

Living the Gospel Intentionally
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What is the Gospel?

The four part gospel skeleton has limitations and lacks authenticity when presented.

Several years ago when people asked this question they expected an easy to swallow four part answer: “God loves you, your sin separates you from God, Jesus died as your substitute punishment, have faith in him and be confident of going to heaven.” There’s nothing really wrong with the response and it actually was very effective in bringing many people into real relationships with Christ.

But it came with some problems that are more obvious now than they were then.¹ First, it felt awkward and out of place to throw in the idea of sin when all you’ve told me is that God loves me. What is sin? What is morality? If God loves me why doesn’t he just overlook the sin, my parents do all the time. So evangelizing became a study in awkwardness. Conversation is going along normally then out of nowhere, “you know you’re a sinner and that your sin separates you from God?” “Huh” “You’re a sinner” “What’s that mean? I never killed anyone.” At this point the conversation has turned into a debate and the person is on the defensive. They disagree because they don’t understand the term and your statement has no reference point in the conversation.

Second, it made church attendance and Christian living a tough sell. If you choose to accept the four-part skeleton gospel then once you have faith there’s no need to join a church. If you’re “in” once you believe then you have no reason to do anything more (like love other Christians or the less fortunate). Church lost its integral spot in Christianity and culture because it was only a “nice add-on” to the gospel message rather than part of the gospel itself. Christian living grew less robust because it “didn’t really matter” once a person was assured of salvation immediately upon saying “amen” to the sinner’s prayer.

Third, evangelism itself soon became an “add-on” to the gospel that you just blurted out whenever you felt like it. *Living intentionally with the skeleton gospel meant going door to door, handing out surveys at malls, and cold calling people. Add evangelism to your daily routine (or feel guilty).* Many, many people truly were moved to their core by this message (I don’t want to underappreciate its power) but because the culture moved so far away from this message it became a very odd and misunderstood addition to conversations. So two people would play basketball together on a Friday afternoon. After the game two sweaty men grabbed Gatorade and their towels and headed toward their cars. Then one guy would say, “I gotta run, my mom is really sick and we think she might die.” The other would respond, “Does she know that the wages of sin is death, but that Jesus has made himself a sacrifice for her sins?” “Huh?” The mention of death is the cue for our Christian to commence his four-part presentation. The guy with the dying mom is shocked because the comment comes out of nowhere. The comment is true and real and powerful, but where’s the compassion? Also, where’s the comfort, peace, and joy of Christ? There’s an even bigger problem: where’s the explanation of

¹This change came because we’ve moved away from being “Christianized” as a nation. Less and less people are familiar with, or have as presuppositions based on, the Christian view of the world. Most believed in God and understood his moral law so the first two points of the skeleton were “givens” in the conversation. Now they aren’t.

loaded terms like “wages”, “sin”, “death”, “Jesus”, “sacrifice”, and “sins”? Each of those terms is potentially foreign and misunderstood by Joe Basketball player.

The four-part skeleton gospel was a simple formula, with a simple question, which required a simple response. A lot of this is good. It really helped clarify some of the core message. But it led to a different serious problem. It became an assumption that all people needed was the formula, the formula itself developed a sense of magical power, and once people had heard the formula the “blood was on their head” to make the right response. So you could actually quantify evangelism by saying “how many people have you evangelized this week?” Seven, I told seven people about the skeleton. Your job was done once the four parts had been laid out. It’s probably easy to realize that people who heard all four parts were still confused because so many of the terms in the four parts were foreign to them and the logic of the whole thing was foreign. If I’m trying to escape death, and God wants to help me in this, why did he kill his own son? Isn’t that a contradiction?

