Keys for Effective Evangelism
by Josef Urban

Dear brethren, I'm beginning a series of posts on this blog that will contain short snippets on the theme, "Keys for Effective Evangelism". I do not claim to be an expert on the subject, nor to have learned everything there is to learn about evangelism. However, I do have a burden to share with the Body of Christ what I perceive to be some foundational, biblical keys to evangelizing the lost effectively for the glory of God. It is my prayer that the Lord would be pleased to make these posts a blessing to the brethren who frequent this blog.

I intend to share with you things that I've learned by experience, to expose and correct errors I have seen in evangelizing with other brethren, and to give you helpful keys and tips about sharpening your evangelistic endeavors and honing your gifting (for those of you who are called to more concentrated efforts of evangelism) for the sake of reaching the lost with the saving truth of God.

Please suffer me to share a little about my experience in evangelism, not for the sake of tooting my own horn, but for the sake of illustration and practicality. These posts are not designed to be scholastic essays, but personal blurbs with much practical application.

To let you know a little of my background, the Lord first called me out to the streets to hand out tracts, engage people in conversation about the Gospel, and open air preach in 2005. By His mercy and grace, I've been doing it ever since and as long as His hand is with me, and He permits me to continue, I don't plan on stopping. Over these past 6 short years, I've met a lot of brethren who evangelize on the streets and have encountered a lot of things, both good and bad. Out of this limited experience, I want to share with you my convictions about biblical evangelism.

By God's evident hand and sovereign grace, He has been pleased to permit us to plant a local church in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, a region where Catholicism is extremely strong and influential and where it is said that the evangelical population is as little as 2%. The congregation on Sundays at this time averages at perhaps about 15 people (give or take). When we started to hold meetings, we did not start with a team of brethren. At first, it was just my

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1 This originally appeared as a series on Josef's site, [www.missionsevangelismtheology.blogspot.com](http://www.missionsevangelismtheology.blogspot.com). I (Drew Mery) have edited these posts together into this pdf file for user-friendliness. I have done this with Josef's permission. Nothing has been changed (even typos that may exist).
wife and I, and another brother who set out to plant a church hoping in the blessing of God. We immediately faced a wall of opposition as we quickly discovered that it is extremely difficult to get Catholics to come to our meetings or consider the biblical Gospel. Our main method of outreach was open air preaching and evangelism on the streets. By God's grace, He saw fit to establish the core group of this church plant from the fruits of open air preaching and street evangelism. There is now a small body of believers who form a core group of members in this church plant, and it is owing to God's grace in evangelistic ministry on the streets.

So although my experience is very limited, by the undeserved favor of the Most High, it is not without the blessing of God. To deny this would be to engage in false humility and to deny God, and I think false humility is worse than outright stinking pride. I want to share with you what I perceive to be some of the keys which have resulted in some of the fruit the Lord has been pleased to grant for the sake of His glory.

If you're interested in hearing what this "babbler of strange doctrines" has to say, stay tuned.

**Keys for Effective Evangelism #1: Make Much of Jesus Christ!**

“Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.” (Acts 8:5) Philip is an example of a biblical evangelist with a biblical message. In fact, Christ is the message of all of Scripture (Luk. 24:27, Jn. 5:39). Jesus Christ was Philip’s message and nothing less. That was also Paul’s message: “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” (1 Cor. 2:2) A quick survey through the book of Acts reveals that Christ was the content, the apex, and the high point of all the major sermons. The apostles were eye-witnesses and spoke not out of the depths of knowledge obtained from reading books, but out of the depths of personal experience with Christ as their Lord and friend. Though we’re not eye-witnesses as they were, we are nevertheless witnesses, and our testimony of Christ must burst forth from the overflow of being in a living, abiding union and fellowship with Him.

