

HOW CAN I BREAK THE SILENCE?

Why is it so hard to say those first few words about the most important Person in my life? Why do I hesitate to pass along the best news I have ever heard? Is there anything that will help me to do the very thing I want so much to do--to tell others that I have found a way of surviving death, living forever, being forgiven of my sins, and exploring the goodness of God forever?

With a desire to answer such troubling questions, Herb Vander Lugt has written this booklet. It reflects the wisdom of a man who understands the tension between the message that must be told and the silence that must first be broken.

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SOUNDS AND SILENCE

In many ways the church is not silent. The sounds of well-amplified music echo through its halls. Impassioned sermons fill the sanctuary. Laughter and conversation flow into the parking lot. Yet, in the midst of all these sounds, there is a disturbing quiet. John Stott calls it "our guilty silence." All too often, those of us who have so much to say to one another have little to say to those who desperately need what we have. Furthermore, we expect them to come to us when we should be going to them.

Ralph Neighbor, an effective church planter and evangelist, was thoroughly discouraged with the results of his work. The 26 new churches he had started had become stagnant soon after they had a building and could pay a pastor. In the large churches where he had held evangelistic meetings, he saw few unsaved people in attendance and little evidence that these churches would ever be anything but "little isolated islands of Christians who don't even try to relate to the unchurched in the community." Leaders and lay people alike were too busy to spend time trying to reach the unsaved.

So, Ralph Neighbor did something quite radical. He decided to begin a church by using a different method. For starters, he went to a lounge during the so-called "happy hour," drinking a soft drink and talking to the beer-drinking unchurched. He and his wife held barbecues in their backyard and invited their neighbors. And then they rented an old house and recruited 40 Christians to help them carry on a round-the-clock ministry to prostitutes, pimps, and drug addicts. After helping these people through the initial stages of rehabilitation, they invited them into their homes. One-by-one they began coming to Christ.

This is similar to what happened in Corinth during the first century. Most of the people who turned to the Lord were what we would call low-class. They were predominantly uneducated, poor, and socially unattractive (1 Cor. 1:26-31). They met the moral requirements of Christ who said that He didn't come to rescue good people; He came to save sinners (Matt. 9:13). By that standard, the Corinthians were well-qualified. Their ranks included people who had been known as fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, and thieves before finding forgiveness and life in Christ (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

The sad truth is that all too often we are not carrying on that pattern of reaching the downtrodden with the good news of Christ. In fact, we fail to reach either the rich or the poor, the educated or the uneducated. While enjoying one another, we are not reaching those who still are as we once were-- without Christ. If so, this is "our guilty silence."

THE SOUND BARRIERS

Why do we find it difficult to break the silence about the best news and most important Person the world has ever known? We aren't that way about other things. If we were to discover a cure for arthritis or tennis elbow, you can be sure that we would pass along the news to anyone we thought could benefit from it. On the other hand, talking to someone about Christ is admittedly more difficult than telling them about a good restaurant. There are many sound barriers--some necessary, some unnecessary.

The Nature of Unbelief. Many people are not only unaware of their need of Christ (they assume they're doing just fine without Him), but they are also predisposed against Him. Talking to them about the Lord is like trying to sell an expensive medicine that the AMA has branded as dangerous and fraudulent. They've heard rumors. They don't think they need it. They don't want to open themselves to a discussion or an argument that they feel might result in their being pressured into making a decision they don't want to make.

The Christian Strategy. A second sound barrier is found in the Christian strategy itself. According to the New Testament, there are times when we are better off not talking. Wisdom shows that there are times when we should let our actions break the ice and create a sense of interest. Peter told Christian wives that they should let their Christian behavior do the talking for them in the presence of unbelieving husbands (1 Pet. 3:1-3). Later in the same chapter, Peter told believers that they should endure persecution in a manner that would cause unbelievers to ask questions about their faith. It is implied that the lives of these Christians would speak louder than their words.

A Lack of Relationships. One reason some of us don't know what to say to non-Christians is that we are not spending enough of the right kind of time with them. We are at a loss for words because we have limited ourselves to talking lovingly and meaningfully only to other Christians. The One who came to us as "the Word" gave us a different example. At the right time, He left the comforts of Home to go to the rescue. In fact, He went so deep into enemy territory that He was criticized by some of the most religious people of His day.

