

In the *middle* is thus a gap — a gap our good deeds can not bridge.

Picture two: In the *middle* is the cross — we consider what Jesus did.

At the *left* is the person — they are left with a choice to make.

But the *right* hand side is where they will end up if they choose Jesus— and so we are reminded that, because they are not yet dead, the purpose is restored relationship with God bringing restored purpose, and eternal life as the significant benefit beyond.

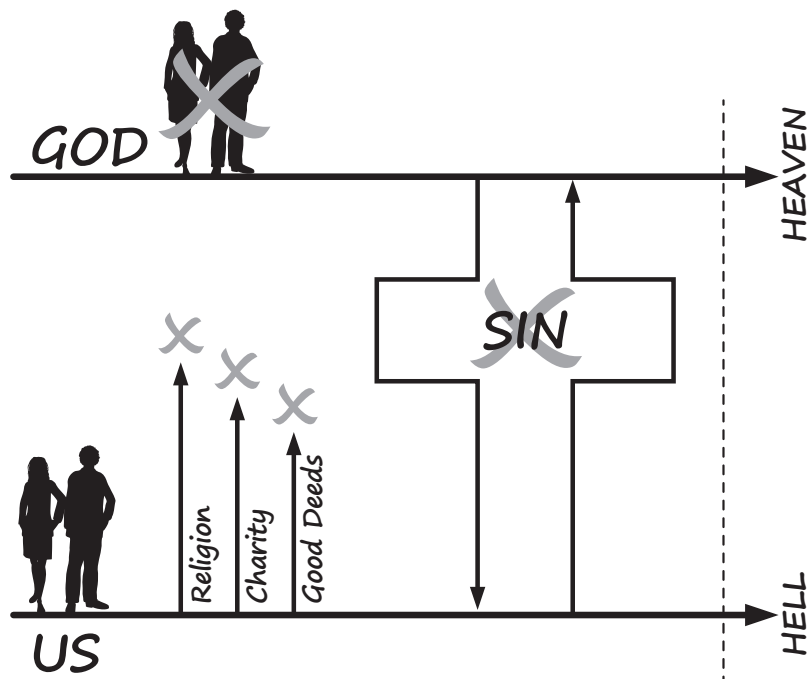
The prayer — as simple as A, B, C. Admit. Believe. Commit.

A new believer's first steps are (1) the Bible, (2) prayer at home, (3) big and small groups at Church (teaching and friendship), and (4) showing and sharing God's love on earth — as above.

You will note that I am careful to explain the Lordship of Jesus — which this illustration does not illustrate well. As earlier mentioned, this is often weakly communicated in gospel presentations.

As a communicator, the above message could be quite easily remembered by thinking of the two pictures.

Below is a second way the same message can be communicated, but which can illustrate Lordship visually.



GOSPEL ILLUSTRATION #2: THE GOSPEL DRAWING

I have found this particular 'drawing' helps me to explain the gospel more clearly than the above. I have sometimes drawn it while explaining, but have also preached with this picture in my mind.

When training people to share the gospel I have found that, even if there was no paper to draw on, by remembering the parts of this drawing a person was prompted what to say.

I will explain it point-by-point to equip you, and so you can equip others.

COMMUNICATION TIPS:

1. Draw the horizontal line with 'GOD' and a person standing on it (as at the top). (God is represented by the words because He is spirit). (Note, you can draw the people by using stick figures).
 - Explain how in the beginning humanity was with God, and the creation was perfect.
2. Cross the person out, write the word 'sin', and draw the second horizontal line below with a person on it.
 - Our sin separates us from God (explain sin).
3. Turn the horizontal lines into arrows (at the right hand side — representing heaven or hell beyond death) and add a vertical dotted line (representing the time of death). It is not necessary to write heaven and hell. If you say it — they will remember, and this helps keep your presentation shorter.
 - The real problem is this: Sin has consequences. We will all, one day, die (the dotted line). Now we have a problem — because we get to heaven only if we are perfect. Otherwise we're already on the road to hell!
4. The small vertical arrows (and again, it is not necessary to write words such as religion, charity, good deeds, etc.)
 - What we have done: We have attempted to 'get back to God' through good deeds, charity and religious efforts. But the standard required is *perfection*, which none of us can achieve (place small crosses above the arrows).

