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*Joyfully
Spreading
the Word*

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS

Edited by
KATHLEEN NIELSON and
GLORIA FURMAN

“Read it and weep—joyfully! This book on evangelism for women, by women, carefully interweaves biblical exegesis with moving stories of gospel transformation and rejection from the diverse experiences of humble sisters in Christ. We are reminded that time is short, our mandate is clear, and King Jesus is glorious—yet we are weak and fearful, preoccupied, and inward looking. I love the book’s insistence on prayerful dependence on God to work, and the soul-burning witness to his answers to these prayers. We are repeatedly encouraged to know our Savior better, that we may proclaim the riches of his grace more fully and with greater nuance and sensitivity to context. It’s a book I want every Christian woman I know to read—because nothing matters more!”

Fiona Millar, Lecturer, Queensland Theological College

“Each and every day the Lord sends his people out all over the world with the same glorious commission: ‘Go and make disciples.’ *Joyfully Spreading the Word* shares faithful examples of disciple making in places of employment, universities, neighborhoods, and homes—rightly reminding us that wherever we are, we have the privilege of sharing the Word with others. This book will encourage and inspire you to see the mission field in your own backyard.”

Melissa Kruger, Editor, The Gospel Coalition; author, *Walking with God in the Season of Motherhood* and *In All Things*

“Have you been longing to share the gospel with your friends and neighbors but have been hesitant to initiate? If so, *Joyfully Spreading the Word* is the perfect place to begin. We all know that we should evangelize, yet most of us feel guilty that we rarely do it. This winsome collection from various writers reminded me of the daily opportunities I have to share my faith and gives me courage and tools to follow through. These women offer practical examples from everyday life, which makes this book so helpful. Read it—you’ll be stirred afresh to share the best news in the world!”

Vaneetha Rendall Risner, author, *The Scars That Have Shaped Me*

“This great book was written by women, but its content is for everyone. The authors truly understand what the Great Commission is all about. It is about not only proclaiming the gospel message, but about living it out every day and in every place. ‘The ambassador for Christ is never off duty,’ to use one of the many gospel phrases found in this book. By this, the authors mean that, regardless of where you live, work, or even visit, as a redeemed person, you are expected to live and share the good news of our Redeemer. Jesus said to go and make disciples, but if we are to live the gospel in everyday life, then we never stop going. That is the challenge in this book. Please buy, read, and apply this book. It is worthy.”

Miguel Núñez, Senior Pastor, International Baptist Church, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic; President and Founder, Wisdom and Integrity Ministries

“*Joyfully Spreading the Word* is refreshingly rooted in delight rather than duty. It is a clarion call compelling all women to go, make disciples, and teach his commandments, coupled with the gentle reminder of the great comfort that he is with us always, to the end of the age.”

Karen Hodge, Women’s Ministry Coordinator, The Presbyterian Church in America; author, *Transformed: Life-taker to Life-giver*

“Biblical teaching, combined with personal examples and stories, make this book a warmhearted challenge for women to engage their everyday worlds with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Be encouraged by it, then take a risk and share your faith with someone around you.”

Mack and Leeann Stiles, authors, *Mack & Leeann’s Guide to Short-Term Missions and Evangelism: How the Whole Church Speaks of Jesus*

“At heart, I’m a hesitant evangelist—and I don’t like that. ‘What should I say? How should I say it? Who would listen?’ That’s why I can heartily recommend *Joyfully Spreading the Word*. This theologically sound, guilt-free book answers those questions. Through a collection of stories and a variety of role models, it inspires readers with both the privilege and the urgency of the biblical mandate to go and share ‘the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus’ (2 Tim. 3:15). Read it, use it, and see if God won’t indeed prove through your life that his Word will not return empty, but will accomplish that which he purposes (Isa. 55:11).”

Jani Ortlund, Executive Vice President, Renewal Ministries

“A desire to reach the lost has often been the gate through which all sorts of unhelpful things have gained entrance into the church. And so I am grateful that *Joyfully Spreading the Word* is what so many books on evangelism are not: engaging and humane while still clear and faithful. I found each chapter to be thought provoking, challenging, and full of insight. As I read it, I found myself both scheming about ways to share the gospel in my circles, and also making a list of other people I wanted to point toward this resource. I recommend it wholeheartedly.”

