



From the Editor's Desk—Dave Benson



Welcome to the first edition of "SIGN." *SIGN* is a monthly e-magazine based out of Brisbane's Kenmore Baptist Church, geared toward getting you out to

intelligently and effectively point people to Jesus.

Okay, "e-magazine" is a bit glorified given the non-existent desk-top publishing happening here!! So if you're skilled in this area and have a few hours to spare each month, feel free to volunteer your services! Even as this publication may not excite your eyes, I believe it *will* stimulate your faith.

Like I've shared in previous emails, the hope is that everyone reading this might at some stage submit a ½ page article, so we can benefit from each other's perspectives, insights, and experiences. There's essentially eight sections that come with each edition of *SIGN*, so slot your article in where it fits best.

Well, enough background. Onto the meaty stuff. This first edition is themed around ***Back to Basics***. What is evangelism? How should we engage our culture? What do we have to offer the average, unchurched Aussie? And what kinds of questions are people asking? Without further ado, let's get into it.

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~shape~

{something pithy to shape our understanding of evangelism, mission, and the gospel}

Let's draw some mental pictures. If I said, "*carpenter*," what picture comes to mind? Is it a guy or a girl? Strong or weak? What does she/he look like? How does she/he relate? Any other impressions?

Try it again with a few more identities. An *athlete*. A *movie-star*. A *professor*.

One more: an *evangelist*.

Now I don't know what you're picturing, but here's where the problem with evangelism starts. That's because the mental picture doesn't look like *me*. (By me, I mean you!)
I'm not that confident.

I don't have a silver-tongue.

I don't own a soap-box.



I chatted with a twenty-something introvert last week who was stuck on this same point. She felt strongly that God was calling her to be an evangelist ... but she didn't fit the stereotype. So we talked. And guess what? She *is* an evangelist ... in the making at least. To start with, her heart aches for those living without hope. Tears flow easily when she prays—God's heart beats within. And she wants to see all Christians become better at pointing people to Jesus.

But let's get back to basics.

What is "evangelism"?

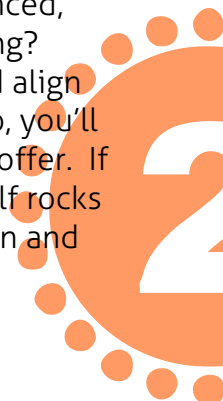
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Maybe this will help. Going back to Jesus' time, the *gospel* (εὐαγγέλιον; yoo-ang-ghel'-ee-on) was "good news," carried by the *evangelist* (εὐαγγελιστής; yoo-ang-ghel-is-tace') to people who hadn't heard. What mental picture did *evangelist* conjure up in Jesus' day?

To start with, it was a political, not a religious term. *Gospel* was a secular phrase in wide-usage, co-opted by Christians to express what God was doing in and through Christ. The specific meaning of *evangelist* was that it pointed to a messenger who would run ahead of the King across the hills, coming from a place of battle, entering and declaring to the city victory over the enemy. It was a public announcement about a public event intended for the public realm of life. Because of the victory, and announcement of the victory, the city has a new beginning, a different reality. The messenger would appear, raise their right hand and yell out "rejoice, we have won the victory!" (Caesar Augustus used this a lot, for the new world order and his reign).

So in the case of Jesus (Luke 3-4:19), he comes from a place of battle (in the wilderness with Satan), and enters Galilee preaching the *euangelion* of God: that God through Jesus has confronted the powers that hold us captive, He has won, and He offers eternal life to those who respond. God through Christ is reconciling everything to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

Interestingly, Josephus—a Jewish historian turned Roman General—once went into a newly conquered village and announced, "Repent, and believe in me!" Meaning? Turn from your ways of rebellion and align with the Kingdom of Rome. If you do, you'll benefit from all this Kingdom has to offer. If you don't, then when the King himself rocks up, you'll be judged for your rebellion and thrown out of the Kingdom.



