



Scripture: Matthew 28:19–20; 1 Peter 3:15; 2 Corinthians 5:20; John 4:35–38

Main Point: Your goal when talking to others about your faith should be to simply put a stone in their shoe.

Welcome

Good morning, everyone! It is wonderful to see so many familiar faces as we gather together to grow in our faith. Before we dive into our study today, let's join together in prayer. [\[Pray.\]](#)

Introduction

If you have your Bibles, please open them to the very end of the Gospel of Matthew. We are going to look at the foundational marching orders for every single person who claims the name of Christ. It's called the Great Commission.

Matthew 28:19–20 (ESV)

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

When we read these words, we often treat them like an elective class; something that's nice to do if you have the time or the personality for it, but not necessarily something that applies to everyone. But look at the wording. This is the Great "Commission," not the Great "Suggestion." It is a command from God that we as New Testament Christians should follow.

Notice Jesus didn't say, "I'd like for you to do this if you have time or if doesn't take you too far outside your comfort zone." No, if we wear the name of Jesus, God wants us to be willing to share His name with others. However, I'll admit there is still a tough reality we have to face if we want to follow this command: when Jesus asks us to go, tell, and make disciples, it usually leads to what I like to call "*uncomfortable conversations*." These are conversations that no one is super excited about having.

Some examples might be telling your parents that you failed a class. There's an uncomfortable conversation. Or maybe, telling your significant other that you think it's time to take a break. It's another uncomfortable conversation. Perhaps, it's telling your sister that you lost her favorite pair of headphones. Uncomfortable conversation. For some of us, telling other people about our faith can be an uncomfortable conversation, but it doesn't have to be.

I want you to be honest with yourself and with us for a moment. Finish this sentence: *"When I think about discussing Christianity with nonbelievers..."* [Teacher Note: Allow for responses.]

Maybe for the natural evangelist that sounds exciting. But for most everyone else, it sounds nerve-racking, even downright scary. Most Christians suffer from anxious thoughts when it comes to talking with our friends about our faith. For example, we play the "What If" game in our heads which paralyzes us:

- What if I say something wrong?
- What if I don't know the answer?
- What if they get mad or annoyed?
- What if they judge me or embarrass me?
- What if I fail?
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Today, we are starting a series called *Tactics*, and its goal is to take the "scary" out of the Great Commission. We want to move from fear to confidence, from uncomfortable to comfortable when we talk to others about Jesus.

Lesson

Let's look at our secondary anchor text for this series.

1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)

"but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect."

We get the tagline for our series from this verse. Always be prepared to make a defense. That means that as Christians we have to be ready for every door or window that opens up for us to insert Jesus into the conversation, and using good tactics is how we can best do that.

When we talk about "Tactics," we aren't talking about manipulation. We are talking about the skill of engagement. Proper tactics allow you to:

- Gain the confidence to engage people for Christ.
- Lovingly challenge incorrect thinking about the Christian faith.
- Present the truth clearly, cleverly, and persuasively.

Before we proceed any further in our series, it's important for us to distinguish between two terms: strategy and tactics.

- Strategy is the big picture. It's the large-scale operation, like learning Bible verses you can use in conversation or the answers to some of the most popular criticisms of Christianity.
- Tactics is the art of arranging and maneuvering. It's how you use what you already know in a five-minute conversation at the grocery store or in the hallways at school.

Our goal in today's lesson is to suggest a significant change in how we approach talking with others about our faith. We want to move away from "preaching at" and move toward "reasoning with." So, when it comes to having conversations about our faith, how should we view ourselves in them? **[Teacher Note: Allow for responses.]**

The Bible gives us a pretty specific job description:

2 Corinthians 5:20 (ESV)

"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

So, Paul told us we are to be ambassadors for Christ. What in the world is an ambassador? **[Teacher Note: Allow for responses.]**

The New Testament scholar William Barclay described it beautifully when he said:

"Ambassadors of any nation live in a foreign land among people who usually speak a different language, who have a different tradition and who follow a different way of life. Christians are always like that."

As Christians, we are residents of the kingdom of God living in a foreign world. We shouldn't be surprised when people don't share our values. We have to be in the world and not of the world as Scripture tells us.

