GARDEN

Relational Evangelism Study

GROUP LEADER'S GUIDE

Week 1 - Why Evangelism?
Your Mission Field Is Already in Your Life

BIG IDEA

God has already placed people in your life whom you can intentionally love, pray for, and point toward Christ.

G - Grow Relationships A - Ask Thoughtful Questions R - Reflect & Research
D - Direct to Helpful Resources E - Engage Over Time N - Nurture Through Prayer

Leader Preparation

Purpose of Week 1

Week 1 establishes the theological and relational foundation for everything that follows.

Participants should leave understanding that evangelism is part of ordinary Christian life; God is responsible for spiritual growth while Christians are responsible for faithful participation; preparation and dependence on God belong together; existing relationships are an important mission field; people are not projects; faithfulness matters more than immediate results; lack of knowledge does not disqualify someone from beginning; mature Christians should nevertheless grow in preparedness; and every participant will work toward becoming **Stage Three ready on one personally relevant topic**.

Before the Meeting

Read **2 Corinthians 5:17-21; 1 Corinthians 3:5-7; Colossians 4:2-6; 1 Peter 3:15; Matthew 28:18-20**. Review the Participant Guide and think through your own answers to the discussion questions.

Choose your own person for the Stage Three Project. **The leader should participate in the project too.**

Your Role

You are primarily a **facilitator, not a lecturer**. The Participant Guide carries the curriculum. Let participants read it aloud together, changing readers at each section break.

Your role is to keep the conversation moving, encourage participation, ask useful follow-up questions, clarify when necessary, and help the group remain focused.

You do not need to know the answer to every theological or apologetic question that arises. Model the principle: **"I don't know. Let's look into that."**

Participant Study Begins

How to Use This Study

Read the material aloud together, switching readers at each section break. When you reach a **DISCUSS** section, pause and discuss the questions as a group. When you reach a **REFLECT** or **MY STAGE THREE PROJECT** section, take a few minutes to write individually before continuing. Unless otherwise noted, Scripture passages should also be read aloud together.

> **No one needs to teach the lesson. Work through it together.**

Scripture First

As you read **2 Corinthians 5:17-21**, pay particular attention to Paul's description of Christians as **"ambassadors for Christ"** and his statement that God is **"making his appeal through us."**

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

DISCUSS

1. What do you think Paul means when he describes Christians as "ambassadors for Christ"?

2. What responsibilities does an ambassador have? What responsibilities belong to the one the ambassador represents?

3. Paul says that God is "making his appeal through us." What does this tell us about God's role and our role in reaching people?

> **LEADER NOTE - WHY START HERE?**
>
> Do not begin Week 1 with GARDEN. Begin with Scripture. GARDEN is a tool for carrying out an existing Christian responsibility, not a program attempting to manufacture one. The ambassador imagery establishes two ideas that matter throughout the course: **we represent Christ**, and **we do not control the response to the message**.
>
> **Optional follow-up:** How might remembering that we are representatives rather than the main character change the pressure we feel during evangelistic conversations?

We Are Ambassadors

An ambassador represents someone else.

An ambassador does not invent the message. He doesn't represent himself. He has been entrusted with something by the person who sent him.

Paul uses this language to describe Christians:

> **"We are ambassadors for Christ."**

That means evangelism isn't merely for pastors, missionaries, theologians, or Christians who happen to be naturally outgoing.

Ordinary Christians have been entrusted with an extraordinary message.

Jesus commands his followers to make disciples in **Matthew 28:18-20**. Peter tells Christians to be prepared to give reasons for their hope in **1 Peter 3:15**. Paul describes Christians as ambassadors through whom God makes his appeal in **2 Corinthians 5:20**.

But none of this means that someone's conversion ultimately depends upon our intelligence, eloquence, or persuasive ability.

Before reading **1 Corinthians 3:5-7**, notice who performs the different actions in Paul's agricultural illustration.

1 Corinthians 3:5-7

DISCUSS

> **"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth."**

What does this agricultural picture teach us about evangelism?

What can we do?

What can we not do?