5. The good news: (drawing the cross)
 - What God has done: God looked, saw and cared, so much so that He came to earth (*the line on the left of the cross, drawn in a downwards direction, coming down to earth*) as the man Jesus,
 - ...lived a sinless life (*the small horizontal bottom of the cross*), and then died on the cross for our sins.
 - But, He then rose again, proving everything He had said and done was true (*the vertical line of the cross, drawn in an upward direction — like Jesus ascending to heaven*). (Cross out the word 'sin') He took the punishment. And this makes our restored relationship with God possible.
6. This thus leaves us with a choice (*pen sitting at the bottom of the right hand line of the cross — where the paths diverge either up the cross to God or along the bottom line to judgment*)
 - we can either live life our way (*trace to the end of the bottom line*), or God's way
 - (1) choosing to believe in Him (*trace up the right hand line of the cross*)
 - (2) Thus being restored to our purpose in life, making this world a better place for Him (*trace along the top before the dotted line, which represents our point of death*), and
 - (3) being assured of heaven with Him in eternity when we die (*continue tracing along the top line through to heaven*).

What I like about such methods is that they are very easy to learn and remember. I have trained many people in the second of these. Many have been able to remember the method months later, without any revision.

Revision, however, is hugely beneficial, and easy to accomplish as a Church or small group. All it takes is for one person to come forward during a service or small group meeting to demonstrate, and everyone is reminded.

The whole gospel is covered, and every member equipped!

2. TRANSITIONING TO A RESPONSE

At this point you are already equipped to share a simple and clear gospel message, were the opportunity to arise. What is needed now is a way to make a transition so as to bring them to a point of response — or to encourage them one step toward Christ if they are not yet ready to follow Him.

It is important here to *engage them* more personally. The dynamics must change back to those of a conversation. Having heard the message from you, your turn to talk is finished — but your role is not. What is now needed is for *them* to talk.

THREE EXCELLENT QUESTIONS:

To assess a person's readiness to receive Christ you could ask the following questions:

1. Where are you in this picture?
Or, where are you right now in relation to God?
The first question establishes their current position.
2. Where would you like to be?
The second question assesses their readiness and desire to follow Christ.
3. Is there any reason why you may not want to cross the bridge now?
Or, is there any reason why you may not want to trust Christ now?
(Can you see anything that might be hindering you?)
This question helps identify any hindrances so you can discuss them.

If they were to identify a hindrance, and you were to discuss it, it is sometimes wise to ask this same question again at the end of that conversation. Sometimes a hindrance is genuinely removed, and a person now ready to respond.

4. To follow Christ is then as simple as A, B, C.
This 'A, B, C' can be used not only as an outline for prayer, but *as a way of summarising all that has been discussed*.

- A **ASK** — It is about recognising our sin, and asking for forgiveness.
- B **BELIEVE** — It is about faith, believing in who Jesus was and what He did.
- C **COMMIT** — Is about the Lordship of Jesus, following His teachings as His friend.

3. LEADING THEM IN A PRAYER

Were they to feel ready to respond we could now ‘seal the deal’ by leading them in a prayer. We note that the real ‘deal’ is decided in their hearts. However the outward words are important.

A first response to God is maybe a bit like getting engaged, while a person’s baptism is maybe like getting married — stating the commitment publically, with the recognition that it is for life.

Because it is *their* decision it is good to ask them to pray for themselves. We could explain what they might say, or could lead in a prayer that they can repeat after us.

To help you remember what to pray, here are three easy-to-remember outlines:

Idea 1: Use the same A, B, C (Admit/Ask — Believe — Commit) as above.

For example: “Dear Jesus, I *admit* that I am a sinner and *ask* for your forgiveness. I *believe* that you are the Son of God, and died for my sin. Thank you for loving me! I *commit* to live for you for the rest of my life. Please help me live a life that is pleasing to you. Amen.”

Idea 2: Simply pray through the gospel content, as above.

(A message of love: Sin, Righteousness, Judgment, Jesus as Saviour, Jesus as Lord).

For example: “Dear Jesus. Thank you for loving me! I recognise I have done wrong (*sin*) and that I fall short of your standard of perfection (*righteousness*). I see now that I have a problem (*judgment*). Thank you for giving your Son Jesus, who died on the cross for my sin. I ask you to forgive my sin (*Jesus as Saviour*). I make you the master of my life. I commit to learn about you, and to follow you, and serve you in this world (*Jesus as Lord*). Thank you for loving me (*it is a message of love*). Help me to live a life that is pleasing to you.”

