

~~get better~~  
~~get perfect~~  
~~get done~~  
~~get right~~  
~~get going~~  
get real

Sharing Your Everyday Faith Every Day

JOHN S. LEONARD

“John Leonard’s *Get Real: Sharing Your Everyday Faith Every Day* is a delightful read from a man who obviously delights in the gospel, loves people from all backgrounds, and rejoices in creatively and compassionately sharing the good news of grace in Christ Jesus as ‘normally’ as sharing a cup of coffee with a friend. Better yet, he teaches us how to do the same.”

**Bryan Chapell**, Pastor, Grace Presbyterian Church, Illinois; author of *Christ-Centered Preaching*

“Do you know why ‘party evangelism’ is more biblical than ‘friendship evangelism’? Do you know why (and how) to ‘evangelize Christians and disciple non-Christians’? Would you like a book about evangelism that is both solidly scriptural and thoroughly practical—and absolutely enjoyable to read? Then *Get Real* by John Leonard is the book for you. No question, this is one of the best books ever on evangelism.”

**Dr. Samuel Logan**, International Director, The World Reformed Fellowship

“When is the last time you talked to someone about Jesus? What comes to mind as you think about that question? Guilt? Frustration? Read John Leonard’s *Get Real* to encourage you to think differently about the people and opportunities Jesus brings into your life. Hear great stories from John’s experience reaching out to Muslims in France and as a church planter in Philadelphia. Read this book if you want to fall in love with the grace and power of the gospel all over again.”

**Dr. Tim Witmer**, Professor of Practical Theology, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia; author of *The Shepherd Leader*

“It’s always puzzled me how Christians who believe totally in the true humanity of Jesus should use such dehumanized methods to introduce him to others. Thankfully, Leonard has written this excellent book that takes the real Jesus as guide and example to liberate us from all those techniques, and to excite and motivate us to be truly ‘personal’ in our evangelism. Every evangelist—every Christian—needs to read it.”

**Dr. John D. Nicholls**, Former Chief Executive and Director of Training, London City Mission

“This is simply *the* best book on personal outreach I have ever seen. John Leonard has written for the evangelistically ungifted. Especially beginning in chapter 4, I sensed, ‘This material is going to change me.’ And it has.”

**Steven Estes**, Pastor; author of *A Better December*; co-author of *When God Weeps*

“This is a disturbing book. In all the right ways. John Leonard brings his considerable wealth of personal experience, cultural awareness, and biblical savvy to this eminently practical guide. Evangelism in Leonard’s approach is less daunting, less frightening, and less awkward than it needs to be. What is

disturbing is that we can no longer hide behind either bombastic boilerplates or timid excuses. What is comforting is that it allows Christ to do all the heavy lifting. If you are looking for the best resource for training in outreach, both personal and corporate, look no further.”

**William Edgar**, Professor of Apologetics, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia; author of *Truth in All Its Glory*

“If evangelism seems difficult, or if you have ever said, ‘I don’t have the gift of evangelism,’ you will wish you had read this book a long time ago. The *Get Real* paradigm is anchored in the Scriptures, and especially in the Gospel accounts of Jesus’s own process of evangelism. *Get Real* explains in easy-to-understand-and-apply ways that evangelism can be a natural part of a Christian’s daily routine. *Get Real* is the material we use to train our missionaries at Mission to the World, and it is appreciated by the missionaries because it works.”

**Paul Kooistra**, Coordinator, Mission to the World

“If you have one book on evangelism in your library, it should be this one. It’s not what you expect. It’s about life, relationships, and godly inefficiency—and it’s about a God who loves us so much that it shows. This is “real deal” evangelism that breaks the rules and opens a floodgate of love and mercy to a desperate and needy world. Reading Dr. Leonard’s book is like a drink of cold, clear water refreshing a thirsty soul . . . ours and theirs.”

**Steve Brown**, Key Life radio program Bible teacher; professor, Reformed Seminary; author of *Three Free Sins: God’s Not Mad at You*.

“John is a gifted evangelist, which could be intimidating as we watch him in action, but, somehow, he immediately inspired me. As I was reading I got excited about all kinds of conversations up ahead. Being real, listening, and always looking for opportunities for a party—I can do that.”