Basically listeners felt like you weren’t being real; you weren’t acting like a real human. Instead, you were trying to sell them something phony. We value authenticity (as Christians and now also in our culture). We expect people to speak out of their hearts toward us but the skeleton gospel seems to only hit one or two spots in us (fear of death/hell, separation from God). Therefore when it entered the conversation it seemed disjointed from the “real me” and therefore came across as inauthentic and fake. It also felt like you weren’t listening to the other guy. When someone tells you that their mom is dying it’s not a good idea to quickly make it worse by telling them she’s going to hell. That’s no way to care for someone. But the four part gospel stuck people in a corner. It was the only way people knew to present the gospel and so they couldn’t really approach that situation differently. The person may really have cared for the guy and his mom but just couldn’t express that care and concern in terms the guy understood and in terms that were authentic according to the Gospel.

What is the Gospel according to the Bible?

If someone ever asks me to teach a NT survey class I think I know what I’ll do. We’ll go through each book of the Bible and I’ll ask one question, “What is the Gospel according to [this book]?” I think it would be a great exercise because you’ll see quickly that the gospel isn’t a four-part program that always begins in the same spot, moves through a predictable middle, and ends with the same conclusion. Let’s try the exercise together.

What is the Gospel according to Mark? Jesus is Messiah, the Son of David and God, the King of Israel (1:1; 5:7; 15:39). The Kingdom of Jesus has begun. He’s overthrowing Satan through healings and exorcisms (1:21-28; 3:10-11). Demons are shaking in their boots and he’ll give the same authority to his followers (6:7-12). But it’s a different kind of kingdom. He’ll take his throne by being brutally killed, and he expects you to do the same (10:35-45). It’s not violence for its own sake; this is sacrificial love, this is taking one for the team, this is absorbing the problems that other people’s sin causes, this is not getting payback when you have every right to and instead sustaining a serious loss so someone else can gain. Suffering, like Jesus and for Jesus, gets you glory in the king’s presence. That’s the gospel according to Mark.

Core announcement: Jesus is Messiah, the King, and Satan is overthrown!

Core problem: Satan has taken many captive, but they can be freed.

Core response: Repent, turn, follow Jesus by suffering like he did²

Core result: In doing so he'll give you authority over Satan and glory in the future

What is the Gospel according to John? Knowing God is real life (eternal life) and real life begins when you start believing Jesus and loving like he loves. 1:1-5, 18; 17:1-3; 20:30-31. If want to experience eternal life then believe in Jesus, follow him by loving others (especially Christians), and like the Passover lamb the blood from his death will protect you from God's wrath. Its all about knowing God and you can't know God unless you know Jesus; and you can't claim to know Jesus unless you love like he loves.

Core announcement: Jesus has come to make God known and give abundant life!

Core problem: We love darkness and hate the light so we reject it

Core response: Believe Jesus, love like he loved, and ask God for spiritual power to follow him

Core result: Eternal, abundant life, both now and forevermore

What is the Gospel according to Acts? Jesus has taken his rightful position of authority and so anyone who changes allegiance to his will be forgiven of their past rebellion and given the Holy Spirit to empower their lives for holiness and mission (2:22-39; 26:17-18). Consider Paul's experience at the Damascus road (9:1-9). He was walking along and Jesus revealed himself in glory. What thoughts went through his mind? "Who's talking to me? This is Jesus. Jesus is in glory? Jesus is in heaven with God? Oh crap, what am I doing? I'm on my way to kill his people. You mean I've lived the past several years trying to *kill* faithful people; I thought they were God's enemies. Oh man, oh this really sucks. What can I do? I get it. I see it. Ok, I realize that you are glorified and that Christians are God's people. I'm sorry. What can I do to correct this? Go back and completely change my message? Ok, I'll do it. Thanks for not killing me." Did Paul go through the skeleton steps and logic? Not really. The Gospel came to him with a clear, definitive, and powerful presentation of the glory of Christ. No need to tell the guy he's sinful. He gets it as a consequence of understanding who Jesus is. That's the Gospel according to Acts.

