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Contents

Foreword by Lee Strobel	7
Preface by Marie Little	9
1 The Essential Foundation	13
2 The Effective Ambassador	36
3 How to Witness	50
4 Hurdling Social Barriers	74
5 What Is Our Message?	88
6 Why We Believe	107
7 Christ Is Relevant Today	137
8 Worldliness: External or Internal?	149
9 Living by Faith	166
10 Feeding the Spring	179
Notes	197

Foreword

LEE STROBEL

I was working as an editor at a Chicago area newspaper. My boss knew that I was a Christian, but we had never discussed the issue. Then at the end of a horribly hectic day during which nearly everybody had lost his or her composure, he said to me: “Strobel, how did you get through the day without blowing your top? What’s this Christianity thing to you?”

Nobody had ever asked me that before. I wasn’t sure what to say, but I walked over to his office door, closed it and spent the next forty-five minutes telling him as best I could how Jesus Christ had brought me from atheism to faith and radically redirected the trajectory of my life.

It was one of the most exhilarating encounters I had ever experienced! When I emerged, I felt as if my entire life had been a movie shot in very grainy black-and-white film with scratchy sound—yet that forty-five minutes had been filmed in vivid Technicolor with rich Dolby stereo.

I instantly realized that sharing the gospel was one of the most exciting, fulfilling and important endeavors of the Christian life. But one thing was clear: to be effective in telling others about Jesus, I was going to need some help. Rather than merely bumbling around like I did with my boss, I wanted to be able to naturally and persuasively talk about Christianity as God opened up opportunities for me.

That's why I was so glad that a friend gave me a copy of Paul Little's book *How to Give Away Your Faith*. Here was a treasure trove of sage advice, practical suggestions and theological wisdom—all written by Paul Little, one of the most winsome and accomplished evangelists of our time. He wasn't merely an armchair expert; rather, Little consistently and creatively lived out Jesus' command that his followers spread the good news far and wide.

Little was killed in a car accident in 1975. Ironically, though, I later became friends with his widow, Marie, who attended the same church where I had found Christ. Like Paul, Marie enthusiastically shared Christ with others and mentored Christians in how they could do the same. In fact, she later used Paul's lecture notes—and her own formidable knowledge and experience—in updating this classic volume.

Now, many years after that life-changing meeting with my boss, I'm still thankful for the role that this immensely helpful book played in giving me the confidence to engage in spiritual conversations. One thing hasn't changed—I still find that sharing the gospel is one of the most satisfying and rewarding aspects of the Christian faith. Whether you're already an outreach veteran or frightened at the prospect of talking to someone about Jesus, you'll find this book to be an invaluable resource. Like me, you'll marvel at how Paul and Marie have been able to synthesize so much useful and encouraging material into one easy-to-read volume.

So read on—and get ready to go from black-and-white living to the colorful adventure of personal evangelism!

Preface

MARIE LITTLE

I have spent the last eight months tampering with genius. At least at times that's how I felt as I worked to update a book which has sold a million copies and continues to sell at a steady pace.

I think I can rightly use the word *genius* in talking about my husband, Paul. Unlike many armchair evangelists, Paul did what a lot of us wish we could do. He was able to make the Christian message comprehensible and alive to students and others as he traveled to hundreds of campuses throughout the world. He was warmly dubbed by one friend as “a shirt-sleeve evangelist.” He didn't just talk about witnessing; he did it! And it was from the lessons he learned in his persistent witness that this book originally came about. He described it as “a book on instruction rather than exhortation” to witness.

Now, two decades later, the fundamentals Paul taught with his eye-opening illustrations hold firmly true and are still eminently useful. And timeless—perhaps even before their time. Twenty years ago Paul told us what to say to a man who tells you that a fried egg on his ear gives him joy, peace and happiness. His answer could be the same today for someone who tells you that a crystal on his or her chest brings light to life.

Paul's unfaltering relevance, along with the book's practicality, convinced the editors at InterVarsity Press and me that *How to Give Away Your Faith* was worth updating . . . and worth maintaining at its highest

potential. The cultural shifts from the sixties to the near nineties made certain quotations and applications out of date for our time. Moreover, I knew there was later material from Paul's tapes and notes that he had envisioned using one day to write *How to Give Away Your Faith II*.

Fortunately, Paul left a wealth of material that would make such a revision possible. Spurred on by the editors, I began to comb through his tapes and files and soon discovered "vintage Paul Little" material not yet in print. His original tapes of "The Effective Ambassador" (which became the TwentyOneHundred slide presentation bearing that name) now enhance chapter two. Other new items include:

- three questions for finding out where people are on their spiritual journeys
- instructions for following up a new Christian
- how to dispel some popular misconceptions of Christianity
- many illustrations of practical truths

In every case I have sought to maintain Paul's major thrust for the book and have guarded every expression that carries his special flavor. Yet it will be obvious in some of the present-day references that the insertions are from my own research and experience.

