



GOSPEL CLARITY



CONNECTING PEOPLE TO A GROWING
RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST



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Gospel Clarity

Equipping God's People to share the Gospel

"Pray that I may proclaim it clearly as I should." - Colossians 4:4

Introduction

I was finishing up an intramural dodgeball game one night during one of my junior years (don't laugh) at Georgia Southern University. It had been a pretty normal day in the life of a college student but the voicemail I was about to receive would literally change everything. I picked up my phone and hit play on the voicemail and on the other end I heard my brother Bryan's voice. His message was very simple. He said in an excited voice, "Bradley, I got saved today and I wanted to make sure I called you to let you know."

My brother and I had grown up together in church all our lives but unfortunately when you held our lives up against the biblical definition of what it means to be a Christian, we missed the mark. That's because we didn't understand the Gospel, which is the very foundation that all of Christian is built upon and rests upon. That summer prior to this encounter a friend did a Bible study with my brother and left a Gospel series by David Platt for him to listen to after they finished the Bible Study. It was through one of those sermons that the Gospel message came through clearly and my brother gave his life to Jesus. This was a major catalyst in my life because it was through his conversion that I began to understand the Gospel for myself and I began to see that it's all about transformation and not behavior modification. That's the reality of the Gospel, it doesn't make it better, it makes us brand new! I watched Bryan become a new creation right in front of me. The way he talked was different, the way he carried himself was different, the way he loved his wife was different, the way he cared about me was different, the way he read his Bible was different. He was a transformed man, and that's exactly what the Gospel does, it changes everything!

I wrote this booklet out of obedience to the Lord. God began to impress on me the reality that people needed to understand the Gospel, but also needed to be equipped on how to share it with others. It is my sincere belief that it isn't that many of us don't desire to share the Gospel, we simply don't know how or are uneasy with trying. My hope is to give you a game plan on how to do just that. Let's see what God says about those who are equipped to go and share the "good news" of the Gospel:

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news!” But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.” - Romans 10:14-17

My hope is to equip you to be those “beautiful feet” for someone who desperately needs to hear the love of Christ. This call to share the “word about Christ” (the Gospel) is not for a select few, it was a call for all of us the minute we gave our lives to Jesus. For too long the church has reserved Gospel sharing for the “professionals” when in reality throughout the history of the church God has used everyday ordinary people like me and you to bring good news to a lost and dying world. Remember, the church is a lot more effective as an army instead of an audience. If more people are equipped, I believe more people will be saved and that is the ultimate goal. My hope is that this document will be a practical, “how to” guide on how to share the Gospel.

What is the Gospel?

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew and then to the Gentile.” - Romans 1:16

The first thing every disciple must understand is that the Gospel is the power of God for salvation. Salvation does not come about by our compelling arguments, our charisma, our persuasiveness, but rather it is an act based solely on the power of God. This passage should be a comfort and a foundation for us as a disciple. I hope this also excites you to read this booklet because the message you’re being equipped to share is the method God desires to use to bring about salvation. What that means when we share it, we’re being obedient to the part God wants us to play in salvation. It is God that brings about life change. Let’s answer this question a little deeper.

“Gospel” means “good news”. Simply put, the good news of the Gospel is that Jesus Christ came from heaven to die in our place for our sin so that we can be saved into a relationship with God for all eternity. We will go more in depth about what this means, but I want to share some helpful information about the Gospel.

- All of the Bible points to Jesus and this Good News. Jesus is the centerpiece.
- The Gospel is what compels us to share with others.
- The Gospel is what sustains us for all eternity. Our hope rests on Jesus’ finished work.

I share all of this because it’s important as you grow in your faith and your understanding of the Bible to never forget the simplicity of the Gospel as the center of everything. I’ve seen it many

times that people can get lost in academia and forget the simple basics of our faith. Learning and growing is critical for a believer, it's not a bad thing. But nothing should derail us from the basics of the faith and the "why" of our learning and growing. We learn and grow so that we can know God more and make Him known to others. This is the simplicity of the Christian life. We must never forget what Jesus saved us from and what God saved us for. At the heart of everything we're doing, we must remember the Gospel.