Core announcement: God has exalted Jesus to his right hand, he's all powerful, all glorious, and thus in charge of distributing God's Spirit!

Core problem: We hate Jesus, but he's in charge

Core response: Change allegiance from other gods, idols, magic, self-made religion to Jesus

Core result: Forgiveness, freedom, forgiving community, the Holy Spirit's power for holy living and mission

What is the Gospel according to Romans? Everyone is in trouble because everyone rebels against God (1-3). But God provided a solution for everyone while protecting his own reputation (4-5). He was faithful to his covenant with Israel and simultaneously proved himself to be Lord of everyone by sending Jesus in fulfillment of his promise to Abraham

²The four part skeleton gospel assured people that God had a wonderful plan for their lives, but it gave a false impression to unknowledgeable people. They were using "wonderful" to mean that Christian living, despite lots of difficulties, is better and has a better end result than non-Christian living. People assumed this meant "wonderful" according to normal definitions of that term (nice family, good retirement plan, ease, comfort). Jesus certainly offers a different "wonderful plan for your life" when he tells people to suffer their entire life as much as a guy does who gets whipped, beaten, and eventually lacerated and pegged to a cross. The language of the skeleton was a bit confusing for most people.

(9-11). He dealt with our rebellion by punishing Jesus as a rebel (even though he wasn't one). God exalted Jesus to his right hand thus giving him, and us, power to overcome the power of rebellion (6-8). If you want to get right with God then pledge allegiance to Jesus and admit that God elected him Lord of all (10:9-10; 1:1-4). In response he'll forgive you, join you with his people, and empower you with the Spirit to overcome sin. If you know that God hates how you're living, then stop it and ask God to help you live with the reality that Jesus truly is Lord of all.

Core announcement: Jesus is Lord of everyone!

Core problem: We reject God by not doing what is right (God's law), what we know intuitively is right (Gentiles), or what we've been told is right (Jews) and that means we're doomed to experience the curse of death.

Core response: Believe that Jesus is Lord of everyone, confess it with our mouths, and live by the power of the Spirit.

Core result: Peace with God, power to do what is right, assurance that God won't reject you, and a spot in God's family.

What is the Gospel according to Revelation? God deserves undivided devotion (4-5). He is judge and his judgment will be intense (6-20). Those who worship him will withstand the judgment (14:1-6); everyone else must immediately repent before it's too late (14:7; 9:20-21; 16:9-11). Those who courageously follow the Lamb in the midst of trial and tribulation will win with Jesus as he conquers Satan and his forces (21:7-8). God is judge, give him all the glory, turn from Satan's clutches toward the Lamb, and you will escape eternal torment. That's the Gospel according to Revelation.

Core announcement: All idols will be trashed because there's one true God who deserves all glory and who is finally bringing judgment on his opponents!

Core problem: We give glory to things that don't deserve it, and those things can't protect us when God opens up the seals of his wrath.

Core response: Repent, give glory to the only One that deserves it and endure courageously the persecution and tribulation which are coming (again, kind of an odd "wonderful plan for your life").

Core result: Life with God, escape from hell, and victory with Jesus over God's enemies

Hopefully you can see how easy it would be to weave gospel into everyday conversations if you freed yourself from the skeleton and embraced a biblical panoply. That's what I want to discuss now, the move from the skeleton to the elephant gospel.

The poet William Wordsworth said, "We murder to dissect" and that gets us to the core of the issue with the Gospel. In a scientific world when we want to study something, when we really want to understand and know it, we take it apart and analyze it. Like with frogs. When a scientist asks, "What's a frog?" he grabs a frog, cuts it open, and tells me that it has a heart, bones, veins, and muscles. But in order to do that he had to kill the frog. Does his description (heart, bones, veins, and muscles) really tell me what a frog is? Not at all. If I wanted a better understanding of a frog I'd go outside and find a frog in the wild. I'd stare at it in wonder and watch it catch a fly in mid-air with its tongue. Then I'd watch him hold his breath (do frogs hold their breaths?) and swim underwater. Then I'd watch him jump like twenty times his body length from one rock to another, effortlessly. I'd watch his big old pouch under his chin puff up with air and listen to the sound he makes when he wants to get jiggy with a female frog. That's a frog. Of course it has

bones, muscles, a heart, and veins. It has to live. But just looking at those things and describing them isn't the frog and doesn't tell me what froggishness is.

