A SPICY STRATEGY TO IGNITE YOUR TEENAGERS

GOSPELIZE

YOUR YOUTH MINISTRY



GREG STIER

FOREWORD BY KRISTOPHER STOUT

"Greg Stier takes his infectious heart and razor-sharp mind and pours it into *Gospelize Your Youth Ministry* in a way that is both inspiring and practical. Greg's commitment to an evangelism that invites 'transformation from the inside out,' especially as lived in and through teenagers, is what drives his ministry and grounds this helpful and detailed resource. What he makes clear from the first pages is that evangelism is not simply a programmatic option among many for youth ministry, but rather is the core reason and outcome of a healthy ministry. In *Gospelize Your Youth Ministry*, Greg Stier provides the foundation, the plan, and the structure to ensure that the book of Acts lives on in and through your ministry."

Chap Clark, PhD

Editor and contributor, Youth Ministry in the 21st Century: Five Views
Professor of Youth, Family, and Culture at Fuller Theological Seminary

"This book is a necessary disruption to how we do youth ministry. We cannot keep doing youth ministry without having the Gospel at the center of it. I love how confrontational and practical this book is—Greg lays the truth out loud and clear. I cannot think of a more important book for youth pastors today."

Nader Maurice

Youth minister at Kasr El Dobara Evangelical Church in Cairo, Egypt

"If we don't make disciples, we've missed the assignment! *Gospelize Your Youth Ministry* will inspire you to follow your good intentions and to live out a deep commitment to making the Gospel core to who you are and how you lead your youth ministry. Thank you, Greg, for sharing these practical 'how-tos' and especially for being the most Gospelized Kingdom dude I know!"

Dr. Larry Acosta
Founder of Urban Youth Workers Institute

"As the global youth movement attached to the World Evangelical Alliance, our priority has been to listen to and serve grassroots leaders across the globe. One urgent and recurring theme has been the need to equip teens to reach, disciple, and empower their peers. I know of no one better placed to do this than Dare 2 Share and know of no better resource than this one to make that happen. Time is short. Let's get it out there and catalyze a Gospel Advancing movement!"

Colin Piper Converge Global Youth Movement World Evangelical Alliance

"If you want to see a disciple-making movement among youth starting from your church, you cannot *not* read this book! *Gospelize Your Youth Ministry* will give you the critical toolbox to boost the movement. It provides stories and practical application to help you imagine what youth group could look like, and Greg Stier's contagious passion will transform your missional DNA."

Stefano Longo

Leadership coach at Communitas International in Via Pellice, Italy

"Trust me, this book will refresh you, encourage you, and refocus you on the original 'Jesus' mission that got you into ministry. In addition, it will help you develop a plan of action that will transform the way you view and do youth ministry for the rest of your life."

Doug Fields
Youth pastor of 30+ years and author of 50+ books
Cofounder of downloadyouthministry.com

"Infused with hard-won wisdom, *Gospelize Your Youth Ministry* is an invitation to practical ways to reignite your youth ministry with profound and courageous strategies that give teens a seat at the table of Gospel Advancement, with Jesus's values at the center of it. This book, and all Greg Stier's work, shows just how perfectly he nails the pulse of Gospel Advancing strategies that are practical for every context in the world and very relevant in the face of a growing, youthful Africa, to mobilize Africa's youth bulge into an agency of youth leaders who are wildly, passionately, outrageously devoted to Gospel Advancing."

Dr. Joe Bonga Regional director at International Christian Youthworks, ICY Africa

"Here's the thing: Too many youth ministries function comfortably without Jesus's interference. A 'Gospelized' youth ministry risks everything on the premise that Jesus still shows up with love, truth, and power when we're faithful. If you're called by Jesus to work with kids, this book will urge you to get reacquainted with Jesus's values for ministry, fix some broken patterns, quit messing around, and join the greatest multiplication strategy the world has ever seen. All for Jesus's glory!"

Dave Rahn Author and researcher Senior consultant at Fuller Youth Institute and Arbor Research Group

"Practical, biblical, inspirational—and very challenging! I'd highly encourage any leader to interact with *Gospelize Your Youth Ministry*. You will gain new insight into biblical texts and practical strategies to move your ministry forward exponentially."