> **LEADER NOTE - AN IMPORTANT DISTINCTION**
>
> GARDEN will ask participants to prepare, study, ask better questions, research objections, improve their reasoning, recommend resources, remember previous conversations, and intentionally follow up. Without a theological foundation, that preparation could imply: *If I become sufficiently skilled, I can produce conversion.* We do not want that. But we also do not want the opposite conclusion: *If God gives the growth, my preparation does not really matter.*
>
> **Theological guardrail:** This discussion can turn into a larger debate about election, predestination, or human freedom. Those may be worthwhile subjects, but they are not the purpose here. Return to what the passage clearly establishes: Paul planted. Apollos watered. God gave the growth.

Plant. Water. Trust God for the Growth.

Paul planted. Apollos watered. God gave the growth.

That's an important distinction.

We can: love. listen. pray. ask. answer. prepare. plant. water.

But we cannot make someone believe. We cannot manufacture conversion. That belongs to God.

At the same time, God's role does not eliminate ours. Paul still planted. Apollos still watered.

> **Dependence on God should produce prayer, not passivity.**
> **Human responsibility should produce preparation, not anxiety.**

> **LEADER NOTE - KEY IDEA**
>
> The two-sentence statement above is worth emphasizing. It provides a theological foundation for both sides of GARDEN: **Prayer:** God must work. **Preparation:** God has given us something to do.

What Does Prepared Evangelism Look Like?

As you read **Colossians 4:2-6**, listen for four things:

> **Prayer. Opportunity. Wisdom. Speech.**

Colossians 4:2-6

DISCUSS

1. What instructions does Paul give these Christians?

2. Which of those instructions require intentionality or preparation?

3. What might it look like to "walk in wisdom toward outsiders" in your ordinary relationships?

> **LEADER NOTE - OBSERVATION BEFORE APPLICATION**
>
> Give participants room to observe the text before turning immediately to GARDEN. They may notice persistence in prayer, thanksgiving, open doors, clarity, wise conduct, good use of opportunities, gracious speech, and knowing how to answer individuals. One especially useful phrase is **"how you ought to answer each person."** It naturally moves us away from a one-size-fits-all presentation.

Paul's description is worth noticing.

He asks Christians to pray. He asks for opportunities. He tells them to act wisely toward outsiders. He tells them to speak graciously.

And he wants them to know **"how you ought to answer each person."**

That sounds less like delivering a memorized speech and more like learning to engage actual people.

Because people are different. Their questions are different. Their experiences are different. Their objections are different.

And many of the people God gives us opportunities to engage are already around us.

Your Mission Field Probably Has Names

Think about your life.

Your coworkers. Friends. Neighbors. Children. Parents. Brothers and sisters. People at the gym. People you hunt with. People you've known for twenty years.

Some of our greatest opportunities to represent Christ don't begin with approaching strangers. They begin in relationships that already exist.

Someone tells you about a divorce. Someone loses a parent. A coworker mentions that they stopped believing in God years ago.

A friend says:

> **"I don't see how anyone can believe in God with all the suffering in the world."**

Someone casually remarks:

> **"Science has pretty much disproved religion."**

Or:

> **"The Bible has been changed so many times that nobody knows what it originally said."**

And sometimes we say nothing. Not because we don't care. Sometimes we simply don't know what to say.

GARDEN begins there.

> **LEADER NOTE - DON'T CREATE A FALSE CHOICE**
>
> GARDEN emphasizes relational evangelism, but do not imply that evangelizing strangers is inferior or misguided. The point is simply that Christians often overlook the mission field already surrounding them.

A Hunting Trip and an Uncomfortable Question

GARDEN began with an unexpected conviction.

Its founder was preparing for a hunting trip and putting an enormous amount of effort into getting ready.

He studied mountain ranges, basins, drainages, water sources, terrain, places where animals might be, and places where he might have the greatest chance of success.

Then there was the equipment: pack, gear, food, weight, what was needed, and what was not.

He was willing to spend hours learning and preparing because the trip mattered to him.

Eventually that preparation raised an uncomfortable question:

What would it look like if I put this kind of intentionality into reaching the people I care about?

Not: *How can I win more arguments?*

Not: *How can I become an apologetics expert?*

But:

There are people I love who don't know Christ. What am I intentionally doing about it?

That question led to something simple: writing people's names in a prayer journal and paying closer attention.

