



# DISCIPLING SKEPTICS & SEEKERS

by Beau Crosetto  
and James Choung

**Why**

**Every Believer**

**Needs**

**to**

**Share**

**Their**

**Faith**

# **Discipling Skeptics & Seekers**

**Why Every Believer Needs to Share Their Faith**

**By Beau Crosetto  
and James Choung**

*Discipling Skeptics and Seekers*

Copyright (c) 2014 by Beau Crosetto and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/ USA

Distributed via Exponential Resources

Exponential is a growing movement of leaders committed to the multiplication of healthy new churches. Exponential Resources spotlights and spreads actionable principles, ideas and solutions for the accelerated multiplication of healthy, reproducing faith communities. For more information, visit [exponential.org](http://exponential.org)

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without prior written permission from the publisher, except where noted in the text and in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

This book is manufactured in the United States.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version(r), NIV(r). Copyright (c) 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.(tm) Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. <http://www.zondervan.com>

All emphases in Scripture quotations have been added by the authors.

**Credits**

Cover and Interior Design: Karen Pheasant and Story.GS

## **WITH THANKS TO...**

This eBook is free to download thanks to the very generous support of some wonderful sponsor organizations:

### **Exponential**

Thanks to Exponential and their tireless work to put on such a great conference for planters and evangelists! Especially Lindy, Karen, Terri and Karen for all their behind the scenes work and such great help to us on the eBook!

### **InterVarsity Christian Fellowship / USA**

We both, for a combined total of almost 30 years, have been brought to faith (or brought back to faith) and then deeply shaped and formed by the values and ethos of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. We're both thankful for the investment by InterVarsity Press as well, who makes the investment to spread our ideas through print. We're so indebted and thankful to be a part of this significant ministry.

### **Vineyard Underground**

We both are also thankful for the research lab that we call the Vineyard Underground. It's been great to have a wonderful community ready to see the Kingdom of God show up wherever they are, and it's our great privilege to serve such a great tribe.

## **AND FINALLY...**

I (Beau) am thankful to my wife and kids for giving me space to write this book with James. They are such great partners in mission. I wouldn't be who I am without them shaping me!

I (James) am thankful to my wife, Jinhee, particularly for a season of deep partnership as we serve the Vineyard Underground. I really thought we would kill each other if we ever formally led anything together, but I was so, so wrong—and glad that I was! I'm so thankful to God that I get the honor to do life and ministry with you, and I can't imagine a better partner, lover and friend.



# EXPONENTIAL<sup>7</sup>

RESOURCING CHURCH PLANTERS

- Largest annual church planting conference in the world (Orlando & Los Angeles)
- 50+ FREE eBooks
- 400+ Hours of FREE audio training via podcasts from national leaders
- FREE weekly email newsletter
- Future Travelers learning communities
- Church planters blog
- Conference content available via Digital Access Pass

[exponential.org](http://exponential.org) >

[@churchplanting](https://twitter.com/churchplanting)  
[info@exponential.org](mailto:info@exponential.org)





# FREE EBOOKS

ReThinking Evangelism, Outreach, Witness,  
Preaching and the Commission in the  
Exponential Resources Series

With 15+ National Leaders

*Dave Ferguson  
Larry Osborne  
Alan Hirsch  
Michael Frost  
Jay Hein  
John Teter  
Larry Walkemeyer  
Alex Absalom  
Vince Antonucci  
Bobby Harrington  
Linda Bergquist  
Arron Chambers  
Beau Crosetto  
Rich Gorman  
and MORE!*

[WWW.EXPONENTIAL.ORG](http://WWW.EXPONENTIAL.ORG)

**BOOK BY BEAU CROSETTO**

**BEYOND AWKWARD**

**WHEN TALKING ABOUT JESUS IS OUTSIDE YOUR COMFORT ZONE**

"Beau brilliantly shows us how to embrace our fear of evangelism and boldly move past it!"

— Dave Ferguson

**AVAILABLE OCTOBER 2014**

Evangelism is scary. We feel compelled to do it, but the thought of it fills us with dread. Talking about Jesus is almost always awkward. And yet when we brave the awkwardness, we see God work. Beau Crosetto helps us move out of our comfort zones and into the awkwardness, and beyond there to life-transforming encounters with God.

 **INTERVARSITY PRESS**  
Heart. Soul. Mind. Strength.

## BOOKS BY JAMES CHOUNG



### REAL LIFE A CHRISTIANITY WORTH LIVING OUT

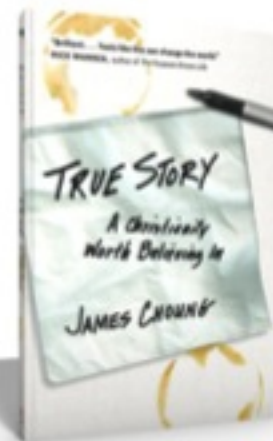
“If you have ever wanted to apprentice someone in the ways of Jesus and are not sure where to start, you gotta read this book!”

— Dave Ferguson

### TRUE STORY A CHRISTIANITY WORTH BELIEVING IN

“Choung’s ‘napkin theology’ and its ‘four-worlds’ diagram promise to be for evangelism in the twenty-first century what the ‘Four Spiritual Laws’ were for the twentieth century.”

— Leonard Sweet



 **INTERVARSITY PRESS**  
Heart. Soul. Mind. Strength.



# RELEASE THE APE

ACTIVATING APOSTOLIC, PROPHETIC, EVANGELISTIC LEADERS



## A BLOG FOR PRACTITIONERS.

### COMMUNITY

*Over 15 different A.P.E. voices contributing weekly.*

### LANGUAGE

*Shaping vocabulary for the conversation around the apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic vocations.*

### TESTIMONY

*Real time stories inspiring you to live into your apostolic, prophetic or evangelistic calling.*

RELEASETHEAPE.COM



**INTERVARSITY**

WHO'S PLANTING MINISTRY ON  
**1,000 CAMPUSES?**

**YOU + US.**

**YOU** NEED A CONNECTION TO CAMPUS.  
**WE** NEED LOCAL MISSIONAL CHURCHES.

LET'S REACH **1,000** TOGETHER.

REACHING **EVERY** POPULATION ON CAMPUS



**CONTACT US TODAY**

[PLANTING.INTERVARSITY@GMAIL.COM](mailto:PLANTING.INTERVARSITY@GMAIL.COM)



# Contents

## **Introduction**

### **Section 1**

#### **Why We Must Disciple Skeptics & Seekers**

For the Sake of ... God

For the Sake of ... Intentionality

For the Sake of ... Disciples

For the Sake of ... Joy

### **Section 2**

#### **How to Be Proactive in Evangelism**

Practice Evangelistic Rhythms

Train Evangelism Skills

### **Epilogue A Charge**

# Discipling Skeptics & Seekers

## Introduction

### Same Old Business

I (Beau) was talking to an entrepreneurial friend of mine who has been in business for 20 years. He is a dedicated Christian, goes to church, but has no idea how God intersects with his line of work.

I know this because I asked him about it the last time we got together. I threw out these questions: *How do you see yourself as an agent for God in His work? How do you influence people for Christ in your business and deals? How is your church helping and equipping you for that?*

I didn't ask him in a condescending way; this guy is a friend of mine. But I genuinely wanted to help him think about his mission. He is a real influencer with people in the marketplace, and I wondered how his work translated to mission in Christ.

