



Eight keys to Grace-Based Evangelism

By Dr. R. Larry Moyer

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Picture two believers in your mind. They both witness to the lost. In fact, they try to witness to someone almost every day. They hand out tracts to non-Christians, and they often turn conversations to spiritual things. But one evangelizes out of grace and the other out of guilt. What's the difference? What distinguishes a person who evangelizes out of grace from one who evangelizes out of guilt?

The differences between these two perspectives are as glaring as the difference between daylight and darkness. They are not hard to notice . . . they are hard to overlook. At least eight key ideas differentiate a person who evangelizes out of grace from one who evangelizes out of guilt. Many of them spring forth from the rich, meaningful passage of Scripture that is Matthew 4:18-22:

And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fisherman. Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." They immediately left their nets and followed Him. Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

How should the truth of this passage influence a believer who evangelizes out of guilt to become a believer who evangelizes out of grace?

1 We see evangelism as a part of discipleship, not a part of salvation.

Over the years, evangelism has been plagued with misconceptions—statements made as though they are biblical, though they could not be further from biblical truth. One of the most damaging says, “If you do not evangelize, you are not a Christian.”

Scripture does not teach anything of the sort. John 6:47 says, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.”* That sentence has a period behind it, not a comma. It does not say “He who believes in Me has everlasting life, as long as he tells someone else about Me.”

Furthermore, if evangelism was a necessary part of salvation, we would have to accept that the thief on the cross who believed in Jesus ultimately went to hell. He didn’t share the Gospel with an unbeliever after trusting Christ. How could he? Yet, Christ clearly said to him, *“Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise”* (Luke 23:43).

Those who evangelize out of guilt miss this vital truth. Instead, they are often seeking to prove to God that they are saved and to earn His love. When they evangelize, they feel they are accepted by God. When they don’t evangelize, they sometimes wonder, “Am I really a Christian?”

Those who evangelize out of grace understand that we can tell others about Christ with the utmost security, because even if we fail, we are eternally His. We are saved by grace—God has given us favor we have not earned and do not deserve. We are not saved through “works” such as evangelizing. Romans 4:5 tells us, *“But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.”*

What a relief! Our salvation rests on Christ’s performance on the cross, not on our performance in evangelism. Nor is evangelism *proof* that we are Christians. The proof of our salvation comes

from trusting Christ alone as our only way to heaven. John 5:24 promises, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.”*

Once again, evangelism is not part of salvation; it is part of discipleship. In fact, the *first* lesson Christ taught His disciples was about evangelism. In Matthew 4:19, Jesus said, *“Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”* A disciple is a learner, someone who follows after Christ. Jesus calls us to take part in evangelism *after* we’ve come to Him, receiving our salvation. As we follow Him, we learn from Him, becoming His disciples. And we evangelize as we follow His example.

So to determine if you’re a Christian, don’t ask, “Do I evangelize?” Instead ask, “Have I trusted Christ?” Once we’ve trusted Christ, we have the privilege of being His disciples. That’s where evangelism fits—as a part of discipleship, not as a part of becoming a Christian.

2

We see evangelism as a privilege, not a pain.

Believers who evangelize out of guilt often view evangelism as part of their “to do” lists. Evangelism quickly becomes a source of pain rather than a source of pleasure. When we evangelize out of grace we find ourselves walking in the footsteps of a Person—One who is alive today, tomorrow, and forever. Jesus not only made our salvation possible, He secured it for eternity. His work on our behalf lifts evangelism to a whole different level. Christ clearly said, *“Follow Me”* (Matthew 4:19, emphasis added). We follow Jesus by being obedient in evangelism. And in light of the awesomeness of who He is, everything about following Him should be considered a privilege . . . especially evangelism.

Peter and Andrew didn’t need a second invitation! When Jesus called, *“They immediately left their nets and followed Him”* (Matthew 4:20). They weren’t the only ones captivated by His invitation. The next two verses read, *“Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat*

with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him."

Consider for a moment a person you deeply respect—a person you hold in a position of great honor. Now imagine if that person saved your life, whether he or she pushed you out of the way of a speeding motorist or pulled you from the rapids of a raging river. Or imagine if a medical doctor saved you from the grip of a deadly disease. If that person were to invite you to do something, wouldn't it be a privilege to be asked?

