

HOW TO REACH YOUR FRIENDS FOR CHRIST

1 Peter 3:15-16

By Andy Manning

The title of this sermon is “How to Reach Your Friends For Christ.”

Recently I attended a pastor’s conference and this is what we learned.

Lafayette Parish has 221,578 people, and 20 Southern Baptist Churches.

That’s a church to population ratio of 1/11,079.

Lafayette Parish is the most unreached parish in the state of Louisiana.

There are a lot of unchurched, unreached people around us.

Who is going to reach these people for Christ?

Us. God has called us to the task of the Great Commission – to reach the lost around us and help them become fully-devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

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

These are the words of Jesus, right before He ascended to heaven. Jesus commanded His followers to be His witnesses. We are to tell everyone in the world how to be saved through faith in Jesus Christ.

Mark 5:18-19 (CSB) says, “18 As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged him earnestly that he might remain with him. 19 Jesus did not let him but told him, “Go home to your own people, and report to them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you.”

After Jesus healed a demon-possessed man, the man wanted to travel with Jesus.

But Jesus had different plans for the man. Jesus told him to go back to his hometown and reach his community for Christ.

That's the same task that He's given to us. We're called to reach our community for Jesus Christ – our family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, classmates, and teammates.

So this morning we're going to look at a couple of verses in 1 Peter to find some help and some encouragement with how to reach our friends for Christ.

Turn with me to **1 Peter 3:15-16**.

15 but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. 16 Yet do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that when you are accused, those who disparage your good conduct in Christ will be put to shame.

This passage gives us three essentials for effective evangelism.

3 ESSENTIAL FOR EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM

1. Be real.

Notice what it says at the beginning of **verse 15**. “But in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy.”

What does that mean? Regard Christ as holy.

Remember that the word holy means “set apart.”

To regard Christ as holy is to treat Christ as set apart from everything else in your life.

Don't treat Christ as if He's on the same level as anyone or anything else in your life; He's on a completely different level.

Don't treat Christ as if He is just one part of your life; He's nothing like the other parts of your life.

One **commentator** said that this verse means "we are to give God His rightful place."

The **NLT** translates this verse, "you must worship Christ as the Lord of your life."

What does "Lord" mean? It has a double meaning. It means boss, or master. And it also means God.

So to worship Christ as the Lord of your life is to regard Him as your God and master. Put Him first. Make Him the center of your life.

In order to be an effective witness you to be real – you need to be a real Christian. You need to be someone who worships Christ as the Lord of their life. You need to be sold out to Christ.

There are many Christians who believe in Jesus, but they haven't surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

They believe in Jesus like they believe in Noah. But just as they haven't invited Noah to take charge of every aspect of their lives, they haven't invited Jesus to that either.

For many Christians, Jesus is Savior, but He's not Lord.

But that's not a real Christian. A real Christian trusts in Jesus as Savior and Lord; Savior and God and Master.

A real Christian is sold out to Jesus Christ; is radical; is hard core; fully-devoted.

Not perfect; but running hard after Christ.

And it's obvious to those who know them.

There are many Christians who talk and act just like the world.

They say they believe in Jesus, and they believe in the Bible, but they don't act like it.

They don't act like Jesus.

They don't take the teachings of the Bible seriously.

And that's not going to win anyone to Christ. That's going to turn people away.

Writer **Brennan Manning** wrote, "The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips and walk out the door and deny Him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable."

Do you know why I can't give you \$1 million? I don't have it.

You can't give away what you don't possess.

You can't share what you don't have.

How are you going to share Jesus with people if you don't have Him?

You can't give Jesus away unless you have Him, and you don't have Jesus unless He has you – all of you.

There are **two things** you need to understand about being a real Christian.

Frist, non-Christians aren't going to be interested in your message unless it has radically changed your life.

If Jesus has radically changed your life, then maybe He's real.

If Jesus is important enough for you to give up all of your sins and live a radical, counter-cultural lifestyle, then maybe He's real.

But if you're no different than the people you're trying to reach, other than some of your religious beliefs that don't really make a difference in your everyday life, then nobody's going to be interested in your message.

Non-Christians aren't going to be interested in your message unless it has radically changed your life.