Mike McKinley, Pastor, Sterling Park Baptist Church; author, *Church in Hard Places*; *Am I Really a Christian?*; and *Church Planting Is for Wimps*

**Joyfully Spreading
the Word**

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Joyfully Spreading the Word

Sharing the Good News of Jesus

Kathleen Nielson and Gloria Furman,
editors

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To the women in this volume whose names have been changed
or left out to protect their privacy—
those who have received the gift of faith in Christ Jesus,
and those we pray will yet believe,
those who have been spreading the good news for years,
and those who have only just begun.
Oh, the stories of grace being woven around the globe,
stories we shall spend eternity unraveling, with joy,
together giving glory to our Savior.

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<i>Kathleen Nielson</i>	

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Oh, magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together!

Psalm 34:3

Introduction

Kathleen Nielson

This is a book by women and mainly for women—but certainly not all about women. It’s about the gospel and sharing the gospel—making known the good news that God has redeemed us sinners through the death and resurrection of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom we are called to believe and find life. As women in the church learn and grow together, following Paul’s instruction to Titus that older women should teach the younger ones “what is good” (Titus 2:3), a call to evangelism must be a crucial part of the good things passed on. Although it is clearly the concern of the whole church, the subject of sharing the gospel is one that women will do well to consider deeply together. Let me suggest three specific reasons why.

1. EVANGELISM TURNS US OUTWARD

First, believing women need to hear voices calling us to a gospel-centered outward focus—rather than a self-centered, inward one. Especially in Western contexts where many Christians have lived comfortably for a long time, there is often a lack of passion and clarity about communicating the gospel to those who don’t know Christ. I regularly find a great deal of passion among women for

personal issues, amid the challenges of relatively well-to-do lives that can leave us stressed or lazy or worried about physical appearances or tempted by easily available, ungodly entertainment. It is easy for many of us to focus on inward-oriented questions that are important but that can fill our thoughts: questions about self-image and identity, emotional health, finding just the right work and finding satisfaction in that work, etc. When we do turn outward toward social issues and actions—and, happily, we increasingly do—the temptation is to turn with passion to the physical and emotional needs that move our hearts. Why are we not equally moved, or even more moved, to share the good news of Jesus and how he can meet the greatest and eternal needs of every needy human being?

Questions concerning sharing the good news of Jesus need not cancel out other, more inward questions. A focus on the gospel and the power of the gospel inevitably feeds our own souls in remarkable ways. At the Gospel Coalition's 2016 National Women's Conference, a workshop panel assembled to discuss the topic, "Evangelism: Sharing the Reason for Our Hope."¹ The panel brought together women who minister in universities and neighborhoods and cross-cultural settings—but, most important, it brought together women on whose lips is regularly the good news of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Their hearts for the gospel came through, not in a theoretical way, but with loving care for the people around them who have not received the gift of eternal life in Christ. Their hearts for the Lord himself came through; it was clear that in sharing the Lord Jesus, they had come to know and love him even more deeply and securely. We heard these voices on the panel calling us to evangelism, and we knew it would be good to hear more.

2. EVANGELISM THRIVES ON ROLE MODELS

We're already talking about the second reason women should be considering together the subject of personal evangelism: there are great role models who can teach us biblically and well. For many

years, Rebecca Manley Pippert has served as a wonderful public role model; with her classic book *Out of the Salt Shaker*, Becky helped shake many of us awake to the beauty and the real possibility of talking with people about Jesus and seeing them drawn by God to faith. What confirms the goodness of Becky's model is that she has continued powerfully to inspire many on this subject, serving in recent decades more internationally than in her native United States. I'm grateful she has agreed to join us in this volume on a subject she has lived out personally and with faithful perseverance.

Such role models, of course, speak not only to women. And, indeed, such public role models must join a host of private ones, so that we will all know we're part of a family enterprise, a whole prayerful purpose of the body of Christ to see the church grow by adding new believers. But it is true that women can play a significant part in this enterprise in a myriad of ways—and one way is through offering role models to the next generation, to help them envision just what a woman with a heart to share the gospel looks like in action. We're hoping that the voices in this book will offer some helpful role models and inspire a whole lot more.

