

# Good News for Family

## **BIBLE VERSES**

“Wives, in the same way, submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, even if some disobey the [Christian] message, they may be won over without a message by the way their wives live” (1 Peter 3:1).

“Be conscientious about yourself and your teaching; persevere in these things, for by doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Timothy 4:16).

“So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household’” (Acts 16:31).

## **LEADER PREPARATION**

Strong Christian families are a powerful example of God’s goodness and grace. However, even with this reality, leading unbelieving family members to faith in Christ can be one of the toughest challenges believers face. Why? Who knows us better than our immediate family members? They know our flaws, mistakes, and shortcomings. That familiarity can make it difficult to get them to see Christ instead of the child they have always known us as. Failure to live up to their expectations might prompt a family member to say things like, “I thought you were a Christian,” or “If you really believed what’s in that Bible, you would \_\_\_\_\_.”

Still, family members are within the sphere of influence for Christians. They don’t face the barriers of unfamiliarity or time needed to establish a relationship, and hopefully family members will have observed life change in their converted family member.

The aim of this unit is to get adults to pray specifically for the salvation of family members and invite them to put their faith in Christ. Numerous evangelism resources can be found at [www.lifeway.com](http://www.lifeway.com) and [www.namb.net](http://www.namb.net).

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

God’s Plan for Sharing (GPS) emphasizes the necessity of prayer prior to sending ministry teams or to organizing evangelistic events in an area. The same is true with family. Prayer must precede any attempts to share the gospel with those who don’t know Christ.

Tell participants that we all need to imitate the example set by Christ’s apostles who prayed together frequently after His ascension (Acts 1:14). However, along with prayer comes the responsibility of Christians to act. Andrew, whose response to meeting the Messiah was to go find his brother and tell him, demonstrates this.

In addition, Christians must live in such a way that their lifestyles won't ruin their chances to share the gospel with family members.

The biblical instruction is clear. Verses like 1 Peter 3:1 tell wives to submit to their husbands in such a way that they can win them to Christ without saying a word. Likewise, 1 Peter 3:7 tells husbands to treat their wives with respect and consideration so that nothing will hinder their prayers. That's a pretty powerful admonition.

In 1 Timothy 4:16, Paul told Timothy to be conscientious about himself and his teaching, since through persevering in these areas he would save himself and his listeners. And, although Paul and Silas were only speaking to the jailer at Philippi in Acts 16:31, the verse carries an implied promise that his actions would affect everyone around him. (After the apostles shared with him and his household, they were all baptized.)

The point made in all these Scriptures is: How we act matters. If our lives are filled with contradiction, inconsistency, or hypocrisy, we can't expect those closest to us to treat our presentations of the gospel seriously. This is a message you should emphasize to participants.

Still, believers can't allow their shortcomings to inhibit them from ever sharing their faith. As a Southern Baptist missionary serving in Mexico says, "When we make mistakes, and we will make them, we need transparency to teach our children and others we influence that Christ has a better way than the way I just took."

Stress too, the joy that will come from seeing a family member come to faith in Jesus. That means both the person who witnesses and the person who makes the decision to follow Christ will spend eternity together.

## **TEACHING PLAN**

### **Facing the Challenge**

Sharing your faith with a family member can pose a tough challenge. When sharing with someone from your household, a parent, or relative, you can feel inhibited since they know your weaknesses. Or your personal life may offer poor evidence of the changes you are encouraging others to make. You may also fear that someone accepting Christ will upset family dynamics and anger others.

Whatever is holding you back, recognize that everyone who claims Jesus as Lord has an obligation to tell loved ones about Him. This doesn't have to be an intimidating task. Do you like talking about your favorite hobby, sports team, or shopping trip? Telling family members about Christ should inspire similar enthusiasm.

The task starts with prayer. Don't try talking to family members about God until you have talked to the Lord about them. The Holy Spirit may give you insights or questions to ask. He knows what will touch the listener's heart.

Tom Eliff, senior vice president of spiritual nurture for the International Mission Board, outlines four reasons family members deserve your best efforts in sharing your faith:

1. Apart from faith in Christ, even beloved family members will spend eternity in hell.
2. We are commissioned to share our faith with others, including family members.
3. We must never imagine ourselves excused from the responsibility of sharing our faith with family members.
4. As believers, each of us will one day stand before Christ's judgment seat and account for what we did with our opportunities.