Dann Spader
Founder of Sonlife and Concentric

"With Gospelize Your Youth Ministry, Greg Stier has written a powerhouse book that I'm convinced can transform the way youth ministry is done in America (and maybe even across the world)! Based on timeless truths in the book of Acts and the latest evangelism research, this dynamic book unpacks principles that can move any youth ministry from typical to transformational, from meeting-driven to mission-driven, from entertainment-based to Gospel Advancing. I pray that you and your youth ministry team take the time to read this book slowly, explore these principles thoughtfully, and apply these truths passionately. If you do, both you and your youth ministry will forever be changed."

Josh McDowell
Author and speaker
Founder of Josh McDowell Ministry, a division of Cru

GOSPELIZE

YOUR YOUTH MINISTRY

A SPICY STRATEGY
TO IGNITE YOUR TEENAGERS

BY GREG STIER

dare 2 share

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DEDICATION

To Pastor Ralph "Yankee" Arnold, who taught me how to Gospelize

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Foreword

Have you ever had an "aha" moment? You know, as if a lightning bolt had fallen from the sky, striking your conscience, and suddenly that thing you were wrestling with or wondering about became incredibly clear? The book you're about to read was my aha moment, my lightning bolt. In fact, it was bigger than that.

It was the answer to my prayer.

Six months before I encountered *Gospelize Your Youth Ministry* and Greg Stier, I was handed the reins of the Youth Ministries division of Word of Life Fellowship, an international organization dedicated to the evangelization and discipleship of youth, especially teenagers. Word of Life has been reaching youth with the Gospel of Christ for more than 80 years through camps, evangelistic campaigns, discipleship training centers, Bible institutes, and youth ministries in local churches. When I was 13 years old, I attended a Word of Life camp, and my life was forever changed.

Then, after 22 years of serving in Argentina and France, and then leading our International Ministries division, I was being asked to

revitalize a key component of what we did both in the United States and around the world. Our Youth Ministries division was dedicated to helping youth leaders and volunteers all around the world run effective teen ministries in their local churches. We provided tools, resources, and training for that purpose.

However, over the previous decade or so, growth had plateaued, and we were struggling. It seemed that "something" was missing. But what? So, I prayed, asking God to show us what we weren't seeing.

The following year, I was invited to sit around the first Gospel Advancing Roundtable, a Dare 2 Share initiative connecting likeminded churches and organizations, with the singular goal of "every teen, everywhere, hearing the Gospel from a friend."

As I heard Greg passionately share his bold vision and then lay out the 7 Values of Gospel Advancing ministry, which are outlined in this book, tears filled my eyes. My heart began to burn as it had very few times in my life. This was my lightning bolt, my aha moment, my answered prayer. *This* was what we were missing.

You see, our ministry was founded eight decades ago by a passionate evangelist, Jack Wyrtzen, a friend of and precursor to Billy Graham and others. God used Jack to fill Yankee Stadium, Madison Square Garden, and radio waves around the world with the message of the Gospel. He often said, "I believe it is the responsibility of every generation to reach their generation for Christ." Walk around any Word of Life campus long enough, and you'll see that written on some wall or T-shirt or promotional piece.

But while we'd become exceptionally good at *my* generation reaching the next generation, we'd somehow lost sight of equipping and inspiring *this* generation to reach *their own* generation. We'd grown content with reaching teens through our own programs, instead of turning teenagers into a massive, multiplying, missionary force of their own.

We needed to get back to our roots. We'd become, as Greg calls it, "institutionalized."

So, we tore apart everything we were doing in Youth Ministries and rebuilt it with this renewed vision. We used the 7 Values you're going to read about as our filter and matrix.

Fast-forward five years, and our entire curriculum, our devotionals, our youth leadership coaching, and our evangelistic events all reflect the priority of helping teenagers share their faith with their friends. That same vision has even found its way into our camps and Bible Institutes

In addition, we've partnered with Dare 2 Share to help translate the evangelistic *Life in 6 Words* app into dozens of languages, including Arabic, Hindi, and Mandarin. We're now training leaders and teenagers on every inhabitable continent in the world with this same Gospel Advancing philosophy. It has reenergized our 1,600 youth workers in more than 80 countries. We're all-in.