Were Paul alive today he would probably shake his head at the original book and my efforts to preserve it, saying in self-deprecation, "I don't know that these are deathless words." In this case, I would surely disagree with him, for the more I mulled over his material, the more my own motivation heightened to continue witnessing to the life-changing power of Jesus Christ. My solemn prayer is that each reader may respond similarly.

One discovery helped to dispel the fears and inadequacies I felt about this undertaking. I learned that every one of Oswald Chambers's prolific writings were published posthumously. During his lectures between 1907 and 1917, his wife took shorthand notes from

which all of his books were produced after his death in his early forties. Paul was in his late forties when an automobile accident took him to heaven while our family was on vacation. There were some obvious parallels in our two stories. I took this widow's model as the Lord's prompting to undertake this update. And now my prayer with this edition is that all who read will come to the same deep conviction as Paul that "the greatest favor you can do for others is to introduce them to Jesus Christ."

The Essential Foundation

So you want to witness! I did too, but I didn't have a clue how to do it without stubbing my toe in the process.

How about you? Do you know how to make the good news relevant? Do you know how to communicate to people to whom the gospel seems alien? How do you talk about Jesus Christ to . . .

- the religion major who mocks your defense of biblical teachings with, "But this is the twentieth century, John!"?
- the hard-working manager of the local service station?
- that office worker who's just been replaced by a thinking machine?
- the junior who's ready to drop out of school because of drug abuse?
- the "who cares" party boy across the hall?
- that girl you know who's gotten everything she's ever wanted?
- those nearest to you: your family, your friends, your next-door neighbors?
- the man on the street who would be one of the 150 million casualties during the first eighteen hours of a nuclear war?
- the trapped housewife struggling to keep up with small children, the Joneses and a dozen civic demands?
- the victim of divorce or abuse who can't trust anyone?

- the doctor who has fertilized a human egg in a test tube and successfully transplanted it in a surrogate mother?
- the upwardly mobile professional next to you in the office?

It's easy to quote "God so loved the world . . . ," but what do the words mean? What can you say that will make sense to these people in their everyday lives?

REALISM IS ESSENTIAL

To begin with, we must be realistic about the world we live in. Times are changing faster than ever before in history. Although Jesus Christ remains the same yesterday, today and forever, these changes significantly color the attitudes and receptivity of those to whom we witness.

My generation grew up playing cowboys and Indians, cops and robbers, paper dolls and store. Today's children live their lives with a ceaseless background of TV while playing out elaborate fantasies with "supernaturals," ghosts and transformers. As they get older, children are becoming all but submerged in an ocean of video games and electronic music.

Today's adults have their own sets of electronic toys; each year new ones arrive, outdating last year's. In addition, the information explosion has turned the entire world into a single "global village" and given everyone a front seat at major events around the world. As a result people are exposed to a cafeteria of cultures and mores; all they have to do is choose what to believe. Along with this, the ever-present media spew out images of a future of genetic mapping, brain-code exploration and "green machines" to produce food from sunlight and air alone. Far and away the most universal change in recent years has been the computerization and miniaturization of every area of life.

But while we have made quantum leaps in our hopes to mold and conquer the universe, the future of civilization seems less and less certain. Is it inevitable that nuclear war will wipe out the whole human

race? Will environmental damage threaten the future habitability of the earth? Or will the spread of AIDS bring slow, painful death even if we conquer other threats? And what is the future of the disintegrating American family?

All this reminds us of the little boy's statement, "If I live to be a man, I'll . . ." Inherent in his statement is the crucial question, Will we all survive and will America make it? Until recently, the trend has been to turn to the gee-whiz wonders of science and technology. High tech is everywhere we look—in the factory, office and home. Its plastic, miracle-working boxes have seduced us into thinking that technology can solve everything. But the truth is, it fails in the most crucial aspect, our need for personal concern and touch. We cannot live by technology alone! Nor can our obsessive consumerism bring hoped-for solace. As a film star once observed, "How many toasters can one person use?"

Now an alarming number of people are looking for honest answers in the new self-help or human potential movements. On close inspection, these are far from innocent twenty-four-hour cures. They promise personal effectiveness and motivational training through Eastern-influenced "mind control" techniques that on the surface appear harmless. Underneath, their values are alien to Christianity. In their groups they spin tales about past lives by using trance channelers, mantras and divining crystals while their Hindu and occultist roots go undetected. Along with this they foster moral anarchy, each person seeking his own truth, blithely bypassing God's revealed truth. Philosophically, their base is monism; we are all gods, humanity is god and all religions are one. The fact that the movement has attracted so many followers reveals a yawning vacuum in the lives of people who are reaching and searching for a possible source of salvation.

