

INTRODUCTION

Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.

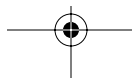
JESUS OF NAZARETH

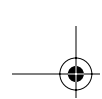
When I was in high school, I never dreamed evangelism would be in my future. God wasn't even on my screen, let alone telling other people about him. I was too busy with going to detention, skipping class for the beach and partying like a rock star. In fact, if people who knew me in my high school days stumble upon this book, they will certainly assume it was written by someone else who just happens to have my name. I'm not kidding.

Growing up, church was not a part of my family experience. I can remember going to church exactly twice in my first ten years. In junior high I was involved in church for one year and had a positive experience. But by the time high school rolled around, I couldn't stand being around Christians. I went out of my way to avoid them. Some of it was Christian culture, some of it was high school culture, but the impressions were powerful and stayed with me.

The Christians always seemed to have their religious frowns cast in my direction. I even received a five-page handwritten letter from an entire small group that warned me to repent of my partying ways because God was going to judge me and hell was certainly in my near future. I wish they hadn't written that letter. I wish instead that they would have asked me about the family tragedy that had left a hole in my heart. That was what I was trying to fill with all of the partying. After that letter, I went out of my way to get further out of the Christians' way.

But here I am writing a book on evangelism. God has done a mighty





work in my life. In his sovereign love and wisdom, he gave me the foundation of an unbelieving past so that I would understand non-Christians. I have learned the most about evangelism from my own conversion experience. My soul warms every time I read about Paul in Acts testifying three separate times about his own conversion. Like Paul's, my soul burns brightly with thanksgiving to God for his grace. I echo the words of the psalmist who said, "The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places" (Psalm 16:6). I have tried to understand the experience of conversion God gave to me so that I can help others in their own conversion experience. I have been on the receiving end of insensitive and irrelevant witness, but I have also experienced outstanding relational evangelism. That was how God rescued my soul my first year at college. I am eager to share what I have learned.

Evangelism is not easy. It is hard to lead our family and friends to live under the love and leadership of an invisible God. It is a challenge to articulate our faith and answer deep spiritual questions in a world that is hostile to the gospel. And it certainly is a great challenge to teach the Bible to people who think King David was a rapper from the East Coast. Yes, our challenges are large. But Jesus is more committed to making us people who get his word out than we are.

Jesus told the fishermen, his first followers, that he would make them fish for people. Evangelism is the promise in his call for commitment. And Jesus takes his promises seriously. He is the Great Trainer who is committed to developing evangelists. He took Peter from fishing in Galilee to leading thousands to faith in Jerusalem. Peter's destiny was to become a fisher of people. And so is ours. But it didn't happen overnight and it didn't happen without some failures along the way.

EVANGELISM AND .400 HITTERS

The highs of being a witness are incredible. And the lows are devastating. Witness is a call that promises failure and disappointment. If





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we expect that reality from the beginning, however, we won't be so fragile when rejection hits us like a ton of bricks. Maybe it will feel like only half a ton of bricks.

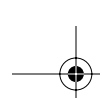
As I reflect on my own development as a witness, I think of the game of baseball. From the time I could walk, I have loved the Los Angeles Dodgers and major league baseball. Ted Williams, who played for the Boston Red Sox, is recognized as possibly the greatest hitter in the history of baseball. He was the last player to hit over .400. The game has been played for over fifty years since Williams's magical year, and no one has been able to match his feat.

The fact that .400 is the most celebrated feat for a hitter should tell us something about baseball. The game's best hitter, in the most outstanding year of his career, failed to hit safely six times out of ten. That means he walked back to the dugout, failing to reach base safely, more times than he got a hit. Yet I imagine Ted Williams held his head high when he went back to the bench. He had learned experientially that baseball is a difficult game. He didn't expect to reach base every at bat.

In the same way, living as Jesus' witness in this world requires proper perspective. We will make many mistakes. It may take years and years of labor before we become an effective witness. That was the case for me. I believe I have experienced growth as a witness because of the simple fact that I never gave up. I always walk to the proverbial dugout with my head held high, knowing that making an out is part of the witness experience. It was years and years before I saw my personal witness change anyone's life. It was through great humiliation and personal shame that I learned to be a teacher of Jesus' Word. It was because of many awkward and painful conversations that I have learned how to build trust and challenge my non-Christian friends. I have made many outs. But I have never given up.

During my first years of evangelism, my average was below .100. If it were baseball, I would likely have been sent down to the minor





leagues. But Jesus taught me great lessons through failure and is fulfilling his promise to me to make me a fisher of people. He will do the same for you.

All of us can become effective witnesses if we do not give up. But we must realize from the outset that there are no shortcuts. I recently had an experience in which God reminded me of the need for good old-fashioned perseverance.