He looked at me and said: "I don't know."

Almost every single business guy I talk to has the same response, and it really bothers me. It also really bothers *them* by the end of the conversation.

He then went on to tell me that he had recently left one company to start another, and then two weeks later, he had to lay off 11 people for budgetary reasons.

One of the 11 texted him during our meeting, saying, "We need to talk about what is next." Clearly, he's reeling from recently being let go.

I asked my friend if these people were Christians, and he gave a quick, "No." Then I asked him, "Have you ever considered your role in discipling these people?"

These 11 former employees don't go to church, and yet, he is a person they look up to and respect—both as a human being and as a businessman. Many in the community looked up to this guy.

He said he had never thought about that, so I asked, “What if church wasn't defined by you going on Sunday mornings, but by you being [sent](#) into your world in Christ's name? What if your pastor and community were empowering you, training you and praying for you to be the church in your work and wherever you go in the world? What if your role wasn't to teach a Sunday school class at church, but to hang out after work with these people and talk? What if the church reinvested some of your tithes towards that?”

He simply said, “I would love that church. It sounds awesome.”

This is not a guy who is against God's [mission](#). He isn't opposed to being sent by God into his workplace either.

He just doesn't have vision for it, and he doesn't have anyone helping him see that Jesus is the one who sends people into the world, not just the one who invites others to attend church on Sunday!

## **From the Beginning**

From the beginning of your church plant, you have to be thinking about how you are going to [release people](#) into their places of influence. They need to be trained not only to reach the people in these places, but to talk about Jesus as well. I am convinced that in many of our church plants, we are gathering people and giving them vision to be part of a new kind of community, but we aren't really giving them evangelistic vision.

My business friend needed vision to be released into his work and to shepherd the people in his sphere. But he also needed vision to talk about Jesus there and expect that he could lead people to faith in the company. He needed a church that gave him not only the permission to reach out, but also the authority and belief that he was the man to lead his friends to Christ. Just gathering them is not good enough. He needed to be given vision that Jesus would use him, not just his pastor, to speak of Christ.

We have so much trouble with evangelism because we are rightfully allergic to pressuring people, or to making it all about helping people get “saved” instead of being [transformed](#). I get that. But we swing too far when we make it all about the journey, passively reacting to our

friends. I am not saying we shouldn't care about the journey, our friends' feelings, or the right time to talk about Jesus. But there has to be a starting point. Friends are not going to just fall into the Kingdom of God by themselves. They need you to offer a conversation, an interpretation and an invitation.

In sum, here's how the church often thinks of evangelism:

***Pressure Evangelism:*** We need to have the slick sayings and the right tracts. We need to “convince” people to believe. We need to argue to the death and if none of this is working we lay it on them with a, “Do you know where you are going when you die?” statement. High pressure, high stakes evangelism. This way is all about the evangelist and twisting people's arms to fit our agendas. There is little awareness of what God may be doing in that moment with the person. We all hate this.

But then we reacted against this in a second way:

***Passive Evangelism:*** We have become a church that is idealistic about the journey—never wanting to make people feel uncomfortable and making sure everything we present is all on their terms. We don't challenge our friends or culture much. Instead, we try to woo them with the gospel and the red-letter words of Jesus, and when they are finally ready to follow Him, we will gladly help them get into the baptismal tank. In this version of evangelism, people's needs and comfort are our primary focus. As a result, many people stay in the faith community unconnected to a relationship with Jesus for far too long. I would also argue that many times this version of evangelism is highly unaware of what God is doing in the moment, in part because we can never imagine that God would ever do or say anything that would make you or the seeking person feel uncomfortable.

But in this eBook, we want to propose a third way:

***Proactive Evangelism:*** What if we could be a church that wasn't full of people with slick sayings and simplistic truths, but we also weren't a church that was so passive and afraid of turning over the proverbial apple cart that we initiated nothing? What if we could journey with our friends, have great discussions, yet also be expectant and urge them to give their lives to Jesus? What if we could be a church where our members knew how to challenge their friends with the gospel but still do it with love and in the context of relationships? What if we could be people that are discerning enough to know how and when to offer truth, interpretation and an invitation to the gospel? What if we could be a people that knew how to wait and journey, but also seized God-given *kairos* moments? What if we could faithfully lead people into a relationship with Christ [at work](#), in the coffee shop, in the dorm room and on the street? Why

can't we be proactive, and yet still be relational and transformational? ‘

Throughout the rest of this eBook, we're exploring the theme of *proactive evangelism*. In Section 1, we highlight why we believe that every Christian—not merely the gifted ones—could and should be involved in evangelism, specifically leading others into a relationship with Jesus. In Section 2, we offer practical communal rhythms and individual skills to help believers be more humble, winsome and effective in their witness. Along the way, we've sprinkled hyperlinks to blog articles and other websites throughout the text to help you explore particular themes even further.

May this eBook equip you to be more effective helpful and faithful witnesses.

# Section 1

## Why We Must Disciple Skeptics and Seekers

To become proactive in evangelism, we have to understand why God is calling us to this lifestyle. In this first section, I (Beau) unpack four reasons why every believer must become proactive in discipling skeptics and seekers: 1) Knowing God's Heart; 2) Becoming Intentional; 3) Making Disciples; and 4) Experiencing Joy.

### For the Sake of ... God

The best image of being proactive in evangelism I can think of is exemplified in the parable of the lost son from Luke 15.

We see a picture of God here that is neither pushy nor overbearing, but He is not passive either. He is on his toes, on the lookout. On the first sight of his son's return, the father runs out to gather him into his arms. He doesn't wait for his son to get back to the house and pose a question to him. No, he meets him where he is and shows him unconditional and unmerited love.

In the same way, we need to be like this in evangelism. We need to be watching for our friends to "turn" towards God, and then be able to help them experience the love of God and His forgiveness. This is the role of the believer in evangelism, whether we are gifted or not. Because, as believers, we were made in His image to reflect His love for those who don't know Him yet.

Some would suggest that the non-gifted evangelist's role is only to live provocatively and stir up curiosity in their friends' lives. The thought is: We should only share our faith when our friends ask. That idea is not bad in itself, but it can make us too narrow and passive. All of us need to join God in His passionate pursuit of lost people. Every believer should be able to talk to their friends about the love of God and the [good news](#) of the Kingdom even without their friends making the first move. You can become a proactive witness that can assist at the first signs of your friends' turning to God. Learn how to ask great questions and start spiritual conversations.

In the parable, walking all the way to the house on his own would have been more exhausting and shameful for the prodigal son. Instead, the father meets him halfway. But we treat our



curious friends the same way when we never bring up Jesus with them. Many of your friends are very curious about faith below the surface, and they just don't know how to bring up the topic. They might feel embarrassed, awkward, nervous or stupid. But let me tell you, the times I have checked the curiosity "pulse" of the people around me with a simple question like, "Would you ever want to talk about spiritual things with me? Maybe grab a beer and talk about how our life can connect with God?" I have never been sad I did. Sure, some of them have turned me down, but many others have thanked me profusely that I would be so kind to ask them. They were relieved because they were making an inward turn towards God and now no longer had to secretly carry the exhausting burden anymore. I met them halfway.

