

come and see.

You don't need a script. You need a story you can tell and a seat you can offer.

A Community of Hope guide to evangelism the way Jesus did it: telling what God did for you and inviting your block to come see for themselves.

come and see.

Sharing your faith: an invitation, not an argument.

© 2026 Community of Hope AME Church. All rights reserved.

Community of Hope AME Church gathers for worship at Crossland High School, 6901 Temple Hill Rd, Temple Hills, MD 20748, Sundays at 10:00 AM.

www.hiphopenation.com · Facebook @CmtyofHope · YouTube @hiphopenationtv

Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

A note before we start: this book is discipleship, not a membership drive. There is no quota hiding in the back pages and no prize for dragging anybody through a church door. If it helps you point one person toward Jesus, it did its job, whatever address their church home ends up having.

The Road Map

OPENING

Before We Begin · from the Community of Hope family

A Word from Pastor Tony · read this first

PART ONE · GOOD NEWS, NOT A SALES PITCH

1 · News, Not a Sales Pitch

2 · God Went Looking First

3 · Come and See

PART TWO · YOUR STORY IS THE SERMON

4 · One Thing I Know

5 · Leave Your Mess in the Story

6 · Tell It in a Minute

PART THREE · YOUR BLOCK IS THE MISSION FIELD

7 · The Parish Outside Your Door

8 · A Table, Not a Tract

9 · Five Names

10 · The Ones Everybody Skips

PART FOUR · WITHOUT THE SCRIPT

11 · Lead With Your Ears

12 · Seasoned With Salt

13 · Gentleness and Respect

14 · When They Say No

PART FIVE · SENT, NOT SOLD

15 · You're Not the Savior

16 · Keep Your Lamp Lit

17 · Now Go

CLOSING

The Toolbox · prayers you can borrow

A Closing Blessing · receive this

Scripture Index · you know the way now

You're Invited · pull up

“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked. “Come and see,” said Philip.

J O H N 1 : 4 6 (N I V)

Before We Begin

This book comes to you from Community of Hope AME Church, a congregation that started in 2006 in a nightclub in the DMV with eight people and a conviction that God was not finished with anybody. We are part of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, a family born in 1787 when Richard Allen and other free Black worshippers walked out of St. George's Church rather than be pushed to the margins of God's house. Our motto still says it plain: God Our Father, Christ Our Redeemer, the Holy Spirit Our Comforter, Humankind Our Family.

From the beginning we have done church in the places church folks were told to avoid. HIV testing at worship. Violence prevention on the corners. Advocacy in the schools. Praying people getting counseling and saying so out loud. We go into dark places and call it being the light. So a book about sharing your faith is not a new program for us. It is the story of how this church exists at all: somebody kept saying "come and see," and somebody kept pulling up.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

J E R E M I A H 2 9 : 1 1 (N I V)

Read this book with a pen. Argue with it in the margins. Pray the prayers even when they feel borrowed, because borrowed prayers count. And whoever you are, whatever you believe as of this page, hear us clearly: we don't care how you come. We only care about the way you leave: loved, hopeful, ready, sent.

Where Everyone Has a Chance.

A Word from Pastor Tony

You good? For real, you good? And the people you love, the ones on your phone and on your porch, are they good? Because I suspect somebody came to your mind just now, and I suspect you've never once told that person what Jesus did for you.

I already know what happened when you saw the cover of this book. You pictured the man with the bullhorn shouting at strangers about hell. You thought, "That's not me. I don't know enough Bible. I'm not going to argue with anybody about religion." And under all that sits a quieter fear: "What if they look at my life and laugh?"

Friend, let me take the weight off early. I am not going to hand you a script. I am not going to teach you five moves to win a debate, because nobody was ever argued into the arms of Jesus, and the folks who got shouted at just learned to cross the street. That style isn't evangelism. It's bad manners with a Bible in its hand.

Here is what this book will do instead. It will show you that the good news is news, not a product. It will help you find words for your own story, mess included. It will teach you to see your block the way God sees it and to say the three oldest words in Christian outreach: come and see. No bullhorn. No corny script. You have been a witness to something. All this book does is help you take the stand.

So read slow, do the Try It boxes, and keep a short list of names close. By the last page you'll be a neighbor with good news and a seat to offer, which is all the church has ever needed.

It's never too late to tell your story.

With you on the block,

Pastor Tony Lee

SENIOR PASTOR, COMMUNITY OF HOPE AME CHURCH

good news, not a sales pitch

News, Not a Sales Pitch

Somebody tried to sell you something this week. A warranty for a car you don't own. A subscription you forgot you had. A DM from a stranger with a "business opportunity." By now you can smell a pitch through the phone: the fake warmth, the manufactured urgency, the sense that this person needs something from you and is pretending to offer something to you. And here is the tragedy: for a lot of our neighbors, that is exactly what church talk smells like.

So let's start by clearing the air. The first word the church ever had for its message was the Greek word *euangelion*. It means good news, and in the ancient world it was not a religious word at all. When a battle was won or a king was crowned, a runner carried the euangelion back to the city. He wasn't selling anything. He wasn't asking the city to try victory for thirty days, satisfaction guaranteed. He was announcing something that had already happened, something that changed everything whether you clapped or not.