So we do the same thing with the gospel when we turn it into a four part skeleton. We murder it. We destroy its life. We steal its wonder. Sure, we're really describing some great truths but it's devoid of life a lot of times because it comes to us like a list of contents (one heart, four leg bones, 236 veins, etc.; God loves, you sin, Jesus died, believe). Have you really captured the essence of the gospel when you have distilled it down to its component parts and abstracted it from its life (namely, Jesus the man you love)? What would you think if you asked me "What's your wife like?" and I responded "she's 5'2", has two major bones in each leg, two working eyes, and I'm pretty sure she has a heart"? Is that describing my wife? Have I really captured her essence? If the gospel is really about a person, Jesus, and a relationship, me and Jesus, then my description should have life. Beyond that, if the gospel is really about something amazing and wonderful then my description of it should reflect that.

A holistic Gospel (the elephant gospel), a gospel which comes out of every corner and busts every problem up, opens windows and doors and amazes people with authentic life.

The Gospel is like an elephant. It's huge and powerful and it will save us from the cannibals that chase us. Imagine we live in the jungles of southern India. One day we are slowly sauntering around on our trusty elephant. Soon, out of the bushes, a tribe of cannibals confronts us. Our trusty steed immediately responds and begins running into the forest. We cut through a forest and his broad shoulders tear down the trees and save us by getting us away from the cannibals. As we flee them we run into a stream and the long legs save us by keeping our head above water. Suddenly the cannibals begin shooting arrows at us and we hide behind his big ears. Finally we run up against a cliff. We're stuck, we can't jump and we can't run back. We jump off the elephant and hide behind him. Our faithful friend turns to face the cannibals. He begins breathing heavily and glares at our enemies. Then he gets up on two legs and blows his trunk as loud as he can! The cannibals are freaked out and they run away leaving only soiled loin cloths. We're safe.

So what saves us? The elephant. Was it his big frame and broad shoulders? Yes. Was it his long legs? Yes. Was it his big floppy ears? Yes. Was it his enormous size, intimidating glare and trunk-bugle? Yes. Would it do justice to your elephant to tell people in the future "An elephant exists, cannibals want to kill you, the elephant can help you, so buy an elephant and you'll be safe"? Hardly. The gospel is bigger than a condensed four part skeletal statement. It's huge and alive. It comes with a story not only of concepts but of life and how it has worked in my life and others lives in different ways. After being saved by an elephant like that imagine that a person you don't know comes and says "what's your elephant like?" You respond, "well, I don't know, let's cut it open and find out." Wouldn't that be ridiculous? Wouldn't it be just as ridiculous to say, "Well an elephant exists, cannibals want to kill you, the elephant can help you, so buy an elephant and you'll be safe"? Wouldn't you instead say, "Let me tell you a story about how awesome this elephant is"?

Now let's connect this with the biblical expressions of the gospel. The Gospel is so much bigger, and fuller, and alive than a four part presentation. The problem we have is that our gospel is basically beyond full description so we have all these images and pictures from the NT that try to capture it but really are just angles on something beyond our comprehension. It'd be like trying to take a picture of an elephant while in your

bedroom. You'd squeeze up next to the wall and try to climb around it or lie on the ground or get on its back. You'd never get the whole thing but if you took enough pictures people would start to get the idea. Every picture would say, "This is true, but there's more." With every picture an onlooker would say, "wow that is really cool" but also "man what else is there about this thing that I can't see in this picture?" Each picture would be accurate and helpful without being comprehensive. A picture of his floppy ear wouldn't capture everything, but neither would a picture of his huge feet. The Gospel is huge and the Bible gives us many different pictures of it. It uses different words, themes, concepts, ideas, terms, phrases, stories, responses, and imagery to describe it. Each one is true without being comprehensive. Each one can tell you enough about the Gospel to convince you that you need it and, when you respond, is capable of bringing what God promises.

