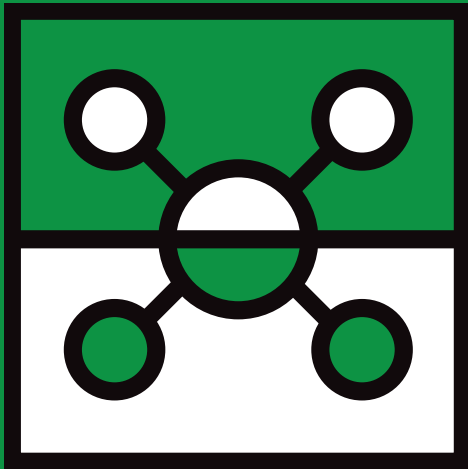


IX 9Marks

What If I'm Discouraged in My Evangelism?



**Isaac
Adams**

Church Questions

Endorsements for the Church Questions Series

“Christians are pressed by very real questions. How does Scripture structure a church, order worship, organize ministry, and define biblical leadership? Those are just examples of the questions that are answered clearly, carefully, and winsomely in this new series from 9Marks. I am so thankful for this ministry and for its incredibly healthy and hopeful influence in so many faithful churches. I eagerly commend this series.”

R. Albert Mohler Jr., President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Sincere questions deserve thoughtful answers. If you’re not sure where to start in answering these questions, let this series serve as a diving board into the pool. These mini-books are winsomely to-the-point and great to read together with one friend or one hundred friends.”

Gloria Furman, author, *Missional Motherhood* and *The Pastor’s Wife*

“As a pastor, I get asked lots of questions. I’m approached by unbelievers seeking to understand the gospel, new believers unsure about next steps, and maturing believers wanting help answering questions from their Christian family, friends, neighbors, or coworkers. It’s in these moments that I wish I had a book to give them that was brief, answered their questions, and pointed them in the right direction for further study. Church Questions is a series that provides just that. Each booklet tackles one question in a biblical, brief, and practical manner. The series may be called Church Questions, but it could be called ‘Church Answers.’ I intend to pick these up by the dozens and give them away regularly. You should too.”

Juan R. Sanchez, Senior Pastor, High Pointe Baptist Church, Austin, Texas

What If I'm
Discouraged in
My Evangelism?

Church Questions

How Can I Love Church Members with Different Politics?, Jonathan Leeman and Andy Naselli

What If I Don't Desire to Pray?, John Onwuchekwa

What If I'm Discouraged in My Evangelism?, Isaac Adams

What Should I Do Now That I'm a Christian?, Sam Emadi

Why Should I Join a Church?, Mark Dever

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Isaac Adams

 **CROSSWAY**[®]
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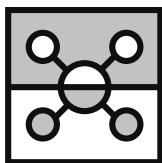
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Who is sufficient for these things?

2 Corinthians 2:16

Such is the confidence that we have
through Christ toward God. Not
that we are sufficient in ourselves to
claim anything as coming from us,
but our sufficiency is from God.

2 Corinthians 3:4–5



A lion sat in front of me.

For years now, Sunday after Sunday, I've seen my pastor, Mark Dever, boldly declare the gospel and known his reputation as a faithful personal evangelist. Yes—*this* man was an evangelist. *This* man was a lion for the truth.

Until he wasn't.

One day, Mark shared with our church how he didn't feel so much like a *lion* evangelist but a *lousy* evangelist, at least in terms of his personal evangelism. He cited one encounter as proof.

On a flight, Mark wanted to share the gospel with the guy sitting next to him but hadn't had the opportunity, as his neighbor quickly put on his

headphones. Standing at baggage claim after the flight, Mark and this man struck up a conversation. It took a turn Mark wasn't expecting when the man said, "Man, I'm so glad you're not one of those evangelical Jesus freaks. Have you ever been on a plane with them? Oh, it's *the worst*. There you are, you can't leave, and they just go on and on."

Mark thought about what to say—and then Mark said nothing. They got their luggage and parted ways.

Of course, Mark's silence could've been wisdom: "Answer not a fool according to his folly" (Prov. 26:4). But Mark confessed that wisdom didn't motivate him in that particular moment. Fear of man did.

Mark startled me with his humility. It takes a lot to use yourself as a negative example in public. I mean, this was *Mark Dever*. The man had literally written a book called *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism!*

Mark's story profoundly affected me. I didn't assume that "if he can't do it, there's no hope for me." Instead, I found myself in good company. If even my pastor faltered in evangelism from time to time, then there must be some hope for me.