What do they believe? What have we talked about? What questions have they asked? What is happening in their life? What should I be praying about? Is there a question worth asking? Is there a resource that might help? Is there a seed I might plant?

That simple habit eventually developed into **GARDEN**.

> **LEADER NOTE - THE ORIGIN STORY**
>
> This version is intentionally written so any future leader can read it naturally. If the founder is leading the group, he can tell the story personally instead. The point is not guilt over hobbies, careers, fitness, or other interests. The point is intentionality: *If reaching people matters deeply, what might appropriate preparation look like?*

REFLECT

Your Mission Field

Take one minute and write down the first names of **five people you personally know who don't follow Christ or whose relationship with Christianity is uncertain.**

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

DISCUSS

1. Was it difficult to come up with five?

2. How much do you actually know about what these people believe?

3. Have you ever had a meaningful spiritual conversation with any of them?

4. If you've known some of them for years but rarely discussed spiritual matters, why do you think that is?

> **LEADER NOTE - HANDLE NAMES CAREFULLY**
>
> Participants will increasingly discuss real people. Establish discretion early. They do not need to reveal sensitive personal details merely because those things affect someone's worldview. Encourage participants to share what is useful and appropriate. The person being discussed should always retain their dignity.

People Are Not Projects

There's a danger here that we need to address immediately.

Intentional evangelism can become unhealthy if we begin viewing relationships primarily as opportunities to accomplish something.

> **People are not projects.**

We're not creating dossiers on unbelievers so we can determine how to defeat their worldview.

We're learning to pay attention because:

> **Love pays attention.**

There is an important difference between asking:

> **"How can I get this person converted?"**

and:

> **"How can I faithfully love this person, understand them, pray for them, and point them toward Christ?"**

The first can easily become focused on an outcome we don't control. The second focuses on faithfulness.

> **LEADER NOTE - A FOUNDATIONAL GUARDRAIL**

This is not a disclaimer to get out of the way in Week 1. It should characterize the entire course. As participants become more knowledgeable, there is a danger that people become objections to solve. Resist that. The objection matters because the person matters. Week 6 will develop this more deeply.

What Counts as Success?

Imagine this situation.

You've spent time preparing for a conversation with a friend. You listen carefully. You ask good questions. You accurately explain what Christianity teaches. You treat their objections fairly. You admit when you don't know something. You give them something worthwhile to think about.

And at the end of the conversation...

> **they're still an atheist.**

DISCUSS

Did you fail?

What should count as a successful evangelistic conversation?

LEADER NOTE - LET THE TENSION SIT

Do not immediately supply the curriculum's answer. Useful follow-ups: **Can we distinguish the ultimate goal of evangelism from what makes one conversation faithful? Can an evangelistic conversation be faithful even when the person moves no closer to Christianity? Can someone apparently move closer to Christianity while we nevertheless handled the conversation poorly?**

Playing the Long Game

If success means:

> **"I caused someone to become a Christian,"**

we've made ourselves responsible for something Scripture never places under our control.

A better way of thinking about success is:

> **Success is faithfully participating in what God is doing in another person's life.**

Sometimes that means clearly explaining the gospel. Sometimes it means answering an objection. Sometimes it means asking one good question. Sometimes it means correcting a misconception about Christianity. Sometimes it means sharing a resource. Sometimes it means listening.

Sometimes it means admitting:

> **"That's a good question. I'm not sure how I'd answer that right now. Let me think about it and get back to you."**

And sometimes it means leaving someone with a question or idea that stays with them after the conversation is over - a **stone in the shoe** that they continue thinking about.

We don't know where one conversation fits within everything God may be doing in someone's life. So we're going to learn to **play the long game**.

> **LEADER NOTE - SUCCESS AND THE GOSPEL**
>
> Do not let "playing the long game" become an excuse for never actually communicating the gospel. GARDEN is not a replacement for proclaiming Christ. The point is that every encounter does not have to contain every element of evangelism, and we should not manipulate conversations to force immediate outcomes.

But I Don't Know Enough

At this point, you may be thinking:

> **This sounds good, but I'm not prepared to have these conversations.**

Maybe you're uncomfortable talking about Christianity. Maybe someone could ask you a difficult question and you'd have no idea how to answer. Maybe you've avoided conversations precisely because you're afraid someone will ask something you can't answer.

