

A LEARN TOGETHER BOOK

Share the Gospel

**BUILD YOUR
SKILL AND CONFIDENCE
IN TALKING
ABOUT JESUS**



TONY PAYNE



What happens when God gives you an opportunity to talk about Christianity or the gospel in everyday conversation? Do you smoothly explain who Jesus is and what he has done, feeling confident to answer any questions that come your way? Or do you fumble or freeze up, not really knowing what to say and feeling nervous about how it will be received?

This **Learn Together** book will teach and train you to share the gospel of Jesus with other people, naturally, confidently, clearly and faithfully, in your own unique way.

Share the Gospel uses the well-known gospel outline *Two Ways to Live* as a framework, and is the sequel to *Learn the Gospel*. We recommend that you work through *Learn the Gospel* before tackling this book, or at least be reasonably familiar with the *Two Ways to Live* outline.

Tony Payne is known around the world as a Christian teacher and writer. He is the author (or co-author) of many popular books and resources, including *Two Ways to Live*, *How to Walk Into Church* and *Guidance and the Voice of God*.

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TONY PAYNE

 **matthiasmedia**
SYDNEY • YOUNGSTOWN

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How to make the most of this “Learn Together” book

This is a special kind of book, and not only because it deals with a special subject—how to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with others. It’s a book that’s written to be read and discussed and worked through *with other people*.

It’s a **Learn Together** book.

In one sense, every book could be a way to learn together. Talking with other people about the books we’re reading is one of the joys of life. Other people teach us, sharpen us, and show us the truth in action.

But this book is particularly and deliberately designed to help *a group of people* learn and grow together by exploring how to share the gospel in everyday life. That group might be your family or some friends or a Sunday School class or the regular small group of people from your church that you meet with each week. It might even be just one other person with whom you organize to meet, in order to read and learn and grow together.

The way we've put this book together is built on four fundamental convictions:

1. God's word, the Bible, is the source of our knowledge of God and of ourselves.
2. God has given us each other to teach and encourage and help each other to learn from his word, and to put it into practice.
3. Reading is a wonderful gift from God—one that is uniquely useful for learning certain kinds of things.
4. A *combination* of learning inputs and approaches is the best way to learn. This book contains multiple opportunities to read, to respond by jotting things down, to listen, to watch, to reflect, to discuss, and to put things into practice in our lives.

Building on these convictions, we've designed this to be a particular kind of book:

- *Interaction and discussion are integral*—at numerous points you'll notice some numbered questions. This signals a good point to pause and talk about what you've been reading and watching, using the discussion prompts and questions to help you get started. These questions and prompts are there to help; don't feel you have to use them all—the important thing is to talk together, and to help each other learn and grow.
- *It's a book to write in*—we've provided plenty of white space and generous line spacing so that you

can underline things in the text that strike you, scribble in the margins, and jot down your own ideas and what you're learning from others.

- *It contains sections to read aloud with other people*—you can take it in turns to read, or you might like to appoint someone who is particularly good at reading aloud to do most of the reading. Some of these sections of text will be from the Bible itself.
- *It's a book with complementary videos*—we've produced some free videos that you can also use as you work through this book together (you'll find them at matthiasmedia.com/sharethegospel). We think watching the video content as a group is usually the best way to work through the 'input' component of the course content, but this will depend on the circumstances of your group. Using the video in the group setting provides an engaging variety of presentation, and is often easier for the group to interact with and discuss. At various points in each chapter you'll see a video icon to show where there is a video that would fit in well at that point. If you do use the videos, encourage your group to read over the text summaries in their own time—either as preparation, or as a way to revise and solidify the ideas. Absorbing the key ideas of each chapter in *both* text and audiovisual form maximizes your learning.

My prayer is that this book will be a useful and enjoyable way to do something supremely important and special: *to learn with other people* what it means to share the gospel of Jesus with other people, in the midst of our everyday lives.

1. A gospel worth sharing

Obvious but not easy

For most Christians, sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with other people seems like an obviously good and kind thing to do. It's something we know God wants us to do, and which our friends need us to do, and which the gospel itself begs us to do. It's a message that just wants to be shared.