Salvation? From what? Loneliness and isolation is the answer we hear from young people. In the sixties, young people began their search with demonstrations and revolutions. They hoped to find mean-

ing in doing their own thing. In the seventies, a spent generation turned into the narcissistic “me” generation. And that spawned the generation of the eighties which seems to be content, by and large, with a materialistic, value-free society.

Listen to a description of the university world of this decade:

Almost every student entering university believes or says he believes that truth is relative. They fear not error, but intolerance. They ask, “What right do I or anyone else have to say one (culture or religion) is better than another?” . . . Spiritual entropy or an evaporation of the soul’s boiling blood is taking place. . . . Respect for the sacred, real religion and knowledge of the Bible have diminished to the vanishing point.¹

This comes not from an evangelical preacher but from University of Chicago professor Allan Bloom.

This spiritual entropy, as Bloom puts it, has penetrated every level of our society. For instance, American high school students have all but stated that for them, celebrity counts for everything. A 1987 World Almanac poll listed their ten heroes. In order of preference the winners were Bill Cosby, Sylvester Stallone, Eddie Murphy, Ronald Reagan, Chuck Norris, Clint Eastwood, Molly Ringwald, Rob Lowe, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Don Johnson.² With the exception of President Ronald Reagan, they are all entertainers or actors. For the high schoolers, the conclusion is unmistakable: if you are not famous (or not in show business), you are nothing. And the implication is that they also admire and would like to imitate their lifestyles.

Adults are not immune to this spiritual entropy either. *Time* magazine’s cover story of May 25, 1987, tells of more than a hundred government officials who have ethical or legal charges against them. *Time* also named Wall Street pinstriped millionaires who are under indictment for illegally manipulating millions of dollars to their own benefit.

Besides that, *Time* describes an appalling list of marines, televangelists and presidential candidates indicted or dethroned because of illicit relationships. The writers of *Time* (not the preachers) headline their story with “Whatever happened to ethics?”

Students, Ph.D.’s, blue-collar and white-collar workers, parents, doctors, statesmen, your neighbors and mine are all mired in the same bog of shifting values.

Today’s adults

- are hard-working.
- are struggling for financial security.
- can be generous and helpful to neighbors.
- make pleasure and leisure priorities.
- are committed to causes that generally line up with their self-interests.
- hate to be patronized.
- can easily detect a hidden agenda in relationships.
- will resist high pressure from any group.
- if single, may flock to bars for human contact and solace.

Religiously, these adults

- see science as more reliable than religion.
- consider Christianity’s claim to uniqueness to be bigoted in the extreme.
- find their moral certainty has either shifted downward or vanished entirely.
- believe psychology probably has as many answers as religion.
- view God as a stern judge or a benign, distant grandfather.
- believe God is probably irrelevant to their existence.

- rarely see the Bible as a source of help.
- vaguely wonder if there isn't some truth to the new cults.
- see Christians as judgmental killjoys.
- will quickly point to the hypocrisy of so-called people of God on TV who bilk money from supporters.

These same adults

- if graduating from college, fear that they won't find a job.
- worry about the risks of marital commitments.
- doubt that their family relationships will ever be stable and satisfying.
- are tempted to abandon traditional values.
- face relentless competition for success.
- fear that they will be part of the grim statistics of people pushed out of their jobs after age forty.
- wonder if they will lose their looks and be rejected.
- worry that old age will find them alone and disabled.

This picture, although not comprehensive, is not pretty. It describes, nonetheless, the kind of soil in which we sow the truth of Jesus Christ. These trends and pressures affect Christians as well as those who have not yet trusted Jesus Christ. Furthermore, I have not intended to imply by this picture that Christians are a holy breed free from any flaws. Far from it! We, too, can be caught up by the same pressures and cultural drifts.

CHRISTIANITY IS REALISTIC

We Christians cannot live with our heads in a bucket and ignore the truth of this picture. It should be no surprise to us when we hear stories of abuse and violence happening in our own neighborhoods. More

important, we must be convinced beyond all doubt that the Christian faith has a message for all facets of this world, that its truth has transformed our lives and that it is of supreme value for everyone.

Any temptation to avoid understanding our world is comparable to the philosophies claiming all reality (including sin) is in the mind. The Christian faith is not so spiritual and otherworldly that it denies this world's reality or the existence of matter. The Christian faith affirms material things; yet it sees beyond them to spiritual things, the ultimate reality.