God doesn't want you to wait for your friends to muster up the strength to ask you questions. Don't make your friends come all the way. That is being proactive. And every follower of Jesus should be a *proactive* witness.

## **For the Sake of ... Intentionality**

As we've seen, one reason for entering into the proactive posture of evangelism is that God's heart turns toward the lost, and He is actively looking for their return. Another reason is that we are called to make the most of every opportunity:

"Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15-16, NIV).

Sure, this passage is also addressing the way we live, and we are called to live in wise ways and be people that are provocative and intriguing in the way we go about our business. It's how we are intentional and a very necessary part of being proactive in our witness. Every believer should carefully think about how they live and carry themselves in public among not-yet followers of Jesus.

But the context of this passage is also about Christ calling every person to *wake up*—for believers to awake from "sleep," and for unbelievers to rise from the "dead" (Eph. 5:14). Jesus is here, and now is the time to fully step into the life He has to offer us through His death and resurrection.

Therefore, every believer is called to live in an intentional, evangelistic way. Believers need to go to work, to school, to their third spaces with consideration and purpose. We need to look for **moments** to have spiritual conversations and to bring up Jesus.

This verse seems to go further, capturing the urgency and focus of a believer with the phrase,

“Make the most of every opportunity.” People who are looking to make the most of opportunities take advantage of moments that would otherwise slip by. They are intentional with their time and words.

Granted, for some of us intentionality can feel manipulative or forced. That is not what I’m talking about. Think about it: You are intentional with people you love. Whether it is with your wife for her birthday or your child as you help them develop a skill, you purposely plan out how you can help him or her and grow your relationship with them. When we love, we are intentional.

Loving Christ and loving others mean that we take on a posture of intentionality. We are intentional towards Jesus to care for His mission and to pursue with Him the people He is disconnected from. We are intentional to enter into His heart and to become a watchman or watchwomen with Him. But we are also **intentional** out of a love for other people. The people at your work and in your family and on your street need you to be intentional with them and watch out for them as they awaken spiritually and turn towards God. They need you to make the extra effort and give the extra attention that intentional people make in loving relationships.

My friend Carolyn is one of those intentional people.

When Carolyn moved to Santa Monica after graduating from college, she had every reason to focus on her new job in marketing and on making friends. But when she got word that Lu, a woman at her office, was looking for God, she made time to minister to her.

Lu came from a Buddhist background and was visiting psychics at the time. She was in need of answers, stressed and hopeless. Lu’s psychologist, Buddhism, work, boyfriend and even psychics could not help her. She quickly realized they offered her nothing.

But Carolyn was ready to help Lu, and during their first conversation Lu accepted Christ. She was desperate and hungry for something real, and God showed Carolyn that her role was simply to interpret what was happening and fill in the rest of the story with the gospel to show Lu what God was doing.

Within the first month of moving to Santa Monica, Carolyn had led a co-worker to the Lord and altered this woman’s eternal destiny and life here on earth. Shortly after, Carolyn joined our church, and then Lu did too. It was so great to hear Lu’s testimony in person, and to watch Carolyn baptize her as our church shared in the joyous occasion.

Two months after Lu’s conversion, she had to return to China to renew her working visa. Within

two weeks, she emailed Carolyn that she had led her mom and cousin to faith. God was really on the move.

Carolyn's story is a great example of being available and ready to take advantage of moments God is setting up. She is intentional in her witness, interruptible, and looking for ways to make the most of her opportunities in life.

You can read more about Carolyn's journey as a witness [here](#).

## **For the Sake of ... Disciples**

Jesus' call to go and make disciples in Matthew 28 is a very clear, proactive charge. We are not called to wait and hope people show up to hear about Jesus. We are called to go preach, persuade and influence people into the Kingdom of God. We are sent as a witness into the world to say and show that the Kingdom of God is at hand!

No one in the church would argue that only the gifted should be making disciples. We agree that we all should be making disciples, and don't want to put the burden of making disciples only onto the shoulders of master disciple makers, right?

We believe that [every person](#) is commissioned by Jesus to go and make disciples and to teach them to obey the teachings of Christ.

So then why do we have such a divide in our churches and teaching about evangelism? How can someone make a disciple without evangelism? How can someone make a disciple without conversion? How can someone make a disciple without helping unbelievers cross from death to life?

Every person is called to evangelism because every person is called to make disciples. If you are serious about disciple making, then you have to be serious about evangelism. If you believe every person can make a disciple, then you have to believe every person can lead others to faith and into the Kingdom of God.

Evangelism is the *discipleship* of skeptics and seekers.

But skeptics and seekers need a different kind of discipleship than believers in Christ. They need teaching on the centrality of Christ, they need to hear the gospel clearly, they need their tough questions answered, they need a Christ-centered worldview explained, and they need the power of God displayed. They need more proof than believers, and it is our role as disciple makers to

give them this proof, and to persuade and compel them into the Kingdom of God. It is the role of the disciple maker to make the claims and life of Christ perfectly clear to the skeptic and seeker. Evangelism is disciple making with skeptics and seekers. Evangelism is making Christ known where He is [not being known](#). It is spreading the good news of Christ everywhere, especially where it is not being heard or obeyed.

If we are going to take the Great Commission seriously, then we have to become proficient in evangelism. We have to embrace it, lean into it, and start to ask the tough questions that many people don't know how to answer and tend to ignore or shove onto the "gifted." What does it mean to disciple a skeptic or seeker? How can I do this effectively? What works in today's culture? What is the core message of Christianity? How do I show and tell about the Kingdom of God simply but powerfully to someone that doesn't know Christ?

As leaders in the church, we need to uphold this expectation for [every Christian](#) in our churches and at our conferences. I find it frustrating and frankly contradictory when one conference speaker calls us to make disciples, then another proclaims that evangelism and leading people to faith is for a certain, gifted few. This happens way too often. We need a more integrated message that says, "We are all called to make disciples, and part of that work is discipling pre-believers — skeptics and seekers. We need to learn how to disciple them and move them towards obedience in Christ. This is called evangelism. We are all called to do this! You can do this!"

I think a brief word here on the *communal* call to make disciples is needed. Jesus did commission a community of believers to "go and make disciples," and I do think that understanding this commissioning within the context of community is important. While I do believe that every person is responsible for the discipleship of skeptics and seekers and therefore called to lead people into the Kingdom of God, I also believe that people within a community play different parts.

One of the best ways I have seen evangelism played out in a community to make space for seeking friends to encounter Jesus is in Los Angeles with InterVarsity. College ministries across a number of campuses have a retreat on Catalina Island every spring called "Can This Wait?." It is fully and solely designed for the seeking person. You cannot go on this retreat unless you are not following Christ. But as a seeker, you can bring a friend who may be following Jesus. The weekend conference has about 100 attendees, and half are not followers of Jesus. Three talks are presented: *Who is Jesus?* *What does it mean to follow Him?* and *Why should I care?* This year, 20 students made decisions to follow Christ before leaving the island.

But communal evangelism can also be simpler. One of my favorite ideas is to have a small group in a neighborhood host a series on discovering Jesus, and then that group invites their seeking

friends over for dinner and discussion. Each week, a different member can lead the discussion and the group together can share the joyous work of revealing Jesus to their friends.