Those who evangelize out of grace view evangelism as a privilege. Those who evangelize out of guilt lose sight of the Person who provided for their salvation. The assignment becomes more important than the Assigner and duty becomes more important than the One we follow.

A grace-based approach focuses on two simple words, "Follow Me." Instead of asking, "Do I *have* to tell?" we ask, "How *many* can I tell?"

3 We see evangelism as an opportunity to be part of some thing permanent, not passing.

Someone once said, "The greatest use of life is to use it for something that will outlast it." Through our involvement in evangelism, our lives count for something that will outlast us. Go back to Matthew 4:19 where Jesus says, "*Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.*" Put yourself in the disciples' sandals. You are a fisher of fish. In effect, you take something that is physically alive and "make it dead." Now consider His invitation to be a fisher of men. As a fisher of men, you take someone who is spiritually dead and are used by God to make him or her spiritually alive. You've made a difference that is eternal.

Examine 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20. Paul said, *“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.”* Paul saw the people he had led to Christ and disciplined as an investment in eternity.

When we evangelize out of grace we are involved in something permanent, not something temporary. Imagine a contractor who evangelizes out of grace. His work is far greater than laying a sidewalk or building a house. Someone can tear up his sidewalk or tear down his house. But nobody can “undo” someone he led to Christ. Consider a dentist who evangelizes out of grace. His life is about much more than keeping teeth healthy. Decay will eventually destroy the healthiest teeth. No kind of decay can take away the salvation of a person he led to Christ. Think about a hairstylist who evangelizes out of grace. She sees her life’s purpose as something far more important than making people attractive. Wind or rain will ruin the best job she’s ever done. Nothing on earth or in heaven can change the eternal destiny of someone she’s led to Christ. Picture a flight attendant who evangelizes out of grace. She sees her life counting for more than getting people to their earthly destinations. A tragedy could cause the plane to crash. But when she is used by God to lead someone to Christ, that person arrives safely in God’s presence. The list goes on and on. When we see evangelism from a grace-based perspective, we realize that we are part of something permanent, not passing.

**“Follow Me, and I will
make you fishers of men.”**

Matthew 4:19

When we evangelize out of guilt we lose that perspective. Our focus turns inward, centering on our feelings of guilt rather than on His kingdom. We become very shortsighted. But when we evangelize out of grace we gain a tremendously long-range view of life. After all, our labor involves the people who will populate heaven.

4 We see evangelism as a learning experience.

Jesus Christ did not say, "Follow Me because you *are* fishers of men." He said, "Follow Me, and I will *make* you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19, emphasis added).

Christ did not have an easy task. Take a minute to reflect on Peter's life. He could be impulsive, self-seeking, and sometimes quite cowardly. Remember that he was the one who denied knowing Christ three times. In spite of Peter's weaknesses, Jesus taught him everything he needed to know about evangelism. And the first person he brought to Christ was his own brother.

Often we think that in order to evangelize, we must know how to answer every question non-Christians could ask, refute any objection they might raise, or explain any verse in the Bible. So we feel guilty or inadequate when we are unable to answer questions or refute objections. How could we ever know enough? The disciples recognized that Jesus was saying, "With Me you don't know have to know anything. Just follow and I'll teach you everything you need to know."

His grace teaches us. Titus 2:11-13 says, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, *teaching us* that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (emphasis added). With grace, evangelism becomes an opportunity to learn. God isn't grading us and comparing our results to someone else's. Instead He is teaching us week by week, experience by experience, and mistake by mistake. Each time we share Christ with someone, we learn a little bit more about evangelism. Jesus teaches us out of grace, and we learn through grace.

Guilt-based evangelism is rooted in performance. We keep asking the guilt-laden question, "How well does He think I've done?" Grace-filled evangelism connects discipleship and the classroom, creating a learning experience with the Master Teacher. If we fail to take advantage of an opportunity, we ask, "Where and how did I miss my chance?" Should a key point escape our minds, we respond, "I'll remember that next time." When our presentation of the gospel doesn't come across as well as we'd like, we consider, "How can I improve?" Most importantly, we must always ask, "Lord, what do You want me to learn from this experience?"

