



Learning Evangelism from Jesus

Jerram Barrs

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Studying Jesus' conversations with diverse people in his day, Jerram Barrs draws lessons and principles for attractively communicating the gospel to unbelievers in our day.

Living in a culture that is opposed to Christianity tempts God's people to conform, to retreat, to be silent. But Jesus showed the way to live faithfully before an unbelieving world.

As the greatest evangelist, Jesus exemplified how to attract people to the gospel. He modeled how to initiate spiritual conversations full of grace and truth. Christian evangelism, then, both in theory and practice, must be shaped by his pattern.

Seeking to articulate the passions and principles present in Christ's life and words, longtime L'Abri staff member Jerram Barrs has studied Jesus' diverse encounters with people throughout the Gospels. Each chapter of *Learning Evangelism from Jesus* recounts one of those stories, draws useful lessons for readers' lives and communication of the gospel, and concludes with questions for further reflection and application. This highly practical book will guide Christians in how to live before unbelievers and how to love them into the kingdom, just as Jesus did.

Learning Evangelism from Jesus Details

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From Reader Review Learning Evangelism from Jesus for online ebook

Tim Woody says

The better of Barrs books on evangelism. What I found best about the book is the intimate personal and scriptural reflections from which he derived his applications. The book is easy to reference, with good grounded subtitles. Each section also identified the application of each chapter, which were the highlights of this book.

Becca Taylor says

Although I was a little hesitant about this book at first, it turned out to be an excellent read. I was leary in the beginning because of the title. "Evangelism" can have a lot of baggage to it. In my experience, evangelism books often try to present a "one-size-fits-all" approach. That has never worked out for me in real life. Barr's book does just the opposite though - or maybe I should say, Jesus does just the opposite, and this book has made explicit note of that.

One of the main themes that continued throughout, was the fact that each person was different, and were coming to Jesus with different intents. Some were Pharisees; trying to trap Jesus in some way or another, others were women; social outcasts, and some were tax collectors; powerful but shrewd citizens of the day. Although Jesus is divine and knew the inner workings of each of these people he spoke to, the fact that what he said was entirely different to each person is an observation of importance. I think it is one of the most critical points in the book. One of the implications of this is the fact that we have to know who the person is in order to appropriately present the gospel. This then leads to the fact that we won't present the gospel the same to every person.

If I had just read through this book without knowing the title, I might not even think it was specifically a book about evangelism. Each chapter follows a similar outline: What did Jesus say and do to who and why, and then how does that apply to us. I felt like I got to know Jesus better through this exposition. At the end of each chapter I found myself thinking, "Wow, this book is so good!", but then realized, I think I like this book so much because it's talking about Jesus, and it was revealing how amazingly countercultural Jesus is and how much his love abounds. I not only gained in knowledge of Jesus and better understanding of the stories told of him, but I found this to be a source of great personal devotion time. I found myself searching my heart, repenting, and praying while reading this. I also particularly appreciated Barr's contextual and historical approach, something that I think is absolutely vital when trying to understand the scriptures accurately.

One other main theme that stood out to me, was the fact that Barr's never spoke of an unbeliever with disdain, but rather had a firm calling to the believers - the church. He thinks one of the major problems that the church has today, "is the issue of the way we treat unbelievers because of their sin". And that "any true giving of ourselves to righteousness... will never lead us to pride, but rather humility before the Lord". Unfortunately, the church today can look a lot like the Pharisees; afraid to approach "the sinners" because they are too caught up in "staying holy" and following their rules. Jesus however dined with the tax collectors, which was considered an intimate encounter. He not only spoke to the samaritan women, but drank from the cup she touched. He spoke with love and equality to her in plain day. He came not for the healthy but to heal the sick. As Christians we are the visible representation of God and his love. Although I can't do this on my own, as 1 John 5 says, because I have faith and have been born of God, I have conquered

the world, and can live out his commandments victoriously.

James says

There is a simplistic beauty in learning evangelism by observing the record of Christ's work in Scripture. Coming from an evangelical tradition where Scripture is held as the guide for all wisdom in life, it seems completely natural to look at Jesus in this way. There are many methods of evangelism in the modern Christian scene but in my experience, I have not had the pleasure of encountering a philosophy of practicing evangelism that sought to base its understanding and method on the example of Christ. Jerram Barrs' book, *Learning Evangelism from Jesus*, has been my first such encounter with such a clearly defined focus on learning how to declare the Gospel primarily by examining various encounters that Jesus had. I tend to feel like I am living passively in my faith in Christ if I am not being challenged to apply Scripture to my life. Sometimes, I reach the point where I am offended and made to re-evaluate my assumptions on the way life should be. The Lord has used these moments in my life to draw me to repentance and to different perspectives on His call on my life. There were various moments in this book where I experienced this again. I am guilty of establishing false rules that go beyond the prohibitions of God. Rather than following the example of Christ, I have followed the example of the Pharisee. I meant well but it was still adding prohibitions to the Word of God. I need to be faithful to what God has spoken and take the risk of allowing others around me to abuse these areas of freedom. I cannot make more rules and expect people to "get it." At some point, I have to trust that God gave all the law that is necessary and that "...the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more (Rom. 5:20)." I need to risk practicing grace!