Communal evangelism is a great way to embrace the Great Commission. But the best communal evangelism is one where everyone gets to play. What I love about the Catalina conference is that gifted evangelists are used to give talks, but every person in the ministry is inviting their friends to sign up for the weekend. Also during the weekend, many different students are leading small groups and having spiritual conversations. The conference sets up believers for evangelism, and the whole community embraces this effort.

My concern is that *if* our churches and ministries are doing evangelism, it is primarily being cast onto the shoulders of the “gifted” evangelist while everyone else passively waits around. This should not be the case.

### **Gifted in Evangelism**

Gifted evangelists, however, do have a clear role in the church and mission to make disciples. If every believer is called to lead people into faith and obedience to Jesus, then one part of the role of the “gifted” evangelist is to equip those people so that they can do this well.

“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” (Eph. 4:11-13, NIV).

The gifted evangelist needs to help equip every believer to see their role in leading friends to faith at work, in their neighborhood, and in every sphere of life. Gifted evangelists make discipling of the pre-believer—the skeptic and seeker—much more clear, compelling and easier to do for the everyday believer. The [gifted evangelists](#) cannot be the ones solely responsible for leading people to faith in Christ, but they can be used to equip others.

Second, gifted evangelists are also helpful in corporate [evangelistic preaching](#) and calls to faith. We need to keep making space in our churches to call people to faith and into obedience to Christ from the pulpit. Gifted evangelists are the ones to do this. I recommend a quarterly talk from the front that is designed for the skeptic and seeker. Have the gifted evangelist give this talk and let them compel people into the Kingdom of God and into a saving relationship with Christ. Let the gifted evangelist show the skeptic and seeker how to turn from darkness and into the light and let them give a public invitation to respond.

Third, gifted evangelists are great coaches and helpers in personal evangelism. I have had many

moments where friends have brought me in to help with a conversation or to take a relationship further into the gospel. This is great use of evangelists. They can tend to pop open conversations or take them deeper. But I must warn you: Every person can and should lead people to faith regardless of gifting, which requires gifted evangelists to make sure they are not taking up all the evangelistic space. Sometimes coming into every situation to bail out people is not ideal. We need to let people have hard conversations, fail, bumble along and learn. Our friends will not become effective witnesses with their words if gifted evangelists are always jumping in to save them.

## **For the Sake of ... Joy**

Last, we need a proactive approach to evangelism because it releases joy into the believer's heart. When I think about discipling people in the ministry I steward, the thing I think about most is how incredible it is to [lead someone to faith](#) in Christ. Few moments equal the joy and awe I feel when I get to see someone turn their life over to Christ.

Just this year, I was meeting with a guy who was not following Jesus in any way. We met up a few times to talk, and one day we studied the story about the woman at the well in John 4. Through our study, he came to realize he had a deep thirst that he could not quench from partying and womanizing. He literally cried out during our study that he wanted this living water, and he wanted Jesus to show him how to live differently. I explained to him that this meant turning the keys of his life over to Jesus, that He was going to drive now and that following Jesus is all about submitting your life to Him and letting Him lead you to live life to the fullest in His Kingdom. I shared the gospel with him, I explained what sin meant, and I explained the meaning of the cross to him. At this point, he was almost in tears. God was stirring him. So, I asked him if he wanted to follow Jesus. I asked him if he wanted to drop his "jar" and head back to his village and share this good news.

I will never forget what he said, "Definitely. I want that." And then he continued on, "We need to figure out how to get more people like me into this ministry, to hear this message."

On that sunny day in LA, we prayed together and welcomed the Holy Spirit into his life. We asked God to forgive him of his sins and to fill him with new life found only in Christ.

The guy couldn't hold back his smile. Neither could Jon, a believer who was with me. Jon, in fact, was clear with me afterwards that he wanted to see this transformation over and over again. He wanted to lead more people to faith and experience the joy that Jesus talks about in Luke 15:7 (NIV): "I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

If we want people to be [joyful disciples](#) and make joyful disciples, then they need to see and taste what leading people into the Kingdom of God is like. It is the lifeblood of ministry. It is what Jesus is spurring us into when He says that the harvest is now (John 4:34-38). Look up and see! He wants us to experience the incredible joy associated with people coming to life in Christ.

It would be a shame if every believer did not experience this and we only left the job of leading people to faith in the hands of gifted evangelists and preachers. It's not fair that they get to have all the fun! It is not a coincidence that the most joyful people I know are leading others to Christ regularly. It is not by coincidence that the churches and communities with the most joy are those that are seeing people come to Christ regularly. There is a joy that can only be [found in the harvest](#), and it is a joy that God intends all believers to experience with Him!

God is calling every believer to evangelism for the sake of knowing His heart, being an intentional witness, making disciples and experiencing the joy of heaven. But knowing the reasons we need to press into evangelism is not enough. We have to know how to be this kind of person and how to create this kind of culture in our churches and ministry. In the next section, James will help us understand how to do this by helping you see how you can create a community that is great at starting spiritual conversations, interpreting where God is at work, and inviting people to respond to the gospel.

## Section 2

# How to Be Proactive in Evangelism

We need some rhythms *and* skills to close the gap between our evangelistic vision and our given reality. So let's make this practical. It's great to have values, but how does this work out in your people and in your communities?

### Practice Evangelistic Rhythms

It would be too easy—and shortsighted—to jump straight to the *skills* we need as individuals. We need a community to *encourage* and *empower* these skills. For when it comes to discipling skeptics and seekers, we've found that it's easier for believers to get involved in evangelism when you have an evangelistic community that supports their endeavors. Not only that, they'll also be more effective.

To do that, you need to address the *culture* of your faith community. How would you change a church culture so that it supported your discipling of skeptics and seekers? Here are six rhythms that can help:

#### 1. Pray regularly for God's leading.

In my younger days, I might have led a list like this with “cast compelling vision” for proactive evangelism. But I'm older, and at least trying to be a bit wiser. After almost two decades of full-time work as a ministry professional (knowing that those in the marketplace are also *full-time ministers* in their God-given vocations), I've learned that a community can have some momentum by casting, as an early mentor of mine used to say, an “attractive picture of an attainable reality.” But something else happens altogether when people [hear God's leading](#) for themselves.

Years ago, I was part of a campus ministry that was dead set against sharing their faith. Leaders actually said words like, “If I wanted to do evangelism, I would've joined Crusade.” *Ouch.*

To become a witnessing community, the culture needed to shift. We had some early wins, when a handful of passionate staff workers pioneered evangelistic activity with a willing few. Their work began to bear fruit. But still, the vast majority of the students were against our changes to the ministry toward evangelism. Even though we were producing some great fruit, we were also



alienating our own community. It was becoming clear that running with our own ideas without their ownership wasn't building any more trust and momentum, and was actually creating resistance.

We were stuck.

We had to change course. Instead of merely pressing our agenda, we started to teach people how to [hear God's voice](#). Then, we created spaces in our student leadership meetings for them to hear God for themselves. Sometimes, we'd just put out an open microphone on a stand for people to share what they heard from God, though we made sure to correct people that we thought were out of line. Other times, we prayerfully worked through an issue affecting our community. We did this every week with our student leaders.

For six months.

