

How Do You Lead a Religious Person to Jesus

Jesus told us that a wise teacher “brings out of his treasure new and old things” (Matt. 13:52b). As a fellow traveler who, like you, desires to reach people with the gospel, please allow me to share three essentials to effectively evangelize a religious person.

This is not a cookie-cutter, formulaic approach. For 50 years, I’ve had the privilege of helping people come out of their comfort zones to become effective in evangelism, and I pray I can do the same for you.

I continue to fan the flame of following the footsteps of Jesus, who “came to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). One of my heroes was Derek Prince. He spoke two prophetic words over me when I ministered with him. He told me, “God providentially puts you in situations where you uniquely connect with people and share the gospel, thereby inspiring others.” On another occasion he said, “Strike while the iron is hot!”

Whatever grace is upon my life for divine appointments, I pray that God will bless you with an impartation—not just information—to be faithful and fruitful as we strike while the iron is hot in the hour of harvest Jesus said comes at “the end of the age” (Matt. 13:39b, NIV).

Religious Revival

Author Tim Keller wrote an article for *The Atlantic*, “American Christianity is Due for a Revival.” I agree! America is a religious country, with Pew Research estimating 64% are Christians as of the fall of 2020. But are these authentic or counterfeit? Some are ignorant, as I was, but others, like many politicians, are hypocrites who need a Jesus jolt to

convict them.

“Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46, MEV).

“But then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who practice evil’” (Matt. 7:23).

There are over 340 million Americans. The majority have religious roots, but just because people go to a church building doesn’t mean they are Christians.

You can cite a label, use religious talk, sing religious songs, enjoy religious programs and hang with religious people yet not be “born again,” which Jesus told a religious man was essential, not optional (John 3:1-7).

I was baptized, confirmed, had 12 years of religious schooling and attended a church service weekly for 20 years. However, I was not born again but a “Lost Soul” (the name of our Cleveland rock band in which I played the drums). When people I liked took the time to share with me that Jesus was punished so I could be pardoned and that I couldn’t earn my salvation by good works but needed to repent and put my faith in Jesus and His finished work on the cross, I was genuinely converted. I then began the adventure of discovering an abundant life in Christ as, for the first time in my life, I read the Bible and obeyed what it taught.

Consider how many people in your sphere of influence are just like me. God loves them and sent His Son to die for them so He could rescue them from the ravages of sin and eternal separation in hell. Lost people matter to God, and we are His ambassadors to reach them with the gospel, bringing forgiveness and the free gift of eternal life.

“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?” (Rom. 10:14a). When my wife’s parents (devout

Catholics) and the seven children who were living at home heard this Good News, they all responded, and many entered full-time Christian ministry. When I shared the true gospel with my parents, sister, girlfriend and a coach (who were all religious but uninformed like me) they were all born again. When I wrote my conversion story. *Clap Your Hands!*, a quarter-million quickly sold all over America and abroad as scores identified with my journey from religion to relationship.

3 Essentials for Evangelizing the Religious

Recommit to gospel sharing. The Great Commission is not the Great Suggestion. Evangelism is not an elective but a directive from Almighty God.

All four Gospels end with the central theme of evangelism (Matt. 28:19, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47, John 20:21), and the book of Acts begins with Jesus directing the disciples to “receive power” to “be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

God “has given to us the ministry of reconciliation ... entrusted to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us. We implore you in Christ’s stead: Be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:18-20).

Paul declared, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. For it is the power of God for salvation” (Rom. 1:16).

Seeing people come to Christ doesn’t happen mystically. God is calling us to repent of disobedience to the mandate of evangelism, renounce fear of man as well as bad theology (Calvinist extremes that the elect are saved without evangelistic efforts) and recalibrate our lives to regularly, intentionally reach out to unbelievers. There’s no impact without contact!

“Prince of Preachers” Charles Spurgeon said, “Soul-winning is

the chief business of the Christian minister; indeed, it should be the main pursuit of every true believer."

Billy Graham stated, "My one purpose in life is to help as many people as I can find a relationship with God, which I believe comes through knowing Christ."

Pastors, take heed: Are your sermons regularly sprinkled with examples of your evangelism to inspire the flock?