Jesus Christ dealt with the crux of this reality question when he fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish. Jesus saw the crowd's need and fed them. The people were stunned by this miraculous feat and wanted to draft him as their leader. What a windfall to have a king like this! But our Lord withdrew from them, as he always did when people were following him for the wrong reasons. When they found him the next day, he told them they were following him only because they had eaten their fill. Then he spoke to the issue of the material versus the spiritual: "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you" (John 6:27).

Jesus was teaching that material food is real. Hunger is real. The world of cities and streets, rocks and trees and people does exist. But he was emphasizing that spiritual realities are of pre-eminent value; they transcend and outlast the material. Indeed, they give true meaning to the material world.

Of course Jesus knew that the people were famished. So he used real food to feed them. He didn't just pray for them and then send them home hungry. He saw them as whole people, not as mere "souls," somehow separated from the rest of themselves. He also knew that their physical and emotional needs were tightly bound up with their spiritual hungers. After they had listened to his message, Jesus then

demonstrated that he cared about their material needs as well. In many cases, he dealt with the physical needs first!

This causes us to think deeply about the extraordinary sensitivity Jesus had for the needs of all people, whether he met them in large groups or in individual encounters. It brings us to ask what steps we must take to follow his example. First, we must be aware of the condition of those around us—whether they are hungry, tired, bored, lonely, mistreated or rejected. We must try to understand what and how they think, how they feel, what they aspire to be and do.

I will never forget an Asian man, a judge, who chatted with me in the dining commons of Harvard University. Speaking as a Christian, he said, “I wish you Christians in the West could realize that we from the East, who have gone through the ravages of war, starvation, suffering, political turmoil and the loss of loved ones, have a profound wound in our hearts.” And he continued, “I know that essentially the gospel is God’s message of love and that while it has social implications, it is directed primarily to man’s spiritual need for redemption. But it would mean so much if only we saw that you understood this wound in our hearts.”

Many of those we rub shoulders with carry just such a “profound wound” in their hearts. Their response to us and the good news we share depends a lot on whether they think we really understand and care. An old Indian proverb states it, “One man should say nothing to another until he has walked in his moccasins.” In spirit, at least, we need to sit and walk where they walk. When we can repeat back to them their thoughts and feelings in our own words, they will begin to trust us. From there they will be willing to think seriously about the things we care about.

It should not surprise us that the people whom God has greatly used throughout the centuries have not just known their Bibles well; they have known other people well too. And loving both, they have made the Word relevant to others.

Because we as Christians have the privilege of knowing the answer to our world's needs, this can be an exciting time to witness. We probably agree, we *should* witness, even that we *must* witness. But when the time comes, we ask the big question, *How* can we witness? How can we explain clearly to this world that Jesus Christ is a right and relevant solution today? On what grounds can we approach those who touch our lives and expect to be heard—and believed?

START WITH THE PERSON NEXT DOOR

To develop Jesus' kind of sensitivity can only be done by having man-to-man or woman-to-woman contact. As Christians we must turn from the world at large to the person next door. Herein lies the rub, for as the old saying goes:

To love the world to me's no chore,
My trouble is the man next door.

Unequivocally, it is when we get involved personally with others that our evangelism begins to take off. Unless we stop theorizing and reach out and knock on the neighbor's door, we'll never get to the real nuts and bolts of witnessing. Lifestyle evangelism begins with talking to people who in some way touch our lives. It is not a superficial, quick relationship or an overnight coup. It involves time and sacrifice, and most of all it involves giving ourselves.

LISTEN

An easy first step for any of us to take is to start to listen to those around us. I said *listen*, not *talk!* Stop long enough just to hear. It might take some effort because it's easier to give advice and talk about our own experiences than to think about the other person. If you are naturally shy, focus your thoughts on the feelings and concerns of the people you're trying to reach. Are they feeling uncomfortable? Do they

find it difficult to converse? What are their concerns? Refuse to allow yourself to dwell on your own emotions. You will find yourself projecting warmth and concern for the other person. As someone has said, “Listen with your heart, not your mind.”

In my work of lecturing to college and university students, I like to sit in student lounges and interact casually with all kinds of students. When I hear the specifics of what they are thinking and how they spend their out-of-class time, I see the real world. Or as I travel, I have the opportunity to hear my fellow travelers tell of their lives away from home. Their comments are peppered with a surprising number of their fears. It’s often an eye-opener. One man said he had both a wife and a mistress and couldn’t understand why he wasn’t happy. This is the real world and it pays to listen and learn. In the process we earn the right to tell our own story.