When we evangelize out of grace we never stop learning, because He never stops teaching.

5 We focus on contacts, not conversions.

The question "How many people have you led to Christ?" imparts a massive load of guilt. When we evangelize out of grace we don't count heads as a measure of our ability or obedience. Our responsibility is *contact*, not conversion. Again, we return to the first disciples Jesus called. Upon inviting them to be fishers of men, how often did He ask, "How many people have you led to Me?" Not once.

In John 6:44, Jesus said, "*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.*" Our job is to bring Christ to people. God's job is to bring people to Christ. When we evangelize out of grace we need not ask, "How many have I brought to Christ?" Instead we ask, "How many have I presented Christ to?"

Because our job is contact and God's job is conversion, we need to see ourselves as part of a process. Jesus taught His disciples this powerful lesson in evangelism during His ministry in Samaria. Christ was in Samaria for two days. He didn't do any miracles to prove He was God. Instead, He said to His disciples, "*Do you not*

say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors" (John 4:35-38). Many commentators feel that the "others" who labored could have been the Old Testament prophets or John the Baptist. The disciples were privileged to reap where others had sown.

When we evangelize out of grace we recognize that we are part of the process God uses to bring people to Christ. Sometimes we are the ninth of twelve people God is going to use; other times we are the fifteenth of twenty-five or the eighteenth of thirty. How exciting it is when we are the twenty-seventh of twenty-seven! So when we interact with a non-Christian, we need not feel pressure to bring that person to Christ. That's God's responsibility, not ours. Our desire is to be used by God to bring him or her one step closer to the cross. Occasionally, we have the privilege of reaping. However, most of the time we are involved in the process of sowing. Once more, our responsibility is contact, not conversion. Of course, we want to see every unbeliever we talk to come to Christ *today*; but even when they don't, we've done our part.

6

We see that our greatest need is to make the gospel clear.

The power of the gospel is in the message, not the messenger. Paul taught this truth in Romans 1:16 when he declared, "*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.*" When Paul went to Corinth, a city filled with intellectuals and philosophers, he kept the message of the gospel prominent in his teaching. He said in 1 Corinthians 2:1-2, "*And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I*

determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." Because the power is in the message and not the messenger, those who evangelize out of grace constantly seek to present the gospel clearly.

Ask an unbeliever, "Are we accepted by God on the basis of works—the good things we've done such as helping a neighbor, giving a friend a ride to work, or providing a meal for a hurting family? Or are we accepted on the basis of Christ *plus* works? Or are we accepted on the basis of Christ alone?" Many who miss the gospel message will answer, "Christ plus works."

When we evangelize out of grace we recognize and internalize the message of grace so that we might share it honestly and accurately. We are not accepted by God on the basis of Christ *plus* something we have done but on the basis of Christ *alone*. On the cross Christ did not make a down payment for our sins; He made the full payment. He declared, "*It is finished!*" (John 19:30). 1 John 2:2 tells us, "*And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.*" The word *propitiation* means "satisfaction." Therefore to be accepted by God, we must be satisfied with what satisfies God. He was satisfied with His Son's death as the only thing that would atone for our sins. And He accepts us through the work of Christ.

When we evangelize out of grace we are captivated by the awesome truth that Christ alone saves us. Unless we trust Christ alone, we have not crossed from death into life. Our good works are meaningless. We must be satisfied with what satisfies God. Teaching this truth clearly and simply is essential to grace-filled evangelism.

We must be satisfied with what satisfies God.

Ephesians 2:8-9 hammers this home. We read, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*" Salvation is not a bargain in which God says, "If you do this for me, I'll do this for you."

Instead He asks, “May I give you free the gift of eternal life with Me?”

This simple truth drives us.

We are motivated by grace and enamored with the message. Why wouldn't we share something so simple a child can understand it and so free anyone can have it? Our message surprises unbelievers. We love to see the expressions on people's faces, the tears that trickle down their cheeks when they come to understand that God is extending them favor they have not earned and do not deserve. With such a powerful message, we don't want to speak confusingly when God speaks so clearly.

Those who evangelize out of guilt lose sight of that message, focusing more on the messenger. Grace-motivated evangelism leads us to a message we want to make so clear that no one could possibly misunderstand.