Next edition of *SIGN* we'll look more at the exact message of the "gospel of the Kingdom" (Matthew 4:23), but for now, notice what Jesus' Kingdom is like from Luke 4:18-19:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

In the words of E. Stanley Jones, the Kingdom is "God's total answer to humanity's total need"—good news for the economically disinherited (Luke 6:20) as well as the spiritually poor (Matt. 5:3); good news to the socially and politically disinherited; good news to the physically disinherited; and good news to the spiritually and physically bruised and oppressed. The year of the Lord's favour, Jubilee, isn't just a heavenly hope, but an embodied hope on planet earth that *starts now*, of which we are the first expression. So we are agents of this Kingdom now.



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Wrapping all this up, what is an evangelist? It's not about being persuasive, or confident, or opinionated, or about trying to save souls and escape this sinking ship. In short, an evangelist is a *Kingdom messenger*. Evangelists are people prepared to demonstrate the Kingdom in what they do, and point people to Jesus as a signpost for the Kingdom of God in what they say. And we have good news to bring that impacts every aspect of life in the here and now, even as it points to a greater hope with the fullness of the Kingdom when Christ resurrects the cosmos.

When it's holistically lived, and shared, we shouldn't be surprised that outsiders press in to take hold of the Kingdom (Matt. 11:12). It represents their deepest desires in this world—for peace, justice, and happiness—which starts now and climaxes when Jesus the King returns.

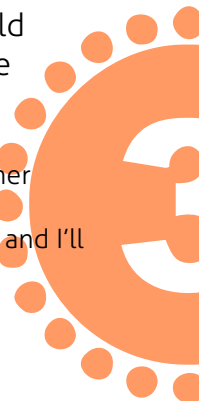
So, are you an evangelist?

~society~

{watching culture for connection points that bridge to the gospel}

Okay, switch off your i-Pod so you can concentrate for a moment. *Music*. How important is it? Perhaps Generation Y (those currently 14-27 years of age) gives us an indication of the role music plays in our everyday lives. Music comes in second only to "friends" as the top source of adolescent peace and happiness.¹ Music provides the soundtrack to our lives—ninety percent of youth listen to music everyday, averaging over two hours. So, if you want some insights into culture—or a launching point for an interesting spiritual conversation—then perhaps you should start with today's poets dominating the pop-charts.

¹ Like anyone reads the footnotes! So rather than me muddy up this article, if you want the source, email me at david.benson@kbc.org.au and I'll pass it on ☺



Now, I could choose some of the crap that's circulating to highlight how twisted our culture has become—Katie Perry's, *I Kissed a Girl*, comes quickly to mind—but how about we start with the good. You see, with any culture we engage, we should ask ourselves four questions:

- (1) What can I commend?
- (2) What must I challenge?
- (3) What barriers must be removed for our culture to effectively hear the gospel?
- (4) What bridges offer a point of contact?

The Apostle Paul is a great model in Acts 17, as he seeks to understand Athens before engaging the Areopagus. And it was in the lyrics of Greece's favourite poets (Aratus and Cleanthes) that he found evidence of a spiritual quest for an "unknown God": "In him we live and move and have our being,' as even some of your own poets have said, 'for we are indeed his offspring.'"

So, with the "shape" article above still fresh in your mind—re: the message of Jesus as the King calling us to lay down our weapons and realign with His Kingdom—check out www.youtube.com/watch?v=44xirQ55lgA. Perhaps our culture's most popular poets are Coldplay. This clip has been viewed nearly 6 million times. Study the symbolism. Watch the words. And tell me there's not a deeper message. Your thoughts?²



² I only put the chorus, in italics, once. In the full version, the third line in the stanza reads "For some reason I can't explain / I know Saint Peter won't call my name." But, in the very last chorus, it reverses: "I know Saint Peter will call my name."