A Sense of Inadequacy. Another reason for our silence is our fear of failure. We're afraid we will encounter questions we won't be able to answer and objections we won't be able to handle. This fear is understandable. Few Christians are so well-versed in the Bible, history, or science that they can effectively answer all the questions or objections that unbelievers throw at them. But that shouldn't stop us. God hasn't asked us to tell people what we don't know. He's asked us to be witnesses to what we do know.

Distraction. Recently, I went with some friends to visit the home of a wealthy Christian businessman. As he showed us his large rooms, walk-in closets, and every kind of convenience,

he was smiling. But then one of my friends dropped a bombshell. He said, "Ron, I imagine you find it hard to long for heaven." Ron's face became very serious as he replied, "Yes. I sometimes think I have too much."

Materialism may rob us of the spiritual awareness we had when we first accepted Jesus as Savior. Remember how thrilled you were when you first sensed God's forgiveness and when the burden of your sin was lifted? Remember when you thought about the hopeless state of others and wanted to tell them what God had done for you?

Look at the words of Jesus to the church at Ephesus: "Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. *Remember* therefore from where you have fallen; *repent* and *do* the first works" (Rev. 2:4,5). How pertinent and relevant these words are to us today!

Remember what you were before you were saved and what happened to you when you came to Christ. *Remember* how joy replaced gloom, peace replaced fear, and gratitude replaced discontent.

Repent of your sin. Admit that you have been wrong. Don't blame circumstances or other people. Accept responsibility for your sin.

Do what you once did. Talk about Jesus again. Break the silence! The first-century Christians were not a silent group. They wouldn't have accomplished what they did if they had been. Too many of us are quiet today. We must break our silence!

THE ACTS STRATEGY

Talk about excitement! You can feel it when you read the book of Acts. It begins with a few of Jesus' followers who were uncertain about what was going to happen next. But they were sure about one thing: Jesus had come back from death! The fact that their leader was alive made them bold enough to go right back into Jerusalem where He had been crucified. There, in obedience to His directions before He ascended into heaven, they waited for the baptism of the Holy Spirit and anticipated witnessing for Him in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the whole world.

Ten days later, the promised event occurred. The Holy Spirit came, they declared the wonderful works of God in dialects they had never learned, Peter preached a great sermon, and 3,000 people repented and were baptized. The church was born. That small group began proclaiming the good news about Jesus in the power of the Spirit. They told people that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, that He died to pay the price for sin, and that He conquered death.

They began the most dynamic movement in history. They swept away all obstacles as they proclaimed their message with spontaneity and power. They reflected a sense of God's presence. They showed such love for one another that sinners were drawn to them. In the way they proclaimed the gospel and lived out its truths, they gave us a model. If we follow their strategy, we will make as great an impact on our culture as they did on theirs.

The Acts Strategy:

[Practicing the Love of Christ](#)

[Reflecting the Presence of Christ](#)

[Proclaiming the Message of Christ](#)

The Acts Strategy



There is no definite declaration in Acts that says, "Multitudes of unsaved people turned to Christ because they were so deeply impressed by the love Christians had for one another." But love was so obvious among these first-century believers that we can be sure the non-Christians saw it. Jesus had told His disciples, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

The early Christians acted as a support group for one another. They shared their possessions (Acts 2:44-47). They helped their widows (Acts 6:1-7). The believers in Jerusalem held an all-night prayer meeting for Peter when they learned that he had been imprisoned and was scheduled for execution (Acts 12). The Christians in Macedonia, though poor and oppressed, astonished Paul by the amount of money they raised for the persecuted believers in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8,9). In his letter to the Christians in Colosse, written during the Acts period, Paul thanked God for their love for all the saints (Col. 1:4). No wonder multitudes came to Christ during those days. This kind of love among believers speaks eloquently to the unsaved who observe.

Such supportive relationships prevailed for a time. The church father Tertullian (about AD 200) quoted the heathen as saying about Christians: "See how they love one another . . . see how they are ready even to die for one another." He saw this as a great factor in causing people to believe on Jesus Christ.

