How to preach a CLEAR Gospel message!

There is an old survival slogan called “The Rule of 3.” It goes like this, “*You can go about three weeks without food, three days without water, three hours without shelter, and three minutes without air.”*

But today we are going to focus on just one of those…water.

Water is necessary for life. Without it you will die.

I was a roofer for eight years and, working in the heat of the Summer, I needed water throughout the day to stay hydrated.

And, because, I live in the Denver area, being a mile above sea level makes hydration even more necessary.

Add to all of this the fact that my family loves to go hiking in the beautiful Rocky Mountains of Colorado.

The higher you go into the mountains the more water is necessary. If you are not properly hydrated you become more susceptible to altitude sickness. I remember once, while climbing three 14,000 foot high mountains (we nickname these 14ers) with my son, not hydrating the 2-3 days leading up to the climb. I got altitude sickness and it was miserable. Although I completed the climb I felt nauseas, had a raging headache and felt like a train had hit me.

Water is necessary for earthly life. In the same way, Living Water is necessary for eternal life.

In John 4:13,14 Jesus said to the woman at the well, “*Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again.The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”*

What is this Living Water that Jesus speaks of? It is the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And, just like with water, the best way to serve the Gospel is clean and clear.

To help illustrate this I’m going to use 3 glasses of water as an illustration.

* 1st Glass of Water…the clear Gospel (faith alone in Christ alone.) What is this water? It is the clear gospel of grace…with nothing added! What's true of a glass of water is true of a presentation of the Gospel. The clearer the better. The Apostle Paul said this in Colossians 4:4 when he told the believers from Colossae to *"Pray that I may proclaim it clearly as I should."* Colossians 4:4
* 2nd Glass of Water…the muddy Gospel…could either kill you or save you depending on the germs that may or may not be in it…

*“Again, if the trumpet sounds a muffled call, who will prepare for battle?****9***[*So*](https://biblehub.com/greek/3779.htm)[*it is*](https://biblehub.com/greek/2532.htm)[*with you.*](https://biblehub.com/greek/4771.htm)[*Unless*](https://biblehub.com/greek/1437.htm)[*you speak*](https://biblehub.com/greek/1325.htm)[*intelligible*](https://biblehub.com/greek/2154.htm)[*words*](https://biblehub.com/greek/3056.htm)[*with*](https://biblehub.com/greek/1223.htm)[*your*](https://biblehub.com/greek/3588.htm)[*tongue,*](https://biblehub.com/greek/1100.htm)[*how*](https://biblehub.com/greek/4459.htm)[*will anyone know*](https://biblehub.com/greek/1097.htm)[*what*](https://biblehub.com/greek/3588.htm)[*you are saying?*](https://biblehub.com/greek/2980.htm)[*You will just be*](https://biblehub.com/greek/1510.htm)[*speaking*](https://biblehub.com/greek/2980.htm)[*into*](https://biblehub.com/greek/1519.htm)[*the air.*](https://biblehub.com/greek/109.htm)*”*1 Corinthians 14:8,9

Although this passage is speaking about speaking in tongues and not having an interpreter, the principle applies to giving the Gospel as well. If we are not clearly presenting the Gospel message we might as well be speaking in a different language to the lost. So we must speak, clearly, in a way they can understand.

Listening to Gospel presentations with the ear of an unbeliever…

* 3rd Glass of water…the poisonous Gospel…Galatians 1:8,9

*“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God’s curse!”* Galatians 1:8,9

“There are some Gospel presentations that are, beyond unclear. They are flat out false. They seek to add to the free gift of God’s grace. They put the focus on what we must do for Jesus instead of what Jesus has done for us.

Every Gospel presentation you give can fall into one of these 3 categories: Clear, Muddy or False. So, how do we make sure we are preaching a clear gospel?

To help you make sure the Living Water you're sharing with others is crystal **CLEAR** (not muddied up) I have developed this simple acrostic. It will help you test your Gospel presentation to see if it is clear enough for a lost person to understand and embrace.

A **CLEAR** Gospel is...

**C**ross-and-Christ-centric

**L**ays out the whole story

**E**asy to understand

**A**lways sounds too good to be true.

**R**elentlessly focuses on faith alone in Christ alone

Let me briefly break these five descriptors of a clear gospel down:

**Cross and Christ-centric**

“*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"* 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

This little passage is part of a pre-Pauline creed that the early believers put to memory so that they could keep Christ, his cross, the resurrection and the ascension as central to the Gospel message. We need that reminder as well.

I've heard famous evangelists attempt to give the gospel without mentioning the cross But there is no gospel without the cross. That's like a comedian setting up a joke without delivering the punchline. Not funny in the slightest.