As you contemplate sharing the gospel with loved ones, discuss the following:

- Who in your immediate and extended family doesn't know Christ?
- How often have you prayed about them? Has God led you to do anything? Explain.
- Who would be most receptive to entering into a spiritual discussion where you can present an invitation to follow Christ?
- Read 1 Peter 3:1 and then describe what a wife could do to win an unbelieving husband to Christ. If the husband is already a Christian, how could her actions persuade a male relative to consider following Jesus?
- Read 1 Peter 3:7 and then describe what a husband could do to win an unbelieving wife to Christ. If she is already a Christian, how could his actions toward his wife persuade a female relative to consider following Jesus?

### **Minding Your Actions**

How we act towards our children, spouses, parents, and relatives makes a difference when it comes to sharing the gospel with loved ones. If our lives are full of contradictions, inconsistencies, or hypocrisy, how can we expect those who know us best to listen when we talk about the power of Christ to change lives?

This doesn't mean we have to achieve perfection; that is impossible for any human. However, we need to strive for holiness, meaning that we are set apart for God's purposes.

In 1 Timothy 4:16, Paul told Timothy to be conscientious about himself and his teaching. And to persevere in these things for by doing this he would save himself and those who heard him. This excellent Scripture reminds us of the necessity for righteous living.

As you contemplate witnessing to family members, examine yourself with these questions:

- My children—Am I spending quality time with them each day, or am I allowing them to spend most of their free hours watching TV, texting, or on the computer?
- My spouse—Do I treat him or her with respect, tenderness, and affection?
- My parents—Do I still show them honor even though I am no longer part of their household? Do I visit them when they're sick, help them when I can, and show them I care?
- My relatives—Do I make an effort to stay in touch, particularly with those who may not live in the immediate area? Do I visit them and show a desire to spend time with them?
- All of the above—What else can I do to show my love for them?

## **ACTION PLAN**

Divide the class or group into pairs for a discussion and prayer time about lost family members. Have each person share with the other about an unsaved loved one, answering the following:

- The person's name and relationship to you
- A favorite story about the loved one
- The reason this loved one has not accepted Christ and how receptive he or she is to a spiritual discussion
- Why you want to see this loved one follow Christ
- A way you can pray for this person

After a person has reviewed these points, stop and let his or her partner pray that God would lead them to look for opportunities to share their faith with this loved one the next time they talk. Then allow the partner time to review the same points. Afterwards, have the first person pray for his or her partner. Commit to share with each other next month how these conversations went.

## **LESSON BY**

Ken Walker is a member of Celebration Church in Huntington, West Virginia. He works in the Storehouse, a food and clothing outreach to low-income residents and also participates in regular outreach activities in the community.

## **NOTES ON SOURCES**

1. Tom Eliff's comments in teaching plan came from Lausanne Web site: [www.lausanneworldpulse.com/themedarticles.php/765/08-2007](http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/themedarticles.php/765/08-2007).

Provided by the Mission Education Team of the North American Mission Board.

# Good News for Friends

## **BIBLE VERSES**

"Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few'" (Matthew 9:37).

"He should know that whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his life from death and cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:20).

## **LEADER PREPARATION**

Today's topic, sharing Christ with friends, is almost as big a challenge as sharing Christ with family. Like immediate and extended family, they likely know many of your weaknesses. Yet, like our family members, we have already established a relationship with friends. That provides an "in" to discuss a variety of topics with them.

Encourage participants in your class or small group to pray specifically for the salvation of friends and invite them to trust in Christ as their Savior and Lord.

One useful resource in preparing for this lesson can be found at [www.lifeway.com](http://www.lifeway.com). Type "7 Habits of Highly Effective Soul-Winners" in the search engine. Type "Evangelism" in the Search box for a list of other resources. Or go to [www.namb.net](http://www.namb.net) and do a search for "evangelism to friends." Among the helpful aids is the "Praying Your Friends to Christ" outline.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

In the Old Testament, David and Jonathan were best friends, ready and willing to lay down their lives for each other. This in spite of the fact that Jonathan's father, King Saul, hated David and wanted to do away with him.

