



SESSION SIX

ENCOURAGING FRIENDS TO FOLLOW CHRIST

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:19-20



Getting Started

Welcome back! Before we launch into session six, let's take a couple minutes to hear any stories from this last week. Did you get to share the faith formula with someone? Or any of the evidence we've been discussing for the biblical record about Christ or his resurrection? As those of you with stories already know, learning about these things is good, but it all really comes to life when you talk about it with a friend or family member!

"The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service." — 1 Corinthians 3:8-9



Opening Discussion

Something you may have noticed from the stories we've been sharing in our group, as well as from your other efforts to tell friends about your faith, is that people rarely change their thinking or spiritual perspectives quickly. Usually it's a longer *process*.

- Think about your own spiritual story. Probably for many of us, it was an up-and-down journey to finally come to faith in Christ—even if much of that was at an early age. Was that true for you?
- Yes, there are those exciting Saul-to-Paul Damascus Road conversions—and we love to hear about them. But how have you seen that these stories are usually the *exception*, not the norm?
- In what ways does it encourage you to realize it is usually a process for people to come to faith? Does that give you more hope for some of the seemingly hard-to-reach people in your life? Why or why not?

To learn more about how we can help foster people's spiritual journey toward Christ, let's take a look at our final video with Lee and Mark.

Video Teaching

Watch the video for session six, in which the guys discuss the topic of this final session: "Encouraging Friends to Follow Christ." As you watch, use the following outline to record any ideas that stand out to you.

Opening Vignette

We need to remember that leading our friends and family members to Christ is a process that could take a long time. We have to be careful not to lose heart when we encounter setbacks, but persevere in praying for them and helping them get past their spiritual sticking points.

Opening Teaching

We want to help our loved ones make a spiritual *discovery* that leads to a *decision* to follow Christ that ultimately leads to making a *difference* in their lives, both now and for all of eternity.

Movie Clip

In the clip, notice how "Kenny London," the religious editor at the newspaper, prodded Lee to make a decision based on where the evidence for Christ seemed to be leading him.

Main Teaching

There are at least eight things we can do to actively participate in the work the Holy Spirit is doing in the lives of our friends and family members:

Real R _____—we need to get out of the mentality that the people we're trying to reach are "projects."

Honest C _____—we need to get real with our loved ones, and initiate appropriate spiritual interactions with them.

Faithful P _____—we need to remember that people come to Christ because *God* is at work in their lives, and faithfully do our part to help foster his activity.

P _____ and **P** _____—we need to seek God's wisdom to know when to give our friends room to process what they're learning versus trying to prod them forward.

I _____ and **E** _____—we have to remember that people have spiritual doubts and be prepared to give answers.

Central **M**_____ of the **G**_____—we must explain to our friends and family members the good news to which the evidence ultimately points.

Friendly **N**_____—sometimes we need to be direct and challenge our loved ones to act on what they're learning about Christ.

Spiritual **O**_____—we need to open the door at some point and tell our friends and family members that they can respond to God's offer of salvation—even at that very moment!

Video Wrap

In the Great Commission, Jesus told us to go into all the world, teach the truth, and present the message of the gospel. But he also reminded us that he would always be with us, helping us as we make our case for him (see Matthew 28:18–20).

Jesus also said we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (see Matthew 5:13–14). He wants us to live in such a way that we make people thirst for God and sense the light of God's hope in the dark areas of despair.



Group Interaction

The teaching for this session gave a good summary of a number of elements for us to keep in mind as we seek to reach our friends and family members for Christ. Let's discuss a few of those elements together as a group.

- Do you have any quick thoughts or reactions to what we just heard?
- Were there any elements that surprised you—or any other elements that you thought should have been mentioned?
- We've covered a lot of ground in this session—and in the five sessions before it. Are you growing in your sense of confidence that you can effectively share your faith with others? Is there anything else you need in order to feel more confident?

