

Christian Book Summaries



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Just Walk Across the Room

Simple Steps Pointing People To Faith

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A Quick Focus

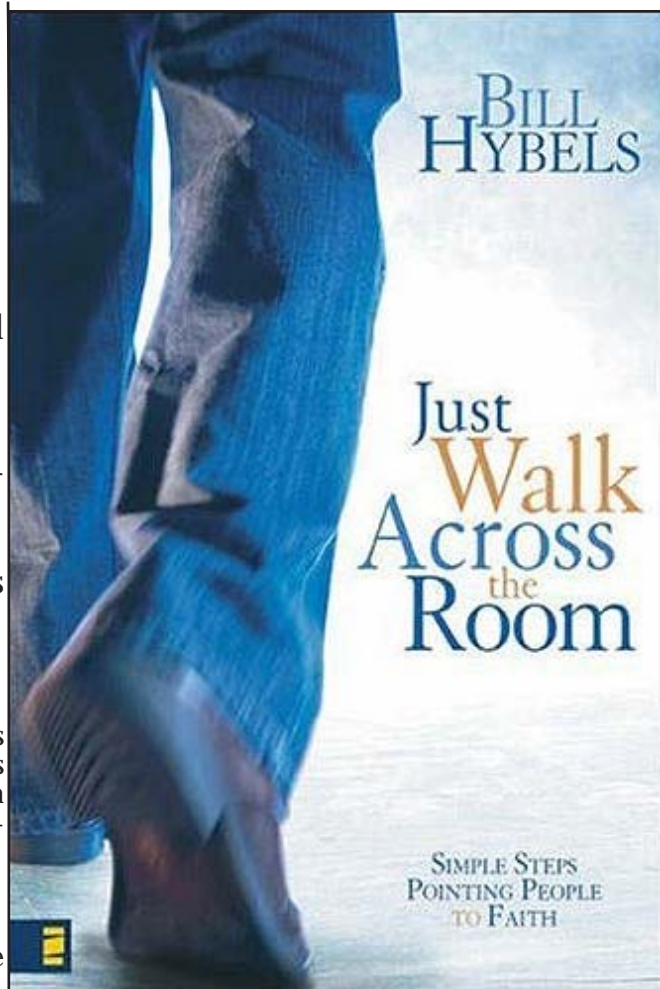
The Book's Purpose

- Issue a call for all believers to engage in life's greatest mission~telling others about Jesus
- Teach evangelism principles that Jesus modeled
- Show believers how they can build relationships with those who do not profess Christ
- Encourage believers every day to listen for the Holy Spirit's promptings "to walk across the room"
- Teach Christ-followers how to frame their story for telling others

The Book's Message

Just walking across a room to engage in conversation may be the very catalyst God uses to change one's eternal destiny. There is no greater divine mandate than telling others about Jesus. And there is no greater joy than playing a role in someone's life-changing decision.

With so much at stake, why don't more believers proactively share their faith with others? After all, most Christians acknowledge that God has given them this responsibility. At some point, what the Bible clearly teaches must collide with one's level of obedience and prompt him to take that walk across the room.



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Eight Main Points

- Take a Walk 2
- Telling God's Story 5
- Evangelism's Highest Value 2
- Learning from the Greatest Teacher 6
- 3-D Living 3
- Grandeur Vision Living 7
- The Power of a Good Story 4
- Walking Through Open Doors 8

take a walk

The average person takes about ten thousand steps a day. In a lifetime, that's four trips around the earth. However, the question of the hour is: Will he use his steps wisely? What if ten steps across a room could impact eternity?

That thought stunned me as I listened to a Muslim tell his story of how he came to Christ. He was at a party, standing alone, when a Christ-follower from the other side of the room broke away from his clique of friends and introduced himself. The two became instant friends. Over the course of time and after many spiritual conversations, the Muslim felt compelled to pray to God, and He gave His life to Jesus Christ. This happened all because a follower of Christ was willing to walk ten steps across a room.

A Walk in the Zone of the Unknown

“What if redirecting a person's forever really is as simple as walking across a room?”