During a conversation I had with a friend, I learned a good lesson about the effort involved in listening. We had a mutual acquaintance who was obviously searching for God. Feeling warm and concerned about that person, I suggested that perhaps I might call him sometime. My friend looked at me for a long moment and then advised, “Only call him if you’re willing to be his friend.” I got his message. If my attitude was “Well, I’ll call and give him a gospel shot in the arm,” I should forget it. Too many Christians evangelize as if they had a “gospel pill” to offer. If non-Christians would take it, they’d find the Savior. Anyone would recoil from such “quick-fix” witnessing.

BE INFORMED

Along with listening, another step for realistic followers of Jesus’ example is to keep informed about the world around us. This will help those of us who must honestly admit that we would have nothing to say if we were locked up for an hour with a non-Christian. Reading a weekly news magazine, listening to the evening news and learning our

community's needs will give us common ground to build on.

As we expand our information base, we will see a slice of life different from our own. It will help us relate the gospel to real situations and to scratch where people itch. The information could help us understand a colleague at work when he confides about a child with a chemical dependency. Or it could give us insight into the dilemma of the single parent down the street who needs an adult friend for her young child. When our neighbor confides in us about his pregnant teen, we might be able to offer information and insight along with our promise of prayer support. Informed Christians will naturally begin caring about their community and world. And the wonderful result will be finding ourselves working shoulder to shoulder with the world that Jesus Christ came to redeem.

WHAT DO CHRISTIANS HAVE TO OFFER?

So far we've been looking at our world today and considering individual needs of human beings in it. We've seen how imperative it is that we know and understand something about both. But if we're going to be realistic Christians, we have to take a careful look at our own spiritual dimension too.

What do we have to offer? Some time ago I spent the evening with a couple who had attended our church for a brief period, went to most of the activities, but then suddenly dropped out entirely. Some of us were concerned to know why these people left our church fellowship. During our conversation, as we discussed belonging to Jesus Christ and living for him, the husband became very thoughtful. He said, "You talk about a relationship with Jesus Christ that is supernatural. In your church, there are some people who have it and some people who don't." I was cut to the quick as I saw our group through the eyes of a visitor trying to search out this intangible "it." The difference was obvious to *him*.

Whether this man's evaluation was accurate or not, seekers are

often carefully examining our Christian groups and us as individual Christians to find that eternal dimension we talk about. A superficial profession won't convince them. They're looking for the real thing—genuine, living faith. They don't always see it, though, in us individually or collectively. And this is not because they're spiritually blind, either. Sometimes it just isn't there.

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE IN THE CHRISTIAN?

Does our claim that we know Jesus Christ make a difference in our everyday lives, day in and day out—in our use of time, money and strength, and in our system of values? What happens Monday through Saturday? If we are students, how about the way we study and why we study? Does the faith we claim make a difference in our relationships with members of the opposite sex? Do we refuse to overindulge ourselves and exploit others? Do we respect people's integrity and rule out activities that demean others? Beyond that, how do we respond when we are disappointed or bereaved? When the chips are down, do non-Christians see in us an attitude of honesty and sincerity that they would like to have? Or are they more apt to say to themselves (as many justifiably have), "I've got enough problems of my own; don't bother me with yours!"? Finally, does knowing Jesus Christ influence our life choices—choosing a major, a career, a graduate school, a spouse, a job?

THE BUSY CHRISTIAN

The "ivory tower" label often given to the university professor or student can unwittingly become the lifestyle of Mr. and Mrs. Average Christian. They can be isolated by the multitude of church activities, sometimes five nights a week. Kids' clubs, prayer meetings, music ministry, planning meetings, deacon and deaconess meetings—all very worthy activities. But the Average Christians may literally have no

time for the unbelieving world. When they think about reaching their world, sheer busyness can prevent them from taking any action. We have all had the experience of wanting to witness but knowing down deep that no one was listening. The world will listen to our message when they see we have an ear that's tuned in.

NO PHONY CHRISTIANS

Phony solutions will never sell to our non-Christian contemporaries. They are fed up with phony people, and they aren't fooled by the pious person whose religion goes only skin-deep. No force-feeding of superficial formulas will reach them. Nor are they attracted by naive wishful thinkers who aren't ready to face up to life's harsh realities of wickedness, weakness, temptation or greed. They are looking for something genuine enough to have meaning in the real world. If Christians can demonstrate evidence in their own lives that Jesus Christ has rescued them—that for them Jesus is a living, daily reality—that will be realistic Christianity.

THREE KINDS OF FAITH

As we considered what we have to offer our world, you may have found yourself cold and tentative about your own faith, without any strong motivation to witness. Let me suggest one startling possibility—that is, your faith could be strictly environmental, an outgrowth of your surroundings.

