

A Short Paper on Sharing the Gospel

Why this paper?

Far too many Christians neglect the great commission, God's call for His people to make disciples. When I ask followers of Jesus "why" they don't share the gospel, I'm typically met with these responses: (1) I don't know the gospel or the Bible well enough to share it with others; (2) I'm afraid of rejection or losing a friend; (3) It's not my gift; (4) I don't even know where to start. The problem with these "reasons" is that they are simply not good reasons for neglecting participation in God's rescue mission! However, that doesn't mean that these common responses shouldn't be addressed. Before you share the gospel, you need to know what it is. The first portion of this paper will be dedicated to answering the question, "What is the gospel?" Next, we will demonstrate from Scripture that the great commission does indeed apply to all followers of Jesus. We will then look at some helpful ways of sharing it by examining the ministries of Jesus and some of His early followers. After this, we will seek to answer the question, "What do we do before and after we share the gospel?" Lastly, we will look at a few "lead in" questions to get the conversation started. I pray that this paper would both encourage and instruct believers at MCC to engage in the task of reaching unbelievers with the gospel, for the glory of God.

What is the gospel?

Before we share the gospel, we must first understand it! Let's start with the word, gospel. Gospel, comes from the Greek word *euangelion* and means, "good news." Before we get to the good news, let's make sure we first have a handle on the bad news. This is important to remember when sharing the gospel with others. Start with the bad news. It's much like a diagnosis from a doctor. "Well, the bad news is that this particular disease has attacked major organs and has done some pretty significant damage." Wait for it... "But the good news is that we have a cure that will totally reverse the effects of this disease and bring you back to full health." If the doctor simply says, "We have a cure for you," you'll quickly ask the question, "For what?" "What's wrong with me?" Alright, so what is the bad news addressed by the gospel? Mankind is outside the Garden! What? Because of sin—*our nature, attitude and actions opposed to God and His glory*—we are separated from God. At the heart of sin is a desire to be God or to replace God with something or someone else. This is also known as idolatry. Sin causes people to replace the True King with lesser kings (e.g., money, power, sex), kings that will ultimately not satisfy. We've all done it, and because we reject God and His glory for other things, we have lost communion with God. Sin acts like a disease upon the human heart! It blinds us to the truth and results in a way of life that is totally at odds with God and His glory (e.g., violence, injustice, dishonesty, division, murder, jealousy, etc.). What are the implications of this loss in relationship? Sin against God invites His wrath eternally! That's the bad news! Not only do we need forgiveness, but a new heart as well! Sin both separates and penetrates. It causes separation between God and man and permeates our entire selves, setting us on a destructive path of utter rebellion against the One True God. This should evoke fear, and yet the gospel prevents us from losing heart.

The gospel is the remedy for sin and sin's destructive and dividing power. But how? The gospel concerns the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (**1 Corinthians 15:1-5**). The good news concerns a Savior, the God-King Jesus Christ, who lived the life we couldn't live and died the death we deserved to die, to bring us back into fellowship with God. Sin demands punishment and at the Cross Jesus took sin's punishment in our place. Sin kills! At the Cross, Jesus exhausted sin's power by dying in our place!