As ambassadors, what should our approach be with nonbelievers? How are we to behave in this foreign land? **[Teacher Note: Allow for responses.]**

Hugh Hewitt once noted:

"It is not the Christian life to wound, embarrass, or play one-upmanship with colleagues, friends, or even opponents, but it is a common vice that anyone can fall into."

When it comes to our conversations with others about our faith, as Christian ambassadors, we can't allow ourselves to become soldiers. There is a massive difference between an ambassador and a soldier. A soldier is focused on accomplishing the mission at all costs, even if that includes violence, collateral damage, or loss of life. In a spiritual sense, a "soldier" mindset often leads to "Bible-thumping," where we are okay with "collateral damage" (hurting someone's feelings or ruining a relationship) as long as we "won" the argument.

On the other hand, an ambassador is called to be something completely different. An ambassador uses diplomacy, negotiation, conversation, and persuasion. They want to win someone for Christ as lovingly and respectfully as possible.

To be an effective ambassador, you need three things:

1. Knowledge: An accurately informed mind.
2. Wisdom: An artful method of delivery.
3. Character: An attractive disposition and manner.

Why do you think these would be three crucial attributes of an ambassador for Christ? **[Teacher Note: Allow for responses.]**

One of the biggest reasons we get nervous is that we think every conversation has to end in a baptism or a conversion. We think we have to "close the deal" every time.

But look at what Jesus said in...

John 4:35–38 (ESV)

"...Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest... For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

Notice that Jesus mentioned two distinct seasons: sowing and reaping. Sowing is like gardening. It's the hard work of tilling the soil, planting the seed, fertilizing the ground, watering the crops, killing the pests, and pulling weeds. It takes a lot of energy and effort.

Reaping is the harvest. It is the moment someone wants to become a Christian or accepts your invitation to come to church with you. We often put all the pressure on ourselves to be harvesters, but most of the time God is calling us to be gardeners, because that takes the most time and effort.

So, if our goal isn't to convert people right then and there, what is it?
[Teacher Note: Allow for responses.]

Our goal is to put a stone in their shoe.

What do you think I mean by that? [Teacher Note: Allow for responses.]

Think about how it feels to have a tiny pebble in your shoe. You can't ignore it. You don't have to take your shoe off right away, but with every step you take, you are reminded it's there until you eventually have to stop and address it.

Our goal in conversation is to give people something to think about that they can't ignore. We want to "annoy them in a good way." We want to get them thinking that perhaps Jesus is worth a second look, even if it takes them weeks or months to come to that conclusion.

Activity

Let's look at a quick scenario to see how this works in real life. Imagine a conversation between Jordan (a Christian) and Maya (a skeptic).

[Teacher Note: Bring a guy and a girl student up to the front and give them the "Week 1 – Scenario Script" to have them act out. This exercise works better, and it is easier to follow if you have some outgoing students who can recite lines smoothly.]

Let's talk about the conversation between Jordan and Maya for a minute. Was Jordan a soldier or an ambassador? Why? [Teacher Note: Allow for responses.]

He was an ambassador. He didn't call Maya names or tell her she was foolish. He used diplomacy and simply asked questions. When Maya went home, what is the stone that will be bothering her? **[Teacher Note: Allow for responses.]**

It's the realization that her worldview doesn't make sense. She has to wonder, if I believe bullying is really wrong, maybe truth isn't just an opinion?

Why did Jordan leave the conversation so abruptly? **[Teacher Note: Allow for responses.]**

If he had stayed and "preached" for 20 minutes, Maya would have become defensive and not listened to a word he had to say. By leaving, he left her alone with the "stone." He let the Holy Spirit do the work of the gardener.

Landing

As we wrap up today, I want you to take these three points home with you:

1. As Christians, we need to always be ready and willing to defend our faith. It is a command.
2. We are to operate with diplomacy, not with weapons. Our character must be as attractive as our message.
3. Our goal is not to win arguments, but to win people. Sometimes the best way to do that is simply to leave a "stone" in their shoe; a thought that leads them closer to the Truth.

Next week, we will look at the first tactic we can use to turn uncomfortable conversations into something else. Let's pray.