan B' when it comes to the gospel, and the church of Jesus Christ are its only ambassadors. Whenever the church forgets this or becomes distracted, evangelists must lovingly fuel and stoke the fires of evangelism once more so that the influence of the gospel can shine brightly for all to see.

# SESSION GUIDE

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## CATCH UP (10-20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Share about your experiences inviting people to respond to the gospel in light of the last session (Session Ten: Application).

## PRAYER

Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, highlighted in the catch up time.

## TEACHING (20-30 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

• ‘So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.’

• **EPHESIANS 4:11-13**

Even those who have a huge platform need some inspiration in life, as Hollywood action hero Dwayne ‘The Rock’ Johnson testifies:

• ‘When I was eight years old, I saw *Raiders of the Lost Ark* in Charlotte, North Carolina. I walked out of there and was so inspired. I loved the movie, and I knew I wanted to be that guy.’

**Question:** Have you ever encountered someone so inspirational that you immediately wanted to do what they do/be like them? What was it about them or what they were doing that had this impact upon you?

Whether in a family member, historical figure, pop culture icon or even a fictional character, we can find inspiration in all sorts of places. Some of this inspiration affects the hobbies and careers we pursue and can even shape our character and worldview. Sometimes it works the other way – you can see someone so talented that it actually discourages you from pursuing something: ‘What’s the point, I’ll never be as good as them!’

There are many inspirational Biblical figures, and it’s good to look to heroes of the faith both on and off the pages of the Bible – especially as we realise that, as impressive as they may be, they were just ordinary people being faithful to God. Knowing that the reason Moses could speak in power to Pharaoh had nothing to do with his oratory skills and everything to do with his faithfulness to the call of God and submission to his power is encouraging as it is inspiring. God is the same, so we could do the same things too.

Ultimately there is only one person who can both inspire *and* empower us. In Jesus we have both the perfect model for what our lives should be, and the perfect power by which we can hope to live in such a way. As we are compelled by the example and teaching of Jesus, and as we are empowered by him for our life of faith, we should be considering the potential influence we have upon those around us.

Paul teaches in Ephesians that Jesus has blessed the church with different gifts that are useful for his kingdom purposes. Evangelists are listed alongside apostles, pastors, teachers and prophets, and Paul states that people who hold the gifting to fulfil these callings are to equip the church for works of service and to build up the body of Christ.

• ‘...somewhere, an idea emerged and became very popular in the Christian community... It is that the ministry of the church is to be done by the paid, professional, theologically-trained clergy. According to this view, the whole purpose of the laity is to receive the benefits

• of ministry, in terms of preaching, counselling, comfort, and those other things that we seek to provide in the church. But the reason why certain gifts are given for leadership is to equip the believers for ministry. The church is to be a mobilised army.’

• **R.C. SPROUL**

It would be a mistake to look at the ministry roles in Ephesians 4 and conclude that they refer to certain special people in our churches. Paul’s letter reveals something far better. These ministries exist because the *church* is special, and God is at work through ordinary people to ensure that it grows to maturity as one body. We take care of those in our church community while reaching those outside of it. Everybody gets to play.

We have a responsibility to use our gifts well, and that means being intentional about being inspirational. It also means that, by the humility and holiness we have explored in previous sessions, we must lead the way in protecting against any misuse of these gifts that can cause division in the church. Pride, ego, envy and the abuse of power are each a shortcut to division.

**Question:** Who in your church is most likely to be considered inspirational, and with that in mind what roles and functions in the church do you see people aspiring to today? Perhaps it’s to become a pastor or youth worker, a worship leader or a Bible teacher. Are people aspiring to witness and evangelism, and if not, why not?

Here are four ways in which we can attempt to inspire others to share the gospel faithfully:

### **1. PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL**

One of the best ways to inspire people to share the gospel is to do so regularly in our gatherings. Another way is to invite our Christian brothers and sisters to come to events where we are preaching – not least for their prayerful support, but also to build their faith as they see its power at work as people encounter Jesus for the first time. As we share the gospel, we should constantly affirm that evangelism is a privilege for all believers.

### **2. PREPARE TESTIMONY**

Help people to think through their testimony and the impact God has had upon their life from the time they first met him until now. How did they first come to put their trust in him, and what has he been doing in their life recently? Deliberately preparing personal testimony is both a great way to inspire and equip each other for evangelism and an act of worship as we give God thanks for what he has done in our lives.

### **3. PRIORITISE STORYTELLING**

In our gatherings and conversations we should regularly share stories about our evangelistic activity. Celebrate and be encouraged when you see God at work through you, and choose to think positively and constructively about what you can learn from situations that didn’t seem to go so well. As your community hears stories of God at work through ordinary people just like them, they will grow in confidence that God could use them too.

### **4. PROVIDE OPPORTUNITY**

Through your church and in your wider friendship group, make opportunities for people to get involved in evangelism. Organise local and international mission opportunities, invite people to be part of a ministry team at events you are running, or take a few friends out for a couple of hours of street evangelism. The ways in which you could do this are numerous: run some training before you go, and debrief when you get back. In time people will become more comfortable taking the experiences of these ‘formal’ opportunities into their everyday lives and their evangelism will move from an organised mission week to an everyday opportunity.

However we go about doing it, as evangelists we must be committed to stirring and helping our brothers and sisters in Christ step into the fullness of their identity as the messenger children of God.