A major takeaway from this book in my own life is that I will be reading and hearing the accounts of Christ's parables in a much more instructive manner. There has always been an assumption on my part that thought: "Well, He was Jesus! I'm not Him, so I can't use these parables for much more than observing and taking note of how He related to people as God." I think I do this because I under emphasize the humanity of Jesus. No, we cannot read peoples thoughts or know their hidden past and use these things for the sake of evangelism but we certainly can follow the examples of grace, mercy, and wisdom contained therein. There is a goldmine of points of application for multiple points of practical Christian living in the parables of Jesus.

Greg Baughman says

A must read (along with its companion volume, "The Heart of Evangelism"). I enjoyed the second volume more, though that may be because of the solid foundation built here. Read this first, then the second. Here Barrs puts flesh and meat on the skeleton laid out in the previous volume, making it a more fulfilling read. These books completely changed my concept of evangelism. Full review of both volumes can be found [here](#).

Conrad says

Used in our community group - a good study. Interesting to reflect on how Jesus interacted with the various individuals he met during his ministry years.

John Brackbill says

The author works through various encounters that Jesus had and draws out principles about encounters that Christians have today and how to "do evangelism" like Jesus. He states that the theme of the book is "Jesus is the greatest evangelist" (P. 16).

The format of doing a light exposition of the encounter and then listing out principles for our evangelism with various headings is very useful. Before doing so though the author opens up a chapter on "The Christian's Calling to the World."

If there was one dominant burden that the author sought to communicate it is this:

"The Christian's calling is never to retreat from the world of unbelievers into an enclave where there are only fellow Christians, nor is it a calling to personal separation, where the only people one knows are fellow believers, for as we see in the Gospels, Jesus lived among those who did not know him" (p. 11).

This quote is taken from the heading "Sent into the world by Jesus" in the opening chapter. That chapter continues with discussions on "The Hostility of the World," In, But not of, the World, "Demonstrating the Trinity's Love", and Praying for the World.

The next two discussions address two problems that the author sees Christians might struggle within this mission to the world. First, is the problem of conformity. He speaks of the fact that Jesus "was not shaped by the ungodly patterns of the culture of his day; rather, he lived in the world in perfect conformity to his Father's commandments" (p. 13). I felt as though he wrote with less passion and concern as he did about the next that he speaks of as "The Problem of Retreat and Separation." This seems to stem from the fact that his intended audience or at least who he thinks will be reading this book tend to fall into the second problem of unbiblical retreat and separation. I added the word "unbiblical" and I believe Barrs would have done well to do the same as Scripture is clear that there is a kind of separation from sin that will, in fact, affect our interactions with unbelievers at least on some level. He rightly challenged the idea that having close friends with unbelievers is a problem. Multiple times he spoke of having intimate friendships with unbelievers. I think I know what he means and I agree with him. We need to be building strong relationships with unbelievers. However, I found myself saying "yes, but not our most intimate friends" and "there are dangers in this area that can't be overlooked even as we are to pursue such friendships." In light of that, I was encouraged to read his strong statement on page 98-99 about the dangers of pursuing intimate relationships with unbelievers for the purpose of pursuing their idolatry with them.

There was one story that he gave and referenced again later in the book that left me scratching my head a bit and wondering if he really has sufficiently worked through the biblical tension between moving toward unbelievers all the while maintaining a concern for our distinction from the world. I will quote it in full here:

"One of our graduates from Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis (where I teach evangelism) telephoned me one day with a very sad and very common example of this problem. He is the pastor of a church that is deeply committed to outreach into their community. The youth group was planning a pool party, not only for themselves, but also so that they could invite their non-Christian friends. A sister church not far away heard about the planned party and asked to join them. The other pastor's wife came to speak to him about it: "We must have some ground rules for this party. The first of these is no two-piece bathing suits

for the girls. Teenage boys have raging hormones, so everyone must be decently clothed.” My friend responded: “But if we have a rule like this, our young people, including my own daughters, will not be able to invite their non-Christian friends. Their friends will think we are crazy to have rules like that, and they won’t come.” The pastor’s wife replied: “Your daughters shouldn’t have friends like that. It is, of course, important to teach our children modesty in dress and other such matters. However, when we make rules like this, the immediate effect (often an intentional effect) is to keep us, and especially our children, apart from the non-Christians around us. Jesus forbids us to do this. He shows us another way—the way of both purity and love. We may find this difficult and even frightening, but as we saw in our first chapter, Jesus is praying for us, and for our children, as we follow him into the world.”