When this love is no longer in evidence, the appeal of the gospel is largely lost. John Chrysostom, who lived about 150 years after Tertullian, complained, ". . . even now there is nothing else that causes the heathen to stumble, except that there is no love . . . Their own doctrines they have long condemned, and in like manner they admire ours, but they are hindered by our mode of life."

Is it possible that the same criticism would apply to us? We talk about fellowship. We enjoy getting together with fellow Christians. We may even enjoy times of Bible study and prayer. But we usually do so with people of our own income bracket and with little sacrificial love. Such meetings are okay, but they don't really fit the meaning of the Greek word *koinonia*, translated "fellowship" in Acts 2:42. Genuine fellowship involves costly sharing--helping one another financially, bearing one another's burdens, and rejoicing over one another's blessings.

Unsaved people would be impressed if they saw New Testament fellowship among Christians. If wealthy believers in the suburbs who pour great sums of money into

lavishly furnished buildings would show an interest in small, struggling works in the ghetto, non-Christians would be much more inclined to believe the gospel.

One of the factors that caused the first-century church to grow so rapidly was the oneness of the saints. The slave and his master worshiped in the same building--usually a house. Yes, there were some problems to be worked out even then, as indicated in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. But true fellowship prevailed, and the church grew by leaps and bounds.

History has shown that large numbers come to Christ whenever affluent believers take a keen interest in their poorer brothers and sisters in the Lord. We must remind ourselves of this responsibility toward the poor (Gal. 2:10). This does not mean, of course, that we abandon our efforts to evangelize on college campuses or among the prominent in our society. We thank God for such ministries. But many church historians affirm that great "religious movements are born among the poor" (Howard A. Snyder, *The Problem of Wineskins*, p.47).

The poor will do their own evangelizing, but they can't do it effectively unless others share with them their time, talents, and money. Then, as these lower-income Christians start doing better financially, they must not forget their roots and desert the people who need them. Jesus repeatedly emphasized the need to preach the gospel to the poor (Matt. 11:1-6; Luke 4:18-21). Snyder comments:

Every denomination needs a continuing infusion of hundreds of new members from among the poor--men and women saved right out of the crisis of their poverty. This would keep us shook up and spiritually alive. It would keep our churches from being captured by any one class or political philosophy, and thus from being compromised. Our radical differences in the world would unite us in Christ (*The Problem of Wineskins*, p.47).

The early Christians practiced real fellowship. They followed the example of Christ, who reached out in love and accepted all kinds of people. We should too! We need to start small ministries among the poor. It won't be easy. It will require more than spending a few dollars. It will demand a share of our time as we do more than hire a few workers. We must become personally involved, rubbing shoulders with the people we want to reach. It worked in New Testament days and it will work today.

Thomas and Earl Koon, one a successful pastor and the other a missionary in Australia, are products of this kind of effort. They came to know the Lord because two Christian men opened a store-front mission in a depressed area, recruited Christians to help them, and brought people into a Sunday afternoon meeting. Those efforts were truly the result of practicing the love of Christ.

The Acts Strategy

REFLECTING THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST

The first Christians were also effective in evangelism because their lives reflected the presence of Christ. They had been touched by God, and it showed. Sometimes His presence was obvious through miracles such as the sound like that of wind and the tongues-speaking on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13), the "wonders and signs" (2:43), the healings (3:1-10), the shaking of a meeting place (4:31), the sudden judgment of two who lied to God (5:1-11), the restoration of life to the dead (9:36-43), and the breaking of prisoners' chains (12:5-19).

God provided many such wonders and signs and healings as evidence of His presence with the men and women who preached Christ. And although those open signs and wonders became less frequent as the apostolic period drew to its close, the Lord continued to work miracles in the lives of His people.

The power of God's presence, however, was not limited to those occasions when the Lord supernaturally intervened to heal or deliver. Even during the early days, when these outward signs were most prevalent, there were situations in which the followers of Jesus reflected God's presence by the way they suffered.

God allowed the Jewish authorities to arrest and scourge Peter and John (5:22-42). He permitted the Sanhedrin to kill Stephen by stoning (7:54-60). He let Saul of Tarsus arrest and imprison believers (8:1-3). He didn't prevent Herod from beheading the apostle James (12:1-4).

