

## An easy method for sharing your faith

You're going to Heaven because someone cared enough to tell you about Christ.

Who have you cared enough to tell? Who are you taking to Heaven with you?

If you just have a vague idea in your mind, it's never going to happen. You need to get specific.

One way to do this is to write down the names of six people you want to take to Heaven with you. They may be friends, family, or co-workers. They're people you care about, people you can invite to church, or people you can share the Good News with.

George Gallup did a survey that said in America there are 34 million people who said, "I would go to church if somebody invited me." Do you think you might know one of those people? Probably!

**The world is far more ready for an invitation than we are ready to invite.** So take the challenge. Write down the names of six people. Then pray and ask God to give you an opportunity to invite them.

Your first thought might be, "I don't know what to say!" Below is a simple four-step tool to help you on the word "BASE." Then at the proper time when you're talking with someone who wants a purpose for living and the hope of Heaven – but hasn't a clue how to get either one – you can ask, "Have you ever established a spiritual base for your life? These are the four things you need to do to get into Heaven."

**B – Believe** You must believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for you and showed He was God by coming back to life.

Do you believe that? If yes, then you're one fourth of the way there already.

A George Gallup poll said that 87 percent of Americans believe this. That's why Christians celebrate Easter. Do you believe? Then say, "I believe Jesus was who He said He was – God – and He proved it by coming back to life."

**A – Accept** You need to receive God's free forgiveness for your sin.

Would you like to accept that? I don't know anyone who'd reject it.

Why would you? If you've got this one, you're half way there. Do you agree, "I have sinned, and I need to accept God's free forgiveness for my sin"?

**S – Switch** Switch to God's plan for your life. That means you're going to say, "I'm no longer going to do what I want to do. I'm going to live the plan God made me for. I want to know God's purpose for life and from now on God's going to call the shots, not me."

When you become a Christian, you put a sign on your life that says, "Under New Management!" Now you're doing God's plan for your life. After all, *your* plan hasn't worked out too well.

If you're willing to do this, you're three quarters of the way there.

**E – Express** Express your desire for Christ to be the director of your life – the manager. The word in the Bible is Lord.

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*“It's just like when a baby is born into a family. That baby doesn't understand everything. That's the purpose of a church family – to help babies grow spiritually.”*

Rick Warren

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Are you ready to express that?

After explaining the four steps, ask the person if he or she is willing to take them. If he or she is, and if he or she has never received Christ into his or her life, lead in this simple prayer:

*"Dear God, I believe you sent your Son, Jesus, to die for my sins so I could be forgiven. I'm sorry for my sins, and I want to live the rest of my life the way you want me to. Please put your Spirit in my life to direct me. Amen."*

If you get the privilege of praying that prayer with someone, explain to the person that he or she has just crossed the line. The person has verbally put his or her trust in Christ. Let the person know that even if he or she doesn't understand everything yet, that's OK.

It's just like when a baby is born into a family. That baby doesn't understand everything. That's the purpose of a church family – to help babies grow spiritually.

Then, congratulate the person. They've just joined the family of God.

Does that seem hard? Do you think you could do that with somebody?

I was talking to one of our church members and she said, "I've been a Christian for many years, but I've never led anybody to Christ." After I shared this simple technique, she said, "I can do this! My dad is not a believer and we're not close, but I believe God wants me to call him."

She picked up the phone and called him and explained the four steps, and he joined in prayer with her and started crying. He is trusting Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord. Now her dad is going to Heaven.

She told me, "If I hadn't listened to the prompting of God's Holy Spirit and hadn't obeyed what He said, my dad would be headed for Hell."

Who is it that God has brought into your life to share the Good News with? God wants to use you.

Your Pastor Jim

## **Are There Many Paths to God?**

*There is only one way to heaven, and that is through Jesus Christ.*  
by Lee Strobel

Jesus often surprised people with teachings that cut across the grain of human nature. "Lose your life to save it." "The first will be last." "The meek will inherit the earth." "Rejoice in persecution." "Pray for your enemies." "It's better to give than to receive." "Turn the other cheek." These are revolutionary teachings.