Living intentionally with an elephant gospel means that your experience of the gospel hits your core, seeps into every facet of your thinking and feeling, and spills out of your daily routine.

My problem is that I don't spend enough time meditating on the gospel. I get excited about teaching. I get excited about theology. But I don't meditate until the various ways of expressing the gospel hit me emotionally. The Puritans aimed for "experimental religion" which basically means you experience the gospel and talk about it emotionally because you feel it. That's what I need and that's what you need.

Bible College creates a problem for you. It creates a habit of rushing through deep theological truths and then moving on without letting them sink in. It's like trying to water your lawn. If you turn the water on for one minute each day your grass will die. If you turn it on for two minutes every other day the grass will die. But if you turn the water on for ten minutes every third day the water will have time to build momentum and sink into the soil. Otherwise the water just sits on the top of the blades and then evaporates once the sun comes out. You need the water to get to the roots. Bible College creates an unhealthy pattern for you. You learn about the entire doctrine of God in five weeks. Was that enough time for any of that to sink in? You learn about the Holy Spirit in less than that. Does it sink in? You need to be conscious of this and make lots of efforts while in school and once you're done to give yourself time to let things sink in.

So here's what I think you should do. Start anywhere in the NT. Begin with a book. Figure out what its gospel is. Then spend several months thinking, praying, talking, meditating, ruminating, sharing, and singing about how God expresses the gospel in that book. Then move to another book. Go through the NT by meditating on its great truths. The cross should hit you deeply; spending months thinking about it will get the truth into your core. Water your spiritual pots with the gospel until all the dirt is saturated and spills out the top. This paper has five gospel presentations that you could begin with.

Christians in America have trouble letting the gospel spill out of their lives because they don't first fill themselves up with it. They maybe only know about one presentation (Jesus saves you from hell by sacrifice) and opportunity to talk about that facet doesn't come up very often (how many conversations typically talk about hell or sacrifice?). Stretch yourself to the point that you have an emotional connection to forgiveness, reconciliation, conquering Satan, eternal life, knowing God, transferring allegiance, the glory of Christ, justification, propitiation, resurrection, the sacrificial system, and God's judgment. Those are ways of talking about gospel that will come up in regular conversation. I'm working on this right now with forgiveness.

Stories of living intentionally from people who spill Gospel

When you feel the Gospel and the Gospel hits all areas of your life, then evangelism isn't an event it's a lifestyle. If the Gospel tells me more than "sin separates me from God and Jesus died as my substitute punishment" then it begins to enter more conversations and situations. When it seeps into your core and you have an emotional connection with it then it comes out with a smile and excitement and you can't help but let it flow.

Donna's story shows that when someone really gets the gospel and feels it, evangelizing is easy not awkward. Tammy's had several bouts with rotten guys that mistreat her. At a baby shower Tammy (a non-believer) spilled her guts to Donna about the latest episode. He mistreated her plenty, even though he didn't abuse her physically he really hurt her feelings. She's dejected. So Donna told Tammy that she'd pray for her that she'd find a guy that loves her and cherishes her. With tears in her eyes, Tammy says, "But I don't deserve a guy like that." Donna responds, "But that's just the point, God gives us things we don't deserve." Tammy already recognized part of the Gospel story; her condition (her being, actions, whatever) told her that she was unworthy of anything good. Donna talked about grace (goodness undeserved) and Tammy was humbled to the point of tears. *That's the Gospel according to Ephesians.*