During the historical period covered by the book of Acts, God allowed Paul to be beaten many times, to be stoned and left for dead once, to be shipwrecked three times, to endure hunger and cold again and again, and to live with a painful physical affliction he called his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 11:1-12:10). But on these occasions the strength of God's presence was just as real as when He supernaturally intervened.

Think of the impression Stephen made on the men in the Jewish council who tried and convicted him of blasphemy. During his trial, they "saw his face as the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15). After Stephen gave his defense, he indicted them for the murder of the Messiah. The council was so furious with him that they "gnashed at him with their teeth" (7:54), "cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him" (7:57,58). While they were stoning him, the last thing Stephen said before he died was, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin" (7:60).

Think of the impression Paul and Silas had on the guards and prisoners in Philippi. Even though their backs were lacerated from being beaten with rods and their feet were fastened in stocks, Paul and Silas prayed and sang songs of praise to God (16:23-25). And "the prisoners were listening to them" (v.25). No wonder the inmates remained in

their cells when the prison doors burst open! No wonder the jailer and his household were saved that night! They must have sensed that in being near Paul and Silas they were in the very presence of God.

God's presence should be just as obvious in our lives. It can be! I know of a minister's wife who was admitted to the hospital for a very painful operation. After some discussion, she realized that her roommate was not at all interested in spiritual things. So the minister's wife prayed that somehow her conduct after her surgery would supplement her words of testimony. It did. The other woman and her husband both became Christians because, in their words, "We could see God in her!"

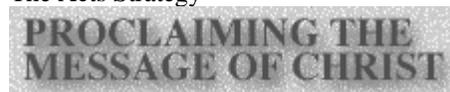
During a television interview, a Christian doctor whose specialty puts him in touch with many terminally ill patients said that some of his non-Christian colleagues have been deeply moved by the calm assurance of believers facing suffering and death. They told him they could explain most unexpected healings and remissions, but they couldn't explain away the presence of God in these suffering, dying saints.

A deacon in a large midwestern church said that he became a believer by what he saw in a Christian mother whose child had been killed by the train he was controlling as engineer.

We can also reflect God's presence in the normal course of life, not just in times of suffering. Recently, a young woman who had strayed from the Lord and married an unsaved man, rededicated her life to God. Her husband was impressed by the change he saw in her. He started attending church with her, and after a year he accepted Christ as his Savior. He said it wasn't the preaching that led him to this decision, but it was the change he saw in his wife and the evidence of Christ's presence. Today his parents, a brother, and a sister are saved. His father testified, "I could tell that God had done something wonderful in his life, and I wanted what he had."

This evidence of the supernatural is an absolute essential for spiritual effectiveness, and it should be evident in every believer. It can't be faked or produced through effort. If we have it, we won't even be aware of it. It is an unconscious, unplanned, Spirit-produced reality that comes through an obedient walk with God.

The Acts Strategy



These first followers of Jesus spread the good news by verbal communication--either by powerful sermons, by serious discussions with non-Christians, or simply by telling their story wherever they went. In one way or another, they all preached the good news.

Public Meetings. The first Christians didn't have church buildings, but they held large public meetings. On the Day of Pentecost described in Acts 2, Peter delivered a powerful address to the thousands who were drawn to the temple by the sound of the rushing wind. Some 3,000 people turned to the Lord. Philip spoke to a large gathering in Samaria

(8:5,6). Paul preached with great effectiveness in the synagogues at Damascus (9:20), Cyprus (13:5), Antioch (13:15), and Iconium (14:1-7). He also gave a memorable appeal on Mars' Hill (17:22-33).

Proclaiming God's message to large groups of people brought multitudes to Christ during the first century. It has been a powerful means of evangelism ever since. Even today, such communication fills a very important role in evangelism. TV, radio, mass meetings, church gatherings, and open-air services featuring effective preaching will always fill a vital place wherever people are free to use them.

The main problem today is that these large gatherings usually draw mostly Christians. Nonbelievers seldom attend. Even excellent media publicity won't attract many of them. That's where we come into the picture. We may not be able to preach before a crowd, but we can pray and invite people.