I used to rule the world
 Seas would rise when I gave the word
 Now in the morning I sleep alone
 Sweep the streets I used to own
 I used to roll the dice
 Feel the fear in my enemy's eyes
 Listen as the crowd would sing:
 "Now the old king is dead!
 Long live the king!"
 One minute I held the key
 Next the walls were closed on me
 And I discovered that my castles stand
 Upon pillars of salt, and pillars of sand

*I hear Jerusalem bells are ringing
 Roman calvary choirs are singing
 Be my mirror, my sword and shield
 My missionaries in a foreign field
 For some reason I can't explain
 Once you know there was never
 Never an honest word
 That was when I ruled the world*

It was the wicked and wild wind
 Blew down the doors to let me in
 Shattered windows and the sound of drums
 People couldn't believe what I'd become
 Revolutionaries wait
 For my head on a silver plate
 Just a puppet on a lonely string
 Oh, who would ever want to be king?



~strategy~

{offering a practical idea to reach those outside the church}

At the heart of evangelism is the concept of being a "witness" ... which basically means testifying to what we personally have seen and experienced. That is, being a witness is about telling *our story*. As we get back to basics, we need to find fresh ways of telling our story, and connecting this to the lives of those we bump into each day. And the heart of this story should be framed around the answer to this one simple question:

Why is Jesus good news to me?

The following thoughts were sent in by **Alan Wright**, a high school student:

"The other day, I was having discussion with a few friends and teachers and we were talking about evangelism, and furthermore, how Jesus went around doing so. We realized that Jesus 'evangelized' by using parables more than anything else. I think that it is important to recognize this as this is how WE can evangelize. OUR stories, I believe, sometimes make the biggest impact. I know that sometimes evangelizing doesn't always mean giving a testimony but I really do think that any opportunity we have to share about how WE came to know our loving God, we should take, right? As well as giving a 'testimony,' any circumstance we are in can turn into story or 'parable' that can be used very effectively as in our society today, people connect to each other through personal experiences.

This is a really corny example but it proves the point quite well. At school, if you ever need a few bucks for the bus, or lunch or something, you can always rely on Jon. He just always has a bit of money and just wants to help you out.

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Ok, so you might be thinking 'where are you going with this?' Well, I guess there will be a time where someone will eventually say to Jon, 'Why do you give so much? What's your motive?' In this case Jon can either just say, 'Well, I'm just a good guy!' or something to that effect, or he can turn it into an opportunity to share God's love with whoever is asking him. For example, 'I give so much because that's what the Bible tells us to do. To be givers, not takers. Jesus GAVE his life for me and I want to give to people in recognition of what He did for me.'

So I guess the picture is . . . Firstly, take every opportunity to share about your life, as people can often relate to it. Secondly, learn how to turn small circumstances into something big and challenging that can provoke thought and send out a message of God's love. I'm not really sure why I wanted to share that with you, but I just thought maybe it can be a way to encourage people to say, 'Hey, being an evangelist isn't that hard!'"



~story~

{recalling a time you got to point someone to Jesus, or how you came to follow Christ}

"And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had **compassion** [*splagchnizomai*] for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:35-36).



Splagchnizomai (Grk.)—literally, bowel-shaking sympathy and mercy for another. Even a glance at the gospels reveals that Jesus' kingdom words and kingdom deeds were characterized by *compassion* (Matthew 9:35-36; 14:14; 15:32; Mark 8:2; Luke 7:13). Jesus' actions were never indifferent—he passionately loved people, suffering with and for them, offering a taste of the banquet to come in His Father's Kingdom (Luke 14:16-24.).

So, for this "back to basics" edition of *SIGN*, it's timely to take a look at compassion in action through the life of **Coral Bryant**. Granted, it took a lot of prodding to get her to talk about herself . . . but it was worth the coercion! Coral's story is a simple illustration of the impact costly love could have in *your* community—if you listen and respond to our compassionate Saviour. Here's a tale of "**God's Ministry in the Dog Park**" . . .

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I bought a dog just before Christmas 2004. My new boy Jax (8 months old) was and had been handled roughly. He needed training and a dog park so he could learn how to socialise and run off his extra energy. Got the picture? He's young; I'm old. I was told about a huge park at Bellbowrie so off we went. Little did I know what God had in store for us?

I started by introducing myself and Jax. The Owners knew the dog's name but not many of the owner's names. So, after some time of getting to know them, I began to introduce the people to each other. This meant I had to try to remember names. As new people came I welcomed them and introduced them to the other owners and spent time with them to make them feel part of the family. There's a very large group of people and dogs who come and if you're new you can feel out of it. There's the before work group, early afternoon, late afternoon, and after work group, as we now have a light.

