

SECOND EDITION

# SHARING JESUS

*without*  
FREAKING  
OUT

EVANGELISM

the Way You Were  
Born to Do It

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**BH**  
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*Sharing Jesus without Freaking Out*

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This book was written with our own kids in mind:  
Rachel, Jacob, Lachlan, Blakely, and Harrison. Our  
hope is that God uses them, and many others of  
their generation, as witnesses of his grace.

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# Introduction

**T**here are millions of people who do not know Jesus. Some of them are your friends. They are the point of this book.

Sharing Jesus with someone else is . . . what's the right wording for it?

Does it *freak you out*?

If so, we understand. You probably wouldn't equate it with the kind of "freaking out" that makes you want to run screaming to get away from something that's suddenly scared or startled you. It's more like the reluctance you might feel if you were to think about asking your boss for a raise. It's one of those conversations you'd do just about anything to avoid because it makes you so uncomfortable. What if the person demeans you? Or gets mad at you? You can't know ahead of time where this thing is likely to go.

So it's the awkwardness of it, the potential for embarrassment—not knowing exactly how to do it, not being sure you can answer all the questions somebody might ask you, not wanting to offend or be thought of as weird, narrow, or pushy. You certainly don't want to be grouped in with those radicals on social media who equate their Christianity with their political positions.

It's *all* of those fears, isn't it? Of course it is.

But it doesn't have to be. (And we intend to start convincing you of this in the first chapter.) In fact, if we could boil down into a single line apiece all the principles behind all eight chapters of this book, here's what we plan on helping you discover about sharing Jesus with others.

- Evangelism doesn't have to be uncomfortable.
- You're under no pressure to prove anything.
- It really just amounts to having a conversation . . .
- and almost any context provides the opportunity for evangelism.
- You can spot these opportunities when you listen . . .
- because people talk about what's best for them.
- So think of evangelism as building a relationship with someone . . .
- and intentionally planning to share Jesus as a part of everyday living.

Sharing Jesus with another person is really no more daunting or complicated than that. And since we believe you're already fully on board with the last of these eight principles (or else you wouldn't be here to begin with), there's no doubt this is something you can do.

The book you're about to read is not a comprehensive theology of evangelism or the methods by which that theological message is communicated. Our goal is simply to show you what evangelism looks like when it's part of your ordinary, everyday conversations. We want to demystify sharing Jesus until it's as natural to you as working your job, practicing a favorite hobby, or engaging in any other kind of daily activity.

Wouldn't that be great?

You've probably thought the day would surely come when sharing your faith would finally get easier. Problem is, that day never just shows up. But whether you're a teenager or senior adult, a PTA member or CEO, a parent, even a pastor—because, yes, we know it can freak pastors out too!—you are holding a tool that can make that day a reality for you. In the next hundred pages or so, we intend to show you how to make sharing the gospel a commonplace part of your lifestyle.

Without all the *freaking out* part.

## { CHAPTER 1 }

# Evangelism Doesn't Have to Be Uncomfortable

*“We are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”*

—Acts 4:20

### Principle #1

You have all you need to begin sharing  
Jesus with other people right now.

**Y**ou do things every day that, to many of the rest of us, would be daunting to the point of impossible. Maybe you run your own business, or hang drywall, or fly airplanes, or craft floral arrangements, or care for cancer patients, or teach preschool. It's something you do routinely, all the time, without freaking out.

Why?

Because you learned how to do it. More accurately, you learned you *could* do it.

There was a time, of course, when you couldn't. None of us, when we picked up our first book, for example, knew how to read. When we sat behind the steering wheel of a car for the first time, we didn't yet know how to drive.

Name some of the many insurmountable challenges you've faced in life: figuring out high school algebra, remodeling your kitchen or bathroom, interviewing for your first real job. The challenge seemed overwhelming. You weren't sure you could do it. And yet you did. You learned a second language. You taught yourself to sew. You graduated from college. You ran a marathon. You did it!

So you have a history of accomplishing things, of becoming adept at things that you once couldn't do at all, until now you can do them quite naturally, with ease—or, if not with ease, at least proficiently. Those tasks don't scare you to death anymore. You may even be genuinely looking forward to your next chance at doing them again.

Why should evangelism be any different?

Here's why: likely, somewhere along the way, you were taught a style of evangelism that made the idea of talking with other people about the best news in the history of humanity(!) feel somehow uncomfortable. You knew you should do it. You even *wanted* to do it. You loved the thought of an unbeliever being captured by the message of Christ you shared and then putting their faith in him. Of the thousands of Christians we've known and taught throughout the years, seldom have we met anyone who refused to share Jesus because they didn't think it was important.