Obviously, the pastor's wife was off saying they shouldn't have such friends. However, I don't think it has to be either or. Yes, we should avoid having to set up rules that unbelievers will simply not understand and that will defeat the purpose of getting together. But couldn't we just not choose those kinds of situations? The way of purity and love might actually require not putting teen boys in a situation where they are getting to know teenage girls for the sake of the gospel all the while being obviously tempted in an overwhelming way to commit the sexual sin of lust in their hearts while doing so. The pastor's wife was wrong, but I am not sure that the author's view of this is right either. There are many ways to get together with unbelieving teenagers that do not set up such a stumbling block for Christian teens. In my mind, this ended up being a case study of how the author applied the biblical principles of in the world and not of it. In this situation, I believe he is not taking everything into consideration properly.

There is so much that is helpful in this book. The author does a good job of working through the text but lacing all that he does with application. I did feel like he lost his way a bit in the 2nd half. The principles of application seemed a bit repetitive and less focused. The last few chapters seemed to be focused more on application to believers and our walk with Christ than our outreach to unbelievers.

I was challenged to be on mission moving toward unbelievers around me and was moved to marvel at Jesus who truly was the greatest evangelist. No doubt you will be as well.

Henry Alvarado says

Excellent read

A new perspective & approach to evangelism based on the greatest evangelist whoever lived! highly recommended reading for those who long to reach the lost.

Rebecca says

Earmarked, underlined, highlighted. This book is now one of my favorites as it dispelled some questions/concerns about the character of God and filled in the blanks to allow me to love Jesus even more than I did beforehand.

Lisa Miller says

Love this book! Barrs bringing some insight into how Jesus interacted with different types of folks. Each chapter focuses on a different story - some are parables but most are stories of Jesus. I was especially challenged to look at everyone through the lens of love - Jesus' love. It's not my job to tell folks how sinful they are but rather tell them how amazing Jesus is.

Wassenario says

Excellent book about how Jesus interacted with people while he was on earth. Biblical + Practical = Chris approved!

Stephen Ground says

God's Heart for the Unbeliever

Prof. Jerram Barrs is deeply aware of God's great love for the unbeliever, and shares in that love with our Heavenly Father. In this book, he gives us windows into the myriad approaches of the greatest evangelist ever to live, Jesus Christ. Through Prof. Barrs' careful and heart felt exposition of these passages, we begin to see exactly how Jesus embarked on his mission, and we see what a delight it is for us to be called to serve by his side.

Andy Montero says

I took forever to read this book, but it's probably one of the most unique books on evangelism I've read so far.

Jerram Barrs really highlights some of the odd answers Jesus gives and provides historical/cultural context to help us understand the impact of his words. Each chapter focuses on a reading selection from the gospels, analyzes it, brings it to life, and then takes some key points for us to use in outreaches.

"..depending on the needs, the confusion, or the ignorance of the people whom he sought to reach..he taught the gracious nature of God's kingdom; to some he taught the law; to some he spoke about the idolatry of money; to others he revealed his own forgiving love; to others he spoke of himself as the Messiah who would reveal all truth; to yet others he gave the challenge of the necessity of urgent repentance" (p. 249).

I appreciate his encouragement to those who feel ill-equipped to reach the hearts of others, since it is that humility and step of faith that God honors and chooses to use in bringing others to Himself.

I'd recommend this book to anyone who has a desire to be obedient in sharing the gospel with others. Great read!

Donald L. Coldwell Jr. says

Excellent Book

This will most certainly be read over and over again as the challenges to evangelize are so clear. Evangelism as modeled by Jesus is not a one size fits all process and this book takes specific examples of Jesus' ministry to explain this idea. Well organized and laid out, this book is a great one to have on your shelf.

Shaela Woody says

Convicting, encouraging study of Jesus' interactions with unbelievers within the Gospel narratives. Barrs highlights several startling aspects of these encounters and then draws practical principles for Christians as we graciously engage with those outside the Church. I especially appreciated his thoughts on Jesus' willingness to leave his listener's hanging (the rich young ruler), to provoke introspection with questions (the teacher of the law), and to humbly admit need and ask for help from social outcasts (asking for a drink from the Samaritan woman).

Ryan says

I've always been challenged by Jerram. I'm moved to repentance and faith whenever I'm exposed to his teaching. I wasn't sure what another book on evangelism would produce, but I found it a great joy to read. Very good insight into Jesus' approach to evangelism that corrects so many of my own flaws.