Such an invitation should be more than just telling people what time the service starts. If we really want to reach them, we have to become involved. Ask them to dinner and invite them to go to church with you. In this way, although you are not involved in a public service, you can assist those who have been called to preach the Word of God.

Small Informal Gatherings. The gospel can also be proclaimed in informal gatherings like a home Bible study. Yes, this is a form of preaching. While the Greek term *kerusso* usually denotes an address before a crowd, the expressions *evangelizo* (used 52 times) and *dialegomai* (used 13 times) may denote telling the good news and reasoning about Christ in smaller groups.

Remember, the first-century Christians had no church buildings. They often met in homes (Acts 2:46; 5:42; 18:7; 20:20; Rom. 16:5; Philem. 2). This kind of proclaiming provides a wonderful opportunity to present Christ without standing behind a pulpit.

One-to-One Evangelism. The message of the gospel can also be given by one individual to another. This is indicated in many New Testament accounts. Jesus often spent time with just one person. For example: Nicodemus (John 3), the Samaritan woman (John 4), the rich young ruler (Luke 18). The people who "went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:4) were ordinary people (the apostles remained in Jerusalem) who just told others the good news--probably one-to-one. When Luke went on to tell about the preaching of Philip (8:5), he used a different Greek verb, one that more specifically suggests public proclamation. But a little later he described Philip's preaching in a one-to-one meeting with an Ethiopian eunuch (8:35).

In summary, the first-century Christians were "communicators." Some proclaimed the Word of God to large gatherings. Others used their homes as meeting places. And almost all of them told the good news wherever they went. Formal preaching is still an important way to communicate the gospel. And we are fortunate to have many outstanding speakers today. The problem, though, is that relatively few unsaved people will go to church, attend evangelistic mass meetings, or change the channel on the TV to listen to a

preacher. We must therefore be more effective in using small gatherings in homes. And we must get back to talking about Jesus wherever we are.

FRIENDSHIP EVANGELISM

The phrase *friendship evangelism* has become popular recently, but the concept is not new. It worked in the 1950s for a Christian businessman who picked up a hitchhiker named Bob.

Bob had been reared in the slums of Chicago. He had been in constant trouble with the law. He was shivering with cold when he got into the car, but soon warmed up and started spilling out the story of his life to this friendly stranger who talked about God and Jesus. As the businessman listened, he became convinced that he and his wife needed to do something for this young man. He pulled over to a pay phone, called his wife, and asked her to get the spare room ready for a visitor.

They took Bob into their home. The wife of the public school superintendent tutored him in reading. The businessman's father gave Bob a job in his factory. And a young friend of the family drove Bob to Chicago to meet a parole requirement. In time, Bob became a believer. And he has been instrumental in reaching his former friends for Christ. Their lives have been transformed--spiritually, morally, and materially. And it all began when one man and a few other Christians befriended Bob.

Friendship evangelism is simply reaching people for Christ by being a friend to them. It's a very effective way of getting out the good news. It reaches people who would refuse to accept a tract handed to them or sent through the mail. It reaches people who would be offended by a direct personal evangelism approach. It reaches people who are so turned off by organized Christianity that they would never attend a religious service or watch one on TV.

Another good thing about friendship evangelism is that almost every Christian can get involved with it. We can make friends of unsaved neighbors. We can get a friendship going with non-Christian work partners, even unsaved relatives and acquaintances with whom we've had little contact for years. This isn't hard to do. The world is full of lonely people. Many will react warmly to someone who reaches out to them. And you don't even have to worry about how you're going to handle the witnessing part of this effort. That will come naturally.

One shy couple recently made this discovery. They started a friendship with an unsaved couple in their neighborhood but did not get around to saying much about their faith. Then, out of the blue, the wife said, "Ron and I know that you go to church every Sunday. We can tell that your religion is important to you and has done a lot for you. We'd like to go with you next Sunday. Would you mind?" Would they mind?! We all know the answer. (By the way, the neighbors are no longer unsaved or without a church home.)

In friendship evangelism, as in so many other endeavors, your effectiveness will be determined by what you are, what you do, and what you say.