"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

M A R K 1 : 1 5 (N I V)

That is how Jesus opens his whole ministry. He sounds like a headline, not a commercial. And that one difference rearranges everything about sharing your faith. A salesman needs the close; a messenger just needs to be clear. A salesman gets nervous because the outcome rides on his performance; a messenger sleeps fine, because the victory already happened with or without him. You are not recruiting for a struggling organization, friend. You are reporting a rescue that is already underway.

You already know how to tell news. You did it when you got engaged, when the baby came, when your team pulled off the upset. Nobody handed you

a script for those announcements. Nobody needed to, because when something good is true, telling it is the most natural thing a human being does. The reason faith-sharing feels unnatural is that somewhere along the way we were taught to pitch instead of tell.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.”

R O M A N S 1 : 1 6 (N I V)

Paul says the gospel itself is the power. Not the presenter. Not the pitch deck. The news does the heavy lifting; you just have to say it plain and stand out of the way. Simple.

T R Y I T : S A Y T H E N E W S P L A I N

Write the good news in one sentence a twelve-year-old on your street would understand, with zero church words. No “saved,” no “redeemed,” no “washed in the blood.” Just news. Keep the sentence. You’ll use it for the rest of this book.

God Went Looking First

Do the shepherd math with me. A man has a hundred sheep and loses one. By every spreadsheet ever made, you cut your losses and protect the ninety-nine. One percent shrinkage is a good year. But Jesus tells the story like the spreadsheet was never the point.

"I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

LUKE 15:7 (NIV)

Heaven throws parties over ones. Not crowds. Ones. And notice who does the searching in the story: not the sheep, not the sheep's concerned friends. The shepherd. Before you ever felt awkward about bringing up faith with your cousin, God was already out looking for your cousin. That search did not start when you got brave. It started before either of you was born.

Watch Jesus live it out. He walks into Jericho, spots the most hated man in town up a sycamore tree, and invites himself to dinner. Zacchaeus didn't apply. He was found. And when the religious crowd grumbled about the guest list, Jesus explained his whole mission in one line:

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

LUKE 19:10 (NIV)

Came to seek. That changes your job description more than any technique ever could. Evangelism is not you launching a search and hoping God shows up to help. It is you joining a search that has been in progress since Eden, when God walked the garden calling "Where are you?" You are not

the lead investigator. You are a neighbor who joined the search party, and the One leading it already knows where everybody is.

That should take the panic out of your shoulders. The friend you're worried about? God has been working on that heart in rooms you've never entered, through people you've never met, in the quiet hours you know nothing about. Your conversation is not the whole operation. It's one flashlight in a field full of them. So before you say a single word to your friend about God, get in the habit of saying words to God about your friend. We wrote a whole book on that kind of talking, *Just Talk*, and this is where it earns its keep: prayer is the first move of every invitation, because prayer reports for duty in a search God is already running.

T R Y I T : J O I N T H E S E A R C H

Pick one person. Every day this week, pray for them by name for sixty seconds, and ask for one thing: eyes to see what God is already doing in their life. Don't plan a speech. Just watch.

*"God, you went looking for _____ long before I cared.
Show me where you're already working, and make me useful to the
search. Amen."*

Come and See

Nathanael was talking trash. Philip runs up glowing, saying they've found the one Moses wrote about, Jesus of Nazareth, and Nathanael hits him with the first-century version of a smirk: Nazareth? That little nothing town? You know how people talk about certain zip codes. They talk about ours that way too. Nothing good comes out of there, they say, and they say it about blocks where God is doing some of the best work on earth.

Now watch what Philip does with the cynicism, because this is the whole book in one verse. He does not argue. He does not pull out a scroll and walk Nathanael through the prophecies. He does not take the bait at all.

"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip.

J O H N 1 : 4 6 (N I V)

Three words. That's the oldest evangelism method in the Christian faith, and it is still the best one, because of what it refuses to do. An argument tries to win; an invitation tries to welcome. An argument corners a person, and cornered people defend themselves even when they're wrong. An invitation leaves the door open, and people walk through open doors all the time. Philip understood something we keep forgetting: his job was not to be the proof. His job was to point at where the proof lives.

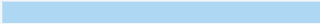
And it worked. Nathanael came, Jesus said one sentence to him, and the cynic folded on the spot, confessing more in a minute than Philip could have argued him into in a year. That is the pattern to burn into your memory: you handle the invitation, Jesus handles the convincing. The pressure you've been feeling, the fear of not having answers, the dread of the debate? Most of it comes from taking over Jesus' half of the job.

But an invitation only works if you know what you're inviting people to. "Come and see" needs an address. For Philip it was a person standing under a fig tree. For you it might be a Sunday at Crossland, a serve day, a meal at your table with your praying friends, a small group where nobody performs. Vague invitations die polite deaths. Concrete ones get taken up.

