

## SHARING Your Story and God's Story: 6 Small Group Sessions on Evangelism

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# DEVELOPING A HEART OF COMPASSION

**E**vangelism is a weird word and a scary thing to do for most Christians. Just about every Christian I've talked with feels uneasy about talking to others about God's plan through Jesus Christ. As you begin a book on evangelism, it would be normal if you had many fears, questions, and experiences rattling through your brains.

Some may fear that evangelism means learning Bible verses and knocking on doors to convert strangers. Others may have concerns about the difficult questions non-Christians will ask: *What's the deal with evolution? If God is loving, why do bad things happen to good people? Why don't marshmallows grow on trees?* Some in your group may have had previous negative experiences trying to share their faith and just don't want to do it again. I know exactly how you feel. I've been there too.

It's my prayer that as you discuss evangelism you'll learn it isn't about trying to convert strangers with memorized tactics. God is the one who changes lives—that's his job. Your privilege, as a Christian, is to develop friendships with others and through a series of stories gently guide them to the God who loves them more than you can imagine. Your "job" is to do what's possible while having faith that God will do the impossible—transform a life. You can do your part!

A healthy discussion of evangelism begins with the "why question." Why evangelism? The Bible provides answers, and as we pursue them we're going to start with developing a biblical understanding of God's awesome love for people. God's love is so different from human love that it can change a life. Human love can influence a life, but God's love can transform a heart, which will redirect a life. And the wild thing about God's transforming love is that he can do it with any life, no matter how bad it might be. Even the worst are within reach of God's love. You might consider someone out of God's reach. God doesn't, and he might choose you to reach them. You never know! Let the journey begin.



# FELLOWSHIP: CONNECTING Your Heart to Others'

[goal: to have students share about their lives and listen attentively to others]

Few people come to Christ without any human assistance. Most people can point back to at least one person who shined some light on Christ, Christianity, or a lifestyle that was an influential witness to living God's way.

**1** Who is the person who most influenced your commitment to follow Jesus? How did this person impact your life? (Remember to keep your response brief so everyone will have a chance to share.)

**2** Do you think many of your non-Christian friends are open to having spiritual conversations? Explain why or why not. Do you find it difficult to talk about God with others? Why do you think that is?

If there are people in your small group who are new to the Christian faith, they should be encouraged to reread page 21 to make sure they understand our working definition of evangelism so they'll be prepared to engage in the upcoming discussions.

If you haven't discussed the **Small Group Covenant** on page 92, take time to read it together and discuss it now. Make commitments to one another that your group time will reflect those values. You may want to have one person read the covenant to the group before you begin each lesson as a reminder.

Use the **Small Group Roster** (page 94) to record the names and contact information of the small group members.



## DISCIPLESHIP: GROWING to Be Like Jesus

[goal: to explore God's Word, learn biblical knowledge, and make personal applications]

Sharing the good news about salvation through faith in Jesus—evangelism—begins with a very distinct attitude or condition of one's heart. It's called compassion. Compassion is the attitude that recognizes the true spiritual condition and needs of people. We are lost and without hope. The following passage reveals the compassion of our model, Jesus.



<sup>35</sup>Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. <sup>36</sup>When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup>Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. <sup>38</sup>Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

—Matthew 9:35-38

Terms that look like this are described in **Learn a Little More** near the end of the session.

4  
What do you think made a bigger impact on the crowds, Jesus' teaching or his miracles? Explain why you think so.

5  
What's the difference between feeling sorry for someone and feeling compassion for him?

6  
Since the crowds had the teaching and wisdom of Jesus, how could they be "harassed and helpless" and "without a shepherd?" Wasn't Jesus their shepherd?

7  
Would you consider yourself to be a compassionate person? Why do you think that?

8  
Is it possible to be too compassionate? Explain.

9  
What are some common obstacles people must overcome to be more compassionate?



10 What would a compassionate person look like in your everyday life (at home, at school, in sports, on the job...)?

11 Why does Jesus say that the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few? Does this mean some people won't be harvested because there are too few workers? What are the implications of your answer to this question?

12 What's the ultimate destiny for those without faith in Jesus? When you think about specific people you know, how do you feel?

13 If you fail to share the gospel with someone, does this mean it's your fault if he or she never makes a commitment of faith in Jesus? Explain your answer.



## MINISTRY: SERVING Others in Love

[goal: to recognize and take opportunities to serve others]

As you develop a heart for those living without Christ, it helps to understand the needs of others.

14 If God's efforts to bring people into his kingdom are not limited by our human efforts, why should we concern ourselves with being evangelistic?

What are the basic needs of the people who live within your community?  
What about the needs of those within your school community? What are  
the needs of unbelievers?

In what practical ways can you begin to meet those needs?



## EVANGELISM: ~~SHARING~~ Your Story and God's Story

[goal: to consider how the truths from this lesson might be applied  
to relationships with unbelievers]

Having compassion for others isn't something that comes naturally to most of us. When God lives within your heart, you'll begin to see others in the way God sees them. That's one of the goals of being a follower of Jesus—to be more like him.

In an attempt to develop a heart for non-Christians, it's good to begin thinking of those you know who don't have a relationship with God. When they're on your mind, they'll begin to make their way into your heart.