Friendship Evangelism:

[What We Are](#)

[What We Do](#)

[What We Say](#)

Friendship Evangelism

WHAT WE ARE

The old saying, "What you are speaks so loudly I can't hear a word you say," expresses a truth very relevant to friendship evangelism. What we are must make an impact on our non-Christian friends before we can expect to be effective in winning them to the Savior. People must be able to see that we are for real.

Make no mistake about it. If we have true faith, it should show. When we placed our trust in Christ, we were born spiritually (John 3:6) and became temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). We have God working in us with the same power He exercised when He raised Jesus from the grave (Eph. 1:15-23). We are in the process of being changed into the very likeness of Jesus Christ. We have been equipped to make visible to our friends and acquaintances the presently invisible Savior (2 Cor. 3:18-4:6). As we read the Scriptures, pray, and obey, the Holy Spirit keeps changing us and giving us the joy of salvation. In most Christians, all of this will show.

Flashing a toothy smile, punctuating your sentences with "Praise the Lord," or putting yourself under a list of external rules won't show spiritual reality. To have it, you must walk with the Lord. The Holy Spirit fills those who do with Christian character (Eph. 5:15-21). People will find you to be a person they can trust. They will see in you the fruit of the Spirit--love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22,23). They will respect you. Some may have mixed feelings about you--half-hating you for making them feel guilty without saying a word and yet half-admiring you. But deep down they'll respect you. And they may be very open to the idea of being your friend.

Friendship Evangelism

WHAT WE DO

The second essential element for the Christian who wants to be successful in friendship evangelism is active goodness--doing good things with unselfish motives. Paul encouraged us, ". . . as we have opportunity, let us do good to all" (Gal. 6:10). As Christians, we should be quick to give a kind smile, to speak an encouraging word, to help with a loving deed. Mow the lawn or shovel snow for an elderly neighbor. Offer transportation to someone who can't drive but needs to go to the doctor or get some groceries. Look for opportunities to show kindness to a single mother.

Kind actions open doors to new friendships and maintain those recently begun. They will come naturally to a truly Spirit-filled person. They are not artificial gimmicks to make converts to our faith. One boy learned this important lesson from his dad. He couldn't see any sense in shoveling the walk for the elderly couple next door. He knew they had resisted his father's repeated efforts to lead them to Christ. So he objected. His father wisely replied, "Bob, you're not doing this for them just to win them to the Savior. I'm asking you to do it just because it's the Christian thing to do."

That's it! It's the "Christian thing to do." It is one of the ways we live out the life of Christ. It is a seed-sowing activity. We sow good deeds, and God makes the seeds grow and produces the harvest.

Friendship Evangelism

WHAT WE SAY

Our speech plays a vital role in friendship evangelism. We can scare a person off if we jump in too soon with a strong appeal to accept Christ. We can confuse people if we get involved in a lengthy explanation of difficult Bible doctrines too quickly. We can make them angry if we are too blunt in telling them about the errors of a religious group they may be involved in. In all our talk, we must be like Paul who said that he would be all things to all men that he might save some (1 Cor. 9:22).

Value Statements. This is a good place to start. We must be careful not to sound preachy, but we can say things that show what we really value in life. The unsaved person will soon pick up some important points: that we don't measure success by wealth, that we are more concerned about being honest than rich, that we are more pleased with our children's good character than their high grades, that we place more emphasis on the eternal than the temporal.

Personal Testimony. As friendship develops and we start sharing how we feel about things, we will have opportunities to relate some of our personal experiences with the Lord. We can tell how He lifted our burden of guilt, how He gave us peace in a time of trial, how He answered our prayers, how He changed our attitude toward someone who wronged us.

At this point, your new friends may begin to avoid you. If the friendship ends, let it be their decision. Often, however, our friends will pick up on our experiences with the Lord and will show an interest in learning more.

Bible Study. If they want to know more, this is the time to get them into a simple, evangelistic, and life-related Bible study. You might decide to use a good booklet or book as a guide, but don't make it a substitute for the Bible.

As you lead them in this study, be honest. If you don't know the answer to a question, admit it and promise to ask someone who may know. Then follow up and come back with the answer. A good evangelistic Bible study provides an excellent basis for a solid salvation decision.