He moved away from the comfort zone of his circle of friends and started to move in the direction of the Zone of the Unknown. He had no idea what would transpire. He just knew the Spirit was telling him to walk. Isn't it amazing that evangelism can be as simple as taking a walk and that those steps can result in extraordinary outcomes?

Christ Took a Walk

God took a walk across the vast cosmos when He became a man. By doing so, He stretched His arms out to sinful people just like us. In order to rescue us, Jesus took the ultimate walk, a walk to the cross. He went to great lengths of suffering to demonstrate His love and forgiveness to the sick, the lonely, the wandering, the addicted, the depressed, and the hopeless.


Imagine the horror the woman caught in adultery must have felt (John 8). Her sins were displayed in the public arena for all to see. The Pharisees thought they had Jesus in a bind when they asked Him what they should do with the woman. He ruined their day when He told them to let the one who was without sin to be the first stone thrower.

Alone with the woman after all her accusers left, Jesus did not condemn her. He offered her a brand new life, a life of freedom. Our primary mission in this world is the same. We are called to serve people and point them toward faith in Christ.

Every week I hear salvation stories, but this particular one about the Muslim kept racing through my mind. God must have surely been speaking to me. As I reflected on the story, I began to realize that this follower of Christ saw the man across the room, heard the Holy Spirit direct him, and actually felt something inside his heart that prompted him to take the walk.

Our Challenge to Walk

What is the one thing you're living for? What matters the most to you? The mind of Christ was focused on one thing—people. People who face a Christless eternity must consume our minds as well. If we really believe that God can redeem and transform a person's life, then we must do all we possibly can to connect people to Him.

Introducing someone to Jesus is life's supreme mission. No task is greater or more rewarding. Think about it. Someone walked across a room to introduce you to Jesus. Jesus walked across the whole universe to save you. So, take a walk yourself and watch what God can do through you. 

evangelism's highest value

Evangelism fads come and go. We've seen the days of tracts, bus ministry, and televangelism, all of which God has used. And I'm sure there will be new tools for the future. I am convinced, however, that evangelism's highest value is listening to and cooperating with the Holy Spirit.

Attuned to the Spirit

Acts 1:8 teaches that the Holy Spirit will empower Christians to be God's witnesses. With these words Jesus taught us that we don't need street smarts or book smarts because we have within us life-transforming power. Galatians 5:25 instructs us to “keep in step with the Spirit.” In other words, by tapping into His power, we receive His guidance, inspiration, and motivation.

How do these words apply to evangelism? They remind us to keep our eyes open daily for God-

continued on page 3

EVANGELISM'S HIGHEST VALUE

continued from page 2

ordained opportunities. Daily we must listen for the Spirit's whisper, "Speak to that person....Go help that person....Take a walk." We should wake up each day and pray, "Spirit, use me today to point someone to You."

The motive to this approach is not to see how many people can get saved. **"My objective is to walk when He prompts me to walk, talk when He says to talk, fall silent when I'm at risk of saying too much, and stay put when He leads me to stay put."**

I don't pretend to understand how the Spirit operates. For example, one day I was getting a haircut and looked for an opportunity to strike up a spiritual conversation. Nothing opened. On the other hand, one day while hiding away in the back of a restaurant studying for a message, the Spirit prompted me to invite the waitress to our Christmas Eve service. I was floored the next time in the restaurant when she approached me and expressed how much she and her daughter enjoyed the Christmas Eve service. It is this dynamic that makes a lifestyle of evangelism an exciting adventure.

Different Roles

Some folks believe that a conversation has been unsuccessful unless the plan of salvation has been clearly explained. Yes, it would be nice if every contact led to a life-changing decision. But that's not how the Holy Spirit operates. Sometimes He wants me to be the seed planter; other times He wants me to be the middle man who waters the seeds. And sometimes, thankfully, I'm the one who gets to pick the fruit from the vine.

We all play different roles in leading people to make decisions that change their eternal destiny. God might want me to lead someone from a negative eight to a negative six on the evangelism scale. He may use you to take the person the rest of the way.

The key to success is to keep planting seeds, because, as Jesus taught in the parable of the soils, some seed will eventually fall upon fertile soil. In this story Jesus reminds us that many walks across the room may leave us feeling completely fruitless. But we must never give up. Keep walking. Always be ready to leave your comfort area to the Zone of the Unknown. You never know when you will have that magical experience of being present when the fertile soil of someone's heart collides with your strategically placed seed.