The contributors are women simply serving in the places where God put them, showing and sharing the good news of what God has done to save us through his Son. Many of these women juggle a variety of contexts, mixing home and work and friendship and hospitality and mercy ministry in that sometimes-chaotic combination that makes up many women's lives. We hope the multiple involvements highlighted by these women will spur others on to see that we can share the gospel from any and every life context, from a kitchen table to an office desk to a podium in front of thousands. We hope these women's stories will stimulate creative thinking concerning the possibility of reaching out not just to people across the globe but to neighbors across the street and people across town. Speaking of stories—we hope you enjoy them; there are a lot of compelling stories in this book, and just *telling* them turned out to be one of

the most effective means of lighting up the subject of evangelism in a most personal way.

We also hope these voices will spur us on to increasingly careful, consistent study of God's Word—not simply in order to feed ourselves, but also to feed others with the Word of truth. The contributors to this volume are women who have immersed themselves deeply in the Scriptures. Their thoughts and words are full of God's Word. Their articulations of clear gospel apologetics grow from the very logic and flow of the Old and New Testaments, with Jesus at the center of the story. They would remind us that it is the Word of God that makes people wise for salvation (2 Tim. 3:15). They call us to trust this Word as the sword of the Spirit, and they provide heartening examples of what it looks like to wield this sword with excellence, humility, and trust in God alone for the salvation of those he calls. Hearing these women's voices will help transform our picture of Bible study from that of a routine meal to an ever-larger table where we get to share an amazing feast.

3. EVANGELISM IS URGENT

Third, and finally, women should be considering deeply together the subject of personal evangelism because we sense the urgency of teaching each other this part of “what is good.” The paragraph immediately following Paul's instructions to Titus concerning the various groups within the church gives the big reason for all his instructions:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. (Titus 2:11–13)

The emphasis in this passage is God's redemptive work through Jesus Christ that has come for “all people,” and that happens in a

certain time frame—a time frame that will culminate in the second coming of the Lord Jesus to earth, in all his glory.

What Paul calls the “present age” is the same period also referred to in Scripture as the “last days” (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2). These terms describe the time in which we now live—the time between Jesus’s first and second coming. It’s a time of taking salvation to all the nations, as believers spread the good news, until Jesus’s return. According to his clear command before he left the earth, Jesus’s calling of believers during this time is to “go . . . 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 that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:18–20).

That command was given to Jesus’s disciples and is passed on through them to the church, with its preachers and teachers and evangelists who lead the church in making and teaching disciples both near and far. This volume’s contributors love and depend on the context of the church, and specifically local congregations, for the work of the Great Commission. (Watch for how many of their stories make local churches a part of the action!) This book celebrates participation in the Great Commission by every single church member, under the leadership of pastors and elders. And this book in particular encourages women to feel the urgency of this call, just as did the women in the early church. Just think of all those fellow female workers mentioned by Paul: Phoebe, Prisca, Mary, Junia, Tryphaena and Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus’s mother, Julia, and Nereus’s sister (see Romans 16).

Among people who enjoy all the economic progress and technological enlightenment of the twenty-first century, rather than urgency there can be even a slight embarrassment about the simple truth that the Bible lights up the way to salvation through Jesus. That Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who died for us, bearing our sins and suffering the wrath of God in our place; that he rose from the grave, providing eternal life for all who believe in him—

this is indeed the good and relatively simple news the Bible teaches and Christians get to share. We share it today in a time when the church is growing fast all over the globe, even in nations that are politically “closed” but where King Jesus is at work through his people and his Word (and through some of the women writing here). It is urgent news indeed, as the hope of Jesus’s coming draws ever nearer.

CALLED TO FAITH AND CALLED TO SHARE IT

Co-editor Gloria Furman and I are praying that this book will further the conversation among women concerning this call to share the good news of Jesus. We all need voices calling us to a gospel-centered outward focus. We need strong, Word-filled role models. And we need a sense of the urgency of this message, this message that calls people from death to life through the power of the gospel. This is the bread of life that lasts forever, and we need to share it.

The women writing in this book have greatly encouraged me, and I hope they will encourage you. They come from different cultures, denominations, age groups, family situations, and backgrounds. And from all those spots where God has placed them, they are reaching out with the gospel. I can do this too, and so can you, by God’s grace. God has reached into the life of every believer, calling each one to himself by the Spirit, through faith in Christ—and then calling each one to give testimony to that faith to those around them, until Jesus comes again.