## DISCUSSION (20 MINS)

Explore the following questions and/or the discussion quotation:

- What does it mean to build up the church in the way that Paul describes in Ephesians?
- How do we maintain our distinctiveness in the world as followers of Jesus, and in the church as passionate evangelists?
- Other than the four ways we explored in this session, how can we inspire others to evangelism?

• 'You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.'

• MATTHEW 5:14-16

## APPLICATION (10 MINS)

Hopefully you will have a desire to stay in this group beyond the end of its first year and continue to journey together to grow as evangelists. But with inspiring the church to evangelism in mind, now is the time to start thinking about what it would look like to run your own Advance group.

Multiplication is a core principle of the Advance movement because it should be our desire as evangelists to encourage others in their evangelism. So take some time to compile a list of people who might be interested in following the same journey you've been on and then begin reaching out in the coming weeks. Use your experience from this group and the Advance resources to help you plan and organise your own group.

## PRAYER

Spend time praying for the local church, that all within it would be faithful to the gospel call on their lives. Pray for opportunities to encourage others, and pray to commission each member of the group to not only proclaim the gospel to a world in need, but to inspire and equip other followers of Jesus to do the same.

## ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.

# SESSION TWELVE:

## RETREAT

**The climax of the first year of an Advance group is a time spent in retreat. How you decide to do this is up to you, but here you will find suggestions for how to spend the time together in keeping with the general principles of Advance group meetings and to bring the first year to a focused end.**

### HOW TO RUN AN ADVANCE GROUP RETREAT

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The general idea is to get away from the normal location and to set aside a longer period of time than you would for the regular group sessions. If you can only spare a morning, afternoon or evening then do what you can in this time, but where possible, retreating for a whole day is more beneficial.

Here are some ideas of what to do during this time.

### KEY SCRIPTURE

The following passage from Colossians will work well as a key scripture for your time together if you are looking for a specific focus during the retreat:

• ‘Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.’

• **COLOSSIANS 4:2-6**

Within this short passage there are twelve things that Paul presents which can be explored and affirmed for our evangelism:

1. Be devoted (devote yourselves to prayer)
2. Encourage spiritual fellowship (pray for us too)
3. Rely on God (God may open a door)
4. Commit to proclamation (we may proclaim the mystery of Christ)
5. Desire clarity (that I may proclaim it clearly)
6. Accept sacrifice for the Gospel (for which I am in chains)
7. Rely on the wisdom of heaven (Be wise)
8. Seize opportunities (make the most of every opportunity)
9. Speak and listen (conversation)
10. Be gracious and humble (always full of grace)
11. Be distinctive (seasoned with salt)
12. Be prepared (that you may know how to answer everyone)

How you study the passage together or alone (see below), how you bring these points out, and how you discuss them together is entirely up to you depending on how you are running your retreat time. But keep this passage and these points in mind as you look at the suggested activities below.

### WORD

A key aim of the Advance group is to help each other grow as evangelists who are committed

to the word of God. This retreat time is a great opportunity to go deeper into his word.

### **EXTENDED BIBLE READING (SOLO READING)**

Extended time spent with the word of God is never time wasted. Taking the time to read through all of Mark's gospel or one of the New Testament letters in one sitting is a great way to get a full perspective on the contents of that book. If it is a shorter book, why not re-read it multiple times, praying and reflecting between each reading, making notes, and then going again? You could all choose to read the same thing, or have a few different options that people then share about their time of reading and reflections.

### **BIBLE STUDY (GROUP READING)**

There are a number of ways that you could facilitate Bible study together on the retreat. Perhaps you will want to revisit some of the key passages you have explored over the Advance group sessions. Alternatively you may feel led to a particular passage or theme that will set the tone for the retreat. As ever, be sure to keep it in line with developing each other as evangelists.

### **BONUS SESSIONS AND OTHER ADVANCE RESOURCES**

One or both of the two bonus sessions in this guide could be used to run a regular Advance group session as part of your retreat. You may also have ideas for how you could run an Advance group session in the same format we have been using but with your own content. Here are just a few topic ideas for sessions you could explore with your group:

- The Trinity
- The Kingdom of God
- The Cross
- The Resurrection
- The Fruit of the Spirit
- Worship and Evangelism

### **SHARING WITH OTHER FAITHS**

Equally you may want to look at a One Thing blog on the Advance website ([advance2020.org](http://advance2020.org)) which feature a number of different evangelists sharing the one thing they wish they had known when they had started to preach the gospel. These short pieces make for excellent discussion starters.

### **NEW RESOURCE**

Hopefully you will want to continue on as a group beyond this first year. Another way that you could resource the group with content is to read a book together between sessions and then bring teaching and discussion based around this. The 'Recommended Reading' section at the back of this guide (page 68) will give you plenty of options, but the ones in bold have been highlighted as especially useful because they are short, subject-relevant and include discussion questions.

## **PRAYER**

Set aside significant time for prayer during the retreat. Plan for prayer times with a specific focus, as well as time for both praying through scripture and spontaneous prayer. Whatever else you do in prayer during the retreat, the following three focuses are recommended.

### **PRAYING FOR EACH OTHER**

Be sure to pray for one another as a primary element of your time together. Ask people to share one area they are feeling thankful to God for and one area in which they need provision or breakthrough. Encourage people to be specific and honest in their requests, and don't rush through each person but dedicate real time to one another. Be sure to keep a note of words and encouragements that come from this time.