T R Y I T : K N O W Y O U R C O M E - A N D - S E E

Decide, today, the one concrete thing you would invite somebody to: a service, a serve day, a dinner. Write it down, with the day and time it happens. When the moment comes, you won't have to think. You'll just say it.

your story is the sermon



One Thing I Know

In John chapter nine, Jesus heals a man who was born blind, and the religious scholars call an emergency hearing about it. They grill the man's parents. They grill the man. Twice. These are the most educated theologians in the city, armed with degrees the man could never earn and questions he could never answer. Is this healer a sinner? What do you say about his doctrine? Where does he get his power? The man does something so simple it embarrasses them.

"He replied, 'Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!'"

J O H N 9 : 2 5 (N I V)

He refuses to answer what he doesn't know, and he refuses to shrink what he does. That's the whole skill. The scholars can out-argue him on every theological point in the building, and it does not matter, because he is not there as a scholar. He is there as evidence.

The New Testament has a word for this. When Jesus commissioned his friends, he did not call them lawyers, professors, or brand ambassadors. He called them witnesses, in Greek *martys*, the word English later turned into "martyr," because the early witnesses kept telling what they saw even when it cost them everything. Think about what a witness does in a courtroom. The witness does not argue the case; that is the attorney's job. The witness does not render the verdict; that is the jury's. The witness answers one question: what did you see? No cross-examination in the world can take your own story from you.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

A C T S 1 : 8 (N I V)

Those are Jesus’ last recorded words before the ascension, and notice the job title. Witnesses. Not debaters. You may lose an argument about science and Genesis. You may get stumped on why God allows suffering; entire books wrestle with that one, including ours, *When Life Falls Apart*. Losing those exchanges costs you nothing, friend, because arguments were never your assignment. Nobody can stump you on what happened to you.

So retire from the debate team today. Take the stand instead.

T R Y I T : O N E T H I N G I K N O W

Finish this sentence out loud: “One thing I know: since I met Jesus, _____.” Say it until it sounds like you. That sentence is now your home base in every spiritual conversation you will ever have.

Leave Your Mess in the Story

She came to the well at noon, the hottest hour, the hour you pick when you want the place to yourself. Five marriages behind her, living with a man who wasn't her husband, in a town where everybody knew everything. Then a tired Jewish rabbi asks her for a drink, reads her whole file back to her without flinching, and stays in the conversation. Knows everything. Stays anyway. That combination undid her.

"Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 'Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?'"

J O H N 4 : 2 8 - 2 9 (N I V)

Look at her opening line. "Everything I ever did." The very thing she came to the well at noon to avoid discussing became her headline. She ran back to the town that talked about her and led with her rap sheet. And the town that had written her off came pouring out to look.

"Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I ever did.'"

J O H N 4 : 3 9 (N I V)

Here is what we do instead. We sand our testimonies down until they're smooth, safe, and useless. "I was kind of lost, and now I'm kind of found." No addiction, no shame, no repossessed car, no season we barely survived. We present the highlight reel and wonder why nobody's moved. Friend, your neighbor does not need proof that church people have it together. Your neighbor suspects, correctly, that nobody has it together. What your

neighbor needs is one credible report that God handles real files. Files like theirs.

One caution, because we love you: telling the truth is not the same as bleeding in public. Some chapters are still open wounds, and wounds need a counselor before they need an audience. This church has said it for twenty years: praying people get counseling. Work the wound with somebody trained, and share it when it's scar instead of blood. A scar is a story with the healing already in it.

TRY IT: THE HIDDEN CHAPTER

Name to God, in private, the part of your story you always edit out. Ask one question: is this a wound that still needs healing, or a witness ready to work? If it's a wound, take it to a counselor or a pastor. If it's a witness, stop cutting it.

Tell It in a Minute

“Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story”

P S A L M 107 : 2 (N I V)

Notice the psalm doesn't say let the redeemed take a class, get ordained, or wait until they feel qualified. Tell their story. It's a command with no prerequisites except redemption itself. But a story only travels if it fits the openings real life gives you, and real life does not give you an hour with a projector. It gives you a hallway. A break room. Two red lights and a school pickup line. Your story needs a one-minute version, because one minute is the size of an actual door.

The shape is old and it works: before, meeting, after. What life was like before. How you met Jesus, or how Jesus cornered you, since half of us were minding our business at the time. What's different now. That's it. No three-point outline, no Greek, no cliffhanger. The man born blind did it in eleven words.

A few rules keep it honest. Use plain words: if you say “delivered” or “sanctified,” your coworker hears static, so say what happened like you'd say it to a barber. Tell the truth in both directions: don't make the before darker than it was for drama, and don't make the after shinier than it is, because the after still has bad days and your neighbor needs to know faith survives them. And land somewhere they can step. “That's why I still pull up every Sunday” gives a person a next move. “And now I'm blessed” gives them nothing to do but nod.

Then practice it out loud. This is the step everybody skips and the step that changes everything. Stories smooth with telling, like stones in a river. The first time you say it you'll wander; the fifth time it will sound like you, because by then it is you. Athletes rehearse, preachers rehearse, and the woman at the well had rehearsed nothing but urgency, which is why her

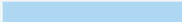
version was six seconds long and still emptied the town. Urgency you can't manufacture. The minute you can.