These women all celebrate the fact that it is God who does the calling, from start to finish. That is the joyful confidence these chapters exude. God calls us by his Spirit and according to his Word, to faith in Christ—who is with us always, to the end of the age.



PART 1

CORE CONCERNS

The Glorious *What* of Evangelism

Becky Pippert

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the most glorious, liberating news that has ever graced our weary, battered planet. Just before the resurrected Jesus ascended into heaven he commanded his disciples to share this good news, and that command extends to all of his followers—in our towns, our communities, and to the ends of the earth. His instructions have nothing to do with our gifts or personality types! He simply commanded, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19 NIV; cf. Acts 1:8). The best decision anyone anywhere can ever make, in response to God’s grace, is to become a disciple of Jesus Christ—by faith in his death on the cross in our place and his resurrection from the dead that promises eternal life. Nothing is more important. Nothing.

The cultural landscape can seem daunting to those who would share this good news—especially those in the Western world. Many pundits and analysts say that America in particular is moving in the

direction of secular Europe. The Christian church is growing dramatically in other parts of the globe—but not so much in the West, where, with the impact of advanced modernity, influential voices are becoming increasingly hostile and antagonistic to true Christian faith. Today any statement of biblical truth about God is often seen as arrogant, intolerant, and politically incorrect.

But a truth-denying culture doesn't have the power to take away people's longing for meaning and worth. If anything, it exacerbates it. God has placed in all human beings the longing for identity, purpose, and relationship, even if people can't quite articulate what they feel they are missing. Yet how will unbelievers know where to look unless Christians both live and tell the good news of what God has done for us in Christ?

Still, our present culture poses increasing challenges for the gospel. For example, I recently had a conversation with a woman who said, "I believe we must honor the god who dwells within our psyche and trust our hearts to guide us—and Oprah really agrees with me!"

A "New Age" devotee¹ told me she no longer believes in the Christian God (if she ever did) because God hadn't answered her prayers for her sister's recovery from cancer: "When she died, I knew I had to find a belief system that defies the human self, so I could exercise greater control." I asked her if she was experiencing any challenges in her New Age faith: "Well," she said, "I haven't quite grasped how to fully apprehend my deity—I think that's why I'm not seeing the answers I want."

Another woman told me that she was a convinced atheist and that life had no meaning: "Human beings are nothing more than meaningless pieces of protoplasm. There is no God—which Darwin has so clearly proven."

Christianity, of course, says something altogether different. Even though a great deal of the Christian message runs counter to our culture, we can still respond intelligently, persuasively, and winsomely to people with very different views. However, if we don't

understand *what* we believe, we won't be persuasive in communicating our faith to others.

In my years as an evangelist, and as my husband and I have given evangelism training to believers all over the world, we have learned that the deepest motivation for witness comes by first understanding what we believe. It is our *theology* that must impact our *methodology*. Not to overlook the importance of the *how*—but it's absolutely vital that we begin with the *what*. Never has this been truer than today, for in a truth-denying world, even Christians are tempted to lose confidence in the powerful truth of the gospel. This truth is personal truth: in understanding the *what* of our faith, we come to know more deeply and speak more clearly about the one in whom our faith rests.

How do we discover truth about who God is and what he has done for us in Christ? The Judeo-Christian faith is based not on what we think about God, but on what God has revealed about himself: *Christianity is a religion of revelation*. God has made himself known in many ways, but his primary revelation is through his written Word, the Bible, which reveals the Word made flesh: Jesus the Son of God. When we give testimony to our faith, we are sharing not just our own experience but our experience of God's life-changing revelation to us in Christ.

So let's follow the biblical storyline of that revelation: *Creation—Crisis—Christ's Redemption—Christ's Return*.

THE CREATOR GOD AND A GOOD CREATION

In a world filled with multiple-choice starting points, we must start where the Bible starts: "In the beginning God . . ." (Gen. 1:1). In Genesis 1–2, we discover a great deal about who God is:

- *God is eternal and sovereign*: God is without beginning or end, having no peer or competitor. God has absolute authority. He commanded and it was accomplished.

- *God is the Creator*: He created all things out of nothing; he needed no help. That God created the world means he is above and beyond all he has made, and is distinct from it.
- *God is good*: His character is righteous and holy, loving and merciful, trustworthy and faithful.
- *God is personal and communicative*: God is not some distant, impersonal power—or a detached mind—or an energy field. God is a loving, personal God who delights and shows parental, nurturing concern over what he creates.

