

Becoming a Contagious Christian

Bible Study or Discipleship Lesson

What does it mean to be a contagious Christian, where our faith is “caught” by those around us? Most of us would love to see our non-Christian friends to step across the line of faith, but we are overwhelmed or intimidated by the idea of evangelism. Perhaps the image we have of evangelism is wrong or incomplete. With inspiring vision and practical steps, this resource will help you become comfortable and even excited about sharing your faith.

This resource is divided up into six lessons, and can be used in a one-on-one or in Core Group.

This resource is based on the book *Becoming a Contagious Christian* by Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg.

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Week 1: Why Become a Contagious Christian?

Intro: The reason that most of us struggle to be contagious Christians is that fear, uncertainty, and self-centered living get in the way of what God is trying to do *through* us. This is a matter of motive, and must be overcome by developing God's heart for the lost.

Intro questions

- What comes to mind when you think of "evangelism"?
- On a scale from 1 to 10, how motivated are you to evangelize to those in your sphere of influence?

Scripture lesson: Read Luke 15.

Scripture questions:

- What does each of these parables have in common?
- In the first two parables, how does each person respond when the object goes missing?
- How does each person respond when the object is found?
- What is the father's attitude throughout the parable of the lost son?
- What do these parables say about God's attitude towards those who are lost?

Reflection questions:

- Who are some people around you that have need for a contagious Christian in their life? This could be a family member, classmate, friend, dining hall server, or dorm janitor, just to name a few.
- What holds you back from sharing the love of God with the people you just thought of? What costs might you have to pay? Relate this to the cost paid by the characters in the Luke 15 parables.
- What are the benefits of living as a contagious Christian? Do these benefits outweigh the costs?

Activity:

- Choose 3 non-Christians in your life to pray for daily. The place to start when developing God's heart for the lost is focused prayer!

Guiding Thoughts:

- To become contagious Christians we need to have the proper motivation. Sharing the gospel because it is "the right thing to do" or because we would otherwise feel guilty is improper motivation. We need first and foremost, to have God's heart.
- When you really value something and it is lost, you *naturally* want to search for it. Our goal throughout this study is to develop God's heart for the lost.

Every moment is an opportunity to be a contagious Christian. God's desire is to turn the *routine* into the *remarkable* in every area of your life.

Week 2: Salt and Light

Intro: Jesus gives us a clear picture of what it means to be contagious Christians through the images of “salt” and “light.”

Scripture lesson: Read Matthew 5:13-16.

Scripture questions:

- What are the functions of salt? What does Jesus mean when he says we are the salt of the earth?
- As the light of the world, how do you sometimes hide under a bowl? What are some ways that God has created you to shine (see Eph. 2:10)? What gifts, talents, and passions has He given you?

The command to be salt and light is the basis for the key idea of this study: $HP + CP + CC = MI$. That is, High Potency + Close Proximity + Clear Communication = Maximum Impact. To have a maximum impact in the lives of those around us, we need to excel at each item on the left of the equation.

In order to be effectively salty Christians, we must have high potency. If our lives don't reflect Christ, we won't have an impact. We must also have close proximity to non-Christians. After all, what good is salt if it never leaves the salt shaker?

The key component to being the light of the world is clear Communication. If we do good deeds, fight injustice, and work for peace in the world, but never mention Jesus, what good have we truly done?

Reflection questions:

- Does $HP + CP + CC = MI$ accurately describe your life right now? Which part of the equation do you consider yourself strong at? Weak at?
- Describe a person who has High Potency and Close Proximity, but no Clear Communication.
- Describe a person who has High Potency and Clear Communication, but no Close Proximity.
- Describe a person who has Clear Communication and Close Proximity, but no High Potency.
- Can you see how this three pronged approach is absolutely necessary to fulfill God's desire to reach the lost?