How do I share the Gospel?

We're starting to run into this in our church. Let me first say, I love my church so very much. I am grateful for a culture where so many members are taking the good news to a community that desperately needs the love of Christ. At the time of my writing this content, we had 8 people be baptized at our church. 6 of them were baptized and led to Christ by someone other than a pastor or staff member at Connection. I can't tell you the joy that gives me as a pastor. I've always said we're a lot more effective as an army instead of an audience. I love the fact that our Heart & Soul members are sharing the Gospel. Again, one thing I believe the Lord specifically has been speaking to me about is that the more people that have their "feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace" (see *Ephesians 6:15*) the more fruit we will see. So I want to reiterate the purpose. I have written this content so that you will be equipped and compelled to join God's people in sharing the "Good News" of Christ.

When and where should I share the Gospel?

I love this question. Here's the deal, there's not a bad place and time to share the Gospel. As we grow in our relationship with Jesus, God will give us greater insight into how he wants us to do that. The Gospel needs to be preached to large audiences in services, the Gospel needs to be shared with strangers, the Gospel needs to be shared in homes with our children, the Gospel just simply needs to be shared. In our context, which is a postmodern Christian era in America, I have seen the most success sharing the Gospel in authentic relationships. I would love to share some content that I believe will be helpful for you in your journey as a disciple maker and sharer of the Gospel. Check out "The Authentic Discipleship Podcast" and click on the episode entitled "The Game Plan", which will give you some insight on how to share the Gospel in a relational environment. A lot of the proper when and where will be based on your unique gift and calling. One thing that I do want to make clear is that Gospel proclamation is a command, not a spiritual gift or unique calling. That means introverts and extraverts are all in the same boat, we're called to share the Gospel.

What passages should I go to?

My personal gameplan when it comes to sharing the Gospel and leading someone to Christ who I feel doesn't have a relationship with Jesus has always gone like this:

- If I know I can get 3 meetings with someone, I'm going to walk them through Romans 1-3, one chapter per meeting.
- If I know it's time to share the Gospel and give the invitation to follow Jesus, I'm going to Ephesians 2:1-10.
- Also, our "Starting Point" content through 1 John is a great resource if you're going to have an ongoing discipleship relationship with the person.

In this content I'd really like to walk you through Ephesians 2:1-10. I think the best way to do it is to invite you along and pretend that as I write this content, I'm sharing with someone whom I believe the Lord is about to bring about salvation.

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins," -Ephesians 2:1

I don't know about you, but there's something all dead things have in common. They are lifeless, they aren't moving and they can't make themselves come to life. In this letter, Paul is writing to a church in Ephesus. The past tense "was" is pointing them to their previous condition before they came to faith in Jesus. What Paul is saying here is that all of us were born spiritually dead in our sin. That means that spiritually we are lifeless in our sin. Just like dead animals, we don't have the power to "wake ourselves up" to life spiritually. We need something to happen outside of ourselves.

"in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." - Ephesians 2:2

What Paul is saying here is that before Christ, all have followed the ways of the world. The way of the world is solely focused on the self. It means that we are focused on doing what's best for us when we really look at the core of our being. This is fanned into flame because we live influenced by Satan, who is the "ruler of the Kingdom of the air" that's referenced in the passage. Essentially what Paul is communicating is that apart from Christ, we are led by sin, selfishness, which is influenced by Satan, the enemy of God. Apart from Christ, this is the condition of every human being.

"All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest we were by nature deserving of wrath" - Ephesians 2:3

What Paul is saying here is that every person lived this way before Christ. Imagine the best, most Godly person you know. There was a time when they didn't know Christ and were in the same spiritual condition as the worst person you know. We all were born into sin, and have gratified the cravings of our flesh, which means we basically have done what we want to do by doing whatever feels good to our flesh regardless of the damage it causes. We've had desires and thoughts that are evil and selfish. Because of this, every person on the planet is due punishment because of our wickedness. The reason is because we were born into this "sin nature". What that means is that we don't have to teach children to disobey their parents, we learn really quickly that all are born with this sin nature. This eliminates the question, "how good

is good enough to get to heaven". It's not a matter of being good, it's critical to understand at this point that we are sinners before a Holy God. We are spiritually "dead" in our sins and Romans 6:23 tells us that "the wages of sin is death". This death is the wrath that's mentioned in this passage. That the due penalty is eternal punishment for our sin before God. It's at this point when we embrace the bad news that we can comprehend fully how good the "Good News" really is.