In all of our Christian groups we can see that people have varying degrees of commitment. I would like to suggest that there are three categories that people fall into. First, there are those who could be described as having “indoctrination faith.” These are people who, without making a personal commitment to Christ, go through all the motions, sing all the right hymns, have all the right answers about the gospel. They have been well schooled from early childhood in Sunday school

classes and kids' clubs and never missed a church service. Indoctrination faith could describe the kids who won all the Bible quizzes and can quote John 3:16 in five languages. They have absorbed every answer they've ever heard, can teach classes and give sermons. They've got all the information, but that's all they've got. This is indoctrination faith.

Second, there are those with a "conformity faith." This faith is largely an outgrowth of strong Christian surroundings. On Sunday these people go to Bible classes and worship services and hear the Bible expounded. During the week they attend other church meetings and contribute with the best of them. They may do all the right things and none of the wrong things—but only because of the external pressure of family and church. Some mysterious sort of osmosis is supposed to make these people "spiritual" but, in fact, there is no genuine desire from within.

When people with conformity faith get into situations where they are on their own and free to decide what they're going to do, they shed their faith like a raincoat. If they go away to college, their whole lifestyle changes. They move out of the safety zone where every activity is carefully structured and get a rude shock. Suddenly they're faced with the shallow superficiality of their Christian experience. Most likely it has been an unconscious drift into reliance on their environment (faith on a horizontal level).

On secular campuses, I have all too often met students, stripped of their familiar Christian environment of home and church, who were faltering and unsure of themselves. Their secondhand faith has slowly disintegrated because they have never known a personal, vertical relationship with Jesus Christ. Back home, everybody says, "Oh, Johnny and Susie have lost their faith at the terrible state university." We need to raise the awkward question, "Did Johnny and Susie lose saving faith, or did they have only indoctrination or conformity faith to begin with?"

When non-Christians look at people with conformity faith they see

a reflection of their environment (which they do not share) but nothing more. And it doesn't impress them. They're not looking for an environment; they're looking for living faith.

Having come from a Christian background myself, I have found it helpful to ask on a regular basis, "Is there anything in my life that can be explained only because of God himself? Or is everything that has happened to me due to my background, surroundings and present circumstances? What if, a week from now, my environment should be completely different?"

Fortunately, there is a third level of faith that has been called "commitment faith." This third level describes those who recognize that to be a Christian is more than giving mental assent to the facts about the Lord Jesus Christ. Demons do that much, as James 2:19 tells us. They believe in one God and tremble. Merely believing the facts is not in itself saving faith. On the other hand, people who have commitment faith are genuine followers of Jesus Christ and are committed to him on a double-or-nothing basis.

For instance, university students may find themselves in an environment openly hostile to Christianity. They may hear challenges to their faith they've never thought of before, let alone known the answers to. But because they are committed to Jesus Christ unequivocally, they will be motivated to dig out the answers rather than cast off their faith. Faced with temptations they'd never experienced before, like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego when they were taken to Babylon, rather than being influenced by the environment, they exert an influence on the environment. What makes these students different? The difference is they have saving faith born of the Spirit from above.

OOZING INTO CHRISTIANITY

It is important to avoid a drift into environmental faith at any stage in life. We need to beware of the often-unconscious belief that people can

“ooze” into Christianity. This harmful tendency develops easily, especially in Christian homes. Watching my own children when they were young gave me a live illustration. I remember Paul Jr. at age four skipping through the house singing, “I’m happy, happy, happy all day long because Jesus is my friend.” I hoped he was happy most of the time, and I also like to think he viewed Jesus as his friend. But doubtless, he often sang that song unaware of its meaning, as so many of us do regularly. We sing truths that are not our own. This pattern of rote repetition without thought or meaning starts in childhood and can become a regular habit carried into our adult life.

It has been observed, wisely I think, that hymns and choruses make liars of us all. We sing of glorious Christian experiences as though they were our very own, and yet they are not. Hymns of commitment are probably the ones most often sung without putting the words into action. When we mouth truths without thought or meaning, it leads us to accept an unreal experience as the norm. Without realizing it, we’re actually living a lie. It is lamentable that our rich heritage of Christian music may lead us to substitute a fiction for the real thing.

BELIEVING FACTS IS NOT ENOUGH

Believing the facts about Jesus can cause us unwittingly to accept intellectual belief as an end in itself. Hence, we miss the experience of being dynamically related to the Person who embodies these facts. Again, I’ve met more than a few college students who told me honestly, “I believe everything about Christ,” but they had to add, “It doesn’t mean a thing to me. My faith is like Pepsi that’s lost its fizz.” Why should life as a Christian be like cold mashed potatoes? Why should it be insipid and burdensome as well? It shouldn’t, but for some it is.