**Edward T. Welch**, PhD, CCEF Faculty; psychologist; best-selling author

“Like most in the church, I believe in evangelism but am honestly reserved about (afraid of?) practicing it with strangers. (Does teaching and caring for a Sunday school class weekly count as evangelism? I sure hope so!) John Leonard passionately believes in, practices, and teaches many creative ways of doing evangelism. If the world is as desperately in need as our Scripture instructs us it is, then John Leonard’s challenging book can teach us bravery. Taste and see!”

**Fredrick Dale Bruner**, Professor Emeritus, Whitworth University; author of commentaries on Matthew, John, and the Holy Spirit in Acts

“Grace-driven evangelism as a lifestyle versus guilt-driven evangelism as a structured event. John Leonard helps us understand how to be ‘real’ and ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ in sharing the grace and gospel of Christ with others. Jesus loved people and openly shared his life with them as he met them in everyday life. We should do the same, and this book will help you do so more naturally and effectively.”

**Robert C. (Ric) Cannada Jr.**, Chancellor Emeritus, Reformed Theological Seminary

# Get Real

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EVERY DAY

JOHN S. LEONARD



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# Acknowledgments

I wish I could tell you that everything in this book is mine, but it was modeled by some very important people in my life. I am mostly just telling you what I've learned from them.

The first of those people is Pat Hunter, a lover of God and a lover of people, who understood grace and shared it naturally with others. She touched everyone in her presence. She was a saint. My favorite quote of hers was one of the last words that she spoke to me. She said, "I've known Jesus for seventy years. I ain't got no better; Jesus has only gotten sweeter."

In 1978, I lived and worked as an intern with Dr. William T. Iverson and his family in Newark, New Jersey. I have never met anyone who could naturally turn a conversation to the gospel and illustrate its truths so powerfully.

Most importantly, my wife Christy loves others deeply. She loves because she knows she is wholly and completely loved by the Lord. Christy has shown me the love of Christ and models how I should demonstrate Christ's love.

I would also like to acknowledge our three daughters: Kimberly, Katie, and Betsy whom we love dearly and are so proud of. (Read the conclusion to understand this remark.)





# The Gospel We Share



# 1

## Two Ways to Witness

**"H**i, my name is Bill. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?" Without waiting for me to reply, he continued—violating my personal space in an aggressive stance that made me feel threatened. Bill jumped right into his presentation of the gospel. It was one that I knew well.

Bill and his team had come to help us with an outreach, and I had come down early to the auditorium to help set up. Bill had not asked me my name, and in fact didn't seem to want to know anything about me. He just cornered me and "shared." The more he spoke, the more perturbed I became. I felt insulted by the impersonal and dehumanizing way I had been approached. And since Bill had assumed I wasn't a Christian, I decided I would play along, giving him arguments for every point he was trying to make. The more unraveled and frustrated Bill became, the more I enjoyed our conversation.

The sales pitch ended quickly when a mutual friend came up to us and said, "John, I see you've met Bill. Bill, this is John; he is part of our local team and is here to help us with the outreach." Bill's mouth

dropped open, looking confused. He stammered, “But . . . are you . . . ? I don’t understand. Your answers weren’t . . .”

The outreach event went off without a hitch . . . so to speak. It was the typical Christian evangelistic meeting. A room full of Christians filled in as props, listening to other Christians tell them about the gospel, while everyone hoped someone in the room would be saved. But no one came forward when the invitation was given, and given, and given.

After the meeting, Bill came over, looking at me judgmentally. He said, “I still think there is something not quite right.” Funny, I was feeling exactly the same way about Bill—but for completely opposite reasons!



Fred rolled into the cafeteria on his three-wheeled scooter. He paused a distance from the table where my wife and I were eating lunch and asked, “May I join you?”

“Sure!” we responded. Everything about Fred communicated safety and acceptance. He was the most nonthreatening person I believe I have ever met.

At the time I was living in the inner city of Detroit with my wife Christy and our two small girls, doing cross-cultural training during the summer, in preparation to go to the mission field that fall. It had been a long, pressure-filled couple of months in the city. We couldn’t understand what living in the inner city of Detroit would teach us about life in the south of France, the mission field where we were headed.

I can’t tell you anything about Fred, as he never spoke about himself; his only interest was in us. He began asking questions as we shared our lunch together. His questions weren’t prying, inappropriate, or just making chit-chat, but invited us into a conversation. Fred was genuinely interested in us. You could see it in his eyes, the tone of his voice, and his body language. He wanted to know us—and we wanted to be known by him!