But by far the most outrageous assertion that Jesus ever uttered is in John 14:6: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." This claim rankles people like nothing else. It's been called narrow-minded. It's been called bigoted. It's been called snobbish. Some of you are seekers and something inside of you chafes at the idea that Jesus is the only way to God, for you are living in a world where there seems to be endless options in virtually every area of life. For some of you this is a stumbling block to faith.

Why is this claim so controversial? One reason is that it strikes at the core of three great myths about religion.

### ***Myth 1: All religions are basically the same.***

The first myth is that all religions are basically the same. You've probably heard people say through the years that there may be distinctions between various world religions, but if you strip them down to their essentials, all religions fundamentally teach the same thing. In other words, all spiritual paths lead up the

same mountain because all religions basically teach the brotherhood and the sisterhood of men and women and the universal fatherhood of God.

Let's concede that there is some common ground shared by many of the world's religions, especially when you look at the level of basic values and statements of belief about morality. Respectful dialogue between people who represent different faith systems is a great starting point. But, at the same time, there are significant differences between the world religions that cannot be papered over. In fact, with this one outlandish assertion, Jesus boldly puts Christianity in a class by itself, because if the path to God is through Jesus, then Christianity cannot be reconciled with any other religion.

The uniqueness of Christianity is rooted in the uniqueness of Jesus himself. Other religious leaders say, "Follow me and I'll show you how to find the truth." But Jesus says, "I am the truth." Other religious leaders say, "Follow me and I'll show you the way to salvation." But Jesus says, "I am the way to eternal life." Other religious leaders say, "Follow me and I'll show you how you can become enlightened." But Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." See the difference?

There are drastic and irreconcilable differences between Christianity and all other belief systems. Every other religion is based on people doing things through their struggling and through their striving to earn the good favor of God. They say people have to use a Tibetan prayer wheel, or they have to go on pilgrimages, or they have to give alms to the poor, or they have to avoid eating certain foods, or they have to perform a certain number of unspecified good deeds, or they have to pray in a certain way, or they have to go through a cycle of reincarnation. These are attempts to reach out to God.

But Jesus Christ is God reaching out to us. Jesus taught the opposite of what those other faiths teach. He said that nobody could do anything to merit heaven, so you might as well stop trying. He said that we're all guilty of wrongdoing. That's consistent with our experience. We know that not a single person here today would claim to be perfect.

Jesus also said that our wrongdoing separates us from our God because God is holy and perfect. Because God is a righteous judge who by his very nature must judge wrongdoing, our wrongdoing has to be paid for. Because he loves us, because Jesus and God are for us and not against us, Jesus voluntarily offered himself as our substitute to pay the penalty that we owe because of our wrongdoing. When we receive his sacrifice on our behalf, we become reunited with God forever.

This distinction is starkly demonstrated by comparing a parable that was taught by Jesus with a similar story that is found in Buddhist literature. Both stories involve sons who became rebellious and left home in a huff, but who later saw the error of their ways and decided to return home. But it's the ending of the two stories that so clearly points out the difference.

In the Buddhist story, the errant son is required to work off the penalty for his past misdeeds through years and years of servitude. But the Christian parable of the prodigal son ends with the repentant son being warmly welcomed home by a loving father who showers him with undeserved forgiveness and undeserved grace.

There are other fundamental differences:

For instance, Christianity says that there is one eternal God who created the universe. But Hinduism says that everything is God; you are God, I am God, this podium is God. Islam denies that Jesus was God and that Jesus died for our sins. All religions are not the same.

While other religious leaders can offer wise sayings and helpful advice and insights, only Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God, is qualified to offer himself as payment for our wrongdoing. No other religious leader even pretended to be able to do that. Theologian R.C. Sproul puts it this way, "Moses could mediate on the Law. Mohammed could brandish a sword. Buddha could give personal counsel. Confucius could offer wise sayings. But none of these men was qualified to offer an atonement for the sins of the world." Jesus alone was qualified.

## ***Myth 2: Christianity is simply one philosophy among many.***

The second myth that Jesus dispels is related to the first myth. The second myth says that even though Christianity might be different, it's just one philosophy among many, and it's only as valid as any other religion. In other words, even if there are differences between religions, they all have equal claims on the truth. You have your truth, and I have my truth.