This biblical model of friendship may bring to mind thoughts of similar, warm relationships among participants in your class or small group. As you introduce this week's topic, ask for a couple of volunteers to share a brief story about a best friend and why they have such a close bond. Then follow up with these questions to everyone: Do you have this kind of best friend? Does your friend know Christ?

Also, ask them if they realize that friends are a fertile field for evangelism. A recent survey conducted by LifeWay Research and the North American Mission Board found that 26 percent of Americans say a personal invitation from a friend or neighbor would be very effective in getting them to visit church. This ranked second only to an invitation from a family member. (Thirty percent said that would be effective.)

Emphasize that, just as with family members, no matter how close a relationship they have with friends, without Christ they are destined for hell and eternal separation from God. Remind them that in a hectic world that moves at a hyperspeed pace 24-7, they still make time to be with friends. This means they have influence and opportunity to lead them to Christ.

In Matthew 9:37, Jesus told His disciples that despite an abundant harvest, the workers are few. This means that more people are willing to consider the gospel than you may suspect on the surface. All it may take is someone with a story of how Christ changed their life and several Scriptures that illustrate the truth about the Savior.

Mention that James 5:20 says whoever turns a sinner away from his error will save his life. Ask, “Is your friend worth saving from eternal destruction? Why would you remain silent if you believe their future hangs in the balance?”

In John 15:12–14, Jesus commanded people to love each other as He has loved, noting that no greater love exists than a person who lays down his life for his friends. Then He added, “You are My friends if you do what I command you.” Before He left this earth, Christ also told us to baptize people and make disciples. Those converts should include our friends.

## **TEACHING PLAN**

### **Contagious Evangelism**

When Johnny Hunt (Southern Baptist Convention president from 2008–2010) first went to his church in suburban Atlanta, he set out to impart soul winning to his congregation. Not just by evangelism programs and preaching, but by personal example.

Almost every Sunday, the pastor would call someone to the platform to introduce them, explain how they had met, how they began talking about God, and how the Lord allowed Hunt to lead them to Christ.

After a while, the excitement generated by these presentations grew contagious. People were asking Hunt to teach them how to do that, too. During his first year, the church baptized more than 300 people and had nearly 275 other additions. This expansion continued until First Baptist Woodstock moved into a 7,500-seat sanctuary in 2004.

That kind of growth may sound impossible for your community. Particularly if your church is located in a rural area or one hit hard by the economic downturn that started in late 2007. Maybe you can't imagine talking to unfamiliar neighbors or strangers at a ball game the way Hunt did. Maybe you are more comfortable talking with your friends. Friends are a ready audience.

Just as with family, though, friends can be a tough mission field. They know your weaknesses and may not be persuaded the change in your life is real and lasting. In Luke 12:51–53, Jesus warns that some people will find the gospel offensive; it can divide family members, friends, and relatives.

Recognize too, that even Christ had a tough time witnessing to friends and neighbors. Mark 6:1-6 outlines how Jesus faced rejection when He returned to His hometown of Nazareth and taught in the synagogue. After all, they reasoned, they knew Him and His family. So who was He to claim that He performed miracles and had great wisdom? These objections prompted Jesus' statement: "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown, among his relatives, and in his household" (Mark 6:4).

Still, obedience to Christ's command to go into the world and make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20) requires that we make the effort. Start the same way you would with family—in prayer. Go to God and speak their names, asking His Spirit to pave the way for you to share with them and to give them receptive hearts.

**Questions for Discussion**

- Name three friends who don't know God. What is holding them back?
- How often do you see these friends? Are there ways you could introduce spiritual topics into a conversation? Explain one.
- Are there things that have happened in the past that inhibit your sharing of the gospel with them? How can others in the group pray for you?
- How often do you pray for these friends? If you haven't been, when can you start?

**Using Humility and Sincerity**

One way to approach your friends is as Christ would: with a humble attitude. Philippians 2:5-11 describes how Jesus didn't consider equality with God "as something to be used for His own advantage." Ultimately, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death on the cross.

