



# Living Proof: Evangelism

## **How the Series Works**

There are twelve sessions in this series, and we recommend you cover them in 12 weeks.

### **In a Group Setting**

If you are going through Living Proof in a small group, you can expect each session to last approximately 90 minutes. Here's an outline of a typical session:

- Welcome with prayer
- View an approximate fifteen-minute DVD segment
- Discuss the segment and worksheet questions
- Close in prayer

### **As an Individual**

If you are going through this on your own, we urge you to link-up with another Christian to assist and challenge you after you have viewed each DVD segment and completed the worksheet questions.

The DVD segments are no dull lectures; they are full of memorable characters and humor.

## Meet the Cast



**Bill and Jackie Warner** – *Bill* is a 43 year-old middle manager. He was raised a nominal Christian, but discovered when he was 30-something how good the Good News is. His wife, *Jackie*, has been a serious Christian for all of her adult life.



**Gerry and Linda Sanders** – *Gerry* is on a fast track to the top of a Fortune 500 company. He had a bad experience with Christians when he was young and wants no part of it. *Linda*, his wife, seems to be content in this second marriage, but the emptiness of money and career are beginning to get to her. They are Bill & Jackie's brand new neighbors.



**Steve Lunsford** – *Steve* is the facilitator of the group. He's an engineer in his late 40's and has been committed to lifestyle evangelism for many years. Steve's hope is to train this complex group to reach their friends with the Gospel.



**Walt and Anne Ridgeway** – *Walt* works for a multi-national computer technology firm. He's a long-time Christian but also a recovering alcoholic. His wife, *Anne*, spends two mornings each week as a volunteer at the high school.



**Hayden and Delores Bishop** – *Hayden* is a partner in a law firm and an elder in his church. He's biblically mature, but has a habit of alienating people by his abrasive outlook on life. *Delores*, his wife, has endured a lot from him, but has mellowed rather than hardened. She's seen and heard it all and still loves Jesus.



**Marjorie Calloway** – *Marjorie* is a mid-level manager in a printing company. Her mother was a great lady of faith, but Marjorie sampled the world for a lot of years before she returned to the foundation her Mom laid for her as a child.



**Nick Piracas** – *Nick* is the youngest member of the group and still recovering from a shocking divorce 2 years ago. He came to Christ in college and spent some time with a parachurch missions team in Central America, but he's not all that grounded in the Bible.



**Phil Rasouske** – *Phil* was Gerry's closest friend and drinking buddy in Viet Nam, where Gerry nicknamed him "Raz." When he comes to stay with the Sanders, Bill and Jackie are in for a rude awakening.

## Session 1

# The Culture Gap

The purposes of this session are:

- To examine the difference between Christian and non-Christian cultures in North America
- To discover why these differences can become barriers to communicating the gospel
- To start learning how to get past those barriers

1. What are some of the big differences between the values of believers and non-believers?

How, then, do we identify with non-believers?

2. What do we have in common that makes it possible for us to reach unbelievers with the good news of Jesus Christ?

Guilt creates openness to the Gospel. Why?



3. In Session 1, there were several philosophical statements made by individuals. Explain why it might be difficult to discuss the Gospel to someone who believes these statements:

- a) Gerry: "I'll be fine. I'm better than this. There's only one thing I need and it's tall and cold and I want it right now."
- b) "Life is just going from experience to experience."
- c) "The right job equals success, period."
- d) "My truth is as good as your truth. If you think you can claim any special knowledge, you're not just kidding yourself, you're dangerous."

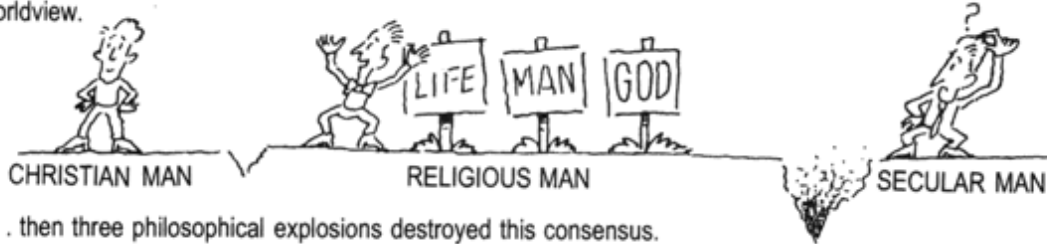
4. What might make a guy like Gerry receptive to the Gospel despite his worldview and values?