### **PRAYING FOR THE LOCAL AND THE GLOBAL**

Take time to pray for your local context and also the global spread of the gospel. If there are specific situations you have a heart for in either a local or global context then pray for them. Lift up individuals, churches, situations, ministries, missionaries, situations from the news and so on.

## **PRAYING FOR THE ADVANCE JOURNEY**

Give thanks for the journey that you have been on in this group, reflecting on personal growth and stories of fruitfulness and salvation. Ask the Lord to continue the work in you that he has begun, and that you would be transformed into his image with ever increasing glory (you could pray through 2 Corinthians 3:17-18).

## **WORSHIP**

Time spent in God's word, prayer and fellowship are all part of worship. But spend time in specific acts of devotional worship – whether it's through singing or other creative expressions.

### **SUNG WORSHIP**

If you have someone who is musically-talented, invite them to lead a time of sung worship. Alternatively there are many great corporate worship apps and videos available online, many of which are free. A quick YouTube search for your favourite worship songs will likely bring up a version of the song with lyrics that can be played for the group to sing along to. There is power in the people of God joining together in song to declare his glory.

### **COMMISSIONING**

Another way in which you could share in a corporate act of worship would be to commission each other before God in the evangelistic task that he has called and empowered you for. At the end of this first year of your Advance group it will be encouraging and affirming to recognise this milestone, so give thanks to God for it and pray over each other as you look to go again with the gospel for the salvation of the world and to the glory of God.

## **FELLOWSHIP**

As we gather together we grow in friendship and trust of one another. The fellowship of your Advance group has hopefully been a blessing to each person, and on retreat you can continue in your commitment to hold each other to account and your enjoyment of each other's company.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

Accountability has been a core part of every session so far, and in this final session of the year, once again commit to the same process to ensure you are living holy and humbly.

### **FASTING/FEASTING**

You may want to commit to a period of fasting as part of the retreat, or base your time together around meals through which you can gather together and make space for discussion. There is no right or wrong way to do this – all that matters is that it helps you achieve the goals of your retreat time.

### **ACTIVITIES**

You may want to plan an activity together – for example, if you are retreating into nature somewhere, go on a walk together and fold some of the devotional activities above into this time. If based in a more urban environment, you could visit an art gallery together and do the same thing, using some of the art as a stimulus for reflection and devotion.

Equally, you might want to do something simply for fun together – a team activity, sport, entertainment option etc. Whether it's fellowship to encourage devotion or fellowship to enjoy each other's company and grow in relationship with each other, invest in quality time with each other.

## **NEXT STEPS**

The first year of Advance is done. Before you bring the year (and the retreat) to a close, be sure to look at the next steps for this group and the new groups that will launch from this one.

### **THIS GROUP**

Create space for people to share about how the Advance group experience has been for them. Share feedback about how you've all grown and developed, and think about what the biggest learning has been from the year. Encourage each other in these things.

If you haven't already committed to keep the group going, ask everyone if they want to continue and give people an opt-out if they want/

need it. If you have enough people to continue journeying together, set some expectation around what you will be doing in the coming months together (what new resource will you be using, whether it be the same meeting times etc.). Pray and give thanks for the first year of Advance, and commit what is ahead to the Lord.

### **NEW GROUPS**

It will also be worth picking up on the development of new groups that was started in the last session. Check how everyone is getting on with asking people to join their new group if they are going to start one and pray for the new groups.

However you run your retreat time, keep the core values of Advance in focus, reflect on the journey you have been on as a group, give thanks for the growth and fruitfulness along the way, and commit the future to God.

# BONUS SESSIONS AND RESOURCES

# BONUS SESSION ONE: CONVERSATIONAL EVANGELISM

**This session explores the importance of seeing and acting upon every opportunity to share the good news, not just those provided from a stage or platform.**

## SESSION IN A SENTENCE

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The majority of evangelistic dialogue in the world takes place interpersonally through conversation, so we must be prepared to share the gospel clearly in any and every opportunity that God provides, not just when we have the chance to preach from a platform.

## SESSION BACKGROUND

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We engage in conversations every single day. Many of these are face-to-face, but through technology we can now converse in different ways with people all over the world in real time. While these digitally-based conversations may not offer the same level of personal connection as a face-to-face encounter in the same room, they have become a normal and invaluable way of connecting with both friends and strangers.

Preaching from a stage doesn't usually give much space for dialogue. It often looks like proclaiming our message and hoping that it takes root in our listeners' hearts. However, in a conversation there is space for questioning, for building a relationship and for listening. Sometimes the one-directional message heard from a platform can be rejected out of hand, whereas personal dialogue offers a greater opportunity to speak more specifically and directly to the concerns of the listener.

Not all gospel proclamation is from a platform. In fact, there are more accounts in the gospels of Jesus talking to people interpersonally than of

him preaching to the masses. 'What do you want me to do for you?' Jesus asks Bartimaeus (Mark 10:51). 'I want to see,' is the simple response that reveals his need as well as his belief that Jesus has the power to bring healing. This one-to-one encounter contains no explicit explanation of the gospel, yet affords Jesus the opportunity to discover and meet the need of the seeker, who moves from blindness to followership.

