LETTING YOUR LOVE FOR GOD
FLOW INTO YOUR EVERYDAY LANGUAGE

LIVING OUT LOUD

KEVIN KING
WITH CHRISTINE DANIELS

FOREWORD BY TED ESLER PHD, PRESIDENT, MISSIO NEXUS

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FOREWORD

IN THE 1950s, as evangelicalism began its ascent as a cultural force, *evangelism*—the act of communicating the gospel—was mostly described as a *program*. It often took the form of a crusade, a presentation, or a set of steps. It always concluded with a prayer. It assumed some basic truths about a person's worldview. It was something you went out and *did*.

This view of evangelism was so widespread within the church that now, some seventy years later, we continue to struggle with it. A couple of cultural shifts have occurred since then, but the idea that we are still "doing evangelism" persists in the hearts and minds of many believers. Even when we know better, it is difficult to divorce ourselves from this way of thinking.

These cultural shifts have, of course, landed the world in a place further removed from the truths we know must be communicated. Jesus commanded us to take the gospel to the whole world, proclaiming God's Kingdom to all. So there's no avoiding it. To be obedient demands that we "do evangelism."

The problem is not in the *doing*, but in the myriad of assumptions that inhabit the word *do*.

When I worked cross-culturally in a war-torn region of the world, I wondered how the gospel message could ever be communicated. The suffering, the suspicion of others, and the hatred that lingered were seemingly insurmountable. As our team struggled to figure out how to "do evangelism," God was at work. He took the hatred that was all around us and turned it on its head. In a country with vast numbers of soul-wounded people, God put together a small church that had people from all sides. They were friends in a sea of enemies. They loved each other, very imperfectly but powerfully, in a place that knew little love. This was the power of the gospel in that context. The contrast that came with the culture around that little church was how God "did evangelism" among those people.

The manner of outreach is easier when the environment is totally different. We don't tend to take our cultural assumptions in with us. We make room for God to work in ways that we find hard to do in our own environments. Can we make room in our everyday lives as we seek to invite others into the Kingdom? It is time for us to wake up from this illusion we have about evangelism as a *project*.

I have been a friend and observer of International Project for some time. This is a ministry that doesn't "do" evangelism. They *live* it. Kevin and Christine are a part of a group of people that have tackled some of the biggest challenges in urban ministry by helping God's people step into a transformed way of life.

As I write this foreword, I am in Cairo, Egypt, one of the world's great cities. The issues presented by this culture are very different from those in New York City, or my hometown of Orlando, Florida. Yet, the same human need for a relationship

with Jesus exists. Evangelism that addresses these universal human needs is not constrained by culture.

Yet, as you read this book, I suggest that you envision your own neighborhood and ask yourself how these principles would play out in that context. What you will find is that this book is not a how-to manual of techniques and strategies to follow, or a list of "tools" to use. Instead, Kevin and Christine highlight relationships, conversations, acts of service, and ways to love others as we live and speak as spiritual people.

In these pages, you will encounter a Kingdom worldview that sees people where they are and seeks to love them into God's family.

Ted Esler
President, Missio Nexus
Cairo, Egypt

INTRODUCTION

WE'VE BOTH BEEN CHRISTIANS for more than thirty years. Throughout our journeys of following Jesus, we've seen the church (ourselves included) neglect the call to talk about God. And we've experienced how lifeless a walk with Jesus can be when we miss out on the adventure of obeying him. We've also seen the fruit that comes from speaking about God. And we've experienced how fun it is to walk with Jesus when he uses our obedience to advance his Kingdom.

Our friendship has grown as our families have connected over these shared convictions and passions. So as God stirred these desires in us more and more, and as people we talked with seemed to be encouraged by them, we decided to write a book together. It turned out to be a bit tricky. Do we write as *we*, or do we take the time to make sure you know which one of us is speaking at every turn? Do we alternate writing chapters or go half-and-half down the middle? Every approach seemed to hinder the way our thoughts flowed onto the page. Ultimately, we decided that it would be best to write the book from a personal perspective, even

if you might not always know which *I* is which (except when we reference our spouses, which kind of gives it away).

We think that's okay. Maybe even a strength. We come from different places, with different ideas, experiences, and stories to tell. We're from different states, generations, and denominations. But we both agree with what we've written, and we hope you find it compelling, convicting, and encouraging as we share what God has done.

But before we go incognito, we want to give you a bit of our background as individuals. Perhaps it will help you recognize our voices throughout the book.