I’ve heard evangelistic messages given that proclaim everything except Christ. They will expound on sin, righteousness and judgment, repentance and faith, the new birth, and many other evangelistic themes without ever arriving to Christ. That is not the type of preaching that is calculated to save souls. A Christ-less sermon is a sham and a sin against the souls of men. Eternal life is to know the one true God and His Son Jesus Christ (Jn. 17:3). How will they come to know Christ if we do not proclaim Him?

Brethren, when you’re evangelizing, make much of Jesus Christ! Proclaim Him, exalt Him, and
glory in Him! Lift Him up so high with such affection and love for Him that all around you want to fall in love with Him! Expound on His Person and work from all angles! Proclaim His eternality, His glory, His exalted majesty, His holiness, His loveliness, His love, His mercy, and all His attributes. Expound on His cross, His sufferings, His agony, and His drinking of the Father’s cup. Everything you say, say it in light of Christ and His cross. Baptize your hearers in a message of blood. Your evangelistic presentation should be a journey, a pilgrimage through biblical truth that is intended to arrive at Christ and Him crucified, and once it arrives there, you must camp there and remain. Don’t tarry long in arriving, and once you arrive, don’t leave from there! Beware of distractions and rabbit trails.

The cross must be the focal point, and everything it entails, but you must not forget to preach the resurrection and triumph of Christ. Preach His resurrection, His eternal and effectual intercessory ministry and Priesthood, His exalted position as reigning King of kings, and His imminent return in power and great glory. I can’t stress this enough: you must not forget to expound on the resurrection! A dead Christ is a powerless Christ. Without the resurrection, the cross is left without vindication and emptied of its power. There are far too many resurrection-less sermons. If you tend to forget to share about it when you evangelize, then write it on your forehead. It’s better to look stupid than to forget the resurrection.

Keys for Effective Evangelism #2: Proclaim the Whole Counsel of God
The previous key for effective evangelism that I gave in this series was to “make much of Jesus Christ”. That is absolutely foundational. However, I don’t want you to get the wrong impression. By saying that, I am not saying that we should always start our presentation of the Gospel by talking about the cross. Sometimes that is certainly appropriate –to start with a confrontation with the truth of the cross and reason across a long line of other related biblical and salvific truths as they relate to the cross and to the sinner’s current state before God, exhorting the sinner to embrace this truth as we lay out the claims of the Gospel before their eyes in living color. This can be especially true when evangelizing people who already claim a “Christian” worldview since they already assume (at least intellectually) the truth of the cross. We must imitate Paul, who determined to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified. If Christ is not our message than our message is void of power to save. Yet, while to be faithful in evangelism we must exalt and proclaim Jesus Christ, at the same time, we must not shrink from declaring “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

This means it isn’t always appropriate to begin with Jesus Christ or with the cross in our presentation of the Gospel. In fact, more often than not, I will dare to say we shouldn’t begin by
talking about Christ. We should begin with the basic foundational truths which constitute the hinges upon which the door of understanding the Gospel swings. Far too many modern evangelists begin immediately with the cross and preach forgiveness to sinners who don’t even recognize, feel, or even hunger and thirst for righteousness from God. The Gospel is not just forgiveness in Jesus. It is a revelation of God and His glory, His righteousness, His attributes, and His saving power. Our presentation of the Gospel must include enough truth about God so as to be likely to be used by God as an instrument through which He reveals Himself by the power of His Spirit in a personal and confrontational way to the sinner. If our presentation of the Gospel is just an offer of forgiveness and eternal happiness but fails to be a revelation of God, it is faulty, broken down, and will hardly be able to function in order to perform its intended purpose in being used by God to secure the salvation of souls.

The apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans serves as an excellent example of explaining the Gospel by declaring the whole counsel of God. It is the clearest systematic explanation of the theology of the Gospel in the whole Bible. Every Christian should be intimately familiar with this book. This should be even truer among those who are regularly and actively involved in evangelistic ministry. I recommend that every Christian who is active in sharing the Gospel spend at least one month straight in the book of Romans. Read it through every day. Meditate on its flow of thought. Pour over it on your knees begging God for light from above. Memorize key verses. Cry out to God continually to burn it into your soul. Listen to solid expository sermons through the book. I can guarantee that when you are utterly saturated with the theology of the book of Romans, and its penetratingly glorious truth has penetrated your soul and floored you with the depths of the riches of the Gospel, it will be exceedingly difficult to preach a half a gospel as so many are doing in modern evangelistic ministries.