Let's continue by taking a few minutes to review these eight elements, as summarized below. Write down any thoughts you want to remember under each of them. Then we'll have some further discussion together about these important themes.

1. Real Relationship

We saw this in the movie clip in Kenny London's friendship with Lee Strobel—and also between Lee and Leslie. Why is this so important? Because friends listen to

friends. If we want to influence the people around us, we need to get close enough for them to want to open up to us. To confide in us. To share their spiritual questions and concerns.

Jesus was called “the friend of sinners” (Luke 7:34). And he was sometimes accused of committing the sins his non-believing friends were known for. But that was a misunderstanding he was willing to deal with in his efforts “to seek and to save the lost” (19:10). We need to imitate him and, with his help, to reach our friends with his message.

“John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ ” — Luke 7:33–34

2. Honest Conversation

The person you hope to reach may be a family member or a friend who you’ve known for a long time. But that doesn’t necessarily mean you have the kind of trusting relationship that will be conducive for honest conversations about personal beliefs, questions, and struggles. Sometimes we need to first take deliberate steps to deepen the friendship. This usually involves finding safe places where we can talk openly, and it often requires us first being vulnerable about our own journey, including setbacks and struggles we’ve faced along the way. Also, this is not something you can rush. Real relationships require plenty of hangout time.

There’s a scene in the movie where Alfie and Leslie are talking in the park about what Leslie can do to better reach out to Lee. Alfie asked Leslie how she used to reach him, and she replied, “We’d talk—really talk—and *listen*.” Alfie responded, “Listen? *Do that!*”

This is the most overlooked part of relationships and conversations. Our tendency is to fill in all the spaces by talking on and on. But instead we need to

do what Jesus did: ask questions and wait for a response. Draw the other person out. Really listen, and then respond to their thoughts, concerns, and questions. In so doing they'll feel understood—and loved. And that will help them trust you and want to open up to you even more.

3. Faithful Prayer

This is easy to neglect, but we must lift our friend up to God in prayer, asking that he will use us, give us the right words and demeanor, and by his Holy Spirit draw that person to Christ. We need to remind ourselves that nothing will really happen unless *God* is at work. Prayer is how we invite God's activity.

In the movie, we saw Leslie praying a prayer that she learned from Scripture and from Alfie. It's in Ezekiel 36:26, and it says this: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone . . . and give you a heart of flesh" (NASB). Leslie prayed that verse—and claimed that verse for Lee—for nearly two years. God heard and honored her prayer. He'll honor your prayers too, but you need to pray faithfully.

4. Patience and Persistence

As we've explained in the other sessions, coming to Christ is almost always a process. So we need to cooperate with God in that process. This is another reason we need to keep praying, asking God for wisdom along the way.

The movie portrays well what was true in real life. Leslie was exceedingly patient as Lee went through all kinds of spiritual ups and downs. He'd get angry and pull back. Then he'd show a glimmer of interest and her hope would grow—only to be dashed again. We need God's grace to show *patience* through a process like that.

But we also need courage to be appropriately *persistent*, like Leslie was when she brought Lee coffee and challenged him to come to church with her and the kids. God used that tenacious side of her, too. We all need a mix of patience and persistence—and God’s wisdom to know which of these to lean toward when.

5. Information and Evidence

People’s resistance to God is often due to a lack of understanding of him and what he wants of us. Lee was surprised when he first visited the church with Leslie and understood the message of grace. He had always thought the Christian faith was based on being a good person, and trying to follow the rules. He needed better information.

But Lee also needed evidence that proved the information was true. Could the Bible be trusted? Did Jesus back up his claim to be the Son of God? Did he really rise from the dead? This evidence was vital for Lee to keep moving forward spiritually.

That means we need to do our homework so we’ll be able to help dispense the needed information. We need to keep on reading, studying, and looking up answers to tough questions. We should be ready to give people good books, or to invite them to church services or to our class or small group, where they can ask their questions and get real answers.