But for some reason, we don't always want to share it. Even the apostle Paul said that he preached the gospel "in weakness and in fear and much trembling," and with a delivery that no one thought was very impressive (1 Cor 2:1-5). This sounds familiar to any of us who have ever tried to speak to our friends or family about the central truths of Christianity. We often feel inadequate for the task, and anxious about how we'll be received.

Perhaps more often, we find ourselves just forgetting about sharing the gospel with others. We get on with our lives, and the church activities and groups we're part of, and leave the "evangelism" to the experts, or the especially keen, or the pastors we pay to do such things on our behalf.

Our struggles with sharing the gospel stem from the kind of fallen, sin-beset people we are—from the various problems and deficiencies that we’re all familiar with. We find our motivation waning; we get preoccupied with our own issues and stop looking out at the lost people all around us; we lose confidence (if we ever had it in the first place); we feel inadequate and bumbling and lacking in practical knowledge or experience. Or perhaps all of these things.

This book aims to address these deficiencies.

It aims to equip everyday Christians with the vision, motivation, confidence, and practical skills to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with other people—in their own way, in their own words, in the midst of everyday life.

We’ll talk more about exactly how we’re going to do this at the end of this chapter, but first let’s talk about our own experiences and expectations.

1. What are the main obstacles or problems you experience in reaching out to others, and talking with them about Jesus?

2. What experiences have you had in doing this? How did it go?

3. What would you like to change or grow in by working through this book? Choose all that apply, or add your own:

- I lack confidence
- I'm worried I won't be able to answer people's questions
- I'm not sure what to say to people
- I find that I often lack motivation
- I don't have many non-Christian friends
- I feel weird introducing the gospel into everyday conversation
- Other ...

The love of Christ

Let's begin by thinking about the core motivations and reasons for reaching out to others with the news of what God has done in Christ. This passage from 2 Corinthians is an excellent place to start.

¹⁴For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died;¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

¹⁶From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We plead* on behalf

* The ESV, along with many other English translations, inserts the word "you" at this point in this verse: "We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." The word "you" is not in the original Greek text, and inserting it here changes the sense of the sentence. We've followed the CSB (v 20b), which helpfully translates the phrase more literally as "We plead on behalf of Christ."

6. Underline every occurrence of the words “us” and “we” in verses 16-21. Who do you think Paul is talking about: just himself and Timothy (whom the letter is from) or all Christians? Why do you think this?

7. What does an “ambassador” do? What do you think it would mean in practice for us to be “ambassadors for Christ”?

8. From this passage as a whole, what do you think are the core motivations for reaching out to other people with the message of Christ?

I can see clearly now

(Go to matthiasmedia.com/sharethegospel to watch video 1a at this point if you'd prefer to watch and listen to the next section, rather than read it aloud. Otherwise, nominate a member of your group to read this next section.)

In this amazing passage from 2 Corinthians 5 and 6, the apostle Paul is explaining to his readers why he does what he does—why he spends his time trying to “persuade others” (as he puts it in 2 Corinthians 5:11), and why his ministry often ends up making him look unimpressive or even crazy (5:12-13).

As he does so, we find that all the reasons and motivations and driving forces of his ministry are not unique to him. In fact, they are the basic truths of the gospel and the Christian life. *The main reason that Paul is a passionate gospel persuader is simply that he is a Christian.*

Paul's explanation of this is full of contrasts or reversals. He speaks of moving from death to life, from old to

new, from enemies to reconciled friends, from sin to the righteousness of God.

Each of these reversals is brought about by what God has done for every Christian in Christ. In his love, God sent Christ to die the death that we all deserved. The loving death of Christ is the key event that drives all the extraordinary changes that God has brought about in Paul's life, and in the lives of all Christians:

- The death of Christ controls us; it compels us to a whole new life, because our old life is dead and gone. He died for all, and so we have died. We now live a new life in service of the One who for our sake died and was raised (5:14-15).
- Through what Christ has done, the old has gone, and we are now a completely new being—a “new creation.” And so we now see everything with new eyes. We no longer view Christ (or anything else) with the distorted and myopic vision of our old lives. At last we can see clearly (5:16-17).
- The death of Christ completely changes our standing and relationship with God. Once we were God's enemies, but now we've been reconciled to him through Christ (5:18-19). Once we were “sin,” but now in Christ we've become the “righteousness of God” (5:21).