Activity: The next time you are in the dining hall with a Christian friend, take note of the salt shaker on the table, and have a conversation with your friend about how you can encourage each other to be salt and light. Talk specifically about the 3 non-Christian friends you are praying for.

Guiding thoughts:

- High Potency + Close Proximity + Clear Communication = Maximum Impact
- Salt preserves, brings out the flavor in foods, and it makes us thirsty. As Christians, we are called to be agents of redemption by standing for righteousness and making people thirsty for the gospel.
- People rarely ask why we live the “salt” life...we must share the “light” of the gospel (see Rom. 10:14).

Week 3: High Potency

Intro: The first element of contagious Christianity is High Potency. The three key components of High Potency are authenticity, compassion, and sacrifice. We will look at how each of these gives us a more credible witness and opens people's hearts to the gospel.

Scripture lesson: Read Luke 10:25-37

Scripture questions:

- Why do you think the Levite and the priest passed by the beaten traveler without helping?
- What do you think went through the mind of the robbed and beaten (Jewish) man when he found out that a Samaritan rescued him?
- To answer the expert of the law's question, who is your neighbor? Was this the answer he wanted to hear?
- If the beaten traveler later appeared in the synagogue of the passer-by priest, how do you think he would respond to the priest's teachings?

“Christians should be the good news before they share the good news.” While not always the case, the fact remains that if we are going to share the message of Jesus with our friends, our lives must agree with our message. This is called **authenticity**. God knows we will make mistakes, and He uses us despite our shortcomings, but we are still called to live a consistent lifestyle.

Reflection question:

- Are you open with your non-Christian friends about your struggles, or do you always put on a good face? Expressing your hurts, and even your doubts regarding faith, can break trust barriers with your non-Christian friends.

As contagious Christians, we must demonstrate **compassion**, not only because it is a mandate from God (see Deut. 15:11, Jas. 1:17, Matt. 25:40), but because it opens up people's hearts. Our witness must be marked by a deep, genuine love for people. Unfortunately, because many of us have fast-paced and self-centered lifestyles, our compassion quotient gets zapped.

Reflection questions:

- On a scale from 1 (a stone-cold heart) to 10 (Mother Teresa), how compassionate are you? Draw a “compassion scale” and put an “X” where you fall.
- What prevents you from being more compassionate? Do you have the time for compassion? Maybe your lifestyle makes you look more like the Levite or priest than the Good Samaritan.

Sacrificial acts are rarely forgotten. To stand out as contagious Christians in our narcissistic culture, we need to live selfless, sacrificial lives (see Rom 12:1-2). The sacrifices we

make as college students may look like: staying up late and losing study time to talk with a friend going through a crisis, giving up a Saturday to volunteer at the homeless shelter, or driving an international friend to the grocery store.

Reflection questions:

- Describe a time when someone made a sacrifice for you. How did it impact you?
- What types of sacrifices may be necessary to increase your potency? What has prevented you from making these sacrifices? Be specific.

Activity: Which area of high potency do you struggle most with? What is one thing you can do this week to boost your authenticity, compassion, or sacrifice factor? Decide what that one thing is and do it!

Guiding thoughts:

- Authenticity, compassion, and sacrifice are central to high potency.
- A lifestyle inconsistent with our message can hinder our witness, while a lifestyle marked by servanthood and love can make our witness more credible.

Week 4: Close Proximity

Intro: Even the most highly potent person makes little impact for the Kingdom if he doesn't get out of the salt shaker eventually! This week we will investigate why close proximity is so important, and how to make it work.

Scripture lesson: Luke 5:27-31

Scripture questions:

- Why do you think Levi invited the “tax collectors and others” to his house to join in the banquet with Jesus?
- Did the Pharisees frequently rub shoulders with “sinners”? What was their opinion of Jesus for doing so?
- How does Jesus' response show that His goals are different than those of the Pharisees?