But through this process, God uncovered past hurts and broken trust, particularly between the staff and students. Reconciliation started to spring up, and an excitement for those who weren't in our fellowship began to grow and flourish. After those six months, the student leaders—all 70 of them—were unanimously ready to move forward together as an evangelistic community. We decided to merge the two campus fellowships into one larger one, making our leadership load more efficient, which freed up energy to help others get to know Jesus. The fruit of this time was immediate: At our first meeting in the next school year, we grew 50 percent in our weekly gathering, and many more people started to give their lives to Jesus.

They heard God, and it changed their hearts.

In this way, one word from God is worth a thousand sermons.

We can't just drum up momentum on our own. We need God's Spirit to breathe life into our hearts and communities over and over again. Especially in the work of evangelism, we will face great opposition—cultural and spiritual. We can't just work harder in this area. We need God to speak and move.

How can you create prayer-soaked spaces where you seek God's will together for the mission? I've been in settings where people heard from God, and for the sake of people who didn't know Jesus, moved to a different apartment, changed majors, shifted career plans, opened up their wallets, went overseas, and planted churches under the promptings of God. It's one thing for a talk of mine to motivate them, but it's wholly another thing when people hear from God

themselves. To be quite honest, it was *humbling*: People started remembering what God said more than what I had said in my carefully crafted and dynamically delivered talks!

Create these prayer spaces. Let people share Bible verses, images, pictures, songs, hymns or Psalms that they are led to share. Serve as an interpretive guide at times, to help people know what's going on. Allow God to speak through and to His people. If you want to learn more about how to do something like this, check out my second book, *Real Life: A Christianity Worth Living Out*.

One note, though. Make sure that you don't relinquish your spiritual authority. Correct people who say things that are creating fear—the opposite of faith— or are producing the opposite of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. Ensuring that the process moves forward in a guided fashion helps people trust the process.

Then have people pray into that. No one can change a heart except God Himself, so asking God to move in the lives of our neighbors, co-workers, friends and relatives is a must. It helps prepare the field—and the workers—for the harvest.

## **2. Teach regularly on God's heart for the lost.**

Our hearts don't constantly burn for those who don't yet know Jesus. And in our culture, evangelism is one of the most offensive things you can do. We'll have every good reason lined up on why we shouldn't engage the people around us with our faith. Who wants to be a part of the religious freak show, right? It's normal to feel that way.

But that's precisely why we need strong teaching to remind us that God always cares for those who are lost, as Beau mentioned in the last chapter. Because a God like that isn't normal, and we need to be reminded to be a bit abnormal in today's day and age.

In fact, God is absolutely relentless about His search, so that all may be found. Luke 15 shares three pictures of this: He scrambles all over the floor with a torch in hand, looking for the lost coin. He's searching over the hills to find the wayward sheep. He sits on the stoop—and then runs shamelessly—to welcome home an irresponsible son!

It's the story of a God who came not just for those who are found, but for those who are lost.

Jesus said it another way: He came not for the healthy, but for the sick (Matt. 9:12, Mark 2:17, Luke 5:31).

Our standing in the community is at stake. When I took a class with Dallas Willard, I heard him say, “The validity of a religion will be based upon the amount of blessing it brings to its outsiders.” In our world, the veracity of our message is written on the actions of our churches. And if we have a church that keeps engaging those who are on the outside in winsome, humble ways, that will continue to speak volumes.

So make sure that you keep talking about it. Otherwise, the arc of church tends to bend back on ourselves, and we get consumed with our own needs or our own agendas, rather than being a church that welcomes those on the outside.

### 3. **Model being a witness**

Another way to shape our community’s culture is through living out a witnessing life. Our actions shape culture far more than our words. If our actions don’t line up with our words, then we create a gap in trust. And no one will risk for leaders they don’t trust.

So after you’ve taught on God’s heart for skeptics and seekers, think of ways you can be intentional to connect with skeptics and seekers around you.

When my wife and I first moved into our [neighborhood](#), we took a couple of months to settle in. After that, we got antsy; we really wanted to get to know our neighbors better. We felt that God had us in this neighborhood for a reason, and we wanted to love them. So we had an idea to throw a mini-block party.

We asked the one couple we knew best, and found a date that would work for them. Then we invited three other households, and everyone came. They brought tons of food, and we had a great time. And it was weird to think that I was meeting some of my neighbors for the first time while they were standing in my kitchen! And the party blessed us back. More than being witnesses, we just had a great time.

Since then, we’ve been invited to their children’s birthday parties. They’ve been to ours. On some holidays, we hang out on the front yard for many hours. Or we’ll wander the neighborhood together on Halloween, or greet Santa Claus together when the police department escorts him around to all the streets of our city. Our one missional action actually created community around us, and we really love being with our neighbors.

Yes, we create spaces. But we also are proactive to have the conversations about the things that really matter. With all of these five households, our faith has been a topic of conversation. And if God is leading, there are times when I’ll ask about their spiritual backgrounds, and find out more about their religious beliefs or lack thereof, and about their histories with faith communities.

Some of my neighbors are against any exclusive claims to a particular faith tradition, others have been burned by faith communities in the past, while still others may yearn for something they used to have, but don't have any more.

We love our neighbors, and sometimes that means we get explicit about the most important things in our lives, so that they can have a chance to explore the source of the hope that we have.

So, as leaders in faith communities, your actions will speak volumes. If you're not doing it, how can you expect the ones that take your lead to do the same?

What are your next steps? What would you do to connect with that person? Throw a block party like us? Invite your co-worker out to lunch or for coffee? Do an activity with one of your neighbors? What if you spent at least *one* meal a week with someone who didn't know Jesus? There are plenty of creative ideas out there, but it's more important to love in *action* than to conceive the perfect idea.

If you're stuck, one book that we've found helpful in thinking about a good next step is Doug Schaupp's and Don Everts' *I Once Was Lost*. They walk through "five thresholds" of conversion, showing you what a typical process looks like for someone to come to faith today.

Find ways to take the next loving step. Living out God's heart for the lost will preach more loudly than what you say, and will have more impact on your faith community. As Jesus said in Matthew 7, don't just hear the word. Do it.

#### **4. Don't hide your failures.**

Don't just talk about your successes, though. You may be an evangelistic wunderkind, but the folks who follow you will find you a bit unreachable or untouchable. You don't want people to be *impressed* with your life; you want them to *imitate* your life. So create the kind of community where risks and failures aren't judged or merely tolerated. Create one where they are celebrated.

To do so, don't just show them your successes.

Show them your failures.

Our church goes out of its way to talk about our failures. John Wimber used to often say, "Faith is spelled, 'R-I-S-K.'" We should be intentional to show people the risks that we take and how we bomb them. And then we show folks how we get back on our feet. We find that after all that, it may have hurt and we might be emotionally bruised. But we're still breathing. It lets people know that it's okay to fail, but it's not okay to just sit in their seats.

Last Labor Day, seven households in our community were out having a picnic in one of our front yards. We had chairs, tables, food, good beer and the kind of gas heater you'd find standing tall at restaurants to stave off the cool of a California night. (We do have thin blood out here, and need to find ways to stay warm!) My wife and I have had good spiritual conversations with one couple already, and we really wanted to invite them to study the Bible with us. So we prayed about it, and planned to invite them during this gathering.