I take along leaflets and info from KBC and give them out just to let them know what's happening. I then found people coming to me to see if KBC had something to offer someone they knew who needed help. They would seek me out if there was a need as they felt I would do something. If there is a medical need I asked if I could put it on the email prayer chain. If food is needed I cook some meals or grab some from Handshake, and others will join me and buy a card, a plant, or give money. I also tell them about what I'm trying to do in my English Class at KBC and ask if they have any ideas. I try to include them in my life. They join with me in filling boxes for the Shoe Box Appeal at Christmas. For Valentine's Day they help with the red hearts I attach to the stem of roses that says "God is Love and He Loves You!"

We have had some very sad times at the park when people have lost their children. This involves getting beside them and offering help—prayer, meals, collecting



money (they say I have the gift of harassment!)—especially for the fire victims, as one mum was a sole parent and putting on a dance with the Progress Assn. to raise funds to cover the funerals. One family didn't have a church of worship so they didn't know where to start when their young son killed himself. One lady who lost her husband at Christmas doesn't want to live anymore. I have spent time with her and gave her some materials and asked if she could help us by making bags for the toys that go into the Christmas shoe boxes. Also Joyce sent a "Yes, We Care!" group to her home. I have another lady 85 yrs who often falls and ends up in hospital. She lives alone so I'm always looking for her if she isn't there. She has just come out of hospital after collapsing. They gave \$210 for Alan's walk in the West for Leprosy. They gave stuffed toys for the farmers and toiletries, and clothes for the refugees.

[Compassion isn't a one-way street. It's give and take.] When I had an operation, last November, they cooked for me. I share the good/bad/ugly with them and them with me. We are honest. I have made up a list of the dogs' names, the dog's breeds, and the owners' names, and to date there are 222 dogs which frequent the park. We

only use first names, except for me as I'm known as the Poo Police. They are collecting for a Megaphone for me, for Christmas. We have a Christmas Party with a Secret Santa for the dogs, and I take up a collection for the guy who brings down his ride-on mower to keep the park just right for us and puts on the Christmas Party.

Encouragements I've received [secondhand] from people I don't know:-

"I would like to acknowledge the wonderful work that a lot of people are investing into the lives of those in need. I would also like to especially pray an abundance of blessing into the life of Coral Bryant. I do not know her, but reading her prayer request fills me with a warmth of our loving Father. What a blessing she is to so many in her community. May our Lord Jesus have His hand on her and that He would protect her, keep on guiding her, and shower her with an abundance of blessings in her life. What an inspiring lady she is. We could all take a leaflet out of her book."

"Please would you pass on to Coral my appreciation for all she is doing. I know that she is doing it for Christ and not her own agenda, but still would like to say how amazing she is. I am professionally acquainted with some of the people on her prayer list and it is great to know that someone has become

close to their needs and is quietly caring for and praying for them so that they experience God's love on legs. I pray that she will keep well and be able to continue this ministry. I know that it is making a real difference."

So, thanks Coral for sharing your story. And even more so, thanks for showing us that little things mean a lot. "God's love on legs" . . . keep walking strong.



Jax my best mate



Owner outside the fence with the dogs



I'm giving Paula a hand



Owners enjoying some food together.



~STUCK~

{some apologetic helps for responding to tough questions people are asking}



If we had all the answers, then Christianity wouldn't be called a "faith." That said, all knowing—even scientific knowing—takes *faith*. We each trust our senses. We each trust some one else's authority and pronouncements. We each begin with unprovable assumptions and presuppositions, from which we reason and make sense of the world.

But God has given us brains to think, a world to explore, and His Word as a guide—so that we can worship Him not just with our heart, strength, and soul, but also with our *mind*. The more we honestly search for the truth, the clearer it becomes. In turn, when we see things clearly, we communicate more effectively, commending our faith to all who ask, but doing so with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15).