To be contagious Christians, we must spend time rubbing shoulders with people who don't know Jesus. Think for a minute about who you can most naturally and effectively share your faith with. Who comes to mind? You are probably thinking of a friend, a family member, someone close to you. We can most effectively share our faith with those who **trust** and **respect** us. Trust and respect are at the heart of friendship, and friendship is the product of large amounts of close proximity.

Whether you want to share Christ with an old friend, or are thinking about reaching out to the brand new exchange student on your hall, two questions often arise: Isn't it wrong to put time and effort into a relationship just to try to convert someone? Second, where am I going to find the time to invest in this relationship?

In response to the first question, we should never have an **ulterior motive** when we initiate a friendship, that is, a friendship should never be contingent on a person's conversion. However, we must have an **ultimate goal**—to bring about good in our lives of our friends, the greatest good being Christ's love in their heart.

In response to the second question, we often underestimate how much time we have to rub shoulders with non-Christians! Think for a minute about all the fun things you do with your Christian friends: house parties, study groups, dining hall excursions, hikes, grocery store runs. What would it look like to invite a non-Christian friend every now and then?

Whenever you are thinking about introducing a friend to Christianity, remember the **Barbecue-First Principle**. Before inviting a friend to an event aimed primarily at Christians, invite them to a barbecue, or Chi Alpha social event, or dinner in the dining hall, or video game night! Spend plenty of time rubbing shoulders in a casual environment where spiritual discussions are free to take place!

Reflection questions:

- How does the idea of “no ulterior motive, only ultimate goal” affect your thoughts on building friendships in order to share Christ?

- Bring to mind your 3 non-Christian friends that you have been praying for these past several weeks. How can you increase your proximity? Which of your regular activities can you use to build these relationships? Which activities would be especially appealing to these friends?

Activity: Invite each of your 3 non-Christian friends to an activity that you do with your Christian friends this week.

Guiding thoughts:

- No ulterior motive, only ultimate goal
- Barbecue-First Principle

Week 5: Clear Communication

Intro: The last element of contagious Christianity is clear communication of the gospel. This one is often seen as the scariest! However, if we live highly potent lives in close proximity to non-Christians, clear communication will come more naturally and more frequently!

Scripture lesson: Read Romans 10:14, 1 Peter 3:15-16, 2 Timothy 4:2

Scripture questions:

- What do these passages say about the importance of preaching (or sharing) the gospel?
- According to the 1 Peter passage, how should we share this good news?

Why does clear communication need to be part of our lives as contagious Christians? Well let's be clear, our final goal is maximum impact—conversion. For many Christians, the thought of helping their friends cross the line of faith is an almost unimaginable goal. For some of your friends, conversion may indeed be a long way off. However, conversion is simply the major milestone of a spiritual journey—a journey which your friends are on right now!

Conversions only take place after the gospel has been shared, and the gospel is shared in the midst of **spiritual conversations**. Does the term spiritual conversation sound a lot less intimidating than conversion? I hope so. Don't underestimate your friends' interest in spiritual matters. Though **religion** may be a wash for some, most people are open to spiritual conversations.

To clearly communicate the gospel, you need to engage your friends in spiritual conversations. One way to do this is to ask direct questions. This can be as simple as asking a friend:

- “How are you doing...really?”
- “Where are you heading in your spiritual journey?”
- or “If you'd ever like to know the difference between religion and Christianity, let me know. I'd be happy to talk to you about it.”

Other conversations that start out not so spiritual can be turned into moments for sharing your faith as well. The key to good spiritual conversations is to be open to what the Holy Spirit is doing in your friend's life.

Reflection questions:

- Do you have many spiritual conversations with your friends? If so, how do they usually begin? If not, what is holding you back from initiating them?
- Brainstorm several more questions that you could use to begin spiritual conversations.

One fear that holds many Christians back from engaging friends in spiritual conversations is the fear of being asked **tough questions**. We don't have to know all the answers to begin conversations. If we are asked a question that we don't have an answer for, the best way to respond is, "I don't know!" Honesty never hurts, and will actually build your witness more than making up an answer on the spot. For more on answering tough questions, check out the "Relational Evangelism Guide" on the Discipleship Resources page of www.XAatUVA.com.