Training teenagers to share their faith during our [Dare 2 Share](https://www.dare2share.org/) events I have often said, *"If you forget everything else remember the cross!"*It's the cross of Christ and his empty tomb that must be central to our Gospel presentations if we want to be clear.

**Lays out the whole story of the GOSPEL**

In Acts 20:27 (RSV) Paul said, *“I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.”*

Are you sharing *"the whole counsel of God"* when it comes to your Gospel presentation? Or are you just sharing bits and pieces of it?

For years, Dare 2 Share has used an acrostic to communicate the GOSPEL that started with G, *"God says everyone has sinned."*Then about 19 years ago in Washington D.C., I heard a lecture by Michael Metzger. He said that if our Gospel presentations start in Genesis 3 with the issue of sin, instead of in Genesis 1 with the reality of God's special creation of humanity, then it's missing the mark. So what did I do? I changed the *G* to "*God created us to be with him*." And now our [GOSPEL](http://www.lifein6words.com/?__hstc=106114972.7cbaa4510ca91612b72d5d630c7f65c6.1517347982952.1563983525709.1564572760914.250&__hssc=106114972.1.1564572760914&__hsfp=536111916) presentation tells the whole story of the Good News of Jesus from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22 in [six simple sentences](http://www.lifein6words.com/connect-with-god/?__hstc=106114972.7cbaa4510ca91612b72d5d630c7f65c6.1517347982952.1563983525709.1564572760914.250&__hssc=106114972.1.1564572760914&__hsfp=536111916#sthash.cYr6bH7S.dpbs).

**G**od created us to be with him. (Genesis 1,2)

**O**ur sins separate us from God. (Genesis 3)

**S**ins cannot be removed by good deeds. (Gen.4- Malachi 4)

**P**aying the price for sin Jesus died and rose again. (Matthew-Luke)

**E**veryone who trusts in him alone has eternal life. (John)

**L**ife with Jesus starts now and lasts forever. (Acts-Revelation)

In a court of a law when you take an oath you put your left hand on a Bible, raise your right hand as the court clerk, bailiff or judge asks you, *“Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?”*In a sense the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are calling us to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth when it comes to the Gospel. So let's tell the whole story as we evangelize others.

**Easy to understand**

*“But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”* 2 Corinthians 11:3 NKJV

I have my own conspiracy theory based on this verse. I believe that Satan has conspired to destroy the advancement of Christianity by making the message of the Gospel seem more complicated than it actually is. I believe that he has deceived many well meaning preachers, evangelists and Christians into communicating a less-than-clear Gospel more often than not. As a result fewer people come to Jesus because they are being offered a muddy glass of "*good news*" instead of a clear one.

The Gospel is a simple message but, far too often, Christians can use confusing terms when communicating the message. These terms have been passed on from generation to generation and many of us have not taken the time to think them through Biblically.

Back to the 3 glasses

Some muddy terms…

Terms like, *"Let Jesus into your heart”* are common fair, especially in children's ministry, yet it is nowhere to be found in the Bible! Actually, this term kept me from putting my faith in Jesus as a kid because I had no idea what it meant!

I had several OCD neurotic thoughts about this phrase?

* Are you there Jesus? Over…Knock three times on my pancreas if you made it into my heart!
* If I get a heart transplant will I go straight to hell?
* If I cough too hard…there goes Jesus!

Another muddy term is *“Just say this prayer to be saved.”*Actually I'm convinced that there will be a lot of people in hell who said the sinner’s prayer but never put their faith in Jesus! Saying a prayer of salvation is fine but saying a prayer never saved anyone! It's their faith in Jesus that saves them!

There is other popular type of term that I would say is not just muddy but if flat out poisonous…

Terms like, “You must make Jesus Lord in every area of your life before you can be saved.”

This is a not-so-subtle form of works for salvation.

Here’s how master preacher and theologian Chuck Swindoll has to say about those who preach this message in his classic book, The Grace Awakening,

“*I can tell you that as a sinner you need to have a stronger commitment to Christ demonstrated by the work you do in His behalf, before you can say you truly believe. My problem in doing so is this: A sinner cannot commit to anything. He or she is spiritually dead, remember? There is no capacity for commitment in an unregenerate heart. Becoming an obedient, submissive disciple of Christ follows believing in Christ. Works follow faith. Behavior follows belief. Fruit comes after the tree is well-rooted*.”

I have a book called Biblical Mormonism (tell story…find book and show it)

Another type of term that is poisonous is a term like this…

“*Turn from your sin and then come to Jesus.”*Really? If I could turn from my sin before I came to Jesus in faith then why would I need to come to Jesus at all? I could save myself! No, we are saved by faith in Jesus and then he begins the arduous, life-long process of turning us from our sin (and he doesn't completely succeed until we are with him in heaven!)

Inevitably this is when someone asks me, “Well, what about repentance?”