But stop us if what we're saying isn't true. Tell us evangelism hasn't become equated in your mind with things that you find to be highly unpleasant, unnatural, uncomfortable.

For one thing, it's been made to feel like public speaking. And almost everybody hates public speaking. According to a Gallup study, the only thing greater than the fear of public speaking for today's adults is the fear of snakes—more than



fear of heights, fear of flying, fear of spiders, fear of tight spaces, fear of anything.<sup>1</sup> Most of us would almost prefer dangling from the ledge of a tall building than to try giving the kind of talk we perceive as being a gospel presentation.

In addition, evangelism training has often been led by aggressive, extroverted instructors who, if they weren't leading witnessing classes and seminars, would make really good salespeople, motivational speakers, or multilevel-marketing professionals. Each of these careers, of course, is noble work, but let's face it: they typically require a certain kind of temperament or skill set in order for someone to be successful at them. And if that kind of person is not you—like that person is neither one of us—you'll likely feel inadequate for the job. Whenever the evangelism method that's being taught doesn't work for every personality type, a lot of people are sure to feel a little freaked out.

Finally, many of the most prominent forms of evangelism training through the years have been heavy on techniques, strategies, and scripted questions that may work fine for "professional" Christians, but not for regular believers interacting with regular people. Plans like these are often not natural to implement. They mostly just feel intimidating. And so, rather than being an encouragement to go out there and share Jesus with others, such methods can unintentionally quash enthusiasm for evangelism by causing people to think they must be doing it all wrong, which only makes them more apprehensive and avoidant, more easily tongue-tied in trying to carry it out.

If this describes you, we feel your pain. The two of us have spent three decades in some of the same meetings and training sessions, learning about methods for sharing the gospel. Some have been helpful, but we have come out of a lot of those

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<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Brewer, "Snakes Top List of Americans' Fears," Gallup, March 19, 2001, <http://Gallup.com/poll/1891/snakes-top-list-americans-fears.,aspx>.

sessions thinking, *That can't be the ONLY way to do evangelism!* Sometimes a method can seem forced or so complicated that normal Christians can't imagine themselves ever actually sharing Jesus with anyone, much less a close friend or family member.

But evangelism doesn't need to feel this way, where it's one of those things you hate being expected to do. The first step toward becoming a Christian who shares Jesus without freaking out is to understand evangelism in a way that removes complications and makes it feel natural.

This book is about that kind of evangelism.

And in this chapter, we want to give you the first part of it. The type of evangelism we'll be describing for you focuses on what you already possess simply by virtue of being a Christian. Or, as our Principle #1 says it, *You have all you need to begin sharing Jesus with other people right now.*

Think of it in three broad categories:

### *1. Evangelism is an overflow of the Christian life.*

The most important requirement for learning to share Jesus is not a winsome personality, a tight presentation, or a well-developed plan. The main ingredient for sharing Jesus the way you were born to share him is simply a genuine relationship with him.

Evangelism happens within the regular rhythm of living with Christ yourself, of being an active participant in the gospel. The more you know him and enjoy him, the more you'll enjoy sharing his story. When Jesus is the central figure of your life—when he determines what you value most, what brings you joy, what stirs your sense of justice, and what you'd fight to the death to protect—he will be what you talk about. If you'll focus on just being a Christian, the ease of casually communicating Christ will start to come naturally.

Your identity in Christ is the basic starting point for evangelism—and yet it's so easy to forget.

There are three reasons many of us forget the importance of our relationship with Jesus: distractions, difficulties, and disobedience. We live in a fast-paced society, and the circumstances of life can distract us from the gracious work of God in our hearts. We live in a broken world filled with suffering; it's easy to allow difficulties to draw us away from his goodness. Finally, we all know the reality of our own sin. Our lives can be summarized as the apostle Paul summarized his:

I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not practice what I want to do, but I do what I hate. . . . For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For the desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it. For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do. (Rom 7:15, 18–19)

Our own shortcomings and failures can cause doubts about who we really are. In the face of these facts, it is important to always remember this:

You are [part of] a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Pet 2:9)

As a Christian, you enjoy a relationship with God that he has designed for you. You are a chosen part of his kingdom. You've been "rescued" from the kingdom of darkness and delivered "into the kingdom of the Son he loves" (Col 1:13). You belong to God and are known by him as his beloved son or daughter.