TRY IT: THE ONE-MINUTE STORY

Write your before, meeting, and after. Read it with a timer until it fits inside sixty seconds. Then say it to one safe person this week, a friend or family member who loves you, and ask them one question: "Did that sound like me?"

"God, you wrote the story. Help me tell it plain: before, _____; then you; and after, _____. Amen."

your block is the mission field



The Parish Outside Your Door

God's people were in Babylon, and they hated it. Dragged from home, surrounded by strangers, they wanted one thing: out. Some preachers of the day were selling them a quick exit. Then a letter arrives from Jeremiah with instructions nobody wanted: unpack. Plant gardens. Build houses. And then this:

"Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

J E R E M I A H 2 9 : 7 (N I V)

The Hebrew word under "peace and prosperity" is *shalom*, and it means far more than quiet streets. Shalom is wholeness: everything mended, nothing missing, kids safe, work steady, doors open, nobody left out of the good. God told exiles to want that for Babylon. Not to tolerate the city. To seek its shalom, tied up with their own.

The old church had a word we've nearly lost: parish. A parish was never the building; it was the ground around the building, every household on it, and the church considered itself responsible for all of them, member or not. That's your block. Your hallway if you're in an apartment, your cul-de-sac, your row of desks. And in case you think you landed there by accident, Paul told the philosophers in Athens exactly how addresses work:

"From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us."

A C T S 1 7 : 2 6 - 2 7 (N I V)

Appointed times, marked boundaries, so that people would reach out and find. Your lease has a purpose clause in it. Somebody on your block will never open a Bible, but they will watch you carry groceries up the stairs, watch how you treat the kid everybody yells at, watch whether your porch is a safe place to stand. Our church has staked twenty years on this: we go into dark places and call it being the light. If you want the fuller vision for what that means, our book *Light in Dark Places* walks the whole ground. For now, start smaller. Start with names.

T R Y I T : W A L K T H E P A R I S H

Take one slow walk around your block or your building this week, praying quietly for every door you pass. Then learn two names you don't currently know: a neighbor, a clerk, a kid. Names are the first square of the mission field.

A Table, Not a Tract

The first thing Levi did after Jesus called him is worth framing. He didn't enroll in a class. He didn't burn his old address book. He threw a banquet, a big one, and packed the room with the only people he knew: tax collectors and the rest of the crowd polite society crossed the street to avoid. Then he sat Jesus down in the middle of it. The religious professionals were scandalized, which tells you the party was working.

"Jesus answered them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.'"

L U K E 5 : 3 1 - 3 2 (N I V)

Levi's instinct is the instinct of every newly found person before somebody trains it out of them: cook for your old crew. Let them meet him the way you did, up close, over food. No stage, no pressure, no pamphlet under the windshield wiper. A meal.

Think about what a table does that a tract cannot. A tract talks at a person from a safe distance; a table seats you at the same level, passing the same dish. A tract can be thrown away without hurting anybody's feelings; an invitation to eat says you, specifically, are wanted. And food lowers defenses like almost nothing else God made. Somewhere between the first plate and the last, people start telling the truth: about the job, the marriage, the diagnosis, the questions they'd never raise in a religious building. The conversation you have been praying for usually shows up around the second helping, uninvited, natural as salt.

Jesus got accused, repeatedly, of eating with the wrong people. It was the scandal of his ministry: this man welcomes sinners and eats with them. Here is a question worth sitting with: when is the last time your faith got you accused of throwing too good a party, with too wide a guest list? Because if the critics of Jesus recognized his love by the company at his table, our

neighbors will recognize ours the same way. Nobody was ever pamphleted into the family of God. Plenty have been fed into it.

T R Y I T : S E T T H E T A B L E

Share one meal this month with somebody outside your church world: your place, their place, or the corner carryout. One rule: no agenda. You are not there to close a deal. You are there to eat, listen, and enjoy them. Let God handle the rest of the menu.

Five Names

Andrew never preached at Pentecost. No book of the Bible carries his name, no sermon of his survives, and in most paintings he's the one you can't identify. But look at what the Gospel of John records as his first act after meeting Jesus.

"The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus."

J O H N 1 : 4 1 - 4 2 (N I V)

The first thing. Not the tenth. And he didn't go find a stranger; he went and found his brother, the person whose whole story he already knew, whose breakfast he had probably eaten off of. One introduction. That introduction was Simon Peter: the preacher of Pentecost, the rock, the name on half the churches in your city. Every sermon Peter ever preached has Andrew's fingerprints on it, and Andrew's entire method was walking his brother across town.

Here is what that means for you, friend: you do not need a stadium. You need a short list. Most of us freeze because we imagine evangelism as addressing the world, and the world is unlistable. So shrink it. Five names. People you already know and already love, who as far as you can tell don't know Jesus, or don't know that any church actually wants them. Your brother. Your coworker who jokes about being a heathen. The neighbor who waves. The cousin nobody checks on. The friend who says "pray for me" as a punchline but watches your life closely.