Have we forgotten that becoming and being a Christian, at its very heart, involves receiving, living with and responding to a person? To give mental assent to a list of propositions about Jesus Christ is not the

same as knowing him personally. It would be like knowing all the facts about the president of the United States but not ever meeting him personally. For many of us, our backgrounds may have included many facts about Jesus Christ, without helping us reach him as a living, present person.

TWO ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS FOR FAITH

To know Jesus Christ personally involves two things. The first thing is a commitment, a time when we make a conscious decision, “Yes, I do want to belong to you, Lord Jesus Christ.” That commitment is a continual, lifetime involvement of one’s self with the living Lord. By definition, a relationship is continual, involving our entire person—quite different from assent to facts but having no contact with Jesus Christ personally. Perhaps we’ve never made that big commitment, never personally invited him into our lives to be our living Lord and Savior. If not, then that’s the beginning.

The second thing is love and obedience to our living Lord and Savior. It is unthinkable to consider a relationship with the Lord Jesus that is less than 100 percent. He is the spectacular Lord from heaven; he is the Lord of all the earth. When we let this fact get fully into the marrow of our bones, willing obedience to him is an incredible privilege.

Some of our Lord’s most solemn words are recorded in Matthew 7:21 when he warns his disciples, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” Here Jesus talks about our relationship to him as *entering the kingdom*. In other places it is called *the new birth*. To enter this relationship is not a matter of using correct vocabulary or going through the empty motions. It involves a clear resolve to do his will. As basic as that resolve is, he does not accept us and love us because of our obedience to him. But obedience is the evidence of a true commitment to him as our Lord. The apostle John

adds a helpful thought. He says that if we keep Jesus' commandments, "we know that we have come to know him" (1 John 2:3). And the whole letter of James amplifies this point.

DOES FAITH NEED ACTION?

Faith, in its very nature, demands action. Faith is action. Belief can be tested by action. For instance, suppose a wild-eyed man ran into your room and said the building would be blown up in five minutes. If you were still there five minutes later, we would know that you really didn't believe him. If you did believe him, you'd get out as fast as you could. We could tell by your actions what you honestly believed.

Similarly, I might tell you I believe that Jesus Christ is the one and only Savior, that life's full meaning can only be known through him and that apart from him all people are under the eternal condemnation of God. But if I go my merry way, ignore his words and his will and live a life of complete self-indulgence, I am not honestly believing or entering the kingdom in the biblical sense.

The Bible gives us many exciting illustrations of men and women whose faith in God was obvious from their day-by-day actions and decisions. Rahab is listed in Hebrews as having faith when she welcomed the Israelite spies into her house. She allied herself with God's people. Joseph literally gave the empty sleeve to Potiphar's wife to avoid immorality. Moses abandoned the pleasures and privileges of a son of Pharaoh to identify himself with the afflicted people of God. Elijah boldly challenged the prophets of Baal to a sacrificial contest saying, "The God who answers by fire, let him be God." Then with apparent brashness he proceeded to dump barrels of water on his sacrifices. He knew his living, powerful God would reply, and he did. Beaten and imprisoned, Paul and Silas sang hymns of praise to their God at midnight. These were not simply pious expressions but confessions and acts of faith from the warp and woof of their everyday lives.

HOW DO YOU TREAT GOD?

Our actions will be based on the answer to a simple question: How do you treat God? Do we consider God to be a living person or just a thing on a shelf? Have we that heart-hunger and thirst that compels us day by day to get away—alone with him—to study his Word and take time to talk to him in prayer? Sometimes we sing the old hymn “Sweet Hour of Prayer” and yet avoid prayer time like the plague. Are we honest with ourselves? Was it yesterday or was it a week ago, a month ago or a year ago that we last met with the Lord alone?

Non-Christians need to detect the supernatural quality of our Christian experiences. Then they will listen to our words about Jesus Christ and ask what it means to know him personally. Students have sometimes come to me after I have spoken to a group and asked, “How does it work? How can I have the kind of life you’ve been talking about? Is there any hope for me?” It’s the greatest privilege to sit down and explain how forgiveness, cleansing and God’s power can be theirs by committing themselves to Jesus Christ.

BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF

Each one of us has been reading through this chapter with different attitudes, different reactions, different conclusions. Some of us are convinced that our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is genuine, but we want it to deepen and grow as our awareness of him increases. Others of us are remembering that our faith used to be much more vibrant than it is now. Or perhaps we’re beginning to realize with a chill that our faith never has been any more than a mental assent to the facts about Jesus Christ and a social conformity to our Christian peers. All these years we’ve been concerned about the pieces of information, but not about Jesus himself. Quite frankly, we may even be questioning whether such a thing as genuine faith or a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is possible.