But there's more. Having been delivered from your sins, you've become part of a royal priesthood, a job description that dates back to the rescue of the Hebrews from Egypt (Exod 19:6). God's purpose for delivering Israel wasn't simply to take them out of slavery, any more than his saving of you was solely

to forgive you of your sins. He wanted his ancient people to enjoy and experience the kind of relationship with him that would give them the opportunity of helping others enjoy him as well. And so he declared them not just a kingdom *with* priests but a kingdom *of* priests.

Priests connect people to God. Priests share messages of hope and help with others. And you, as one of his modern-day priests, are in an ideal position to tell people how truly wonderful your God is.

You're someone who knows from firsthand experience that the God of the Bible is not a terrifying God who's out to hurt people, even incredibly sinful people. You know that the real enemy of humankind is sin, not God, and that God's desire is to *save* people from their sins, giving them a new heart, a new hope, a new home.

It is this saving work, which God has done in your own heart, that equips you "so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet 2:9).

Now this discovery alone, we realize, is probably not enough to put you at total ease in sharing Jesus. You may be thinking you need a lot more than that. But God hasn't left you all alone down here to figure out how to share him without any help. God himself indwells you through his Holy Spirit, who guides you, informs you, and empowers you to be his faithful witness in the world (Acts 1:8).

As if the knowledge of God's presence with you is not enough, remember that God has given you even more: *the gift of prayer*, which provides you opportunity to communicate (and even commune) with God as he empowers you to become his unlikely vehicle for spreading the gospel.

Prayer, first of all, is able to shape your attitude about *God's mission*. The praying Christian is one whose mindset stays anchored on spiritual matters and who increasingly thinks rightly about God. When you practice a lifestyle of prayer, you

naturally become more sensitive to gospel concerns, which opens your spiritual eyes to witnessing opportunities you might otherwise miss.

Next, prayer shapes your attitude about *people*. Through prayer, you begin to see people as God sees them. Suddenly your neighbor is no longer just the person who lives on your street or in your apartment complex; he or she is someone for whom Jesus died and was raised from the dead. Praying for specific people grows your love for them enough that you *want* to share your Savior with them.

And so, because of who you are, you're already enlisted and empowered to do this. The Holy Spirit within you will guide you into conversations, open doors for gospel interaction, and use those encounters to bring people to new life in salvation.

Like the priests of old, you—as a member of this royal priesthood—have been tasked with and equipped for delivering a message of God's love, mercy, and grace to others. Not everyone will want to hear what you have to say, of course, nor will they all believe that the message applies to them. But your responsibility is simply the sharing. And everything you need for doing it is right there inside of you.

## *2. Evangelism is storytelling, and every Christian has a story.*

You may have been a Christian for many years, or perhaps you're relatively new to the Christian faith. You may also have tried any number of different methods or strategies to help you be better at evangelism. But establishing a lifestyle of sharing Jesus does not require new tools or techniques or even new skills. Think of it as simply retelling a story—something you already do all the time.

The reason you can tell a story, whether it's the story of your first kiss or the story of your child's first steps, is because you *know* those stories. That's all it really takes to be able to share them. Being personally familiar with a story that you want to tell is why you can so vividly describe scenes from your childhood to

your kids, or recount the events of your workday to your spouse, or jump into nearly any conversation on any topic by interjecting a story that connects with whatever's being talked about.

*Storytelling.* That's what evangelism really is. The gospel at its heart is the story of God reaching out to the people he made and enabling them to live in right relationship with him because of what Jesus Christ has done on their behalf. Every Christian knows this story. *You* know this story. Or if you don't feel that you know it well enough to articulate it fluently, we'll be talking about it so much throughout this book that by the time you reach the end, we trust you'll believe that you can.

You also know your *own* story, your personal pilgrimage that led you to faith in Christ, as well as the story of what his grace continues to accomplish in your life even now. Evangelism, the way he uniquely made you to do it, involves that story too.

Think about the ministry of Jesus. As he taught, he told stories. He told stories about weddings and farming and tending sheep. He told stories about rich people and poor people, about faithful people and foolish people. He took ordinary circumstances that everybody in his day understood, and he used those stories to talk about the eternal God. And most people loved it.

Because everybody enjoys hearing stories.

What they *don't* enjoy is a sales pitch . . . which you don't enjoy giving anyway, and which you probably aren't internally wired to deliver. Few things are more uncomfortable to most of us than giving a canned evangelistic spiel that ends with a demand for a response. Good thing, then, that sharing Jesus is not about honing a sales technique. It's simply about retelling a story. *This* story. *These* stories.