Write the five names down. Something changes when a burden becomes a list: it stops being weather and starts being work. Pray for them by name, one minute a day, the way chapter two taught. Watch for the openings God makes, because God makes them: the crisis they mention, the question they float at the cookout, the funeral, the baby, the loneliness that leaks out

at midnight. And when the opening comes, do the Andrew move. Not a lecture. An introduction. “Come check it out with me Sunday. I’ll pick you up. We’ll get food after.”

You never know which name on your list is a Peter.

T R Y I T : T H E F I V E N A M E S

Write five names in the back of this book or in your phone right now, before you turn the page. Pray for one minute a day over the list. When an opening comes for any name, offer your come-and-see from chapter three.

The Ones Everybody Skips

Jesus told a story about a banquet where all the respectable guests sent regrets. The host had every right to cancel the whole evening. Instead he did something that still offends the respectable:

“Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.”

L U K E 1 4 : 2 1 (N I V)

And when the servant reported there was still room, the host pushed the search wider: out past the town limits, to the roads and country lanes, until the house was full. God’s guest list runs exactly opposite to the world’s. The world recruits the promising, the polished, the people who raise the average. Heaven pursues the passed-over, and heaven’s house does not open the buffet until the overlooked are seated.

Every one of us carries a private list of people we’ve already decided would say no. The cousin still using. The coworker who announces his atheism like a weather report. The man outside the store whose name nobody has asked in years. The girl whose life looks too put-together to need anything. We skip them politely, the way the town skipped a certain Samaritan woman, and we call the skipping realism. Scripture calls it a seating error.

This church cannot read Luke 14 from a distance. Community of Hope was born in 2006 in a nightclub, with eight people, precisely because somebody believed the crowd that would never touch a church door might still touch a door they already knew. We set up chairs where other folks saw a write-off, and the room filled. It has been filling for twenty years. The last book of the Bible ends with the same wide-open door:

“The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come!’ Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.”

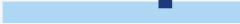
R E V E L A T I O N 2 2 : 1 7 (N I V)

Let the one who hears say “Come.” You heard it once. Somebody wide-listed you. Pass it on, especially to the name you crossed out.

T R Y I T : T H E U N L I K E L Y I N V I T E

Identify the one person you had quietly disqualified, the one you assumed would laugh or decline. Invite them anyway, warmly and concretely, this week. Their answer is not your business. The invitation is.

without the script



Lead With Your Ears

Here is a test you can run on your own memory. Think of the last person who made you feel like a project: the salesman waiting for you to finish talking so he could resume the pitch, the acquaintance whose eyes said the conversation was a means to an end. Now think of the last person who made you feel heard all the way down. Which one would you call back?

“My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry”

J A M E S 1 : 1 9 (N I V)

Quick to listen. We usually read that verse as advice for arguments, but it might be the single most useful evangelism instruction in the Bible, because nobody in the history of the church was ever listened to into feeling like a project. Listening is not the warm-up act before the real ministry starts. Listening is the ministry. Attention is love made visible, and in a world where every app, ad, and algorithm wants a piece of your neighbor, an hour of undivided human attention preaches before you say a word about God.

Jesus, who knew what was in every heart and technically never needed information, asked questions constantly. “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked a blind man whose need looked obvious. “Who do you say I am?” “Do you want to get well?” The questions were not for Jesus’ benefit. They were dignity, handed to people used to being talked about instead of talked to. When you ask a real question and then actually wait, you hand your neighbor the same dignity.

And here is the part nobody tells you: listening earns you the story you want to tell. People who feel heard get curious about the person who heard them. They start asking you questions back. Why are you like this? What’s with the church thing? How are you calm when everything’s on fire? Now

you're not forcing a testimony into a conversation; the conversation is requesting one. The door you were trying to pick opens from the inside.

TRY IT: THE COFFEE QUESTION

Have one conversation this week where your only goal is their story. Ask where they grew up, what they're carrying, what they hope for. Don't mention yourself unless asked. Afterward, write down one place you think God is already at work in what you heard.

Seasoned With Salt

“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”

C O L O S S I A N S 4 : 5 - 6 (N I V)

Grace and salt. Kind and flavorful. Paul’s recipe for talking with people outside the faith has exactly two ingredients, and most of us manage to leave out both. We swap grace for pressure and salt for blandness, and then wonder why nobody wants seconds.

Start with the voice. Somewhere along the line, church folks picked up a special tone for spiritual conversations: softer, higher, slightly haunted, like a sympathy card learned to talk. Drop it. God gave you your actual voice on purpose, the one you use at the cookout and the barbershop and the group chat, and that voice is the instrument this message was assigned to. A borrowed voice reads as a performance, and people brace against performances. Your own voice reads as a person, and people open up to persons.

Next, the jargon. You are bilingual and may not know it: you speak your neighborhood’s language and you speak church. “Traveling mercies.” “Hedge of protection.” “Covered by the blood.” Inside the family those phrases carry freight; on the sidewalk they’re fog. Translation is a form of love. “God kept me” can become “I should not have survived that year, and I know why I did.” Same truth, no fog.