This God created human beings as the apex of his entire creation—all finally declared by him to be “very good” (Gen. 1:31). What made human beings unique from all the rest of creation is that only humans were created in the image of God. Adam and Eve were given language, creativity, love, holiness, immortality, and freedom (within divine limits) to choose their actions. They were created to love and know God, to live in harmony with him and the rest of creation, to reveal God to the rest of his creation, and to rule the world as God’s stewards, under his sovereign, loving rule. This is our crucial starting point as we interact and share the good news with others: every single human being is created by God in the image of God.

Everything God created was made for God’s glory and for human benefit. Adam and Eve had an open, intimate relationship with God; a loving relationship with each other; fulfilling work to do; and a world full of pleasures, tastes, sights, and smells! They were created to enjoy God’s goodness and submit to God’s gracious will. All of Eden was given to them with only one restriction: “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die” (Gen. 2:16–17). God placed the tree in the center of the garden and clearly warned Adam and Eve of the consequence if they willfully chose *independence* instead of *God-dependence*: They would surely die.

But the principal feature of life—*life as God intended*—was a lavish gift. *The gospel message from start to finish is God’s personal offer of amazing grace!*

CRISIS: THE FALL AND THE MESS WE MADE OF THINGS

People around us today often scoff at the notion of sin. Our world has new names for what ails us: poor self-esteem, neurosis, addiction, anxiety, psychological wounding, etc. It isn’t that these issues are not a reality; it’s that such analysis does not go deep enough to reveal the root cause.

Yet for all the protest that sin is an old-fashioned, outdated concept, nearly everyone agrees that something has gone terribly wrong and must be made right. We see the wrong in world wars, racism, genocides, terrorism, human trafficking, exploitation of children—and in our own personal battles evidenced in broken relationships, anger, addictions, and on and on.

What happened that caused our planet to go from paradise to our present brokenness? In Genesis 3, we discover that, though Adam and Eve were created in God’s image, they rejected God’s rule and chose to be self-ruled when they disobeyed God’s command not to eat the fruit of that tree. As a result, sin entered the human race: there is now no area of human personhood that is not infected by sin—even though we still reflect, however dimly, the image of God in which each human being is made. But the perfection God had established was broken, and human beings have been in the grip of sin ever since, as Genesis 4–11 so chillingly describes. Sin is such an all-inclusive reality on our planet that Paul says: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Like Adam and Eve, all humans have chosen self-rule instead of God-rule.

That means that everything we see around us and in us that is so tragically wrong—natural disasters, famine, genocides, and all forms of personal brokenness—can be traced back to the time when human beings first rebelled against God. Into that garden came the

evil Serpent, whom Revelation identifies as “that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan” (Rev. 20:2). The Bible reveals the reality of Satan and other supernatural beings who have rebelled against God and who do their best to tempt human beings to sin. Although the Bible reveals various forms of evil, such as corporate systemic evil and Satan and his demons—the Bible is clear that at the heart of sin is personal rebellion against God.

Genesis 3: Sin’s Essence and Sin’s Outcome

Over dinner, a skeptic psychiatrist friend described the typical problems that drive people to seek her help. Then she said: “But you’re a Christian, so you think the problem is that we’re all sinners!” I asked what she thought the biblical understanding of sin was, and she answered, “Oh, something along the lines of drugs, sex, and rock ’n roll?”

What my friend didn’t grasp is that from the biblical perspective, sin at its core isn’t just misdeeds. The Bible locates sin at the very center of human personality. Sin could be described as having a *God-complex*: we get ourselves and God mixed up! We live as if we are in charge. Sin is actually twofold: it’s the deliberate refusal to trust and worship God as God, and it’s the prideful claim to insist on the right to run our lives. Sin is both unbelief and idolatry, as we try to create meaning and identity by depending on things other than God.

Biblically speaking, sin is always against God. That is why we can’t understand sin’s true meaning without understanding that sin, first and foremost, is rebellion and disobedience against a righteous God.