PERSEVERANCE AND DEDICATION

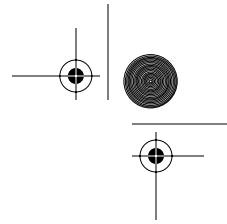
I am a full-time campus pastor with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. One day I was working on my laptop computer in the campus library when I locked my laptop to the chair I was sitting in. While I was messing around with this new lock, I accidentally changed the combination to a number I didn't know. At first I thought it was amusing. But then I realized I had no way to remove my computer from the chair. I began to panic when I looked at my watch and realized I needed to preach a sermon in one hour.

Reviewing my sermon notes and praying for the worship time ahead was suddenly no longer an option. For the next hour, I struggled to open the lock. I prayed to God and even asked him to tell me the numbers. That didn't work. I tried to pry the lock open. That failed. As the worship service drew near, I had no other choice but to take the chair with me. I picked it up and walked the chair right out the front door of the library with the laptop locked to the leg. The student librarian looked up in a moment of confusion as I whisked by, but before she could speak, I was out the door.

I ended up bringing the chair home with me that night. I didn't know what else to do. I awoke early the next morning for a meeting and left the computer and chair at home. I explained to my wife, Becky, what had happened the night before. She got a good laugh out of this one.

The next day I was at a meeting and called Becky at lunch. She





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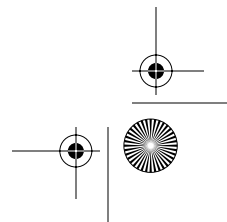
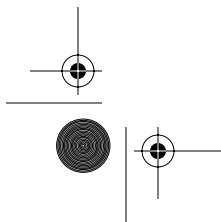
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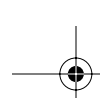
had opened the lock! I was thrilled. I asked her how she did it. She said that she started at 0000 and kept increasing the four-digit combination one number at a time, trying to open the lock at each turn. It finally clicked open at 0386. The only way she could free the computer from the chair leg was by turning the lock 386 times. At least the new combo wasn't 9998. I thanked her profusely. I had regained my computer from the chair, which I returned to the library the next day. (Campus ministers shouldn't steal furniture from the campus library.)

From the computer lock experience, I learned a lesson about life and evangelism. There are no shortcuts to freedom. If we are to become witnesses, we must learn our lessons in Jesus' school of witness development. We all wish we could pray one prayer and then suddenly become modern-day John the Baptists. While some recent converts might experience God's kingdom in this way, most of us will not. The excitement of conversion occurs only because of the daily commitment to being a witness. God will not allow us to shortchange the process of him shaping and sending us for witness.

Persevering, remaining dedicated to the "lock turning" fundamentals of being an evangelist, is hard work. That should be fine with us, though, because our witness is all about the people we love. It is all about our family, our friends, our coworkers, the people at the grocery store, our new neighbors who just moved in. We won't get publicity for leading them to faith, but we will have the thrill of our life in seeing God move.

Personal witnesses aren't flashy. We are faithful. Our lives are to be marked by patient suffering as we walk with sinners through their process of conversion. The suffering will be manifest, for example, with late-night phone calls when the non-Christians we love call us as their life is falling apart. And our hearts will be set apart with thanksgiving because the suffering is worth it. Personal witness is all about showing up with a good attitude. If we do not give up but





rather let God grow us to engage our friends and teach them the Bible, we can all become effective witnesses.

GIGS LOS ANGELES EVANGELISM TRAINING

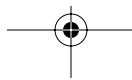
This book was birthed from an evangelism training program I created for the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship campus work in Los Angeles. Forty students and staff committed to the year-long training program. The growth was encouraging. People who were obviously gifted and wired for evangelism, and those who weren't, became effective witnesses.

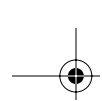
My vision was to inspire and train people to lead their unchurched friends into understanding and responding to the Bible. These studies are called GIGs, an acronym for "Groups Investigating God." GIGs are small-group Bible studies for non-Christians. They are effective because they help non-Christians see Jesus in his Word without all the trappings people associate with religion. They have also proven effective in helping non-Christians move forward in their process of conversion to genuine discipleship. I became a Christian through a GIG in 1992. And I have been leading seeker Bible studies ever since.

The staff and students grew tremendously that year in learning to lead their own GIG ministries. They took great strides in communicating with non-Christians. They prayed with greater urgency and effectiveness and saw God move in response to their intercession. They became better teachers of God's Word and were surprised at how eager non-Christians are to study the Word. They became people who believed God wanted to use them to reach their friends.

Here is a testimony from John Negrete, one of the students who developed into a witness:

I have never prayed for God to let me lead somebody into the kingdom until I was challenged by the training program to lead





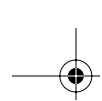
at least one person into the kingdom by the end of the academic school year. It was one of the lofty goals of our group. And I think that this has been one of the greatest lessons I've taken away from the meetings. No challenge is too impossible or too crazy for God. And I think that's how I've changed the most as an evangelist, realizing that it is possible for me. Not just other people. Not just Becky Pippert. But me.

In my GIG I was teaching the Bible to a Jewish woman who was checking Jesus out. I boldly invited her to an evangelistic conference for non-Christians in GIG studies. I told her that it would be good for her. She thought about it and decided to go. In that invitation I saw that what I was learning was true. We have a lot more room and trust with our friends who are interested in Jesus than we think. We can challenge them and be bold without having to be afraid they won't like us anymore or will stop coming to the GIG.