Then, the salt. Salt is interest, honesty with flavor, the courage to be specific and even funny. Bland religious pleasantries preserve nothing. Tell the actual story with the actual details: the repo man, the diagnosis, the 2 a.m. prayer that sounded more like an argument. Jesus talked about seeds, yeast, wedding parties, and crooked judges, and crowds stood in the sun

for hours because the truth had taste. Notice, finally, what Paul assumes: that outsiders will be asking you things worth answering. Live and talk with enough grace and salt, and the questions come to you. Season accordingly.

T R Y I T : T R A N S L A T E I T

Write down three church phrases you actually use. Next to each, write what it means in plain speech your coworker would get on the first pass. Practice the plain versions until they feel natural. That's your outdoor vocabulary now.

Gentleness and Respect

Peter wrote his first letter to Christians who were catching real hostility: slandered at work, isolated in their families, some headed for worse. If anybody had an excuse to get sharp-tongued about the faith, it was them. Read what he told them to do instead.

“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect”

1 P E T E R 3 : 1 5 (N I V)

Three instructions, and each one levels a different fear. First: revere Christ as Lord in your heart, which settles the question of whose approval you actually need before the conversation even starts. Second: always be prepared. Your hope should be explainable. Not defensible in a doctoral exam; explainable, the way you can explain why you love somebody. “The reason for the hope that you have” assumes your life is visibly hopeful enough that somebody would ask, which is its own assignment. And notice the direction of traffic: they ask, you answer. Peter’s evangelism is a response to curiosity, not an ambush at the bus stop.

Third, the pair of words this whole book leans on: gentleness and respect. How you say a thing is part of what you are saying. A harsh gospel contradicts itself in the delivery, like a shouted lullaby. If your tone communicates contempt, your neighbor will believe your tone and ignore your content, and they will be right to, because tone is the part you actually meant.

Respect goes one step further than gentleness, and it’s the step the church keeps stumbling on: respect means their answer belongs to them. God built human beings with the freedom to say no and has been absorbing our no’s with patience ever since Eden. Love that will not honor a person’s freedom

is not evangelism; it's pressure wearing a cross. You are not called to override anybody. You are called to be so ready, so gentle, and so respectful that your answer outlives the conversation.

T R Y I T : T H E R E A S O N

Write two sentences answering the question “Why do you have hope?” Keep them somewhere you’ll see them: wallet, mirror, phone notes. When somebody finally asks, and somebody will, you won’t reach for a script. You’ll reach for the truth.

When They Say No

You finally did it. You prayed, you picked your moment, you offered the invite with grace and salt. And they said, “Maybe some time,” which you both understood to mean no. Now you’re replaying the conversation, auditing your words, wondering if you ruined the friendship and embarrassed God. Friend, put the tape down and read this slowly:

“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”

1 CORINTHIANS 3:6-7 (NIV)

Paul, the greatest evangelist in Christian history, files himself under “planting staff.” Growth is a different department, and the position is filled. Nobody stands over a garden yelling at the dirt to hurry. Seeds work underground, out of sight, on a schedule the farmer doesn’t set. Some sprout in a week. Some sit through winters. Ask around your own church and you’ll hear it constantly: “My grandmother prayed for me for twenty years.” “A man invited me to church a decade before I walked in.” The no you received today is a photograph of one moment, not the whole film. You cannot see the end of somebody’s story from the middle, so stop grading the seed on the day you planted it.

Two rules for the day after a no. First, keep the friendship at full strength. If you cool off toward people who decline, you confirm their worst suspicion: that the friendship was a funnel and they were a lead. Jesus watched the rich young ruler walk away, and the text says he loved him, without chasing him down the road or revising the offer. Love lets people leave and leaves the porch light on.

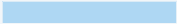
Second, keep your peace. Results were never your column in the ledger. You will answer for faithfulness: did you pray, did you love, did you offer?

You will not answer for their response, and carrying what was never assigned to you is how good inviters burn out into bitter ones. Plant. Water. Sleep. God is in the growing business, and business is good.

TRY IT: NO - AGENDA LOVE

Pick one person who has already told you no. Do them concrete good this month, a meal, a favor, a check-in, with zero church ask attached. Let them experience the friendship standing at full strength on the far side of their no.

sent, not sold



You're Not the Savior

Of all the parables Jesus told, one gets almost no airtime, and it might be the most restful sentence in the Gospels for anybody who has ever carried a friend's soul around like a backpack full of bricks.

"This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how."

MARK 4 : 2 6 - 2 7 (N I V)

Whether he sleeps or gets up. The farmer's unconsciousness is written into the parable on purpose. The kingdom advances while its workers are snoring, because the growth never depended on their vigilance in the first place. "Though he does not know how" is not a gap in the farmer's education; it's the job description. You scatter. You sleep. Something holy happens in the dark that you will get no credit for and carry no blame for.

There is one Savior, friend, and the position is not vacant. Say that out loud if you need to, because anxious evangelism preaches an anxious God, and that's false doctrine delivered through your body language. If every conversation with your unbelieving friend hums with desperation, what they learn is that your God is losing and needs you frantic. But a person at rest, who loves them without monitoring them for signs of progress, preaches a God who has the situation handled. Your calm is a doctrine. So is your sleep.

