



BROADCAST TALKS

# Sharing the Gospel with Authenticity

by Jerry Root



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**Jerry Root** is professor of evangelism and the director of the Wheaton Evangelism Initiative at the Billy Graham Center for Evangelism at Wheaton College. He also serves as the C.S. Lewis Institute's Christopher W. Mitchell Senior Fellow for C.S. Lewis Studies. Root received his Ph.D. from British Open University and his M.Div. from Talbot School of Theology. His passionate, engaging, and thoughtful presentation of important truths has made him a favorite professor of Wheaton College students for years. Both his M.Div. thesis and Ph.D. dissertation were about C.S. Lewis. Root has taught college and university courses on C.S. Lewis continuously since 1980. Root is the author, contributor, or editor of more than twenty books, including *The Quotable C.S. Lewis*, *C.S. Lewis and a Problem of Evil: An Investigation of a Pervasive Theme*, *The Surprising Imagination of C.S. Lewis*, and *The Sacrament of Evangelism*. He and his wife, Claudia, have four children and thirteen grandchildren.

The following is adapted from the opening talk given at the 2018 C.S. Lewis Institute Summer Conference, Communicating the Gospel: C.S. Lewis Style, held at the Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College (IL). This talk is the first of six presented by Jerry Root at the conference. (The Wade Center is a major research collection of materials by and about seven British authors: Owen Barfield, G.K. Chesterton, C.S. Lewis, George MacDonald, Dorothy L. Sayers, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams.)

BROADCAST TALKS presents ideas to cultivate Christ-like thinking and living. Each issue features a transcription of a talk presented at an event of the C.S. Lewis Institute.



**T**alking about communicating the gospel convincingly, I want to consider the character of the evangelist and authenticity in the evangelist’s life.

In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote, “No man knows how bad he is till he has tried very hard to be good.” He wrote also, “The main thing we learn from a serious attempt to practise the Christian virtues is that we fail. If there was any idea that God had set us a sort of exam and that we might get good marks by deserving them, that has to be wiped out.” This self-awareness of inadequacy, which also may be a kind of gift of God, drives us to Christ. It was Spurgeon, I think, who said, “I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages.”

And this self-awareness makes our message authentic and vital. It also removes pretense from our presentation of the gospel. We don’t have to put on airs, for people come to Jesus desperately. We can look to the people who are discovering that desperation in their own life and speak to them with authority out of our brokenness and out of our discovery of God’s grace to meet us in those places.

As you share your faith, people are going to want to know, is it real in your life? Is it the real deal? When you start sharing your faith authentically, you’ll start to see the things that need to change inside of your life. In this way, sharing the gospel can refine our character.

Dallas Willard once observed that grace is not opposed to effort; it is opposed to earning. That's important. Grace is not opposed to effort, but it is opposed to earning. We should be seeking to grow in Christ. We shouldn't be inert in our Christian lives.

After presenting the gospel in *Mere Christianity*, Lewis directs his readers' attention to spiritual formation, to the development of character. He says, "You cannot make men good by law: and without good men you cannot have a good society." There has to be some transformative operational power of the gospel in our life, which gives us confidence when we present the power of Christ to change us, to change people. The gospel should be transformative.

So Lewis writes in *Mere Christianity* in this regard about the cardinal virtues (book 3, part 2). These are discussed in Plato, particularly *The Republic*; in Aristotle, particularly in the *Nicomachean Ethics*; in the early church fathers, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and medieval mystics. As Lewis addresses the character of the Christian and the evangelist, he is sitting on the shoulders of giants. If you read 2 Peter 1:1–11, you'll see the characteristics of virtue: courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom. And Peter writes about it in the context of becoming better evangelists; if these qualities are ours and increasing, they will render us neither useless nor unfruitful; that is, they will make us useful and fruitful in the presentation of the gospel.

## Four Classic Virtues

So let's look at those four virtues. I want to define each of these characteristics or habits, for our application and for use in follow-up with people we've led to Christ. Virtue is an integrated whole made up of courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom.

*Courage* is the first characteristic of virtue. One courageous act doesn't make you a courageous person. It's a lifetime of learning to endure, to have fortitude, to persevere. In 2 Peter 1, the NIV mentions "perseverance." So courage is the habitual ability to suffer

pain and hardship. It's endurance, it's fortitude, it's staying power. Courage is the ability to say yes to right action even in the teeth of pain. Lewis writes, "Fortitude includes [two] kinds of courage—the kind that faces danger as well as the kind that 'sticks it' under pain. 'Guts' is perhaps the nearest modern English." Courage is the ability to be an evangelist even if the tide seems to be going against the grain of the Christian community; we still stay missionally engaged.

