

Chapter 1

Why We Share Christ with Others



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Let me begin by asking you a question: What does God most want to communicate to all of humanity?

Think about it for a moment and consider what your answer might be.

Some time ago, an American football quarterback, Tim Tebow, became well known as a Christian because of his willingness to share his faith in Christ through the witness of his life and his missionary work with children. He used his platform as an outstanding football player to witness in small ways. For instance, he would kneel in the end zone and pray for a moment after scoring a touchdown. At each game, both college and pro, he would write “John 3:16” in white on his eye black (the black grease players put under their eyes). What happened during one major playoff game was extraordinary. Tim Tebow led the Denver Broncos to a totally unexpected win. More interesting was that many of his statistics ended up using the sequence of numbers 3, 1, and 6. Tebow passed for a career high of 316 yards. His yards per completion were

31.6. His yards per carry were 3.16! The fact that John 3:16 was seen on his face by those watching the game and the coincidence of so many stats using the numbers 316 was not lost on the television or social media commentators. The next morning, millions of people searched for John 3:16, making it the top internet search.

Tebow has encouraged everyone to use whatever position of influence they have to communicate their faith in Christ. He witnesses to Christ by his lifestyle and willingness to share his faith unashamedly in straightforward, simple ways. His use of the eye grease with John 3:16 provoked curiosity among millions of people who then searched for what John 3:16 meant. Who knows what the fruit of that action will be?

THREE ESSENTIAL TRUTHS

Back to the question: What is it that God wants to communicate to all people? The following verse from the Gospel of John summarizes the essence of what God wants every person to know:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (Jn 3:16)

Let's look at three essential truths communicated in this verse.

For God so loved the world ...

The first truth: God loves you and me and every human being. This is the good news — amazing and potentially life-changing news. God loves *you!* The entire Bible, from beginning to end, essentially cries out, “God loves you!” If this is true, how does

God communicate this love to the world? How can we come to know his love? I mean, really know his love? God reveals his love by giving us Jesus, his only begotten Son.

If you want to know what the love of God the Father is like, look at the Son. Jesus is the perfect reflection of the Father. Jesus tells us, “I and the Father are one” (Jn 10:30). To know what God the Father’s love is like, find out what Jesus is like.

Reading the Gospels for the first time as a young man had a tremendous impact on me. Seeing the people Jesus associated with astounded me. Jesus was happy to hang out with anyone who was open to him. He reached out to the poor and to the wealthy: blind Bartimaeus the beggar (Mk 10:46) and Zacchaeus the wealthy tax collector (Lk 19:2). He reached out to people who weren’t religious and who were living in serious sin: the Samaritan woman, who had been married several times and was living yet with another man (Jn 4:7–18). He also reached out to the religious: Nicodemus, who was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin (Jn 3:1). Nobody was excluded from the invitation to come to God the Father through the love Jesus offered to all.

As I read these accounts in the Gospels, I was deeply moved and realized there was hope for me. The Gospels tell us Jesus received sinners (Lk 15:2). Everything that Jesus said and did revealed that no one is outside the reach of God’s love. I began to see that God wanted me to come to him through Jesus, whom he had sent.

... that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish ...

The second truth: Jesus came so that we would not perish. What does it mean to perish? Perishing means being separated from God. The “perishing” this verse is referring to is eternal

separation from God — hell. The teaching of Jesus in the Gospels is very clear: both heaven and hell exist.

Who is in danger of perishing? Those who do not believe in Jesus. Because God loves us, he created us with free will. We can choose to live our lives saying, “I will live my way! I’ll do whatever I please. I’m not interested in this stuff about Christ, I don’t believe it.” Or we can choose to say, aided by God’s grace, “Lord Jesus, I believe.”

As C. S. Lewis famously said, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Your will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Your will be done.’”⁵

... but have eternal life.

The third truth: God’s ardent desire is for all to be saved. As Saint Paul tells us in Scripture, “[God] desires all to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). God loves us so much that he sent Jesus on a search and rescue mission to do for us something that we could not do for ourselves. Even more than a parent who longs for the well-being of his or her child, God the Father longs for all to be saved through what Christ has done.

He offers us this free gift of his salvation through Jesus Christ, who died for the forgiveness of our sins and was raised to give us the power to live a new life through faith and Baptism. But it calls for a personal response. Each of us needs to say yes to God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

COMMUNICATING THE GOOD NEWS

How does God plan to communicate this Good News now? The simple answer is: God wants to use each one of us. How do we know? Through Scripture, Church teaching, and the desire of our hearts.

Scripture

Before Jesus ascended to the Father, he said to his disciples: “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (Jn 20:21). In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus said, “Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to all of the creation” (Mk 16:15). Saint Matthew tells us that Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth had been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19). Guess what? This mission Jesus entrusted to the Church to go and proclaim the Gospel is a commandment Christ gave to all of his disciples. That means every one of us! Every baptized Christian is called to communicate the inconceivable good news of God’s love, revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ, to others. It is at the heart of the Christian faith. Jesus is saying to every one of us who are baptized, “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (Jn 20:21).

Church teaching

Since the end of the Second Vatican Council (known as Vatican II) in 1965, all of our popes have been calling all Catholics to embrace the mission of evangelization. It is a radical re-emphasis of the mission Jesus entrusted to us 2,000 years ago.

