

“I read this through in one sitting—it is realistic, challenging and wonderfully helpful. I am anxious to get this book into the hands of my congregation.”

ALISTAIR BEGG, Founder of *Truth for Life*

“If we are honest, none of us find evangelism easy and we make a lot of excuses. This down-to-earth, practical book provides us with useful tools to help us overcome our fear.”

STEVE CLIFFORD, General Director of the Evangelical Alliance, UK

“Rico Tice has a love and passion for sharing the message of a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ.”

NICKY GUMBEL, Vicar of Holy Trinity Brompton, London; pioneer of Alpha

“Honest to a fault and deeply challenging—but big-hearted, Christ-centred and wonderfully encouraging. That is *Honest Evangelism*, because that is Rico Tice—witness to sinners and equipper of saints. *Honest Evangelism* is a much needed book from someone who knows what he is talking about.”

SINCLAIR FERGUSON, Teaching Fellow of Ligonier Ministries

“A great read that is both realistic and hopeful about our evangelism, written by a man whom God has used mightily to spread the gospel. Every Christian will benefit from this.”

REBECCA MANLEY PIPPERT, author of *Out of the Saltshaker* and *Uncovering the Life of Jesus*; founder of *Becky Pippert Ministries*

“A good and timely book that is rich in wisdom, grace and guidance. Challenging, liberating and above all encouraging. Read it!”

J. JOHN, Director of the Philo Trust; author of *Just10*

“We desperately need to read this book. It is compelling, and made me want to speak to my neighbours and friends about the Lord Jesus. Honest Evangelism is the Know and Tell the Gospel for today. I pray that every Christian will read it!”

GARY MILLAR, Principal, Queensland Theological College, Australia; author of *Saving Eutychus*

“There are plenty of ‘how to’ books on evangelism—this isn’t one of them. It speaks to the heart, engages with the realities of a hardening culture, and with genuine freshness faces me with my hurts and fears and encourages me to overcome them.”

HUGH PALMER, Rector of All Souls Langham Place, London

“Rico is one of the clearest and most faithful evangelists alive today, and no one is in a better position to write a book like this for cultures where the good news sounds remote and increasingly encounters hostility. I can’t wait to use it.”

MICHAEL HORTON, Professor of Theology and Apologetics, Westminster Seminary, California; author of *Ordinary*

“Rico Tice writes from the Christian trenches to give us a book that is realistic about witnessing, gives us reasons to keep at it, and offers us the resources to use. This book will help the church stop copying, and start helping, the world.”

SIMON MANCHESTER, Rector of St Thomas, North Sydney, Australia

“I couldn’t be more excited about this hard-hitting, honest book. Not only did I enjoy Tice’s insights into Scripture and solid theology, I also found myself drawn to his appropriate and vivid stories throughout the book. Bottom line: I really, really like *Honest Evangelism* and commend it to you.”

J. MACK STILES, Elder in the Redeemer Church of Dubai; author of *Marks of the Messenger* and *Evangelism*

RICO TICE
WITH CARL LAFERTON



Honest
EVANGELISM

How to talk about Jesus
even when it's tough


the good book
COMPANY

*For my wife, Lucy, valiant for truth
and for my father, Trevor, always providing*

Honest Evangelism: *How to talk about Jesus even when it's tough*

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FOREWORD

by D.A. CARSON, Professor of New Testament,
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Wheaton;
President of The Gospel Coalition

The changes taking place in Western cultures are both discouraging to Christians and, ironically, encouraging. More precisely, most of the changes themselves are discouraging, but they are calling forth a different set of changes that are encouraging. The book you are holding in your hand is one of these encouraging changes.

The discouraging changes are easy to list. Rising biblical illiteracy means that there is less and less cultural consensus around things like the Ten Commandments. Honour is an old-fashioned word, easily mocked; truth is increasingly flexible; the lust for power, success, and money has become more and more transparent and unchecked; dignity is old-fashioned; cruelty and vengeance are sometimes depicted as virtues.

Thirty years ago, if I were speaking with an atheist, that atheist would most likely be a “Christian” atheist; that is, the God in which the atheist did not believe would be the Christian God—which meant that the categories for discussion were still on my turf. That can no longer

be assumed, and so even our efforts at evangelism are troubled by the fact that Christians live in a different world that seems alien to many people all around us.