I've been begging Greg for a new version of his book—an edition to show the world that this vision and these values are not some radical, new Western youth ministry fad. It's far more than that—it's biblical. These are timeless principles taken straight from the book of Acts, vital and applicable for every culture, every teenager, every youth leader on the planet.

Before you dive into this hilarious and thought-provoking read, I challenge you to take a moment right now and, as I did, ask God to show *you* what you might not be seeing.

Then, get ready. The lightning bolt is coming. Your own aha moment awaits.

Kristopher Stout Executive Vice President of International Ministries Word of Life Fellowship, Inc.

Introduction

Jesus, so it seems, was a youth leader. He banked on his band of teenagers to change the world—and they did!

My belief (and the premise of this book) is that teenagers today, through the power of the Holy Spirit, have the same ability to advance the Gospel to their own generation and beyond—and that *your* ministry can be a major catalyst to make that happen.

But, wait a second, you might say. What makes you say Jesus was a youth leader? We can't know for sure, but the evidence points strongly in that direction.

First, there's cultural and historical evidence: According to gotquestions.org, the average age a Jewish student would start following their rabbi was somewhere between 13 and 15, which means most of the disciples likely weren't much older than that.

And then there's this intriguing story in Matthew 17:24-27:

After Jesus and His disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma temple tax came to Peter and asked, 'Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?'

'Yes, He does,' he replied.

When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. 'What do you think, Simon?' He asked. 'From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes—from their own children or from others?'

'From others,' Peter answered.

'Then the children are exempt,' Jesus said to him. 'But so that we may not cause offense, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth, and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it, and give it to them for my tax and yours.'

All the disciples were in Capernaum, but it seems only Jesus and Peter paid the temple tax. When you cross-reference this passage with Exodus 30:14, you realize that this tax was applicable only to those age 20 and older.

If I'm reading this correctly, that means Jesus was a youth leader, with one adult sponsor and one really rotten kid, named Judas Iscariot. He had a small budget and no youth room. But with His youth group of 10 on-fire-for-Christ kids, and the help of one all-in adult leader, He launched a spiritual revolution that spread throughout the world and continues to this day.

My own life is a testimony of the radical power of the Gospel—and of teens' effectiveness in spreading it.

As a fatherless kid raised in a family of street fighters, bodybuilders, and thugs, I witnessed the miraculous spiritual transformation of my entire family—all because a church in the suburbs of Denver, Colorado, had the courage to venture into the city to share the Good News of Jesus.

Watching the simple Gospel message transform my tougher-thanyou-can-imagine uncles and God-could-never-forgive-me-for-allmy-sins mom powerfully impacted my life as well.

After the Gospel, the next most-influential factor that has shaped my life and ministry is the philosophy of that suburban church, which believed not only in the power of the Gospel but also in the potential of teenagers.

The church's founding pastor—Ralph "Yankee" Arnold—had started it with teenagers in mind. He believed the best way to reach a city was to mobilize teenagers to reach other teenagers for Christ. Yankee believed that teenagers came to Christ quicker and could spread the Gospel faster and farther than adults ever could.

And from what I experienced, he was right. The church's youth ministry equipped and challenged its students (including me) to share the Gospel—and we did. Over the years, hundreds of teenagers and adults put their trust in Christ as a result of the church's middle schoolers and high schoolers sharing their faith.

What does all this have to do with you and your ministry?

Answering that question is precisely what this book is about. Throughout these pages, we'll dig into the book of Acts to discover the ministry model—a strategy we call "Gospelizing" or "Gospel Advancing"—that allowed Jesus's teenage disciples to turn the world on its head.

We'll discover—also from the book of Acts—the 7 key values that underpin spiritually thriving, Gospel Advancing ministries.

We'll learn how implementing these values not only equips and inspires your students to spread the Gospel but also helps them fall more in love with Christ personally, in a way nothing else can.

We'll hear real-life stories from youth leaders worldwide whose Gospelizing efforts have yielded Kingdom-expanding results—and we'll glimpse how they've overcome some of the challenges they've had along the way.