What if we don’t know the answers to the questions they’re asking? That’s okay—just admit it, and then do a little research so you can get back with them with an answer a few days later. God will deepen you along the way, and your friend will appreciate your efforts and input.

6. Central Message of the Gospel

More than just general biblical information, our friends need to understand the central message of the Christian faith, the gospel. In many ways, everything else leads to this message—that we’re sinners in need of a Savior. He is one who, thankfully, came to bring us salvation. He paid the penalty for our sins. He loves us. He wants to forgive us and set us on a new direction, to adopt us into his family, and to lead our lives.

How should we respond to that message? Maybe this will sound familiar, but we need to *Believe* the truth about who Jesus is and what he offers us, and then to turn from our sins and humbly pray to *Receive* his forgiveness and leadership in our lives. When we’ve done this, we can be confident that we’ve been adopted into his family and have literally *Become* a child of God.

In Romans 1:16, Paul tells us the gospel is the “power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.” So share it with the boldness that comes from knowing you are wielding the message that is literally “the power of God” for the salvation of your friends.

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7. Friendly Nudges

The scene we watched during the teaching shows Kenny London, who had been pretty mild-mannered throughout the movie, finally getting fed up and challenging Lee to “put up or shut up” and to “stop blaming me, and the church, and God.” He tells Lee, “Do your job. Stack up the evidence, follow the facts, and write the story—win or lose!” It was the kind of spiritual jolt Lee needed. Most of us have likely needed something similar along the way.

It may feel intimidating to challenge your friend. You will need to do so in a way that fits your personality and the relationship you have with that person, and in a spirit that shows you are motivated by love. You'll need wisdom from the Holy Spirit concerning how and when to give that person a nudge. And you may need to do so more than once. But be willing to give that gentle push, because that's what it takes for many people to get off of dead center and to take that vital step of faith into God's family.

8. Spiritual Opportunity

Finally, we need to be ready and willing to open the door for our friend to actually pray to receive Christ. We saw this in the movie clip last week when Leslie told Lee he could receive Christ right there on the spot. Do you remember what he said? “*Now?*” he asked. “Don’t we have to go to church?” Leslie replied, “Nope, right here, right now—this is church!” She then briefly explained the faith formula and led him to pray, in his own words, acknowledging his need for Christ—and God did the rest!

We need to be willing to take a small risk to find out if our friends are ready. We need to be sure we’re ready as well. Here’s a tip that might help: when you pray with your friends to receive Christ, use the faith formula as an outline for the prayer! Specifically, have your friends talk to God, out loud, and do the following:

- Acknowledge that they *Believe* they are sinners in need of the Savior, that forgiveness is available through Jesus’ death, and that new life is available because he rose from the dead and is there to help.
- Express that they want to turn from their sins and *Receive* Jesus as their Savior and Lord. Or, as Lee and Mark often describe it, as their Forgiver and Leader.
- After addressing the *Believe* and *Receive* parts, have them thank God that they’ve now *Become* his child—right then and there. This helps them trust that he has already heard and responded to their prayer, just as he promised he would (see 1 John 1:9).



Group Reflection

Now that we've taken the time to reflect on each of these elements and write down a few notes, let's break into groups of four to six people to discuss the following:

- Which of these eight elements were the most important in the process of your own journey toward faith in Christ?
- Which of these do you feel your family members or friends most need from you right now?
- Is there something else that wasn't mentioned that you think your friends need most?
- Is there one or more of these broad areas that you sense you need to focus on more in your efforts to reach others? Which areas?
- Would anyone share any specific steps you sense God leading you to take to grow in this area—or maybe a risk you think he is asking you to take to better reach out to your friend?

Before we end, let's take a few minutes to pair up one more time to pray for each other as we continue to reach out to our family and friends to *make our case for Christ*.



