

HOW TO EXPLAIN CHRISTIANITY TO YOUR FRIENDS

Or Anyone Else Who's Interested

by Steve Hixon



Life Perspectives from Fellowship Bible Church

A pastor friend of mine answers the inevitable American question "So, what do you do?" with "I tell people about Jesus Christ when they're interested. Are you interested?"

For some reason his boldness seems terrifying to many Christians, and yet it may be one of the most open and honest replies we could make. We are here to tell people about Jesus Christ. We aren't here to force the issue when people don't want to listen, but we are to be on the lookout for any opportunity, large or small, to share the good news. We may be a whole chapter in someone's life, but often we're simply a sentence, or a phrase, or a comma! The Holy Spirit is ultimately in charge of whatever impact we have on another person's spiritual life, so that should help us relax...and let Him use us however He wants. As someone once said, we are all beggars who just want to tell other beggars where to find bread. *Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."* (John 6:35)

Most Christians would agree to two things: 1) believers are here to explain Christ to those who don't know Him, and 2) this prospect can be frightening. Why is that?

Basically, it's the same reason that people are afraid of public speaking; we're scared of being put on the spot where our inadequacies are exposed. We imagine that a non-Christian will ask us questions we can't answer, and that

our poor showing will ruin God's reputation. But is that God's attitude? No! He knew our weaknesses when he chose us to carry His message. Does God ever say that we need to be able to answer every conceivable question immediately? No! He just asks us to show up.

The first time I ever tried to explain my faith, I was met by what seemed a hundred "Yeah, but what about..." replies. Alarmed, I hurried back to my older Christian friends. They patiently listened to my panic, and they responded with a quiet assurance that everything was OK. I insisted that they didn't realize how difficult this was. Their peacefulness irritated me! But looking back, I see what they saw then. God is in control, and many people's objections to Christianity are often simply a smokescreen. This is not to say that honest questions don't deserve careful, honest answers, but many people live in fear. Spiritual things are the great unknown, and that scares them.

Before I came to Christ I lived in confusion and frustration, and my reasons for rejecting Christ were a mixture of ignorance and anxiety. But God loved me, and was patient with me, and that's how He is with everyone. Most people who accept Christ are brought into the kingdom through a long series of events, in which God patiently opens the person's heart, like a kind and skillful surgeon.

"There are people around us whom God longs to touch through us – people that only we can touch with our particular style and personality, people whom we have been called to. We must begin to ask God, "Is this the one? Is she the one You are seeking?" It is a fantastic drama, and God wants to use us to accomplish it."

Rebecca Pippert

WHAT MOTIVATES ME?

Why do we share our faith? What should motivate us to be witnesses for Jesus Christ? Here are three reasons, although there are many others.

1. THE GREAT COMMISSION

Jesus' last words to the disciples spelled out their mission, and ours: make disciples. This is a two-step process of 1) bringing people to Christ, and 2) teaching them what they need to know to live a godly life. In the midst of our complex world, we sometimes forget this clear command:

"All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

2. THE LOVE OF GOD

We also seek to bring others to Christ because it is the best thing that can happen to someone. If we had a cure for cancer and failed to give it to a dying victim, would that be loving them? Romans 5:5 tells us that *"God has poured out his love into our hearts"*, and it only makes sense that if He loves the world, and His love is in our hearts, then we should begin to feel His love for those around us.

3. THE FACT THAT HELL IS REAL

Francis Schaeffer said that ultimately, we must tell people about Christ because hell is real. No one spoke about the reality of hell as much as Jesus did. The hard truth is that if a person fails to receive God's free gift while they can, they face a Christless eternity. Human beings will encounter Jesus as either Savior or Judge, and Hebrews 10:27 makes it clear that *"it is appointed to man once to die, and after that judgment..."* There are no second chances.

4. THE PRIVILEGE OF BEING AN AMBASSADOR

As Bill Hybels has said, being used by God to influence another person towards a relationship with Christ "is the greatest spiritual high you will ever experience. It is the greatest single contribution you could ever make in someone's life." The thrill of having someone say, "Thanks for reaching out to me. Thanks for pointing me to Jesus," is indescribable. To be part of what God is doing on earth is an incredibly rewarding experience, an awesome privilege.

SO, WHAT DO I ACTUALLY SAY?

"Witnessing is sharing the good news of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and leaving the results to God."

Bill Bright

Everyone has a different personality, different life circumstances, and different spiritual gifts. Some believers are closer to the "Billy Graham" end of the scale, while others are less gregarious and don't find themselves sharing their faith every day. However, it is important that every Christian know what to do when they do find themselves in a situation that give them an opportunity to explain Christ. The apostle Peter wrote to encourage us in this, *"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). The following are a few good, proven ways to share your faith. We suggest you study these carefully, (in a group if you can), and pray for God to open your eyes to "open doors" on a regular basis.