Later in the day Donna talked to Tammy's daughter, Melinda. Melinda follows her mom's example and picks awful guys. "What's this new guy like?" Well he's good looking. "And....?" Well, he's really good looking and so I like that. Donna responds, is he self-absorbed? Yeah, kind of. Donna brings the gospel, "Becca if you don't find a guy that thinks of God above all others then you'll never have a relationship where someone thinks of you more than they think of themselves. You need someone who thinks of God as being of first importance. That way you'll not be ignored or be an idol. You don't want to be either because the first option makes you insignificant, the second makes you too important and you can never meet expectations. You want him idolizing God, cherishing you, and humbly thinking of himself." This is the Gospel of the glory of God. In proper perspective God's glory gets us right with him and reorients our relationships so that they'll actually work. *That's the Gospel according to 2 Corinthians and Revelation*

Donna's husband, Bob, had prostate cancer two years ago. He went to UCLA medical several times and got to know the doctors and nurses pretty well. On the first visit they told him that he had cancer, that it was aggressive, and that it was potentially fatal. Very drastic action would be needed if his life was going to be saved. He believed them but got a second opinion and their diagnosis was confirmed. A few weeks later they performed very aggressive surgery and got it out. For six weeks he laid in bed in pain but the doctors reassured him that the cancer was gone and he would now live a healthy life. Bob saw the obvious connection to the gospel. He had won their hearts by being kind and generous and respectful during the entire ordeal. He had mentioned his prayer life and faith and several Christian friends had shown up during the process to comfort and pray for him. Now he took his opportunity. He wrote the doctor a letter. He said, I want to thank you for what you have done. I have to admit that I see a strong similarity between what you have done and what I do on a regular basis. I came in a few months ago and you told me that I had a life threatening problem and that I would die if I didn't do something about it. I couldn't see the cancer, but you told me it was there. I believed you. Then a few weeks later we did something major and now you tell me it's gone and I'm healthy again. Personally I can't tell the difference nor can I actually check to see if you're lying, I just believe you. Now I need to tell you something. You have a life threatening condition as well. God calls it sin but you can think of it as rebellion, idolatry, or

breaking his law. You may not see it, but trust me it's there. There's a surgery that can be done to fix your problem and I've been used by God to help people in the process many times. I've seen great results. If you undergo this surgery you can be healed and you'll have a long and healthy life with God, but if you don't then you'll die from your condition. Do you believe me? *That's the gospel according to Romans.*

On Sunday I spoke with a man on the airplane home from North Carolina who told me that all religions are basically saying the same thing. Same story, different angle. All "variations on the same theme," is what he said. So he talked and talked about how they believe in a higher power, and good and bad, they all want peace and love, and are concerned about the afterlife. So he proposed his solution, we need tolerance and by tolerance I mean that every religion should just admit that it is only a point of view and no one should try to convert others to that view.

I asked him a few questions. 1) What is the relationship between religion and reality? What is the relationship between what religions say, in their scriptures and sermons, and what is spiritually actually there? 2) What do you personally believe about God? I know you like to study religion from a distant and examine it "scientifically" and you think its "fascinating" but do you believe God exists and what can you say about him? Both answers were the same, "all variations on the same theme." There's a higher power, good and bad, peace and love, afterlife. So basically you can't say anything?

Then he accidentally trapped himself. "I mean, no one can know for sure because [according to my scientific presupposition about knowledge] no one has gone to the other side and come back to tell us what God's like." I responded, "Except for one. That's exactly what Jesus claimed to do. He claimed to come from God to earth and then he died, spent time in the spiritual world, and then returned to tell us about it. As a lapsed Catholic are you saying you don't believe in the resurrection. Didn't he really do it? Can't we trust his opinion?" The guy didn't want to answer the question with a "no" but he was afraid of the implications of a "yes". *That's the Gospel according to John.*