We'll explore the difference between just checking all the activity and Bible-lesson boxes and enthusiastically embracing Jesus's final mandate: to "...go and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:19).

As you read this book and begin implementing the 7 Values it outlines, I encourage you to start with baby steps—and don't give up. These values are simple to understand but often challenging to apply. You can be sure Satan will do his best to discourage, deceive, distract, and destroy you and your efforts. There's nothing our enemy hates more than a Gospel Advancing, disciple-multiplying, God-glorifying ministry. So fortify yourself in prayer, and refuse to stop pushing.

As Galatians 6:9 urges us: "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

Greg Stier
Founder of Dare 2 Share

Don't Just StandThere—Gospelize!

'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth'

After He said this, **He was taken** up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid Him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as He was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into Heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into Heaven.' Acts 1:8-11

Imagine experiencing that moment when Jesus gave His disciples the final charge to go into the world and spread the Good News to everyone, everywhere. You would have just spent the previous 40 days reveling in the shocking joy of Jesus's resurrection from a horrific death, and now His pierced, beautiful feet are leaving the ground.

Jesus starts floating upward, upward, upward. He goes higher and higher, finally disappearing into the gentle clouds that waft across the deep-blue Judean sky.

Then a voice startles you out of what feels like a dream. You turn to see two men dressed in white who've appeared out of nowhere. "Why do you stand here looking into the sky?" they ask. Their pointed question reminds you that Jesus has given you, in His final words, a promise and a purpose.

The promise and purpose Jesus offered His disciples set in motion a revolution that has continued to this day.

First, He promised that the Holy Spirit would soon be upon them and that He would bring with Him a divine power—not to set up an earthly kingdom but to advance a spiritual one.

Next, He gave the disciples a purpose: to be His witnesses, starting where they were (Jerusalem) and then spreading farther and farther away (to Judea, then Samaria, and then the ends of the earth).

Finally, Jesus disappears into a cloud, and the disciples just stand there awestruck, staring into the sky.

It all happened so quickly.

But God doesn't give them the luxury of sitting around, processing what just took place. Instead, two angels immediately appear on the scene and ask why they're still there.

In essence they're saying: "Don't just stand there! Spread the Good News!" They were reminding the disciples and all their spiritual descendants—which includes us—that there's a mission to accomplish (advance the Gospel), a plan to accomplish it (start where they were and expand to the ends of the earth), and a deadline to accomplish it by (when Jesus comes back on a cloud).

The angels reminded them it was time to do what Jesus told them to do—wait for the Holy Spirit and then get busy with the mission.

And that's exactly what they did. Ten days later, immediately after being baptized with the Holy Spirit, they stood up and started telling everyone the Gospel. As a result, 3,000 were added to their number in one day (Acts 2:41).

But they were just getting started. In every chapter of the book of Acts, we see the Gospel powerfully advancing:

- In Acts 1, Jesus commissioned His disciples to take the Gospel across the street and around the world.
- In Acts 2, the disciples' tongues were set on fire with the Gospel.
- In Acts 3, God used Peter to first heal a man's broken body and then share the Gospel to heal his broken soul.
- In Acts 4, the power of prayer shook a building, and the power of the Gospel shook an entire city.
- **In Acts 5**, the apostles were commanded to keep quiet, but they never stopped preaching the Gospel.
- In Acts 6, the Gospel grew and multiplied across Jerusalem, because the apostles prioritized prayer and preaching and delegated everything else.
- In Acts 7, Stephen was stoned for declaring the Gospel.
- In Acts 8, the Holy Spirit prompted Philip to chase down a chariot and preach the Gospel to an Ethiopian eunuch, who then took the message to Africa.
- In Acts 9, Jesus commissioned Saul to declare the Gospel to the Gentiles.
- In Acts 10, the Gospel transformed Gentiles.
- In Acts 11, the Gospel transformed Greeks.

