



## Come Out of the Cave by Ryan Reese

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*We envision a congregation whose love for Jesus and one another leaves a clear and compelling witness for Christ.*

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*Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*

*Colossians 4:5-6*

I'm no fan of the *Twilight Series* by Stephenie Meyer. That may be an ignorant statement coming from one who has never actually read the books. But I have seen enough of the movies to know that these fictitious Northwestern vampires who have taken the world by storm will never capture my heart. Let's just say that the most interesting thing I found in Forks, Washington was the Timber Museum, not a Hollywood trail walked by pale teenagers with pointy teeth.

While I can't get excited about Meyer's stories, I do understand why a vampire novel should unfold in the Pacific Northwest. This is the one place in the country where their arch-nemesis, the sun, does not often flaunt its mighty powers. We live in one of the most beautiful places on earth, but for several months God hides the land for His intense irrigation purposes. The dark and rainy winters have many effects on us. My family and others share a common complexion, that of ghosts. We keep the coffee pot warm so we can plough through the day. Northwesterners love to curl up by the fire with a good book, or throw paint on a canvas, or spend time mastering an instrument. There is no shortage of artists and musicians in this land.

But now, God has spoken: "Let there be sun." And there is sun. God reminds us that He has surrounded us with His spectacular work in creation. And He reminds us that he has surrounded us with something else He created: *neighbors*. The winter months pose a minor problem for Christians who would like to love, serve, and

share the gospel with their neighbors—they are in hiding. Maybe your neighborhood is different than mine, but it seems that "neighbor sightings" are rare in the rainy season. We may see them blazing a trail from their garage to their home, but that is about it. Add this to the fact that Americans in general live more isolated lives than they used to, and the task of loving our neighbor is fraught with difficulty.

Of course, none of these obstacles is insurmountable in winter. But in the light of the summer sun they quickly melt away. Our vampire neighbors are crawling out of their caves and showing their faces. They are mowing their lawns and getting terrible sunburns. They are walking to the park, riding bikes, playing tennis, going to the beach, tending the garden, and climbing mountains. And we should be out there with them, for the glory of God. We should be prayerfully seeking opportunities to serve them and engage them in meaningful conversation. This summer we have the chance to begin or build better relationships with those around us, for the sake of the Gospel. Who knows, maybe we will get to know them in such a way that our friendship is maintained when everyone else goes back into hiding. Here are a few things to keep in mind as we prepare our hearts for the summer:

**Pray for them.** Any good we can do for our neighbor must come from God's hand. If you don't already, begin praying for you neighbors. Pray that God would grant you favor in their

eyes, that He would deepen your relationships with them. Pray that God would bring them to Himself using your words and your deeds to do it. It's no surprise that when Paul writes about evangelism, he writes also about prayer (see Ephesians 6:10-20 and Colossians 4:2-6). Remember, you are royal priests (1 Peter 2:9), and one thing priests do is offer up intercessory prayers. They also speak God's Word ("proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light").

**Love them.** Don't treat them like an evangelistic project, or a mere object to receive your "evangelistic speech." Get to know them. Find out who they are, where they've been, what they believe and why. Invite them over for dinner and show them that you genuinely care. Show them that a person who loves Jesus loves others, too.

**Serve them.** Look for chances to lend a hand. Help them carry the couch, clean up the yard, paint the fence, or whatever it is they need. Don't expect them to ask you—volunteer. Jesus would tell you to lend your weed-eater without expecting it to be returned. I'll bet they bring it back. Meet as many of their needs as you can—including physical needs.

**Tell them about Jesus.** The greatest need your neighbors have is to know the Lord. This is the need they may not know about. You need to tell them. Do it prayerfully. Do it sensitively. But do it. You aren't fully loving your neighbor as yourself if you aren't helping them meet Jesus.

## Tools for Evangelism by Brian Watson

There aren't many prerequisites for telling people about Jesus. You simply have to know Jesus—you have to have a relationship with Him—and know why Jesus came and what He did by dying on the cross and rising from the grave. That's really all you need to get started. However, it helps to have some ideas about how to share the gospel with people. Fortunately, there are some good resources out there. The following is a list of books that we have in our Resource Center. All of them are fairly short and easy enough to read.

*Basic Christianity* by John Stott. This book focuses on Jesus: who He is, what He came to do, why we need Him, and how to respond properly to Him. It's a great little book. It's also a good one to give to friends who are curious about Christianity.

*Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* by J. I. Packer. This is another short, classic book. Packer discusses the gospel and how God's sovereignty works together with our obedience in proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. Theology is important and it informs how we do things as Christians, including sharing the gospel.

*The Gospel and Personal Evangelism* by Mark Dever. Dever is a Southern

Baptist pastor, a very smart man, and a very clear communicator. This book addresses a basic questions such as "What is the gospel?" and "How should we evangelize?" This one is short and sweet.

*Questioning Evangelism* by Randy Newman. Newman works for Campus Crusade for Christ and he has a lot of experience sharing the gospel. This book focuses on how to manage evangelistic conversations. He recommends that we do what Jesus did: ask people questions. He also covers some objections that people have to Christianity. This is a really good book that helps prepare you to have conversations with other people about Jesus.

*Speaking of Jesus* by Mack Stiles. This author used to work for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, which, like Campus Crusade, is a collegiate ministry. Stiles writes about his evangelistic experiences, the gospel, how Jesus shared the gospel, Paul's theology of evangelism, and how to share the gospel with others. This book is another easy read and it's both biblical and practical.

Finally, you can find my writings about the gospel, evangelism, and apologetics

on our website at <http://www.pinehurstbaptist.org/evangelism.asp>.

Most of these authors talk about the gospel in a very easy to remember way: God-People-Jesus-Response. The gospel is a story about the holy, perfect, almighty, all-knowing, triune *God* who created us to worship Him. It's a story about *people* and how every person has failed to worship God by obeying Him, and therefore deserves death. It's a story about *Jesus*, who lived a life of perfect obedience, died an atoning death in our place, and rose from the grave to show the debt of sin has been paid. The proper *response* to the gospel is repentance (turning away from selfishness and sin) and faith (turning to God by loving him, trusting him, and obeying him). Everyone who repents and believes will spend eternity with God. Everyone who does not believe but keeps on living as if God doesn't exist will spend an eternity in hell. That reality should motivate us to tell others about Jesus. We exist to glorify God by proclaiming His excellencies. It's worth spending some time preparing to do what God made you to do.