Even Philip, the one biblical character to specifically carry the title of 'Evangelist' is instructed by an angel of the Lord to minister one-to-one with an Ethiopian eunuch between mass preaching missions (Acts 8:26-40). For the majority of Jesus followers, sharing the gospel will happen through personal conversations with family members, friends, colleagues, or even total strangers. The ministry highlight reel we find in the New Testament shows that Jesus and the first evangelists were fully prepared to share the good news both with the multitudes *and* with the individual. The question is, are we?

## SESSION GUIDE

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### CATCH UP (10-20 MINS)

*Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. For smaller groups, ask each person to share one win and one struggle since last meeting. For larger groups, select four or five people to share specific testimony since last meeting.*

### PRAYER

*Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, highlighted in the catch up time.*

## TEACHING (20-30 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

• ‘Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

• Then, leaving her water jar, 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?” They came out of the town and made their way towards him.’

• **JOHN 4:27-30**

When was the last time you spoke to a not-yet-Christian friend about your faith? How about a total stranger? Many preaching evangelists can find interpersonal witness quite challenging. Give them a microphone and a stage and they can preach all day, but when prompted by the Holy Spirit to talk to a stranger in a coffee shop, it can be a different story.

**Question:** Why do some who can boldly proclaim from a stage struggle in one-to-one encounters? Do you thrive or struggle in a one-to-one situation?

Jesus is interested in individual lives. For as much time as he spent preaching to the crowds, the New Testament records him just as frequently engaging in one-to-one dialogue with people he met on his ministry travels, and some who intentionally sought him out. Whether he was preaching to the multitudes eager to hear his words, to angry religious folk trying to catch him out, or to a diverse array of individuals – the rich and the poor, male and female, sick and healthy, religious and irreligious – Jesus seemed perfectly comfortable communicating his message.

When Jesus meets the Samaritan woman in John 4, there are a number of key things we should notice:

### 1. BE READY FOR THE ENCOUNTER

For the Samaritan woman this encounter was thoroughly unexpected – and potentially inappropriate – but Jesus is ready to talk to her, initiating the dialogue out of his physical need for water. How many conversations could be initiated from a simple place of need or circumstance in our lives? The plumber who enters your home to fix the shower? The barista who serves you your coffee? The doctor giving you a challenging diagnosis? There are opportunities all around us to speak, and while the encounter may take the ‘seeker’ by surprise, we should always be ready to offer the hope that we have in Jesus (even when we are tired, as Jesus almost certainly was here).

### 2. ENGAGE PERSONALLY AND POSITIVELY

One of the most beautiful things about this encounter is how Jesus treats the Samaritan woman: with kindness, sensitivity and compassion. The natural way in which he engages her in dialogue, the personal connections he makes to her life, and the compassion with which he reveals the truth to her are all inspiring examples of how to engage in positive dialogue.

### 3. LISTEN WELL

It is inevitable that people will have questions about what we believe. Instead of being placed on the back foot by these questions, we should take the time to listen well, and then offer sincere responses as and where we are able. Often this will include asking questions of our own – as Jesus does with the Samaritan woman. Questions invite people to reflect upon the ideas we are presenting (and to reflect upon their own ideas too), rather than just asking them to accept what we are offering wholesale. Jesus was a master of using questions in his evangelism, confronting people with the frailties of their current worldview while offering them truth in its place.

### 4. MOVE FROM MISUNDERSTANDING TO REVELATION

The woman misunderstands what Jesus is saying at first (verse 11). Jesus perseveres in the dialogue, giving her a more fully-formed framework upon which to build her understanding until she has a moment of revelation. Misunderstanding and

misinterpretation are part and parcel of human dialogue. Don't panic, persevere. Keep building bridges until what you are saying is clear – this is all you are responsible for. It is the Spirit of God who will turn simple understanding into true revelation.

## 5. KEEP THE MAIN THING THE MAIN THING

It would have been easy for Jesus to get sidetracked with political and cultural conversation when the woman showed concern over the appropriateness of his request to her for water. Instead, he kept the main thing the main thing so that the gospel conversation could move forward. Many times in conversational evangelism there will be opportunities to get sidetracked, but our aim (even if we have to take a few detours here and there) is to keep the cross of Christ central to the dialogue.

## 6. RECOGNISE POTENTIAL

The person in front of you has potential both to receive the gospel and to become a witness for it. Those who have most recently encountered God are often the most compelling evangelists. This should both challenge us – that we must never lose the infectious joy of our salvation – and inspire us – that those to whom we witness can immediately become effective and attractive witnesses for Christ.

While not everyone might have a platform from which to preach (or even the calling and gifting to be a 'preaching' evangelist), we are all called to engage in evangelism. The majority of evangelistic dialogue in the world takes place interpersonally through conversation – individual believers talking with individual seekers. Jesus and his followers were committed to this kind of outreach, and so too should we be.

## DISCUSSION (20 MINS)

*Explore the following questions and/or the discussion quotation:*

- Why is listening so important when we're talking to people about our faith?

- How might conversational evangelism change depending on whether the person is a friend or a stranger?
- How can you be more intentional in seeking out opportunities for personal witness?
- How can you encourage and support those who find personal witness difficult?

• 'Our struggles in evangelism are not primarily about methodology but about maturity. Do we have a heart for God and do we care about the things God cares about (lost people)? If we have God's heart, we will do whatever we can to advance his kingdom purposes in every conversation we have with our non-believing friends.'