"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved." - Ephesians 2:4-6

I say it all the time, this is the best "but" in all the Bible. Instead of God leaving us in our spiritually dead condition, he made a way for us to become "alive with Christ". God did this because of His great love for us. This is why Jesus left heaven to die on the Cross. He came to die in our place so that we could become spiritually alive. God did this because he is merciful, which means he gives us something we do not deserve. Imagine for a second sitting dead at the bottom of the ocean, 10,000 feet below the surface. The Gospel doesn't mean we wake ourselves up and swim heroically for 10,000 feet to life. We all know that's impossible. No, the Gospel is that Christ swam 10,000 feet to rescue us and bring us to life. This is amazing love, and an amazing invitation God makes to us! What did we do to deserve such love and opportunity? Nothing, it is by "grace" we're saved. Grace means unmerited favor. That means God sent Jesus on our behalf because of his choice, not ours. It's important to understand who we are apart from Christ, and what God did through Christ so that we might be saved.

"And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus." - Ephesians 2:7

If you're like me, God would have been more than fair just to rescue me out of my sin and put me on level ground. But God didn't just do that. When we place our faith in Christ and are saved, we're seated with Christ in the heavenly realms. What that means is that our souls are secure for all eternity. Positionally, we are right before God and our eternal destination is heaven. This is amazing! God did this to show his grace and kindness.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this isn't from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." - Ephesians 2:8-9

So how are we saved? By grace through faith. Grace is the unmerited favor of God. Faith is relying on the love of Christ we've just heard through this passage. Hebrews 11:1 gives us a great definition of what faith is: "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." Even though we can't physically see Christ, we know this message is true. We are saved by:

1. Admitting our sin before a Holy God (we're dead in our sin)
2. Believing in Christ's finished work on the Cross (faith that Jesus is who He says He is)
3. Receiving the free gift (praying and receiving the gift of salvation)

It's important to know that salvation is a gift of God. It is not earned, therefore we have nothing to boast about. To put it simply, Christ is the hero of every salvation story. We are products of God's grace.

"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." - Ephesians 2:10

As a commissioning, it's important to understand that we aren't saved by our good works, but we are saved to fulfill the good works God has for us. In essence, saving faith produces works. It's always important to share with the person what next steps look like. That's why it's our responsibility to share some healthy follow up with someone who gives their life to Christ, pointing them to the church where they can grow and flourish in their relationship with God.

How do I help someone respond to the Gospel?

So how does the conversation go from here? From here I love to ask someone if they've ever heard this Gospel message before. I then follow it up with asking them if they've ever understood what it meant. After that I ask them if they have a real relationship with Jesus. If the answer is no, ask them if they would like one. From there, there are two Scriptures I like to share with people.

"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." - Ezekiel 36:25-27

This is an Old Testament prophecy about what salvation in Christ will be like. Essentially what Jesus is doing is removing our old heart that was ruled by sin and self and giving us a new heart that can accept and walk in the love of God. The "Spirit" that's referenced is the Holy Spirit. It's the Holy Spirit that helps us follow God and obey Him. Just like we shared in the earlier passage, we can't fix ourselves and love God. We need something outside of ourselves to walk out a relationship with Jesus. That's the Holy Spirit that God gives us at salvation. He moves us to follow God and obey Him. The last passage I share with someone coming to faith in Jesus is:

"If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your heart that you profess your faith and are saved." - Romans 10:9-10