If that's where you are, you're not disqualified. **That's one of the reasons we're here.**

During this study we're going to talk about three stages of preparedness.

Stage One - No Knowledge and No Comfort

Someone raises a difficult question and you genuinely don't know how to answer.

> **"That's a good question. I'm not sure how I'd answer that right now. Let me think about it and get back to you."**

That's a legitimate response.

Stage Two - Growing Comfort and Curiosity

You begin learning how to ask thoughtful questions:

> **"What do you mean by that?"**
> **"How did you come to that conclusion?"**
> **"Why do you think that's true?"**

You discover that you don't need to know everything to have a meaningful conversation.

Stage Three - Knowledge and Confidence Together

You become increasingly capable of combining thoughtful questions with substantive answers.

You understand an issue. You can identify assumptions. You can explain the Christian position. You can respond to important objections.

And you're still willing to say **"I don't know"** when you genuinely don't.

Stage One is a perfectly legitimate place to **begin**. But it isn't where we want to remain.

> **LEADER NOTE - DON'T LOWER THE BAR TOO FAR**

We want hesitant Christians to hear: **You can begin now.** We do not want mature Christians to hear: **You never need to become better prepared.** Stage One removes the barrier to participation. Stage Three establishes a direction for growth.

Our Eight-Week Challenge

We're not going to spend eight weeks merely **talking about becoming prepared**. We're actually going to do it.

During this study, each of us will choose **one person** already in our life.

Then we'll identify **one significant question, objection, belief, or worldview issue** relevant to that person.

Maybe it's: Why does God allow suffering? Has science made God unnecessary? Can we trust the Bible? Is there any evidence that God exists? Why would Christianity be the only way? Is morality really objective? Did Jesus actually rise from the dead?

Over the next eight weeks, you'll learn how to investigate and prepare for that issue.

> **Become Stage Three ready on one topic.**

Not an expert. Not a professional apologist. **Prepared.**

UNDERSTAND

Accurately understand the claim or objection.

QUESTION

Know how to ask thoughtful questions about it.

EXPLAIN

Explain the Christian response naturally in your own words.

RESPOND

Handle some of the most important objections and follow-up questions.

RESOURCE

Know where you and the other person can go to learn more.

> **Understand -> Question -> Explain -> Respond -> Resource**
>
> **If you can learn how to become prepared on one topic, you can learn how to become prepared on another.**

And then another. That's how preparedness develops over a lifetime.

LEADER NOTE - THIS IS THE COURSE-LONG PROJECT

This is not optional homework added to the curriculum. It is one of the central outcomes of the eight weeks. By Week 8, participants should have experienced the process of moving from *I don't really know how I'd answer that* to *I've thought carefully about this. I understand the issue, know useful questions to ask, can explain the Christian response, can handle the major follow-ups, and know where to go deeper.* The deeper lesson is: **I now know how to become prepared.**

MY STAGE THREE PROJECT

Week 1 - Choose Your Person

Return to the five names you wrote earlier.

Don't choose the person who seems **easiest to convert**.

> **Who has God already placed in my life whom I want to love, understand, pray for, and become better prepared to engage?**

First name: _____

Relationship: _____

What do I currently know?

What do I think this person believes about God?

What do I think this person believes about Christianity?

Have we had spiritual conversations before? If so, what do I remember?

Are there experiences in this person's life that may have influenced what they believe?

What don't I know about this person's beliefs that I would like to understand better?

> **Remember: Don't confuse what you assume someone believes with what they have actually told you.**

Part of GARDEN will be learning to listen.

> **LEADER NOTE - DON'T LET THEM CHOOSE A TOPIC YET**
>
> This is intentional. Week 1 is about **the person**. Participants may already know exactly what objection they want to research. That's fine, but do not make them formalize it yet. Reinforce the sequence: **Person first. Issue second.**

Discuss Together

1. What does being an "ambassador for Christ" require of an ordinary Christian? Where does that responsibility begin and end?