The thesis statement of the whole book is found in the first chapter: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." (Rom. 1:16-17) Notice how the apostle begins by stating that the power of God almighty that results in salvation is contained in the Gospel. That means if we modify it, water it down, or adulterate it in any way, we are stripping the Gospel of

its power to save. We must preach it biblically. Anything less than a biblical Gospel will result in something less than a revelation of the biblical God, which will result in something less than biblical salvation.

After announcing what the Gospel does and how it does it (i.e. it saves by the power of God), Paul summarizes what the Gospel is all about. It is the revelation of the righteousness of God. The issue here is not merely life-fulfillment, worldly contentment, or a nice happy life. The issue is righteousness –and not just any righteousness, but the very righteousness of the most holy, perfect and glorious God.

The argument continues: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.” (Rom. 1:18-20) In saying this, the apostle contrasts the righteousness of God with the ungodliness and unrighteousness of man. He mentions God’s attributes and how He has revealed His glory and power through creation, and yet man has rejected and suppressed the general revelation of God by his love for sin, thus provoking and deserving God’s holy, hot and burning wrath.

So the Gospel starts with God, His glory (as revealed in His attributes), and His righteousness. It then considers man in the sight of this perfect God, being sinful, rebellious, utterly depraved, and void of anything that is truly morally good. The argument of Romans proceeds throughout the rest of chapters one, two, and the better part of three, to present God’s case against the depravity and guilt of mankind as a master attorney would put forth his arguments against a guilty criminal being tried for capital offenses. The apostle opens up the law and shows how mankind has raped it and put God to open shame, concluding with the thunderous indictment that the whole world is guilty before God and accountable to His judgment (Rom. 3:19).

Yet he doesn’t leave us without hope. He explains that all the righteousness we are void of by nature, which we need to be reconciled to this holy God, is found in the Savior Jesus Christ. Christ’s death satisfied God’s wrath against sin because it satisfied the demands of His justice. We violated God’s Law, and Jesus Christ suffered the capital punishment in our place. His blood satisfied the just punitive vengeance of God so that God could freely forgive us by His grace. The condition of receiving this gift of salvation is faith in Jesus Christ. All this is summed up in Romans 3:23-26 and then expounded on in greater detail in the remainder of chapter 3 and in chapters 4-5. Then Paul goes on to explain that the very grace that forgives us by the blood of
the Savior also transforms us by the power of the Holy Spirit by virtue of our union by faith into the death of Jesus Christ, thus those who are recipients of God’s grace have been transformed and set free from the reigning power of sin and the condemnation of the Law (chapters 6-8a).

We must follow suit and present our case when pleading with sinners according to the whole counsel of God. Mankind is on death row for having committed capital offenses against the divine Judge but is blind to his true plight. We must expound on the nature and character of God, magnify His glory, exalt His righteousness, and by the use of the Law (or the moral principles contained in the Law) show sinners that they are stripped, helpless, and unable to do anything to save themselves or contribute to their own salvation by their contaminated works (which they think are good but are in reality just as abominable to a holy God as the sinful heart from which they spring). We must reason with them of sin (their personal guilt), righteousness (God’s perfect standard) and judgment (how they deserve divine wrath). From there, we must move on to the cross and glory in it exceedingly, explaining how the cross is the vindication of God’s offended justice, how it satisfies the demands of God’s law, how it propitiates God’s wrath, how it demonstrates God’s love, and how through the cross and resurrection salvation was secured to be given as a gift of grace to those who trust in Christ alone. Therefore, the guilty sinner can receive the perfect righteousness of God by faith in Jesus Christ and can be justified (declared forgiven and accredited with the righteousness of Christ in order to be placed in a right-standing with God) and receive eternal life. True faith in Christ will result in a radical break with sin and a new style of life of continual and increasing obedience to the will of God.