Too many Christians continue to equate evangelism with a prepackaged presentation, or with asking and answering a particular set of questions, or with trying to win a theological debate. One of the reasons Christians avoid engaging in evangelism, or typically avoid the topic of religion altogether

in polite company, is because they fear the resulting discussion will deteriorate into an argument. Some people love arguments; most people loathe them.

When you act like a telemarketer toward non-Christians, you can expect to get a predictable result: hang-ups. But when you simply view evangelism as storytelling—telling the story of the gospel and the story of God's work in your life *through* that gospel—the fear starts to go away. No longer do you feel responsible for proving a point. You're not arguing for why your views are correct and why opposing views are mistaken. And you're certainly not suggesting that becoming a Christian will instantly solve anyone's problems.

Sharing Jesus doesn't need to be uncomfortable, unnatural, and forever confined to that dreaded emotional space between awkward and terrifying. It can actually be as natural as sharing any other story from any other part of your life. It's just another ordinary conversation with ordinary people. The way you already know how to do it.

### *3. Evangelism is relational, and every Christian has relationships.*

When you (1) truly make God the main focus of your life as a Christian, and (2) recognize him as the main character in the story of the Bible, as we'll soon discuss in greater detail, you can then (3) make him the main focus of your conversations with others. You can begin to weave Jesus naturally into the fabric of your ordinary relationships, just as his gospel is woven into the fabric of your being. Your love for *him* joins together with your love for *them*—your friends, your family, your coworkers, even your care and compassion for total strangers—so that as you're going about your everyday business, you find yourself entering into the privilege of sharing the story of God's grace with them.

And you don't even need to go out looking for people to share him with, because they're already there.

Your life is a line that continually intersects with others every day. Depending on your current season or situation, you

routinely experience an assortment of the following connections: you wake up next to your spouse in the morning; you have breakfast with your kids; you wave hello to your neighbor as you walk down the driveway; you chat with the cashier at the grocery store; you spend an hour in a meeting with some of your work associates; you visit with other parents while your children take a dance class; you hang out at the lake with friends. Each of these encounters—and all the many others like them—represents an intersection. Granted, none of them on its own may seem to contain anything overtly spiritual. But what if they do?

We ought to see *every* encounter as special, not because each one is sure to end up with someone becoming a Christian or even with an opportunity to share the gospel. It's special simply because you're living that moment alongside an individual whom God has put in relationship with you (whether temporarily or long-term)—a person he loves, someone who has a place in his story already.

And this will always be the case. All the time.

Each of your current and future relationships exists as a ready, natural, ongoing conduit for the gospel. God, through Christ's work, has brought you into relationship with him, and along the way he's also brought you into relationship with others. *Many* others. This is God's plan for the progress of the gospel, whether you're encouraging your family or fellow believers in their faith, or introducing the non-Christians in your life to the story of God's love for them.

Either way, your only real job is to enjoy these relationships that are already yours. Christ has achieved everything required to advance his gospel; you now get the opportunity to enjoy his work and how he chooses to do it. It's as if someone has bought you a piano and given you all the skill and resources you need for playing it. It's time now to just sit down on that bench, beside whomever he pllops into your life today, and play away!



Start by simply determining that your purpose in life is to participate with God in the progress of the gospel, and then begin seeing your daily encounters with others as special opportunities to bless and encourage them. No encounter is without value if you believe the story of the gospel includes everyone. The non-Christian barista who serves you at the counter isn't likely to become a believer merely because you always come into the coffee shop with a friendly smile. But each of your interactions with him or her could contribute toward opening up this person to gospel conversations, whether with you or with someone else.

It's what these relationships of yours are for. Random encounters become gospel encounters when you live Christianly within the relationships you already have. And look around: you certainly don't lack for relationships.

## Act Naturally

You're a Christian.

You have a story.

You have relationships.

You are all set then. Principle #1: *You have all you need to begin sharing Jesus with other people right now.*

We repeat: despite what you may have been led to believe, evangelism does not mean attending another conference, learning a new approach, or gaining new insights into people. Your ability to casually communicate Christ—to share Jesus without freaking out—means just being yourself, a child of God. You may be an extroverted Christian or an introverted Christian; either way, you're a Christian. And that's enough. Evangelism doesn't require you to change who you are.

Do you like to talk to strangers? Then talk to strangers. Are you scared even to look at people you don't know? Then don't look at people you don't know. It's not an accident that God made you with your own particular temperament. In fact,

living out your personality is the most natural way for you to display his work in your life. Remember, you're not signing up to be a salesperson; you're just signing up to live as a Christian.

