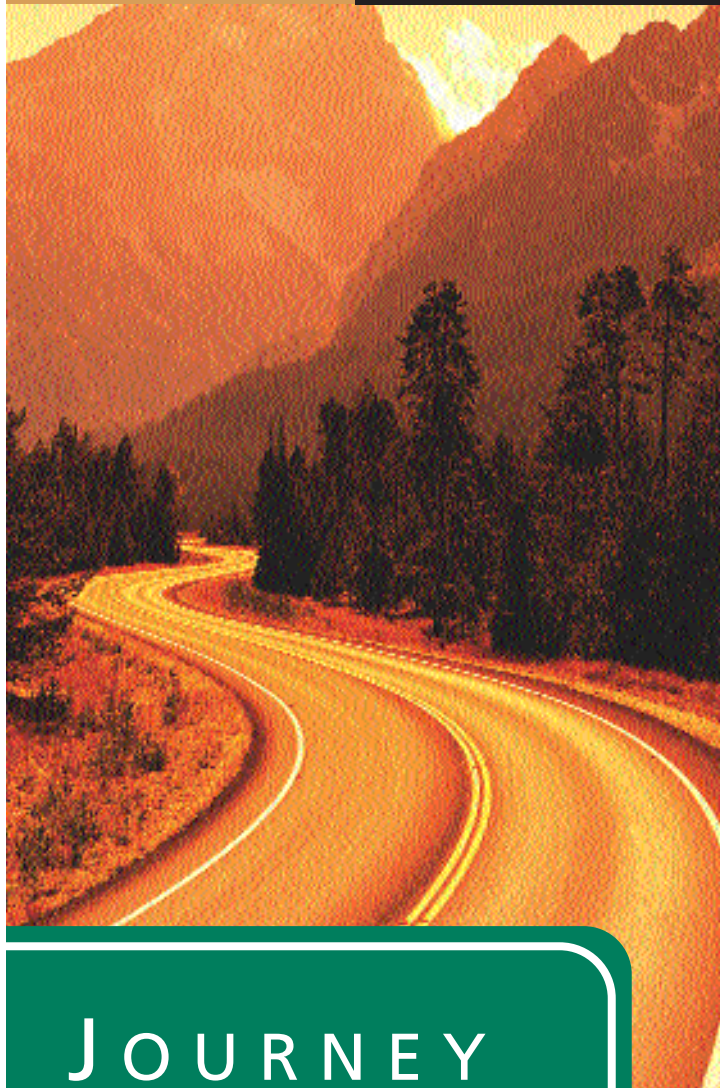


volume 8



JOURNEY  
TO FAITH

Go Into  
All the World

# GO INTO ALL THE WORLD... SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

**A**fter John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15).

Good news! Everyone likes to hear good news. We hear stories of people who just won the lottery, becoming instant multi-millionaires! Others win cars, boats or luxurious vacations. Someone learns that their cancer is in remission, or that they just got a promotion, and it is a cause for celebration. Good news! A couple who has struggled to have a baby finally learns that they have conceived—good news! Our favorite sports team wins the championship—good news!

Face it, good news is always welcome. Or, is it? How many of us have spied someone on a street corner wearing a sandwich board, or holding a sign that reads something like this: “Repent or Perish. The Kingdom of God is at hand!” What immediately strikes us is the expression or attitude of the person bringing us what is supposedly good news. They are often expressionless, or worse, they look angry. If this is supposed to be good news, someone forgot to tell their face!

At a college football game a large crowd of people gathered on the university grounds to cheer on their team while the band played. They

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were in a great mood, anticipating another victory by their home team. As they all marched merrily across the street to the football stadium, the thousands of people were greeted by two stone-faced men holding large signs.

One sign read “JESUS HATES SINNERS!” On the other side of the sign it read “Repent and believe in the gospel!” Everyone did their best to simply ignore them.

We’ve all seen the cars go by plastered in Christian bumper stickers, or the people at parks

with bullhorns proclaiming loudly and annoyingly that the kingdom of God was at hand, and everyone had better pay attention! For many people, maybe even you, this is what passes for sharing the gospel. It seems odd, annoying, belligerent and highly

negative. It doesn’t really seem to be very good news at all. Who in their right mind would want to be associated with that?

Author and speaker Rebecca Pippert once wrote, “Christians and non-Christians have something in common: We’re both uptight about evangelism.” Most Christians feel as uncomfortable about that kind of activity as anyone else does. On the other hand, spiritual issues are the most important issues of life and need to be addressed.