"True joy in the Christian adventure unfurls when you play the role that the Spirit asks you to play. Your job~and mine~ is to say, 'God, I am open for whatever role you might have me play. Whatever it is, I'm available to be used.'"

CBS

3d living

Most Christ followers agree that God expects them to engage in evangelism, but only a small percentage actually do anything about it. Most believers struggle with how to get the job done. To help our people at Willow Creek, we have designed a strategy to encourage our people to take the gospel into their neighborhoods. We call it "Living in 3D."

"Simply put, if you are a Christ-follower, then you are called, equipped, and expected to share the gospel. No exceptions!"

Develop Friendships

The first concept is to develop friendships. Unfortunately, trends indicate that the longer a person attends church, the fewer evangelistic conversations he engages in. The typical excuse is, "I'm just not wired for this evangelism thing." Believers subconsciously bargain with God by inundating themselves with Bible studies, ministry projects, and volunteerism, thinking that engaging in all this activity absolves them from their duty to share their faith.

3D living always begins with love. The more like Christ one becomes, the greater his love for the lost should become. What God treasures first and foremost is people. The same should be true for us. Like Jesus, we should see people's potential beyond their obvious flaws. He saw potential in someone like Zacchaeus. He looked beyond Saul's vengeance against Christians and saw a powerful force for the kingdom.

continued on page 4

3-D LIVING

continued from page 3

We need to develop friendships with the same spiritual goals in mind. Instead of avoiding the next-door neighbors, we need to see them as those for whom Christ died. We need to believe that the old can become new, the fallen can be restored, and the derelict can become a disciple.

Start small with a non-threatening gathering of neighbors. Invite them to a cookout. Allow friendships to emerge. It might be you that the Holy Spirit will use to bring someone into the kingdom.

Discover Their Stories

As you develop friendships with those far from God, the next step is to discover their stories. Before bridges can be built, you must practice the “potential of close proximity.” In other words, you can never be an effective evangelist unless you put yourself in the paths of those who do not embrace Christ. But once you develop a friendship, you must learn what life has been like for them. Discover their stories.

When you build relationships with others, it is critical that you use the style you’re comfortable with. Don’t try to fit into the mold of someone else’s method of evangelism. God simply wants you to take the walk across the room and be authentic.

The key to engaging in spiritual dialogue is to listen carefully to the other person’s story. Look for the open window of opportunity. Sometimes the situations become awkward. Sometimes you’re faced with questions you don’t have a clue how to handle. But no matter how uncomfortable things may become, discover the person’s story. Why? **“Because you just might be the single flame in someone’s dark night who reminds them that there is a God who created them, who loves them, and who yearns to relate with them, starting from right where they are.”**

Discern Next Steps

Once you have heard someone’s story, be sensitive to possible next steps you can take to bring the person closer to Christ. In conversation, one of the greatest temptations is to keep everything on a surface level. God wants you to move deeper.

Most conversations will encounter a fork-in-the-road moment. In these moments what will you do? Keep the discussion light and end it with a half-hearted joke? Or will you take the next step that will allow you to have a deep impact on the person’s life?

Any ten-minute conversation will reveal dozens of ways you can provide resources. Most people send very clear signals. You need spiritual radar that will track the Holy Spirit’s promptings as well as the person’s needs. The key is to have a willing heart to provide any resource possible to help the person better connect with God. If the person doesn’t make a decision for Christ, no big deal. But you will never know where things could possibly lead unless you take the risk to be a resource provider.

CBS

the power of a good story

the one probing your faith. You need to be ready to tell your story with great clarity and sincerity within 45 seconds.

Stories have a way of captivating our minds and hearts like nothing else can. They give us fresh eyes to understand the world around us. They raise questions that force us to think about life.

The Greatest Storyteller

Jesus knew the power of a good story. To communicate the most important issues of the human soul, He told everyday stories that any listener could easily understand. Whether He talked about a compassionate shepherd, a rich young ruler, or a woman baking bread, every story pointed to the grander vision of God.