This is an extremely condensed and brief overview of the flow of thought in Romans. It is by no means exhaustive and this is certainly not everything we should ever preach when we proclaim the Gospel. We haven’t even mentioned some extremely important truths such as how the active obedience of Christ relates the imputation of His righteousness to the sinner, or of regeneration, for instance, which are definitely alluded to in the book Romans in its declaration of the Gospel. However, if our customary presentation of the Gospel does not at least generally present these truths to the people who hear us, it is doubtful we can be said to be declaring the whole counsel of God as it relates to the salvation of sinners.

This does not mean that we must explain all of these things every time we share the Gospel. Sometimes we only have time to give out a tract and utter just a few words to a passerby in the hope that God will use our witness in spite of its unavoidable brevity. I’ve been in many conversations where as I’m expounding on God’s holiness and the sinfulness of sin, or on the Law of God and the eternal condemnation of sinners, where the conversation is abruptly broken or ended by the hearer or another annoying distraction. In that case, I try to get in at
least a very brief explanation of the cross and tell them if they repent and believe they will be saved. I’ve even had several occasions where sinners, upon understanding their guilt before God and being terror stricken by the thunderous demands of Sinai’s justice, have literally taken off and fled, running away as fast as they can before I could explain to them the hope of the Gospel. We cannot prevent such things.

Yet the point is that this is not a formula. I am not saying that your presentation of the Gospel must always follow the precise flow of argument presented in Romans. You must be led by the Spirit of God and be constantly asking God for wisdom from above and for a prophetic edge to your Gospel witness. The way you present the Gospel should differ from time to time. If you are always parroting the same thing over and over, and there’s never any spontaneity or freshness in what you say, I’m not sure if you’re being led by the Spirit of God. A survey of the evangelistic sermons of the book of Acts will reveal that the apostles didn’t always say the same exact things when they preached. However, if you do take time to study the short blurbs of their sermons contained in Acts, you will find that all these elements of the Gospel message that Romans explains in detail are alluded to, even if briefly, in the sermons of the apostles in Acts.

We must not preach half of a Gospel. Don’t preach all love and no justice, holiness or wrath. Paul mentions wrath in His Gospel repeatedly (Rom. 1:18, 2:5, 8, 3:5, 3:25, 4:13, 5:9). But at the same time, don’t preach an unbalanced view of God, mentioning only wrath and punishment for sin without magnifying His grace, mercy and love. Paul glories in the love of God as revealed in the Gospel (Rom. 5:5-8). I have seen those who err in preaching all love and no wrath, all forgiveness with no justice, and there are those who react against them by overemphasizing the truths that those people fail to mention, and the result is the very ones who are trying to counter the error of a modern sentimental “gospel” fall into error on the opposite extremes themselves, and thereby fail to present the Gospel hardly at all because they’re too busy pronouncing God’s judgment on doomed impenitents. We must proclaim the full counsel of God, and we must keep Christ and Him crucified as our central focus at all times.

**Keys for Effective Evangelism #3: Load Your Preaching with the Word of God**

I’ve seen enough preaching and have witnessed enough evangelistic encounters to know that much of what passes today for evangelism is bankrupt from true spiritual substance because it is jam-packed with the arguments of human reasoning and is greatly lacking in direct citation of the Word of God. Nothing packs a punch right to the gut of sin like a direct quote from God’s Word. Reasoning with sinners on the streets is essential, but doing so without quoting the Word of God is fatal to the true work of evangelism. “For the word of God is living and active,
sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Heb. 4:12) Nothing else pierces and cuts hearts like God’s Word. Nothing else exposes secret motives and prophesies directly to the hearts of men like God’s Word, anointed with Holy Spirit power, quoted from the lips of a sanctified vessel meet for the Master’s use.

