

“Becoming a Contagious Christian”

John 4:32-36 ¹

What’s the first image that comes to your mind when you hear the word “evangelism”? For many of us, “evangelism” stirs feelings of perplexity, guilt, embarrassment, and similar negative emotions.

I also expect that many, if not most, sermons you’ve heard on this subject have left you feeling more discouraged and guilty than anything else. My goal this morning is to enable you to leave this service *eager* for an opportunity to be an evangelist!

The truth of the matter is that “evangelism” is nothing more than the Greek word for “good news”; and “evangelists” are persons who bring good news. The idea of evangelism is that once I know the Good News—that God loves me, forgives me, and has a purpose and plan for my life—then God intends for me to tell other people about what I’ve discovered. As it’s sometimes put, “Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.”

Think about it this way. Do you have a hard time talking to other people about your favorite ball team? Your favorite hobby? Your favorite recipe? Your grandchildren? Of course you don’t! If your life in Christ *really* is the wonderful, transforming, purpose-giving, fear-eliminating, deeply joyful experience that we say it is on Sunday mornings, then it really shouldn’t be hard to talk about.

If you want your spiritual life to take on new luster, new adventure, and new power, then take the time to learn how to tell someone how to be “born again” so that you’ll be able to do that the next time God gives you that opportunity. Those opportunities will come, and that’s what we’re going to learn this morning. If you stay awake for the next few minutes, you’ll know pretty much everything you need to know in order to begin this adventure.

The basic outline that describes how to be born again has only four points, and all of them can be found in John 3:16. They are: God’s Purpose; Our Problem; God’s Provision; Our Decision. Would you say those with me? **God’s Purpose, Our Problem, God’s Provision, Our Decision.**

God’s Purpose is that *every person* receives the gift of eternal life, purchased on Calvary’s Cross (John 3:16); but **Our Problem** is that Sin prevents our receiving this gift (Romans 6:23). **God’s Provision** is the sacrificial death of His Son to remove our Sin (Romans 5:8); and eternal life is granted upon **Our Decision** to acknowledge our need and to ask for God’s transforming forgiveness (Romans 10:9-10). That’s not complicated, is it? You already know a lot of passwords and phone numbers that are more complicated than this.

Explaining these four things in the context of our own personal experience is called “giving witness” or “giving testimony” to what God has done for us. Witnessing is not preaching or “button-holing.” Witnessing is not debating. Witnessing is telling others what has happened to us in an attitude of prayerful respect and care: “*Once I was blind, but now I can see!*” (John 9:25).

Before we look at these four things together, I want to review the “Six Principles for Sharing Your Faith” that appear at the top of the handout in your worship bulletin. These six principles should help you feel more relaxed about this whole enterprise:

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on May 17, 2015.

1. **The Principle of Responsibility:** One of the best things about faith sharing is that you and I are not responsible for the outcome. *The work of salvation is the work of the Holy Spirit* (John 16:8). You and I give witness to what we ourselves have experienced, but it's the Holy Spirit who causes persons to open their hearts to forgiveness and new life in Jesus.
2. **The Principle of Respect:** Peter reminded us to share our faith in a gentle and respectful way (1 Peter 3:15). Faith sharing is not about arguing or debating. Faith sharing is about simply describing what God *has done* and *is doing in our own lives*. And because every person has been created in the Image of God, every person is worthy of our respect, no matter what they seem to be doing with their lives at the moment.
3. **The Principle of Loading the Heart Drive:** One of the very best things we can do to prepare ourselves to share our faith is to spend daily time studying God's Word. If we have taken the time to "hide God's Word in our hearts" (Psalm 119:11), then God's promise to us is that God's Spirit "*will teach [us] what needs to be said even as [we] are standing there*" (Luke 12:12). All we have to do is ask.
4. **The Principle of a Clear Spirit:** Jesus expects us to live our lives "*in a way that God would consider worthy*" (1 Thessalonians 2:12). One thing that prevents many Christians from telling others about their faith is that we allow things in our lives that we know are wrong—or are less than we know God expects from us. It really is possible to live with a "clear spirit," and that makes sharing our faith a great deal easier and much more effective.²
5. **The Principle of Current Experience:** A woman was sharing in prayer meeting about how wonderfully God had saved her many years ago, saying that "my cup runneth over." After she sat down, a young voice was heard to say, "And I'll bet her cup has wiggle tails in it, too." The point was that ancient, stagnant testimony is not very persuasive. What is God doing in your life today? What things has God been teaching you recently? Those are the things that will support effective witness.
6. **The Principle of Spiritual Breathing:** As you see on the handout, "spiritual breathing" involves silently asking God—in the very moment of spiritual conversation—to cleanse our hearts and make us useful instruments for the Spirit's work. We "exhale" our sin, "inhale" God's forgiveness and guidance, and trust that God will accomplish what the opportunity requires.