As you begin to engage in spiritual conversations, one question will probably be asked, and you need to be ready to answer this one: "What does it mean to become a Christian?"

Reflection question:

- In 2 minutes or less, explain what it means to become a Christian.

Was it hard? Easy? Did you find yourself going longer than 2 minutes? Without much forethought, explaining what it means to become a Christian can be a difficult task! There are many ways of explaining the gospel, but a simple outline goes as such:

1. God—He is loving, holy, and just.
2. Us—we were made by God, and we were good! Unfortunately, we abused our freedom and rebelled against God, becoming evil. Because God is holy, we cannot experience God's presence (the Holy Spirit, and Heaven) in our evil state. Because He is just, He cannot simply "do away" with our evil.
3. Christ—because God is loving, He sent His Son to suffer the penalty we deserved through death on the cross. Because Christ was resurrected and was given new life, we also have the possibility to experience new life!
4. You—can begin a **relationship** with God by acknowledging your sinfulness, asking God for forgiveness, and committing to follow Christ! This new life includes eternity with God in the future, but also fulfillment through the presence of the Holy Spirit now!

While it is important to know a basic outline of the gospel, the most effective way to present the gospel is through **your story**. The best way to explain the difference Christ can make in a person's life is to share the difference He is making in *your* life.

Activity: Write out your story and look for an opportunity to share it. Use "Telling Your Story" from the Discipleship Resources page of www.XAatUVA.com as a guide.

Guiding thoughts:

- Without clear communication of the gospel, the world will not know to put its faith in Christ.
- Spiritual conversations provide opportunities to share the gospel.

Your story is one of the most effective ways to share the gospel.

Week 6: Maximum Impact

Intro: We have reached our destination: maximum impact, life change, world change. Conversion is at the heart of maximum impact, so it is important that we are ready and available to walk our friends through conversion when they are ready to follow Jesus.

Scripture lesson: Read Luke 23:40-43, Romans 10:9, Luke 15:10

Scripture questions:

- According to these Scriptures, what are the basic requirements for salvation?
- What were the characteristics of the conversion of the thief on the cross? Does this conversion seem to have elements missing, or does it seem different from a “traditional” conversion?

Reflection question:

1. Describe your own conversion experience.

When your friend has reached the point where he is ready to follow Christ, here a few things to keep in mind as you pray together:

1. Forget about word formulas: Magic words don’t save—a genuine confession from the heart that Christ is Lord, repentance for a life of sin, and a cry for God’s grace are what save.
2. You pray first: thank God for bringing you friend to this point in his spiritual journey.
3. Turn it over to your friend: encourage your friend to speak from the heart to God about their need for forgiveness and desire to receive God’s grace and follow Christ.

After your friend has become a Christian here are a few things to keep in mind to help them grow stronger spiritually every day:

1. Affirm: reiterate the importance of the decision your friend made to follow Christ.
2. Paint a realistic picture: explain that there will be ups and downs in their relationship with Christ, and that sin still needs to be eradicated for the relationship to grow stronger.
3. Talk about prayer and Scripture study: Talk to your friend about the importance of daily prayer and time in the Bible. There are many resources on prayer and Scripture on the Discipleship Resources page of www.XAatUVA.com.
4. Talk about the importance of community: stress the importance of living in community with other Christians and the importance of church involvement.

Reflection question:

1. Why is it dangerous for a new believer to not receive any discipleship? What are some potential scenarios (see Matthew 13)?

Activity: Talk to a Christian friend about her conversion. Continue doing HP + CP + CC to achieve maximum impact!

Guiding thoughts:

1. Conversion is at the heart of maximum impact. We must be ready to welcome our friends into the Kingdom.
2. Our work does not end when a friend becomes a Christian.