So here are some real questions:

Has Jesus radically and obviously and noticeably changed your life?

Has Jesus made you different than the world around you?

Has Jesus transformed you from the person you were before you became a Christian?

Here's the **second thing** you need to understand about being a real Christian. **Non-Christians are not going to be interested in your message unless they can see that Jesus has radically changed your life for the better.**

Non-Christians are looking for happiness; they are looking for peace; they are looking for hope; they are looking for freedom from addictions; they want to know how to have a healthy marriage, and to raise their kids right; they are looking for meaning, and purpose, and significance.

And if it's obvious that Christ has given those things to you, if it's obvious that Christ has radically changed your life for the better, then non-Christians will be interested in your message; because they want what you have.

But if your life is just as messed up as theirs, just as sinful as theirs, then why would they want what you have?

So here's another real question: Has Jesus radically changed your life for the better?

Now if your answer to these two questions – Has Jesus radically changed your life? Has Jesus radically changed your life for the better – is No, then that means you are not a real Christian, and you've got some work to do if you want to be an effective evangelist.

In **Matthew 5:13 (CSB)** Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It's no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet."

Jesus said you are to be the salt of the earth. What does salt do?

It does **two things**.

First it makes people thirsty. You should live in a way that makes people thirsty for Christ.

Second, salt makes things taste good. Your lifestyle should make the gospel of Jesus Christ taste good.

Lee Strobel was the legal editor for the Chicago Tribune. And he was an atheist. His wife, Leslie, was an agnostic. Several years into their marriage Leslie decided to follow Jesus. Lee was devastated. He thought that she was going to “turn into an irrational holy roller who would waste all of her time serving the poor in a soup kitchen somewhere.” He thought divorce was inevitable. But over the next several months, he saw positive changes in her character, her values, and the way she related to Lee and the children. “The transformation was winsome and attractive.” So when she invited Lee to go to church with her, he went, and eventually he became a Christian.¹ Notice what got Lee to give church a try. It wasn't Leslie's words about Jesus; it was her lifestyle; it was the way that Jesus had radically changed her life for the better. When Lee saw that in his wife, it got his attention. It softened his heart.

That's what happens you are a real Christian.

Non-Christians will be interested in your message if they are impressed with the messenger.

2. Be ready.

The second essential for effective evangelism is to be ready.

Look at **1 Peter 3:15** again. “But in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.”

The word “defense” is the Greek word apologia, from which we get our word apologetics.

Apologetics is the skill of giving a reasoned defense of the Bible and the Christian faith.²

You've heard the questions.

¹ Lee Strobel, *If God Made the Universe, Who Made God?* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2012), 2-3.

² Brett Kunkle, *Apologetics Study Bible for Students* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2009), 1355.

How do you know God exists? How can a loving God allow suffering? Why do you trust the Bible? Why do you believe that Jesus rose from the grave? Why do you believe that Jesus is the only way to God?

To be an effective witness, it's not enough to know what you believe; you also need to be able to explain why you believe it.

You must be able to give a reasoned defense of the Bible and the Christian faith.

You have to be able to demonstrate that Christianity is not a baseless tradition, but that it is based on real evidence and actual people and events in history.

You have to be able to show people that once you know the facts, it is more reasonable to follow Jesus than to reject Him.

Kenneth Boa wrote a helpful explanation of apologetics in an essay in the Apologetics Study Bible. He said that **there are four functions of apologetics**. If you want to reach your friends, you need to be ready to use all four of these.

First, vindication or proof. This involves explaining the philosophical arguments as well as scientific and historical evidences for the Christian faith. In other words, be able to explain the scientific and philosophical evidence for creation, and the existence of God. Be able to explain the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Second, defense. This involves defending Christianity against the plethora of attacks made against it by critics of varying belief systems. Isn't the Bible full of contradictions? Doesn't the Bible promote slavery and sexism? Wasn't the Bible changed over time? For example, Muslims make three attacks on Christianity. First, Jesus didn't die on the cross. Second, Jesus didn't claim to be God. Third, Jesus didn't rise from the grave.

Third, refutation. Answering the arguments non-Christians give in support of their beliefs. Your non-Christian friends have their own beliefs. You need to be able to explain to them how their religion is wrong.