This myth is appealing because it seems to reflect the pluralistic attitude of the United States. On one level, that attitude is helpful. It is important that we are tolerant of people who believe differently than we do. The Bible tells us that those of us who are followers of Jesus need to be loving and respectful and accepting toward people of all faiths. Under our Constitution, all religious viewpoints are equally protected; anybody can believe whatever they want. But the problem is that some people jump to the erroneous conclusion that because different philosophies are equally protected, they must be equally valid. That's just not the case.

The concept behind what our Supreme Court calls the "marketplace of ideas" is that truth and falsehood will grapple in unhindered debate, so that truth will prevail in the end. So even though all religions are equally protected under our Constitution, this has nothing to do whatever with whether they are based on truth.

A few years ago, in one of his classic columns, Mike Royco said in a tongue and cheek way that he was a member of what he called "The Church of Asylumism." He explained that this church believes that there was an advanced civilization that lived in a distant galaxy millions of years ago. One day a few hundred of these aliens ate some tainted veggie dip and as a result, a virus hopelessly scrambled their brain. They tried to treat these victims, but nothing would work. So they decided to take them to an uninhabited planet that would serve as an asylum and where they could roam free and act goofy. That planet, Royco said, was earth. We're all descendants of those aliens. Royco said, "You want proof? Read history books! Look at the newspaper! Look at the TV news! Then tell me this isn't one big loony bin."

Royco, I hope, was kidding about being part of the Church of Asylumism. But in this country people have the right to believe whatever they want. If there really was a church of asylumism, under our Constitution, it would be as equally protected as Willow Creek Community Church, as the Methodist denomination, as the Episcopalians or any other religious group. But friends, that would not mean that the teachings of the church of asylumism were true.

Of course, this gives anybody in the country freedom to make the claim, as Jesus did, that they are the way and the truth and the life; that they are the only way to God. The question is, how do we know that Jesus was telling the truth?

Jesus backs up his claim with unique credentials. Jesus authenticated his claim of being God by living a perfect life, by embodying the attributes of God, and by fulfilling dozens of prophecies written hundreds of years before Jesus came to this planet. Unlike other religious leaders, Jesus also authenticated who he was by performing great miracles in broad daylight, in front of skeptics. He demonstrated his mastery over nature. He demonstrated his mastery over sickness. He demonstrated his mastery over death by bringing Lazarus back to life after four days in a cold, damp tomb. In the most spectacular demonstration of his deity, Jesus fulfilled his own prediction by being resurrected from the dead, in an historical event that was witnessed by more than 500 people and that sparked a spiritual revolution that has been unparalleled in the history of the world.

Christianity is not just a philosophy; it is a reality. Jesus didn't just claim that he is the one and only Son of God. He validated his claim with convincing evidence like nobody else in history.

## ***Myth 3: Christians are narrow-minded to think Jesus is the only way to heaven.***

The third myth says that Christians are narrow-minded and snobbish when they say that Jesus is the only way to heaven. If there were many roads to God and Christians were claiming, "Ours is the best," I would agree they were being narrow and arrogant. But that's not what Christians are saying. They are saying that somebody has got to pay the penalty for the obvious wrongdoings that keep us separated from God. By virtue of his sinlessness and by virtue of his divinity, Jesus is the only one qualified to be our

substitute. That, friends, is the reality of the situation. It is not narrow-minded to act in accordance with the evidence and to pursue truth.

A few years ago, some friends' baby girl developed jaundice, which is a disorder of the liver that caused her skin and the whites of her eyes to turn yellow. Of course her parents were very concerned, so they took the child to the pediatrician. The pediatrician told them jaundice is a potentially devastating disease, but it is also easily cured: all they had to do was to put the baby under a special light that stimulates healthy liver function.

The parents could have listened to this from the doctor and said, "That sounds too easy. Just put her under a light? What if instead we scrub her with soap and water and dip her in bleach? Certainly if we worked hard enough we could get her normal coloring back."

The doctor would have looked at them and said, "You don't understand. There is only one way to cure your daughter." They could have replied, "What if we just ignore all this and pretend everything's okay. The jaundice is your truth, doc; it's not our truth. If we sincerely believe that, things will turn out for the best in the long haul."