When the husband went into his own house to get something, I offered to help. I thought it was an opportune moment, so I somewhat nervously began: "Hey, you know how we've been talking about spiritual things lately. If you ever wanted to learn more, you could come over and study the Bible with us? What do you think?"

Then he looked down, and talked about how busy he was and didn't know if that would work. An indirect "no." Later, I found out that my wife also did the same with his wife, and she gave a similar answer. We bombed out.

When I came back to our church community, I made sure to tell the story. I showed them how it didn't go well. I asked them to pray for that couple. And in it, faith rose. Because if someone like you can mess it up, then it may give someone who respects you the freedom to whiff it, too. And in the risk, faith blossoms.

## **5. Regularly encourage everyone to play**

Sure, there are some in your community who are already gifted evangelists. They seem fearless, and if you're honest, a bit tactless too. They don't need the encouragement to talk about their faith, and may have a honed intuition on what to do or say with people who wouldn't call themselves Christian.

But then you have the rest. And as we've said earlier, God has a plan for them as well.

I'm tempted to write that God will hold them accountable for not talking to their friends about Jesus. If you don't sound the alarm as the watchman, then the blood is on your hands, right? But that doesn't capture the right heart. We're not going to hold their toes over the flames until they begrudgingly start a spiritual conversation with someone. That kind of guilt-induced motivation won't last long in people's souls.

Instead, invite everyone to this great adventure of helping people fall in love with Jesus, to find the very things their souls are looking for. And perhaps, we can come up with easier ways for them to be engaged.

In 2009, Mayor Bob Frie of Arvada, Colo., felt that if people knew their neighbors, then people would rely more on each other than on the city's services. So when he had his chance, he challenged a group of pastors to help make Arvada a city of good neighbors. His message cut deep. It was ironic: The *mayor* of the city told *pastors* to love their neighbors! But it was also convicting because when the pastors thought about it, they really didn't know their neighbors, much less love them. If *they* didn't, then people in their churches probably didn't either.

In response, Jay Pathak, pastor of the Mile High Vineyard, came up with a simple way to help believers get to know their literal neighbors. He drew a tic-tac-toe board and put a picture of a house in the middle. Then he challenged the people in his church to just get to know the names of the eight physically closest families, represented by the empty tic-tac-toe spaces. Fill in the board with names to help strangers become acquaintances, and help acquaintances become friends. By 2011, 4,000 households were involved. This movement has grown, and you can find out more about them at [artofneighboring.com](http://artofneighboring.com).

It's a great "low bar" that's accessible for anyone to try and create friendships that might help someone fall in love with Jesus. In our church community, we keep encouraging our small groups—what we call *root groups*—to keep thinking, praying and being creative in engaging their friends, relatives, co-workers, and neighbors to be a communal witness to those around them. We also have our tic-tac-toe sheets in between our Bibles, to remind us to love our neighbors.

Create opportunities. Give challenges. Don't let them hear the Word, and not do it. Give people an opportunity—the great privilege—of leading someone to faith.

## **6. Share stories regularly.**

This last one might be obvious, but stories shape a culture. So tell lots of them, particularly about attempts to talk about Jesus with skeptics and seekers. And definitely share the stories where people are starting to walk with Jesus in your community.

And you shouldn't be the only one telling the story. Let others do it. Give space for those who are just trying. Offer room to those who are leading people to faith. Have people who have recently become followers of Jesus tell their own story. I assure you, all of it will be encouraging.

In our church, we have someone tell a story about how they are engaging the Kingdom of God in their workplace. We alternate between stories from the secular workplace and those who work in more explicitly religious contexts. We want people to hear about how God is moving not only when we're together, but how He keeps moving when we're apart.

So we've heard stories of a young woman starting a Bible study in her advertising agency, or another starting one in her occupational therapy department. We've heard a story of an inner-city high school teacher who seeks the Kingdom when she teaches special education kids—how her work is worship as well. When our small church donated volleyballs for the team she coaches, her students asked, “Where did these volleyballs come from?” She replied, “My church bought them for us.” And their curiosity grows about these folks who follow Jesus.

One campus ministry in San Diego hosts an event at the end of every quarter. They encourage all the people who have come to faith in the previous quarter to invite their friends, and they all hear the stories of two or three people who decided to follow Jesus. These friends, in turn, are then given a chance to follow Jesus, and so the harvest multiplies. Evangelistic moments become an evangelism movement.

Stories inspire. Sharing stories help the storyteller understand its lessons, and communicate it to the rest of us—helping us see how God moves in everyday life.

## Reflection questions

1. How would you create a space for people to regularly hear God's leading in their lives as it relates to mission?
2. Where could you teach regularly on God's heart for those who don't know Him?
3. What is one step you can take this week to model reaching out to skeptics and seekers?
4. What stories of failure can you share with believers, to embolden them to take their next risk in evangelism?
5. How would you encourage someone else to be proactive with a skeptic or a seeker this coming week?
6. Where could you share stories of evangelism in the upcoming week?

## Train Evangelism Skills

Now that you've started *rhythms* that help sustain a proactive evangelism culture, you'll still need some *skills* to impart to your folks to equip them to be humble and winsome witnesses.

They don't have to be pushy salespeople that manipulate confessions to follow Jesus. Nor should they be the one sitting back, hoping and waiting for someone to ask them directly about their faith. Could there be another way?

Here are some skills you could impart to your people, once they are motivated. As Beau alluded to earlier, you'll need a conversation, an interpretation and an invitation.

## A Conversation

### 1. Look for God's leading.

Let's assume that your community's culture holds the value of discipling skeptics and seekers. Let's also assume that because you've already instilled some evangelistic rhythms in your culture, your people are accustomed to creating spaces often to hear God speak.

So, you release them, out of their believing bubble, to look for God in the real world. They are beginning to put into practice their belief that the God of the universe isn't just active in their own faith communities, but also wherever they walk on this great blue planet. They're out there—looking for the ways God might be moving in the lives of our relatives, friends, co-workers, neighbors and acquaintances.

But how do they recognize the ways God might be leading in the lives of those around them?

Let me tell a story: I have a friend named Lou. He's a huge barrel of a man who works out two hours each day—every day. His face looks like Bill Cosby's (so much so, that once he was asked to double for him). But it gets even odder: he always wore T-shirts with birds on them.

He's an avid bird watcher. As they say, he's a *birder*.

We were in the church parking lot one day, and he points out to a speck in the distance. He says, "That's a red-shouldered hawk," and at the time you would've forgiven me for a little skepticism. It was way, far away.

I asked, "How do you know?"

"Just listen," he said. "It's one of the most vocal birds in California."

And as if on cue, the hawk's screech cuts across the sky. He goes on to explain more about the bird—what it looks like, what its breeding habits are, and more details than I could remember.



He knows everything about this bird because he's studied the books, he's taken tours with other birders, and he's knelt in silence hundreds of times, waiting for a glimpse of aviary glory. All of these rhythms helped him, when the time arrived, to recognize a red-shouldered hawk.

Some are called to be bird watchers. We're called to be *God watchers*.

And to be God watchers, we may need to learn how to hear His leading. Studying the Bible, discerning in community, keeping times in prayer will help us recognize God's voice in the everyday when He wants to speak. And when we see God moving in the lives of our friends, wouldn't we want to say something about that? Maybe say how Jesus is involved?