**"NO WAY!"** Make two lists. In the first list write names of public figures—people you don't know personally (actors, athletes, teachers, politicians...)—about whom you assume by their lifestyle that they probably don't have a relationship with God.

In the second list write names of people you know personally who are the type of people who cause you to think, "No way is that person a Christian. I don't think this person would want anything to do with Jesus." (Think through different areas of your life: school, family, neighborhood, work, sports teams...)

PUBLIC FIGURES



## PERSONAL ACQUAINTANCES

(You may want to use initials or code names if your book might be read by others.)

What are you currently doing to develop friendships with those people?

At the beginning of small groups such as this one, you should decide whether your group is open to inviting friends to join. If your group is open, list who you would like to invite and make plans for talking with them. Your small group leader or your leadership team may have already determined the group is closed at this time. If so, a good group respects and follows that decision. You may be able to invite friends to join you in the next LIFE TOGETHER book.

**Read How to Keep Your Small Group from Becoming a Clique (page 96)**  
when you're at home.

Pray for the people in your second list above.

You'll find three prayer resources in the back of the book. By reading and discussing them, you'll find your group prayer time more rewarding.

- **Praying in Your Small Group** (page 126). Read this on your own before the next session.
- **Prayer Request Guidelines** (page 128). Read and discuss these guidelines as a group.
- **Prayer Options** (page 130). Refer to this list for ideas to give your prayer time variety.

Before your group breaks, read **At Home This Week** together. (If everyone in the group has already done this in another LIFETOGETHER book, you can skip the introduction if you'd like.)



## WORSHIP: SURRENDERING Your Life to Honor God

[goal: to focus on God's presence]

Compassion for others seems to flow from those who have a growing and intimate relationship with Jesus...the True Shepherd. Typically you'll discover that your evangelistic efforts will increase as your faith grows stronger. When you're most connected to Jesus is when you'll be most sensitive to seeing others connect to God.

Have each person share one specific way the others in the group can pray for them. This is a time to write down prayer requests on the **Prayer Request Log** (page 132). Pray for one another that this small group time will help you grow in your relationship with God and that you'll learn more about what it means to care for the lost sheep in your world.

# AT HOME THIS WEEK

Each week, you'll have at least four options to help you grow and learn on your own—which means you'll have more to contribute when you return to the group.

## Daily Bible Readings

On page 108 you'll find **Daily Bible Readings**, a chart of Bible passages that correspond with the lessons—five for each week. If you choose this option, read one passage each day. Highlight it in your Bible, reflect on it, journal about it, or repeat it out loud as a prayer. You're free to interact with the Bible verses any way you want, just be sure to read God's love letter—the Bible. You'll find helpful tips in **How to Study the Bible** (page 109).

## Memory Verses

Memorizing Bible verses is an important habit to develop as you learn to grow spiritually on your own. **Memory Verses** (page 112) lists six verses—one per week—for you to memorize if you want to plant God's Word in your heart. Memorizing verses (and making them stick for more than a few minutes) isn't easy, but the benefits are undeniable. You'll have God's Word with you wherever you go.

## Journaling

Use **SCRIBBLE** pages, 117-125

You'll find blank pages for journaling beginning on page 117. At the end of each session, you'll find several options and a question or two to get your thoughts going—but you aren't limited to the ideas in this book. Use these pages to reflect, to write a letter to God, to note what you're learning, to compose a prayer, to ask a question, to draw a picture of your praise, to record your thoughts. For more suggestions about journaling, turn to **Journaling: Snapshots of Your Heart** (page 114).

If you'd like to choose journaling this week, respond to this question: *What are your fears when you think about evangelism?*

## Wrap It Up

Write out your answers to session questions your group didn't have time to discuss.

This week share with the others in your group which option seems most appealing to try during the coming week. The variety of preferences is another reminder of how different the people in your group are.

During other weeks, take time to share with the group what you did **At Home This Week**.



# LEARN A LITTLE MORE

## Synagogues

"During [the time of Jesus] the term 'synagogue' referred both to a group of people and a building or institution. The meeting place and prayer hall of the Jewish people."

***The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6, by D. N. Freedman  
(Doubleday, 1996).**

## Compassion

To be sympathetic to the distress of others with a desire to alleviate it. True compassion moves us to action. See James 5:11 and Psalm 103:13.

## Sheep without a shepherd

Sheep are not intelligent animals. They have few natural defense mechanisms, which means they're low on the food chain. Without a shepherd to care for them, they are at the mercy of predators such as wolves, lions, and bears. This is an accurate picture of us without Christ. We are at the mercy of predators like the world, our desires, and Satan.

## Harvest

Jesus uses the picture of a harvest to describe the gathering of people into the kingdom of God. When a crop isn't harvested at the proper time, the fruit falls to the ground and rots and becomes useless. The crops are people ready to believe in Jesus. Jesus has called all believers to work the field in order to harvest people for the kingdom. God is not dependent on our efforts, but he still calls us to work the field, not to stand on the sidelines.

# FOR FURTHER STUDY

Luke 13:34; 23:28-43



# NOTES

If you are watching the LifeTogether DVD, you may use this page to take notes.

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