Filmmaker George Lucas said in an interview for *Time* magazine (4/26/99) that he had a purpose for his *Star Wars* movie. “I put the Force in the movie in order to awaken a certain kind of spirituality in young people—more a belief in God than a belief in any particular religious system. I wanted to make it so that young people would begin to ask questions about the mystery. Not having enough interest in the mysteries of

*While no one wants to be yelled at or lectured, everyone will eventually want an answer to the question: Is there a God, and if so, what does he want to tell me?*

life to ask the question, ‘Is there a God or is there not a God?’—this is for me the worst thing that can happen. I think you should have an opinion about that. Or you should be saying, ‘I’m looking. I’m very curious about this and am going to continue to look until I can find an answer, and if I can’t find an answer then I’ll die trying.’ I think it’s important to have a belief system and to have a faith....”

Lucas realized that there are important issues that people don’t take as seriously as they need to. One such subject is the issue of God and having a relationship with him. While no one wants to be yelled at or lectured, everyone will eventually want an answer to the question: Is there a God, and if so, what does he want to tell me?

### WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

When the crowds of people saw the giant sign reading “JESUS HATES SINNERS!” there is little chance that any of them saw that particular message as good news! But is that the gospel? Is that the message God has for man? Is that why Jesus came, to tell us how much God hates us? Hardly!

The word “gospel” comes from a Greek word “euangelion” which simply means “good news.” In Matthew 4:23, the Bible says, “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom...” In the book of Mark, at the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry we read, “Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ‘The time has come,’ he said, ‘The kingdom of God is near. Repent, and believe the good news’” (Mark 1:14,15).

The good news of the gospel is not an open discussion or debate. It’s not a demand—it’s an announcement of an attractive offer. The offer is new life because of God’s grace.

To many people, because of some of the experiences they have had with the sign carrying, bull horn crowd, the word gospel has come

to mean something bad, discouraging and angry. You can't blame them. But the gospel is really good news, not bad news. As Roy Gustafson wrote, "Religion is man's quest for God; the gospel is the Savior God seeking lost men. Religion originates on earth; the gospel originated in heaven. Religion is man made; the gospel is the gift of God. Religion is the story of what a sinful man tries to do for a holy God; the gospel is the story of what a holy God has done for sinful men. Religion is good views; the gospel is good news" (*Drapers Book of Quotations for the Christian World*, #9545, Edith Draper, 1992, Tynedale House Publishing, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois).

Actually, in order to understand the good news, you first have to understand the bad news. This bad news is what many of our sign carrying friends are fairly good at communicating. The truth is that God does hate sin. He is a perfect God who cannot sin himself, and cannot tolerate sin in his presence. The Bible teaches that we are all sinners, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). A sinner is not a criminal, or some pathological person. The word sin just means "to miss the mark." A person is a sinner because they are unable to be perfect, to keep the perfect commandments of God. So all of us are sinners.

Since God hates sin, some have taught that God hates all sinners. But just the opposite is true. The gospel, or good news, does not consist of the belief that God hates sinners, but just the opposite. In one of the most famous verses of the Bible we read, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

In a nutshell, that is the good news. Though we have sinned against God and broken his commandments, his response was not to destroy us or to threaten us into submission, but to send his dearly beloved Son, Jesus, to give his life to satisfy God's requirements on our behalf. The good news is that God loves us and wants to enter

into an eternal relationship with us. He has literally died to bring us back into relationship with him. Love, not anger, is God's attitude towards us today. That is truly good news!

But this brings up a question in the minds of many people. Is the gospel good news for everyone?

### HOW CAN ANY NEWS BE GOOD FOR EVERYONE?

What may sound like good news to one person may actually be bad news to another. When someone wins the lottery, that is good news for him or her. But it isn't good news to everyone else that lost! The person who learns they just won a contest hears nothing but good news, but those who didn't win don't feel the news is all that great. If three people want one job, the employer's final decision is only good news to one person—to the other two it is bad news.

Author and historian Steven Ambrose, in his book *The Wild Blue*, writes that the men who wanted to join the Air Force in World War II needed to take mental and physical exams to see if they would qualify to be pilots, navigators or bombardiers. When the parents or wives of those who had passed the exams received a form letter from the government announcing their accomplishment, the outside of the letter was stamped with two large words: GOOD NEWS! This was to keep anyone from worrying that a letter from the government about their husband, father or son was telling them something bad or terrible had happened to them.