I was at a kid's party recently, and a non-Christian, Asian father of young children talked about how he thought he was starting to have a spiritual experience. He had read a secular biography about someone who survived being a prisoner-of-war because of his faith. It led him to think about spiritual things and wonder if he should study Buddhism more so that he would know what he might give up if he followed Jesus.

That was a new conversation between us, so I jumped in with, "That sounds like God to me. It looks like He's trying to get your attention."

And he started to cry right there, in the middle of a kid's birthday party. It *did* sound like God to him.

We've been talking about Jesus ever since.

Perhaps we can find ways to help people see that God is actually getting their attention, actually getting into their lives.

## **2. Have some conversation starters.**

For some people, the thought of starting a spiritual conversation is terrifying. That's the big great leap. They've been told all their lives to avoid two conversation topics because they always go badly: religion and politics. And they can't help themselves with the second one.

But with the first, that rule is kept fast and firm.

We've been in places where spiritual conversation starters have been awkward and jolting. You may have been trained under the Billy Graham Association as a telephone volunteer to ask, "If you were to die tonight, do you know where you would be?" And that works really well when

you're on the other side of the phone *after* someone has taken the initiative to call you *because* they heard Rev. Graham speak.

For that particular case, it's a great question.

But it's surely going to be a hard start with your friends today, especially if you haven't broached the topic of spirituality up to that point. So you may need a list of other conversation starters. Sure, any of the following can be used poorly and out of context, but a few work for me:

- *What is the most interesting spiritual experience you've ever had?*
- *Tell me more about your story—what's your background?*
- *What do you think is wrong with the church/Christianity today?*
- *Did you grow up in a particular religion? Are you still connected to that faith? (If they say no), what changed for you?*
- *What has been your experience of Christianity?*
- *How would you define success in life? Why do you define it that way?*
- *How similar are your personal beliefs about spirituality to your parents'?*
- *Tell me about your major? Why did you choose to study that?*
- *What kinds of things do you like to do for fun?*
- *Tell me about your family? How well do you connect with them?*

Some of these are just conversation starters that, at first glance, might not have to do with spirituality. But they get the conversation going.

And when it comes to spiritual conversations, I've found that there's an art to this. Yes, at times it will be awkward. But as Beau often says, awkwardness always precedes breakthrough. For more thoughts on starting spiritual conversations, check out Beau's upcoming book, *Beyond Awkward: When Talking About Jesus is Outside of Your Comfort Zone*.

### **3. Listen well.**

This is much like the first skill, but it's something that deserves to stand on its own. You might think that evangelism is about talking a lot, but it's really the opposite. Evangelists need to be great listeners. In this way, people won't feel like you've pressured them into anything. Instead, they've received the huge gift of being understood, even for that one conversation. But it may also help someone be more willing to take the next step down the road to get to know Jesus better, precisely because they feel known.

Recently, I was speaking at a weekend conference, and a woman came up to me after one of my talks and wondered if we could have a conversation. We set up a time, and when we finally met my eyes tried not to betray my surprise when she started telling me about her recent past as a stripper, and how she had witnessed porn shoots firsthand and attended industry events such as the AVN Awards (the porn industry's version of the "Oscars"). She's since moved away from stripping, after seeing what it was doing to the mental health of her co-workers, but still profited handsomely in the adult entertainment industry as a webcam model.

In that moment, everything in me wanted to pull her out of that kind of life. She deserved so much better. I wanted to start preaching, and ask her to leave the industry and sin no more.

But it was more important to listen and to hear her story, and to trust that God might be doing something in her life. And as her story unfolded, it was clear that God was moving in her life. She had no spiritual background, but she came to the conference because one of her crazy high school friends became a Christian, and she had started to go to church with her. But she had lots of questions.

She said, "I've never talked to a pastor before."

I said, "I've never talked to a stripper."

After she told her story, she asked, "Can I follow Jesus and still do what I do?"

It's a loaded question, but I also discerned that I shouldn't get into a conversation about what you can and cannot do.

"I don't think that's the right question," I responded. "That makes Christianity more about rules instead of a relationship."

"Isn't that what it is?" she asked.

“Not really. It’s not about how far you can go in any area, really. It’s not just about the boundaries. It’s more like falling in love, because when you do, you’re willing to give up anything to be with him. It’s like that with Jesus: If you get to know Him and fall in love, you’d be willing to give up anything.”

“That’s cool,” she said.

We talked more, in the same room where lots of other students were hanging out, late into the night. I shared about how Jesus had His worst words for religious professionals, like me, but was kind and embracing of those on the outside—people like tax collectors and prostitutes. And we talked more about Christians who were reaching out to those in the adult entertainment industry.

Then she left, and I had no idea what she took away from the conversation.

Early the next morning, in her small group, she gave her life to Jesus. She told them she had heard too much about Jesus not to do something.

“I’ve learned too much about Jesus. I can’t turn back,” she told them.

#### **4. Tell transformational stories**

I used to tell skeptics and seekers stories of God’s power. I remember one time, seven households were all hanging out for Labor Day on one of our front yards. I told them a story about how a dancer came to our church (which meets in my house), and how he couldn’t go to an audition because his knee was in so much pain. But after we prayed for him, he was immediately doing backflips in our backyard.

I thought amazement would light up their faces.

Instead, there were blank looks. Others started shifting in their fold-up seats, hoping someone would change the conversation. One neighbor broke the silence and actually said, “I’m glad that you were able to make that person believe that he felt no pain.” That was *not* what I said—a miracle happened in my house! But I also could also see that it was brushing up against his worldview, and he was having none of it.

In the end, the story didn’t stoke any curiosity.

Sure, stories like that might work in some places, but I found that in my neighborhood (and I would guess in most of the Western world), we could find ourselves with a skeptical audience.

Plus, it's not that compelling. It sounds like too crazy a story to believe in, like I'm a pitchman for some product that promises more than it can deliver.

Instead, tell stories of [transformation](#). Share about your experiences where you followed Jesus to some risk and cost to you, where you had to go against your own instincts and follow God—to let Him be Lord. In this way, you can talk about the decisions you've made, to show that you're really serious about what you believe. When someone asks me about what I do, I often talk about how I opted out of the lucrative career plan paved by my elite education so that I could follow Jesus by being a minister—which, if you didn't know, is much less lucrative.

What would *you* talk about?

This is the point: Words are cheap. But deeds show what you believe. And if you're willing to sacrificially give to someone in need because of your faith, or you turned down a high-paying job to work in a non-profit where you raise your own support, or you were able to give up an addiction because of the tough choices Jesus was leading you into—these are the stories that demand attention. These kinds of stories are so much more compelling because they don't talk about your victories. They talk about your sacrifices. And what you give up tells a better story than what you accomplish.

They are hero stories of pressing into adversity.

Yet the hero in your story isn't yourself, but the God you love.

And when people see your faith lived out, that is way more intriguing and compelling. And when they see it, they will need you to interpret that for them, so they can at least know to whom you give the credit.

## **An interpretation**

### **5. Explain what God is doing.**

So, as you listen, keep listening not only to your friend, but also to God, to discern what to do next. We need to respond in a way that doesn't sound canned, but actually takes into account what you've heard from someone else, as well as any prompting from God.