You have a story to tell, and the story fits into God’s greater vision. What happens when someone asks you why you’re so fired up about God? Are you ready with a well-prepared response? These moments could very well define eternity for

“Living in 3D plants the seeds for evangelism to take root, but being able to tell an effective story is what bears the fruit.”

The Power of a “Bad” Story

We’ve all heard someone with good intentions share a faith story that probably would send one fur-

continued on page 5

THE POWER OF A GOOD STORY

continued from page 4

ther away from God than closer. For example, don't start your story with some weird spiritual experience you had with God. Strange things do happen, but most likely someone living far from God will never be able to relate to what you're saying.

Most stories are far too long. The listener would actually prefer that his clothes still be in style when you're done. Three minutes (or even shorter) should be your target. Then make sure you allow time for the listener to ask you follow-up questions.

Many stories are too fuzzy. Make them simple. Don't include a dozen plot lines. Keep the storyline moving in one direction. Also, be cautious of using religionesse, words that may mean much to you but absolutely nothing to the listener. And you should be aware that coming across with an air of superiority will certainly communicate that you don't really care about the person you're talking to.

Before and After

Your story should tell very simply what Christ means to you. What difference has He made in your life? You probably wouldn't listen to an overweight person tell you about a diet plan. In the same way, no one will listen to you unless he knows that your life is genuinely different.

Don't make your story dramatic. Very simply state what your life was like before and how your life is different since you decided to follow Christ. A great before and after story is found in John 8, where the formerly blind man said, "I once was blind, but now I can see." Think about Zacchaeus: "I used to steal from people, but since I became a Christ-follower, I now care for people, especially the poor."

Basically, a solid story contains three prongs: what your life was like before, the fact that you made a decision to follow Christ, and the difference He has made in your life. Work on your story. Hone it and shape it. You will be amazed how God can use it to bring others into His kingdom.

CBS

telling God's story

Since the beginning of time, people have sensed that a great chasm exists between them and God. They have an inner compulsion to bridge the gap. But how? Most attempts to solve this dilemma begin on the humankind side. Study all the religions and you will discover a framework by which man must perform works in order to appease a holy God—that is, every religion except biblical Christianity.

God has a story to tell. He took the responsibility upon Himself to build the bridge. In order to reach sinful man, He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross. His death became the ultimate bridge by which sinful man could enter into a relationship with a holy God. **"And there is no higher honor in life than to be message carriers of the greatest news known to humanity."** The whole reason we exist on this earth is to spread the news that the bridge has already been built.

Effective Gospel Presentations

To be an effective witness, every believer needs to have under his belt several different ways to communicate the gospel message. Pictures work the best. One very effective tool is the bridge illustration. Draw God on one side of the paper, man on the other, and a great chasm between them. The chasm represents the sin that separates us from God. Draw a cross that bridges the two sides to demonstrate that only Jesus can bring a person into a relationship with God. Whoever walks across the bridge will be granted the gift of eternal life.

Another effective method is the "Do versus Done" presentation. Every religion except Christianity requires that you do enough good things to merit the favor of God. Christianity, on the other hand, can be spelled D-O-N-E. What Christ did on the cross is sufficient for our salvation. His death satisfied God's requirement for a perfect sacrifice.

The morality ladder presentation demonstrates the universal longing for God. Picture a ladder. On the top is God because He is perfectly moral. On a couple of the upper rungs write the names of Billy Graham and Mother Teresa, two individuals that certainly would rank high on the morality ladder. On the bottom, put serial killers. Put your own name in the middle. Then ask the person where on the ladder he would mark himself. Then ask how he plans to make up the gap between him and God. Choosing to follow Christ is the only way to bridge the gap.

Evangelism Dysfunctions

Most Christ-followers sincerely believe that God's story has the power to change lives. But a troubling contradiction exists in churches across America. As much as we believe in the power of Jesus to change lives, too few are willing to tell the good news to others. I call them the avoiders. They might take a walk across the room but then mysteriously be tight lipped when God opens a door to share their faith.

continued on page 6

TELLING GOD'S STORY
continued from page 5

“Although most Christians say that the gospel really can renew, save, and transform lives, they get all timid when it comes to living as though it is true.”