Paul is saying that his evangelistic ministry is something that *the gospel itself drives him to do*. He now sees

everything with new eyes. The new life he now lives, he lives in service of Christ. He's now been reconciled to God, and God has given him the ministry of reconciliation. A new day has dawned: the day of salvation. His job now is to be Christ's spokesman and representative—like an ambassador, representing his king in a foreign country—imploping all those around him to be reconciled to God, the true king of everything.

Is being an “ambassador” for Christ something unique to Paul as an apostle, or does it also describe the role of every Christian? The answer is *both*. There's no doubt that the apostles and first Christian evangelists had a unique role in representing Christ and bringing his message to the world. But Paul describes his calling as Christ's ambassador in 2 Corinthians 5 in a way that draws his Corinthian readers (and all of us) into the same role and task. Just as all Christians share Paul's experience of new life in Christ, and his compelling motivation to serve Christ in everything, so we also share in his basic commission or task, each in our own way:

¹⁷ ... if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation ...

Like Paul, we realize that the extraordinary gospel message of new life and reconciliation with God is not just

for us, but for the whole world. We look around us with new eyes, and see a world full of people who remain hostile to God; who are God’s enemies, not his friends. And we discover that just as God has reconciled us to himself, so he has entrusted us with the privilege and responsibility of spreading the extraordinary message of his reconciling love to others. A new season or time has dawned. It’s the “day of salvation” (6:2), in which God sends out his “ambassadors” to appeal to everyone to be reconciled to God through Christ (5:18-20).¹

- 1 As noted above, most English Bibles make this a little harder to see by the way they translate a couple of the verses in this section of 2 Corinthians. The second half of 2 Corinthians 5:20 is usually translated “We *implore you* on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (ESV; NIV very similar). This makes it sound as if Paul alone is the ambassador, and the Corinthians are the ones he is the ambassador to, calling on them to be reconciled to God. However, the word “you” is not in the original Greek text. Verse 20 literally reads “Therefore we act as ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were appealing through us; we *plead on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God.*” The verse is saying that the role of Christ’s ambassadors is to implore people to be reconciled to God. In this verse, it is not an appeal to the Corinthians themselves—which makes sense given the nature of what Paul has just said about the Christian life in the preceding verses. The Corinthians have already begun a radical new life in Christ; they are part of the “us” who have been reconciled to God in Christ.

Paul’s appeal to the Corinthians themselves comes in 2 Corinthians 6:1, where he says (literally), “But as fellow-workers, we also implore you not to receive the grace of God in vain.” He might be saying in this verse that he is a fellow-worker with God (as most English translations take it, thus supplying the words “with him” or “with God”), or Paul might mean that *he and the Corinthians* are fellow-workers together, which would also make sense in the context. Either way, the point is the same: the ambassador of Christ not only appeals to the unreconciled to be reconciled to God (in 5:20), but also urges those who have received God’s grace (like the Corinthians) to continue in it, and not receive it in vain (in 6:1).

Now, as we'll see (in chapter 3), we all share in this task but we each have our own opportunities and abilities and circumstances. We're not all the same. In fact, one of the purposes of this book is to help each one of us learn to share the gospel in our own way, in our own words, given the particular opportunities we have in our lives.

However, the problem most of us have is that we simply lose sight of our role as ambassadors for Christ. We step back and stay silent. We don't actively represent our king and share his message. Our vision gets cloudy. We take our eyes off the love of Christ in dying for us. We lose focus on the totally new life we now live as his servants. We start viewing the world and the people around us with our old eyes—as if we were still in our old life “in the flesh.” We stop noticing the inseparable connection between being reconciled to God and being entrusted with the message of reconciliation.

We forget that we are ambassadors for Christ. We forget that now is the day of salvation.

The first step in learning to be an everyday gospel-sharer is to pray for God to open our eyes to see all these realities with fresh clarity.