To humility, add sincerity. Friends instinctively know when you're "faking it," but they also know when you are motivated by concern for them. They will recognize if your primary objective is to get their name on your church's roll so you can move on to another "conquest." They will likely reject such an approach. As much as you want to grow the Southern Baptist family, your first objective is to expand God's kingdom.

In the Old Testament, David and Jonathan were best friends. They were so close that they were willing to die for each other. And this despite Jonathan's father, King Saul, wanting to kill David because of jealousy. Do you have this kind of affection for close friends?

If so, you will want to take steps to see them accept Christ as Savior. It won't be simple, but with planning, foresight, and prayer you can be the person whom God uses to persuade them to follow His Son.

**ACTION PLAN**

Today you will work on a plan for approaching friends and neighbors with the gospel. Start by listing your two closest friends who don't know Christ and an unsaved neighbor whom you see regularly. Then describe the following:

- Something I can do to bless each of these people during the coming month
- A specific prayer I can say for each of them at least once a week
- A key Scripture I can memorize that will relate to them why salvation is necessary (1 John 5:11-12 is one)
- The name of an accountability partner in this group who I will report back to on my efforts a month from now

If there isn't time during the group session, record your responses later today. Note the Scripture on your electronic device or write it out on an index card so you can refer to it often.

**LESSON BY**

Ken Walker is a member of Celebration Church in Huntington, West Virginia. He works in the Storehouse, a food and clothing outreach to low-income residents and also participates in regular outreach activities in the community.

**NOTES ON SOURCES**

1. LifeWay survey statistics from "LifeWay Research Factoids" at LifeWay Web site.
2. Story about Johnny Hunt: from NAMB's Family to Family—Leader Guide, and statistics about his church from story in Florida Baptist Witness in June of 2008.

# Good News for Enemies

## **BIBLE VERSES**

“But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:44–45).

“If the world hates you, understand that it hated Me before it hated you” (John 15:18).

“Keep yourselves in the love of God, expecting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life. Have mercy on some who doubt; save others by snatching [them] from the fire” (Jude 1:21–23).

## **LEADER PREPARATION**

Suggest to the people in your class or small group that they must share the gospel with their enemies, and you may hear a loud gulp. Timid as we may be to even approach our enemies, we know that God’s call clearly includes witnessing to those opposed to the gospel and people who may not like us.

While this may sound scary, in reality it is no tougher than witnessing to family and friends. Tell participants that while their foes may not like them, they probably don’t know them as well as family and friends do. This could serve to remove some inhibitions caused by the other person knowing their weaknesses. Remind them that the first step in witnessing to foes is identical to the first step in witnessing to family and friends: prayer.

There are helpful resources for this lesson at [www.lifeway.com](http://www.lifeway.com). If you type in “witnessing to enemies,” you can find articles titled “Non-Christians: Friends or Foes?” by Ginger Plowman; and “Sermon on Evangelism, A Winning Witness, Acts 4:23-36,” by Steve Andrews. A good book is *Permission Evangelism* by Michael Simpson. You can read the first chapter at [www.permissionevangelism.com/book.htm](http://www.permissionevangelism.com/book.htm).

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Do you envision yourself as having no enemies? If you are a Christian, there is someone who dislikes you for that fact only. There are plenty of people who don’t care for Christians. There are atheists, members of other faiths, and former church members who have been hurt in church and are now hostile to anyone connected to “religion.”

Sometimes opposition comes from those who claim to be believers, yet are antagonistic to anyone who doesn’t belong to their particular denomination, sect, or ideology. It can even come from religious

leaders; something Jeremiah discovered when he tried to correct Israel for its misguided ways. At the peak of his dismay, he moaned, “You deceived me, Lord, and I was deceived. You seized me and prevailed. I am a laughingstock all the time; everyone ridicules me. For whenever I speak, I cry out—I proclaim: Violence and destruction! because the word of the Lord has become for me constant disgrace and derision” (Jeremiah 20:7–8).

Yet in the next verse, the prophet declares that God’s message was like a fire burning in his heart, something he could no longer hold inside. That kind of zeal will help believers speak the truth when they contemplate the awful fate that awaits anyone without Christ. Friend or foe, it should make no difference.