The good news is that by trusting in Jesus and His saving work, we can be brought back into a relationship with God. What was lost has been restored, because of Jesus. The gospel is the good news of **rescue through representation!** Let's go to Paul for help here. In **Romans 5:19** he writes: "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous." The gospel is the good news of God becoming the King mankind always needed, to live the life we were always called to live and to fight the battle we could never fight on our own because of sin. Think David and Goliath! When David fought against Goliath, he did so representing all of Israel. His victory, therefore, was imputed to all of God's people. What was true for him was now true for all of Israel. That's what the gospel does! King Jesus, at the Cross, reversed the curse of Adam, our former representative, and now stands as the new representative of God's people. He did this by doing battle against sin and evil at the Cross! At the Cross he exhausted sin's power and paid for sin's punishment. What's true of Jesus is now true of us, because by faith our lives are now hidden with Christ in God (**Colossians 3:3**). What about the resurrection? Simply put, the resurrection means that the Cross worked and that the Father has accepted Jesus' death in our place. The resurrection validates all that Jesus said and did! It also means that the curse of death will be turned back for those who trust in Jesus, evidenced by our future resurrection bodies and new creation. The good news is that Jesus is King and that the powers of evil have been disarmed through His victory over sin and evil at the Cross (**Colossians 2:13-15**). Finally, before looking at the appropriate response to the gospel, we must highlight the future implication of the gospel, not only for humanity, but for the entire cosmos. The gospel declares that creation, too, will be restored! In **Colossians 1:19-20** Paul writes: "(19) For in [Jesus] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, (20) and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." At the completion of the gospel's work, Paul says, "that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (**Romans 8:21**). Sin has devastated all of God's good creation, and the gospel is the good news of God's rescue project for the entire created order. All that is wrong will be made right! **Revelation 21:1-4** looks ahead to a new heaven and a new earth, the wiping away of every tear, the abolishment of death, pain and evil. This is the work of the gospel! God's people, in Christ Jesus, will exist in God's new creation with resurrection bodies in the glorious presence of God for all eternity.

How do we receive this? The good news **MUST** be responded to in order to be benefited from. The proper response is repentance and faith (**Mark 1:15**), and the result is both external and internal. By trusting in Jesus, our verdict is flipped from guilty to innocent (external), and our hearts made new by the Spirit of God and our union with Christ (internal). The gospel results in a new heart and mind and new power to live a God-honoring life. Not only does our status change (from object of wrath to son or daughter of the King), but we are further transformed from the inside-out. This is a lot to take in, I know, but hopefully your understanding of the gospel has been expanded through this short study. So, how can we condense this down without losing any of the necessary elements of the gospel? Here's what the good news of the gospel proclaims:

- **Rescue from wrath!** See **John 3:16-18, 36; Romans 3:21-26**
- **A restored relationship!** See **Colossians 1:21-23**
- **God's provision of a new representative and a new verdict through union with King Jesus!** See **Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 2:13-15; Colossians 3:3**

- ***A renewed heart and mind (=a new way of life) through union with Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit!*** See Ezekiel 36:25-27; 1 Corinthians 2:16; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 3:1-5, 12-17
- ***Eternal communion with God in a new heaven and new earth with resurrection bodies!*** See Romans 8:18-22; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Revelation 21:1-4
- ***Repentance and faith as the proper response!*** See Mark 1:15; John 3:16, 36; Ephesians 2:8-9

Here it is in sentence form: *The gospel proclaims rescue from wrath for the purpose of a restored relationship with God through King Jesus, giving way to a new way of life pleasing to God and a glorious future, and may be received by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ!*

Why must we share it?

Because the Bible tells us so! That's right, God's word is so clear on this. What did Jesus tell His followers in **Matthew 28:18-20**? (18) And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (19) Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Jesus DOES NOT say, "Hey boys! I have a cool job for you to do, but only if you feel like it. If you're not too busy, maybe you could invest some time in taking the good news about me to others." Instead, with unmatched authority, Jesus charges His disciples to make disciples of all nations. This is not the great suggestion, but the great commission. When the King says, "Go," we go!

Furthermore, sharing the gospel was the norm for the early church! Listen carefully to Paul's words to the Thessalonian believers in **1 Thessalonians 1:6-8**:

"(6) And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, (7) so that you became an example to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia. (8) For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.

Did you hear it? The Thessalonians, after receiving the word (the gospel), declared the good news both near and far. The word sounded forth from those it had transformed!

Not only is gospel-sharing the norm of the early church (and therefore should be the norm today), but Peter tells us that we were rescued *for the purpose of proclaiming the good news!* **1 Peter 2:9** reads:

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, *that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*"

What are these *excellencies*, if not the story of God's gracious and glorious rescue mission found in the gospel?

Think of it this way. What if you had a friend involved with cancer research. Let's say this friend called you one evening overwhelmed with joy and excitement exclaiming, "I've found the cure for cancer!" You too would respond with joy and excitement and quickly ask, "Well, who else have you told? What's the process for making the cure accessible to people with cancer?" Imagine that your friend responds with these words: "I'm not going to tell anyone. I've decided to keep it to myself." Jaw-dropping

silence... You might say, "What's wrong with you? You have the remedy to save millions of lives and you're not going to share it? That's horrible! I can't believe it! Come on!" And yet, we do this with the gospel every day!