What's Common to Us

Too often, I'm like Mark in that airport. And if you've picked up this little book, my guess is you are too. Maybe at one point in your life, you told the gospel to anyone who might listen, but you've felt that passion cool. Or maybe you're eager to share the gospel with taxi drivers or other folks you'll (in all likelihood) never see again, but not so eager when it comes to sharing the gospel with folks you see regularly.

Whatever it is, let Mark's example remind you of the apostle Paul's words: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man" (1 Cor. 10:13). In other words, you're not alone.

What's also common to Christians, however, is our commitment to evangelize the lost. By "evangelize," I mean sharing the gospel with someone in hopes that they repent of their sins and believe in Christ for salvation. Every Christian should engage in evangelism. The Bible makes this point repeatedly:

- Matthew 28:18–20
- Mark 12:31
- Acts 1:8; 8:4; 11:19

- Romans 10:12–15
- 2 Corinthians 5:11–21
- Ephesians 4:15
- 1 Peter 3:15

In those passages, you'll find examples and instruction to share the gospel. Just to make sure we're talking about the same thing, here's what I mean when I use that word *gospel*. The gospel is the message that God is holy and people are not, but Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross, and was raised three days later for those who would turn from their sin and trust in him. In so doing, they receive the gift of eternal life.¹

This book is for those who want to share that gospel message but, for whatever reason, struggle to do so faithfully. Perhaps you get awkward or silent when an opportunity to share the gospel emerges, or you feel like you don't live a good enough life to tell people about a good God. Maybe you don't want to lose a job or friendships. But following Christ means loving those who don't follow Jesus, and that love includes sharing the gospel.

What are some reasons you may not be sharing the gospel? Do you expect the church staff to do it or perhaps just the extroverts in the church? Are you too busy with your plans to think about someone else's eternal state? Are you a Christian in name but a Universalist in practice, acting as if God will simply save everyone in the end anyway? Are you ashamed of God's justice and goodness in judging and condemning sinners? If any of these reasons describe you and your lack of evangelism, I'd like to gently say two things:

First—you need to repent.

Second—there's hope for you.

If you're a discouraged evangelist, or if you feel like one, this book is for you. The good news for bad evangelists is that the same gospel we want to preach to others is the same gospel that gives us the power to obey Christ's command to share the gospel with others.

Understanding Our Job in Evangelism

How do you define success in evangelism? What makes a "good" evangelist? Many Christians assume that good evangelists are those

who regularly see conversions from their evangelistic efforts, while bad evangelists don't see conversions. But according to Scripture, a bad evangelist is simply any Christian who doesn't regularly share the gospel—no matter the results. Now when I say “regularly,” you may want to know how many people you should evangelize to be considered “regular.” But the Bible doesn't give such a number and seeking one might reveal a wrong posture toward evangelism—treating it more like a chore to check off your spiritual to-do list than a privilege to enjoy.

Evangelism shouldn't be something we merely *have* to do; it's something we *get* to do. Evangelism may be our job, but it should primarily be our joy. Just consider: *God* has given *us* the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). The King of kings has us as his messengers!

So instead of asking how many people you should evangelize each week, ask yourself: “Could I be described as someone who faithfully shares the gospel out of love for God and my neighbor?” We can be more or less faith-

ful, but generally, how would you say you're doing?

Rightly understanding our job in evangelism is crucial because we easily get discouraged in evangelism *for the wrong reasons*. Discouragement is one of Satan's favorite arrows, and he loves to confuse and dishearten evangelists into silence.

You may be sharing the gospel faithfully but have yet to see someone actually believe. That's hard. But our job is to proclaim salvation not produce it. We're called to deliver a message to people; God's the one who delivers people from sin.

Imagine how odd it would be if a mailman was discouraged because he thought "Every time I deliver a letter and someone opens it, they don't like what they read!" It's not the mailman's job to make people *like* the mail but to *deliver* it. Likewise, it's our job to deliver the gospel to people, and God's job to cause them to believe the gospel. We share the faith, and God grants the faith. As Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father" (John 6:65).

Our Joy & Job	God's Joy & Job
Sharing the gospel	Granting faith in the gospel

Too often, Christians are like *discouraged* mail carriers for the gospel. Is that you? If it is, let me encourage you to consider turning your attention from your evangelism to the character of God. Discouraged evangelists should hope in God. Why? Well, we have countless reasons, but the following nine reasons have particularly encouraged me. I pray they do the same for you.