1. THE FOUR SPIRITUAL LAWS

Campus Crusade for Christ's little yellow booklet is the most popular ever written. It goes like this:

Law One: *"God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life."*

(John 3:16, John 10:10)

Law Two: *"Man is sinful and separated from God, thus he cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life."*

(Romans 3:23, 6:23)

Law Three: “Jesus Christ is God’s only provision for man’s sin. Through Him you can know and experience God’s love and plan for your life.”

(Romans 5:8, 1 Cor. 15:3-6, John 14:6)

Law Four: “We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God’s love and plan for our lives.”

(John 1:12, Eph. 2:8,9, Rev. 3:20)

God knows your heart and is not so concerned with your words as He is with the attitude of your heart. The following is a suggested prayer: “Lord Jesus, I need you. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving my sins. Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be.”

2. THE “ROMAN ROAD”

This is an especially helpful way to explain the gospel. Staying in one New Testament book, you can walk through a few verses which tell the whole story. You can memorize these or mark them in your Bible. (Essential verses are in bold, helpful additional ones are in normal type):

Romans 3:9 *What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. ¹⁰As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. ¹²All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”*

Romans 3:23 “...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”

Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 5:8 “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Romans 10:9 “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Romans 8:1 “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...”

3. THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

The gospel of John is probably the best book to have someone read who is open to investigating Christ. In fact, John tells us that he wrote it for that express purpose: “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:30,31)

In addition to Jesus’ “signs” which proved who He was, there are numerous stories of personal encounters He had with all types of people; often the reader will identify with one of these. Most famous may be his conversation with Nicodemus in chapter 3 in

which Jesus explains that a person must be “born again.” That section ends with John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

And there are Jesus’ great claims, not only to divinity: “I and the Father are One” (10:30), and “Before Abraham was born, I Am.” (8:58), but to aspects

of His character: “I am the Good Shepherd. The good shepherd lay down his life for the sheep. (10:11,12), I am the Way the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (14:6)

4. THE THREE GREAT TRANSFERS

Although this may be more effective in teaching a new believer than in witnessing, these three principles explain what happens when a person accepts Christ. They condense a lot of theology into just two verses:

“We do not win people by proving to them that they are wrong. Rather it is the beauty and superiority of Christ that makes them realize there is a better way.”

Jim Peterson

1 . Adam's sin was transferred to Us

"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned..."

(Romans 5:12)

2. Our sin was transferred to Christ

"God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us..."

(2 Corinthians 5:21a)

3. Christ's righteousness was transferred to Us

"...so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."

(2 Corinthians 5:21b)

This briefly outlines the "bad news" and the "good news". Where does the step of faith occur? Between steps 2 and 3.

5. HOW DO YOU SPELL YOUR FAITH?

"If you'd ever be interested in knowing the difference between religion and Christianity, I'd be happy to explain it to you." Most people think of Christianity in such a way that they would spell it "D-O". But that is religion, an emphasis on doing things to impress God. It's not Christianity, which is a relationship with a person. God says that no amount of good works that we can do will ever be enough to get us into heaven, to cancel out the mistakes we've made, the sins we commit, the "bad things" (as my daughter says) we do and say and think. Instead, God's idea is spelled "D-O-N-E". His offer to us is a free gift, in which the payment has already been made by His Son, who took our place, dying instead of us, receiving the punishment we deserve. Nothing needs to be added to what He accomplished; the gift simply remains to be received.

6. YOUR OWN STORY

Perhaps the most common and powerful witness is the one any Christian can give: just tell what happened to you. People want to know if it's real to you, if Jesus has really made a difference in your life. Never mind your inconsistencies and failures, people understand that you're not claiming perfection. People are hungry for truth, for peace of mind, for a still place in the storm of their lives.

It is helpful to think through how God worked in your life; see if you can tell your "story" in about five minutes. You don't want to sound "canned", but you don't want to ramble for an hour either. Once an older man asked me how to dedicate his life to Christ, and my answer was so long-winded that by the time I finished, he had actually fallen asleep!

As you tell your story, be honest, don't exaggerate. Include the great themes: what your life was like before Christ, how you became aware of your sin, how you expressed to God your need and your desire for forgiveness, what happened in the days and weeks to follow. Then you can tell your friend that the same experience can be theirs for the asking. You don't have to pressure them to decide that moment, but make it clear that you're ready to talk more whenever they are.

One final note: no one is *naturally* competent to deal with such important spiritual matters. When you think about it, it's an amazing thing that God entrusted us with the job of communicating His good news to a world that lives in darkness. But don't be overwhelmed! Remember that Jesus said, *"The fields are ripe for harvest."* Paul, likewise, reminds us: *"Who is equal to such a task? Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant... We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us."*

(2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5,6; 5:20)

Recommended Reading:

Sharing Your Faith

Lifestyle Evangelism, Joe Aldrich

How to Give Away Your Faith, Paul Little

Living Proof, Jim Peterson

Out of the Saltshaker and Into the World,
Rebecca Pippert

Answering Questions

Know What You Believe, Paul Little

Know Why You Believe, Paul Little

More Than a Carpenter, Josh McDowell