A few years ago, Beau was on campus and encountered a woman in a Bible study who was angry with God, and wasn't even sure if she believed in Him anymore. Her dad had died of a heart

attack a few years earlier, and she was the one who discovered his body. She had good reason to doubt God's existence, but as she continued to talk, her voice betrayed a longing for Him as well.

That night, they studied the parable of the lost sheep together. She had never heard this story before, and she could hardly hold back her tears as she saw that the loving shepherd left the 99 for the one. She started to awaken to the reality that Jesus was near, and desperately searching for her.

Then Beau gave her an interpretation of the moment: he was there, and they were studying Scripture, as evidence that God was still on the search-and-rescue mission for her. So he asked her, "Do you want to let Jesus carry you like the shepherd carried the sheep? Do you want to recognize His presence and let Him into your life and join this community of faith?"

She gladly accepted, and fell into the arms of the Father. This woman is still following Jesus strongly and has oriented her whole life around His Kingdom purposes. All she needed was a clear interpretation about where God was relative to her pain and hurt. She needed to see that He was for her and not against her.

You can [read the testimony she gave](#) to her community just two weeks after that night with Beau. Knowing that she is following the Lord strongly six years later, going back and reading her fresh words from two weeks after conversion is so encouraging.

I think we forget that we are often the spiritual authority in any given room. As Christians, we are truly ambassadors of the Kingdom of God. We go in His authority and in His name. Wherever we go, heaven rushes around us. That is the kind of authority that has been given to everyone who believes. We are all priests.

And in this way, we need to be the chief interpreter of people's experiences with things of the Spirit. Seriously. So many things happen around them, and these actions are not always self-interpretive, and if we can be the ones who are God watching, spotting the ways God is moving in the lives of our friends, then we can give an incredible service of love and hope to those who want and need more of it in their lives.

## **An invitation**

### **6. Know the Big Story.**

At some point, there will come a time to tell the Christian story. 1 Pet. 3:15 (NIV) exhorts us: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”

So you will need to equip people with some [summary of the Gospel](#). Some may cringe at the thought, because the last thing they want to do is memorize a script. It feels so artificial or forced. But honestly, that awkward feeling is more internal than what others actually perceive. Plus, people often get more natural with practice, as with anything else like sports or music. If you want to move or play what you want to, you’ll still have to learn the basics and master them. And if you want to be a natural, you’ll have to be the one working hardest in practice, right?

In our InterVarsity community, the main way we share the gospel is the Big Story. If you want to learn more, you can read about it in my first book, *True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In*. It’s a helpful way to share the gospel and has been used in every continent except Antarctica, and translated into many languages. You can find more resources [here](#).

Let me be clear: I’m not saying it’s the *only* way to share the gospel. It’s just one that we think is hugely effective today, but also thoroughly biblical. And if you have another way you want to share it, we’re all for it. Just make sure you that when people are given the chance, they know how to articulate the gospel.

#### 7. **Invite response.**

We also like the [Big Story](#) because it’s good for inviting response. With whatever gospel summary you use, make sure that people learn to ask for a response. We want people to *do* something with what they’ve heard.

I have a story that I wouldn’t have believed if I hadn’t heard it from someone I knew. Years ago, my friend came up to me, his blue eyes flashing with excitement. He almost couldn’t get the words out.

“James, I prayed for this homeless man on the beach,” he said. “His ribs were broken because he got hit by a car. I prayed for him, and he started to feel warm. I heard cracking coming from his chest cavity. After I prayed, he pulled himself up, straightened out his back, and took a deep breath. He said, ‘I’m healed!’ Isn’t that amazing?”

It was almost too much to believe, but I knew this person also had a gift for healing. Yet something didn’t sit right. So I asked another question.

“So did you invite him to follow Jesus?”

Those blue eyes gave me a blank stare. Then he looked down, and after a moment said, “Um ... I forgot.”

He missed a golden chance to invite someone to follow Jesus. Sometimes, we're so caught up with the way we present the gospel that we don't even give someone a chance to respond. You could invite them to a Bible study with you. Or you could invite them to church. You could ask to pray with them, or invite them to a time of listening prayer. (I'm personally excited to keep learning how to invite skeptics and seekers to hear God's voice, so they can have an experience of God to help them make a commitment to Jesus.) Or you could invite them to come on an urban ministry project that your church is hosting. You could invite them to follow Jesus. Whatever you do, don't miss the opportunity. It seems that Jesus rarely left a conversation without a challenge.

When you are in a conversation like this, try to discern what the next step could be for them. Maybe you'd invite them to come to church or a small group with you? Maybe you'd invite them to join the urban project that your church does to serve those who live outside? Perhaps you'd invite them to a special lecture? Or maybe you'd offer to study the Bible with them?

But make sure you invite them to *do* something about what they've heard.



## Epilogue: A Charge

Our hope is that evangelism wouldn't be a dirty word to you and your church, that it wouldn't make you think of pushy salespeople who are manipulating others to "seal the deal."

Instead, we hope that as you disciple skeptics and seekers and teach others to do the same, evangelism would feel more like an adventure—and you are the safari guide. Instead of pointing out the wild lions and charging elephants, you are looking for God and pointing Him out to people. Instead of highlighting the behavior of cheetahs and leopards, you are pointing out the ways God moves in each one of us. Many people around you never saw past your pocket protector or your suit or your bucket and broom or your surgeon's mask to see that you were actually a spiritual guide.

Remember when I (James) wrote about the couple that turned down my wife and me to study the Bible together? We learned from our mistake, realizing that our invitation may have sounded too intense to our neighbors. So we came back around. One time, the husband had offered to watch our children on a dreary Saturday afternoon, and we took him up on it. I dropped by to pick up my kids afterward, and he said that he had two questions about Christianity: *What does the Bible say about women in the church?* He cared because he had three daughters and wanted them to be empowered. Second, he asked, *What does the church think about the gay community?* So we talked.

Then I leaned in and said, "Would you guys like to come over for dinner and just talk about spiritual things? What do you think?"

And he said, "Sure, we'd love that."

We're still trying to proactively love our neighbors. We hope that adventure isn't one forced on others, but also one that isn't missed in our passivity. But instead, it's an adventure that is found, because we are being proactive to look for the ways God is moving in the people God has put around us.

And pressing in.

As you go, be blessed by an old-time blessing:

*May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you wherever He may send you.*

*May He guide you through the wilderness, protect you in the storm.*

*May He bring you home rejoicing at the wonders He has shown you.*

*May He bring you home rejoicing, once again into our doors.*

# Beau Crosetto

Beau loves starting new things for God in difficult places.

He currently is the Greater Los Angeles Director for Greek InterVarsity and in charge of seeing "witnessing communities" start in every fraternity and sorority in Greater LA.

Beau is married to Kristina and has two kids, Noah (4) & Sophia (2)

 /beaucrosetto

 @beaucrosetto



# James Choung

James Choung has been involved in campus ministries for over 18 years, empowering rising generations of Kingdom world-changers. He currently serves as InterVarsity's national director of evangelism, and also leads a missional community called the Vineyard Underground. He has written *True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In* and its follow-up, *Real Life: A Christianity Worth Living Out*.

 /jameschoung

 @jameschoung