- **In Acts 12,** the impact of the Gospel continued to increase and spread.
- In Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas embarked on their first missionary journey to spread the Gospel.
- In Acts 14, Paul was stoned for preaching the Gospel, but he, unlike Stephen, survived and kept on preaching it.
- In Acts 15, the apostles rebuked legalists for trying to complicate the Gospel.
- In Acts 16, Paul, Silas, and a teenage boy named Timothy took the Gospel to Philippi.
- In Acts 17, Paul preached the Gospel to the intellectual elites of Athens.
- In Acts 18, Paul took the Gospel to the pagan partiers of Corinth.
- In Acts 19, Paul mobilized the Ephesian believers to spread the Gospel across the province of Asia.
- In Acts 20, Paul recounted the power of the simple Gospel to the elders of Ephesus.
- In Acts 21, Paul updated the apostles in Jerusalem on how the Gospel had shaken entire nations.
- In Acts 22, Paul was arrested for preaching the Gospel in Jerusalem.
- In Acts 23, Paul was almost assassinated for preaching the Gospel.
- In Acts 24, Paul explained the Gospel to a governor named Felix.
- In Acts 25, Paul explained the Gospel to a ruler named Festus.
- In Acts 26, Paul explained the Gospel to king named Agrippa.

- In Acts 27, Paul was shipped off to Rome to stand trial before Nero for preaching the Gospel.
- In Acts 28, Paul preached the Gospel for two years while under house arrest in Italy.

In fewer than 30 years, we see the Good News spread from Jerusalem to Rome—without planes, trains, or automobiles, without Instagram, TikTok, or Facebook. Instead, the simple Gospel spread face-to-face and person-to-person and shook the known world for God.

Throughout the ages, the baton of responsibility for preaching the simple Gospel has been passed down from one generation to the next. Now that baton is in our hands.

As followers of Christ today, we've inherited that two-millennia-old mission, plan, and deadline. Until our Savior returns to planet Earth on a cloud, He's called us to join Him in accomplishing an eternity-altering quest.

The quest to make disciples.

The quest to spread the Good News.

The quest to Gospelize.

I love the word *Gospelize*. When I first heard it, I was exercising in my basement, while listening to someone on an app reading a Charles Spurgeon sermon (yes, I'm a preaching nerd). While I was pumping out the pushups, I heard these words from the premier preacher of the 19th century:

I contend for this: that to Gospelize a man is the greatest miracle in the world. All the other miracles are wrapped up in this one. To Gospelize a man, or, in other words, to convert him, is a greater work than to open the eyes of the blind.¹

Spurgeon didn't invent this word. It was an Old English word that simply meant to "evangelize" someone.

Instantly, I was hooked. The word *evangelism* smacks of bullhorns and pointy fingers of judgment. But Gospelize sounds like transformation from the inside out, which is exactly what the world needs, what our teenagers need, what *we* need.

So what does it look like to Gospelize a youth ministry? One way to understand it is to picture adding "Gospel spice" to your ministry mindset and model.

Every culture around the world has some sort of spice they use to make their food taste better and add that extra burst of flavor. Whether it's curry in India, chili powder in Mexico, garlic in Italy, ginger in Japan, or salt and pepper in the United States, spices bring zest to food. They turn bland into blissful and dull into delicious.

In the same way, to Gospelize is to add Gospel spice to everything we do. It makes us dangerous to the kingdom of darkness and turns our bland meetings into arm-wrestling matches with Satan for the souls of our teenagers.

Like a distinctive spice, the pure, simple Gospel stands out strikingly among all other worldviews and philosophies. When C.S. Lewis was asked, "What makes Christianity unique among all the world religions?" his answer was, "Oh, that's easy. It's grace."²

Grace is the undeserved favor of God we receive through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ—and it's absolutely mind-blowing. We're saved by what Jesus has done, not by what we do. We receive eternal life through faith, not by works. This message adds a spice to our recipes that no other religion in the world can duplicate or replicate. It's true of Christianity alone.



GOSPELIZE IN ACTION

Central Asia

A youth leader friend of ours (we'll leave him unnamed because evangelism is illegal in his country) has a goal of reaching the youth in his nation with the Gospel, despite the risk of serious persecution. The Gospel transformed him—rescuing him from the emptiness and turmoil of a lifestyle of gambling and heavy drinking—and he wants others to experience the same freedom, joy, and peace he's found in Christ.