Brethren, it is a trap to get involved in endless debating, using logic to try to persuade sinners to abandon their sin and flee to the Savior for mercy. Intellectual persuasion can reach the intellect and at its best, persuade the mind, but God’s Word pierces to the heart, convinces the conscience, and floods God’s truth right into the very soul of man. While there is a place for debating, and we must not be intellectually incompetent, the truth is that true power to convince, convict and convert is found only in God’s Word.

It is the Word of God that is alive and carries with it supernatural power to impart divine life into the spiritually dead. “...since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.” (1 Pet. 1:23) God has ordained to use His inspired Word as the instrument through which He sovereignly reveals Himself and brings forth sons unto glory: “Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” (Jam. 1:18) It is the Scriptures that are able to make sinners “wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15). In fact, it is by faith that we are justified, and “…faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” (Rom. 10:17) People must hear Christ’s word in order to believe, have eternal life, and escape the condemnation that awaits the ungodly: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” (Jn 5:24)

Not only does God save sinners through His Word, but if we’re to be useful as servants of the Lord in the task of evangelism, we must have our minds saturated with the truth of the Scriptures. Our competency must come from God, and He supplies it to us by means of His Word: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17) Just as the apostle Paul also said: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...” (Col. 3:16) When Paul wrote the Thessalonians, he said: “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.” (1 Th. 2:13) Even Paul didn’t rely on his own intellect and ability to use persuasive logic, but on the power and efficacy of God’s Word to convert souls (cf. 1 Cor. 2:1).
One time I was in a barber shop and a man was cutting my hair. We started talking, and soon the conversation turned to spiritual things. I don’t remember everything that was said. All I remember is that a river of Scriptures flowed forth from my mouth, much to my surprise, as I shared the Gospel with this man who claimed to be a Christian. God’s Word convinced him quickly of his sinfulness, his lost condition, and his need for a Savior. By the end of the haircut, the man was floored under the power of divine truth, and in the midst of trying to restrain his inward anguish, appeared almost delirious under the burden of a guilty conscience. He wept and told me to leave without paying. I insisted on paying, but he would not accept. Then he fled to the back room to find refuge from the public eye, and I left. What convinced this man who just 10 minutes prior believed himself to be saved that he was utterly lost and desperately in need of Christ’s saving grace? I can assure you it wasn’t me, it wasn’t any fancy arguments or persuasive speech. It was God’s Word under the blessing of the Holy Spirit. God blesses His Word when it is quoted, explained and applied. Brethren, it is such a simple key to seeing God bless your evangelistic endeavors, and yet so powerful. It is absolutely vital that you pack your witnessing with the living Word of God.

When you’re sharing the Gospel with someone, be sure to have your hand firmly gripped around your sword, ready to draw it and pierce right into the heart of any objection to the Gospel that is raised. Be conscious of the fact that objections will come, and that when they come, you will respond to them not with logic or human reasoning but with “It is written!” It is important that you consciously be alert to recognizing objections and that you will strive to answer as biblically as possible at all times. This takes conscious effort and focus. As soon as an objection arises, with sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit (with prayers arising in your heart and mind to the Lord in the midst of it looking for His guidance), let your mind fly through the pages of your mental Bible until a verse jumps out that answers the objection. As soon as it jumps into your consciousness, let it fly off your tongue and strike its target.

Every sinner who has not yet surrendered to Jesus Christ hasn’t done so because there are certain strongholds, certain patterns of thinking, and certain lies that they have believed that keeps them in a spiritually blind state. You must search out and destroy every last false refuge the sinner has, chase him out of all his false assurances and cut through the webs of lies and deceptions he has believed, until he’s left naked and exposed before the truth of God with nothing to do but to humble himself and confess his shame before the Lord in repentance. “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.” (2 Cor. 10:4-5) Yet reason with the Word of God in meekness, not with an accusing tone of voice, but with boldness coupled with gentleness and respect (cf. 2 Tim. 2:24-26). “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that
you may know how you ought to answer each person.” (Col. 4:6)

Here is the point of everything I’ve said: be sure to jam pack your evangelism with direct quotation from Holy Scripture. Heap buckets of salt on those who listen to you. Strive to answer every question and objection that is raised with either a direct quote from, or a clear reference to, a biblical text. Have a (preferably, hand-sized) Bible with you and as soon as you’re going to quote a text, flip open your Bible and point your finger to it. Sometimes it is even helpful to stand right next to the person you’re witnessing to, and as you read the text, follow along with your finger as the person’s eyes follow the words you’re reading out loud.