* The word repent is a great word but usually mistranslated. Greek word, “*Metanoeo*” means to “*change one’s mind*.”
* Doug Holliday’s definition of repentance, “To change your mind about sin, self and Savior. Your changing your mind about sin in that you now see it as a barrier between you and a holy God…about self, in that there’s nothing you can do in and of yourself to remove that barrier…and about the Savior in that you now see him as the only one qualified to remove that barrier.

Rescue Mission story

I will never forget preaching at the Denver Rescue Mission as a young, wet-behind-the ears, nineteen year old “preacher boy.” I knew that I literally had a captive audience. If these men and women wanted to eat and a place to sleep they had to listen to my sermon. I also knew that they were used to hearing typical down town “turn or burn” sermons. If they hadn’t heard them at the rescue mission they had heard them in the downtown streets of Denver where street preachers wield their pointy fingers and bellow their pointy sermons. So I wanted to try a different tactic.

As I stood behind the pulpit and looked at the full room of “sinners”, I noticed that the rescue mission staff was sitting off to my left in some chairs along the wall. They were used to hearing sermons as well. But they weren’t prepared for what I was going to say.

“How many of you in this room have ever heard a preacher tell you that if you want to go to heaven you have to give up your drinking, your smoking, your cussing, your chewing, your drugs and your sexual immorality?” I started. They all kind of looked up with a groggy look of agreement. Many raised their hands in affirmation and grunted out a “I have.” I went on, “Well, I want to tell you something a little different tonight.” I will never forget that moment. Everybody looked up at me in unison, including the rescue mission staff.

“If you want to go to heaven keep your alcohol, cigarettes, cuss words, tobacco chew, cocaine and sexual sins.” Talk about a cup of coffee to sober up everybody in the audience. Their eyes were wide open. Their jaws were dropped. By now the rescue mission staff was standing (I think ready to take me off stage.) One of the disheveled man in the audience yelled out a hearty “Amen!” to my proclamation.

Now that I had their full attention I went on, “You keep every single one of your sins and you come to the cross of Jesus Christ. You simply believe that he died for those sins. You simply place your trust in him to forgive you for those sins. And not only will he forgive you, but he will come to live inside of you and he will give you the power and desire to turn from those sins. But you cannot turn from your sins until you have the power to do so. And you cannot have the power to do so until you are forgiven. And you cannot be forgiven until you believe.”

The rescue mission staff sat back down. Seven people experienced were infected that night with the pure, untainted viral message of God’s grace.

Put every term you use through the grace test. If the terms you use makes an unbeliever focus on what they must do (other than simple faith in Christ) than what Jesus has done, then it is not a CLEAR Gospel.

**Always sounds too good to be true.**

 *“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit…”* Titus 3:5

This sounds too good to be true!

Here’s what the great preacher Martin Lloyd-Jones shared about the clear gospel of grace:

“*There is no better test as to whether a man is really preaching the New Testament gospel of salvation than this, that some people might misunderstand it and misinterpret it to mean that … because you are saved by grace alone it does not matter at all what you do; you can go on sinning as much as you like because it will redound all the more to the glory of grace. That is a very good test of gospel preaching. If my preaching and presentation of the gospel of salvation does not expose it to that misunderstanding, then it is not the gospel*.”

If your Gospel message, at first, doesn’t sound like a license to sin…then it’s not the Gospel. Now, don’t get me wrong. It’s NOT a license to sin…but it is almost always accused of being that because we are saved by faith NOT by works! But don’t take it from Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones, take it from the Apostle Paul.

He was falsely accused of preaching a gospel that gave people a license to sin, “*Why not say—as some slanderously claim that we say—‘Let us do evil that good may result”? Their condemnation is just!”* Romans 3:8

You can always tell you are preaching the Gospel message clearly when the "*You mean to tell me…*" people start to attack. They'll say stuff like,

"*You mean to tell me that someone can trust in Jesus and go out and sin and they'll still be saved?"*

*"You mean to tell me that my Aunt Suzie who is a good lady but an atheist will go to hell and a mass murderer can trust in Jesus on death row and go to heaven?"*

The "*you mean to tell me*" people reject true grace and want to make salvation somehow deserved by the recipient.

It’s not really “you mean to tell me” but “God means to tell us”…and what does he tell us?

In Ephesians 2:8-9 he tells us, “*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—****9****not by works, so that no one can boast.*”

Sounds too good to be true.

In Romans 4:5 he tells us, *“However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.”*

Sounds to good to be true.

In Galatians 2:16 he tells us, *“Know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.”*

Sounds too good to be true.