KEVIN

I went to a Catholic high school. My family wasn't religious or anything, but it was the best educational option at the time. During my junior year, I was required to take religion classes, and they got me questioning some things. I started reading the Bible so I could debate my teachers. I'd read a section, form an argument, and then bring it up in class. Sections turned into chapters, which turned into books, and all the while God was turning my heart and mind upside down.

After a few months of this, I began searching for someone apart from school who could help me understand Jesus better. My cousin recommended that I talk to her father-in-law, and he explained the gospel to me more fully. A couple of months later, I visited a local nondenominational church and made a profession of faith to follow Jesus, and by spring of my junior year, I had decided to get baptized.

When I went back to school that fall, I started talking about my new faith in Jesus. It wasn't long before I was called to the

principal's office and warned that if I continued to talk to others about my beliefs, they were going to ask me to leave the school. I didn't stop. After two more meetings with the principal—and even though a group of teachers and priests actually circulated a petition to have me expelled—I was allowed to complete the final months of my senior year. Those encounters had a big impact on me, and I became even more passionate and tenacious about sharing the gospel with others.

After graduation, I went to a Bible college and took evangelism classes. I memorized and practiced gospel presentations. I went up to people cold turkey and shared with them. I really had a heart to see lost people find Jesus, but I didn't have a whole lot of regard for their needs in a particular moment. And though I still believe there is value in learning a clear gospel presentation and setting aside time to share it with people, it started becoming more and more clear that my idea of evangelism was missing something. When I decided to go out witnessing, I went with courage and gumption. But most of the time, the gospel wasn't coming up in natural ways. Unless I had already planned to share the gospel with someone, spiritual things weren't part of the conversation.

Over many years, God shifted my ideas about how, why, when, and where to engage people spiritually. In 1998, my wife and I moved to New York City to focus on ministering to unreached people groups. In 2010 (through International Project), I started a training program called Equip, focused on helping cross-cultural church planters develop their ministry skills. It soon became clear that most ministry skills are *universal*, meaning they work in any culture, with any people group, and for any age. Another important lesson I learned is that knowing how and when to turn up your spiritual volume in a natural, organic way is the most necessary

and important skill for ongoing, consistent spiritual engagement that produces good fruit.

Maybe you're like I was, turning your spirituality on and off at any given moment. Maybe you enter conversations with evangelistic fervor or no evangelism at all. And maybe you sense something is missing from all your interactions. If your journey is anything like mine has been, I'm confident I can help you. There were many times when I didn't speak up, and I regret those times. There were also many times when I did speak up but left discouraged by the lack of response, feeling that there must be a better way. This struggle is what ultimately led me to write this book. It's about letting your love for God flow naturally into your everyday language. It's about the freedom we have, as spiritual people, to bring spiritual things into our daily conversations. And as we speak, whether it's comfortable or awkward in a given situation, God will use our words in incredible ways to draw people to himself.

CHRISTINE

It was an early morning flight, and I was really tired. My desire to fall asleep, coupled with my motion sickness, rendered me virtually useless from takeoff to landing. I remember ignoring the nagging guilt I felt for not taking the opportunity to share the gospel with the captive audience alongside me in row 17. I grew up in a church where trying to convert people on airplanes was deeply ingrained in the culture. By not doing my part, I was being a "bad" Christian.

As I was drifting off under the influence of Dramamine, I heard the woman in 15F strike up a conversation with the man next to her. They talked about the weather and their kids and where their travels were taking them. To the average eavesdropper,

this conversation would be boring, but I was invested in it because I knew where it was headed. The woman in 15F was a friend of mine from church, and she was a "good" Christian.

Right after the topic of local restaurants died down, my friend turned to her seatmate and asked the question I knew she'd been waiting to ask: "Where do you think you'll go when you die?"

The man was obviously taken aback, and he didn't hide his surprise as he shifted his weight and told her he already knew about "all that Jesus stuff." When my friend tried to ask some follow-up questions, he made sure the conversation ended quickly, and soon they went their separate ways (as much as two people can who are sharing the same eight square feet of space, that is).