Having these principles in the back of our minds, let's look briefly at "God's Purpose," "Our Problem," "God's Provision," and "Our Decision." This is really not complex at all

1. **God's Purpose:** The simplest place to begin is with John 3:16, a verse that nearly everyone will have heard, or at least heard of, thanks to the colorful "John 3:16" fellow at sporting events on TV. This one verse can also be used to share God's basic plan for our salvation. There are many other verses that can be used, but *John 3:16 is enough*. The point to be made with John 3:16 is that God is for us, not against us (as Jeremiah 29:11 also points out), and that **GOD LOVES US**. God wants good things for us, just as we want good things for our own children and for our friends.

² Psalm 51:15 reminds us that sin seals our lips; 1 John 1:9 reminds us that forgiveness is available; 1 Corinthians 10:13 reminds us that God gives us strength to conquer temptation.

2. **Our Problem:** Though God gives many wonderful gifts to persons who are not yet God's spiritual children, we humans don't experience the most important gift God has to give—God's own Self, in personal, intimate soul friendship—on our own. In fact, John 3:16 points out that, left to ourselves, our sin will cause us to “perish,” both in time and in eternity, and there's not a thing that we ourselves can do about that.
3. **God's Provision:** John 3:16 tells us that the Cross of Jesus is a bridge—the only bridge, in fact—by which we can travel back to God across the chasm created by our sin.³ In ways beyond our understanding, Jesus has purchased our forgiveness, and He beckons us to come home to God.
4. **Our Decision:** Finally, John 3:16 tells us that by believing in Jesus—turning from our sin and placing our faith in Him alone—we receive eternal life. The Bible says that “**Anyone** who calls on the name of the Lord **will be saved**” (Romans 10:13). Anyone . . . will be saved. Those are categorical statements. They are guarantees.

One of my favorite verses is John 5:24, where Jesus told us, “*I assure you, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me **have eternal life** [PRESENT TENSE]. They **will never be condemned** for their sins [FUTURE TENSE], but they **have already passed from death into life** [PAST TENSE].*” We are redeemed, past, present, and future. Now that's Good News!

Having briefly explained these four points, simply ask two questions to the person with whom you are talking: “**Does this make sense to you?**” and “**Is there any reason you would not want God to do this in your life?**” Don't exert pressure, but do give a clear opportunity for response, remembering that *conversion is God's work, not ours*. Our role is to share our faith in the power of God's Spirit, leaving the results to God.

As the handout notes, there are no magic words by which to ask for God's forgiveness. The main points are to ask for God's *forgiveness*, to thank God for honoring that request and granting *pardon*, and to ask for God's *guidance* in living in the Way of Jesus. Since many persons do not yet know how to pray, one easy way to go about this is for you to offer a brief prayer of this sort phrase by phrase, letting your friend follow you in the fashion of the wedding vows, or you can prompt her as she uses her own words. Where it's possible, I usually ask persons to kneel with me while we pray this prayer for forgiveness.

If your friend chooses to trust God's promise and to ask for forgiveness and New Life in Christ, then you'll have the joy of participating in a miracle of birth far more wonderful than that which happens in hospital birthing rooms. Hospital births bring persons into *time*; spiritual births take them into *eternity*.