I'll give you an example about courage in relation to endurance. When I was in college, I was playing football. Football is an anaerobic sport. You put out for six seconds, and you pant desperately for air for thirty till the next play. A real good friend of mine, Pokey Cleek, who was following me up as a new Christian, was the conference champion in the high hurdles, but he ran cross-country to build up his endurance during the off season. When my freshman football season was over, he came to me and said, "Jerry, I'm going to go run in the Palos Verde marathon," which has since blended into the Los Angeles marathon. The Palos Verde marathon was not the Chicago marathon that's flat as a pancake. Pokey said, "I want you to run with me." I hadn't trained a day for the marathon. He'd been running cross-country all fall. I said, "Pokey, I can't do this." I was a freshman, right, very gullible. So Pokey says, "I'm sure, Jerry, you'll be a natural. Why don't you go?"

We had to get up at five-thirty in the morning to drive to Palos Verde. We get there, and I'm saying to myself, "What am I doing here?" And then all of a sudden I see the *ABC Wide World of Sports* camera crew there. Then I see the *L.A. Times* photographer, and all of a sudden that adrenaline started pumping, and I was off. I was convinced I was going to win this thing. I'm embarrassed about it now, but when the thing got ready to start and the guy was going to blow off the gun, I was in a sprinter's stance on the front row. He shot the gun, and I took off, and — you know what? — I did. I led the Palos Verde marathon, for about 200 yards. I had a stitch in my

side and knew I had another twenty-five-plus miles to go. I never finished it. I got twenty miles in about 3.5 hours, and I lost all the skin on my feet. I couldn't walk straight for three days. It was really unfortunate because I was trying to kill my friend Pokey Cleek, but I couldn't catch him. You know what I learned that day? A marathon isn't a sprint. Neither is life. It requires endurance, fortitude, staying power, and the Christian life is this way as well.

Jesus said to go and spread the gospel. Most are not naturally gifted, but the courageous persevere and learn from their mistakes and grow. I don't have the gift of evangelism. I have it as a high value; I've made a boatload of mistakes, but I've tried to learn from the mistakes and ask forgiveness of the people I might have offended. Also we learn from each encounter, so that when new encounters come, we can do it better. I think Lewis was a great evangelist, because wherever he was sharing his faith, he was growing and learning from each encounter.

The next vital virtue is *temperance*. Temperance is the habitual ability to resist the enticement of immediate pleasure in order to gain the greater, the more remote, good. The apostle Peter calls it "self-control." If courage is the ability to say yes to right action even in the teeth of pain, temperance is the ability to say no to wrong action even in the jaws of pleasure. It's very different from abstinence, Lewis says. It's very different from abstinence because anybody stubborn can be abstinent. But temperance is right amount, right place, right time. Lewis put it this way. "Temperance referred... to all pleasures; and it meant not abstaining, but going the right length and no further." It's a mark of maturity, I believe.

You might think my children were born mature, right? But they weren't. When they were children, I noticed they would sell their souls for sweets. I'd come home from work, and everyday they'd say, "Daddy, did you bring me something? Did you bring me something?" I always brought them something, maybe a paper clip,



a doodle if I was talking on the phone. Sometimes I'd bring them that yellow butterscotch candy wrapped in cellophane. "Daddy, Daddy, did you bring us something?" and I'd say, "Yes, I brought you this penny candy." I decided one time to do an experiment with them. I said, "I'll give you the penny candy now, or, if you're willing, you could refuse it now and I'll take you to Toys 'R' Us and buy you a toy tomorrow for ten dollars." That was back when ten dollars could still buy you something. They all took the penny candy. I had my work cut out for me. Finally the day came when Jeremy said, "I'll take that toy." The other kids looked at him like he was crazy. They didn't even suck on the candy to make it last, they chomped it! They couldn't even suck on it temperately. But eventually each one took the toy. I remember years later, Alicia was telling us about some problem at high school. One of her classmates had got caught up in something unfortunate and the consequences that followed. She said to me, "Dad, is this why you did the penny candy thing with us when we were little? So we would learn to be temperate in all these areas as well?" I think this kind of character doesn't come easy to us. If you want to be temperate, it's going to take some courage too. These things are all interwoven.