2. Why do Christians sometimes feel little urgency about the spiritual condition of people they genuinely love?

3. What is the difference between intentional evangelism and treating someone as a project? Can intentionality ever become manipulative?

4. If God ultimately gives the growth, why should Christians spend significant time preparing for evangelistic conversations?

5. What should count as a successful evangelistic conversation? Does someone need to move closer to Christianity for the conversation to have been worthwhile?

6. Before reading 1 Peter 3:15, consider this question: What level of preparation should reasonably be expected of a mature Christian?

1 Peter 3:15

How does Peter's instruction affect your answer?

7. Think about your hobbies, career, finances, fitness, entertainment, or other interests. Where have you willingly invested significant time becoming knowledgeable or competent? How does that compare with the effort you've invested in becoming prepared to represent Christ?

8. Is there anything about evangelism that currently makes you uncomfortable? What are you afraid might happen?

> **LEADER NOTE - THESE QUESTIONS CAN GO DEEP**
>
> There is no need to rush through all eight. Follow productive conversations. Question 2 can expose complacency. Question 3 protects against manipulation. Questions 4 and 5 reinforce the theological foundation. Question 6 introduces increasing preparedness. Question 7 echoes the hunting story. Question 8 surfaces fears that later weeks will address.

This Week in the GARDEN

Don't try to manufacture a spiritual conversation this week. Begin more simply.

PRAY

Pray for your person **by name every day**. Pray for the whole person - their relationships, struggles, questions, and circumstances. Ask God to work in their life, give you wisdom, and provide opportunities along with the wisdom to recognize them.

PAY ATTENTION

Try to learn **one thing** this week that helps you understand your person better. Don't interrogate them. Just pay attention.

LISTEN

If spiritual matters arise naturally, resist the urge to immediately formulate your response. Listen carefully. What are they actually saying?

RECORD

If something significant happens, write it down: a question, belief, conversation, struggle, something to pray about, something to understand, or a possible seed to plant later.

> **LEADER NOTE - KEEP WEEK 1 SIMPLE**

Participants may leave energized and want to immediately send apologetics videos, initiate a debate, research every objection, or manufacture a spiritual conversation. That's not the assignment. For Week 1: **Pray. Pay attention. Listen. Record.** We are developing intentionality before strategy.

Pray Together

Break into groups of two or three. Share only what is appropriate.

Share the **first name** of the person you've chosen and briefly explain your relationship with them.

Then pray for one another's people.

Pray for **God's work in their lives, wisdom, open doors, courage, humility, genuine love,** and the ability to faithfully **plant and water while trusting God for the growth.**

LEADER NOTE - DON'T SKIP THIS

It is easy for an intellectually engaged group to have a great discussion and then treat prayer as a closing formality. Do not. If **God gives the growth**, prayer is not an appendix to GARDEN. It is fundamental to it.

Before Week 2

Keep praying. Keep paying attention.

You don't need to figure out your person's biggest objection to Christianity yet. You don't need to start researching. You don't need to force a conversation.

> **Know the person. Pray for the person. Pay attention to the person.**

Next week we'll introduce the framework that will guide the rest of our study:

G - Grow Relationships
A - Ask Thoughtful Questions
R - Reflect & Research
D - Direct to Helpful Resources
E - Engage Over Time
N - Nurture Through Prayer

GARDEN

And we'll begin learning how these six practices can help us become more intentional with the people God has already placed in our lives.

After the Meeting - Leader Reflection

Who seemed especially engaged?

Who seemed hesitant about evangelism? Why?

What fears surfaced?

Did anyone misunderstand intentionality as manipulation?

Did anyone appear to believe they need extensive apologetics knowledge before they can begin?

Did anyone seem resistant to the idea that mature Christians should become increasingly prepared?

Did everyone identify a person?

Is there anything from the discussion that should be revisited next week?

You don't need to solve every issue immediately. Part of leading GARDEN is paying attention to the participants in the same way we're asking participants to pay attention to the people in their lives.

Leader Preview - Week 2

Week 1 answered: **Who has God already placed in my life?**

Week 2 introduces the full GARDEN framework and begins moving toward: **How can I engage this person intentionally without forcing the process?**

The Stage Three Project also takes its next step: **What question, objection, belief, or barrier might actually matter to this person?**