Fourth, persuasion. Not merely convincing people that Christianity is true, but persuading them to apply its truth to their life. This focuses on bringing non-Christians to the point of commitment. The point is not merely winning an argument, but winning souls.

One of the best stories of apologetics in practice is the story of Nabeel Qureshi.

He was a devout Muslim, and when he was young his family moved from Scotland to the Northeastern United States. After graduating from high school, he enrolled in Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. He joined the speech and debate team, and there he met another student named David Wood, and they would quickly become best friends. For one of their first speech and debate tournaments they shared a hotel room. After they got in their room, Nabeel noticed David sit down in the chair, grab his Bible, and start reading. Nabeel wrote, "It's difficult to express just how flabbergasted I was by this. Never in my life had I seen anyone read a Bible in his free time. In fact, I had not even heard of this happening." So Nabeel asked him, "So, David, are you a hardcore Christian?" David answered, "Yeah, I guess I am." Nabeel said, "You do realize the Bible has been corrupted, right?" That was the beginning of a four-year apologetic discussion between the two of them. Nabeel's goal was to convert David to Islam, and David's goal was to win Nabeel over to Christ. Eventually, Nabeel made the decision to give his life to Christ and go into full-time ministry as apologist and evangelist.

But that's not all. Nabeel's story is cool, but his friend, David's story, is even more interesting. David grew up as an atheist. And as an atheist, he decided that there was no such thing as objective morality. There's no such thing as right or wrong. There are just societal norms. But why do you follow them? There's no meaning to life. There's no heaven or hell. And so he became very angry, and very violent. And he decided that he wanted to take his anger out on people. Started studying bomb-building when he was 18. He got a copy the Anarchist's Cook Book; he learned to make pipe bombs; he learned to put together a

homemade grenade launcher; bought a book on disguises so that he wouldn't be recognized. But it all felt a little a little amateurish, so he decided to become a chemistry major in college so that he could build something a little more sophisticated. But his plans of becoming a bomber had to be put on hold, because the first person he decided to kill was his father. On the night before Thanksgiving, when his father was asleep in bed, he took a ball peen hammer and began to hit his father in the head with all of his might; he kept hitting him until he was sure he was dead. Surprisingly his father survived, although with brain damage. And so David was taken to a mental hospital, and later, jail. And while in jail, David met another inmate named Randy, a devout Christian. The first thing David noticed was that Randy was very different. Whenever there was a fight, Randy wouldn't watch; he would look away and pray for it to stop. So one day when Randy was reading his Bible, David began to attack his faith. David said, "The only reason you're a Christian is because you were born in America. If you were born in China, you would be a Buddhist; if you were born in India, you would be a Hindu. If you were born in Israel, you would be a Jew. Because people like you believe whatever you're told to believe." And David noticed something interesting about Randy. When David attacked his faith, Randy didn't shrink away and retreat like a lot of other Christians; he sat up and began to give a reasoned defense of the faith. In the words of David, "Randy fought back, and began to embarrass me about some of the things I was saying." That began a long friendship between the two of them in which they continued to debate and talk apologetics, and miraculously, David got saved; he gave his life to Christ in jail and went on to become a full-time evangelist and apologist.

Don't underestimate the importance and power of apologetics. It's not enough to know what you believe. You need to be able to give a reasoned defense of the Bible and the Christian faith.

3. Be respectful.

The third essential for effective evangelism is to be respectful.

Let's read **1 Peter 3:15-16** one more time. "15 but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a

reason for the hope that is in you. 16 Yet do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that when you are accused, those who disparage your good conduct in Christ will be put to shame.”

Notice the command to do this, to give a defense, *with gentleness and respect*.

Remember that the goal is not to win an argument, but to win a soul.

To do that, you have to do apologetics. You need to discuss and debate. But you must do so with gentleness and respect.

What does this look like practically?

First of all, avoid arguing, or quarreling.

There’s a difference between an argument and a discussion.

Usually arguments begin as discussions, but then something happens.

Your voices get louder, you start talking faster, you start interrupting each other and talking over each other, you start getting frustrated and angry, and you start throwing out insults and saying mean things and yelling at each other.

Don’t argue.

Philippians 2:14 says, “Do everything without grumbling and arguing.”