The third classic virtue I want to address is *justice*. Justice is basically the habit of being law abiding and concerned for the general welfare of one's society. It seeks to be fair. It renders to others their due. Lewis says justice "is the old name for everything we should now call 'fairness'; it includes honesty, give and take, truthfulness, keeping promises, and all that side of life." You find these comments by Lewis in *Mere Christianity*. Justice is that one feature of virtue that says my character and moral development is linked to my responsibility to others. As a matter of fact, some people think that the greatest thing Lewis wrote was the sermon *The Weight of Glory*. When he gets to the end of the sermon, he says that there are no *ordinary* people. "You have never talked to a mere mortal." Every person you meet

“may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you should be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare.” And he says, “All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations.” And the “load, or weight, or burden of my neighbor’s glory” calls for this sense of justice. In other words, in evangelism, there’s a character that should be developing in me of justice — responsibility — to share my faith with other people. This is important in our own recognition of what’s going on in our own soul, in our own character, in our own development as we then engage with others. Evangelism is an act of justice.

And lastly, virtue includes and requires *wisdom*. The definition of wisdom is the habit of being careful about decisions we make; it seeks counsel and advice. Lewis says prudence (another word for wisdom) “means practical common sense, taking the trouble to think out what you are doing and what is likely to come of it.” Wow! There’s great advice to give evangelists.

## Living Examples

So let’s see if we can take this foundation — character of the evangelist, the recognition of our own needs, a willingness to incline ourselves to grace as we develop Christian habits of virtue, courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom — and see how these characteristics together can work out as we share Christ with other people. Again, 2 Peter 1:1–11 says, if these things are ours, they will allow us to develop habits that are useful and fruitful for kingdom purposes and sharing the gospel. Let’s look at one: I’ll start to be more aware of others. Rather than being self-referential, I’ll become self-aware and in turn concerned for the welfare of others. So here’s something I’ve tried to do in light of what Lewis has written.

If you’re going to share the gospel with somebody, it seems to me that in sensitivity to that person you have complete freedom to ask



public questions. People matter. You can engage them in discussion when sitting on an airplane; you can talk to somebody with public questions. You're leaving Chicago by plane. What's your name? Public question. Do you live in Chicago? They say, no, I'm going home. Oh, where's home? San Francisco. What brought you to Chicago? Listen to the answer, and you begin to get information that gives you the freedom to go deeper, because these people — strangers — matter. And we're becoming less self-referential and more aware of the needs of others.

I remember once I was in Chicago. I met this guy and said, what's your name? He said Peter. I asked, you from Chicago? Public question. We're in Chicago. He said, yes, I live in Chicago but I grew up in Albuquerque. When my parents divorced when I was twelve, I moved to Chicago with my mother. This guy was in his late twenties. He didn't have to tell me all that stuff. But he did, and he gave me the freedom to keep talking. I said, that was a long time ago, but it sounds pretty raw for you still. Tell me about that. And he started unpacking his heart. I think he had probably thrown that information out, who knows how many times? Nobody picked up on it. You know what I found out about Peter? It wasn't that he was so upset that his father had abandoned the family, but he was getting upset about what the bitterness and the rancor was doing to his own soul. He didn't know how to break free and forgive his father. Now I'm not just talking to him of the gospel self-referentially. Aware of this person with whom I'm talking, aware of the brokenness of our world, I'm able to segue the gospel to the place of his felt need, and it's being heard.

Another thing: awareness of our own brokenness, awareness of the character that needs to be emerging in us — it should also make us aware of human brokenness around us. When we share the gospel, this is helpful — picking up on Lewis's style. We should validate brokenness, validate it when it comes up in a conversation; let the person talk it out.

## Fictional Parallels

The best explanation of what I've seen then in Lewis's fiction is *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. "There was a boy named Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it." (Written by Clive Staples Lewis, who knew nobody deserved to be named Clive Staples.) Eustace ends up in Narnia with his cousins, the Pevensie children Edmund and Lucy.

In the magic of that Narnian world, Eustace has the heart of a dragon under the skin of a little boy. (He protests his being there; he constantly wants to go to the British consulate and get things settled.) Eventually they are on a ship in a terrible storm. Their masts are off; they're in the storm for a long time; the ship needs to be revictualled; their water is low. Eustace is stealing water long beyond his rations when the ship comes to shore. All hands on deck — to fix the ship. Eustace will have nothing to do with it. He goes walking off and comes to a dragon's lair. He doesn't even know what the place is because, Lewis says, he never read the right kind of books. All of a sudden in the magic of that world Eustace becomes externally what he's always been internally. He's sitting at the dragon lair. He puts a gold wristband on his arm. He looks down in the water, and he sees hovering over him a dragon. He's afraid. He's got to get out of there. He moves his left hand, and the dragon moves his left claw. He moves his right hand, and the dragon moves his right claw. All of a sudden, he looks in the pond, and he sees reflected back the reality of who he is, that he is dragoned.