On the opposite extreme are the erupters. They mean well, but they erupt any time someone walks across their path. They walk across the room sometimes when they shouldn't. Once they have their victim in grasp, they cut loose and spew out the gospel message like rapid gunfire. Erupters must learn to let God do the orchestrating of the moments.



Changing the World

I wonder what the end-of-the-day conversation was like between Jesus and His disciples. They raised question marks about Him dialoguing with a sinful woman. Don't you imagine He used the evening to talk about the harvest and how ripe it is and how it includes those from different backgrounds?

Use your imagination to picture the woman at the well fifteen years removed from her conversion. Maybe her whole family has gathered together for a great time of fellowship. The woman, one more time, tells her story of how Jesus met her and gave her living water.

Once the woman met Jesus, she shared her experience with others. Many came into the kingdom because of her witness. With great boldness, she tried to change her world by telling others. God wants to use you to change your world. Are you willing to let Him use you?

Go back in time and think about your own story, how Jesus entered your heart and gave you a brand new start. Who was the one person who walked across the room to tell you the gospel story? Are you ready to walk across the room to help someone else find Jesus? Christ shed His blood for every person you see each day. When will you put some action behind your faith and take that walk?

learning from the greatest teacher

No one has ever modeled evangelism better than Jesus. In John 4, we read the story of an immoral woman whose life was transformed in an unlikely setting. The story of the woman at the well presents us with excellent lessons on evangelism, demonstrated by the greatest Teacher.

Lessons from the Master

First, Jesus bridged the chasm. Most Christians have been taught from childhood to insulate themselves from the world and to steer clear from the wrong crowd. In this story Jesus taught us that we don't have to allow the world to intimidate us. He sought to build bridges instead of making the chasm deeper between the great divides. He could have shied away from talking with someone from a completely different background. But He didn't.

Second, Jesus asked a question. He was very intentional in how He initiated spiritual conversations. He asked questions to test the waters. He didn't barge through doors that were not opened. Christ-followers must learn from Jesus' example and ask thought-provoking questions that can open the door to deeper conversations.

Third, Jesus did not travel down rabbit trails. When the conversation got a little tense, the woman tried to steer Jesus onto other subjects. He stayed focused. Today, people throw up many smoke screens. You don't really believe that Jesus is the only way to God, do you? What about all the hypocrites in church? At that moment, believers must discern whether the questions are genuinely sincere or merely an effort to get the conversation off-track.

Fourth, Jesus gave hope to the hopeless. She was thirsty, and He offered her living water. People today are filled with shame. We must communicate grace and forgiveness. People today are addicted with destructive habits. We must let them know that Christ can set them free. People today are weary. We must teach them how Jesus can give them the rest they long for.

“Our job is to stay the course, walking when we are prompted to walk, talking when we are prompted to talk, staying quiet when silence is required, and trusting God with the outcome of redeeming his broken and sin-scarred people.”



grandervisionliving

Luke 5 tells the story of Simon Peter on the lake fishing but not having any luck. After teaching a large multitude on the shore side, Jesus told Peter to give the fishing one more shot. Reluctantly, he and his friends put their boats out a short distance from the shore. Before long they had caught fish in record numbers. They are beside themselves with excitement. Jesus used the story to challenge them to a vision that far superseded their fishing experience.

Fishing for People

As excited as His followers must have been, Jesus in essence said to them, "Guys, you haven't seen anything yet." Then he challenged them to a grander vision of fishing for men, a journey that would change people's souls. He asked them to leave everything behind and follow Him for the sake of people's eternal destinies.

notes, books, and tapes as I sought to lead him to Christ.

During this hospital visit, I pleaded with him to give his life to Christ and not to let another moment pass without being certain of his eternal destiny. I was amazed as he sincerely opened his heart to Jesus. Less than twenty-four hours after his decision, he was gone. This experience compelled me to cry out to God. I asked Him to help me to live every day with that same sense of urgency regarding

people's eternal destinies.

“Are you going to throw your one and only life into pursuing small fish, or will you risk tossing your nets out there in anticipation of catching the human-sized ones?”