What was the final outcome of human disobedience to God? When Adam and Eve turned away from God in rebellion, God declared to them his righteous judgment, just as he had promised. Suffering and death fell upon the human race. The consequence of Adam and Eve’s rebellion was disastrous: the human race became

catastrophically separated from the eternal love of God. The perfect trust and warm, intimate friendship they had enjoyed with God and with each other were destroyed; they lived instead under his judgment of death. God's presence was removed and human beings experienced a spiritual separation from God they had never known.

The predicament of fallen humanity is so serious, so grave, and so desperately wrong from within and without, that it is beyond human ability to fix. Think about it: Can fallen human beings change the intrinsic structure of our sinful nature and remake our natures from the inside? Can we defeat Satan? Do we have the power to conquer death? Clearly we do not!

Who then has the power to deliver and rescue us? Who can take what is so terribly wrong and make it right? Obviously, only a power that is stronger than ourselves can help us overcome ourselves. Nothing short of divine intervention can rectify our situation.

We glimpse this divine intervention even in the garden of Eden. Although God banished Adam and Eve from the garden, he didn't stop loving them, as we see when he tenderly made them better clothes than what they'd made for themselves, to protect them once they were outside the garden.

Most important, in Genesis 3:14–15, God declares war on the Serpent (Satan) and says that the offspring of the woman will crush the Serpent's head. The whole rest of the Old Testament points toward the coming of that promised offspring who would finally defeat Satan: Jesus the Savior, born of a woman named Mary. God will not allow the Enemy's plan to harm his plan. This is the first promise of the gospel!

The Bible reveals that before the beginning of time and the human revolt, God had already decided on his plan of how to rescue the planet that had turned from him (Titus 1:2; Eph. 3:11). He would send a Redeemer, Christ Jesus the divine Son of God, who would endure suffering and death in order to bring sinners back to God. *Even in human rebellion we see the promise of God's grace.*

CHRIST AND OUR REDEMPTION

The good news of the gospel is that sin and judgment were not the end of the story!

Though God owed us nothing, in his mercy and grace he sent his divine Son from heaven on a rescue mission in order to redeem a people for himself and to restore everything under Christ: “to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ” (Eph. 1:10).

How did the Father send his Son? Christ Jesus came to us from heaven through his birth, life and ministry, death and resurrection, and ascension. What theologians call the doctrine of the incarnation affirms that Jesus was the God-man: his nature was fully divine and fully human, though without sin. While each aspect of Jesus’s life has vital lessons in evangelism, we must focus on the cross and resurrection to grasp the heart of this good news we have to share.

The Death of Jesus

It is extraordinary to realize what Jesus’s death accomplished: human rebellion and sin were overcome, the power of the enemy was conquered, and death was defeated. While all that Christ’s death accomplished is vitally important, it is the overcoming of sin that lies at the very heart of the meaning of the crucifixion.

What we often miss is how a holy and loving God could forgive sin without compromising his holiness—and yet judge evil without frustrating his love. What is God to do? He loves us and we have rebelled. His nature is loving, but he is also just. Someone once told me, “I believe in Karma! The law of Karma is harsh: *you sin—and you pay!* It’s as simple as that!”

But the amazing good news of the gospel is this: *you sin—and God paid!* When the just judgment of a holy God had to fall, Christ became our substitute, and the wrath of God fell on him. It is a remarkable fact: we are the proud sinners, but the final sacrifice for our sin and pride is God, a willing victim.

The late John Stott wrote:

For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices himself for man and put himself where only man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives which belong to God alone; God accepts penalties which belong to man alone.²

We can never humanly fathom what Jesus endured on the cross. We get a hint in the garden of Gethsemane when we see Jesus's profound sorrow as he realized what he was about to face on the cross (Matt. 26:36–46; Luke 22:39–46). But the deepest clue is hearing Jesus's loud cry from the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). Now we see a glimpse of the cost Jesus endured: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). At the cross Jesus took on himself the sins of the whole world—from all nations, past, present, and future—bearing God's wrath as the perfect and final sacrifice for all who believe in him (1 John 2:2, 23–25). Just as sin separates us from God's presence, so Jesus was separated from the very presence of God.

That, far more than the nails and suffocation, is why the cross was so excruciating. To pay the price for human sin, Jesus had to experience the utter anguish and abandonment of being separated from God and bearing his judgment for sin. That is what hell is, to be severed from God's presence and under God's wrath; *hell is what Jesus's agony was about*. Christ had never known a moment apart from the presence of his Father until the cross.