Conclusion

Here is a closing reminder of what we've covered during these six sessions—areas in which we're now more ready to let God use us as we reach out to our friends for him.

In session one, we learned about the importance of *helping our friends consider the case for Christ*. We hope you now see that nothing could be more important than this!

In session two, we learned *how we can describe our own spiritual journey with Christ*. We talked about how we can share, in three parts, what spiritual truths we came to *discover*, what that led us to *decide*, and how that decision has made a *difference* in our lives.

In session three, we talked about how we can *back up the biblical record of Christ* using the A-E-I-O-U acronym. We learned that the Gospels exhibit clear *Authorship*; they're *Early Writings*; there is *Integrity of the Text*, we have *Outside Corroboration*, and they exhibit *Uniqueness*.

In session four, we discovered how we can *present evidence for the resurrection of Christ* using the Four E's: *Execution, Early Accounts, Empty Tomb, and Eyewitnesses*.

In session five, we learned—and practiced—*how to explain the central message of Christ, the gospel*. We used the faith formula: *Believe + Receive = Become*, which we should all by now have down cold!

And now, in session six, we have discussed eight key elements that will help us better *encourage our friends to follow Christ*.



Closing Challenge

Don't forget what Lee and Mark said at the end of today's teaching: *You can do this!* God has called you to share his truth with clarity and confidence but also with gentleness and respect. He wants to use each of us to reach our friends for him.

"Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes." — Ezekiel 36:26-27 NASB

Finishing the Session

Let's close in prayer, asking God to help us remember what we've learned during these six sessions, to have the courage to put this information into action, and to have his power working through us so that our friends and family members will find our case for Christ compelling, leading many of them to receive his forgiveness and grace.



BETWEEN-SESSIONS PERSONAL STUDY

Reflect on the content we covered in our final session of *Making Your Case for Christ* by engaging in the following personal study activities. This will help seal your understanding of the eight elements we discussed related to how we can encourage our friends to follow Christ.



Study God's Word

In the following section, we'll examine eight Bible passages that underscore the importance of each of the elements we discussed during this session, followed by a reflection question to help you apply it in your own life.

Real Relationship

Read Luke 19:1–10 to see how Jesus reached out to Zacchaeus, the tax collector (maybe you remember the children's song, "a wee little man was he!"), who had climbed a sycamore tree in the effort to get a better glimpse of the famed teacher. What do Jesus' actions tell you about the need for—as well as the potential in—building *real relationships* with people who are far from God?

Honest Conversation

Read John 4:1–42 to see how Jesus sought out the Samaritan woman and engaged her in an *honest conversation* about her relationship with the Father. Notice how he initiated their discussion, turned ordinary topics into spiritual interactions, side-stepped superfluous questions to focus on substantial subjects, and got personal with her about her need for a Savior. How does his example inspire or challenge you in your own conversations with friends who don't yet know God?

Faithful Prayer

In Ezekiel 36:26–27, God says, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees.” As you saw in the movie clip, this is the passage that inspired Leslie Strobel's *faithful prayer* for her then-skeptical husband. It didn't happen right away, but ultimately Lee's heart was changed and Leslie's prayer was answered. How does this inspire you to pray for the loved ones you hope to reach for Christ?

Patience and Persistence

In 2 Timothy 4:2, Paul admonishes, “Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.” What lessons can you draw out of this passage about your need for both *patience and persistence* in your evangelistic efforts?

Information and Evidence

In John 10:37–38, Jesus said to his critics, “Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.” In other words, Jesus was saying that if his critics were unwilling to take him at his word, then they ought to look at the broader *information and evidence* that was seen through his works, including his divine insights and miraculous actions, and be convinced by those. So Jesus pointed to evidence, as did Paul and other writers of Scripture. How important is it for you, then, to know and use evidence in reaching people who are skeptical about the claims of Christianity? What further steps do you think would help you grow more confident in this area?

