



**HOW TO SPEAK LIFE
SHARING YOUR
FAITH IN**

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INTRODUCTION

THE MISSION FIELD



I want people to know Jesus—my family, my friends, my neighbours, everyone. But it's tricky. When it comes to faith, the people in my life are in so many different places.

Some of them think Christianity is the worst. They reckon it's bigoted, controlling, anti-science, regressive—just awful. In their hearts they manage (I think—I *hope!*) to absolve me personally, but they figure I've been swept up in something Very Bad. These friends are a minority though.

Far more of my friends and neighbours shrug their shoulders and say, 'Good for you, Glen, whatever gets you through the night.' Perhaps they've even had some experience of faith in the past. But if they have, they feel it's no longer for them. Still, they're far from hostile.

Then there are those with more of a Christian history. It could be distant, it could be recent, it could be positive, it could be poisonous. For these friends it's complicated. There is a genuine attraction to Christ (or there used to be), but there are also a thousand distractions and obstacles in their way.

And then there are the total surprises. Some friends shock me by being open to the gospel all of a sudden. Like a month ago when a friend—*out of nowhere*—confided in me: 'I realised over the summer I don't know anything about the Bible.' He's since taken himself and his family off to church every Sunday.

Think of your own family, friends, neighbours and work colleagues. Do you recognise these kinds of categories? I didn't pick them at random. These four types of people map onto the four types of soil Jesus spoke of in Matthew 13. Remember the parable: God's kingdom grows like seed. But the seed, representing God's Word, gets scattered across all kinds of ground: the path; the rocks; the thorns; and the good soil.

Jesus goes on to explain what these 'soil types' refer to. First there's the path where birds come and gobble up the seed. This represents flat out resistance—even satanic opposition—to the gospel. The Word is meant to take root in our *hearts* but instead we find hearts that are 'calloused' (v15) and resist the message of the kingdom.

Next there's stony soil. This represents a shallow reception of the Word that soon shrinks back from real commitment. After that come a tangle of thorn bushes. These represent 'the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth' (v22), choking whatever faith may lie beneath. Finally comes the good soil which receives the Word deeply and enduringly.

This is the mission field. Responses are mixed, to say the least. And if we're the ones holding out the Word of life to friends and family, how will it look? 'Hit and miss'—and mainly miss.

I'm guessing that's how your evangelism feels. Mine certainly does. 'Evangelist' is my day job and yet, when

I report to my board of trustees every quarter this could be the headline every single time: *Hit and miss—mainly miss.*

THE POWER OF THE SEED

Imagine a Martian came down to see the farmer in the parable at work. He'd be puzzled. What good can it do to scatter such tiny particles on the ground? What *are* those little granules he's littering all over the place? It looks like a hopeless activity. Even if you explained to the Martian about seeds and germination, the sower seems to be the least strategic farmer in the history of agriculture. *Who sows on the path? Surely not among rocks? And, mate, the thorns? Seriously?*

I know nothing about farming but even I think to myself: What about a scarecrow? Maybe dig the rocks out? If there are thorns, surely you should spray them, or cut them back, or weed them out...? Please do something—*anything*—instead of throwing fistfuls of precious seed at frankly hopeless situations.

But no. There is no plan B for this farmer. Or C, or D. It's all plan A, and a very rudimentary plan it is: sow the seed. The power is not in the farmer's delivery, cutting-edge technology or brilliant new strategy. The power is entirely in the seed. And isn't that encouraging?

Earlier I said the seed is God's Word, and it is (Mark 4:14). But let's think more deeply about God's Word because,

ultimately, *Jesus* is the Word of God—the eternal Word (John 1:1–2). And a very early title for Christ in Scripture appears in Genesis 3:15, which promises the coming Seed of the woman (or ‘Offspring’, it’s the same word in Hebrew). It was prophesied right from the beginning that this Seed would be born of a woman to crush Satan, though he himself would be struck. The oldest, most enduring gospel promise of the Scriptures was the promise of ‘the Seed’.

When Jesus came—when the Word became flesh—he likened himself to a seed that must be buried (John 12:24). But what happens to seeds when they are buried? That isn’t the end. It’s only the beginning.

And so, through Christ—the Seed—being crucified and buried, he would rise again to give new life. Such is the nature of seeds: *down they go* into the darkness of the earth, then *up they rise* to bring life and nourishment to the world. Jesus promises exactly that. He would be the first to die and rise, but he would pioneer a way of life for all his followers (John 12:24–26).