On Monday I was talking to a guy I play volleyball with who's a sheriff. He goes out on nuclear task forces to save my life. "What do you do?" he asks. I'm a pastor. "Oh so you save lives, too." Yeah, the danger isn't always as visible to people but its just as real and actually a lot worse than nuclear holocaust. I didn't close the deal. I planted the seed. I talked about hell in a very natural way because it came up. Judgment, death, and awful things that await humans were a topic of conversation already. I didn't have to switch us from talking about sunshine and lollipops to ripping our eyes out in anguish. *That's the Gospel according to Revelation and 2 Peter.*

People these days are in and out of prison a lot; it's a lot more common than it used to be. Justification makes sense to them. You are guilty and you know it but what if there was a way to get you off the hook? I tell them the story of my friend John. John needed pain killers for headaches. Soon that turned into a need for marijuana, then cocaine. Eventually he tried to break the addictions and asked a doctor for a super prescription of pain killers. He wouldn't give it, so John snuck in after hours, forged a prescription, and got caught. Four felonies. Life in prison. He was cuffed, fingerprinted, etc. and told to come back for trial. He showed up for trial and they said, "John who? You're not on our list." He called his lawyer, "if you believe in God now is the time to thank him, you must have fallen through the cracks; it looks like they lost your paperwork." He's completely free. No record. No condemnation. But now in gratitude to God he had better never risk breaking the law again. *That's the Gospel according to Romans.*

I'll list out a few more for you:

Rich kids hate their parents usually, it would be easy to talk about idolatry with them and how they become like the idols they serve (Ps 135) but it might be more appropriate to talk about the heavenly father and a new family (Mark 2).

Meth addicts live self-destructive lives. The thief only comes to kill, steal, and destroy. He's a liar who tells you that meth is great when in reality it has ruined you. Reject the devil and turn to Jesus (John 8, 10; Mark). You want eternal life? Believe Jesus, love like he loves and he'll give you overflowing life.

Santeria, Wicca, Native American religion, and idolatrous Buddhism are all on the rise. I tell the story of rival powers and Christ's supremacy. If they're caught and need freedom I tell them that Jesus can release them. He has all authority. *That's the gospel according to Colossians and Mark.*

There are more idols than just chubby little laughing guys you can buy at Pottery Barn or Restoration Hardware. Idols of the heart steal glory from God and give it to something worthless. I tell them about false gods and empty saviors that can't really do anything for them. I tell them that money, sex, power, fame, love, marriage, romance, excitement, and adrenaline are all secondary things that shouldn't be treated like they're primary. Only God is primary (Revelation; 2 Cor 4; 1 John; Colossians 3:5).

Sometimes, Jesus does something great in life and you just let people know without needing an introduction to it. How's your day? "You know what, it's frickin awesome." Really? Why? "This guy came to our church last week. He's into white power, has five felonies on his record, is hooked on heroine, tried to commit suicide twice in the last year, and was in jail from age 13-18. He broke down and surrendered to Jesus. Now he's a completely different guy; honestly you wouldn't believe it if you saw him." Like Paul on his way to Damascus, you proclaim Jesus first and then let knowledge of sin come out as a realization. I may preach the gospel just by telling someone how great Jesus is. Love this guy! Then later I can tell them how to love him.

If the Gospel in its fullness and strength and power and life penetrates your soul and becomes a part of your emotional self then evangelizing won't be an activity it will be a lifestyle. You won't "work at" evangelism, instead you'll pray for boldness and opportunities. You'll see more and more opportunities and they'll be natural not forced.

Very Practical Advice

Here are a few ideas to chew on. Basically all I'm saying is be visible, make friends, be a normal human that wants to interact with others. Emotionally connect with the Gospel and then pray that you'll live intentionally. You'll naturally evangelize.