• **NORMAN & DAVID GEISLER**

## APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Talk to someone about your faith this week as a part of your normal life – not through a ministry opportunity or a speaking engagement. In an everyday conversation, ask them if they have any questions about your faith and let them know you would be happy to chat, or ask them a question about who they think Jesus is and see where that leads.

## PRAYER

Pray that God would help you to better see the potential around you each day to share his hope with others. Thank him for placing these opportunities in front of you and that he delights in making you part of what he is doing in the world. Pray for those who struggle with one-to-one encounters – that God would help them to overcome any fear and anxiety and that you would cheer each other on as you go.

## ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

*Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.*

# BONUS SESSION TWO

## APOLOGETICS

**This session looks at the tool of apologetics and helps us identify where we may need to sharpen up on some of the things the world wants to talk about, while always being able to point people to the person of Jesus Christ.**

### SESSION IN A SENTENCE

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Apologetics is an evangelistic tool that helps us respond to questions about our faith and provide a defence of the gospel to those who object to it.

### SESSION BACKGROUND

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When we're asked questions about our faith and the message we preach, it is our responsibility to offer authentic responses which point to the truth about Jesus.

Christian apologetics is most simply defined as, 'A defence of the Christian faith.' Apologetics is not a new development in evangelism, but can be traced to the Bible itself, from the use of the legal term *apologia* in 1 Peter 3:15 to the construction and delivery of Paul's speech to the Athenians in Acts 17. The Bible features more than one account of a well-reasoned or creative presentation of the Christian faith in response to questions, concerns and objections.

The task of apologetics is not to make God plausible, but to connect people to the truth and authenticity of the hope that we have. We defend our faith so that those who question it may come to know Christ. But no one is argued into the kingdom of God - it's only by his saving power.

- 'Apologetics does not save; only Jesus Christ
- is able to do that. But apologetics can - and
- should - serve as a John the Baptist, making

- the paths straight, facilitating routes to the
- cross of Christ.'

• J.W. MONTGOMERY

Apologetics can respond to attempts to intellectually or spiritually remove Jesus from his throne. This may lead to challenging dialogues, but we must remember that, as Chris Sinkinson writes, 'It is not our intention to offend, but it should be our aim to expose the limitations of any rival to Christ.' It is helpful to remember that the use of apologetics is not limited to evangelism - it can also serve the church as part of discipleship, helping to connect believers to deeper truth as much as it can help connect non-believers to the cross for the first time.

### SESSION GUIDE

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#### CATCH UP (10-20 MINS)

*Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. For smaller groups, ask each person to share one win and one struggle since last meeting. For larger groups, select four or five people to share specific testimony since last meeting.*

#### PRAYER

*Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, highlighted in the catch up time.*

## TEACHING (20-30 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

• 'But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.  
• Always be prepared to give an answer to  
• everyone who asks you to give the reason  
• for the hope that you have. But do this with  
• gentleness and respect.'

• **1 PETER 3:15**

Peter calls all believers to be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks us why we have the hope we have. We should prioritise sharing the gospel clearly, but when questions arise we should be ready to offer our responses thoughtfully and meaningfully.

Some of the most foundational philosophical questions of life are also the hardest for most people to answer: 'Why am I here?', 'Where did we come from?', 'What is the meaning of life?' You may also be asked to share your views on what the Christian faith has to say about topical issue like sexuality, gender identity, divorce or abortion. You may find yourself attempting to defend traditional faith positions against modern scientific understanding – for example, defending the account of God's creation in Genesis in light of evolutionary biology. Other questions may examine claims about God's character – such as how a good God could allow suffering.

**Question:** What kind of faith questions have you been asked in the past, and how prepared have you felt to answer such questions?

Fortunately, apologetics by itself can't save anyone – otherwise the pressure and responsibility of salvation would rest in the strength of our arguments. Apologetics can often be a helpful way by which we can help a person move from unbelief to belief, but it is God himself who will bring a person to life as they hear and respond to his call *through* our witness.

Think about it like this: We stand with a non-believer on a road, at the opposite end of which is the empty cross of Christ. Along the

road are potholes, blockages, walls, debris and sharp objects. The cross itself is barely visible through a haze of fog. Apologetics is a way by which we can safely journey down the road, sweeping away debris, filling in pot-holes, tearing down walls, removing blockages and clearing the fog. Our ultimate goal is to help the person get closer to the cross, for it is there that they will encounter the risen Jesus. Apologetics serves simply for the not-yet-believing person to make room for an encounter with Jesus.

Here are four things we should bear in mind for successful apologetic conversations:

### 1. ENGAGE WITH THE POWER OF PREPARATION

For some, like noted apologists Ravi Zacharias, William Lane Craig and John Lennox, apologetics will become a central focus of their evangelistic outreach – and so study of theology, philosophy, the sciences, history, current affairs, world religion and other topics will become a vital diet. For others, a willingness to keep engaged in subjects as we encounter them in the world and in conversation would be wise, especially where we know one of our friends has a particular concern or issue. This is to say nothing of our normal commitment to feast upon the word of God daily to grow in our understanding of him and the truth it reveals.

### 2. COMMIT TO THE POWER OF PRAYER

As with all forms of evangelism, prayer is essential. When it comes to apologetics, ask God to help you answer questions with gentleness and respect.