The Scriptures at the beginning of this lesson can also provide inspiration for those intimidated by the prospect of approaching their enemies:

- Those who are repulsed by the idea of facing opposition can draw comfort from Jesus’ statement in John 15:18 that before the world hated His followers, it hated Him.
- In Matthew 5:44, Christ commanded His children to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them.
- If skeptics and doubters upset them, remind them that Jude 1:21–23 tells us to have mercy on those who doubt and to save others by snatching them from the fire (of hell).

Romans 8:6–7 tells us the fleshly mindset is hostile to God and cannot submit to His law. All believers should be able to relate to this since it describes their pre-Christian days. It should also give them a compassionate outlook when it comes to dealing with those who are against them.

Remind them that they are not out to win a debate and to keep in mind these two points outlined by author Michael Simpson. Effective evangelists are:

- 1) Overwhelmed by the impact of God in their lives
- 2) Respectful of another person’s journey

## TEACHING PLAN

### Reaching the Opposition

Today we look at the challenge of sharing Christ with those who are opposed to the gospel or who don’t like you personally. This can seem an even tougher challenge than witnessing to family and friends—tough but not impossible.

You can, in fact, be part of winning a tough cookie to Christ. A prime example is author Michael Simpson, a one-time atheist who now works with the Navigators ministry. Simpson now disciples young professionals and Russian university students.

In his book, *Permission Evangelism*, Simpson recalls how a Christian friend shook him up. After a long discussion of her faith views, she asked him to describe the history and science on which he based his beliefs.

"I began well, but after a few minutes it all unraveled, without her uttering a word," Simpson says. "I was mortified. I fancied myself an atheist, but the reality was I merely lived and argued as a confused antagonist...I had concocted a nice God stew but had no solid basis for that perspective."

As with friends and family, the first step to sharing the gospel with those opposed to it is prayer. Without prayer paving the way, atheists, agnostics, or those who follow other religions aren't going to be receptive to your overtures. However, when the Holy Spirit touches their hearts, your success may surprise you.

One thing you want to avoid is debating anyone. An overriding mark of a Christian should be humility. Trying to imitate political analysts or radio talk-show hosts who try to outshout or verbally intimidate opponents will not likely persuade many non-believers.

What should you do if it becomes apparent that the other person is solely interested in trying to argue and frustrate everything you say? Walk away and, as Christ put it, "shake the dust off your feet" (Matthew 10:14). Simpson recalls the time he told an argumentative person that he wasn't interested if all the man wanted to do was debate. "When a person is unwilling to listen, why in the world would you try to reason with him?" he says. "A pointless debate would leave both of us frustrated and angry."

As you contemplate this task, discuss the following:

- Who are your enemies?
- Who doesn't like you because of something that happened in the past?
- What can you do to reach these people?
- How can you pray for them?
- Have you ever encountered an atheist or someone else who was hostile to the gospel? What happened?
- What social or special-interest groups could you join to meet more non-Christians?

### **Motivation to Reach Out**

Like Michael Simpson, collegiate church planting strategist Mat Shockney believes in mixing with non-believers as a way of meeting people who don't know Christ. Find something you like to do—whether riding motorcycles, playing basketball, or shopping—and do it with those who aren't saved, he says.

"The tendency with believers is they want to do things with the saved," Shockney says. "We want to hang out with the saints. I get that, but you've got to be missional. It's one-on-one, building a relationship and talking to them about Christ."

As you go, remember the motivation of Scripture. Facing hostility from those opposed to the gospel isn't easy, but Jesus reassured His disciples in John 15:18 that the world hated Him before they hated His followers.

In Matthew 5:44, Christ said we are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, “so that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.”

Jude, the brother of James, encourages Jesus’ followers to have mercy on those who doubt and save others by snatching them from hell’s grip (Jude 1:21–23). Though Jude was referring to people who had gone astray under the influence of false teachers, his words apply also to those whose minds have been blinded by Satan.

Granted, this is a tall order. But so was going to the cross. We who follow the One who died for us should be willing to face our enemies—and love them into the kingdom of God.

### **ACTION PLAN**

Divide your class or small group into teams of three to four people for a brainstorming session on what they can do to reach those hostile to the good news of Christ or people who may not like them.