At the conclusion of a Synod of Bishops on evangelization ten years after the close of the second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI wrote, “We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church.’ . . . She exists in order to evangelize.”⁶

Saint John Paul II wrote in his 1990 encyclical *Mission of the Redeemer*, “God is opening before the Church the horizons of a humanity more fully prepared for the sowing of the Gospel. I sense the moment has come to commit all of the Church’s energies to a new evangelization and to the mission ‘*ad gentes*.’ No believer in Christ, no institution of the

Church, can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples.”⁷

**LEARN MORE ABOUT THE NEW
EVANGELIZATION**

Download a free booklet on St. John Paul II’s teaching on the new evangelization entitled *Characteristics of the New Evangelization* at christlife.org/sharechrist.

Personal desire

Most of us, once we experience the love of God personally, are anxious to tell others about it. It’s like Peter and John in the Acts of the Apostles, “We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). It’s a natural reaction to share what excites us, much like when we’ve seen a good movie or a new TV show; we want to tell our friends about it. There is nothing more exciting to share with others than the good news of what Jesus has done for us.

WORD AND WITNESS OF LIFE

The glossary of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) offers the following definition for evangelization: “the proclamation of Christ and his Gospel by word and testimony of life, in fulfillment of Christ’s command.”⁸

I would like to highlight three key points from this definition:

1. First, we proclaim Christ and his Gospel in word, talking about Jesus and what he has done for us.
2. Second, we share Christ through the witness of our lives, which should be increasingly growing in harmony with God’s will.

3. Third, we evangelize because our Lord commands us to do so.

This simple definition clarifies what it means to share Christ. Simply put, both words *and* witness of life are required. Evangelization, furthermore, is a command the Lord gives his Church, not an optional extra for “really holy Catholics.”

PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS

When I was a young man searching for the meaning of life, a friend shared with me the change that occurred in his life because of the Lord Jesus. I was impacted by not only his joy in telling me that Jesus had changed his life but also the undeniable transformation of his life. He was different. I had known him for years, but now he had a joy and peace about him that wasn't there previously. He was noticeably free of a lot of behaviors I had been trying to get free of on my own power. He attributed his changed life to Jesus, and he told me that Jesus could change my life as well. He offered a witness both in words and testimony of life.

It is worth mentioning that he evangelized me shortly after his own conversion. It's easy to fall prey to thinking you need to get your life together and receive a theology degree before you can share Christ. Evangelization is not apologetics. It is simply sharing with a friend the love and joy we have found as we continue to grow with Jesus as the center of our lives. If we wait until we become saints, we may never enter into the wonderful mission Jesus has given us.

The Church teaches that the starting point of all evangelization is a person, Jesus Christ, and our relationship with him. This is essential and the very foundation. Evangelization isn't simply sharing what we know about Jesus. It is sharing our lived experience of a personal relationship with Christ.

We cannot give away what we do not possess. The popes in recent years have spoken about this truth many times.

Saint John Paul II said, “The starting point of such a program of evangelization is in fact encounter with the Lord.”⁹

Pope Benedict XVI said, “We cannot bring to the world the Good News, which is Christ himself in person, if we ourselves are not deeply united with Christ, if we do not know him profoundly, personally, if we do not live on his Words.”¹⁰

Pope Francis said, “Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus.”¹¹

A personal encounter with Jesus is where it all begins. We come to know Jesus personally, and then we are sent forth to live as his disciples and share him with others.

THE FOUNDATION OF EVANGELIZATION

When Saint Paul established the first local churches, he made it clear that Jesus Christ must be the foundation of any church community. “According to the commission of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and another man is building upon it. Let each man take care how he builds upon it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 3:10–11). Saint Paul wanted the Church in Corinth to be absolutely clear that there is no other basis upon which the Church can grow than the Person of Jesus Christ.

Consider this: You want to build a house with a limited budget, so you discuss cost-saving options with the builder. You’re told that building without the foundation is not an option. Without a solid foundation, the house will not last very long against the wind, rain, et cetera. You can’t build the first and second floor and forget about the foundation.

While it makes sense to us when it comes to building a physical structure, frequently we want to build up the Church without the foundation. We want to bring people into the first and second floors — teaching on the sacraments, apostolic succession, Mary and the saints, morality — without first laying the essential foundation everyone needs: a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. A huge pastoral problem facing the Church today is the many Catholics who have been catechized but never evangelized. While catechesis is important, it is not the foundation. The Second Vatican Council explains, “In Catholic doctrine there exists an order or a ‘hierarchy’ of truths, since they vary in relation to the foundation of the Christian faith.”¹²

The foundation of the Christian faith is a relationship with the Person of Jesus Christ. All evangelization must begin with this core doctrine, which the Church calls the *kerygma*. Pope Francis explains how the Church has recently rediscovered the centrality of this message: “In catechesis too, we have rediscovered the fundamental role of the first announcement or *kerygma*, which needs to be the center of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal.”¹³

Whenever people encounter the Lord Jesus personally, they want more. They hunger to enter more fully into life in the Church. They desire to mature in their faith and seek to tell others the good news they now know personally. We at ChristLife have witnessed the unbaptized received into the Church. We’ve seen the baptized who haven’t been part of the Church, nor living a Christian life in years, become a vital part of their parish. The foundation of the Church and her mission is the person Jesus Christ and relationship with him. That has to be clear to each of us. This is the basis of effective evangelization.

STEP INTO MISSION

Jesus tells us that “apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). The first Step into Mission activity is to pray for your own personal faith renewal and to create a prayer list of people in your life who need to know Jesus Christ. Pause before going to the next chapter, turn to page 89, and complete the Step into Mission activity for chapter 1.