What this passage is saying is that salvation is a heart matter, not a head matter. When we believe in our heart that Jesus is who He says He is, that is what saves us. The declaration that Jesus is Lord means that we admit we were the leader of our lives and now we willingly want Jesus to be the leader of our lives. I also like to point out the reality that it says, that those who believe and declare WILL be saved. It does not say maybe or might be, but if we earnestly want

to make Jesus Lord, God's going to do His part. There will be days in the Christian life where we feel saved and close to God and there will be times we feel a million miles away. Regardless, we need to remember the promises of God that we're learning today. I end with asking them if they believe that Jesus is who He says he is and follow that up by asking if they'd like to make Jesus Lord of their life. If so, all that's left to do is pray in obedience to Scripture to "declare Jesus is Lord". The prayer doesn't save the person, it's just following up in obedience to Scripture. There is no perfect "sinner's prayer", but what's primary is that the person admits their sin and declares Jesus Lord of their life. I'll give you an example to follow and use if you'd like one.

As you begin to pray for the person to receive Christ, first pray earnestly to God about it and then have the person repeat this prayer:

"Lord, I admit that I'm a sinner in need of a Savior. Jesus, I believe you are who you say you are. You died on the Cross and did what it took to save me from my sin. I want to receive your forgiveness. Jesus, I declare you Lord of my life. Change me from the inside out and give me a new heart. Thank you for what you did for me on the Cross, amen."

All that's left to do now is celebrate! This is a wonderful moment to see someone come to know Jesus and enter the Kingdom of God. Love on the person and again point them toward helpful next steps that lead them toward getting involved with a Gospel centered church. If they're in our area and you'd like to get them involved at Connection Church, H&S is a wonderful next step. Here they'll learn the basics about what a relationship with Jesus looks like and how they can grow. Also, inviting them to join a Connect Group is an important next step. Here they'll be loved and encouraged by other believers.

Parting thoughts on Salvation

I want to share some things that I feel are critical when it comes to leading someone to Christ that I've learned through the years of ministry and by God's grace getting to see many come to know the Lord.

1. Salvation is a work of God, not of man (John 6:44)

This is important to know and understand. Whenever we make salvation about us or about a person other than Jesus, we're about to miss the mark. No one can change the human heart except for Jesus. Let this be a relief as you share the Gospel clearly, how people respond and what God does is not up to you, it's up to him. I believe the fear of "messing it up" holds many back from sharing the Good News.

2. We can't force people to be saved (Ezekiel 36:25-27)

Following up with the conversation above, on the flip side we should not feel the need to force salvation onto someone. It doesn't work like that. We should always have an urgency, but we

must know that there's nothing we can do to change the human heart. What we will wind up doing is either pushing people away or giving someone a false assurance that isn't founded on the love of Christ. We must be faithful in our part and trust God to do his part. This comes with wisdom and discernment over time.

3. God calls us to fish for men and not every fish is caught the same way (Luke 5:10)

It requires discernment about what God is doing in each situation. Gospel proclamation and discipleship are linear in the fact that not everyone meets Christ the same way. Sometimes the Holy Spirit will lead you to be more confrontational with someone who doesn't know the Lord out of love and urgency. Some people need that. Other times, the Holy Spirit will lead you to be patient and wait for the right time to share the Gospel.

4. Love is the most important thing you can demonstrate (Mark 12:30-31)

If our hearts are motivated by anything other than love when we're sharing the Gospel and desiring someone to know the Lord, we are wrong. While we're patiently hoping and praying for people in our life to come to know the Lord, loving them well is the best demonstration of the Gospel we hope to declare to them that they may be saved.

5. Prayer is incredibly powerful (James 5:16)

I learned this truth early on in my walk. If I can change a human heart on my own, I had better pray to the God who can. I have seen incredible results of what God has done in response to prayer. Praying for people to come to know the Lord will accomplish much more than our efforts on our own. Make praying for the lost a consistent discipline.

Know that I'm cheering for you! I've written this document in obedience to God and I pray that God will use you to lead many people to Jesus. I love you very much and I'm thankful to join you on this great journey God has called us to, which is seeing people connected to a growing relationship with Jesus! The best is yet to come!

In Christ,

Buck Benton

THEIR RESPONSIBILITY IS TO
EQUIP GOD'S PEOPLE TO DO HIS
WORK AND BUILD UP THE
CHURCH, THE BODY OF CHRIST.



EPHESIANS 4:12



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