

# HOW WILL THEY BELIEVE?

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From the dawn of humanity's creation to 1914, just one hundred years ago, there were 1.8 billion people on the planet; today, there are 7 billion. That's a 388% increase, in just 100 years.

Of those, 3.2 billion (nearly half) likely have never heard the name of Jesus Christ nor ever met one of His followers. They have no hope nor assurance of eternal life. They have no real idea of what they stand to gain or to lose.

The Apostle Paul wrote, *"How can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent?"* (Romans 10:14-15)

## **Why is this important?**

It's important because there is only one way to be saved. There is only one path to eternal life.

In our pluralistic culture, how can anyone say such a thing. Is it arrogant? Is it bigoted? Is it blind? In a word, NO.

I once was blind, but now I see. And what I see is that Jesus Christ speaks the truth. He said, *"Unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God"* (John 3:3). How does one receive this new birth? Quoting Jesus again, *"God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16). The Apostle Peter nailed it for us: *"There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12).

A bigot is one who has an obstinate belief in the superiority of her own opinions (that's arrogance) and a prejudiced intolerance of the opinions of others. I do not rest my trust in my opinions, but in what I find written in the Bible (even when it contradicts my opinions), for I believe it is God's treasured and guarded Message. And I don't dismiss or ignore the opinions of others—many of which I have shared at some point in my life—but they don't persuade me, especially when they are not anchored to historical facts other than familiar traditions.

How can we assert that there is only one way to salvation and keep a straight face? Because God has revealed to us the great love with which He has loved us through Jesus Christ. As it is written, *"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners (ignoring*

*and opposing God in word and deed), Christ died for us (Romans 5:8)—the Just for the unjust” (1 Peter 3:18). “Christ loved us and gave himself up for us” (Ephesians 5:2).*

Jesus said, *“Enter through the narrow gate, because the gate is wide and the way is spacious that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. But the gate is narrow and the way is difficult that leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13-14).*

### **And why did He send us?**

Couldn't an angel have done a better job? Actually, the Message is most persuasive on the lips of a first-hand witness. The heart that has been redeemed can communicate redemption's plan more effectively than a dozen angels.

Though we falter and hesitate due to our own brokenness, though we are beset by our own demons and temptations and failures, still the one who has personally experienced Christ's redeeming love and amazing grace is the best candidate to represent the Savior.

By one man (Adam) sin entered the world and sentenced the human race to destruction, and by one Man (Jesus) the redemption price was paid to rescue alive everyone who trusts in Him.

The student shall be like his teacher. The saved shall be like their Savior. God said, *“You shall be holy, because I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16).* Jesus said, *“You be completely loving, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is completely loving” (Matthew 5:48).* Paul wrote, *“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5).*

We are the closest thing to themselves at their moment of need and opportunity. Who better to represent the Good News—in the flesh!?!

### **Don't believe Facebook!**

*“Don't Believe Facebook. You Only Have 150 Friends.” “That was the headline of an NPR article (June 5, 2011). While you can facially recognize 1,500 people, and Ashton Kutcher has 15 million Twitter followers, you can only have 150 meaningful relationships.” (Stephen R. Graves, October 1, 2013)*

Graves suggests four spheres of organic influence in your life: biological, geographical, vocational, and volitional.

- Biological—family, relatives, in-laws.
- Geographical—neighbors, community.
- Vocational—co-workers, bosses, clients, consumers.

- Volitional—intentional outreach (volunteering, service, mission).

Each of these circles is a sphere of personal influence. And the meaningful relationships within them are those you currently maintain, plus those you would resume if you could.

I want you to think of these as your “corner of the vineyard,” your potential harvest for the Lord; that is, the people whom *God has placed* in your life, and whose lives God wants to influence for eternity *through you*.

Every human being is on a journey toward Christ. The Holy Spirit is either working *with* them to reveal Christ and convince them of His trustworthiness, or, having done that, the Spirit is working *in* them to transform them into the likeness of Christ and also working *upon* them to reach and encourage the faith of others.

It is this last activity of the Spirit that I want to address today. In today’s Bible text, Paul identified four phases through which we may engage and encourage others. It all begins with you, your faith, your spiritual formation, your spiritual gifts.

### **You just need to be sent.**

Jesus said to His disciples, “*As the Father has sent Me, so I am sending you*” (John 20:21). We—you and I— have been sent in Jesus’ name to continue what He began to do and to teach. “*Go and make disciples of all the nations*” (Matthew 28:19). We have been sent to proclaim the Kingdom of God and the Way of Salvation.

Not everyone is a vocational preacher, but all have been called to share the Good News. It is the responsibility of this pastoral team to equip you to fulfill that calling.

For this you need a genuine and growing knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Genuine knowledge begins with a new birth. Without that, you’ll just be guessing. We preach the new birth.

Growing knowledge comes from a continuing perusal of the Message contained in the Bible, and attentive observation and reflection on your life experiences. We teach the Scriptures.

For this you need the power of the Holy Spirit. “*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere*” (Acts 1:8). This is God’s plan. There is not another that works. We impart the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

We train and commission for this work—not just some, but all. “*Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others*” (2 Timothy 2:2).