Not sharing the gospel may be the most selfish thing we ever do. Let me end this section with a somber quote from Penn Jillette, an atheist:

"...I've always said, you know, that I don't respect people who don't proselytize. I don't respect that at all. If you believe that there's a heaven and a hell, and people could be going to hell, or not getting eternal life or whatever, and you think that, well, it's not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward...How much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize? How much do you have to hate somebody to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them that? I mean, if I believed beyond a shadow of a doubt that a truck was coming at you, and you didn't believe it, and that truck was bearing down on you, there is a certain point where I tackle you. And this is more important than that..."

How do we share it?

Alright, let's get practical! Maybe you're reading this paper and up to this point you've been saying, "Chris, I already know the gospel and I'm already convinced by Scripture that sharing it is something I'm supposed to do! I just don't know how to do it or where to start!" Ok, then this section is for you. The most important thing to know at this point is the gospel message itself. Hopefully now you have a good (or at least, better) handle on the good news we as followers of Jesus are called to share. Let me begin by saying that there is not **ONLY** one right way of sharing the gospel. There is **ONLY** one gospel, but different ways of sharing it. The important thing is that it is spoken. It must be heard (**Romans 10:14-15**). I want us to take some time to examine the ministries of Jesus, Peter and Paul and look at **three ways** we can go about sharing the most important message in the world: **(1) Parable/Story; (2) Salvation-History; (3) Testimony.**

Let's start with one of Jesus' favorite modes of communication, the parable. Jesus, the Creator, was extremely *creative* in announcing the breaking-in of God's good news two thousand years ago. One way He did this was by telling stories, specifically stories drawn from everyday life, using language that the people of the day would have been familiar with. Take for example *The Parable of the Lost Sheep*, *The Parable of the Lost Coin*, and *The Parable of the Prodigal Son* in **Luke 15**. All three stories focus on a "lost" item being found and the resulting exuberant celebration of the item being reconciled to its owner. This is what the gospel declares! The God of the Universe left Heaven to pursue that which had been lost because of sin. These stories grip the reader. They bring the reader into the story and move the reader to identify with a particular character or characters. Stories are powerful and should be used to announce the gospel. I often use stories to convey the gospel message. One I often use describes a person standing before a Judge, guilty and knowing that everyone in the courtroom perceives the individual's guilt. I then paint the picture of the Judge raising the gavel, preparing to put the guilty party's sentence into place. But then all of sudden the back door to the courtroom opens and in walks Jesus. He slowly makes His way to the Judge and enters into a conversation. The Judge then nods, looks down at the guilty individual and says, "You may go! You're free!" As the person makes their way through the door they quickly glance back in amazement to see Jesus handcuffed in their place, taking the punishment they deserve. This is what the gospel does! This is what the gospel is like! It's important to always be prepared to share the "gospel specifics" of the story, namely answering the

question(s) of how the Cross of Jesus makes this type of exchange (the innocent for the guilty) possible. When sharing the gospel, use stories that illustrate what the gospel has done, and always seek to fill in with the “gospel specifics.”