Jesus coming to earth was God's stamp of "GOOD NEWS" so that we wouldn't misunder-

*Religion is the story of what a sinful man tries to do for a holy God; the gospel is the story of what a holy God has done for sinful men. Religion is good views; the gospel is good news.*

stand. The gospel, the good news, is that the loving offer of God for salvation is for anyone and everyone who will believe and accept it, regardless of what you have done, said or believed in your past. This isn't just good news for a few people, but for everyone.

Before you think this is a point too obvious to make, think about all the offers you have heard and received in your life. How many of them were open to absolutely everyone who was alive, and would be alive in the future? All the offers we receive have built-in restrictions, limitations and expiration dates attached to them.

A great example is the American idea of freedom. Our country has stood for years as a beacon of hope to the peoples of the world seeking freedom. We offer freedom to all that are oppressed and seeking asylum. But the stipulation is that you have to come to America to get it. We can't export it and make it available anywhere in the world. The offer therefore is not open to everyone, because not everyone can get to America. Do you begin to see the difficulty of any good news that affects all equally?

Often, amazing offers sound great until you read the fine print, where the stipulations are spelled out. Then your excitement turns to disappointment when you learn that you have to buy something, or be a certain age, or income level, or live in a certain place to be eligible. The many Sweepstakes that are offered through the mail to so many of us all have fine print detailing who is really eligible and who is not. You often have to be on someone's subscription list to even be made aware of this offer.

Some offers are limited to certain people, others are limited to certain times and situations. A sweepstakes company may offer a wonderful prize this year, but only this year. The offer has a definite beginning and expiration date. A store chain might make a great offer to any who come into their shops in the month of December, but after December the offer is no longer available. At times countries embroiled

in civil war with rebel factions will declare a time of amnesty where rebels can be pardoned and re-enter the society without fear of retribution. Yet, there is a beginning and ending to this offer.

That is what makes the gospel, the good news, stand out so vividly. The offer of good news, the pardon and grace of a loving God, transcends political boundaries, languages, customs, geography, status, income, race, religion, sex and every other barrier. It is an offer that applies equally to each and every human heart and mind. There is no favoritism involved here.

No one who hears this offer is in a better or worse position to take advantage of it than someone else. This is why the gospel is truly good news for everyone! This is why Jesus encouraged his disciples to preach the gospel, to share the good news with everyone they could. But again, this raises an important question.

### **SHARING THE GOSPEL DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THE SAME AS BEING OBNOXIOUS**

You might have heard, or even voiced yourself, the complaint: "I don't want someone cramming their ideology down my throat!" There have certainly been cases of people who have been far too aggressive in how they share the good news of Jesus Christ. But we need to pause and examine this complaint.

Christianity, contrary to much popular opinion, is not primarily an ideology. It is primarily a relationship between a person and the living God. And in sharing the gospel we are not seeking to "cram it down" someone's throat, but to make them aware of a divine offer that they are entitled to participate in; one that will have eternal ramifications to them.

Look at it this way. Pretend a friend of yours bought a lottery ticket on a lark one day while visiting you. They threw it casually on the dashboard of your car, and then left to go back home, forgetting all about it. Later, you realize that this is the winning lottery ticket. Would you dare to

be “obnoxious” enough to call and call him until you got through and could tell him the good news?

Sharing the gospel is simply letting people know that something far more important than a winning lottery number is theirs. Many people, like a lottery winner, are simply unaware of their good fortune.

Christian philosopher and author, C.S. Lewis, wrote in his book, *Christian Reflections*, “The salvation of a single soul is more important than the production or preservation of all the epics and tragedies in the world.” There is simply

nothing that is more important to any person than where they will spend eternity.

But is that true? A recent *Newsweek* Poll revealed that 72% of Americans say they’d welcome a conversation with their doctor about faith or spirituality. In other

words, there are a lot of people with questions and concerns about spiritual things, and they are willing to talk about them.