Before the Lord saved me, I clearly remember that the preacher who shared the Gospel with me said: “behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” A clear quote from 2 Corinthians 6:2 (KJV). However, the preacher didn’t say he was quoting Scripture or give the verse reference. I had no idea that that was in the Bible at that time as I was lost and dead in my sins. However, those specific words seemed to pierce my heart with prophetic power and I knew the voice of God Himself was speaking directly to me. Though I didn’t even know it was in the Bible, I knew God spoke those words directly to my soul. The Word of God has power like no other word. The Spirit of God blesses it to convert sinners. It is a living Word that still speaks. When God owns it as it is quoted, it imparts divine life and raises the spiritually dead. If you saturate your soul and feast continually on the words of the Bible, then when you evangelize, it will flow out of your belly like rivers of living water that produce life where the thirsty land was only barren and dead before.

**Keys for Effective Evangelism #4: Memorize Scripture**

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...” (Col. 3:16) That's a biblical command, and it is extremely helpful for evangelism. The previous key for effective evangelism in this series was “Load your preaching with the Word of God”. In order to do that, you must have your mind and heart saturated with God’s Word —and what better way to do that than to memorize Scripture? As a disclaimer, I do not claim to be an authority on this subject, and I openly confess my own failure in this regard in many ways. However, the little that the Lord has allowed me to memorize despite my inconsistency of discipline in this area has certainly been a huge blessing to me and has greatly helped me in evangelism.

I want to give you some tips to memorizing Scripture. These are things that I have either done in times past and they have helped me, or have been told me from friends who have memorized much more Scripture than I.
The Necessity of Discipline and Consistency

When mentioning the memorization of Scripture, most people balk immediately and say they can’t. The excuses are always similar, such as “my brain is not wired that way” or “the ability to memorize is a spiritual gift I don’t have”. While I think there is some truth in the thought that for some people it comes with greater ease than with others (I have some friends who are walking Thompson Chain-Reference Bibles who naturally gravitated toward memorizing Scripture and seem to be peculiarly blessed and facilitated in doing so), the truth is that everyone who is capable of coherently engaging in intelligible communication is able to. Just think about how much everybody memorizes as a routine part of life: Names, phone numbers, addresses, how to get to a certain person’s house, what you order at a certain restaurant, etc. It is not uncommon for a high school teacher to memorize the names of a couple hundred students every school year with a little effort. Even speaking the English language itself is the fruit of tremendous amounts of memorization that we did in our earliest years of childhood when our brains had nowhere near the mental capacity they currently do!

If you’re going to memorize, the first thing you must do is rebuke the lies of the enemy that tell you that you can’t! By God’s grace, and with the conscious resolution to launch forward, you certainly can! Let love for God’s Word be your motivation. What better way to invoke the blessing of the Lord than to meditate on His Word day and night in memorizing it?

*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. (Psalm 1:1-3)*

Get it settled in your heart: if you want to truly prosper in evangelism, you must meditate on the law of the Lord day and night. All it requires is: (1) the conscious decision and resolution to discipline yourself and work for it and (2) consistency and perseverance without giving up or neglecting the practice. This is where most of us have failed. Many have never succeeded at memorizing much Scripture because they lack discipline, not because they’re unintelligent.