After he became a youth leader, he encountered Dare 2 Share training materials and began to develop a bold vision to share the Gospel with every teenager in his nation. But it didn't take him long to realize he couldn't accomplish that goal on his own. So he started training students and other leaders in Gospel Advancing strategies.

One of his favorite methods is to take young people on trips, stopping in many towns along the way. During these trips, youth build relationships with each other and meet with other young leaders to encourage them, pray with them, and teach them Gospel Advancing methods. He invests in building relationships with leaders and creates opportunities for them to learn from one another—exchanging best practices and encouraging each other through struggles.

His passion and strategies led him to be appointed as the youth director for a nationwide, multi-denominational coalition of 5,000 churches. In this role, he oversees and impacts thousands of students and leaders, who themselves are equipped to reach others and dedicate their lives to spreading the Gospel. They speak up and share Christ boldly, despite the very real possibility of being persecuted.

They're living out Romans 1:16—"For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes..."—and it's expanding the Kingdom of God throughout their nation.

Gospel spice reminds us as believers why we're here to begin with. It brings us back to the foot of the bloodstained cross and reminds us that we're sinners saved by God's grace, through Jesus's sacrifice. It lifts our heads toward the harvest field of the yet-to-be-reached and sets our hearts ablaze with a passion for the lost. It enables us to stand on the promises of who we are in Christ, because of what Christ did for us 2,000 years ago at Calvary.

To Gospelize is to add Gospel spice to everything we do.

In more straightforward terms, to Gospelize your youth ministry is to build a context in which the Good News of Jesus is moving deeply *into* the souls of your teenagers and outwardly *through* your teenagers to others. When you make the Gospel central to everything you do, you're Gospelizing your ministry.

Gospelizing your youth group is much, much more than simply getting teenagers to share the Gospel with their peers. When you read through the book of Acts, you see that evangelism is front and center. But the Gospel-sharing efforts of the early followers of Jesus sprang out of a context of believers who loved God and loved others. They emphasized prayer and were committed to God's Word. It wasn't just about making converts; rather it was about relying on prayer, caring for each other and the people around them, and advancing the Gospel by multiplying disciples.

This forward movement of the life-changing message of Jesus was accomplished through the moving of the Spirit's power, first *in* the early disciples and then *through* them to reach others.

So how do you create a context in which this happens consistently? Ahh, that's what this book is about!

In Acts 1:8, Jesus called His disciples to pursue His mission by being His witnesses, starting where they were at and expanding outward. But, led by the Spirit, they didn't just make disciples, they multiplied

them! This means life-on-life investment in those who had put their faith in Jesus, training them to reach their spheres of influence. By the time you get to Acts 28, the Gospel had become an unstoppable force.

If you read the book of Acts closely, you can see this was an exciting, messy, and dangerous process. But you also see the disciples learning and growing in their ability to advance the Gospel, not just personally, but also by equipping other believers.

This book-of-Acts strategy from 2,000 years ago works just as powerfully today. And not only does it work, but it transcends culture. It's not a Western way, an Eastern effort, a Southern strategy, or, well, you get the idea. Rather, it's an "anywhere" model that's effective on every continent and in every culture.

What we read in the dusty pages of Acts needs to be dusted off and done again today in our 21st-century, postmodern context. Why? Because the mission is clear, and the deadline is near. As Acts 1:11 promises, He *will* be coming back!

So don't just stand there—Gospelize!

SPICE IT UP!

QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU AND YOUR LEADERS GOSPELIZE YOUR YOUTH MINISTRY

- 1. How do you think the disciples felt watching Jesus float away into the sky after He gave them the charge to advance the Gospel?
- 2. Do you think we're currently more of a "standing around looking up at the sky" type of youth group or a "step out and Gospelize" group?
- 3. How can the Gospel spice things up in our lives and ministry?
- 4. In what ways does our ministry advance the Gospel to our students? How about through our students? Discuss the difference between the two.
- 5. Have you ever personally led someone to faith in Jesus? How did it change them? How did it affect you? If you haven't, have you ever been taught how to do so?