### 3. RECOGNISE THE POWER OF HUMILITY

Arrogance and belligerence are unhelpful and unattractive qualities. Responding to a question with conviction does not mean we have to throw humility out of the window, and humility means we are prepared to accept we don't know everything. Sometimes, simply saying, 'Good question, I don't know the answer to that,' is the best response we can give.

### 4. UTILISE THE POWER OF A QUESTION

Letting people know that they have permission to ask you questions and that you are happy to

try to answer without taking offence can create brilliant opportunities for dialogue – especially with those who would love to ask questions but might be afraid of offending you. Beyond that, don't be afraid to ask your own questions: dialogue isn't a one-way street. We mustn't seek flippantly to put people on the back foot, but gently to point out deficiencies in their own pre-conceptions. Jesus loved to ask questions as he ministered, and he asked significantly more than he answered!

No-one has ever been argued into the kingdom of God, or become a follower of Jesus merely because they lost a debate. But gentle and respectful apologetic dialogue can help to move people a little further down the road towards the cross.

## DISCUSSION (20 MINS)

*Explore the following questions and/or the discussion quotation:*

- Why is it important to take people's questions seriously?
- What are the limitations of apologetics?
- Do you feel equipped to answer questions that come up as you share the gospel?
- How can apologetic study be worshipful?

• 'Apologetics is a resource; it is up to the apologist to make the connections with the lives of real people in the modern world. Without this connection, theories remain theories, abstract ideas hanging in mid-air, and not grounded in the realities of life.'

• **ALISTAIR MCGRATH**

## APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Think through some of these common questions about the Christian faith and explore how you might help someone journey from their initial question to the cross of Christ.

- Who made God?
- Hasn't science disproved Christianity?

- What about the big bang theory and evolution?
- If God is good, why does he allow suffering in the world?
- Isn't the Bible full of mistakes and contradictions?
- If God is real why doesn't he just show himself to the world?
- There is no such thing as absolute truth, so shouldn't we all just believe what we want?
- I'm a good person...why would God send me to hell just because I don't believe he exists?
- Why Christianity instead of another religion?
- Do you really believe in miracles?

## PRAYER

Pray together for the wisdom of heaven as you attempt to answer the questions and concerns of the world in humility and love, while representing God with integrity and boldness. Pray for open minds and receptive hearts, and give thanks that even though there are sound and reasoned answers to be shared, God's saving work does not ultimately hinge on our ability to successfully answer challenging questions.

## ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

*Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.*

# APPENDIX: GOSPEL DOCTRINE

You are not an accident. You are created by and in the image of the perfect and loving God (Father, Spirit, Son) who is the source and sustainer of life (Genesis 1).

All have rejected God (sinned) by going our own way, instead of living in obedience to our creator. This is why the world is broken and full of suffering. This injustice aggrieves God, who does not trivialise sin by ignoring or excusing it, but who justly punishes those who offend (Romans 3:23).

We are powerless to put things right once we have rebelled against God, having committed an act of treason against the king of the universe. Rejection of God is rejection of life itself. We are left with eternal death, the natural product of our rejection of life and of God's punishment (divine justice) for breaking his standard for right living (Romans 6:23).

But God desires for none to know death, for he is love itself and wants to be in eternal relationship with us, his dearly loved children. God graciously set in motion a rescue mission to save us (1 Timothy 2:4-6).

God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world as a human being, to live the perfect human life that never rejected the Father. Jesus was killed upon a cross, acting as our substitute and taking upon himself the death we deserved for our rejection of God (John 3:16; Romans 3:23-25).

Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead, showing that the curse of death is broken. New life is possible only through trust in Jesus Christ and the seeking of forgiveness for sin (Proverbs 28:13; Ephesians 2:1-10; 1 John 1:7-9).

Jesus' death and resurrection achieved reconciliation, redemption, propitiation (appeasement), and the defeat of evil. Our sin was credited to Jesus, and his righteousness is credited to us (imputed righteousness). The only requirement on our part for this transaction to take effect is that we trust in Jesus as Lord (faith), and believe that God raised him from the dead. We are saved by faith alone. (Matthew 20:28; Romans 10:9; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; John 12:31; Colossians 2:15).

We can now access a restored relationship with our heavenly Father. We have peace and are adopted into his family. We die to our old life and are born again into a new life. (Luke 9:23; Colossians 1:20, 2:13-14; Romans 5:1-2; Galatians 4:4-7).

Jesus ascended to heaven, where he reigns at the right hand of the Father, but he has sent believers the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower us to live obediently in the fullness of life, and to help us share his good news with the world. We become new creations - disciples - transformed by the work of the Spirit in our lives, which leads to fruitfulness. We work as God's ambassadors in the world, representing the kingdom of peace, serving as witnesses to the truth of the Jesus story in word and deed (Micah 6:8; Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:11-21; Galatians 5:22-23).

One day, Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead. God's perfect kingdom will be restored and eternal life with our loving Father awaits those who trust in Jesus as Lord. Eternal death (hell) awaits those who do not. The good news is that no one needs to perish eternally, all can know eternal life and joy in relationship with God, through faith in Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15; Revelation 21:1-8; 22:1-5).

# APPENDIX: GOSPEL NARRATIVE

Before all things, God existed in perfect relationship with himself, Father, Spirit, Son. God created the world and it was very good, and he shared a unique relationship with humankind. We were created for perfect life with him, the king of the universe, and life itself! But God did not force humanity to love him, he let us choose for ourselves. With this free will humanity chose to go their own way, rejecting God.