Recognize the process. Jesus took time for individuals. He was not a Type A personality, looking for the shortest line to avoid conversations. Talking to the woman at the well led to her conversion and that of her entire town. Then, admonishing His disciples for missing the potential harvest, He told them that evangelism was a process that "leads to eternal life" as "he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together" (John 4:34–39).

One of Satan's biggest lies to prevent Christians from plundering hell and populating heaven is to deceive us into believing the lie that taking time to engage the lost makes little difference. Yet the Bible teaches that one plants, one waters but God gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:6–9).

This takes all the pressure off believing it all depends on me. The hidden hand of God is at work in people's lives, so after we've done our part, let's relax and let the Holy Spirit "convict the world of righteousness, sin and judgment" (John 16:8).

Evangelism is a process, just like cultivating soil, removing weeds, planting seeds and watering to reap a harvest. Church growth studies point out that most people have about six to seven contacts with the gospel before conversion. As you plant seeds in hearts, you might be No. 1, 4 or finally 7 as they yield their lives to Christ.

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus said, "The seed is the word

of God" (Luke 8:11b). I've planted hundreds of thousands of gospel seeds in my evangelistic efforts through conversations, testimony tracts, speaking, literature and invitations to events. Only in eternity will I discover the results of my investment of time and money. "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon [money] of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations" (Luke 16:9, KJV).

Joe Aldrich said, "There will be opportunities during your friendship with others to communicate bits and pieces of both the gospel itself and your own personal testimony ... The temptation is to unload the entire evangelistic dump truck the first time the conversation turns to spiritual things. As a general rule, this is not a healthy pattern to follow. Gradually directing a person to Christ through seed planting is a much preferable approach."

In leading religious people to Christ, consider these examples of how one life makes a difference in God's providential chain of events, the beautiful drawing of someone to Jesus.

I went to a fair and a man shared the gospel with me at a booth. My car stalled and a man helped me, giving me a gospel leaflet. I visited a church and received a lunch invitation. I tried a second church, where a couple invited me for a meal. I revisited the church, heard the gospel and received a New Testament. I was born again later in my bedroom. For five decades, I've continued the process, reaching hundreds of thousands for Jesus because a few folks were faithful.

Professional baseball star Billy Sunday left a bar, heard outreach songs, attended a service and heard the gospel. He was born again and entered the ministry. Over 46 years, he reached 100 million for Christ, pioneering tent and radio evangelism. He inspired Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, T.L. Osborne, Reinhard Bonnke, Aimee Semple McPherson, Luis Palau and Pat Robertson.

Dave Wilkerson went to violent gangs in New York City and shared the gospel with them. He jolted the head of the Mau Maus, Nicky Cruz, with "Jesus loves you!" Cruz was soon converted and other gang members saved. Cruz entered the ministry, evangelizing millions globally for 60-plus years. My wife's parents and all seven of their children at home were saved through his ministry.

Edward Kimball taught Sunday school to young boys and prayed to win each to Jesus. He went to a shoe store where one worked and led D.L. Moody to Christ; Moody evangelized hundreds of thousands on two continents. One convert, William Chapman, became an evangelist who preached to masses; another was Billy Sunday, who joined his team. Another convert through Chapman was Mordecai Ham, who set up evangelistic services in Charlotte, North Carolina. A student there said he wouldn't attend the crusade, but a friend persuaded him, and he finally went and was converted. This convert, Billy Graham, went on to preach to more people than anyone else in history. God honors those who faithfully plant gospel seeds.

Karen C. sent me an email. "Years ago, I shared your book, *Clap Your Hands!*, with someone I worked with. She got saved, her parents, as did her three brothers, her husband-to-be, his parents, his five brothers and now their families. It affected more than 100 people, and that's just two families."

May God stir our hearts to reject Satan's lies and embrace God's truth that every life can shine and make a difference. "Those who are wise shall shine as the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who turn the many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever" (, MEV).

Recover lifestyle evangelism and enjoy the adventure. In our mission to honor the mandate of our master, may we once and for all turn from sledgehammer evangelism and bounty hunters with gospel six-guns pressuring people to convert.

“Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade people” (2 Cor. 5:11), so let’s recover the art of Spirit-led persuasion and embrace what’s natural, relational and enjoyable. Lifestyle evangelism is the process of living in such a way that non-Christians move one step closer to Jesus Christ as a result of our love and initiative in their lives. We’ll pray, prepare, believe and expect divine appointment: providential, not coincidental, supernaturally orchestrated opportunities with non-Christians to help them discover new life in Jesus Christ.

We’ll enjoy the adventure of sharing the Good News with needy, confused, often religious and sometimes hopeless people outside of Christ. “For we are His workmanship [Greek “masterpiece”] created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). We no longer speak of “chance encounters”; these are supernaturally orchestrated and sovereignly arranged by Jesus who “desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4).

On my journey I’ve given out about two or three of my personal testimony tracts daily for almost 50 years. Most have gone to average folks, but God has also had me plant seeds with famous folks such as Nicole Kidman and Keith Urban, Charlton Heston, Martin Sheen, Jim Valvano, Elizabeth Taylor, Jane Seymour, Bob Dole, Janet Reno, Donald Rumsfeld, Geraldo Rivera and many more whom He loves.

Specific Steps for Evangelism

What is the scriptural strategy of best practices to reach religious people (and all people, for that matter) with the gospel? Once we’ve repented of disobedience, rededicated ourselves to be faithful and realigned our priorities to engage in the process, we “pray to the Lord of the harvest, that He will send out laborers into His harvest” (Matt. 9:38) and declare, “Here I am. Send me” (Isa. 6:8b).

10 Ways to Connect

1. Pray for non-Christians and for opportunities to meet them.
2. Extend a friendly greeting.
3. Take initiative in establishing conversations.
4. Learn people's names.
5. Take a genuine interest in people's lives.
6. Bless people with tangible expressions of God's love.
7. Be a servant by doing helpful good deeds for others.
8. Open your home to adults and children.
9. Look for creative and natural ways to interact with them (holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, welcoming new neighbors, birth of babies).
10. Be reconciled if any conflict or offense lingers.

Additional Tips

Remember Every Nation's . acrostic: **S**tart a conversation. **A**sk questions. **L**isten attentively. **T**ell your story.

Slow down and recognize that many opportunities for sharing Christ's love and our faith come disguised as unwelcome interruptions.

People will never care what we know until they first know we care.

When people leave our presence, they won't remember what we said but how we made them feel. We should exhibit no self-righteousness, arrogance, argumentativeness or condescension.

Be winsome and establish common ground to spark conversations. Be a generous tipper; have some knowledge of sports, current events, weather; notice a team logo.

Avoid religious terms/jargon: "Get saved/plugged in/committed."

Use humor; lighten up—be natural and enjoy interacting with

people! Here are the two primary ways to express love: accept people where they are and take a genuine interest in their lives.

Learn the Basics

All people, religious or not, have three basic needs: transcendence (connecting with God), significance (finding purpose) and relationship (community). They may project an image that all is well, but these needs lie deep inside.

All people want love, peace, hope, health, freedom from guilt, addictions and answers to dilemmas and problems of life. In heaven we'll still worship, learn, fellowship and serve, but we'll never evangelize again.

Through the years, I've used guides from Evangelism Explosion, Billy Graham's "Peace, with God," Cru's "Four Spiritual Laws" and more. Here's an acrostic . from Dare 2 Share Ministries to help you gain gospel fluency: **G**od created us to be with Him. **O**ur sins separate us from God. **S**ins cannot be removed by good deeds. **P**aying the price for sin, Jesus died and rose again. **E**veryone who repents and trusts in Him alone has eternal life. **L**ife with Jesus starts now and lasts forever.

Here's the deal: Jesus said, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19b). If you're not fishing, are you really following? Begin today to do something about it!

Author's Note: *After finishing this article, something magnificent happened! The outpouring of the Spirit began at Asbury University, then spread across the country. I saw the essentials for supernatural visitation: humility, hunger, holiness, brokenness, repentance. May the Holy Spirit use this message mightily in your life, and may we seize the moment for another Jesus revolution!*

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