There are three things to talk about after such a wonderful moment, if time is available (these things are also discussed in the “Your Life” brochure). **First**, point out that your friend has placed his or her faith in the fact of God's promises, given in the Bible, and that God has honored this request as God said He would. I usually go over John 5:24 at this point, too. The

³ In John 14:6, Jesus told us that He is the only way back to God. Many folks chafe at this. The exclusivity of the claim challenges our pride. The situation, though, is that these are Jesus' own words to us. The requirement of being born again (John 3:3) is not ours, but His. The question, then, is really this: *Who is Jesus?* There are only three answers to that question. There are only three options if a person claims to be God, as Jesus clearly did: (1) that person is insane; (2) that person is lying; (3) that person is telling the truth. Each of us has to study the record of Jesus' life given in the Gospels to decide which of these three is the case.

fact of the matter is that your friend may or may not feel any differently after accepting God's forgiveness, but the point is not feeling. The *point* is God's promise.

Second, either at this time or very soon after, tell your friend how important it is to obey Jesus' command to be baptized and to join a local community of believers—a church. Baptism is not the last act of salvation, but it is one of our first acts of obedience, sort of like putting on a military uniform, publicly identifying with the people of God. And every newborn needs the loving environment of a family in which to be nurtured and to grow. God's family is found in the local church.

Finally, ask your friend to think of someone who would rejoice with him or her about what they have just experienced, and encourage your friend to tell that person about this new birth just as soon as possible! Such sharing helps to solidify commitment, and it provides good encouragement for new beginnings. You might also ask who they know who needs to experience what they have just experienced. New believers make extraordinarily effective evangelists!

So there you have it: “God's Purpose,” “Our Problem,” “God's Provision,” and “Our Decision.” Let's say them together once more: **God's Purpose, Our Problem, God's Provision, Our Decision.**

Finally, I'd like to talk with you for a moment about the graphic at the end of the handout, the one with all the circles.⁴ The central circle represents ourselves, and it is there that we must begin with *clarity* about our own faith experience. We move outward through the next six circles through *commitment* to the Great Commission, *confidence* about how to present the Gospel, and *concern* for those who do not yet know the Lord.

Circle 2 represents our immediate family, however we define that group. As you reflect on the persons in this circle of your life this week, ask God to impress you with the name of a person in that circle. Begin to pray for this person, and begin to pray for God to give you an opportunity to talk with him or her about spiritual things.

Then move prayerfully through Circles 3-6, again asking God to impress you with particular names, and beginning to pray for these persons. “Person X” in Circle 7 refers to people we don't know but encounter along the way, such as persons in stores, at meetings, at ball games, or on airplanes. Begin to pray that God will arrange divine appointments with Circle 7 persons in your life.

One of the really neat things about these circles is that the circles of our lives overlap, and as you and I bring one person after another to the Lord, God's Kingdom does indeed “come on earth as it is in heaven”! Here's how to start: Ask yourself what you already love to do. What are you already involved in? What excites you? What are you passionate about? Do those things for the glory of God by finding people who like to do those things and loving them.

