

THE LOST ART OF HANDING OUT GOSPEL TRACTS

By Katherine. Pittman

“But what do I say?!” I asked desperately. “And what if they reply?”

My sweaty palms clenched the newly obtained tracts, my heart beating faster as we neared the bus’s exit. I offered excuse after excuse—digging for anything to evade my fiancé’s playfully-given assignment. He rejected them all.

A smile danced across his face, seemingly ignorant of the sheer terror growing in my heart. *Did he think this was easy?* I’d stood by his side as he offered tracts to dozens of strangers, but now he was asking me to do the same. We were at our stop.

“Bevakasha,” I said hastily, using one of the few Hebrew words I knew. “These are for you.”

In a second, the bus was gone.

It’s been more than twenty years since I handed my first tracts to those girls in Jerusalem. But even today I still get scared. It’s still awkward almost every time. And yet, I continue to feel compelled, even privileged, to do this uncomfortable, scary work of handing out tracts. If you’ve been terrified to share the gospel or have hesitated to use tracts to do so, here are a few reasons that may cause you to reconsider.

Tracts allow others to seek God in private. Once, as my husband distributed tracts along this same bus route in Jerusalem, an older Jewish man began to read the tract. Yes, believe it or not, tracts get read. Suddenly, he stood up, angrily throwing the booklet to the ground. “Missionaries! Missionaries!” he shouted. Yet moments later, my then-fiancé watched as the same man retrieved the tract from the floor, quickly sliding it into his pocket as he exited the bus.

For many—a practicing rabbi, a Muslim, even a “cool” college student—it may be too big of a step to own Jesus publicly. Like Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night, many cannot receive the good news in a crowd and won’t risk the danger of showing up at a Christian gathering. When we offer a tract, we provide an opportunity for a hidden seeker to learn about Jesus privately until he or she is ready to accept God more publicly.

Tracts allow us to reach souls when time is short—or words fail. “And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” Paul writes in [Romans 10:14](#). But friends, so often I am aware of my inadequacy, and so often I stumble over words. This is where tracts are so beneficial. How do we even begin to share the gospel with a stranger? We’ll probably always need more time. Yet as we place a tiny seed of gospel hope in their hand, we come alongside our Lord in this glorious gospel work.

Tracts stay long after we’re gone. Sometimes though, the Lord helps us to share *a little*. We initiate a conversation with a coworker or family member, but our talk gets interrupted. Or we get together, but somehow that moment for sharing the gospel escapes us.

Many years back, the Lord placed a coworker on my heart. For weeks, I tried to tell her about the Lord on breaks and between scanning grocery orders. Eventually, I gave her a pocket-sized gospel of John and encouraged her to read it. For a while, the booklet sat unopened. But one day she approached me at work. “I read your book,” she told me, “and I went to my friend’s youth group last night and prayed . . .” She didn’t need to say another word. The glow on her face told the whole story.

My husband was also saved after reading a tract. It’s true. Reading alone in his room at night, he read a boring tract and prayed the generic prayer on the back—and the Lord flooded his heart and changed everything. Do a quick internet search to discover many famous people, even more you’ve never heard of, were saved through tracts. They work. People *do* read them. Servers. Bank tellers. That random person who found one in Walmart or grabbed a gospel booklet from the park bench. Even those left in bathroom stalls—those get read too.

TIPS FOR MAKING TRACT-SHARING EASIER

We can all agree it's awkward to pass out tracts. But friends, we're not off the hook. Paul tells Timothy—timid Timothy—to do the work of an evangelist ([2 Tim. 4:5](#)). As something of a shy, fearful Timothy myself, here are three things that have helped me.

Pray. Most people who do any gospel sharing know this is key. “And when they had prayed . . . they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness” ([Acts 4:31](#)). Sometimes God fills you with fresh love for the lost. Sometimes, as with the apostles, an unnatural boldness comes. But it often comes as you pray.

Prepare a few sentences. Of course, we're flexible if the Lord gives us something new to say, but in my experience, knowing how to begin has been incredibly helpful. “Hi, this is a story about how Jesus can change your life—can I share it with you?” Or slightly less assertive, “This message encouraged me when I was going through a tough time, and I just wanted to pass it on.” It can be as simple as, “Can I give this to you?” You'd be surprised how many respond with a willing, “Sure!”

Create your own. Years ago the Lord began showing me how valuable tracts were, especially in my case. Certainly tracts must clearly display the gospel, but a winsome appeal to the lost is also important. I wanted something that felt like *me*—something I could unashamedly stand on without feeling the need to excuse that random, cheesy (or overbearing) sentence. As Charles Spurgeon admonished, “Get good striking tracts, or none at all. But a touching gospel tract may be the seed of eternal life.”

Unfortunately, many tracts are *old*. I'd read them and think, “This is a neat story, but I can't imagine anyone picking it up.” Then one night the Lord reminded me of my own salvation and filled my heart with a gospel message. I furiously wrote and edited, eventually working alongside a tract publisher to get copies in print. Sharing my story made both the giving and the receiving of the tracts easier. “You wrote this?” a gas

station attendant asked. I nodded. “Okay, because you wrote it, I’ll read it.”

Writing your own tract also provides a relatable way to connect with others. Once I left the tract with my stylist after getting a haircut. Moments later she called, sobbing. “I just went through this too,” she exclaimed through tears. “Thank you! I’m going to read the whole thing!” I was scared she’d think I was a fool! Praise God he can use our story to reach others.

Of course, if you can open your home to your neighbors, go for it! If you can befriend strangers on the street or invite your server or cashier to a Bible study with your church family—wonderful! But for so many of us, that’s not always possible.

And friends, have you noticed that hijab-covered cashier and just wished she knew the gospel? Have you passed a homeless man on the street and remembered the gospel is powerful, even to destroy strongholds and change a life ([Rom. 1:16](#); [2 Cor. 10:4](#))? As we see the darkness increasing, we feel the cry rising in our hearts, “Lord, reveal yourself to these lost souls!” Yet, a moment passes, our words fail us, we run out of time. Too often we are left only with the burden that comes from longing we could do more, wishing we could represent him better, and yearning to offer some hope in this weary world.

With a tract in our hand and a prayer in our heart, we can. We can pray, offering a tract with its simple message of hope, and hand it to another.

As Andrew Peterson’s worship song asks and answers: Is he worthy of this? He is.

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