Join an existing club or group (rather than making your own): Christians used to have success inviting people to parties, having fun game nights or attractional events, or telling people there was a seminar, concert, skate contest, etc. that others could come and watch. They might create a bike club, band, hiking group, surf camp, ballet company, rock climbing gym, or whatever and have lots of success inviting people to join. None of this is bad and in fact I would greatly encourage you to do these things. But we're called "salt" of the earth, we're supposed to be purifying and preserving decaying meat, and to me starting a club of salt and then inviting a little meat to join distorts the picture. If you've got a jar of salt (hundreds of Christians) and you invite one small piece of meat to join (a non-Christian) you're going to have some nasty meat. So join an already existing group (meat) and be salt in it. There are lots of clubs (bikes, camping, surfing, poetry, Renaissance fair, Pokemon, World of Warcraft, etc.) full of decaying meat for you to help. People already throw concerts, game nights, seminars, skate contests, and parties.

Don't waste your time and energy putting one together. Instead just go and show how Jesus would respond. Make friends.

If you need friends according to affinity then don't make them Christian friends: Affinity means you have something in common that you both like. As Christians we have the natural affinity of Jesus so we don't have to have anything else (like skateboarding or guitar playing or website construction) in common to have real friendship. But we do need something shallow like that to make friends with non-Christians. So get your fix of affinity friends from people that you don't share the most important affinity (Jesus) with. If you love biking then go outside and start biking until you meet people. If you love volleyball go to a local gym (not your church gym!) and play. If you love poetry then find a poetry club and start loving it. Make friends through natural affinity and bring them to Christ. Show them what Jesus thinks about your shared affinity. Go alone to these things. That makes you vulnerable and I've found it more likely that you'll make friends if you're alone.

Be intentionally visible in your neighborhood. I go on a walk around the neighborhood at least once a day if not twice. I pray for my neighbors and I randomly get to know them. Yesterday I met Matt (whose hilarious kids were really smart) and Maxine (whose response to seeing a Bible in my hand was "praise the Lord" and we had some good fellowship). Walk or ride your bike to places. Go outside often and be seen. Do your homework with other people. If you want to hang with friends don't cloister yourself in your apartment or at EBC but find a public place.

Build routines in your life that help you develop friendships. Go to the same grocery store so you see the same clerks and customers. Go to the same restaurants so you see the same hosts, servers, and managers. Surf the same spots, skate the same parks, dance at the same clubs, smoke at the same tobacco shops, drink at the same bars. I know it's pushing the limits but some of you may have the maturity to be intentional at a tobacco shop or bar. Here's my suggestion. Go alone. If you go with friends then you'll just spend the whole time talking about how "other Christians would think this is so wrong, and aren't we so cool." That's not the point. The point is, hurting people drink away their sorrows and you can help them. If you're alone you're less intimidating and will be forced to talk to other people. Don't choose "Christian" coffee shops, restaurants, clubs, or shops if you don't have to. Be friendly and nice.

When hanging around Christians change your tone and your vocabulary. Get in the habit of speaking like non-Christians are around and pretty soon they'll feel comfortable around you. If some dork among you keeps cracking Bible College theology inside jokes no one will come inside. If you keep your appreciation for grace and forgiveness fresh then people who need grace and forgiveness will sense that they fit in.

Develop a new hobby that requires help or instruction from someone else. When you do this ask a non-Christian for help. It puts you in a position of humility and that's a great posture for sharing the Gospel.

Swap stories and build excitement about what God's doing. When you have a great story to tell about the gospel then tell it and ask others to share theirs. Get excited about what's happening. I often retell stories, some are kind of outdated, just to remind myself of how exciting it is to live with a purpose. Going to junior college is boring; going into a hostile environment with the express purpose of sharing the gospel is exciting. Walking around the neighborhood is boring. Walking around asking God to open doors to speak truth into someone's life is exciting. Going to Starbucks is so repetitive, but repeatedly going in order to build friendships with baristas so you can lead them to Christ is exciting. Living intentionally makes the mundane very exciting.