Not long ago, I was talking with a grieving man who had recently lost his adult daughter. I commiserated with him, and slowly began to talk about life after death, and of knowing someone who had passed that way. He immediately brightened up and responded: “I know just what you mean! My daughter had a lovely garden. I think she’d like to come back as a butterfly”, and once again I was struck by the brutal fact that in our respective “speeches”, he and I were passing like ships in the night, living in parallel universes, needing to start much farther back if we were really going to communicate. More broadly, Christians are increasingly dismissed as intellectually inferior, or, worse yet, narrow and blind, with the presumption to insist that this Jesus of theirs is the only way to God. Christians are hate-filled bigots who should be ignored, and, perhaps, suppressed.

So where are the encouraging elements?

As the social cost of claiming to be a Christian increases, the percentage of nominal Christians decreases. To put this another way, the decline in church numbers over the past quarter-century is largely a decline in nominal believers—and that means the percentage of Christians who are in for the long haul, regardless of whether they are lauded in the culture at large, is gently increasing. Many churches that gladly affirm and preach the gospel, and that insist that genuine Christians learn to take up their cross daily, are made up of converted men and women who, with joy,

delight in being forgiven by the God who made them and who will be their final Judge. These believers live their lives here with at least one eye captured by visions of eternity; that is where their greatest treasures are being stored up. In other words, at the very moment when many voices in Western cultures are turning away from the Christian foundations that played a significant role in making us what we are, a new and younger generation is turning back to the Bible again. These “encouraging elements”, as I’ve called them, are small; but, like the cloud the size of a man’s hand on the horizon in Elijah’s day, they may herald mighty showers.

When the surrounding cultures become as negative toward faithful Christianity as they are, we must not forget that we are not the first generation to face such challenges. In his day, Jesus asserted that it was precisely because he spoke the truth that many did not believe (John 8 v 45). There are times when the truth is so out of phase with popular beliefs that it becomes positively repulsive to many people. When that happens, the proclamation of the truth has the effect of blinding eyes, deafening ears, and hardening hearts, as Isaiah found out (Isaiah 6 v 8-10). It is what brought Jesus to the cross. Yet ironically, it is precisely by the foolishness of Christians proclaiming the truth anyway that some hearers do repent, believe, and are saved. Or, to resort to one of Paul’s metaphors, Christians and their message become a sweet, life-giving aroma to some, and the stench of death to others (2 Corinthians 2 v 15-16). In a word, biblical Christianity becomes polarising.

Rico Tice understands these things, and wants other Christians to understand them, too. In a polarised culture where Christian convictions are not in good odour, where are courage and joy in Christian witness to be found? What does Christian witness look like—both in the hard times when the mockery becomes savage, and in the good times when people are transformed by the gospel? This book, more than others in this genre, tells it like it is, and thus prepares believers to be faithful followers of Jesus, in the long train of prophets who faced ridicule long before we did (Matthew 5 v 10-12). This book thus stands as one of the encouraging markers of our day, a book that doesn't minimise the challenges, but directs us to Christ and his gospel to teach us to be overcomers.

D.A. Carson

INTRODUCTION

I find evangelism hard.

The problem with being an evangelist is that people assume that you find evangelism effortless; but I don't find it easy, and never have. For me, telling people about Jesus has often been nerve wracking. But it has been joyful. My hope in writing this book is that I'll help you experience some of the heavenly joy in finding the lost that floods out at the end of one of Jesus' most famous parables, about the shepherd who finds a lost sheep:

When he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep." I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent. (Luke 15 v 5-7)

In a few brushstrokes, Jesus shows us that something of great value is lost. There's an all-out search to find it. Then when it's found, there's unbridled joy right across heaven.

And that "something" is people. God is the great evangelist, the great seeker and finder of people; and he's

called his followers to the same pursuit and the same emotion.

I've felt some of that soaring joy over the years, as I've seen the Lord seek and find lost people; and I will try and keep that before you and share it with you, while taking an honest look at some of the gruelling aspects of the loss and the search.

1. TWO HALVES OF THE STORY

Coming to Christ is such an indescribable joy. When I was sixteen, my uncle was killed in a cliff fall. That was the first time I saw my father cry. And like dad, I had no answer to his death. So to hear from a teacher that Jesus Christ had got through death himself—and that he could get me through too—gave me such relief and hope. Suddenly, I could think of my own death and be at peace. And suddenly, life also made much more sense.

To know Jesus' love changed everything, because his love was so different from that of the world around me. I went to a school that, not surprisingly, raised its pupils on conditional love: *We'll love you if you prove yourself... if you're good enough... if you succeed.* The DNA of the whole place was about earning approval. And that kind of academic success was elusive for me, a dyslexic who couldn't read until I was nine (though on the plus side, I was very good at colouring in).