7 We see God as on our team, not on our back.

Jesus Christ was known as a person of grace and truth (John 1:14). As He took the disciples from being fishers of fish to fishers of men, His character was revealed. He wasn't a tyrant giving orders in a “do this or else” fashion but a teacher providing guidance and assistance. To put it in workplace terms, He was setting them up for success, not failure. He was on their team, not on their backs.

Witnessing out of guilt is not fun. We feel God is pleased when we do well and disappointed when we mess up. But when we evangelize out of grace, our view of God is very different. We trust Him to teach us as we go. From beginning to end, we need His

assistance. He walks with us, providing all the help we need. God assists us by opening doors. Believers cannot open a door for the gospel. They can only walk through a door God has already opened. When we evangelize out of grace we trust that God will provide opportunities for sharing the gospel. Likewise Paul said, *“Meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains”* (Colossians 4:3). When the apostle Paul wrote that passage, he was a prisoner of the Roman Empire, most likely handcuffed to a Roman soldier twenty-four hours a day. No doubt Paul had the chance to share Christ in prison. Can you imagine being the non-Christian Roman soldier who was handcuffed to Paul twenty-four hours a day? But even though he was witnessing in spite of his circumstances, Paul did not want to be limited by the walls of a prison. He asked the Colossians to pray that God would open a door for the gospel.

God also gives us courage. Evangelism is scary; sometimes it can be downright frightening. It requires boldness. But where does that boldness come from?

The same One who provided the open door will give us the boldness to walk through it. Peter, John, and the other disciples said to God, *“Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word”* (Acts 4:29). Two verses later we are told, *“And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.”*

Similarly, Paul asked the Ephesians to pray, *“That utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak”* (Ephesians 6:19-20). In other words, he asked them to pray that God would give him the words to say and the boldness to say them. Where did Paul—who witnessed out of grace—go for assistance? To the One He knew was on his team, not on his back.

**Evangelism is scary, but
God gives us the courage.**

Even the Great Commission takes on new meaning through the perspective of grace-based evangelism. Christ said in Matthew 28:18-20, *“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”* (emphasis added). From the first physical step we take towards an unbeliever to our spiritual discipleship of a new convert, God directs, assists, and encourages us. The God of grace is on our team, not on our backs.

8

We see evangelism as something God rewards.

All who have trusted Christ will spend eternity in heaven. But not all will be equally rewarded. Christ connected rewards with discipleship in Matthew 10:40-42. We read, *“He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.”*

Remember that evangelism is part of discipleship. Therefore, obedience in evangelism will be rewarded along with obedience in every other area of the Christian life. As Revelation 22:12 tells us, *“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.”*

Should anticipating a reward motivate us to evangelize? Definitely. As we share the gospel with the lost, we can look forward to the day when God will say, *“Well done, good and faithful servant”* (Matthew 25:23).

When we evangelize out of guilt we lose sight of our heavenly reward. “Proving something to God” becomes our motivation instead of faithfulness. We focus on being accepted by God instead of being obedient to Him. However, those who evangelize out of grace dismiss any thoughts of whether or not they are accepted by Him. We know that God has accepted us through Christ’s death and resurrection. So we work, looking forward to that day when we will be rewarded for having held dear to our hearts what was dear to His—reaching the lost.

Motivated by Grace – His Call!

Evangelizing out of grace is radically different than evangelizing out of guilt. These differences impact the way we see God, unbelievers, the gospel, our obedience, and every aspect of the opportunities before us. When we evangelize out of grace, we boldly take on each God-given opportunity with a positive attitude. The sheer privilege of partnering with our heavenly Father permeates every encounter. Instead of looking at evangelism and asking, “Do I have to?” the believer who evangelizes out of grace asks, “When do I get to?” We envision the day when we will see our God of grace.

This poem captures the excitement that builds in us as we are motivated to evangelize out of grace:

*When I stand in that heavenly kingdom
And saints around me appear,
I hope someone comes up and says,
“You’re the one who invited me here!”*

- Adapted from R. Graham Carver, Sr.



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If the insights and encouragement in this little booklet ministered to you, then check out the evangelism know-how and wisdom of Dr. Larry Moyer and the team at EvanTell share on their blog—evangelism.net.



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