Apologetics isn't meant to be a specialist field. It's about facing honest questions and knotty objections with grace-filled, reasonable responses. It's not about persuasion and marketing tactics. Rather, it's about clear thinking and clear talking, so that all who have hearts to respond are not turned away by a confusing and implausible presentation of what we believe.

A month or so ago *Dave White* and *Andy King* took their small group through an "*Evangelism Workshop*." As part of this time, they gave out some pointers for how to respond to common objections and questions that block people from seriously considering Christianity. I know they would want me to *emphasize* that these answers are just a start. Also, there is no one answer fits all approach. Apologetics is about a true dialogue—give and take—so you should prayerfully listen and ask questions as much as (if not more than) you speak. Even so, I think you might find this helpful. Here's their thoughts concerning this tricky question:

"If God is good, how can he allow so many people to suffer?"

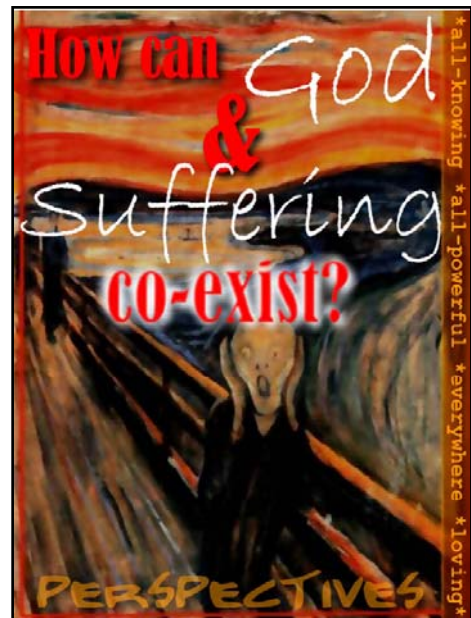
Answer tips:

- This question stems from the fact that suffering is not natural, but is a consequence of our disobedience, therefore emphasise that God does not like suffering either ...
- Originally God created the world without suffering
- For love to truly exist, humans recognise the ability to choose to reject or accept love
 - If someone puts a gun to a girl's head and says, "Marry me!" clearly most people can see that's not valid
 - Rape isn't real affection as it is a violation of choice—God is no cosmic rapist
 - Where did our idea of choice come from?
 - God! Gave us the choice to obey him and have everything that he had → all perfection, no suffering forever!



- We chose to disobey God, and by choosing to do so we removed ourselves from His perfection and became imperfect
- We then continued betraying his perfect standard by exploring new things such as hatred that leads to murder, stealing and violence.
- **Analogy** to make it simpler:
 - Imagine (hypothetically) a genius mechanic made a perfect car and that mechanic wrote a manual on how to look after it and use it properly. This mechanic then gave it to someone and gave them the manual so they could look after it.
 - If that person ignored the mechanic and used the wrong fuel, wrong parts etc then the car would start breaking down. It would stop doing its job perfectly and would become imperfect. *That is what happened with world*
 - God made the world perfect, he gave us instructions and the choice to follow them. We ignored that choice and the consequences was the break down of the world or 'suffering'.
 - *But*, God through Jesus Christ has broken into this suffering world and has conquered evil (by rising from the dead). So we live in anticipation of the day that God comes to set everything straight, judging all evil. On this day, the whole cosmos and us with it will be resurrected like Christ to new life—those who accept God's forgiveness receive eternal life; those who reject God's grace are under judgment, which is Hell. We each have a choice. [ed.]

Want more? You can download the booklet by Dave Benson, "How Can God and Suffering Co-Exist?" from <http://www.mediafire.com/?ndiuyzm5t1>.