In this environment that says you aren't good enough, and so you need to prove yourself, can you imagine the joy that came in discovering that I didn't have to prove myself

to God; that I was given Christ's perfection for free; that I lived by his performance and not my own?

Prove yourself—not to him.

You aren't good enough—exactly.

Succeed—he already has.

So telling other people about Jesus seemed an obvious thing to do. But very quickly, I began to be mocked for it. Sometimes there was real hatred. Some of my classmates issued a four-page spoof newsletter targeted at me. Here's a taste from the first edition:

"My form of Christianity," muses Rico, "consists of making myself look like a total idiot [in reality, they used a stronger word] in front of large, intelligent audiences."

Rico, Christianity, you will find, is just a phase you're going through—don't let other people get caught up in your whirlpool of religious fantasy. Praise the Lord? Alleluiah? No. Just get lost [in reality, they used a stronger phrase].

I'd walk into lunch with the butterflies of knowing another newsletter had been sent round. It was horrible. I remember kneeling down by my bed one day and crying. I couldn't believe this was how it had worked out. I had come to faith in Jesus and thought: *This is wonderful*. I'd told other people and they had said: "No, it's not wonderful at all".

The novelist Graham Greene once wrote: "There's always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in". This was that moment for me, and

I remember thinking: *This is only the beginning. This is what it will be like to be a Christian. But how can you go back, now you've tasted the joy of knowing Jesus?*

The painline

Why am I telling you about the schoolboy experiences of a teenager a couple of decades ago? Because I think being a Christian in the west right now, in our culture, is not dissimilar to what I experienced back then. There may not be persecution, but we're in a culture of growing hostility to Christianity. It's not just apathy we face—it's antipathy.

Many people really don't like the gospel. Sometimes they express that politely, sometimes not politely at all; but they don't like it.

This shouldn't really surprise us. Think how incendiary much of what we believe is. We believe Jesus is the only way to know God. We believe the cross is the only way to be forgiven. We believe that one day, everyone will be judged.

So if you are going to talk to people about Jesus, you are going to get hurt. It is going to sever some relationships. It is going to provoke people. Not every time, and depending on our circumstances, friendship groups, workplaces and so on, our experiences will vary, but we will face rejection enough of the time to give us second thoughts, because I don't know about you, but I don't particularly like getting hurt. We're wired to assume that if we're getting hit, something's gone wrong. And so whenever I tell someone the gospel message, and get hit (metaphorically speaking), there's a temptation either to stop saying anything, or to change what I'm saying.

I know there's a painline that needs to be crossed if I tell someone the gospel; but I want to stay the comfortable side of the painline. Of course I do!

I think that's the main reason why we don't do evangelism. Most Christians, when they first come to faith, want to tell others. Why wouldn't you?! It's brilliant—in Jesus you're in relationship with the living God; you have an answer to death; you have an answer to your sin; you have a point and a purpose to your life. But sooner or later—and in the west, it's happening increasingly soon—someone mocks you or wounds you or dislikes you. And because you're not stupid, you figure it out: *I don't want to get hit, and this keeps getting me hit, so something's gone wrong here. I'll stop doing this.*

Jesus' sheep

But Jesus himself said that this is just normal. When he sent his disciples out on their own for the first time to tell others about him, here's how he described their mission:

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves.

(Matthew 10 v 16)

That's what Jesus says is going on when a Christian in the workplace or the coffee shop or at the meal table opens their mouth to talk about who Jesus is, why he came and what that means. Sheep among wolves... think about that for a moment. You don't see pictures of this in children's Bibles. We don't like to think or talk about it much. But it's the image Jesus uses.

Now why is it like that? Why is telling people about

Christ so hard? Because of what our world is like. Jesus describes it so vividly in this parable:

A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall round it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed. (Mark 12 v 1-5)

Jesus is aiming his words at the religious leaders of his day, but we share the same DNA as them. In other words, the picture of the vineyard is a picture of the world, and people are like God's tenants... and the tenants want to be the owners. Jesus says human beings use their freedom to deny the owner of this world his rights. We are tenants who want to be owners; so we act as if we are the owners, and we hate the real Owner. And so the Owner's messengers are not welcome. They get hit; they get hurt; they get killed.

Sheep among wolves. Messengers going to tenants who want to be owners. That's what evangelism is. That's what I realised as I knelt by my bed that night; and if you've been trying to tell friends and family about Christ, that's what you'll have discovered, too. And I bet that if you have stopped trying, it's because you've come to one of two

conclusions. Either you don't think it's working, because you got hit; or you don't think it's worth it, because you got hit.