Once a seed ‘dies’ and rises again it becomes a tree which contains fruit and the fruit contains many more seeds—seeds ‘according to their kind’. Jesus has risen from the dead to give us his kind of life and his kind of seed. Now *we* have the Word of life and we can scatter that same seed. This is the life we’ve been swept up into. The Word gave us life and now we have become those who speak life to others.

This book is about sharing your faith. In a deep sense it's about scattering seeds. But the power is not in your method of sowing. You don't have to do in-depth cultural analysis of your friend's particular 'soil type'. You don't have to learn the secret of effective delivery. You don't have to prepare Plans B, C and D as a back-up. It's not about you and your skills, it's all about the seed and its power.

So out we go into the world to sow the word of Jesus. What should we expect? From one point of view it will be hit and miss—there'll be birds and thorns and rocks. But Jesus gives us another perspective in Matthew 13.

WORLD DOMINATION

A single apple pip can feed the world. Imagine it: if the seed goes into the ground and rises again, it produces a tree. From that tree will come dozens of apples and hundreds of seeds. Plant those seeds and you'll get thousands in the next generation. By the sixth generation you'll have enough apples to feed the world.

Seeds are easily overlooked yet have tremendous power—just like the Word:

He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes

a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.'

MATTHEW 13:31—32

Here in Matthew 13, Jesus rounds off his seed parables with the simplest yet most striking of them. He is in no doubt where his kingdom is headed. Though it looks weak and despised, one day his kingdom will conquer the world.

It takes time. Farming is not about instant results, but in the end the seed is victorious. It gets to the point where the birds perch in the tree grown by the word of Jesus. At the start of Matthew 13 the birds seemed so much greater than the seed. They devoured it, seeming to snatch away all hope in satanic opposition. And yet, if you just let the seed do what the seed does, even the greatest enemies of the kingdom are dominated by, and dependent upon, Christ's kingdom.

Even those who think Christianity is 'the worst'—bigoted, cruel, restrictive and regressive—do so by perching on the kingdom values of Jesus. He has taught the world what is 'best'. He has taught us *all* to value equality, compassion, freedom and progress. For more on *how* the word of Jesus grew such a kingdom you can read my book *The Air We Breathe*.

But if you want to be part of the ongoing advance of this kingdom—if you want to learn to speak life in our own generation—read on. It's all about a day-by-day work: unsung, untidy, undaunted, unhurried. It's about scattering the word of Jesus near and far, all the while

knowing nothing, ultimately, can stop this seed growing. The word of Jesus will conquer the world.

COMING UP:

EIGHT SEEDS TO SCATTER

Sowing the word is for everyone. Yes, there are capital-E evangelists—those specifically gifted by the Spirit and called by the church. But this book is to help you speak life whatever your gifting or role. In each chapter I give an example of a one-on-one conversation I've had. All of them were unplanned. But in the middle of ordinary life sometimes opportunities arise. And I want us to be ready. How? By filling our pockets with seed.

Alongside these example conversations, I'll be giving you a different seed in each chapter. By the end of the book you'll have eight sentences or questions which you can sow into your conversations.

These are not clever strategies or polished presentations. I don't want you to be an advertising executive. I want us all to be profligate farmers, chucking seed like it's confetti. Unimpressive. Messy. But, by the Spirit, somehow life springs up. The power is not in the delivery, the power is in the word. And so, as we think about evangelism, we should spend time hearing afresh the word of Jesus. That's where the subtitle comes in: *Sharing Your Faith in 321*.

321 is a way of summarising the message of Jesus. You can read about it in an older book called *321* and a newer book called *How to See Life: A Guide in 321*. There's also a course which can be done in person or viewed online at 321course.com. 321 is all about 'life according to Jesus' and we'll be exploring it throughout these pages. I'd love you to hear the word again via 321 so that it beds down deeply in your heart and takes root. I want to evangelise you, so that you can evangelise others.

This book is therefore best used in conjunction with one of the 321 resources. And perhaps the best follow up to reading this book would be to put on a 321 course and invite your friends. But *How to Speak Life* can also stand alone, which is why I summarise the main ideas in each chapter.

As we begin, I want this book to be more than theoretical. Why not bring to mind two people you'd love to see come to Christ? To help you decide which two people to choose, consider who you might invite to a 321 course—whether in person or online? For every exercise we do in the book, keep these two people in mind and pray for them at the end of each chapter. Once you've worked through *How to Speak Life*, you might like to invite them either to church or to the 321 course, or both! In fact, why not pray for them right now.

I'M PRAYING FOR...

Name:

How would you describe their soil type?

Name:

How would you describe their soil type?

OK, ready? Let's learn how to speak life in 3, 2, 1...