When Jesus looked at the crowds and felt the size of the need, look at the strategy he handed his disciples:

“He told them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’”

LUKE 10:2 (NIV)

The field has an owner, and it is not you. The harvest has a Lord, and it is not you. Your five names were on God’s heart before they were on your list, and they remain there when you put the list down to rest. We wrote in *Open Hands* that rest is an act of trust; here is where that trust gets tested. Scatter your seed. Then log off and sleep like a farmer.

TRY IT: HAND IT BACK

Tonight, pray through your five names one at a time, and after each name say: “They were yours first. They’re yours tonight.” Then go to bed on time. The seed knows what to do.

Keep Your Lamp Lit

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

MATTHEW 5:14-16 (NIV)

Two things about lamps, and both of them will save your witness. First: a lamp shines because it is lit, not because it strains. Nowhere in the Sermon on the Mount does Jesus tell his people to shout at the darkness or exhaust themselves radiating. The lamp's whole job is to stay connected to what fuels it and stay out from under the bowl. Which means the most important evangelism work you do this year might look nothing like evangelism: worship that refills you, prayer that isn't performance, Scripture that feeds you before it arms you, a community that knows your real name, rest that isn't earned. Our books *Just Talk* and *Reading the Text* exist for exactly this maintenance. You cannot give a light you are not receiving, and the saddest sight in the church is a lamp that kept serving after it went dark, running on reputation and fumes.

Watch for the warning lights. Resentment when somebody asks for more of you. Testimony that describes God's work in the past tense only. Prayers that have become announcements. Faking joy on Sunday you didn't feel Saturday. None of that disqualifies you; it just means the oil is low, and low oil is refillable. Pull over. Refill. The mission can wait a week better than it can survive your flameout.

Second thing about lamps: they belong on stands, in view. "Let your light shine before others" is not a command to perform; it's a command not to hide. Live your ordinary faith where people can see it: how you work, how you tip, how you grieve, how you apologize, how you treat the waiter who

got the order wrong. Nobody can glorify God over what you keep private. A lit life, visible, on its stand, preaches all week without saying a word, and then makes the words believable when you finally say them.

TRY IT: CHECK THE OIL

Name which one has gone dry lately: worship, prayer, Scripture, community, or rest. Refill that one this week, on the calendar, before you take another step of outreach. Lamps first. Then light.

Now Go

Eleven ordinary men climbed a mountain in Galilee, and Matthew includes a detail the church would have edited out if the church were writing fiction: when they saw Jesus, they worshiped him, but some doubted. Some doubted, on the mountain, at the finale. And Jesus handed the assignment to all of them anyway.

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”

MATTHEW 28:18-20 (NIV)

Notice who did not receive this commission: a clergy conference. It went to fishermen, a tax man, and assorted doubters, which settles forever the question of whether the Great Commission is for professionals. If you have been waiting to feel qualified, the mountain is your answer. Doubting worshipers got the whole assignment, and the church they started reached your block.

Notice, too, how the sentence is built. The command to go travels inside two bookends: all authority before it, always with you after it. You never carry an invitation anywhere that Jesus lacks jurisdiction, and you never walk into a conversation alone. The scholars also tell us the word “go” carries the sense of “as you go”: as you head to work, to class, to the gym, to the cookout. The mission does not require a new schedule. It rides your existing routes, because God already routed them through your five names.

So here we are, friend. You know the news is news. You have a story with the mess left in and a one-minute version that sounds like you. You know your block is a parish, your table is an altar of welcome, and your list has five

names on it. You know how to listen first, season with salt, honor a no, and sleep like a farmer. Somebody once looked at you and said “come and see,” and you came, and you saw. It’s never too late to say it to the next person down the row.

Go.

T R Y I T : T H I S S U N D A Y

Pick one name from your five. Send the text right now, before the feeling passes: “Pull up Sunday and sit with me. I’ll save you a seat, and we’ll grab food after.” That’s it. That’s the whole assignment.

Prayers You Can Borrow

Borrowed prayers count. The disciples borrowed one from Jesus, the church has been borrowing it ever since, and nobody upstairs checks for plagiarism. Pray these as written, or cross out our words and put in yours. They're yours now.

BEFORE YOU TELL YOUR STORY

God, you were the best part of my story before I knew you were in it. Put the right words in my mouth and the right person in front of me. Keep me plain, keep me true, and keep me out of the way. Amen.

FOR THE FIVE NAMES

Lord of the harvest, you know the five names folded up in my pocket. Go where I can't go and touch what I can't reach. Work the night shift in their hearts, and let me be nearby, smiling, when the door opens. Amen.

WHEN YOU'RE SCARED TO SPEAK

God, my mouth goes dry and my mind goes blank and I'm already rehearsing their laughter. Remind me the pressure was never mine to carry. I'm a witness, not a lawyer. Help me say one true thing today. Amen.

FOR MY BLOCK

God of every address, you set me here on purpose. Give my block shalom: safe kids, steady work, open doors, and nobody invisible. Make me part of the answer to my own prayer. Amen.

WHEN A FRIEND SAYS NO

Jesus, you let people walk away and loved them the whole time they were leaving. Take the sting out of this no. Keep my heart soft toward my friend, keep the friendship at full strength, and keep the porch light on in me. Amen.