The next “way” of sharing the gospel concerns the “salvation-historical” method. This method seeks to place the gospel story in the larger context of God’s grand story of redemption (from Genesis to Revelation). It involves seeing the gospel as the climax of God’s saving activity in history! Reading the Bible this way helps us to see all of God’s activity in Scripture as pointing to Christ and His gospel. When using this method you might begin with creation. Establish at the outset the following truths: (1) God is Creator; (2) He created all things; (3) He created people; (4) He created people to know Him and make Him known. Next, you might describe the *Fall* of mankind (**Genesis 3**). Here we see the beginning of the bad news that must first be understood before one can fully appreciate the good news. You could talk about the power of sin to separate us from God. You could further define sin as idolatry, the selfish pursuit of putting one’s self or something else before God. Next, you could highlight the promise of God in **Genesis 3:15** to remedy the problem of sin and evil through the sacrifice of Eve’s offspring. You might then take your audience to **Genesis 12:1-3** where God promises to bring blessing and reconciliation (curse-of-sin reversal) to all the families of the earth through Abraham’s offspring. You might then fast-forward to Jesus, specifically places where Jesus is described as Abraham’s offspring (see **Matthew 1:1; Galatians 3:16**). You could then talk about how God has used the Cross and Resurrection to deal with sin, evil and death and through the Cross and Resurrection is reconciling lost sinners to Himself and putting the world to rights. Talk about how God plans to restore creation and bring about a new heaven and new earth where sin, death, evil and pain will no longer exist. They will be swallowed up forever. I typically use the **4-fold structure of Creation; Fall; Redemption/Rescue; New Creation** to share the gospel as God’s plan, proclaimed in the Old Testament, to bring lost humanity back to God and to put the world to rights! Examples of this approach are seen by Paul (**Romans 5:12-21**); Peter (**Acts 2:14-41**); Stephen (**Acts 7**) and even Jesus (**Luke 24:27**). This approach simply seeks to place the gospel (the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ) in the overarching context of Scripture. Scripture is telling one unified story—God’s rescue mission to bring humanity, separated by sin, back to Himself. This method or mode helps people to see the gospel as the central theme and climax of Scripture. Through the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, God is at work bringing humanity back into the Garden, namely back into fellowship with Himself (see **Revelation 2:7; 21:3**).

A third way of sharing the gospel is by telling how Jesus’ story has intersected with your own story. We often refer to this as *testimony-sharing*. My warning is always this: When sharing your story, make sure to always emphasize the power of Jesus’ story to change your own life. Simply put, your story can’t save, only the story of rescue found in Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. We see numerous examples of this in Paul and elsewhere. See **Ephesians 2:1-10; Colossians 1:13-14; Colossians 1:21-23; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Acts 9; Philippians 3:1-11**. A testimony is a powerful thing when it’s told in light of the gospel. “Let me share with you how Jesus’ story has changed my life!” The gospel is what changes our story and makes our story worth telling! In fact, the gospel brings us into God’s story!

Let me end this section with a simple challenge, one that many of you are familiar with.

1-4P Challenge: Commit to doing the following **4** things for **1** unbeliever in your relational world:

- **Pray** for opportunities and boldness to share the gospel with this person and for the Lord to soften their heart.
- **Plan** ways to spend time with this person to build a relationship and point them to Jesus.
- **Practice** the gospel before them by living a Christ-like life.
- **Proclaim** the good news to this person and invite them to follow Jesus.

What do we do before and after we share the gospel?

Before and after we share the gospel with an unbeliever, we must pray! Pray for the Lord to open their eyes to the truth of the gospel. Pray for the Holy Spirit to convict them of sin and reveal to them the incomparable beauty and majesty of Jesus and His saving work. When sharing the gospel, you must remind yourself often that you do not have the power to convert an unbeliever. Your job is to simply share the good news and trust the Lord for the results. When you share the gospel with an individual for the first time, they may not repent and believe, but might in fact express interest in learning more. I've had this experience multiple times. Use this opportunity to invite them to do a one-on-one bible study on the life of Jesus or a book in the Bible. Keep praying and trusting the Lord to work! See **John 3:1-8; 6:44; 1 Corinthians 3:5-7**.

Some "Lead In" Questions for Sharing the Gospel

At this point you may feel like you have all the information you need. You truly desire to share the gospel with unbelievers and maybe you know several that you'd like to begin sharing it with. However, you still don't know how to get the conversation moving in the right direction. Here are some helpful "lead in" questions:

- What do you believe about Jesus?
- Why do you think Christians talk so much about Jesus' death on the Cross? What was the purpose of His death?
- Have you ever heard the gospel? Do you mind if I share it with you?
- What do you think happens after you die?
- Why do we exist? What's the purpose of life?
- Where do you go to find meaning, joy and satisfaction?
- Have you ever read the Bible? Would you be interested in doing a one-on-one bible study with me to learn more about Jesus?