We can learn a lot about this grander vision from Matthew. When he left the tax collecting business, he didn't abandon

Peter accepted Jesus' call. He left career and family behind to pursue life's greatest mission~seeking the lost, loving the forgotten, and serving the poor. The story of Chuck Colson can be compared to Peter's grander vision living. Chuck sought to fulfill the emptiness in his life through everything but a relationship with Jesus. Through the witness of a businessman friend, he gave his life to the Christ who showed him the joy and fulfillment of fishing for men. Imagine the scores of prisoners whose destinies have changed because Chuck was able to see beyond crime and failure to men who possessed tremendous potential for the good of the kingdom.

his ungodly friends. He threw a party that included Christ-followers as well as his lost buddies. He included people that the religious leaders would have deemed outcasts.

What we need is a shift of focus. The Father's heart always leans toward people~and, yes, lost people. We need to see all people as those for whom Christ has died. The grander vision leads us to serve the needs of others and to speak up at every prompting of the Spirit.

We make a big deal at Willow Creek about throwing Matthew parties, putting ourselves in social settings where believers can mingle and build relationships with those who have yet to embrace Christ. It all boils down to this~am I willing to get out of the office and out of my regular routines to include people who desperately need Jesus? To invest your life in anything but people is to pursue a vision of lesser value. The choice is yours. Will you accept God's invitation to go after the big fish?

The Urgency of the Grander Vision

The longer we walk with Jesus, the greater is the urgency we have toward eternal realities. We recognize that the time is short. One day I felt an overwhelming sense of urgency to visit a friend's father in the hospital. He had colon cancer and the prognosis was not good. The father and I had developed a strong relationship. I had put in his hands many

walking through open doors

Famous last words. Sometimes final words represent an attempt to communicate what the person wants to be remembered for. To put in a capsule the “walk across the room” lifestyle, I have chosen several verses from Paul’s final words to the Colossians (4:2-6).

Prayer and Evangelism

To stay rooted in the faith, the Apostle challenged them to devote themselves to prayer (v. 2). Prayer and evangelism are closely intertwined. If we want to be successful leading others to Christ, we must be devoted to prayer. We must not even think of doing evangelism unless we are prayed up.

Throughout the day we should communicate with God as we intersect with people. “God, is this an open door? Do you want me to say anything? Direct me.” On the other hand, we also need to invest time in closet praying where get alone and enter into times of uninterrupted dialoguing with God. These times help us recalibrate our world to God’s world.

What Should We Pray For?

In verse 3 we get a clear picture of Paul’s passion for the lost. He asks the believers in Colossae to pray for God to open doors so that he can fearlessly proclaim Christ to others. Paul knew from experience that you cannot cram the gospel down the throats of people who are far from God. He knew that only God can open the doors.

We need to make Paul’s prayer our prayer every day. “God, will you please open up doors for me today? Will you allow me to engage in spiritual conversations with someone? Send new people into my life that will allow me to build bridges for You.” God loves that kind of praying. And He answers. The more you pray, the more you will be attuned to the doors the Spirit is opening.

Walking through Open Doors

We can’t bust doors open. That’s God’s job. However, when He opens the door, we absolutely must take advantage, and we absolutely must speak the message with greatest clarity. Verses 4-6 stress that we must seize every opportunity. However, our conversation must be filled with grace and seasoned with salt. And we must be prepared to answer any question raised.

Sometimes the open doors are extremely obvious to spot. They might come unexpectedly, but we know the door is wide open. We must walk through the door and speak up and trust that God will give us the words to say that will accomplish His purposes.

The conversation may turn in many directions. However, there are three irreducible truths I always try to convey. First, God loves you. Second, Christ chose to pay the penalty for sin. Third, the decision is yours. One cannot drift into salvation. He must make a conscious choice.

“No trophy, no promotion, no pleasure, no possession will ever hold a candle to the thrill we feel when God uses us to touch another human life for eternity.”

As a follower of Christ, one day you will speak your final words and be ushered off into heaven. When you get there, imagine the street talk. When you ask someone, “How did you get here?” wouldn’t it be awesome to hear, “The day you walked across the room was the starting point for me”? For that scenario to happen requires that you start walking across the room today. What are you waiting for?



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