The weekend of the conference I really pushed my self-imposed limits on what I could say to her. Jesus was speaking to her in real ways, and I helped her interpret what he was saying to her. I spoke to her with conviction, knowing I was sent to her by God. This Jewish woman, who had come to seven GIG studies, decided to follow Jesus that weekend and is now growing in her faith. It has been an incredible gift to be the one who led her into Jesus' kingdom. God answered my prayer for the year that I might personally lead someone to Jesus.

This experience was tailored to strengthen my faith and boldness. I saw God come through for me, and my trust in his voice skyrocketed that day. I would never have taken that risk if I hadn't been challenged. I've never even conceived of doing something like that. I've only heard stories. And now I have my own stories. There have been more since then.





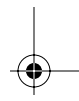
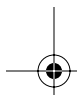
Witnesses are developed. Jesus promises that to those he calls. The question is whether we are willing to commit to a development process that offers no shortcuts. The call before us is profoundly humbling, and it promises rejection and failure. But when we compare the personal costs and sacrifices we will endure to the immeasurable joy that is offered to the witness, how can we pass up such a great offer from Jesus?

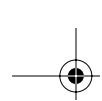
WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

For the past two years, I have spent my time planting new urban campus ministries for InterVarsity in Los Angeles. My job requires crosscultural evangelism, crosscultural evangelism and more crosscultural evangelism. Hearing that, you may be jealous of how I get to spend my time. If so, this book is for you. Others of you, however, might prefer to be tortured and killed rather than sign off on that job description. If so, this book is also for you. You don't have to be the apostle Paul to lead your friends and family to Jesus; you just have to be open to God's shaping power to make you a witness. We can all do that.

Each chapter in the book has biblical foundations from John's Gospel. From September 1998 to September 2000, I studied the Fourth Gospel intensively. I began studying the Fourth Gospel because I was drawn to the imagery of water, bread and light. But as I went deeper, I discovered that John's Gospel paints a picture of God's supreme victory in evangelism and teaches us how God develops his evangelists. I want to share that picture with you.

Let me give you an idea of what to expect in the chapters that lie ahead. The first three chapters are all about getting the Word deep into us. It must be in us before we get it out. We will focus on what it means to belong to Jesus and enjoy an intimate relationship with him. We will also spotlight how the praise of other people proves anathema to our leading our friends to faith. We will then take a look





at what it means that witnessing is good for us, the witness. The command to witness is not meant just to bless the world; it is meant to bless us as well. Chapter four is the hinge that connects the Word in us to the world. We have much to learn from how Jesus loved and handled the world. The final three chapters draw our attention to God's commitment to his witnesses as we win the world through witness. God is not distant in any dimension of our evangelism experience. He goes before us, he is behind us and he is even inside of us. We are offered endless intimacy and resources as we get the Word out—with God, never apart from him. We are not alone.

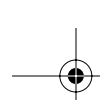
The book concludes with two growth projects. The first examines the practical steps to becoming a witness. If we are to become witnesses who grow over the course of a lifetime, we will need guiding principles and values to direct us into that growth. The second growth project details how you can start your own GIG ministry. After all, it is through hearing *and* doing the Word of God that we grow.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS AND ISN'T

This book is not a training manual. I believe that training conferences and seminar workshops are the best venues for training. This book is meant to inform, inspire and motivate you to take the next step as a witness. That step will be different depending on who we are and what kind of experience we have as witnesses. If you are new to evangelism, it is my prayer that this book will help you begin your own Word-based evangelism ministry. If you have been a witness for many years, I pray this book will encourage you to go deeper with Jesus and experience the joy of bearing an ever-increasing amount of fruit. And if you are an evangelism leader, I pray this book will assist you as you lead the people of God into witness in a rapidly changing world.

I have included stories of people who have recently become followers of Jesus. Where appropriate, I have changed the names of the people involved. I hope these testimonies of God's work encourage





you. I have tried to give full accounts of conversations, where necessary, to help you get a feel for my communication style with non-Christians. I find it helpful to observe others and how they communicate the gospel. I hope that my stories, both the failures and the victories, will help you in your own evangelism development.

As you read the stories of how God moved, please remember that my greatest trait as a witness is the refusal to give up. Over the past ten years, I have had many reasons to stop sharing my faith with my friends. I have hit many walls that appeared too high to climb. But God has always been faithful to help me ask the right questions and send me mentors to help me learn and help me grow. Some of those mentors ministered with me. Others I learned from through their writings. If you are willing to commit to being Christ's witness, he will be faithful to shape and send you.

Please join me as together we become more fruitful and joyful witnesses. But don't believe that God develops us as his witnesses just because I said so. It is Jesus who calls us. Your non-Christian friends and family will be eternally grateful if you accept his call. May the Holy Spirit use this book to inspire and motivate us all to become burning, shining lamps in this dark and dying world. Amen.