I can't explain what happened, but as we spoke together, a healing came over us. It felt as if warm oil was being poured over our heads. We could feel it going through our bodies, deep down into our bones, lifting the weight and pressure off of our shoulders, bringing calm over us.

I don't often think of the first encounter with Bill. In fact, I hope I never see Bill again. But Fred, yes—I would love to meet him again.

One reason that we're so reluctant to evangelize is because we believe that evangelism is doing what Bill did—imposing ourselves on others and leaving people cowering, feeling unimportant, used, and violated. We equate evangelism with selling. We see ourselves like those annoying phone solicitors who always seem to call us when we're sitting down to dinner! For this reason many of us run from anything that resembles evangelism. To have the gift of evangelism, it seems, you either need to have the personality of a used-car salesman or the capability to lead someone to Christ while in the 10-items-or-less lane at your local supermarket. If this is what you believe evangelism requires, I can't blame you for not wanting to evangelize.

As Christians, we know we should share our faith with others. However, we don't do it until we feel horribly guilty—then we force ourselves upon some poor, unsuspecting soul. We share the gospel the way they feed geese in France to make *foie gras*. They shove a funnel down a goose's throat and pour in the grain. Likewise, by force-feeding the gospel to others, the outcome of our "sharing" is that our guilt is assuaged. Who cares about the results? We didn't really expect anyone's life to be changed anyway.

The sad reality is that if you've ever watched a movie with caricatures of Christians, the truth is worse than fiction. Evangelism shouldn't be this way.

Evangelism doesn't have to be like my encounter with Bill; it can and should be like the time I spent with Fred. That kind of interaction leaves a deep personal impact. And yet the last word that would come to mind when you consider our interaction with Fred is "evangelism."



We would call what Fred does “counseling.” But it has everything to do with evangelism because we were made by God to have deep relationships with him and with others.

Sharing your faith doesn’t impose itself on others, leaving them feeling resentful and used. It invites people to step beyond a superficial friendship where no one really cares about listening, and to head toward deep spiritual relationship. It’s an approach that makes it safe for people to confide in you and trust you with the truth of what’s going on in their lives, so that your interaction with them becomes like warm oil, bringing healing, peace, and grace, lifting the burdens off their shoulders.

A real approach is not a presentation that you memorize, because the gospel you share is shaped by the person the Lord has brought into your life. It is molded by that person’s particular circumstances, problems, and struggles. In this approach to evangelism, the gospel is not a one-size-fits-all spandex sweatsuit; it is tailor-made, fitting only one person—the one standing in front of you.

Just because there isn’t an outline to memorize doesn’t mean this way of sharing your faith is easy. It requires you to have a wide and growing knowledge of the Bible and of our Lord’s teachings. One of the best ways to prepare to share your faith is to take notes in Bible study and church—not just to read the Bible, but to study it and absorb it. Read widely so you can be like the scribes of the kingdom our Lord speaks about when he says, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (Matthew 13:52).

At the same time, don’t be intimidated if you’re a new Christian. New Christians can make the best evangelists. Don’t believe for one moment that you don’t know enough. You’re looking for the people God is leading to himself through you. Therefore, God is going to use you in their lives because you have unique insights and experiences into the gospel that perfectly fit the people you’re sharing your faith with.

This book is divided into two parts. The first part is a look at the gospel from Scripture. My prayer is that you will fall in love again in the retelling of the story of the grace of God that is yours in Christ.

Once, when my wife and I were in a difficult place in our marriage, another couple invited us to dinner, unaware of what was going on in our lives. They asked us to share the story of how we met and fell in love. As we retold the story my wife and I fell in love all over again. I hope that you too will fall in love again with the gospel as the story is retold.

The second part of this book is about the way you set the gospel free in your life, so that your interactions with people become sources of grace and healing. Most of the ways we do this are counterintuitive to conventional wisdom.

This book is about grace, not guilt. This book does not guilt you into sharing your faith because you can't share grace if you're under guilt. It's about setting you free so that you'll be able, by God's grace, to impact those around you for Christ.

### Discussion Questions

1. How would your feelings about evangelism change if you thought of it more as a "Fred experience" than a "Bill experience"?
2. How can you shift from sharing your faith out of guilt or obligation to sharing as a response to God's grace?
3. What questions do you have about this approach that you hope will be answered in this study?