Dale Carnegie wrote, “The only argument you will ever win is the one you don’t engage in.”

Gentleness means stay calm and kind.

And respect means treating people as if they are very valuable and important.

So how would that look in your evangelistic conversations?

Don't raise your voice. Avoid insults; don't make fun of their beliefs. Don't cut them off mid-sentence. Avoid insulting body language like rolling your eyes, or making mean faces, or laughing at them.

Ephesians 4:14 says that we should be “speaking the truth in love.”

Colossians 4:6 (CSB) says, “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer each person.” We need to be like Jesus.

John 1:14 says that Jesus was “full of grace and truth.”

We need to share the truth, but we need to do with grace and love, gentleness and respect.

So God has called you to try to win your friends to Christ; to be an evangelistic Christian; to be a witness. And there are three essentials for effective evangelism.

Be real. Be ready. And be respectful.

HOW TO GET READY FOR COMPANY

Now before we close, let's talk about Easter.

Not only are each of us called to witness to our friends and family, but our church is called to reach our community for Christ. And so that's what we're supposed to be doing together as a church. We're here to work together to reach our community for Christ.

Unbelievers and unchurched people are most likely to attend church on Easter Sunday. That's just the thing you do on Easter. So we're going to take advantage of the opportunity. We're doing lots of outreach, and hopefully some new people will come in and get saved.

So let's talk six ways to get ready for company as a church.

1) Allow unbelievers to act like unbelievers.

Remember this: The church is not a hotel for saints, it is a hospital for sinners.

When we invite the community church, our goal is to reach lost people.

And so if lost people show up, don't be surprised if they look and act like lost people.

You have been healed and transformed and cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. They have not.

Don't be a stuck up, holier than thou holy roller who is too good to talk to sinners.

Jesus was a friend of sinners.

Lost people don't get saved and then go to church. They go to church to get saved.

So we need to be welcoming and loving to lost and unchurched people, to sinners and secular people when they show up.

2) Practice the 10-foot rule.

From now on, anytime you are at a church event, especially Sunday mornings, when anyone passes within ten feet of you, look at them, smile, and say hello.

I've heard multiple stories of people not going back to a church because nobody spoke to them. They felt like they were invisible. It felt like the church was a tight-knit social club that they weren't invited to.

3) Don't break the 5-minute rule.

The five-minute rule simply means before you leave this room, spend five minutes visiting each other.

A lot of times Christians run out of church like the building is on fire.

It's hard to be a welcoming, friendly church if we come late, and leave early.

I also recommend that you come early to visit as well. Every Sunday we have meet and greet before church from 9:30 to 10 am. That's a great time to greet and welcome new people. I especially encourage you to come for meet and greet on Easter Sunday.

4) Connect with the disconnected.

Before and after church, during meet and greet, and during the five-minute rule, connect with the disconnected. Look for people who look new; people who are isolated; people who aren't sitting by anyone; and introduce yourself and welcome them to church.

If you come in late, after church has started, scan the room, find someone who is sitting alone, and sit by them.

Let's pretend that we like each other, and who knows, we might end up liking each other!

5) Leave the best parking for guests.

We want our first time guests to have the best possible experience. One of the ways we can do that is to give them the best parking. If you are a member or regular, long-time attender, then don't take the first two spots. Leave those for first time guests.

Whenever Lydia and I go somewhere and there's a really good parking spot available we say, "It's meant to be."

Hopefully that's what our guests will feel like when they attend. They will find the perfect spot up front and say, "It's meant to be. We were supposed to come today!"

6) Leave the best seats for guests.

Going to a new church for the first time is frightening, unless you're an extreme extravert. Especially if you are visiting a church at a movie theater.

So one of the ways we can make our first time guests more comfortable is by giving them the best seats.

Now the best seats for a first time guest are not the best seats for a long-time member. Some of you, your favorite seat is up front.

For first time guests, the best seats are in the back, near the aisle closest to the door. That way they can make a quick exit if we break out the Kool-Aid.

So I encourage on Easter, and every Sunday, to sit in the middle, and near the front.

These may seem like little things, but when you put them all together, they add up and make a big difference.

So let's be evangelistic individuals, and let's be an evangelistic church.

Let's pray that God will do a mighty work through us this Easter.