~study~

{suggested reading to better equip you for evangelism}

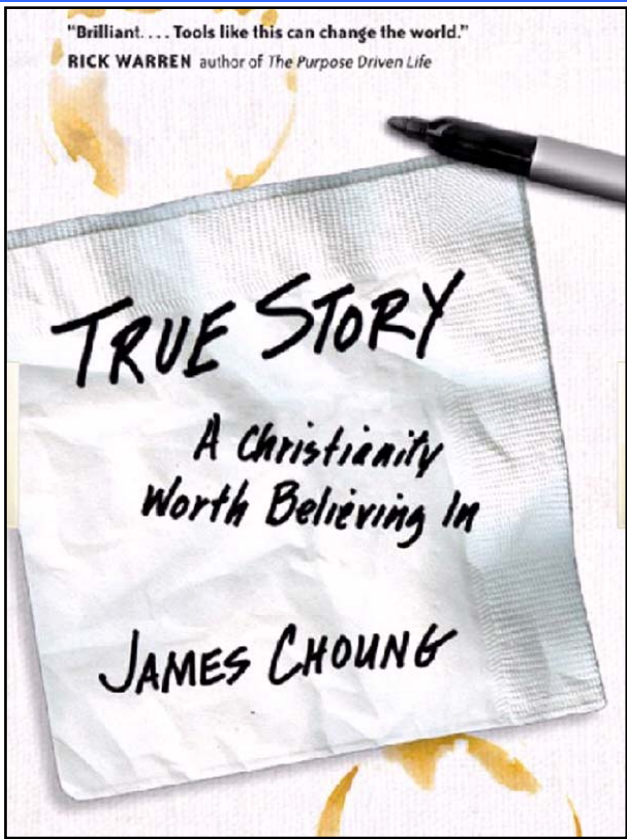
"Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh"
(Ecclesiastes 12:12).

Well said tired dude.

Then again, why did he take the time to write this advice down?!? If you haven't worked it out yet, good reading makes for good growing. But it's like choosing your friends. Bad friends corrupt good character, so choose wisely. Conversely, if your reading community leads you to chill out with guys like C. S. Lewis and N. T. Wright, it won't be long before they rub off and you start looking smart.

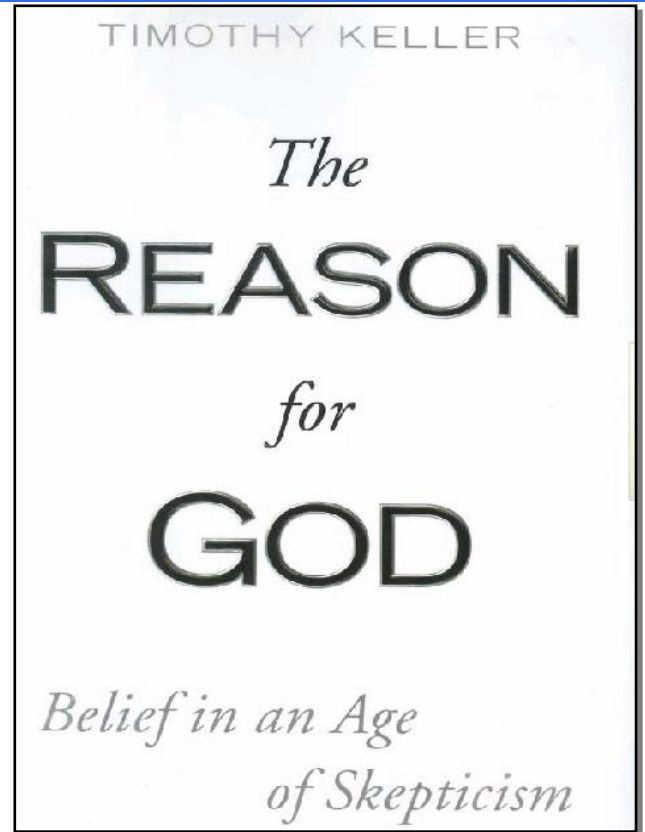
So, given this month's theme, here's some good fodder:





James Choung, *True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In* (IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2008).

Ever felt like the way we understand and explain Christianity just doesn't connect with the average 21st century westerner? In a world of terrorism, financial collapse, global warming, divorce, and depression, what "good news" does Jesus' bring? Choung challenges views of evangelism as simply an escape ticket to heaven, in the process carving out a fresh way of sharing the old story as the hope of all nations. The book itself reads well, divided in two halves—the story half, where he fleshes out the journey of Caleb to find a Christianity worth believing in; and then his explanation and unpacking of this new way of sharing the gospel.