It's good to keep in mind the fact that most people come to Christ through a process. Those who respond meaningfully to a word from an earnest stranger on a plane or through some other casual encounter have usually been prepared by previous contacts and events. T. T. Shields, a well-known minister in Canada, used to say that it takes 9 months to produce a healthy baby and that forcing birth too quickly produces nothing more than a stillbirth.

BREAKING THE SOUND BARRIER

How do you break the silence with a non-Christian? How do you break the spiritual sound barrier? Well, don't try to go too fast too soon. In most cases, when time permits, you'll want to spend time talking about common interests. Build relationships. Show that you're a real person. If you sound too pious or come on too strong, you will usually turn off someone who is unsaved.

Sooner or later, however, you will want to begin asking questions that relate to what you've been talking about. The answers you get may lead to an opportunity to lovingly share the gospel. Here are a few illustrations.

Moral Issues. Let's suppose something has just been said that relates to moral issues. Maybe someone did something dishonest. You can ask a question like, "Do you think it is always wrong to be dishonest?" Perhaps the person has a magazine on the table with a cover that is somewhat seductive. You might point to it and ask, "How far can magazines go without violating standards of decency?" If he says he sees no harm in seeing suggestive pictures, ask, "What about the violent pornography that exploits children?" He's almost sure to admit that this is wrong. You will then have an open door to tell about your belief in God and the moral standards He has given us.

Bad Circumstances. We often encounter people who are sad or worried. A newlywed who is having adjustment problems. A mother of teens who has just received word that she has cancer. An executive who faces heart bypass surgery. An assembly-line operator who is told that his plant might be shut down. In these kinds of situations, we must show genuine concern by being good listeners. Try to say something encouraging. Tell them you will pray for them. Or, if you are in a private place, offer to pray for them right then and there. Few people are so atheistic that they will resent your offer to pray. Once you show that you are personally concerned about them, they will usually be more open to listen to you. Your testimony of how you came to know the Lord is often appropriate at a time like this.

Family Problems. You will often encounter people who are deeply troubled because of problems at home. When this occurs, be a good listener. If you ask appropriate questions, you will be able to determine their relationship with God. When people are troubled, they will readily talk about God if they don't feel threatened. Therefore, be gentle and low-key. Don't push too hard. In summary, you can usually find an opening to witness if you

get people talking about their problems. You can be effective if you take a genuine interest and avoid anything that makes you sound self-righteous or superior.

LEADING OTHERS TO CHRIST

When I was 19 years old, I began speaking to small gatherings on street corners, in jails, and in nursing homes. I was somewhat afraid when I stood up before a group, and I was petrified at the thought of leading an individual to Christ. I was familiar with biblical truth and I was assured of my own salvation, so I don't know why I was afraid.

As it turned out, I discovered that my worries were needless. The first time I helped lead someone to Christ, I had no difficulty. I started where the man was in his own thinking and helped him place his trust in Jesus Christ. In his case, I didn't need to show him that he was a sinner. He knew that full well, and he wanted to be forgiven and changed by God. That made my task easy. The fact of the matter is that he probably could have found peace with God without my being there to help him.

Knowing the Basics. If you want to have the joy of leading a person to faith in Christ, you need to know a few basic truths--and you need to know them well. These truths can be stated in different ways, but they boil down to the following four points:

1. Every person is by nature a sinner who stands guilty and condemned before God.
2. Every person is helpless to save himself by his own effort.
3. In love, God provided salvation for sinners through Jesus Christ, who became a member of the human family, lived sinlessly, and then died on the cross to pay for our sins.
4. Salvation is an individual matter and requires a personal response on the part of anyone who wants to be saved. Because God accepted Jesus' sacrifice by raising Him from death, all who acknowledge their sin and place their trust in Christ are adopted as God's children.

You will find that the Bible verses supporting these points are built into the greatly used witnessing tracts that are reproduced on pages 30 and 31. Before you use these tracts, or any other, make sure you know the basics so well that you can be flexible when you deal with individuals.

Being Flexible in Your Approach. If the person you are trying to help is convinced that he is a sinner, admits that he can't do anything to save himself, and wants to be forgiven and changed, you can omit those points. You should begin by showing him what God has provided for sinners and how He saves by grace through faith alone. On the other hand, if the person balks at admitting that he is guilty and condemned and absolutely helpless, you can't go on to tell about God's provision or the glory of salvation by grace alone. If you meet somebody who refuses to accept the idea that all are lost and that Jesus is the only way to God, you will accomplish nothing by using a "packaged" salvation plan.