Rejecting the king of the universe is treason without equal, rebellion against life itself. Death, suffering and pain entered the world. Humanity doomed itself to separation from their perfect heavenly Father with no way back. God couldn't excuse the rebellion, for there would be no justice in that action. A just and righteous God must demand a penalty be paid for the crimes committed. The punishment for rebellion against life is death.

But God so loved the world that he initiated a plan to save humanity from death – to make it possible for us to know the fullness of his life and love forever. God sent his son Jesus into the world to live the perfect human life, a life that never rebelled and became guilty of any crime against God.

Jesus willingly died upon a cross to take the punishment of death that humanity deserved for its rebellion and in doing so he became our substitute. Three days later he came back to life, because he is God and death cannot hold him. In this moment it became possible for humanity to not only receive forgiveness for rebellion against God, but to share in the new and eternal life that Jesus has made possible. The curse of death was broken.

All we need to do is believe that Jesus is who he says he is – the crucified and resurrected saviour of the world, the king of the universe – and choose to make him Lord of our lives. There is salvation and life for all who trust in him, and the empowering of his Holy Spirit enables us to live the kind of lives we were created for: lives that reveal the image of God so that all may know true life. By placing our trust in Jesus, we die to our old life and are born again into new life. One day Jesus will return and his perfect kingdom will be restored. All who trust in him will live forever within his kingdom, and so we are called and compelled to share God's love with the world so that all may know this eternal hope.

# APPENDIX: TEN-MINUTE YOUTH GOSPEL TALK EXAMPLE

## ONE: YOU ARE NOT AN ACCIDENT!

So many people go around thinking that they are a cosmic accident, that they are here because the universe just came into being from nothing, and then we somehow arrived a few billion years later. But that doesn't make any sense, nor does it offer any hope for what life can mean!

The Bible says that God has always existed and created the world from a desire to share his love with his creation – humanity.

So you are not an accident – you are God's creation, you are loved and you have purpose.

## TWO: YOU HAVE MISSED THE POINT!

The problem is, when people don't know that God created them and that he loves them, they miss the whole point of their life! Knowing God is living life as it was meant to be lived – in friendship with our creator, in relationship with a loving, kind, merciful, gracious, patient and wise God. The Bible talks about God as a perfect father, who wants good things for his children – that's you and me!

Not knowing God is like running onto the pitch of the World Cup final but not bothering to set up any goals... no one would be able to score a goal, no one would be able to win the trophy – it would be pointless.

## THREE: YOU CAN KNOW FULL LIFE!

The biggest problem with missing the point with God is that we don't just lose out on the best life he has for us, we actually reject and turn our back on the king and creator of the universe! The Bible tells us that when we reject the life God has for us, bad stuff will come into the world because

we think we know how to live this life better than the one who created us. The Bible calls this **sin**, but maybe an easier way of thinking about it is selfishness. We choose our way instead of God's way. We say, 'Hey God, I'm better than you, I know more than you, I don't need you.' We only have to turn on the news to see the messed up world we live in, and this is the result of people missing the point, living for themselves instead of their loving Father, God.

This rejection puts a barrier between us and God, when you go against the God who gives life, you are only left with death.

But God doesn't want you to die. The Bible tells us that God sent Jesus into this world – God in human form – to live a perfect life that shows us how we are to live to the full. When we reject God there is a punishment due, like when you get a detention for breaking the rules at school.

Jesus was killed on a cross to symbolically take the death that we all choose when we reject God, to take our punishment – our detention.

Three days later he came back to life – after all he is God, death can't keep him down! – to symbolically reveal that when we say sorry to God for our rejection of him, and then put our trust in him, we can come back to life and know life to the full!

## FOUR: WHO IS IN THE HOTSEAT OF YOUR LIFE?

Who watches *The Big Bang Theory*? In that show Sheldon has a seat on his couch that no one else is allowed to sit in – it's his spot! We get like that with our lives: we say, 'Hey God, you can't sit in the hotseat of my life, I want to be in control!' But God loves us so much that he wants us to know

the true life that he created us for, to help us, to guide us, to sit where he belongs, in the hotseat of our lives.

So many of us are confused about what life is about. We struggle with depression, self-harm, eating disorders, we're not happy with what we see in the mirror, we don't think we're going to achieve anything, we're unhappy and stressed...

God says, 'You are missing the point. Turn back to me, say sorry for rejecting me and I will forgive you. Put your trust in me and I will show you full life, real life, and you will never experience death.'

You are not an accident, you are loved. God will not force you to trust him, choose it for yourself – turn back to God, and know real life.

# APPENDIX: GOSPEL METHODS

## THE FOUR SPIRITUAL LAWS

[4laws.com](http://4laws.com)

Bill Bright's classic explanation of the basics of the gospel.

## THE4POINTS

[the4points.com](http://the4points.com)

A youth-focused version of the four spiritual laws.

## THE THREE CIRCLES

Various YouTube Examples

A short and simple explanation of the gospel designed to be easily replicable by anyone who learns it.