Appoint a leader and have him or her review possibilities. One possibility is to use Facebook, My Space, or other social networking sites to create discussions with people who may appear antagonistic but are searching for the truth.

Have the leader ask such questions as:

- Are you intimidated by the idea of reaching out to enemies? Explain.
- Are there people from your workplace or neighborhood who may be lost but may be receptive to the gospel? How can you reach them (phone call, e-mail, Facebook, etc.)?
- Who have you been at odds with in the past but could reach out to now?
- Is there someone you need to apologize to or a broken relationship you need to mend so you have an open door to share the gospel with that person? Briefly describe what happened. Then ask someone in the group to pray for you.

Wrap up the discussion by having each person name one way they will deliberately try to reach someone who is opposed to the gospel.

### **LESSON BY**

Ken Walker is a member of Celebration Church in Huntington, West Virginia. He works in the Storehouse, a food and clothing outreach to low-income residents and also participates in regular outreach activities in the community.

### **NOTES ON SOURCES**

1. Comments from Michael Simpson came from his book, *Permission Evangelism*.

Provided by the Mission Education Team of the North American Mission Board.



SHARING CHRIST #4

---

# Good News for Your Community

## **BIBLE VERSES**

“He (Jesus) also said to them, ‘This is what is written: the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day, and repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:46–48).

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

“Much more then, since we have now been declared righteous by His blood, we will be saved through Him from wrath” (Romans 5:9).

## **LEADER PREPARATION**

Today we look at sharing Christ in our community—the Jerusalem Christ referred to in Acts 1:8. Remind participants they can do this with confidence because, in this same verse, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would give us power to witness.

The aim of this lesson is to engage adults in evangelism in their community with goals of getting them to pray for people’s salvation and invite their neighbors to put their faith in Christ.

An excellent resource for this week is the book *Permission Evangelism*, by Michael Simpson. You can read the first chapter at [www.permissionevangelism.com/book.htm](http://www.permissionevangelism.com/book.htm). Witnessing resources at the North American Mission Board’s Web site, [www.namb.net](http://www.namb.net), include the Intentional Community Evangelism (ICE) program and others. You can also find evangelism resources at [www.lifeway.com](http://www.lifeway.com).

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

In Acts 1:8, Jesus said His disciples would receive power when the Holy Spirit had come upon them and that they would be witnesses in Jerusalem and other regions, all the way to the ends of the earth. Our focus today is our Jerusalem, which refers to the city, county, or area where you and the participants in your class or small group reside.

What is our responsibility to the people in our community? The same that Jesus outlined in the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:29–37. Although many have interpreted this story to mean we should help someone in trouble, the application is much wider.

In today's dysfunctional world, there are countless victims nearby who have been beaten up by life's circumstances. They come from broken homes, shattered marriages, or a background of substance abuse. Or they are disillusioned after discovering that the gaining of material goods, workplace achievements, or personal fulfillment still left them feeling empty. Whatever the story, millions are searching for the truth. Followers of Christ need to share it with them.

In addition, the parable shows that anyone we come in contact with is our neighbor. Because of the highly mobile society in which we live, the world has literally landed on America's doorstep. Migrant workers, immigrants, university students from foreign countries, and tourists mean that even rural residents will encounter the world in their Jerusalem. We should seek to reach out to them just as we do the residents who have lived around us for decades.

In the same way we care that our family and friends don't spend eternity separated from God, we should be concerned for those in our community. Those who accept Christ know the joy and peace that comes from following Him. Yet we should never forget what He has saved us from. As Romans 5:9 says, "Much more then, since we have now been declared righteous by His blood, we will be saved through Him from wrath."

God's Plan for Sharing (GPS) uses block parties and other evangelistic events aimed at helping people while introducing them to Christ. The same principles apply here. As we reach out to our neighbors and demonstrate an interest in their lives, we will gain entry points to share the greatest story we have ever experienced.

Taking the first step is also the biggest step. Yet just as someone took that step toward us, remind learners that they need to take this step toward others in their community.