Answering when attacked

And yet the Bible tells us that, even though there are times when it hurts, we are all to be witnesses. Here's a verse that every book on evangelism quotes, so I thought this one should too:

In your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. (1 Peter 3 v 15)

This looks great! I live with Jesus as my King, and I get ready for people to say to me: "What's different about you? I want to have what you've got. Please tell me about your hope, and where it comes from." So we sit down, I tell them the gospel, and they come to Christ and thank me for living with Christ as Lord and telling them about him.

But that's not what 1 Peter is about at all. Every chapter of that book is about how Christians suffer for being Christians. It's a letter written to churches who "suffer grief in all kinds of trials" as they're subject to "the ignorant talk of foolish people"—who face a "fiery ordeal" day by day (1 v 6; 2 v 15; 4 v 12).

So the next verse, after Peter talks of being prepared to give an answer, mentions people who "speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ" (3 v 16). The previous verse talks about how these Christians will "suffer for what is right" (v 14). Peter is talking about us

being ready and willing to talk about our gospel hope when people are attacking us for what we believe. He's talking about being willing to cross the painline and risk getting hurt for speaking out. He's talking about being prepared to answer people when they say: "The way you live offends me, and your beliefs seem ridiculous to me" or: "I don't like Christianity. Why on earth would you believe these things?" 1 Peter 3 v 15 is about getting attacked, and then answering back clearly, about Christ, and with respect.

You will get hit

Here's the thing: Jesus says we're sheep among wolves. The Bible tells us to answer those who attack us. But most books I've read on evangelism don't tell you that. There's always this suggestion that if you do evangelism in a certain way, or if you learn to be charming or funny or interesting as you share the gospel, you can avoid getting hit.

I want to be honest: if you tell non-Christians about Jesus, it will be painful. That's what the books (other than the Bible) don't tend to tell you.

And it's because we don't have this truth firmly in place that, when we screw up the courage to tell someone about Jesus and find ourselves being rejected, we stop what we're doing or we change what we're saying. No one ever warned us that this is what evangelism can be like! So the reason I've written this book, and the reason I'm talking about hostility to the gospel as well as the joy of the gospel in this opening chapter, is just to be very honest. If you live in the west, you live in a culture that is increasingly hostile to

Christianity. That's just how it is. In the UK, I think we're pretty much at the point where to hold Christian values and to speak Christian truth is to get hated. In the US, it seems that that's where it's heading.

And elsewhere in the world, it's far, far worse. The level of persecution we risk when we talk about Christ is nothing compared to what our brothers and sisters round the world face simply for following Christ. A couple of years ago I visited the Delhi Bible Institute in India. The students at this new college are being trained to take the message of Christ Jesus to areas where people have never heard it before. These guys keep a bag, ready packed, by the back door. That's so that if people come in the front to kill them, they can grab it and run. I was talking to one of the staff there about the possibility of suffering and she said: "Of course there'll be suffering. What do you expect?" And the first graduate of the Delhi Bible Institute got martyred within six weeks. He graduated, went up into the villages, preached about Christ, and got murdered. It wasn't unexpected, and he did it anyway.

That puts the pain of rejection or mockery as a result of talking about Jesus in the west into perspective, doesn't it? Compared with what Christians face in most of the world, someone laughing or sneering at me, or turning their back on a friendship with me, is a mere pinprick of pain. And compared to what Christians will enjoy in the world to come—a perfect eternity with the Lord Jesus—the costs of evangelism are, as the apostle Paul put it, "light and momentary troubles" because there is "an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Corinthians 4 v 17).

I know that. But it doesn't feel like that. It feels more painful than a pinprick, more hurtful than something light and momentary.

The other half of the story

But all this is only half of the story. I wanted to put it first because it's the half that usually gets hidden or missed out altogether. Evangelism does hurt. You do risk your reputation and relationships if you're going to talk about Jesus. There is increasing hostility to the gospel message.

But something else is going on, too. There is also increased hunger. The same rising tide of secularism and materialism that rejects truth claims and is offended by absolute moral standards is proving to be an empty and hollow way to live.

And that means that, excitingly, you're more and more likely to find people quietly hungering for the content of the gospel, even as our culture teaches them to be hostile towards it.

To some extent, it's always been this way. In fact, it's what Paul discovered in Corinth. It's easy to think of Paul as rampaging unstoppably around the eastern Mediterranean, confidently proclaiming Christ, joyfully accepting the beatings, knowing that his message was unstoppable, that his apostleship gave him huge authority, and that churches would spring up wherever he visited.

But that's not how Paul saw his work at all. When he visited Corinth, he was visiting a city built on trade, with a culture that prized chasing experience and promoting