Whatever our individual situations, let’s at least be honest with our-

selves and not put up a front to impress someone else. In the presence of God we can each ask ourselves whether we have genuine faith, faith that's actually meaningful every day. If we can answer yes with assurance, we ought to thank God again for his goodness and grace and ask him to deepen and extend our faith in each experience of life. Those of us who aren't sure that our answer is yes, or who know that we must say no, can take a simple step. Come to Jesus and speak to him directly. Tell him that you want to know him and to have faith in him. And tell him that you are prepared to put yourself completely into his supremely capable hands.

NO HALFWAY FOR THE CHRISTIAN

As I have indicated before, there is no halfway faith in Jesus Christ. Total and irrevocable commitment to Jesus Christ every day is the prerequisite for a vital relationship with him. When we begin to hold out on him in some area or to rebel against his will (even in some "minor" detail), our spiritual vitality suffers. A spiritual short circuit causes a snag in communications. We say we're willing to witness for the Lord to our friends or to our coworkers. But we start with conditions, "Please, Lord, don't ask me to befriend Joe; anyone but him, Lord." Or, as one young medical student said, "I'll witness anywhere, Lord, except to my professional colleagues."

How prone we are to think that we know better than God! Or that we must choose between doing God's will and our own happiness. As if God wanted us to be miserable! Our heavenly Father loves us; Jesus Christ died for us; the indwelling Holy Spirit is his promise to us. Certainly the triune God is not about to shortchange us in life. The well-known Indian pastor Sundar Singh said it well, "The capital of heaven is the heart in which Jesus Christ sits enthroned as King." The deepest joy that can be known in our life comes from total commitment to Jesus Christ and his will for us.

Then we will find that telling others about him is an incomparable experience. Let us ask the Lord Jesus (for the hundredth time, or the first time) to live in us as Lord and Savior and to fill our lives. From there we can ask him to give us inner boldness and vigor to give away our faith to others.

The joy and rewards of witnessing are superb. A businessman in our small group Bible study called me on the phone the day after a meeting. His words made my day. He told me that he had taken home the small book I'd given him to read. "There were five points in that book," he told me. "When it came to number five, I did what it told me to do. I prayed to Jesus Christ and told him I wanted him to have my whole life." Then he said, "Hey, this is the greatest!" I totally agreed. It's the greatest thing to commit yourself to Jesus Christ. And it's the greatest thing to tell others about him.

But, remember to witness effectively we must be realistic—genuine in our knowledge of people in today's world and genuine in our total commitment to Jesus Christ.

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY

1. In order to make the good news relevant, we need to understand the people we are communicating with—what their world is like and what they think is important. Reread the lists of generalizations about today's adults (pp. 21-22). How would you change these lists to better describe, in general, non-Christians you actually know?
2. Working with your new, improved list:
 - Place an M next to the characteristics that you possess.
 - Star the attributes that you admire in others.
 - Check off the characteristics that might indicate a person would be open to the gospel.

- Underline the characteristics that might indicate a person would hesitate to give Christianity a hearing.
 - Place a box next to the characteristics that Christ specifically promised help with. (If you want to, jot down any verses that come to mind.)
3. Of the five categories in question 2, which do you think would be important to keep in mind when presenting the gospel to someone? Why?
 4. What types of information would you like to add to your lists? How would it help you reach out to others with the gospel?
 5. Because it's easy to *assume* we know people even when we don't, Paul Little suggests we develop listening skills so that non-Christians can speak for themselves. In what situations this week could you get some non-Christians to share their views?
 6. The author goes on to say that non-Christians value the opinions of people who are informed about and involved in society. How informed and involved are you?
 7. If you think you need to improve in this area, what first step could you make this week?
 8. Even though we know we're imperfect, non-Christians expect us to demonstrate what being a Christian can be. However, not every supposed Christian demonstrates a faith worth watching! Review the three types of faith Paul Little describes: *indoctrination faith* (pp. 29-30); *conformity faith* (pp. 30-31); and *commitment faith* (p. 31). Which type of faith do you think you possess? (Expect to find traces of the others as well.)
 9. If yours isn't commitment faith, would you like to have this kind of faith? You may need to make a conscious, lifelong decision to belong to Christ. You may need to determine to obey Christ, even

when it's difficult. If necessary, talk to a mature Christian to decide what the next step is for you.

10. What will you do this week to deepen your relationship with Jesus Christ?

SUGGESTIONS FOR A STUDY-GROUP LEADER

1. Before your study, choose two *brief* news articles—one about a community service project and another about a recent crime. As you begin the study, read portions of both to the group. Ask group members to mention what they think the articles indicate about our society.