



# Thoughts from the Bible and Books

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April 2006

## The Great Omission

There is nothing we are so obviously commanded to do as Christians, and yet do so little of, as evangelism. We know the Great Commission. We've memorized the verse from 1 Peter about being ready to give a reason for the hope that we have. We remember how Paul reasoned with Jews and proclaimed Jesus to the Gentiles. We've heard sermons on being ambassadors for Christ. And yet we seldom share the gospel.

We just can't seem to muster up the courage to share the good news about Jesus. We pray for open doors, but the doors never seem to open. We try lifestyle evangelism, but that doesn't work (we have yet to hear, "Gee, Bob, I've noticed you don't swear. Can you tell me about Jesus?") We work on friendship evangelism, but can't quite pull the trigger on the "Jesus talk." We ask a few polite leading questions of the stranger on the plane, but after two grunts and a moan, we figure "his heart must hard" and so we gladly shake the dust off our pretzels and move on to the in-flight movie. "Maybe when he sees that I watch movies, he'll know how interested I am in redeeming the culture and that will plant a pre-evangelism seed," we surmise.

## Facing our Fears

Evangelism is hard for us. It's hard for me too. I wouldn't say I have the gift of evangelism. The pastors I know who have the gift of evangelism can't stand being in their studies, know lots of non-Christians, and

love meeting new people. Your pastor, on the other hand, loves to be in his study, knows a few non-Christians, and enjoys meeting new people from time to time, but it sure feels like work. Yet, I need to share the gospel, and not just on Sundays. Spiritual gift or not, we all need to bear witness to the work of Jesus Christ.

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*First, remember that God saves.* You can't save anyone, so don't try. God is the one who sovereignly changes your heart, and that's what he needs to do for your friend too. The sheep will hear the Shepherd's voice. You're job is to speak the truth in love, not to give your friend a new heart. Just be clear and heartfelt and trust that God will effectually call his chosen ones unto salvation.

*Second, remember that you are not a salesman.* The biggest reason I hesitate to share the gospel with my neighbors is because I don't want to seem like a pushy salesman. Evangelizing can feel like hosting a neighborhood party and then right before the meal announcing, "Now that you're all here, I'd like to show you these wonderful knives. They cut through quarters and can be yours for only \$99.95." I want people to know I care for them as people not just as potential buyers for what I'm selling. That's why I

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need to remember that I'm not trying to sell anything—not my church, not Christian values, not even Jesus. I only need to share the good news. Remember that next time you are fearful of evangelizing. You are not unloading high priced vacuum cleaners, you are heralding a tremendous piece of good news. Evangelism can be as simple as saying “Did you know that Jesus was the Son of God? He lived a perfect life. He died for sinners. And then he came back to life. I believe he's the good and all-powerful ruler of the universe. That's why it's a joy to follow him.” No sales pitch. Just news.

*Third, be humble.* If they say, “The church is bunch of hypocrites,” don't say (as I want to sometimes) “Well, then I guess you'll fit right in.” Say, “I know Christians don't always walk the talk. In fact, it's still a struggle for me to follow Jesus. But that's why I'm glad there's forgiveness and grace. That's actually what Christianity is all about.”

*Fourth, be honest.* Be quick to say, “That's a really good question. I don't know the answer to that.” A couple months ago I was at Qdoba for lunch when I overheard two guys talking about *The Passion of the Christ*. They were poking fun at it and trying to poke holes in the reliability of the gospels. So I went over and asked them what they were talking about. We proceeded to talk about the historic nature of the Christian faith and the trustworthiness of the Bible for 5-10 minutes. I didn't have time to answer all their questions and I couldn't fully answer all their retorts. But I was honest and did my best and I think the Lord honored that.

*Fifth, be straightforward.* Don't go down rabbit trails. It's not that you want to avoid hard topics like homosexuality, but remember that you aren't trying to make them act like Christians or hold to Christian morality (those things come later). You first off want them to hear about God and the story of redemption and pray that God gives them a new heart.

*Sixth, pray.* I have three categories on my prayer list that I pray for everyday. I pray for my family. I pray for faithfulness in the word of God and prayer. And

I pray for missions and evangelism. Just the simple act of praying (for a minute or two) about evangelism each day (that's my goal) has made my heart grow in love for my neighbors and in my burden for sharing the gospel.

### **Opportunity Knocks**

Are you feeling like “I can do this. I can share my faith.” You should, because you can. Here's how. We are making this Easter, April 16, an outreach Sunday. What does that mean? It means the sermon will include a simple, clear presentation of the gospel. It means we will have a special gospel choir of SCF and SICF students. It means that we are making plans to have extra greeters and extra friendly folks ready to engage visitors. It means that there will be food and drink available after both services. And it means you should invite your unchurched friends and family.

Next week we will be passing out John Piper's excellent book *Fifty Reasons Why Jesus Came to Die*. The books will be free to anyone who will take them and give them to a non-Christian. I want to challenge every family and single person at URC to take and give away at least one book. Some, hopefully, will take 3 or 5 or 10. In each book will a small insert giving information about URC. If one hundred families invited one friend each and only 10% of them came, that's still ten new people to hear the gospel. What if 150 families and singles invited 3 friends each and a quarter of them came, that would be almost 90 people and their families!

Pick up a book next Sunday, ask the Lord for courage, knock on your neighbor's door, or talk to a stranger, and say, “Hi. My church is giving out these books for Easter. It's a really good book that talks about why Jesus died. I'd like you to have it. Inside the cover there's some information about my church. Do you think you might be able to come for Easter this Sunday?” The Lord will bless you for your faithfulness. “Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).