Overhearing that conversation gave me a roller coaster of emotions that matched the condition of my stomach at high altitude. At first, I was cynical. *That all seemed forced.* Then I was embarrassed. *The entire encounter was uncomfortable.* Then I was discouraged. *She didn't get anywhere with him.* Then I was proud. *At least she went for it.* Then I was jealous. *I haven't said a word to anyone.* Then I was worried. *I'm a bad Christian.* Then I was cynical again. *This is stupid.*

I have been passionate about the gospel for many years now. It's the truth that changed my trajectory and continues to shape my life. The more I learn about myself, the more I realize my need for the gospel to infiltrate my thinking, overtake my rogue emotions, and transform my actions. But despite all that, I have spent most of my life not knowing how to proclaim the gospel to others. I have regularly felt a mixture of guilt (as I say nothing) and embarrassment (as I overhear others say awkward things).

To be honest, I think a bit of hesitancy is healthy when it comes to sharing the gospel. I don't think God intends for us to force

or finagle our way into awkward conversations to try to convert people. My mistake was that I let that little bit of healthy hesitancy turn into a monster of insecurity, and for a while it kept me from obeying God's call on my life. But over the past several years, he has been opening my eyes and my heart to a new (more biblical) way of approaching evangelism, and it has liberated my day-to-day interactions with people.

When Kevin asked me to write this book with him, I got excited about the potential to bring people from a cynical, burned-out, and guilt-ridden relationship with evangelism to a place of freedom and fruitfulness. If you've spent your life as a Christian cringing at the thought of pulling out a napkin and drawing a chasm that only the Cross can span, you're in good company. For a long time I felt the same way. But don't let your cynicism, fear, or hesitancy keep you from joining God in what he is doing. There is a whole wide world of adventurous, fruitful, and authentic gospel-sharing that begins with the simple act of speaking up. My prayer is that this book will excite you and equip you for that.

Kevin and I find it a bit ironic that we are writing this book together. He was the kind of evangelist that made me cringe—and that I hoped to never be associated with. I was the kind of *non*-evangelist that Kevin judged and tried to compensate for. But that's why we believe this book will be relevant and helpful no matter which side of the spectrum you're starting from. This isn't a rejection of the gospel traditions we've come from; nor is it about finding the middle ground. Instead, it's an invitation for you to see how God has called us all to speak—by allowing our love for him to flow into our everyday language.

1

A SHEMA LIFESTYLE

Witnessing is not a spare-time occupation or a once-a-week activity. It must be a quality of life.

DAN GREENE

HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED something like this? You move to a new town or a new neighborhood, and you're confident that God has put you there for a reason. Eager to reach your neighbors with the good news of Jesus, you're excited when the couple across the street seems interested in establishing a friendship. When they invite you over for dinner, you pray before you go, asking God to give you opportunities to engage them spiritually. You walk across the street full of hope and anticipation.

Over a delicious meal, you talk about your kids and your jobs and the weather—all the while wondering how you can bring up the subject of Jesus without it being awkward.

"Speaking of the weather, have you ever thought about whether you're going to heaven when you die?"

Nah, that's not the right approach. You don't want to be weird about it or force anything. You want the gospel to flow naturally into your conversations; and when it doesn't, you talk about other things instead. Afterward, you tell yourself it's not a big deal because you're in this for the long haul. You know there will be many more opportunities to share with your new friends. You'll say something next time.

But the next time comes and goes, and the time after that; before you know it, you've been living across the street from your friends for years and have never managed to find the "right time" to speak up about spiritual things. It's not for lack of desire. It's not for lack of prayer. You just don't know how to do it. You don't know where spiritual things fit into your everyday conversations, so you leave them out. And the longer it goes on this way, the more unlikely it is that you'll ever say anything about your faith in Jesus.

If this sounds familiar, don't think you're the only one with a story like this. Not by a long shot. The more I talk with people about evangelism, the more I realize that we *all* have our own version of "the failed attempt." Some have taken the route of silence. Others have tried their hand at steering the conversation. Some have never even gotten around to meeting their neighbors in the first place. But whatever the particular details might be, most Christians seem to struggle with how to share Jesus with the people around them.

In the church, the current prevailing concepts of evangelism have let us down. We've come to think of sharing the gospel as a *strategy* we employ rather than an *identity* we live out. Therefore, thinking strategically, we memorize a few facts about God's plan of salvation, devise some starter questions, and look for opportunities to insert them into conversations out of the blue. This approach

tends to result in clumsy, irrelevant, and untimely ways of expressing our spirituality. It also leads to discouragement because many believers don't feel like themselves when using a scripted conversation. It doesn't fit who they are or how they think, and they start to wonder whether evangelism might be something better suited to a different type of person.