Idea 3: ‘Thank you. Sorry. Please. Please.’

For example: “Dear Jesus, *thank you* for dying on the cross for my sin. I’m *sorry* for the wrongs I have done. *Please* forgive me for my wrongs (*Jesus as Saviour*). *Please* come and be my Master and Lord. I commit to following you from this day forward (*Jesus as Lord*).”

All that is left is for us to put this into practise.

AN IMPORTANT PERSPECTIVE FOR ‘RESPONSE TIMES’

Salvation is best understood as a ‘considered decision.’ Too often we have called people to follow Jesus with great emotion, and this has confused the decision they are supposedly making. I recall reading of a response call in a Church that was so emotionally powerful that a man who didn’t want to respond found himself putting his hand up while still not wanting to. Needless to say he exited the Church as soon as possible afterwards because he had been emotionally manipulated, and was more resistant to Christianity after the experience. I note that even if manipulation was not the intent of the preacher, it is what he did.

At the present time we see fewer responses to Jesus than fifty years ago in many Western cultures. Some — in their eagerness to see responses — have looked for what ‘works.’ What has seemed to work has been highly ‘choreographed’ response calls during services — and so these ‘methods’ that confront people and cause them to consider Jesus have been studied and perfected. However, in truth, this hasn’t worked because these ‘salvations’ don’t last. I have seen one hundred people respond in a highly emotionally charged altar-call by a guest speaker at an event, and could find none of them in a Church a year later.

In Luke 14 Jesus talked about the cost of following Him. He likened the decision to a man building a tower who would consider whether he had enough money to complete it *before starting to build it*. He then likened the decision to a king going to war, who considers if he has enough men and resources to win the battle *before going to war*. Jesus was instructing the people around Him to carefully consider the implications of following Him before choosing to.

As important as the decision to follow Christ is, and as eager as we may be to see those we love respond, and also as much as we might urge them to consider... ..it must remain their decision, and we must guard our manner so that we do not convince them of something that they will feel unconvinced of a day later.

Jesus said in Luke 14:33 “...any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.” He did not make the decision easy for those who were listening — and neither should we.

I’m not saying we should make it overly hard either — but I am saying we should protect the decision to follow Christ as a ‘considered decision.’ We should make the path clear, and encourage those around us, in love, with all our passion, to *consider* taking that path — but not push them beyond what they are ready for.

What about success?

If they do not respond, you have succeeded in exactly the same measure as if they had responded — because your job is to tell them, not ‘convert’ them. While it is right that your passion is for their response (you desire for their sake that they be reconciled to God) you will get no reward from God for any person’s decision to follow Him! You will, however, be rewarded for every time you told another person about God’s love from a motive of love, or encouraged them toward faith.

As discussed at the start of chapter eight, our ‘win’ is to have helped a person take one step closer to Christ. Each step they take toward Christ is their ‘win’! When they have heard the gospel, and understood it, they are closer than before! The Holy Spirit can now remind them of this message (or the illustrations you used — noting illustrations are more memorable) and convict them of the truth of this message in due time (see John 16:8).

Until you had shared the gospel this was not possible!

IN SUMMARY: THE MAN IS THE MESSAGE

Some people feel scared that, if they try to share their faith, they will get something ‘wrong.’ Maybe you are like this. You read the above and feel overwhelmed. If you feel like this, there is real hope for you!

While the gospel does have a content, much of communication is in our manner. If I told you a story around a campfire while feeling angry or depressed it might have a completely different feel to how it would sound were I to tell it while feeling full of hope, or after having something really great happen in my personal life. Who we are, and what we feel, comes across in our words.

Imagine two mathematics teachers. While the content might be the same, one might be interesting and the other boring. Communication is not only about content. It is about the communicator!

So, if I shared the gospel while believing that the person listening will be disinterested because their ‘god’ is their sinful pleasures, I might communicate with a condemning tone! However, if I feel genuine awe at the great love of God, and genuine love and hope for the person I am sharing with, I might communicate the gospel as a message of love and hope! If I share with faith that God is already at work in their life because He loves them, my affirming tone may even serve to draw faith out of them.

So, you feel your words are far from perfect? Be encouraged, because communication is about a lot more than words!

We will conclude this section by turning to a truly encouraging story that will remind us that we don’t have to become loud evangelists, or have perfect words.

If we do our best, *God can make up for the rest!*