In light of this, there is only one question before us: *What kind of God willingly sacrifices everything so that he can be in relationship with his creation?* Remember, God the Father didn't start loving us *after* Jesus went to the cross. God's love for us sent him there. The cross didn't procure grace; it flowed from grace. Christ took our sinfulness into himself and overcame in his own heart

what could not be overcome in human life. That is why the cross is the dividing line of human history. In every facet of God's action on the cross we see divine love at work. *More than any other act of human history, the cross reveals why the good news of Jesus Christ is truly a gospel of grace.*

The Resurrection of Jesus

How do we know that God accepted the sacrifice of Christ? How can we be sure that our estranged human race can now be reconciled to God? Because Jesus Christ arose from the dead! The resurrection and Christ's freshly healed wounds are the proof that God has accepted Jesus's sacrifice for us.

The wounds that the risen Jesus showed his disciples represented his suffering and death on the cross, his gift of love (Luke 24:36–40). When Jesus told them, “Peace be with you,” he was offering real peace, because through his wounds and resurrected life we can now be reconciled to God as we put our faith in him. This is the message of the gospel that we are called and privileged to share.

We don't share this gospel in our own strength. Just before the risen Jesus ascended into heaven, he promised the disciples that he would send them (and, by implication, every believer from that time forward) the gift of the Holy Spirit—the very presence of the risen Christ with us and in us (John 14:15–17, 25–26). Then he commissioned them (and us) to go out into the world and share the gospel. Now, because of the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives, all believers are empowered and strengthened to be witnesses for the Lord Jesus who died for our sins and rose again, reconciling us to God forever.

Jesus didn't come to earth to make good people better but to give life to the dead! Through the cross and resurrection, God in Christ Jesus forgives the guilt of our sin, frees us from the enslavement of sin, gives us a new nature through the power of the Holy Spirit, and promises us eternal life! What gifts for those who believe! This

is good news indeed! Beginning to grasp the amazing *what* of our faith indeed spurs us on to share it with others who desperately need to know how to find life, as opposed to death.

CHRIST'S RETURN: RESTORATION

Even the glory of all that Christ accomplished through his death and resurrection isn't the end of the gospel story. The Bible shouts from the rooftops that Jesus came to reconcile the world to God—and that he will come again! All of human history is moving toward that God-appointed goal. The personal return of Jesus Christ will end human history as we know it, ushering in a new and endless age, and completing God's eternal plan for salvation.

When Jesus first came to earth, he ushered in the kingdom of heaven, but he didn't erase all the effects of sin on our planet. Human beings would still experience hardship, injustice, disease, and death. It is only when Christ returns and brings the presence of heaven with him, that all forms of evil—sin, Satan, and death—will be destroyed forever and he will make all things new.

I heard a remarkable sermon by pastor and theologian Peter Lewis in Nottingham, England, on the four significant events that will take place at Christ's return:³

(1) *There will be a reckoning.* The Bible says that at the end of history the dead from every generation will be raised from death and Christ will judge all who have ever lived (John 5:28–29; 3:18, 36). There will be justice at last because God will rectify all wrongs and establish his righteous rule forever. Those who have refused God's offer of grace and who tragically insist on living apart from God's presence will in effect have their request honored. The Bible is clear that God wants no one to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). The Bible is also clear that God, through Christ Jesus, will judge all humankind fairly (Rom. 2:11). While this is hard for people to hear in our age of tolerance, those who have rejected God “will be punished with everlasting destruction

and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (2 Thess. 1:9).

The Bible presents this judgment both as God’s sovereign, holy will and also as human beings’ choice. C. S. Lewis illumines the perspective of human choice:

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, in the end, “*Thy* will be done.” All that are in Hell, choose it. . . . No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek, find. To those who knock it is opened.⁴

Christians need not approach Jesus’s judgment with fear. The Judge we meet on the day of judgment is the Jesus who loves us and the one we have known and loved in this life (Rom. 8:1). No wonder Paul looked forward to rejoicing at Christ’s coming with those to whom he’d preached the gospel and who had believed (1 Thess. 2:19)!