Obviously, you can't follow exactly the same approach with all people. Paul didn't use the same procedure with the jailer (Acts 16:27-34) as Philip did with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-39).

Furthermore, you must be prepared for the fact that some people won't believe on Jesus Christ no matter what you say. Felix, Drusilla, Agrippa, and Festus heard Paul passionately present the truth, but all of them refused to believe (Acts 24-26). When you encounter this kind of determined unbelief, don't be needlessly offensive. Be courteous and pray that God will continue to work in their hearts.

If people insist that they are willing to stand before God on their own merit, say something like this: "Tom Paine said the same thing. He said he wanted justice, not mercy." Then you could say, "But I'll admit that I don't want justice. I have fallen far short of loving God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. And I don't always love my neighbor as myself. If I had to stand in my own goodness and receive justice, I would be sentenced to hell. I'm thankful for God's mercy in Christ. I hope you will be too someday."

FOUR WAYS TO EXPLAIN THE GOSPEL

THE ROMANS ROAD

Romans 3:23--Man's Need. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Romans 6:23--Sin's Penalty. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Romans 5:8--God's Provision. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Romans 10:9,10--Man's Response. "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation."

THE ABC'S OF SALVATION

Admit that you are a sinner. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

Believe on Christ. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

Confess your faith. "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation" (Rom. 10:9,10).

FOUR THINGS GOD WANTS YOU TO KNOW

1. **Your Need as God Sees It** (Is. 64:6; Jer.17:9; John 3:3; Rom. 3:10,11,23).
 2. **Your Own Helplessness** (Prov. 14:12; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Gal. 2:16; James 2:10).
 3. **God's Provision for Your Need** (Is. 53:6; John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 3:18).
 4. **God's Promise to Meet Your Need** (John 10:28; Phil. 1:6; Heb. 7:25; Jude 24).
- Therefore, change your attitude toward sin (Acts 3:19). Put your trust in Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31). Make your decision today (Rom. 10:9,10).

THE BRIDGE TO ETERNAL LIFE

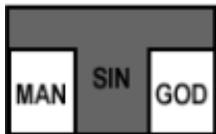


Figure 1

Because all of us have sinned (Rom. 3:23), we are not only destined to die physically (Rom. 6:23), but we are presently in a state of spiritual death or separation from God (Eph. 2:1-4).

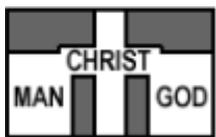


Figure 2

When Jesus died on the cross, He took our condemnation and paid the price for our sins (Rom. 4:25; 5:8; 1 Cor. 15:3). By suffering and dying as our substitute, Jesus (1) provided a righteousness that God can credit to our account (2 Cor. 5:21) and (2) made reconciliation possible between sinners and a holy God (1 John 2:1,2).

HARD QUESTIONS

People without Christ are lost and on their way to hell. We know that we are commanded to love them and to tell them about Jesus. But we tend to sidestep our responsibility. We get into involved theological discussions on why God hasn't elected everybody to salvation. And we argue for the moral necessity of a hell for the wicked. However, the question each of us should be asking ourselves is, "What am I doing to reach the lost?"

A husband and wife in their mid-twenties determined to stay in their Detroit home even though a gang of teens tried to get them to move by making life miserable for them. They invited the gang to a party in their house. The outcome? A good relationship with the neighbors, a weekly home Bible study, and the salvation of several of the gang members.

Many Christians are finding that friendship evangelism works. They have become friends with unsaved work associates and neighbors. They hold small group Bible studies. They sow the seed of the gospel by being friendly, kind, helpful, and open about their faith. Some believers are also handing out tracts, calling on visitors to their church, or inviting people to church services.

Ask yourself, "If everybody did as much as I am doing to reach the lost, how many people would be coming to know Christ?" A hard question, but each of us must evaluate

what we are doing to reach the world for Christ. We must break the silence--our guilty silence--and bring Christ's message to a dying world.