Two Different Ways to Memorize

There are basically two different approaches you can take to Scripture memorization. You can practice either one or the other, or preferably, practice both. The first consists of memorizing key verses that are of particular benefit for evangelism. Specific passages that consist of only
one to three verses at a time from all over the Bible are memorized according to this approach. If you’re going to run with this method, you may consider starting with the evangelistic verses Living Waters has compiled. The Fighter Verses website is also particularly helpful (though not necessarily focused specifically on evangelistic texts). The second method consists of memorizing large passages and entire books of the Bible. If you're going with this method, Andrew Davis has a very helpful article on the subject.

Methods of Memorization

• Reading and Repetition. Just by reading a verse over and over, silently and out loud, will work wonders at locking it into your memory. Read it ten times silently, then ten times out loud, saying the book and verse each time you read it. Most people will find that just by doing this for 5 to 10 minutes each day, they can memorize huge amounts of verses over a period of time. Hey, if this method works for John Piper, why not for us?

• Index Cards. I have found that the good old fashioned method of using index cards is the most helpful method for me personally. Just simple write the text of the verse(s) you will memorize on one side of the card, and on the other, the book and reference number. For instance, on one side write: “And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.” Then on the other side write: “Colossians 2:13-14”. Then carry the cards with you and flash through them regularly as you go about your daily routine. This turns standing in lines, waiting in traffic, and other such things that are typically squanderers of precious time into profitable activity that benefits your soul and equips you for more effective evangelism. You will want to memorize the cards both ways, making sure you memorize both the passage and the reference well. Obviously, this works well when memorizing sporadic verses from all over the Bible, but believe it or not, it also helps when memorizing larger passages because it helps you to lock the verse numbers into your memory and not just the words. Just write out the whole chapter or book on index cards one verse at a time, one verse per card, and memorize them systematically, reviewing every day what you’re memorized previously until you’re done with the chapter or book. Each day take on one new verse, memorize it, and review your previous memory verses. Try to recite the whole passage then without looking at the cards, and recite it both forwards and backwards. They also have an audio of Ray Comfort reading them. Living Waters has a zip file of their evangelistic Scripture list formatted for printing on card stock. Or, if you prefer a more well-rounded Scripture memory program, you can purchase a Fighter
Verse pack or Memorization Journal in the ESV from Desiring God.

• **Record and Listen to Yourself.** This might sound a little silly to some, but who cares? If it helps to hide God’s Word in our hearts, then let us be fools for Christ’s sake. If you have an IPod or personal Mp3 player, this works the best. Just record your voice on it, or use the audio recorder on your computer (if you’re using Windows, go to the Start Menu, then to Programs, then to Accessories, then to Sound Recorder). Record yourself reading your memory verses, being sure to say the verse references as well as the text of the passages for each verse, save the file, upload it to your audio device, and listen to it over and over. Recite your verses out loud as you hear yourself reading them.

• **Listen to the Audio Bible.** This is primarily for those memorizing entire books or longer passages. Listen over and over again to your memory passages. If you have a CD player in your car, and you drive to work every day, listen to your memory books on the way to and back from work. Soak your ears with you memory passages and recite them out loud along with the audio.

• **Write it Down.** (cf. Deut. 17:18) Some people learn well by writing since it causes them to slow down, think, and visualize what they’re saying. Write down your memory verses over and over on a piece of paper. Do it to memorize them and to review them from time to time. Some people may prefer to type them out on their computer.

• **Stick them all over your house or office.** (cf. Deut. 6:9) The wall next to your desk is a great target for sticky notes of God's Word. So is the space around the bathroom mirror - brushing your teeth can become a spiritually profitable way to redeem the time. The refrigerator is typically a frequently visited location, so why not tape a heap of verses to it and pause to read one every time you open it up for refreshment? Or how about the dash of your car (be careful not to block your gauges in case you get pulled over)? Or how about hanging a cork-board in a prominent location in your house or office full of Bible verses you could pin to it as you memorize them?

