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September 7, 2025



## Closing the Deal?

*by Christine Spinner*

**T**he scene is a familiar one: a Sunday school class of adults, squirming. The teacher has just asked the question that often makes us cringe: “How many people have you personally led to Christ?” Sure, we’ve witnessed to many, prayed with a few, invited some to church, but when it comes down to “closing the deal,” many of us feel almost embarrassed about our paltry (or nonexistent) “sales.”

It’s troubling when spreading the gospel becomes like a high-pressure pyramid scheme, with those who underperform feeling shamed. But shouldn’t we be winning others to Christ? Actually, no we shouldn’t—because we can’t. No song

you ever sing, no word you ever write, no sermon you ever preach will get anyone saved. Because, although he allows us to help for our own benefit, the Holy Spirit does all the work of bringing someone to Christ. So, in a sense, it is disingenuous to claim credit, even if we were physically present when someone prayed for salvation.

For those of us who may have never “closed the deal,” this revelation is freeing. The things we’ve done were not in vain, even if they fell short of an instant conversion. As Paul said, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow” (1 Cor. 3:6). Picture your own personal timeline, with “conversion experience” marked at the end (although we know that’s not the end!). Along the way, you would see tick marks labeled “heard plan of salvation preached for the first time,” “impressed by Christian coworker’s kindness,” and “friend told me he would pray for me during a hard time.” None of these people could say they led you to Christ—even though their actions moved you a few ticks closer to the goal at the end of your timeline.

So, can we help the Holy Spirit in his work, even if we aren’t present in the time and place a person gets saved? Definitely! Don’t give up hope or feel worthless—there is much benefit in “pre-evangelizing” by being yourself and by being attractive, honest, and available.

### **Be Yourself**

Salvation will not change your basic personality. If you were somewhat shy before, you’re going to retain that tendency. Many—not all, but many—people who become preachers and teachers have naturally outgoing personalities, so when that Sunday school lesson or sermon is about witnessing, those of us who are introverted can begin to feel very inadequate. Most Christians could probably work harder on witnessing to others, but we can’t all do it the same way. And we shouldn’t. God made each person, Christian or not, different. Your personality is tailor-made to reach someone no one else could. Some people can memorize a

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presentation of the gospel and present it in a way that is appealing and persuasive. Some of us spend ten minutes every morning looking for our car keys. If you’re a key-searcher, you may need to find an approach with a little less memorization.

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15). It sounds too easy, but people really will come to you about your faith if they know you are a Christian and you make it attractive. So let them know in a way that is natural for you. Don’t edit your conversations; give God the praise for things no differently than if you were talking to a friend who *was* saved. If coworkers ask about your weekend, tell them you went to church and briefly share something good about the service. You don’t need to overwhelm them, but church is part of who you are. You’re not really asking them for any response, but your words will plant a seed in them, and they will begin to watch you to find out more about Christianity.



### **Be Attractive**

Christians should be attractive people. Not in the sense of our physical appearance—our style or grooming habits, even though these should not be neglected. But Christians should be attractive in their attitudes and demeanor. There's no worse advertisement for Christ than those who say they know him and have had their lives miraculously changed by him, and yet go through life with a bitter way about them and a constant sour expression on their faces. Who wants to spend Sunday morning, let alone eternity, with a bunch of crabby complainers?

Jesus told his followers, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32). Although he was talking about his imminent death, this verse is also frequently interpreted to mean that when we exalt Christ through our lives, his Spirit can also work through us to attract others to him. We don't need to tell people what they are doing wrong; deep down inside, they know. It's also not our job to tell them what they need to quit doing in order to follow Christ. God seems to have that whole conviction thing down pretty well. (Remember the last time *you* felt it?)

What we do need to do is love people and enjoy our lives. That doesn't sound too difficult, does it? We all have hard times, and we don't want to be fake, but for the most part Christians should be joyful people. We're forgiven! We don't have to feel guilty about our pasts. We don't have to take the punishment we rightfully deserve. It should be natural for us to look for the good in people and situations, without letting the negative drag us down. After all, we're only passing through, right?

"You are the light of the world. . . . Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:14, 16). If we make Christianity look like it should, people will want to be a part of it.

### **Be Honest**

It's hard for people to "buy" someone who is happy, happy, happy all the time. Even as Christians, we go through heartbreak and disappointment. It's not a sin to have emotions; God gave them to us! We can be honest, even with our non-Christian friends and acquaintances, and God can use our honesty.

For instance, when a loved one dies, it hurts. A lot. It hurts even when we know we'll see the person again, and especially if we are unsure of their spiritual condition. It's *okay* not to say, "Well, I'll see her in heaven!" Being real enough to say, "This is a really rough time for me, but I know God's going to help me get through it" can make a lasting impression on unsaved people. Then, when they face a hard time, they may feel more comfortable turning to you for support. After all, they saw you go through a difficult time, but with a hope they don't have.

We can also be honest with our questions about God. He is a mystery beyond our comprehension. If he were small enough that we could understand him, who would want to serve him? If someone asks you a real toughie, trying to stump you, and you haven't done the soul searching and Scripture reading to have a personal answer, you're better off just admitting that you don't know rather than giving a stock answer that you don't really believe yourself. Take the question and do the searching, then come back with what you find. Anyone who challenges you like this can really be affected by your returning to them to open a conversation about spiritual things.