The doctor would have said, "You're going to jeopardize the life of your child if you do that. There is only one way to cure her. You're hesitant to pursue treatment because it sounds too easy. But look at the credentials on my wall. I've studied at medical school. I've used what I've learned to treat and to cure countless babies. Trust me."

Would anybody accuse those parents of being narrow-minded if they trusted a doctor with credentials and pursued the only course of treatment that was going to cure their little girl? Of course not! That is not being narrow-minded. That is acting rationally and in accordance with the evidence.

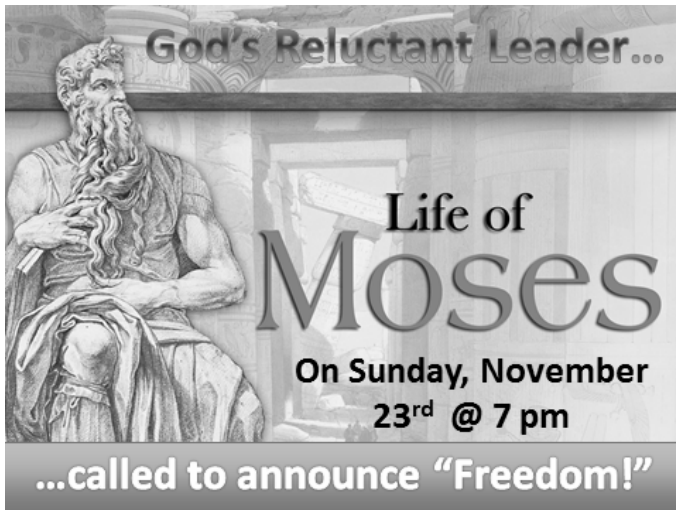
Every person in this room has a terminal illness called "sin." The reason those of us who follow Jesus cling to him so tightly is that he is the Great Physician who has the only cure. We could try to scrub away our sins with good deeds, but it will not work. We can sincerely think that there are other ways of dealing with it. But we would be sincerely wrong. The truth is that only the Great Physician offers a treatment that will erase the stain of sin. He has credentials and credibility to back him up. So when we turn to him, we're not being narrow-minded. We are acting rationally and in accordance with the evidence.

In addition to not being narrow-minded, it is anything but snobbish for Christians to believe Jesus is the only way to heaven. For a Christian to act holier than thou is snobbish, but to believe that Jesus is the only way is not. Let's pretend there are two country clubs. The first country club only admits people who have earned their membership. In order to get into this club, you have to obtain superior wisdom. You've got to fulfill a long list of demands. You've got to somehow attain certain spiritual advancement. You've got to go through cycles of reincarnation or whatever. Despite their best efforts, many people will not make the grade, and in the end, the door will be slammed in their face. They're not going to be good enough. They're not going to make the qualifications to get in.

This is what other religions are saying when they teach that people have to try and try to work their way to God. But Christianity is different. Christianity is like the country club that invites anyone who is interested, because Jesus has already paid for his or her membership. Rich or poor, black or white, regardless of your ethnic heritage, regardless of where you live, we would love to include you. The doors are wide open. Entry is not based on your qualifications. Entry is based only on you accepting Christ's invitation. Which faith system is snobbish?