• **Sing God’s Word.** (cf. Col. 3:16) Even if you’re musically incompetent and sing like a stray dog that just got his leg ran over by a car, what’s important is not what you sound like but locking the Scriptures into your memory. By creating a tune in your mind and singing your memory passages, the distinct vocal sounds and repetition of tune actually helps to lodge God’s Word in your mind. This can especially help if you make up little songs for your verses or passages and then use this method in unison with the voice recorder.
How often have we been driven into a state of emotional instability by an annoying little tune stuck in our heads that just won’t go away no matter how hard we try? It’s time to use such annoyance for our spiritual benefit. If the silly little tune has our memory verses in it, then it’s a good thing that it doesn’t go away easily! If you're particularly interested in finding CD's of Scripture songs, again the Fighter verses pulls through to not only help you memorize Scripture, but to grow in sanctification as you learn patience amidst annoyance. (Sorry guys, but that's my opinion! Actually, to be fair, just some of the songs are bad, but most of them are quite tolerable!) They have an interesting story of how they got started. Whatever you do, even if you just try to sing out loud inventing the tune as you go, this method can help you memorize Scripture.

- **Discuss your memory verse(s).** (cf. Deut. 6:6-7) For those who are heads of the household, while in conversation with your family at the dinner table, tell them your memory verse(s) and invoke a discussion about it. Share your insights on the passage, what you think it means in its Biblical context, how it applies to you and your family’s lives, and ask your family members questions that provoke discussion about the memory passage(s). Meaningful discussion helps to lodge the Scriptures deeper down into your heart. This is especially helpful if the whole family is memorizing Scripture together.

I’m sure there are other things you can do to help you memorize God’s Word. The important thing is not the method(s) we use, but that we have consistent discipline in actively seeking to know God’s Word by heart.

**Here’s a few more tips:**

- **Spend a little time every day memorizing.** We are forgetful creatures by nature. If you don’t review the verses you’ve already memorized on a consistent basis, you will forget them.

- **Don’t give up!** Sometimes we get busy and to our shame, neglect our spiritual disciplines. When it comes to Scripture memory, it can easily be laid aside for several days. After a good period of time of consistently committing a little time each day to Scripture memory, it gets pushed aside for a week or two. We get discouraged, and give up. Don’t let that happen! If you neglect your practice, don’t throw in the towel, just acknowledge that you lost some ground and jump right back in. Review where you left off, and start afresh.

- **Stick to one Bible translation.** This is very important. You don’t want to be quoting some
verses out of the NASB, some out of the ESV, and some out of the NKJV. That can be chaos. Choose your translation of choice, and stick to it. And just a word of advice: stay away from the looser translations –the more paraphrased they get, the further away from God’s actual written Word they wander. While they can be helpful for reference, avoid them for memorization.

• **Consider using the Bible translation of your church.** If your church uses the NASB, and you plan on being there for an extended period of time, my advice is to avoid using other translations for memory. Memorize in the translation your church uses so you can talk the same language as the people you fellowship with most often. However, if your church uses the NIV or other even looser translation, I would advise you to consider either the NASB, the ESV, or the NKJV for memory, just because I think the NIV and other translations are too loose to be considered accurate and faithful to the original text. In Spanish, I use the Reina-Valera 1960, not only because it is the translation our church uses, but also because the vast majority of Christians in Mexico use it and it is a faithful translation. When I cite Scripture, I want those who know their Bibles to be able to follow along in their minds and I don’t want to throw them off with unfamiliar terminology from a translation they’re not used to.

• **Find a memory partner.** It’s always helpful to have an accountability partner for stuff like this. If you have a definite plan of Scripture memory, try to find a partner to memorize it together with. Hold each other accountable. When you see each other, recite the week’s memory texts to each other. This also works for small group Bible studies that meet on a regular basis. The group leader can hold the people accountable and set the example.

If you are able to quote myriads of Scripture texts in your evangelism, it will add a tremendous impact to your witness. God’s Word is powerful and convinces souls of the truth like nothing other.

If you have other helpful tips or methods, or helpful resources, please share them in the comments section!