

# The Gospel Test: Do Your People Really Know the Good News?

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*Imagine waiting outside the doors of the sanctuary of any evangelical church in America with a video camera and a microphone at the end of the Sunday morning service. Your mission? To interview 10 random members of the congregation with a simple question, “If I were not a Christian and you were to explain the Gospel to me what would you say?”*

Supposing you weren't tackled by a rogue usher and Good Fellas boot stomped in the foyer, imagine some of the potential answers you could hear...

- *“Um, well, I guess that God loves you and if you, well, follow him then, you know, it will all work out.”*
- *“As long as you're a sincere person and don't kill anybody or anything like that I think God would let you into heaven.”*
- *“Isn't there some prayer that you are supposed to say and then you're in?”*
- *“I don't really concern myself about this sort of thing because it's the pastor's job to tell people about Jesus anyway.”*
- *“If you were chosen before the foundation of the earth to be a part of his family then you're in. If not, well, nothing you can do will matter anyway.”*
- *“I guess if you live a good enough life you'd be okay.”*
- *“I'm not sure but it has something to do with Jesus dying on the cross.”*

Sadly, it's not hard to imagine hearing answers like these coming from church-going people today. But what if you were interviewing the people of your church with the same question?

Before you dismiss the scenario of less-than-adequate answers coming from members of your congregation (or attendees of your Bible study, students in your youth group, etc. consider the possibility that you could be over-estimating what the Christians you lead really know when it comes to the Gospel.

I have been greatly disappointed in my informal interviews with countless Christians from all sorts of denominations on this very subject. As I've traveled the United States and preached in hundreds of venues, from churches to conferences to camps and retreats, I've been sadly surprised by the inability of many believers to articulate the simple truth of the Gospel in a clear way. Many of these believers have attended church for years and still can't pass “the Gospel test” at least when it comes to explaining the message of the good news of Jesus Christ.

Paul summed up the Gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3,4 when he wrote, “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures....” The Gospel is the message that Jesus died in our place for our sins as a substitutionary atonement. He was buried and he rose from the dead, proving that he was the Son of God himself. In the most famous verse of Scripture Jesus said that whoever believes in him has eternal life.

Yes, it's that simple! It's so simple that a child can understand it and so jaw-droppingly deep that a Seminary professor can choke on it.

So if the Gospel message is so simple then why can't the average Christian clearly articulate it? And what are some practical action steps we can take to help those we minister to understand it more deeply and articulate it more clearly?

## **1. Relentlessly present the Gospel in your sermons, lessons and talks.**

Too many preachers only give the Gospel when it fits naturally into their sermons (or on Christmas Eve, Easter and other special outreach services.) Many have told me things like, “Well, the church service is for the believer and that’s why I don’t give the Gospel.” They say things like this as if the Gospel were only for unbelievers and can be set aside after a person puts their faith in Jesus. But what you see in the preaching of the disciples was an obsession with the good news of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection for the Christian and non-Christian alike! The Gospel message was at the epicenter of their epistles, the driving subject of their sermons, the launching point of their theological rants, the punchline to their practical applications and the basis for their painful rebukes.

The best preachers throughout the ages have been equally obsessed by the Gospel. From Martin Luther to Martin Lloyd Jones to George Whitefield to Billy Graham the message of the cross was the engine that drove each of their sermons to believers and unbelievers alike. Charles Spurgeon was once asked, “What is your style of preaching?” His answer was simple and straightforward, “I take my text and make a beeline for the cross.”

Pastors, take your text and make a beeline for the cross until your church members feel the splinters of its blood stained wood in their hands. Youth leaders, Sunday school teachers, Bible study leaders...do the same. Relentlessly tie the Gospel into your talks until those under your spiritual leadership can share the Gospel without thinking or blinking.

Before I was a full-time evangelist I was a church planting pastor who gave the Gospel at the end of every sermon I preached. Rich, a member of our church who happened to be a UPS driver, told me that he had the opportunity of leading a person to Christ that week. I asked him what evangelism training class had prepared him to do that. He said, “I haven’t taken a class or read a book on evangelism. But I hear you give the Gospel every week at the end of your sermons and now I can share the good news of Jesus in my sleep.” If you make a beeline for the cross in each of your talks those you minister to will be able to do the same thing.

## **2) Equip them to master the message of the Gospel.**

As the leader of a ministry that trains teenagers to relationally and relentlessly evangelize (Dare2share) I get the privilege of equipping young people to master the message of the Gospel all across the United States. I don’t train them to use a method but to master the message of the Gospel. To do that I have them memorize an acrostic that tells the whole story (aka “meta-narrative”) of the Gospel from Genesis to Revelation. We call it the GOSPEL Journey Message.

God created us to be with him.  
Our sins separate us from God.  
Sins cannot be removed by good deeds.  
Paying the price for sin, Jesus died and rose again.  
Everyone who trusts in him alone has eternal life.  
Life with Jesus starts now and lasts forever.

Why invest the energy in getting others to memorize an acrostic? You wouldn’t dare try to play the guitar without mastering the chords. Well, think of these six points as “chords” to the Gospel message. Have those you lead memorize these points and personalize them until they can turn these six chords into beautiful music spiced with their own story and style. Soon their explanation of the Gospel will go from awkward to awesome. To help you train those you lead [here](#) is a podcast you can watch and a PDF outline you can use which will help you equip them in the GOSPEL Journey Message.

Whether you choose to use the GOSPEL Journey Message or something else, the main thing is that those you minister to on a weekly basis have a clear, cogent and complete understanding of the simple truth of the good news of Jesus Christ. If you don’t think they need it I dare you to break out the video camera and microphone this Sunday at your church. Interview ten random people and see if they can pass the Gospel test.

You may be surprised.