Central Message of the Gospel

The apostle Paul was highly educated and could teach about many important topics—and often did. Yet in 1 Corinthians 2:2, he said, “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” In other words, he was making it clear that nothing would sidetrack him from focusing on the *central message of the gospel*—the good news of salvation that is available to us through Christ and his finished work on the cross. What lessons can you draw from this? Is there someone you’ve been talking to about a variety of spiritual topics, but he or she needs you to bring the conversation to a head by asking where he or she stands with Jesus and his offer of salvation?

Friendly Nudges

In Revelation 3:2–3, Jesus admonished, “Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.” Peter told us in 1 Peter 3:15 to treat people with

“gentleness and respect”—but there are times when we must give *friendly nudges* to the people we’re trying to reach. In fact, many of them won’t move forward spiritually until we finally look them in the eye and tell them it’s time to “Wake up!” Is there anyone in your life who needs that kind of jolt from you? What will you do?

Spiritual Opportunity

Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28–30). And the last chapter in the Bible extends this gracious, open-ended invitation: “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come!’ Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life” (Revelation 22:17). God’s salvation is available to everyone—including our family members and friends. Sometimes we just need to give them a *spiritual opportunity* to respond to God’s invitation. What about in your life? Does anyone you know come to mind? Why not reach out to them today?



Put It into Practice

For this final “Put It into Practice” section, take some time to page back through the contents of this study guide to remind yourself of all you’ve learned, and then put it into action by sharing it with the people in your life who need to hear it most. Review. Pray. Shoot a text message or make the call. Get together and take a small risk and share whatever God has been telling you to say. God will use you, some of your friends will find a faith like yours, and they’ll thank you for all of eternity for *making your case for Christ!*



Reflect on a Key Story

In this final account from *The Unexpected Adventure*, Lee Strobel tells about his efforts to share Christ with an old friend from college. Read it and be encouraged, and then reflect on the four questions listed after the story.

Hang Time

Lee Strobel

I pulled up to my friend's house in a tiny convertible sports car. "You want us to drive across the country in *that*?" he said with a laugh.

"What do you mean?" I replied, feigning indignation. "Leslie and I drove all the way from Illinois to Florida in it last year."

He looked incredulous. "On *purpose*?"

Soon we were bantering like old times. Tarik and I had met as students at the University of Missouri, and on weekends we hitchhiked across the prairie to check out custom motorcycle shops in Joplin and Kansas City. Our wanderlust continued after we graduated, including a trip down to New Orleans during the Super Bowl to explore Bourbon Street and the rowdy football parties going on before and after the event. But now we were about to embark on an adventure with more serious overtones.

Because Tarik was working in Iowa and I lived in Chicago, we hadn't seen each other for several years. However, I heard vague rumors that he was facing some personal opportunities and challenges, and I doubted whether he had anyone he could trust to talk to about them. Besides, we had never really discussed my newfound faith in Christ.

So I called and said, "Hey, remember those road trips we used to go on? Let's take a week off from work and drive."

Surprisingly, Tarik didn't need any convincing. "All right. Why not? Pick me up."

He didn't ask what I would be driving, hence his dismay when I showed up in a blue Mazda Miata with the top down. The car barely seats two, but he squeezed inside and off we headed west without any particular destination in mind.

I don't think we turned on the radio the whole way. We just talked and talked. Actually, my role for the first couple of days was simply to listen. He was troubled about some impending decisions, and so for hours on end he discussed them in depth. I offered advice whenever I could.

Before long, we hit Omaha, had a nice steak dinner, and then decided to turn south. In Kansas, driving down U.S. Highway 281, we stumbled upon the geographical center of the forty-eight states, marked by a small monument and a tiny chapel that might seat six people. We ventured inside, where I pretended to preach a sermon; Tarik, raised in a Muslim home, didn't look very comfortable in the wooden pew.