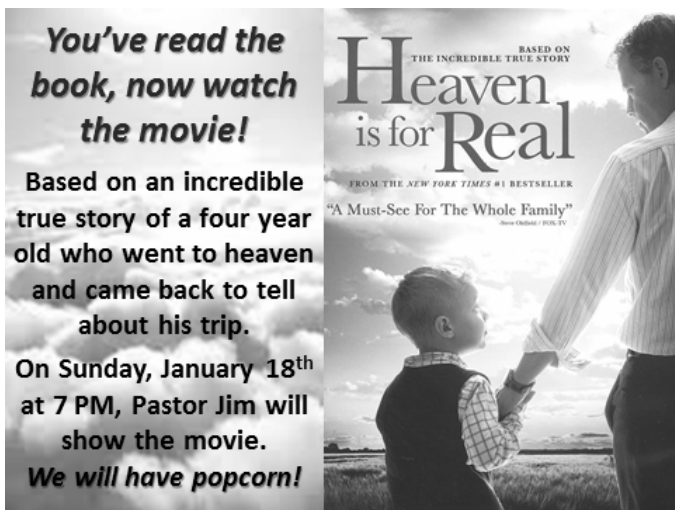
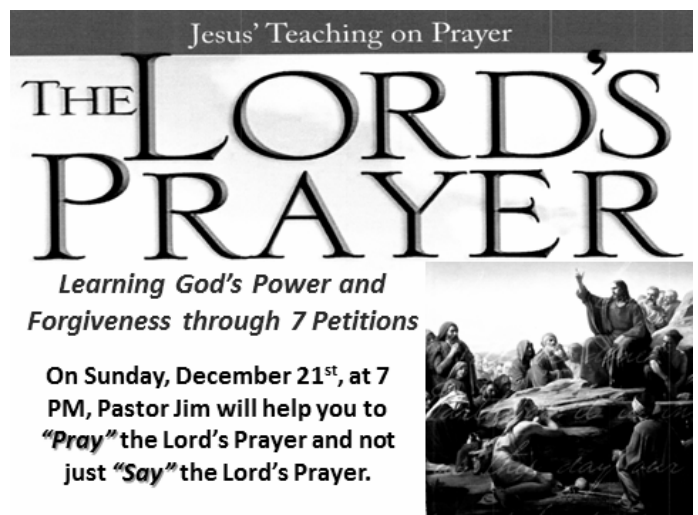
Christianity is unique. It cannot be reconciled with any other religion. It backs up its truth claims with the credentials and credibility of Jesus Christ, which cannot be duplicated by any other spiritual leader. That's why when Jesus said he was the way and the truth and the life, history does not laugh; history has been revolutionized by Jesus.

## Coming Sunday Evening Teaching Events



- On Sunday evening, November 23<sup>rd</sup>, Pastor Jim will teach on **“The Life of Moses.”**

- On Sunday evening, December 21<sup>st</sup>, Pastor Jim will teach on **“The Lord’s Prayer.”**



- On Sunday evening, January 18<sup>th</sup>, Pastor Jim will show the movie **“Heaven is for Real.”** This is a must see movie for every Christian.

**There is no cost to attend these Teaching Events and you don’t have to register in advance. These one night sessions would be something great to invite your friends and neighbors to come and join in the study of God’s Word.**

## Walk through the Bible Class for November

Come along for a trip through the Bible, book by book and learn new insights and meanings you may never have seen before. Pastor Jim gives you a thorough over-view of each book, and identifies any connection that Book has with the New Testament. He also shares with you how each book and its prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

The handout class material will become your personal commentary to that book, along with the extra reading that Pastor Jim provides, will provide insight and understanding for years to come.



### Class Schedule – 2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesdays of the Month

November 11<sup>th</sup> - 1 pm or 7 pm – Begin our study of the Introduction to the Major and Minor Prophets of the Old Testament

November 25<sup>th</sup> - 1 pm or 7 pm – Finish the Introduction to the Major and Minor Prophets and begin the study of the Book of Isaiah

December 9<sup>th</sup> - 1 pm or 7 pm – Continue the study of the Book of Isaiah

December 23<sup>rd</sup> – NO CLASS – CHRISTMAS BREAK

January 13<sup>th</sup> –1 pm or 7 pm – Finish the study of Isaiah and begin the Book of Jeremiah

January 27<sup>th</sup> –1 pm or 7 pm – Continue our study of Jeremiah

February 10<sup>th</sup> - 1 pm or 7 pm – Finish Jeremiah and begin the Book of Lamentations

February 24<sup>th</sup> - 1 pm or 7 pm – Continue our study of Lamentations

March 10<sup>th</sup> - 1 pm or 7 pm – Finish Lamentations and begin the Book of Ezekiel

March 24<sup>th</sup> - 1 pm or 7 pm – Continue our study of Ezekiel



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

# of plants \_\_\_\_\_

In honor of: \_\_\_\_\_

In memory of: \_\_\_\_\_

Cost per plant is \$8.00. Make checks payable to St. John Lutheran Church. Place order form and payment in box in the back of church or mail to the church office. Deadline for orders is Sunday, December 14<sup>th</sup>. Please pick up your plant(s) after the Christmas Eve worship service.