Oh he's so brokenhearted with the reality of his brokenness, his real character. He makes his way back to the *Dawn Treader*; they're all afraid when they see him. After awkward efforts at communication, they realize who he is. Everybody comes running up and loves on him. They were loving on him even though he's been so difficult. He realizes that these people have been kind to him all along. Now, in his dragon state, he can be useful to them. They need a mast. He

finds a tree and knocks all the branches off with his dragon claws. With his dragon hot breath, he tempers the wood, puts the thing up in the ship, and they've got a mast. He flies over the island and finds mountain goats and different things useful to the ship. He finds sweet water and sends them to go get it for the cistern. But now they have to leave the next day, and what are they going to do with Eustace?

That next morning in the gray moments before day breaks, there's one member of the *Dawn Treader* who's up and about when Eustace as a boy comes back to the ship. This one member becomes his Father Confessor. Eustace shares that last night he was lying awake when a huge lion showed up. Even though he was a dragon, he was terribly afraid of it. The lion told him to undress himself. It dawned on him that dragons were scaly things like snakes; maybe he could just shed his scaly skin and be a boy again. So after tremendous effort to shed his skin, he saw he couldn't do it. It's like Lewis said in *Mere Christianity*. Nobody knows how hard it is to be good unless you've tried; if you've tried, you see your own frustration. Eustace looks in the pond and sees that he's still a dragon. A second time he tries to shed his skin. He looks in the pond, and he's still a dragon. Then a third time also, frustrated. Then the lion said, "You will have to let me undress you." And with that lion claw, he cuts through all that dragon flesh all the way to that dragon heart that needed to be transformed. The lion makes the dragon a boy again. He clothes him, and Eustace comes back to the ship. Who was it waiting to meet him in this gray dawn moment? Do you remember? It was Edmund. Edmund, the one who had to have his own undragoning in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Aslan had to give up his life to set Edmund free. And now what happens to Edmund? Edmund becomes the Father Confessor to Eustace. He goes out on the evangelistic enterprise and receives him.

By the way, we're not done with Eustace. He comes back in *The Silver Chair*. What for? There we see Lewis's ecclesiology, his view

of the church. You've got his soteriology in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. You've got his eschatology in *The Last Battle*. You've got his ecclesiology in *The Silver Chair*. A motley crew of unlikely collaborators. Eustace and Jill and a Marsh-wiggle named Puddleglum are given an assignment to rescue the king's son, who's been under a spell and doesn't know his own identity. They have to go into that land, and they muff every sign; they goof up, very incompetent, just as we are in the church. But they go to rescue the king's son and bring him back to his true identity. In their brokenness, they're missional.

## Wrap-Up

In our brokenness, we can be evangelists. In this regard, I encourage you with the opening greeting and charge of the apostle Peter to his readers, ancient and modern. By God's power we are redeemed. By our disciplined effort we can become effective evangelists:

To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His *divine power* has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence... *For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue...* For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 1:1–3, 5, 8 ESV. (emphasis added)

[Videos of the complete version of this talk, and the other five talks given by Jerry Root at the 2018 C.S. Lewis Institute Summer Conference, are available on the C.S. Lewis Institute website: [www.cslewisinstitute.org/CommunicatingtheGospel](http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/CommunicatingtheGospel).

Evangelism is also subject of the book *The Sacrament of Evangelism*, by Jerry Root and Stan Guthrie (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2011).]

# 4 Virtues

**tem·per·ance** (tem'pə-rən·s) *n.* [ME. < L. *temperantia*, moderation] 1. the state or self-restraint in conduct, especially appetites, etc.; moderation 2. alcoholic liquors or total abstinence

**wis·dom** (wiz'dəm) *n.* [ME. < OFr. < L. *wisdom*] 1. the quality of being and following the soundest judgment; sagacity 2. learning, knowledge, experience, or wisdom of the ages

**just·ice** (jus'tis) *n.* [ME. < OFr. < L. *justitia*] 1. the quality of being impartial; fairness 2. the quality of being just; rightfulness; justice 3. the quality of being just; rightfulness; justice 4. sound reason; just deserts

**cour·age** (kū'r-ij) *n.* [ME. < OFr. < L. *cor*, HEART + *age*, thing of] 1. the quality of being brave; the quality of being bold; the quality of being bold 2. the quality of being brave; the quality of being bold 3. the quality of being brave; the quality of being bold 4. the quality of being brave; the quality of being bold

The C.S. Lewis Institute was founded in 1976 and endeavors, in the legacy of C.S. Lewis, to develop disciples who will articulate, defend, share, and live their faith in Christ in personal and public life.

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C·S· LEWIS INSTITUTE

8001 Braddock Rd, Suite 301  
Springfield, VA 22151  
703.914.5602  
[cslewisinstitute.org](http://cslewisinstitute.org)