Before long, even the thought of evangelism carries with it feelings of anxiety, fear, apprehension, and guilt. Christians are tired of having awkward conversations that bear little to no fruit. And we're tired of interactions that don't reflect who we really are. Still, there's a constant tension building within us because we really want to be the kind of people who are brave and obedient and spread the gospel of Jesus. But we have no clue how to get from "How's the weather?" to "Jesus died for you."

The good news is that we feel the desire to share our faith. We feel the desire because we know that Jesus is the only path to life. We feel the desire because we know we are called to make disciples. And we feel the desire because we know that God is seeking and saving those who are lost, and we want to participate in what he is doing.

The bad news is that too many Christians have forgotten how to speak—or never learned how. They've kept their mouths shut about the gospel, even though it is the most compelling, transformative, life-giving message there is. The problem is that they don't know how to talk to people *simply* and *genuinely* about God.

How do you get into conversations that naturally lead to the gospel? How do you bring up the hope and promise of eternal life? This is where the bottleneck is, and it's why many believers rarely share about their faith.

But it doesn't have to be that way.

Maybe, like a lot of Christians, you are standing at the ready, equipped with the ability to give a compelling gospel presentation if the need should arise. And yet no one is walking up to you and asking, "What must I do to be saved?" If you find yourself waiting for opportunities that never seem to come, may we, in all humility, show you a more excellent way?

THE SHEMA

> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.
>
> DEUTERONOMY 6:4-5

Thousands of years ago, Moses delivered this command to the Israelites. Devout Jews ever since have started and ended each day by reciting it as a prayer that forms the beginning of a passage known as the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).[1] The words of the Shema were written on the doorways of Jewish homes, bound up in scrolls on their hands, and even placed on their foreheads. This passage had to be always within sight, always on their minds, and everywhere at the forefront of their actions.

The prayer begins with a word that means to *listen* or *hear*: "Hear, O Israel . . ." But this word, *shema*, doesn't align with the simple English definition of "hearing." In English, we can "hear" something but disregard it. That's why frustrated parents sometimes yell at their kids, "Are you even listening to me?" We often think of hearing as simply knowing that someone is talking to us, and it can be disconnected from responding to what the person says.

But in Hebrew, *shema* is altogether different. It means to *listen attentively* and *respond obediently*. Shema is the act of giving our attention to something so fully that hearing and doing become one and the same. Proclaiming that "the LORD our God . . . is one" becomes "loving him with all our heart and soul and might." In other words, our response to God's character is to love him with all that we are.

Though the Shema has been foundational to Judaism since the time of Moses, it is not confined to Jewish tradition. Jesus said that the Shema is the pinnacle of the Christian walk as well. To "love the Lord . . . with all your heart . . . soul . . . mind and . . . strength" is the commandment to sum up all commandments.[2] In other words, the Shema is an incredibly important concept for anyone who is interested in following Jesus.

When Moses gave the Shema, he didn't just tell the people *what* to do; he also told them *how* to do it:

> These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.
>
> DEUTERONOMY 6:6-7

The most tangible expression of your love for God is talking about him. When you get up in the morning, talk about God. When you're walking down the street, talk about God.

When you are sitting at home, taking your kids to the park, eating at a restaurant, or commuting to work, talk about God. God should be at the forefront of your mind. You should speak like a

person who is almost preoccupied with him. Everything points to him, relates to him, comes from him, reflects him, reminds you of him—and you can't help but express it in almost everything you say. The more deeply and fully you love God, the more naturally this language will flow out of you.

When I say that we should talk about God, I don't mean simply dropping Christian jargon into our daily conversations. Rather, as part of our vernacular, we should make statements that point to spiritual realities and the presence of God in our lives. We should say the spiritual things that come to our minds as we talk with others. This doesn't necessarily mean sharing the gospel with everyone we meet. It just means using simple statements to show that we are followers of God. In chapter 6, we will talk more specifically about what those simple statements can look like.

Moses further instructed the Israelites:

> You shall bind [these words] as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.
>
> DEUTERONOMY 6:8-9

Some Jewish people have taken these verses very literally throughout history. In New York City today, you will sometimes see Hassidic Jews with small leather boxes attached to their heads. These boxes are called phylacteries, and they contain the words of the Shema. Phylacteries are frontlets between their eyes. It's the first thing you notice about them. You can't pretend it isn't there. It's obvious that they are Jewish because they are literally wearing a sign across their foreheads.

Even if we don't practice the commands literally, there is deep meaning in these verses for us as followers of Jesus—both in our private walk with God and in the way we make our faith known to others.