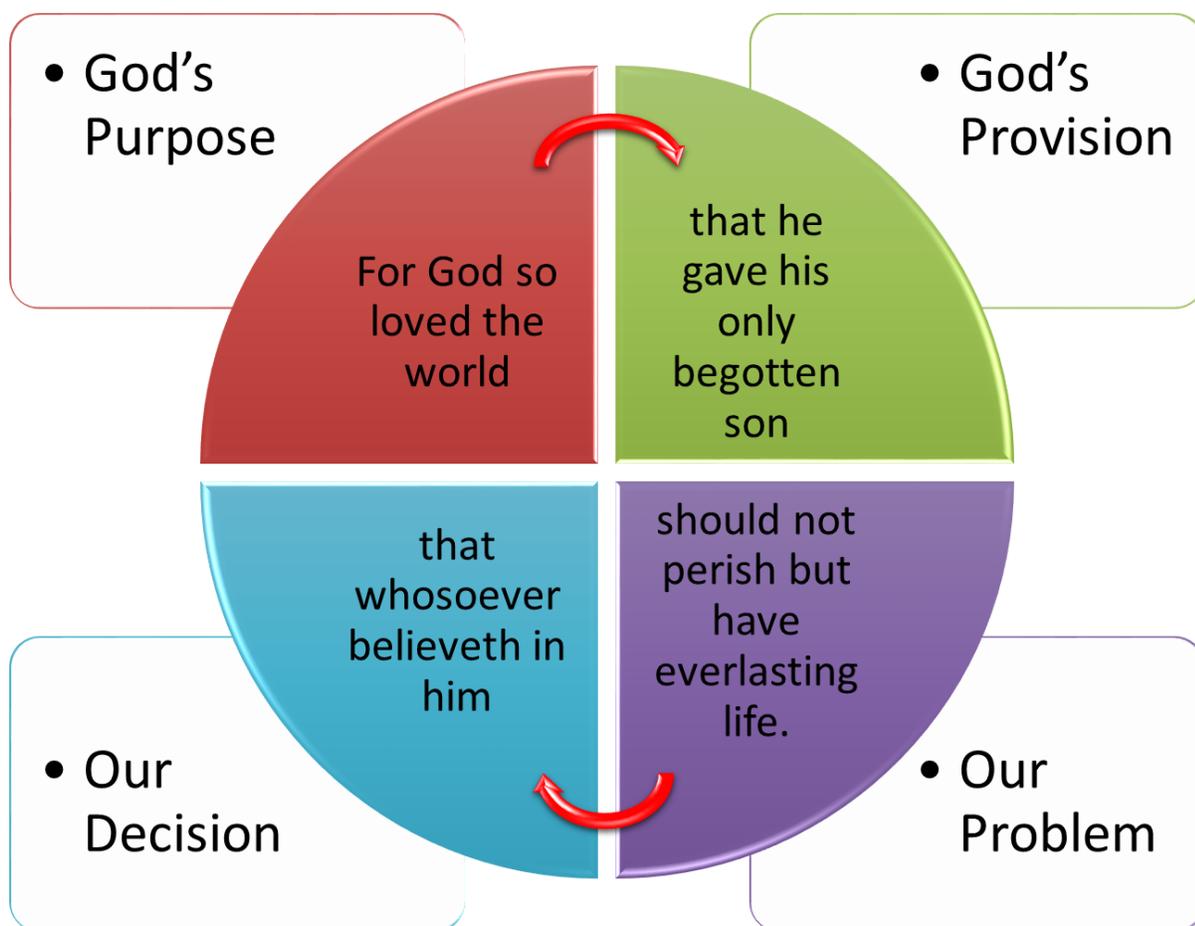
Did you get that? Being an evangelist doesn't involve more meetings at church. Evangelism has to do with Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, quilting clubs, bridge clubs, golf clubs, bowling leagues, soccer teams, bicycles and kayaks—all kinds of fun stuff. The important thing is to spend time with people who aren't already Christians . . . on purpose.

And things get even better than this. Jesus told us, “*Truly I tell you, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive **a hundred times as much** in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life* (Mark 10:29-30).

⁴ The idea for these circles comes from Oscar Thompson, Jr. *Concentric Circles of Concern*.

Do you know how much “a hundred times over” is? That’s 10,000 percent. **Ten thousand percent!!!** Where else are you going to get such a return on your investment? I can tell you: *nowhere*. This is the best deal in the Cosmos!

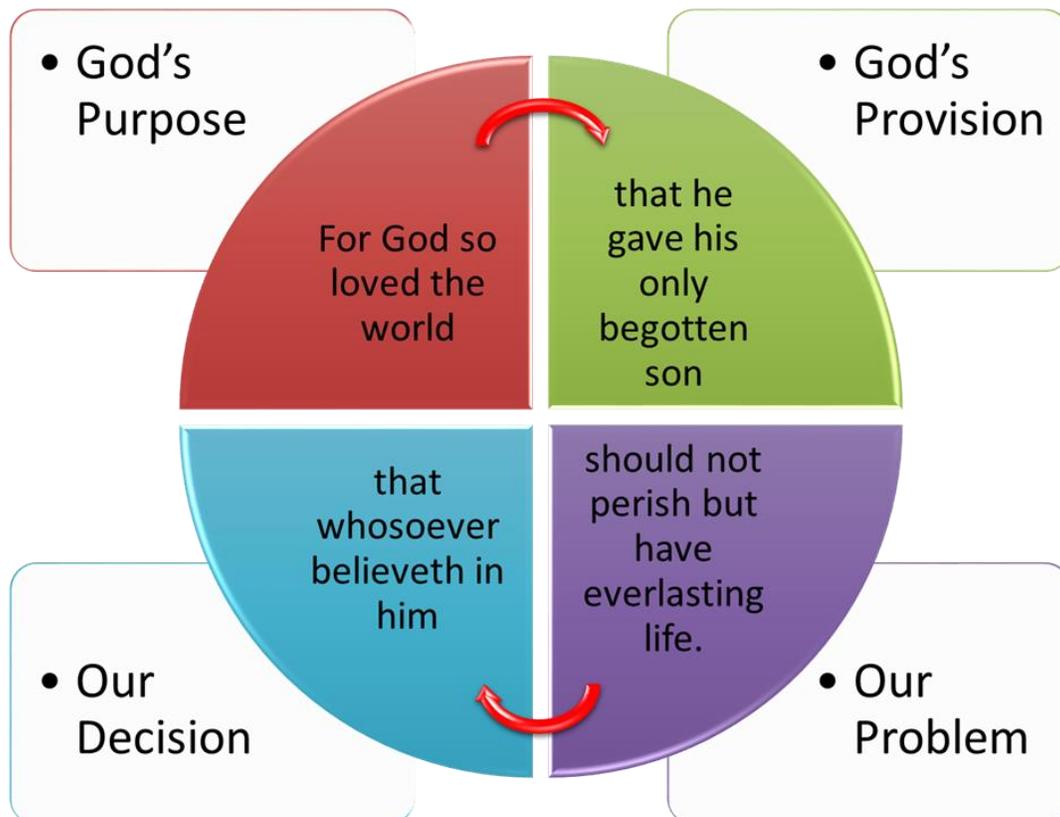
Tell the Good News, my friends! Tell the Good News!