So be content being yourself—with your own style, traits, interests, and relationships—because that is what God has given you. Your genes, your environment, your experiences, your education—each of them play a role in your approach to evangelism.

Do you love movies? Music? Art? College football? Then just roll with how God has formed you and where he's taken your passions. Embrace them fully and engage them for the sake of Christ and the progress of the gospel. Leverage your inherent skills, abilities, and predilections as means of establishing authentic relationships with others. And once inside those relationships, use them to talk about Jesus, the One who is *most* important to you.

Because if your faith matters to you—and we know it does—you'll naturally include something of the gospel story in your normal conversations. You won't need to manufacture those interactions or awkwardly infuse religion into your relationships. It'll all happen naturally, as God works through you, through what matters most to you.

In 1 Thess 2, Paul reminded the young believers in the church at Thessalonica that he and his companions had not used coercive means or other crafty approaches to try convincing people that they should become Christians: "We never used flattering speech, as you know, or had greedy motives—God is our witness—and we didn't seek glory from people, either from you or from others" (vv. 5–6). After all, Paul wasn't looking for personal followers or leading a cult; he was only looking to tell people some good news.

The same is true of you. Whenever you're telling your friends about something, you don't use unnatural tactics to do it. You just tell them. You tell them with your life, with your actions, with your stories: "Here's what I did this weekend";

“Here’s where I went yesterday”; “Here’s an interesting thing I learned recently.” Why make sharing Jesus with them any more complicated than that?

In his excellent book *Joy for the World*, author Greg Forster puts it this way:

If they [people outside the church] encounter Christianity through our efforts to leverage secondary assets (politics, scholarship, worldview, . . . emotions, causes), they will not encounter the joy of God. But when they see that the total Christian life makes a radical difference in homes, workplaces, and communities, they will want to know why. Then they will know that the joy of God is a real thing. Then they will know there is a real supernatural power working in the lives of Christians.<sup>2</sup>

God has situated your life within a web of contexts. You have a home, a neighborhood, a city, a workplace, and a group of friends who likely possess many of the same interests as you. If you’ll simply participate within these contexts in sincere and genuine ways, without feeling the need to force things, you will naturally exhibit the gospel through your ordinary interactions. Be a good family member, a good friend, a good Little League coach, a good worker . . . a good member of your own context, right where you live. And then watch God create opportunities for you to make much of the grace of Christ.

What the two of us hope to see today are more Christians like those unnamed believers in Acts 11:19–23 who planted the gospel deeply in Antioch, the fourth-largest city in the first-century Roman Empire. We need more Christians like the

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<sup>2</sup> Greg Forster, *Joy for the World: How Christianity Lost Its Cultural Influence and Can Begin Rebuilding It* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 94.

ones described by Michael Green in his book *Evangelism in the Early Church*:

In contrast to the present day, when Christianity is highly intellectualized and dispensed by professional clergy to a constituency increasingly confined to the middle class, in the early days the faith was spontaneously spread by informal evangelists and had its greatest appeal among the working class.<sup>3</sup>

The primary means of the gospel's early spread came through evangelism done in "the marketplace," through Christians engaged in everyday conversations with their friends and neighbors.<sup>4</sup> The evangelists of that era were primarily average Christians who retold the story of God's work in reconciling the world to himself. By sharing that story from within the contexts of their normal relationships, they took an active role in the mission. They became, as Paul referred to the Christians in Philippi, "partners" in the advance of the gospel (Phil 1:7; see also "partnership" in v. 5). They grabbed hold of what was already in their hands—their faith, their stories, their network of relationships—and they used it all to share Jesus throughout the rhythms of each day.

Christian evangelism can always be enhanced, of course, by churches putting on big events or launching big programs, inviting the whole community to attend. But nothing will ever be more effective—more natural—than ordinary, everyday Christians building genuine, lasting, individual friendships through which others can both see and hear the gospel.

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 175.

<sup>4</sup> For examples from early Christianity, see *Life and Practice in the Early Church: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Steven A. McKinion (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 115–50.

And don't ever think of it as something you can't do. *Because you can.*

The same gospel story that changed your life can give you the ability to move beyond your insecurities and talk about Jesus. No doubt about it. So be encouraged, because nothing you do for God is done alone. The Father sees you, the Son compels you, and the Spirit guides you and empowers you.

So as we conclude this chapter and look forward to where we're going from here, we encourage you to begin regularly praying a short prayer like this one:

*God, I know you love people. Give me an opportunity today to help someone see your love for them and hear of how they can enjoy your work in Jesus Christ. Give me the boldness to talk with them about Jesus. Amen.*

Let's do it.