## **You just need to be heard.**

Greg Mundis, the Director of Assemblies of God World Missions has said, “Witnessing begins with loving them until they cannot help but ask, ‘Why?’” We are to demonstrate God’s compassionate love to others until they cannot help but ask us, “Why are you doing this? What compels you? What sustains you?”

Paul asked, “*Don’t you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can’t you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?*” (Romans 2:4). If it is God’s kindness that turns a soul away from the addiction to sin, then we must show them this kindness. It may be your acts of kindness that will win an audience—gain their attention and their ear.

However, sometimes the only act of kindness you can offer is to tell them the Good News. You cannot and will not spend three years building a friendship with each person God brings across your path. Sometimes, all you get to do is tell them the story of His saving love. Some are ready to hear it, before you ever meet them.

Paul wrote, “*Each one of us does the work which the Lord gave him to do: I sowed the seed, Apollos watered the plant, but it was God who made the plant grow*” (1 Corinthians 3:5-6). Sometimes you will prepare the soil with acts of kindness for another to sow the seed of God’s Word. Sometimes you will plant the seed, but another will reap the harvest. No role in the process is better than another (all are equally vital), and your part will not be compared to someone else’s; what’s important is that you *have* a part and do it faithfully.

If it is God’s kindness that turns a soul away from the addiction to sin, then we must show it, *and* we must tell it.

Demonstration is only half the story—a backdrop that validates our words. But the Good News is essentially a message, a story that must be heard. At some point, each of us must open our mouth to speak of Jesus Christ. You needn’t be a Bible scholar to do so. You don’t have to produce answers to every question you may be asked, or every objection that may be voiced.

All that is required is a simple, clear expression of your faith in Christ—“I once was lost, but now I see.” It’s the testimony of how His story has impacted your story—how you are different today, since Jesus came into your life.

Use the voice God has given you. In the relationships God has given you.

## **They just need to believe our Message.**

It is not your responsibility to save people. Jesus Christ has already done a magnificent job of that. And yet, He Himself was despised and rejected by many of them. Not every person will thank you for sharing Christ's love and story with them. Don't let that get you down.

It is *their* unbelief they are wrestling with. Help them with that struggle, as they permit you, but don't make their struggle your own. That struggle is actually a vital part of the formation of their faith.

Jesus once told a story that has application here: *"There was once a man who had two sons. He went to the elder one and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' 'I don't want to,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. 'Yes, sir,' he answered, but he did not go. Which one of the two did what his father wanted?"* (Matthew 21:28-31). The elder son, though he refused at first, finally did what his father asked of him. We can only imagine the struggle of conscience he must have gone through to finally obey. It was not his initial decision, but his final resolve that answered his father's demand and gained his respect.

You must allow others this process. Give them time to struggle with the truth. Don't pressure or harass them. Don't resent their indecision or rejection. God doesn't.

Once you have told them the truth they need to hear, pray for them to succeed in their struggle. Lift their name to the Lord repeatedly, inviting Him to make His truth a blessing to them. When you do see them again, encourage them to trust God's way. Report His continuing faithfulness in your life.

If they have questions—and they will—urge them to present them to God, not just to you. Encourage them to initiate a conversation with Him. You see, there is one final step in this process that needs to be taken.

## **They just need to call on Him to save them.**

Faith that is held in reserve is not active. To activate their faith, they must call on the Lord. *Some of you* don't yet get this. How much more a spiritual novice!

Faith has a voice! *"The message is very close at hand; it is on your lips and in your heart.' And that message is the very message about faith that we preach: If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved"* (Romans 10:8-10).

Your voice is the switch that activates your faith. The devil doesn't mind you believing whatever it is that you believe, until you start saying it. Therefore, the Bible says, *"No one can say 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit"* (1 Corinthians 12:3). You may believe that in comfort, as long as you keep it to yourself. When you start saying it, the devil will get nervous and start pushing back. That's where the struggle begins.

That's why the baptism with the Holy Spirit is confirmed by speaking an unknown language. No expression, no power.

Christianity is a spoken faith. That makes a lot of people nervous. It needn't be spoken insensitively, or rudely, or harshly—but it is to be spoken.

*"Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet"* (Isaiah 58:1). *"For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline"* (2 Timothy 1:7).

When you see that a person has faith to be saved, encourage them to voice that to the Savior. Perhaps you can pray with them, or lead them in simple prayer of repentance and faith. Only a small percentage of people will make such a weighty decision without the encouragement of someone else. You can be that encourager.

Such a prayer can be as simple as saying three things: Sorry. Please. Thanks.

"I'm sorry for trying to live my life without your active help. I have messed up. I have hurt others. I'm sorry."

"Please forgive me. Please rescue me from myself. Please come into my life and change me."

"Thanks for taking my place and bearing my sins on the cross. Thanks for forgiving me and giving me eternal life with Jesus Christ."

Now, that's only the beginning, but the all-important one. It launches the adventure of a lifetime—and beyond!

You have been sent, so that they may hear, and hearing, believe, and believing, call upon the name of the Lord and be saved. You are a key! Take courage, and join the adventure!