Tim Keller, *The Reason for God* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 2008).

I've read a lot of books on apologetics, but this has to be one of the most accessible and inviting books written directly for spiritual skeptics and seekers alike. (It's a great give away for friends who ask—and are willing to face—the tough questions.) The first half of the book answers the case against Christianity . . . seven objections ranging from the problem with trusting the Bible, through the stereotype of Christianity as a straitjacket, to the apparent intolerance and exclusivity of Christianity offering "one way" when there are many religious paths. The second half of the book then attractively lays out the case for Christianity, following hints of God's existence, through our fallenness, to the importance of the cross and resurrection. Keller is a Pastor in New York City, and he writes very well for the jaded twenty-something tired of defensive answers and looking for something real to believe in as the postmodern malaise descends. Definitely worth a read.



~search~

{evangelism related web-links to explore}

<<http://offthemap.com>>

If you're tired of program based evangelism, and want it to be doable for ordinary Christians—like Jesus' own model of interaction with outsiders was—then this is your site. It's fresh, creative, and for the spiritually adventurous it offers a guide for evangelism when you're off the map traditional approaches follow. Well worth an explore.

<www.leestrobels.com>

Lee Strobel is pretty famous for his books: *The Case for Christ*, *The Case for Faith*, *The Case for a Creator*, *The Case for the Real Jesus*, and *God's Outrageous Claims*, among others. But this web-site is kinda' unique in that it's almost exclusively video based. If you're investigating questions of the faith, or wanting to direct friends to helpful 3 minute answers as a conversation starter, then this is a great site to surf.

~serve~

{opportunities to grow in your witness through participation and/or training}



There's so much I could promote right now, but I want to highlight *just one* opportunity to grow and serve. It's *that* important.

Are we, or aren't we an international church?!?

It seems to me that Jesus was about reaching out to the least, the lost, and the disenfranchised. He wasn't a clique dweller. You see, on the margins, people need good news, and they're open to explore new avenues of thought and experience.

This is why it totally makes sense for KBC to fully jump on board with our **ministry to international students**. We spend hours each week propping up the 99 through our church based program, when lots of "1's" are right outside our gates.

Coming up on **Saturday 4th July, 6pm** is a **Bush-dance** where *you* could come and start a connection with an international student. It's a fun night, but the real ministry starts once the night is over and you record the name of a student you clicked with. From there, you have an open door to show them God's love through friendship, help connect them in, and—as they're open—point them to Jesus.

We have about 300 international students currently connected with our church, though too few volunteers to make them welcome and build friendships. Such a simple program. Such a great way in. But to be effective, you could do with some **training**.

The **training** is for one night only, **this Sunday 21st June, 7:30pm @ KBC**

You must **rsvp** to Pastor Thong (thong.ng@kbc.org.au), who will give you more details.



Another related opportunity takes no preparation or training—just rock up @ **KBC every Sunday 3:30-4:30pm lower hall** for “Speaking English with Aussies.” Simple ... if you can speak English, and like a good conversation, then you can connect with international students who are hugely keen to learn the language and connect in socially.

Seriously, guys, there’s few opportunities better, simpler, and more effective than these.

Get into it!!



Final Thoughts ...

Well, that’s it for this edition. I’d love to hear your thoughts and suggestions, and especially to read your own contributions toward future editions. At this stage, the theme of the next edition is *Evangelism: What’s Our Message?* Evangelism is far bigger than just saying the right words. But, if the “gospel” is the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16), then evangelism must at least *start* with us knowing and sharing this powerful message faithfully, planting the right seeds. So, what is this message? What are natural points of contact in our culture to bridge from in sharing the gospel? How do you go about sharing the message? And what are some of the key sticking points to people accepting the gospel? Have a think about it, then let us know your thoughts ☺

SIGN, JUNE 2009

Until next edition,

***May you point many people to Jesus,
empowered by the Spirit of love.
Make the most of every opportunity,
giving glory to our Father above.***

Your fellow labourer in the Kingdom,
Dave Benson

