

Little, Paul E. *How to Give Away Your Faith*, Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 1988.  
191pp. \$12.00

### **The Message/Theme**

*How to Give Away Your Faith* is an owner's manual for evangelical Christian living. More than its instruction-oriented name implies, the work encompasses the full essence of what it means and the responsibilities inherent to being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Consequently, while related, the "message" and the "theme" of the book are different. The theme expands on the implication of the title. In short, all aspects of the work are connected in theme to the practice of personal evangelism. "How" to share one's faith with lost people is the thematic thread woven throughout the diverse chapters. The message however, extends to define, defend, and distinguish Christianity in light of the New Testament's obligatory, great commission, call to arms. The author's message speaks to the broader questions of: "who" we are in Christ, "what" it means to be disciples of the risen Lord (both in terms of privilege and responsibility), "where" and "when" the principles of lifestyle evangelism apply (everywhere and always), and "why" we believe what we believe, "why" we do what we do, and ultimately "why" all self proclaimed Christians are called to live out their faith by sharing it with others.

### **What I Liked About the Book**

There are many aspects of the work that I find worthy of praise. First and foremost, the author has created a very comprehensive tool. As noted above, his "owner's manual" perspective, compared to the typical "instructional guide" approach, explains the theological foundation, individual responsibility, and pragmatic facets of personal evangelism. Again, Little takes the reader beyond "how," and secures the footings of "who," "what," "where," "when," and most importantly "why" surrounding Christian evangelism.

Another positive point relates to the real-world, down to earth, style of the book. The author skillfully combined the theological depth of the message with the sensitivity of speaking plainly. Without skirting any essential doctrinal issues Little lays out a clear, compelling and convincing argument for the universal call for Christian evangelism. In the same way, the author is effective in connecting with the reader by sharing his own struggles and shortcomings. Little's honest transparency brings credibility to the work. His gritty examples and personal reflections from the underbelly of humanity also show the reader that the author's expertise reaches beyond the safe walls of academia. Via the language used and examples shared, one can quickly see that Little has lived what he writes.

The book was also well organized. In near outline form, Little takes his readers from the starting line of what it means to be a Christian, all the way to the maturing goal of making disciples of others. The author does a great job of explaining each step in the process and links them in a naturally flowing way. I appreciated Little's ability to speak to the broader issues while staying on message in the details.

Lastly, I was particularly appreciative of the work's scope and "maintenance program" for the evangelistic Christian. Just as the book is distinguished for its inclusion of foundational, theological explanations of the responsibilities Christians have to evangelize the lost, so it is to be praised for its contributions devoted to perseverance of the saints. The closing chapters of *How to Give Away Your Faith* are specifically geared toward the marathon-like duty that we are called to, while acknowledging the sprint-like nature that is stereotypically associated with personal evangelism. Little systematically addresses the misconceptions that can set up long term failure or disillusionment amongst well-intentioned Christians. Moreover, he discusses at length many of Satan's weapons and strategies employed to empty the tank and thwart the efforts of marginally committed Christians. In the end, Little directs his readers back to the source of all meaning and evangelistic motivation – he reminds us that Christ alone is to be our focus as well as the answer to all of our questions.

### **With What Did I Disagree**

There was nothing in context or script that I would disagree with from the book. However, I would offer the following suggestion as a constructive observation. Namely, Little would have strengthened his work if he complimented the breadth of the book with a little more concentrated depth in the area of mechanics and application. Given the thoroughness with which he handled the theological pillars, I have no doubt had Little applied himself to a comprehensive description of the “how” (extending beyond the principles and surface tactics covered in chapter three), the book would have been a wonderful hybrid-cross between the owner’s manual noted earlier and the instruction manual that typifies most works on the subject. Therein would have been the complete manual on personal evangelism.

Conceptually, I also disagree with the absence of role-playing in any teaching tool that professes to instruct people in personal interaction – of any kind. I have learned first hand as a Sales Manager the power of preparation that comes through role playing. Notwithstanding the role of the Holy Spirit in evangelism, I think it is a mistake to talk about the dynamics of interpersonal communication without practicing it. Moreover, while I again acknowledge the role and power of the Holy Spirit (the all-controlling power) in the process, I think we are remiss, if not negligent in our responsibilities to expect the “practicing” that leads to higher effectiveness to happen with actual lost souls in the learning curve. That is not to say that I endorse stagnation or inactivity on behalf of the believer until a certain level of “effectiveness” can be measured. On the contrary, I acknowledge the responsibility of every believer to share the gospel – at every opportunity. Rather, I am measuring Little’s proposed methodology against both the work’s implied goals (to teach people how to share their faith) and its effective potential. Simply put, teaching people how to share their faith with role playing better equips them to do the work of actually sharing their faith.

### **Three New Things I Learned and Will Apply in Future Evangelism**

The most valuable thing I learned from reading Little's book is that there are seven core questions that he has found to be at the root of most inquiries during outreach. By familiarizing myself with those questions in their various forms and studying the corresponding Biblical answers I will be far better equipped in the trenches of evangelism. My ministry was also bolstered by the detailed coverage of what Little described as the eight principles for effective personal evangelism. I try to live, learn and teach by principles; therefore, the author's approach fit perfectly into my awareness as a man, a student, and as a parent/teacher/minister. As I continue to try and live my faith, helping others to become disciples of Christ, I will use Little's pillars of principles regularly. Lastly, I "learned" something I already knew. Let me explain. Knowing something does not always guarantee one has learned what it means. For example, one can know how to repeat a particular phrase in another language but never grasp its translation. In much the same way, I have long since known that Jesus Christ is to be at the center of all I do. However, I never truly understood what that meant in the context of personal evangelism. After reading Little's work, I learned that I need to focus on introducing lost souls to the gospel – which is the living God, as opposed to merely sharing the concepts of Christianity with the goal of leading lost people in the sinner's prayer. Again, I knew that... but now I have learned it.

### **Questions Raised for Class Discussion**

Why is role-playing neglected in Little's book and could it enhance most teaching tools on personal evangelism?

Where would you recommend we go to find a more comprehensive work on the tactical questions on "how" to do the mechanics of personal evangelism?

Given the post-modern climate of Western civilization today, would you recommend a stronger apologetics component to our outreach efforts? If so, do you have a source of comparable breadth and plain language that you would recommend to compliment Little's work?

Can we discuss the process of putting together a teaching program that can be used in our churches? I would love to come away from this class with the pragmatic ability to share what I learned in a way that fits into the context of everything from a ninety minute “pre-outreach” session, to a Sunday school setting, to an extended seminar for lay leadership.

What is the single most important aspect of this book in Dr. Beougher’s mind?