# RECOMMENDED READING

## THE GOSPEL AND EVANGELISM

Mark Dever, *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism* (Crossway: Wheaton, Illinois, 2007)

Will Metzger, *Tell The Truth* (IVP: Downers Grove, Illinois, 4th ed., 2012)

**Ben Jack, *The Simple Gospel* (The Message Trust: Manchester, 2018)**

**Rico Tice, *Honest Evangelism* (The Good Book Company: London, 2015)**

J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (IVP: London, Reprint Ed., 2012)

Andy Hawthorne, *Here I Am: Joining God's Adventurous Call To Love The World* (David C. Cook: Colorado Springs, 2019)

Tom Wright, *Simply Good News* (SPCK: London, 2015)

R.T. Kendall, *Whatever Happened To The Gospel?* (Charisma House: Lake Mary, Florida, 2018)

Robert E. Coleman, *The Masterplan of Evangelism* (Baker: Grand Rapids, MI, 1963)

David Watson, *I Believe In Evangelism* (Hodder and Stoughton: London, 1976) (currently out of print but second-hand copies are available cheaply through Amazon Marketplace)

## BASIC CHRISTIAN BELIEF AND INTRODUCTORY THEOLOGY

**John Stott, *Basic Christianity* (IVP: London, 2013)**

J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide To Historic Christian Beliefs* (IVP: London, Reissue Ed., 2011)

Alistair McGrath, *Christian Theology: an Introduction* (Blackwell: Chichester, W. Sussex, Fifth Ed., 2011)

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction To Biblical Theology* (IVP: London, 1994)

## THE CROSS AND RESURRECTION

John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (IVP: London, 1986)

D. A. Carson, *Scandalous: The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus* (IVP: London, 2010)

Derek Tidball, *The Message of the Cross* (The Bible Speaks Today) (IVP: London, 2001)

Paul Beasley-Murray, *The Message of the Resurrection* (The Bible Speaks Today) (IVP: London, 2000)

## PREACHING AND COMMUNICATION

Tim Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (Hodder and Stoughton: London, 2015)

Carmine Gallo, *Talk Like TED: The 9 Public Speaking Secrets of the World's Top Minds* (Macmillan: Oxford, 2014)

## APOLOGETICS

C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Harper Collins: London, 1952)

Alistair McGrath, *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith* (Baker: Grand Rapids, 2012)

J. Warner Wallace, *Cold Case Christianity* (David C. Cook: Colorado Springs, 2013)

Tim Keller, *The Reason For God* (Hodder & Stoughton: London, 2008)

Tim Keller, *Making Sense of God* (Hodder & Stoughton: London, 2016)

## ONLINE RESOURCES

[reasonablefaith.org](http://reasonablefaith.org) · [coldcasechristianity.com](http://coldcasechristianity.com) · [apologetics315.com](http://apologetics315.com)

## DVD/USB RESOURCES

[talkingjesus.org](http://talkingjesus.org) · [Alpha.org](http://Alpha.org) · [Dare2Share.org](http://Dare2Share.org)

# ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTIONS

'Search me O God and know my heart' (Psalm 139:23)

**Accept** one another (Romans 15:7) · **Confess** your faults to one another (James 5:16)

**Encourage** one another and build each other up (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

## KEY

- .....
- ✓ Good
- Okay
- ✗ Bad

**'Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously towards others the way God lives towards you.'** (Matthew 5:48, MSG)

How clear is my vision for my life?	How are my friendships?
How clear is my vision for the work I'm involved in?	Are my relationships with those I serve healthy? (Peers, leaders, the opposite sex)
Am I enjoying what I do?	How healthy is my response to being hungry, angry, lonely, or tired?
Do I feel God's pleasure in what I'm doing?	Am I engaging in inappropriate lustful thoughts?
How passionate am I?	Am I taking enough rest?
Am I pursuing intimacy with Jesus?	Am I managing my time well?
Am I making enough space for prayer?	Am I spending my spare time in a healthy way?
Am I spending time in personal Bible study?	Am I keeping a healthy balance between church, work and home life?
Did the Bible come alive for me today?	Am I forming and maintaining relationships with non- Christians?
Am I seeking evidence of God's power in my life and ministry?	Am I exposing myself to sexually-alluring material?
Is Jesus real to me?	Am I defeated in any part of my life: jealous, impure, critical, irritable, touchy or distrustful?
Am I teachable and accountable?	Am I managing my money well?
Am I available and approachable?	Am I giving generously?
Am I listening well?	Am I choosing not to envy other people?
Am I making myself vulnerable to others?	Am I choosing to not grumble or complain?
Am I leading with a servant heart?	Am I walking with integrity?
Am I trustworthy?	Am I decisive and confident?
Am I keeping my promises?	Am I willing to take risks?
Am I holding on to healthy perspective?	Am I making goals and reaching them?
Am I handling pressure well? (from people, work, circumstances)	Am I willing to make sacrifices?
How is my health?	Am I keeping my cutting edge?
Am I eating healthily?	Am I moving in the power of the Spirit?
Am I sleeping well?	Am I withholding forgiveness from anyone?
Am I allowing my mind to dwell on inappropriate thoughts?	Am I pursuing freedom from destructive patterns and strongholds?
Am I remembering the sick, hurting and needy?	
Are my family happy?	

**'Trust God from the bottom of your heart. Don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go. He's the one who will keep you on track. Don't assume that you know it all. Run to God! Run from evil.'** (Proverbs 3:5-7, MSG)





# THE GOSPEL. THERE IS NO PLAN B.

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