(2) *There will be a reunion with Jesus.* Everyone, friend or foe and from every generation, will see Jesus when he returns to earth. To be clear, for believers who die *before* Christ’s return, there will be reunion with the Lord Jesus in heaven, just as he told the thief on the cross (Luke 23:42–43). But even though life in heaven now is joyous, it is still temporary. Only at Christ’s return will we see the full culmination of human history. First there is the judgment, and then Jesus will set up God’s kingdom on earth: “God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God” (Rev. 21:3).

(3) *There will be a resurrection for all believers.* When Christ returns, we will receive our resurrected bodies, just as Jesus did at his resurrection. We will enjoy a world where loved ones no longer die and where there are no more tears or sorrow or hurt—just the supreme blessing of being with the Lord God (1 Cor. 15:52–54).

(4) *There will be renewal.* There will be a healing and restoration of our planet! Jesus will renew the whole earth and heaven. We will find ourselves in our own but renewed bodies, and in a renewed earth and heaven.

GOOD NEWS THAT MUST BE SHARED!

Why does the good news of Jesus Christ fill us with hope and joy? Because evil doesn't have the last word—God does! Satan will be led to his doom and God's people will be united to God and to each other, for the old will have gone and the new will be here. A great part of the witness of God's people is that we are filled with this hope, even in the midst of the greatest suffering.

What do we do while we wait for Christ's return? We are living in the period of history between Christ's first and second coming. It is the "already and not yet" phase of human history. What are we to do? We pray for Christ's return and we work for God's glory!

At the heart of our prayer and work must be the spread of God's glory through the spread of the gospel of his Son. As followers of Jesus Christ, we must be passionately committed to evangelism through witness that is *visual* (through our being and our deeds) and *verbal*. Biblical evangelism always involves both aspects, not just one! Our approach to evangelism must be biblically faithful, culturally relevant, spiritually empowered, and relationally effective. Above all, we must love as Christ has loved us: "Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well" (1 Thess. 2:8).

As we share our lives, we won't share all at once this amazing *what* of the gospel that this chapter has begun to unfold. We'll ask questions of our friends and acquaintances; we'll be ready to answer when people ask about our hope (1 Pet. 3:15); we'll pray and we'll sense when someone is ready to hear more. But as we ourselves more and more fully grasp the theology of our faith—the *what* and the *who*—then our questions and our answers will be

more and more clear. We'll be spurred on and enabled by the Holy Spirit to bear faithful witness, as God's Word dwells richly in us.

God wants to use us! We do not have the power to produce conversions in others—nor can we make people see their sin; that power belongs to God alone. So we share our lives and the good news of Jesus with our fellow image bearers, praying that a sense of sin and an awareness of their need for the gospel will be awakened through the Holy Spirit. And, as God graciously enables, we will have the profound privilege and thrill of helping people commit their lives to Christ Jesus as they repent and believe in him.

Jesus commands all believers to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). When we see the beauty and glory of the gospel, the victory won by the Son of God on our behalf and in our place, and the cosmic significance of all that Christ has accomplished, how can we possibly remain silent and keep this glorious news to ourselves?

YOU CAN BE A PART OF THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL IN THE WORLD.

Here are theological reflections and real stories from women from across the world who are eagerly sharing the good news of Jesus wherever God has placed them—showing us just how possible it is to follow Jesus’s call to evangelism in our ordinary, everyday lives.

Contributions in This Book

“When we see the beauty and glory of the gospel, the victory won by the Son of God on our behalf and in our place, and the cosmic significance of all that Christ has accomplished, how can we possibly remain silent and keep this glorious news to ourselves?”

Becky Pippert, “The Glorious *What* of Evangelism”

“I walked over and put my arms around my friend. ‘Maisie, Jesus would never treat you like this. Jesus treats his daughters like royalty. Jesus asks a lot, I know, but he gives you the world.’ It was hard to say so little. It has been hard to pray so much more than I say.”

Rosaria Butterfield, “Spreading the Word among Friends Identifying as LGBTQ”

“In our efforts to share the gospel, we should take counsel from the flight attendants. We are in an emergency situation: all around us, people are gasping for spiritual breath. But in order to best assist them, we must have our own supply firmly affixed.”

Megan Hill, “The Heart of the Evangelist”

“Evangelism has an expiration date. . . . It is a means to an end and that end is fellowship with God forever. No two conversations, no two train rides, no two lunch breaks, and no two walks at the park are the same. History is going somewhere. Time is literally running out.”

Gloria Furman, “Spreading the Word in Everyday Life”

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