What's Our Hope?

1) Hope in God Who Counts Us Righteous in Jesus

So, it happened again.

You clammed up.

You feared man.

You didn't share the gospel.

A pang of grief nags you. *Some evangelist I am.* But don't shoo this thought away too fast. After all, grief—good, godly grief—leads to re-

pentance (2 Cor. 7:8–10). Yet the main reason we can repent is the main thing we often lose sight of: God's grace given to us in God's Son, Jesus. He is our hope before God.

Even if you've been sinfully silent in evangelism, take comfort from 1 John 2:1:

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

If you're a discouraged evangelist, remember this: *Jesus, not your evangelistic track record, is your righteousness before God.* Of course, we shouldn't use this truth as an excuse not to evangelize. We don't sin so that grace can abound (Rom. 6:1). Rather, those who've been freed from sin want to obey. We want to love Jesus. It's our love for Jesus and his love for us that motivates our evangelism (2 Cor. 5:14). Guilt may motivate you for a while, but that motivation won't last. However, knowing Jesus and the grace God has given you through him—enjoying him more than you do your career or yourself—will make

you a faithful evangelist. Reflecting on God's grace will make you care more about what God thinks of you than what people think of you.

Sharing Jesus comes from the overflow of loving Jesus. This may surprise you to hear in a book on evangelism, *but evangelism isn't everything—Jesus is*. He's our Lord, yes, but he's also our brother, one who sympathizes with our weakness (Rom. 8:29; Heb. 4:15).

So relax.

Enjoy God's grace.

Enjoying God, it turns out, is a large part of what it means to obey God. Discouraged evangelists too often think they can be dutiful evangelists without being happy evangelists. Yet we shouldn't separate the two.

If you don't want to be a discouraged evangelist, fix your eyes on Jesus. Strive to enjoy him more. No grandparent has to be told to talk about their grandkids. Their delight in them bubbles over. While talking about grandchildren doesn't offend people the way talking about Jesus might, the principle holds true: the more we delight in Jesus, the more we'll share Jesus. As one author wrote, "Our power in drawing

men to Christ springs chiefly from the fullness of our personal joy in Him, and the nearness of our personal communion with Him.”²

What are some ways to reflect more deeply on the gospel and on the grace of Christ?

- Spend time meditating on God’s word.
- Pray through passages of Scripture and ask God to impress on your heart a greater love for the gospel.
- Regularly attend your church and seek out discipling relationships with other saints.
- Read biblically faithful books that hold out the character of God and the promises of the gospel (you might consider starting with Tim Chester’s excellent book *Enjoying God*³).

These are just a few suggestions. Ultimately, if you want to grow in evangelism, do all you can to fix your eyes on God’s Son, our brother, Jesus.

2) Hope in God Who Blesses Us with Children

Family is a wonderful gift. The Bible regularly reminds us that a wife and children are gifts from the Lord (Ps. 127:3; Prov. 19:14). What’s

more, all Christians can enjoy the gift of family in the local church—brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers in the faith (1 Tim. 5:1–2). Just as family is for everyone, so is this section.

Writing to his son in the faith Timothy, the apostle Paul commended Timothy’s family for faithfully sharing the gospel with Timothy.

I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. . . . Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings. (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14–15)

Don’t miss this detail about Timothy: his grandma and mom spiritually influenced him. Timothy first heard the gospel from them. Never underestimate the spiritual value of raising your children in the fear of the Lord. *Parents, keep sharing the gospel with your kids. They are your primary gospel audience.*

One reason Christians don't share the gospel is because we feel like we're not good at it. We clam up; we fear what people might think; we feel bad; and the cycle repeats. But what if there was hope for our timid evangelism? Isaac Adams encourages disheartened evangelists to hope in God, not their efforts. If you've ever felt discouraged in your evangelism, you're in good company, and you're a prime candidate for God's grace. Come and be reminded of it once more, so that you might joyfully share the gospel again.

Church Questions is a series that seeks to provide ordinary Christians with sound and accessible biblical teaching by answering common questions they have about church life. Each volume offers biblical answers and practical applications with the goal of nurturing healthy church practice and commitment.

Isaac Adams (MDiv, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) serves as a pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC, where he lives with his wife and two children. He is the founder of United? We Pray, a ministry dedicated to prayer for racial strife between Christians.

EVANGELISM AND OUTREACH