And yes the Gospel according to Jesus sounds too good to be true as well. What is his message? The clearest and most comprehensive explanation of the Gospel is when Jesus explains the good news to Nicodemus in John 3:14-15

 *“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up. that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.* ” John 3:14-15

When Jesus was reaching out to Nicodemus with the gospel he referenced a very interesting Old Testament story. He refers to Numbers 21:4-9 where the Israelites were judged for their incessant sin of complaining. God unleashed venomous snakes in their midst to kill them off. But Moses, once again, interceded on their behalf. Here was God's solution, *"The LORD said to Moses, 'Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.' So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived."*Numbers 21:8,9.

God's solution was simple. Look at the fake snake and live. And this is the exact illustration that Jesus uses with Nicodemus, *"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."*

Look and live. Believe and receive. That is it. That is all.

Imagine some of the religious leaders in Moses' day saying, *"No, that's too easy! The Israelites must really look, they must****look hard****at that snake. They must look so hard that their eyes turn red. Because if they don't burst a small blood vessel in the white of their eyes then their look was not a genuine look. They were fake looking."* Absurd.

And, yes, look and live, believe and receive, sounds too good to be true.

If your gospel doesn’t sound too good to be true then it’s not true!

**R**elentlessly focuses on faith alone in Christ alone

*“This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”* Rom. 3:22

The Latin Term that fueled the Reformation is “*Sola Fide."*It means "*faith alone*." The very idea that we could be saved by simple faith in the risen Christ was revolutionary 500 years ago when Martin Luther shook Europe with this message.

And it should be as revolutionary today.

* **The word repent is never mentioned in the book of John**. But the word believe is mentioned almost 100x’s!
* Chair illustration

What makes Christianity unique is that we are the only world religion that doesn't provide a stairway to heaven (or nirvana or whatever.) Instead we provide a bridge, made from the cross of Christ. We don't climb our way up by our good deeds we walk to him in simple faith, putting the full weight of our sinful selfish souls on the blood stained wood and work of Christ on the cross.

When sharing the Gospel with someone relentlessly take him/her back to faith alone in Christ alone as the key to salvation. It's so simple a child could do it (and so challenging that a theologian could choke on it!)

So let's keep it as clear as a tall glass of pure water with nothing else added!

This is not a license to sin but a reason to serve…

Let me explain it using a poker analogy: “All in” is a poker term that means to push all your poker chips in the middle. It means that you are so confident that you hold the winning hand that you are risking all the money you can, represented by poker chips (take them out and start stacking them) that your hand will win.

Now, before we go further into this illustration, I want you to know I’m not encouraging you to play poker. Please don’t. Dare 2 Share has not started a side casino business to fund the ministry. “Welcome to Lead THE Cause kids, but before we go out to share your faith we have some Black Jack in the back!”

No, I was raised in a conservative church where you didn’t dance, go to movies or play cards. Actually, I did dance and go to movies…but I didn’t play cards. And if I did I played war. So, again, not trying to get you to play Poker. Please don’t.

So, with all of that as a backdrop, let me explain to you that, in the game of Poker, the highest hand wins. A dealer deals the cards and the ones who eventually get the highest hand wins whatever is put down as a bet.

In poker the highest hand possible is what is called a Royal Flush. It is a Ace, King, Queen, Jack and Ten…all in the same suite.

So, if you get a Royal Flush you’ve won the game. There’s no higher hand. It’s so rare but when it happens in Poker it’s a big, bid deal. Because if you push all your chips in and everyone else around the Poker table does the same, you are going to win the entire pot of money!

Well, guess what? At the moment you believed in Jesus, God dealt you a Royal Flush. You’ve already won the game! You have eternal life. You have a purpose on earth and a home in heaven. You have all the inheritance of Jesus himself waiting for you. God lives in you and is cheering for you.

And all you did was to simply receive the Royal Flush from Jesus himself. So, why would you not go all in?

Why would you just throw one chip in and say, “Yeah, I’ll go to youth group more often?” And “Maybe, I’ll share my faith once in awhile.” Heck, maybe I’ll start reading my Bible more.” (throw a chip in for each one of these)

If you did this, you’d simply be robbing yourself, why? Because you hold the winning hand! It only makes sense to go all in!

In Romans 12:1 Paul wrote these words, “Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship.” To use a Poker analogy this verse could read, “Therefore, I urge you brothers in view of the fact that you’ve been dealt a Royal Flush, go all in and serve Jesus!”

Again, you don’t have to. You can just throw in a chip or two. But why would you do that when you have everything to win and nothing to lose? Why would you do that when you hold the Royal Flush?

Preaching the Gospel of grace is not a license to sin, it’s a reason to serve. It’s a reason to go ALL IN to serve Jesus! So let’s preach the Gospel CLEARly and, once someone puts their faith in Jesus, let’s challenge them to go ALL IN to serve Jesus!

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**A**lways sounds too good to be true.

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Pray for the youth leaders to like Paul in Colossians 4:4 proclaim it clearly like they should.