WHEN YOU DON'T FEEL QUALIFIED

God, I don't have answers for half their questions, and we both know it. But I have eyes you opened and a life you changed. One thing I know. Let that be enough today. Amen.

F O R T H E T A B L E

Jesus, you did some of your best work at dinner. Bless this food and every person around it. Let my table feel like your table: nobody performing, nobody auditioning, everybody welcome. Amen.

F O R W O R K E R S F O R T H E H A R V E S T

Lord of the harvest, the field is bigger than my reach and riper than my courage. Send workers. And if one of the workers you're sending is me, wake me up early and point. Amen.

A Closing Blessing

May you never again confuse good news with a sales pitch, and may you carry the announcement like a runner from a battle already won.

May you remember, every time your courage dips, that God went looking first, and that you have never once evangelized anybody God wasn't already after.

May you tell your story with the mess left in it, plain enough for a hallway, true enough for a courtroom, and may "one thing I know" be armor enough.

May your block feel the difference because you live on it: names learned, doors prayed past, shalom sought like it was your own, because it is.

May your table stay crowded with the wrong people, the way his was, and may your guest list get you lovingly accused.

May you lead with your ears, season with salt, answer with gentleness, and honor every no while keeping the porch light on.

May you rest like a farmer who knows whose field this is, sleep while the seed works the night shift, and wake up unashamed of the gospel.

And may somebody, some year, grab your arm at a church door or a cookout and tell you it all started the day you said, "Come and see."

Where everyone has a chance.

Simple.

In the name of the Father who came looking, the Son who set the table, and the Holy Spirit who fills the house: amen.

Scripture Index

Every passage this book leaned on, in the order your Bible keeps them.

- **Psalm 107:2** · the redeemed tell their story (ch. 6)
- **Jeremiah 29:7** · seek the shalom of the city (ch. 7)
- **Jeremiah 29:11** · hope and a future (before we begin)
- **Matthew 5:14–16** · let your light shine (ch. 16)
- **Matthew 28:18–20** · go and make disciples (ch. 17)
- **Mark 1:15** · the good news announced (ch. 1)
- **Mark 4:26–27** · the seed grows at night (ch. 15)
- **Luke 5:29–32** · Levi's banquet (ch. 8)
- **Luke 10:2** · the Lord of the harvest (ch. 15)
- **Luke 14:21–23** · the widened guest list (ch. 10)
- **Luke 15:4–7** · the shepherd and the one (ch. 2)
- **Luke 19:10** · to seek and to save the lost (ch. 2)
- **John 1:40–46** · Andrew's introduction; come and see (chs. 3, 9)
- **John 4:28–29, 39** · the woman's come-and-see (ch. 5)
- **John 9:25** · one thing I do know (ch. 4)
- **Acts 1:8** · you will be my witnesses (ch. 4)
- **Acts 17:26–27** · God set your address (ch. 7)
- **Romans 1:16** · not ashamed of the gospel (ch. 1)
- **1 Corinthians 3:6–7** · God makes it grow (ch. 14)
- **Colossians 4:5–6** · seasoned with salt (ch. 12)
- **James 1:19** · quick to listen (ch. 11)
- **1 Peter 3:15** · gentleness and respect (ch. 13)
- **Revelation 22:17** · let the thirsty come (ch. 10)

Soli Deo Gloria

You're Invited

In 2006, a preacher and eight people started holding church in a DMV nightclub, figuring folks who would never touch a sanctuary might still walk through a door they knew. Twenty years in the making, Community of Hope AME Church is still that church: HIV testing at worship, violence interrupted on the corners, and a room where the question is never how you got here.

We don't care how you come. We only care about the way you leave.

PULL UP SUNDAY. We worship at Crossland High School, 6901 Temple Hill Rd, Temple Hills, MD 20748, Sundays at 10:00 AM. Come early for a good seat or come late and take ours. Dress code: clothes.

WATCH FROM WHEREVER. Find us at www.hiphopenation.com, on Facebook @CmtyofHope, and on YouTube @hiphopenationtv. Plenty of our family pulled up online before they ever pulled up in person. That counts.

PRACTICE ON US. If this book stirred a story in you and you want help finding the words, write to info@hiphopenation.com or call 240-273-9115. And if you're reading this because somebody handed it to you: that was their come-and-see. This page is ours.

KEEP READING. This book is part of a Community of Hope series:

start here. · your first steps as a new believer, no assumptions made.
just talk. · prayer without the performance.
reading the text. · how to open the Bible and actually understand it.
breath and fire. · getting to know the Holy Spirit.
when life falls apart. · faith for the seasons that break you.
light in dark places. · justice, mercy, and loving your neighborhood.
open hands. · generosity with your money, your time, and your rest.
come and see. · this one: sharing your faith without a script.

We'll save you a seat.

— Rev. Tony Lee & the Community of Hope family

where everyone has a chance.

We'll save you a seat.

W W W . H I P H O P E N A T I O N . C O M

C O M M U N I T Y O F H O P E A M E C H U R C H

Sundays 10 AM · Crossland High School