Can You Tell Me How I Can Become A Christian?

❖ SIX PRINCIPLES FOR SHARING YOUR FAITH

1. **The Principle of Responsibility**: The work of salvation is the work of the Holy Spirit. We give witness to what we ourselves have experienced, but it is the Holy Spirit who causes persons to open their hearts to Jesus (John 16:8).
2. **The Principle of Respect**: Because every person is created in God's image, whenever we speak of Jesus to others, we speak with respect, with clarity, and with love (Genesis 1:26-27).
3. **The Principle of "Loading the Heart Drive"**: The Bible tells us to "hide God's Word in our hearts" so that we will understand God's purposes (Psalm 119:11; Deuteronomy 6:4-7; Psalm 19:7-14).
4. **The Principle of a Clear Spirit**: By God's grace, we live our lives in ways consistent with the Gospel, so that we are not ashamed of our testimony. We "walk the walk" (Colossians 1:10).
5. **The Principle of Current Experience**: "You must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if you are asked about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it" (1 Peter 3:15).
6. **The Principle of Spiritual Breathing** (from Bill Bright):
 - **"Exhale"**: "But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong" (1 John 1:9)
 - **"Inhale"**: "let the Holy Spirit fill and control you" (Ephesians 5:18)
 - **Trust God**: If we are faithful students of the Word, "the Holy Spirit will teach you what needs to be said even as you are standing there" (Luke 12:12).



1. “Does this make sense to you?”
2. “Is there any reason you wouldn’t want God to do this in your life?”

❖ Don't pressure, but do give a clear opportunity to respond. Conversion is God's work.

Prayer of Invitation, “The Sinner’s Prayer”

(There is really no one version of this prayer—these are not “magic words.” Use words that fit what you have talked about together. Even better, prompt them as they use their own words.)

Dear God, thank you that you love me, and that you have paid the debt for my sin. I agree with you that I have sinned and am in need of your forgiveness. I ask you to forgive me of my sin, to cleanse my heart, to make me your child, and to begin to remake my life so that I will become more like Jesus. Guide me through your Holy Spirit as I discover the purpose you have for my life. Thank you for saving me! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

❖ After the prayer:

1. Emphasize that faith is anchored in God's promises, not in our feelings. Sometimes people feel significant emotion after a prayer of repentance; sometimes they don't.
 - Emphasize Jesus' promise to the new believer: “I assure you, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life [**PRESENT TENSE**]. They will never be condemned for their sins [**FUTURE TENSE**], but they have already passed from death into life” [**PAST TENSE**] (John 5:24).
2. Talk about the importance of baptism (Matthew 28:19-20) & church membership (Acts 2:47; Hebrews 10:23-25) for growing faith.
3. Encourage immediate witness: Who can you tell about your decision who will rejoice with you? Who do you know who needs to find what you have found?