It was the famous aviator Charles Lindbergh who once commented “Isn’t it strange that we talk least about the things we think about most?” The things we really care about, we want to talk about. In fact, the things we really care about, we will inevitably talk about. People do talk about spiritual things, and they have questions. They don’t want to be lectured to or chastised, but they want to learn. Don’t you think most people would be happy to learn that:

- God loves them
- God has forgiven all their sins
- God wants to enter into a deep and permanent relationship with them

You may have wanted to share the gospel with someone but were afraid that you would be

*The task of sharing the gospel does not require that we convince everyone to accept the offer, only that we share it with those who want to hear it.*

labeled fanatical if you did so. But is it fanatical to share good news with someone? The task of sharing the gospel does not require that we convince everyone to accept the offer, only that we share the offer with those who want to hear it. It is, after all, not our offer—it is God’s.

Some people, maybe you yourself, have wanted to share this good news with someone, but were afraid, afraid that you don’t have all the answers.

### WHAT IF I DON’T HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS TO PEOPLE’S QUESTIONS?

Relax, you won’t. Nobody has all the answers, except God. When God asks us to share his good news with someone else, he is not asking us to share what we don’t know; only what we do know. But consider this, if you know the gospel, you know more than most people.

The vast majority of people believe that God is not offering salvation for free, but that we have to work for it. Most people believe that God grades on some kind of divine curve, and that if they do enough good works they will get in to heaven, and if they don’t, they won’t. But that isn’t the gospel, and it isn’t good news. It sets up a standard that is impossible to meet because God is absolutely perfect, and no one can reach his standard (Matthew 5:48). For many people, this information would be very bad news indeed. But we are not saved by doing good works, but by his divine grace, through faith (Ephesians 2:8,9).

Besides, a person will be growing spiritually the rest of their lives and still not learn all there is to know. If we wait until we have all the answers to every question before we share the gospel with someone, we’ll never share it with anyone!

Consider this. If there was a primitive culture of people who were dying of a sickness that modern medicine could cure with simple antibiotics, would you withhold giving them the necessary medicine until you understood everything about how these antibiotics work—until

you could answer every possible question? Or, would you give them the medicine first, and save their lives? The answer is obvious. Since you know the antibiotics will work, you use them.

If you understand the good news, if you understand the offer God is making to mankind, you too can share the gospel.

If someone developed a vaccine for AIDS which would save the lives of millions of men, women and children, would you want it to be kept a secret? If someone found a cure for cancer, should we keep it quiet and not be obnoxious about it, tracking everyone down with cancer and trying to convince them to save themselves by taking the vaccine? Wouldn't we be making public service announcements, making sure the newspapers ran it in their headlines, sending out letters to all who had cancer or AIDS, encouraging politicians and celebrities to join the cause?

In the book, *Kon-Tiki: Across the Pacific by Raft*, adventurer Thor Heyerdahl tells how he and a crew of five crossed the Pacific Ocean from South America to the South Pacific Islands on a crude raft of balsa logs bound together with hemp rope.

During the three-month journey in 1947, they had little control of the direction of the raft and no way to stop its forward progress. They learned early in the voyage that anything dropped overboard was almost impossible to recover once it passed behind the raft.

Two months into the voyage and thousands of miles from land, Herman Watzinger lost his footing and went overboard. The raft, driven by a strong wind in heavy seas, moved ahead faster than he could swim.

The five remaining men were horrified for their friend. They tried to throw him a life belt on a rope, but the wind blew it back at them. In seconds, Herman was all but lost to sight in the tumble of waves.

Suddenly Knute Haughland grabbed the life belt and dove into the water. He swam back to

Herman and wrapped his arm around him, holding his exhausted friend and the rope while the men on the boat drew them back to the boat. In the same way, sharing the gospel will sometimes demand that we take risks in order to take essential information to someone who is lost and heading for great danger.

### **WHAT IF A PERSON DOESN'T WANT TO HEAR THE GOSPEL?**

There are definitely people who are aggressively hostile to any news about God. You probably know several. Some past experience has embittered them to the things of God, and they don't want to hear any more about him. We can feel that such a person could never respond to the gospel. But history teaches that this simply isn't always so. Sometimes a person doesn't believe the first time they hear the gospel. Sometimes they will hear the gospel several times before they ever decide to accept the good news.

There was a radio "shock jock" in Atlanta who made regular, hateful speeches against anyone who professed a belief in Christ. He was known to hundreds of thousands of late-night and afternoon listeners as David Paul. He gained incredible ratings by being outrageous, including bringing in dancers to strip in front of him while he described their action on the radio. He would also advise young people to steal from their church offering plates, and to sue their parents if their parents forced them to go to church.