Soon after that we were zipping down Highway 24 through Cawker City, Kansas, when I slammed on the brakes, put the car in reverse, and backed up to confirm what I thought I had seen. Sure enough, it was the World's Biggest Ball of Twine, all seven million feet of it, coiled into a ball approaching ten feet in diameter and enshrined in a large gazebo. Not quite awe-inspiring, but certainly worth a couple of campy photos.

As we approached Kansas City, our conversation turned to faith. The thorny challenges he was facing, I said to Tarik, might be less daunting if he had the comfort, wisdom, and guidance of Christ in his life.

Having been born in an Islamic country, Tarik was culturally Muslim, but he wasn't actively devout. When we were in college, the topic of religion came up only once, when we got into a disagreement about God. Tarik was aghast that I *didn't* believe in him, while I was astounded that he *did*.

As we drove, I told him the story of how I investigated the evidence for Jesus, and I described the way my new faith had changed my worldview, attitudes, and priorities. We stopped in Kansas City and went to a Royals baseball game that night, chattering about Christianity between innings. The following day we headed down Interstate 70 to Columbia to visit the University of Missouri, where we had met more than twenty years earlier.

We had a great time exploring our old dormitory and hangouts. At the end of the day, I stopped at a Christian bookstore so I could buy a Bible for Tarik. The next morning, before we left the hotel, I said to him, "Let me clarify what

Christianity is about." I leafed through the New Testament to Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

"That," I said to Tarik, "pretty much sums it up. We deserve death, eternal separation from God, because of our sin or wrong-doing. But God offers us forgiveness and eternal life as a gift, purchased when Jesus died on the cross as our substitute to pay for all of our transgressions." I emphasized the word *gift* to contrast with Muslim teachings, which emphasize doing good works to try to appease Allah.

Tarik listened politely but didn't say much about this. As we headed north toward Iowa, I would bring up the gospel from time to time, but he seemed reluctant to talk about it. I tried not to get discouraged, telling myself that he was probably mulling over the implications of the verse. But deep inside I wondered. His personal challenges were weighing heavily on him. Did he see Jesus as a potential help or as a meaningless diversion?

It was late when we returned to his house. "I've got to leave early in the morning," I said as I was getting ready to head to the guest room. I was going to leave it at that, but I decided to take one more shot.

"Remember, we talked about how the Bible says forgiveness and eternal life are a gift," I said. "Would you like to pray with me to receive that gift? We could do that right here, right now."

His response stunned me. "Yes," he said. "I'd like to do that." And that evening, Tarik prayed with me to make Christ his Savior.

I cranked up the praise music as I drove back to Chicago the following morning. Tarik and I had spent five days meandering around the countryside. We had given up precious vacation time from work in order to spend those days hanging out together. But it was, I mused, a small investment compared to the eternal results.

Sometimes we won't reach our friends for Christ until we're willing to take more radical measures to do so. Lee took almost a week to drive around the country with his old friend in order to tell him about his new faith. What radical step do you think God might be telling you to take (*besides* buying a convertible)?

It's always tempting to say *no* for our friends before we give them the chance to say *yes* to Christ. Given that Tarik had been raised in the Muslim faith, that's certainly something Lee might have been tempted to do. Thankfully, he wasn't! Is there someone you've been saying no for? Are you willing to give that person the chance to say yes? What is your next step to take in doing that?

Lee wrote, "I was going to leave it at that, but I decided to take one more shot." Just imagine if he had really *left it at that*. Is there someone with whom you need to "take one more shot"? When will you do so?

After praying with Tarik to receive Christ, Lee "cranked up the praise music" while driving back home. He was having a heavenly celebration—here on earth. We've tried to convey throughout this course that there is nothing more rewarding than impacting another person's life for all of eternity. Have you experienced that yet? Have you experienced it lately? Don't you want to experience it a lot more?

Take a few minutes to pray and ask God to give you the wisdom, the clarity, the courage, the opportunities, and whatever else you need to be able to—as Jesus put it in John 15:5—"bear much fruit."