God can use our mess-ups, too. (Hallelujah!) If someone sees you act in a way that's not Christlike, admit it and apologize—even if it's days later. It's a reminder to the person that Christians don't claim to be perfect, just forgiven. It can be a great time to share that no matter what we've done, God's always ready to take us back and help us overcome it.

### **Be Available**

Lastly, after you do these things, be available for people to come to you with questions and prayer requests. You may get some late-night phone calls and spend time with some people you always felt you had nothing in common with. But if you are open to letting God use you, you will be amazed at the people you can touch with just the reality of who you are and what God is doing in your life. Even if you're just a tick on their timeline and you never do "close the deal," your investment in their lives will be rewarded. ●



*Continue learning about and praising the Lord at home with your family. Here's an idea how to do that.*

## SNACKS IN THE DARK

**A**fter dark one evening, call everyone to the kitchen. As a family, gather all the ingredients necessary to assemble a quick, no-bake treat (perhaps a sweet treat like Rice Krispies bars, or a savory one like a cereal-based party mix).

Place all the ingredients on the kitchen counter, line up all the measuring utensils and serving bowl, read the recipe together, and then invite the youngest members of the family to measure out the dry ingredients. Only, as they're picking up the boxes to begin, turn off all the lights so that they're plunged into total darkness.

Cajole and encourage them to continue with their measuring, despite the lack of light. (It's sure to be a mess—and good for lots of giggles.) After a few minutes, turn on the lights, and sweep the mess into the bowl—along with the remainder of the ingredients (now's the time for the liquids).

As you're eating the results of your experiment, talk about how much more productive it is to go about our work when we're in the light. Draw a parallel to the way Jesus brought the light of God's truth into the world (John 1:5)—and why life is easier to navigate when we live in his light. ●

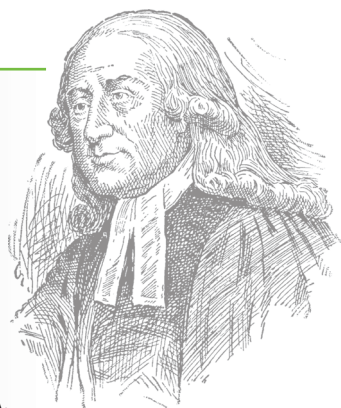


# WORDS from Wesley

## John 1:18

**N***o man hath seen God*—With bodily eyes: yet believers see Him with the eye of faith. *Who is in the bosom of the Father*—The expression denotes the highest unity, and the most intimate knowledge.

(*Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, by John Wesley, M.A. Fourth American Edition. New York: J. Soule and T. Mason, for the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States, 1818.)



## THROUGH THE BIBLE IN A YEAR



### Monday

**September 8** Psalms 139–144

### Tuesday

**September 9** Psalms 145–150

### Wednesday

**September 10** Proverbs 1–3

### Thursday

**September 11** Proverbs 4–7

### Friday

**September 12** Proverbs 8–10

### Saturday

**September 13** Proverbs 11–13

### Sunday

**September 14** Proverbs 14–16



## SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY



### *John's Gospel of Jesus' Life*

## INCARNATION AND SALVATION

### John 1:1–18

*The incarnation gave humanity the opportunity to know Christ and receive him as Savior.*

#### INTO THE SUBJECT

Many cultists and liberal theologians insist Jesus was just a man, though perhaps a perfect man. What does the incarnation teach about Jesus' true identity?

#### INTO THE WORD

1. What do you learn from John 1:1–5 that affirms Jesus' deity?
2. How does John refute the theory that all life is the product of chance and the survival of the fittest?
3. How does knowing Jesus created everything affect the value you place on human life?
4. Do you see any pro-life support in John 1:3? If so, what is it?
5. Why would you agree or disagree that darkness and dying aptly describe the world we live in? What contrasting qualities did Jesus bring to us by becoming a human being and dying for us?
6. What does it mean to you personally to be a child of God (John 1:12)?
7. John beheld Jesus' glory. What event in particular do you think he might have been thinking about as he wrote this statement (Matt. 17:1–8)?
8. What admirable characteristic did John the Baptist display, according to verses 15–17? How can you display this characteristic as you share the good news of Jesus with others?

#### INTO THE WORLD

Many of Jesus' contemporaries rejected him, but some believed in him. With whom will you optimistically share the message of salvation this week?

## BEGINNINGS CAN BE HARD

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God. (John 1:1)*

As the youngest of five children, I watched my older siblings do things that I could only dream of doing. I almost always wanted to join them, whether it was watching a movie, hanging out with their friends, or riding a roller coaster. When the year finally came that I was tall enough to ride the big roller coasters at Hershey Park, I became scared. It took five or six times of watching them ride before I got on. But since that first loop, I continue to love thrill rides to this day.

Beginnings are usually risky, which makes them hard. They are often filled with fear of the unknown or the risk of failure.

John's prologue is a profound section of Scripture that includes the creation of the world, Christ's incarnation and salvation, and us. The balance of human and divine activity is important to the prologue, the gospel as a whole, and our lives. In Christ, we have the perfect example to follow. Even when God calls us to some new beginning or to bear witness to him in a new way, we have the assurance that he who has been around since the beginning is also with us. Just as I needed my siblings to lead me out of my fear of roller coasters, let Christ quell any fears on the journey he is leading you.

—Scott Donahue-Martens

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*John 1:1–18*

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**Go with God into the unknown and  
start a new beginning.**

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