## **TEACHING PLAN**

### **Helping Hurting People**

Jesus told about the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:29-37. But the parable has a much broader application than just reaching out to a crime victim. Numerous people have been bruised by life, whether that means they came from a broken home, a horrible marriage, or abuse that drove them into a cycle of alcohol or depression.

No matter what their stories, people in your community are searching for the truth. They may have sought it in material prosperity, hard work, or fame, only to discover disillusionment and pain. Followers of Christ need to tell hurting people about the Savior who changes lives.

One step towards making this a reality is building relationships outside the church. Too often our friends come only from our church congregation, denomination, or other tight-knit circles. We need to make an intentional effort to move beyond these comfortable confines and touch those who don't know Christ.

Author Michael Simpson has taken such steps. In his book, *Permission Evangelism*, Simpson notes that he has even attended yoga classes so he can meet non-Christians. When he lived in Utah, he visited parks, coffee shops, and restaurants on Sundays to meet young people who were turned off by religion.

“How many non-Christians do you spend time with?” Simpson says. “Are you so tied up in Christian activity that you don’t have time for anyone but Christians? Do you expect non-Christians to reach out to you first and conform to your ideals without the grace of God?”

Megachurch pastor Bill Hybels follows this approach. The author of *Just Walk Across the Room* suggests using hobbies as opportunities to tell others about Christ.

“If you’re a golfer, why do you always golf with Christians?” he asks. “Why don’t you say, ‘Friday afternoons in the fall I’m going to put a group of golfers together who are not from my church’?”

Intentional efforts on the golf course, at a lake, while grocery shopping, or while dining in a restaurant don’t have to be formal, memorized presentations. While it helps to have an idea of what you want to say, it is just as important to share honestly about the ways God guides you and gives you peace.

### **Sharing Your Experience**

Bill Hybels calls his method of evangelism “hanging around” to see if others display openness to spiritual discussions. Then he watches the Holy Spirit do His work.

Sharing from one’s own experience is another way of reaching non-believers. Terry Dorsett, a Southern Baptist missionary and church planter in Vermont, had a discussion with an agnostic last year. Instead of reviewing a long list of Bible verses, Dorsett shared about some things that had happened to him.

One involved his daughter and what he called the “green bean miracle.” As a young father, he watched as his daughter pulled a pot of boiling green beans off the stove. They fell in a circle around her body as hot boiling water ran all over the floor. Yet not a drop of water or a bean touched her.

“The green bean miracle is not based on faith because the miracle is a fact,” he says. “It actually happened. It was a real life experience. Each time I have another such experience, it just reinforces the fact of God’s existence in my mind.”

Dorsett says such experiences are quite common. He asked a group of teens in the youth group at his church if they had ever had any. Although most didn’t grow up in Christian homes and few could articulate their faith using theological terms, they shared stories of brain tumors shrinking, marriages restored, victory over addictions, and various physical healings.

“Though some of those teenagers have not yet made a commitment to become a Christian, the vast majority did believe there is a God because of the facts of their experiences,” Dorsett says.

What about you? What miracles have you experienced? How has God changed your life? Are you prepared, as 1 Peter 3:15 advises, to “always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you”? When you step into your community with a message of optimism, people will listen.

## **ACTION PLAN**

Getting involved in groups that revolve around hobbies, special interests, or sports will take a long-term commitment. You can't show up for a meeting or activity once every three months and expect to develop lasting relationships. In addition, regular involvement means you may have to forego a church event or personal pastime, like watching TV.

The primary step you can take today is planning for increased community involvement. Divide the class or small group into teams of three or four people. Have each person answer these questions:

- Which hobby, sports, or other activity do you enjoy?
- Is there a group in our area that you could get involved with for the purpose of meeting non-believers?
- What other activity or personal habit would you have to give up to pursue this special interest?
- What are three goals you can set for this community involvement?
- How would being more involved in the community affect the church?

## **LESSON BY**

Ken Walker is a member of Celebration Church in Huntington, West Virginia. He works in the Storehouse, a food and clothing outreach to low-income residents and also participates in regular outreach activities in the community.

## **NOTES ON SOURCES**

1. Comments from Michael Simpson came from his book, *Permission Evangelism*.
2. Terry Dorsett's comments came from his blog, this one published Nov. 11, 2009.