He would often tell people that the only time he would enter a church would be to blow it up. But he ended up leaving the station over

*If someone developed a vaccine for AIDS which would save the lives of millions of men, women and children, would you want it to be kept a secret?*

a contract dispute. He took a job as a car salesman and while there was impressed with the life of a fellow salesman. The Christian witness of this salesman was used to lead Paul Staves (David Paul) to accept and embrace the wonderful gospel.

Sometimes a person needs to see how the gospel has changed their life before they are ready to hear any more about it.

As Emmanuel Suhard once wrote, “To be a witness does not consist of engaging in propaganda, or in stirring people up. It means to live in

such a way that one’s life would not make sense if God did not exist” (*Drapers Book of Quotations for the Christian World*, #3336, Edith Draper, 1992, Tyndale House Publishing, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois).

*While good news of any kind can make us happy, the gospel is more than just good news. It is good news with the power to change our hearts.*

There is no one who is an “untouchable” as far as the gospel is concerned. Madelyn Murray O’Hair was the most famous atheist of our generation. She raised her children to believe the same thing she did. Her son, William Murray, grew up as an atheist, hating all things Christian. He was instrumental in helping his mother in her goal of removing prayer from our public schools.

But later, as an alcoholic with no hope, no joy and nothing to live for, he wondered if maybe God might exist. Later, this atheist not only came to hear and accept the gospel, but became an evangelist and Christian leader, sharing the gospel with thousands.

We cannot hope to know the condition of anyone’s heart. Some who may seem the most unlikely to believe the gospel, might embrace it. Some who seem like they would be most likely to believe the gospel may reject it. The apostle Paul, who wrote most of the New Testament letters, was one of the most ardent and

antagonistic enemies of the early church. He hated the church and everything it stood for.

But one day on the road to Damascus, Jesus appeared to Paul and revealed himself to him, and Paul finally understood the grace and kindness of God. He became one of the greatest preachers of the gospel our world has ever seen (Acts 9:1-31). He finally understood that Jesus had come to bring the gospel, the good news that God loves us and wants a relationship with us, to people like him.

### THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

While good news of any kind can make us happy, the gospel is more than just good news. It is good news with the power to change our hearts. The apostle Paul said in Romans 1:16 “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes....”

Paul recognized that the gospel has a power over the human heart. He had certainly felt its power in his own life, changing his hatred to love and devotion. He would later become a martyr to the very cause he had once tried to stamp out.

Not all good news will change our hearts in a good way. The person who wins the lottery doesn’t always become happier and more fulfilled; the difficulty in adjusting to sudden wealth often becomes a problem that ruins their life. The person who was so happy to get a particular job can later grow to hate the job, wishing they had never taken it.

In other words, most good news will not change our heart for long. It may make us temporarily happy, but not permanently. Most good news doesn’t have the power to change us permanently. As someone once said:

*Give a man a dollar—cheer his heart  
Give him a dream—challenge his heart  
Give him Christ—change his heart.*



But the gospel is different in this way. The good news that God loves a person, and is actively seeking a relationship with them, can melt the hardest heart. Because the good news is that you can enter a relationship with God, and when God enters your life, he brings joy. And because God never leaves, and never goes back on his promises, you can always be glad that you accepted the good news of God.

There is no greater feeling than to know that you are forgiven, that God isn't mad at you, that in fact, he loves you with a power and a passion we can hardly understand. This truth changes the way we look at God, others and ourselves. In short, the gospel produces change. It has been changing people for the last 2,000 years.

C.S. Lewis once wrote, "My feeling about people in whose conversion I have been allowed to play a part is always mixed with awe and fear: such as a boy might feel on first being allowed to fire a rifle. The disproportion between his puny finger on the trigger and the thunder and lightning which follow is alarming" (*A Severe Mercy, Letter to Sheldon Vanaucken*, 1953, p. 134).

Jesus entrusted the gospel to his followers. He told us to "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation!" (Mark 16:15). While God does call some (like the apostle Paul) to go into other places and other cultures, for most of us it involves sharing the gospel with those in our own world.

Our world includes our families, our friends, our workplaces and our neighborhoods. When we have heard and responded to the good news of the gospel, it then becomes our responsibility to take this good news to others who have yet to believe. The gospel is not something that God wants us to keep private about. Good news shouldn't be kept quiet, it is meant to be shared. Especially good news that will change your life! Maybe it is time that you started sharing the good news!