When we bind God's truths on our hands or write them on our doorposts, they are something only we will see. They serve as a personal reminder of what our lives should be devoted to. When we strap them across our foreheads or write them on our front gates, they act as a sign to everyone. They become an obvious proclamation of what our lives are devoted to. In giving us the Shema, Moses was pointing to the fact that God is at the center of *everything* we say and do—both public and private.

As Christians, we don't wear phylacteries or place mezuzahs (small parchment scrolls, containing the words of the Shema, in decorative cases) on our doorposts, but we can and should follow the Shema in how we speak—both inside and outside our homes. From the moment we enter a conversation with others, they will be able to tell that we are spiritual because it will be obvious in our language—so obvious that we might as well be wearing a sign on our foreheads. This is one example of how we love God with everything we are. We become so enamored of him that we can't help but talk about him in obvious ways, in every context.

If you have the desire to share the gospel but feel burned out, afraid, or awkward; if you tend to remain silent because you don't know how to bring it up; or if you haven't figured out where God fits into your conversations, so you leave him out altogether—I have some good news for you. Moses gave us the answer thousands of years ago, and Jesus reiterated it: God fits *everywhere*, into *every* conversation. When we know him, we love him; when we love him, we can't help but talk about him.

These verses in Deuteronomy, and their corresponding passages in the Gospels, have incredible implications for evangelism. If sharing our love for God is less about memorizing the right words and more about letting the natural words flow out of us, then the bottleneck disappears. We don't have to worry about how to bring up the gospel because the Shema is not a strategy for sharing the gospel; it's a way of living that begets the gospel. Spiritual people talking about spiritual things naturally leads to spiritual engagement.

This is what I like to call *living out loud*:

- *Living*: It's an active, natural posture of loving God and talking about him as we go about our daily lives.
- *Out*: Our love for God spills over into everything we say and do.
- *Loud*: This doesn't mean we turn up the volume to draw attention to ourselves, but rather that we talk about God in ways that are *obvious* to the people around us. Think *loud and clear*.

Living out loud doesn't mean we're flamboyant, obnoxious, or provocative. It simply means that we bring the same enthusiasm to talking about God that we naturally demonstrate when talking about other things we're excited about and committed to and that we believe are important.

DELIVERY GUY

I have been on a journey of living out loud for many years. I am nowhere near perfect at it, but what I can tell you is that it gets

easier and becomes more and more natural to talk about God in every situation. Along with that, it becomes more likely that we will see fruit in the most *un*likely places.

When I began to let my love for God flow into my everyday language, even something as ordinary as ordering pizza became an opportunity to see God move. And a simple spiritual statement changed the course of a conversation—and, ultimately, the course of a friendship.

One Monday night, there was a knock at my door. This was not unexpected, because I had ordered a pizza earlier. As the delivery guy handed me the warm boxes, I asked him his name.

"Muhammad," he said.

We got to talking a bit, and Muhammad told me he was from Senegal.

"That's really cool," I said, "because God is doing amazing things among your people."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

I told him that God was speaking to people in dreams and visions, and people were coming to know Jesus.

Muhammad and I became friends that day. We exchanged phone numbers and started meeting twice a week. My house was on the way to the pizza place where he worked, and we would often get together to talk and pray before he started his shifts.

Eventually Muhammad moved back to Senegal. But before he did, he had read Scriptures with me and heard me talk about Jesus; he knew how to pray to him and had learned a bit about trusting him.

That Monday night when I ordered the pizza, I had no evangelistic strategy in mind. I wasn't trying to lure someone to my door so I could hit them with the gospel message. I ordered the pizza

because I was hungry. When Muhammad brought it to my door, I didn't have a plan to engage him spiritually. Our conversation went where it did because I didn't bite my tongue when a spiritual thought came to mind. And because, as it turned out, Muhammad was hungry too.

Our misguided ideas about evangelism have left us jaded and kept us silent. But I believe there's a better way. In the pages that follow, we will show you that there is a biblical case for why spiritual engagement includes simply speaking up. We can't err on the side of saying nothing and hope that our actions alone will bring people to Jesus. We must open our mouths. We will show you that engaging people spiritually can be a regular, natural, genuine rhythm of life for every follower of Jesus. Yes, including you. It won't require you to check your personality at the door or use techniques that don't fit who you are or the situations you're in.

As you discover these truths, our goal is to give you a new vision for spiritual engagement—one that will help you move away from feelings of fear and awkwardness and toward the freedom of letting your love for God spill into your everyday language.