9. Think about the application of 2 Corinthians 5 to your own life:

- How would describe your own experience of new life in Christ? How is it different from your old life, or from the lives of other people around you?

- Where is your own vision cloudy? What causes you to lose focus on who you are in Christ, and on what your role is?

- What attitudes or habits in your life does this passage challenge?

- What do you find hardest about being an “ambassador for Christ”?

Give thanks and pray together about what you’ve learned in this passage.

Aims and expectations

This is a **Learn Together** book, and throughout we’ll be assuming that you’re reading and working through it with other people.² Reading and thinking and talking and practicing with others has massive benefits for learning, but it also comes with some responsibilities:

- a commitment to meet with the group, session by session, and to chime in to the discussion—to learn *together* by listening and speaking and helping others learn³

2 For more on how **Learn Together** books work, see page 5.

3 Part of this group learning responsibility is a commitment to catch up on anything you’ve missed, if circumstances happen to keep you away for one of the sessions.

- a commitment to work consistently at the “Before next time” activities and exercises, so that you’re ready to contribute
- a commitment to pray for the other members of the group.

By the time you’ve finished all eight chapters, the goal is for you to have:

- clarified and increased your motivation for sharing the gospel with others, as a normal aspect of the Christian life (we’ve already begun to do that in this chapter)
- learned how to reach out to others in everyday Christian conversation, to ask and answer questions, and to have “God talk” as a natural part of your life
- learned how to share the gospel itself naturally in your own words and style
- learned how to lead someone to Christ
- grown in your confidence to be an “ambassador for Christ” in every area of your life.

Knowing the gospel

One of the very first steps for achieving all of these goals is simply to have *a clear understanding of the gospel itself*. We can’t share what we don’t ourselves know. And if we are going to share the gospel in a natural and personal way, in the midst of the to-and-fro of everyday conversation, we need to know the gospel *really well*—for it to be

second nature to us, as easy to remember and articulate as $2 \times 2 = 4$. When this is not the case, the result is often a bit of a mess. (▶ You might like to look at video 1b for an example of this.)

Perhaps you've had a conversation like that at some point. When this happens, we're like ambassadors who have been given an important message to deliver from the king—but somehow, because we weren't paying attention or have forgotten, when we come to actually deliver the message we can't actually say what it is. We mean well, and it's great that we're willing to open our mouths and talk. But because the message isn't clear in our heads, it's not clear when it comes out of our mouths, which doesn't make us terribly good ambassadors.

We need a clear gospel framework in our heads if we're going to share the gospel with others.

The gospel framework that we'll be using in this book is called *Two Ways to Live*. To learn this framework well, we strongly recommend that you first work through the partner book to this one, which is called *Learn the Gospel*. Hopefully you've already done so. If you haven't yet done that, and don't know much about *Two Ways to Live*, you'll have to put in some extra work over the next couple of weeks to catch up. (See further below at point b.)

Our hope and prayer is that by learning how to talk clearly and naturally about Jesus (over the next seven chapters), you'll be able to bring him great glory as his ambassador in a lost and broken world.

Before next time

Each chapter of this book concludes with some work to do before you get back together with others. It's all part of the experience of "learning together."

a. Look around with new eyes

In Christ, we no longer think about anything in the same way anymore. Think about the different areas of your life. Who are the non-Christian people whom you know and interact with and could pray for?

b. *Two Ways to Live*

As preparation for learning how to share the gospel in your own words, it's important to have the key elements of the gospel thoroughly lodged in your mind. We're going to do that by making sure that we know the *Two Ways to Live* gospel outline off by heart. Some readers will have done this already. If you haven't, don't worry—it's not long or difficult! Here's what to do before next time:

- If you already know the *Two Ways to Live* outline, have a quick read through appendix 1 (“Learning the gospel with *Two Ways to Live*”). It will be a helpful refresher.
- If you’re new to *Two Ways to Live*, you’ll need to put in some extra time over the next couple of weeks to learn the outline. You might want to get together with others to do this, or just do the work on your own. All the information on what to do, along with suggestions for how to do it, is contained in appendix 1.
- Try to come to the next session of your group time having memorized points 1-3 of the outline.