*"Man is made in God's image; therefore he has a natural receptivity to the truth of the Gospel. All evangelism is predicated on this fact."*  
-- Jim Petersen, Living Proof

## Going Deeper

A hundred years ago, believers and unbelievers in Western culture agreed about most of the basic issues of life. Almost everybody believed God existed, was a Person, had created the world, and had established certain moral standards reflected in the Bible. But a cultural gap began to crack that consensus, and it's been widening ever since.

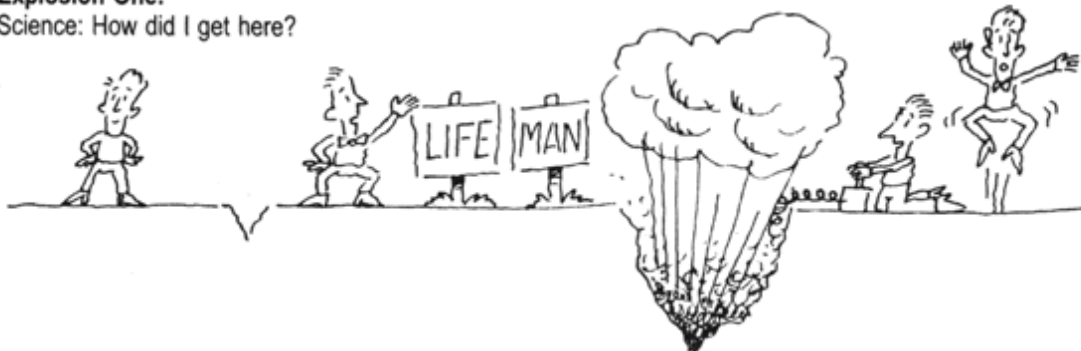
80-100 years ago, Western culture had a consensus on the basic issues of life. . . . There was a unified worldview.



First, Darwin and other scientists challenged the idea that God created the world. Believers and unbelievers began to differ over a basic question of life: **“How did I get here?”** Scientists and teachers began to apply the scientific method to just about everything, including God, and a new idea took hold: we can know only what we can scientifically test and verify. Since God wouldn't stand still to be weighed and measured, they convinced themselves He was imaginary.

### Explosion One:

Science: How did I get here?



Second, scientists declared that people were simply the product of chance and natural selection. If that's true, then the purpose for our existence is up for grabs. We aren't here because a loving God created us with a plan, so philosophers opened up a second question: **“Why am I here?”**

### Explosion Two:

Philosophy: Why am I here?



As people questioned their origin and purpose, a third explosion widened the cultural gap even further. If the God of the Bible no longer gave us existence and purpose, then the Bible's moral standards should be scrapped too. People asked a third question, **"How then should I live?"** This issue has burned for decades, until by now most people are convinced that the absolute truth (including moral truth) does not exist. Right and wrong have been replaced by doing you own thing. Self has become god.

### **Explosion Three:**

Moral Behavior: How then should I live?



### **So What?**

What difference does all this make to us, who base our lives on biblical truth? It makes this difference: We need to be like the men of Issachar if we want to draw people to Christ.

We want people to answer, "How then should I live?" by saying, "I should live by following Jesus Christ." But there is no way a person can come to that conclusion as long as his answers to the first two questions are that of our culture. Those answers are so deeply rooted that they are not open for discussion; they're mostly unconscious. They are of the "everybody knows..." variety.

Human beings are shaped to the core by their culture. Whether we are taking the gospel to the Japanese or the secularized guy next door, we have to communicate in a language he can understand. We have to take his basic assumptions into account – things like relative truth being the only truth, having no eternal purpose in life, and god being a social construct.

Reaching our neighbors is a cross-cultural experience. Their assumptions and values are as foreign to our biblical view as those of a tribe that worships ancestors. If we presume that people are people and talk to our coworkers about repentance, we are in for a shock. That word isn't even in their vocabulary.

### **Built-in Receptors**

Is it hopeless, then? That's often our first sense when we find ourselves surrounded by people we do not understand. We may prefer to ignore cultural differences, because we don't know how to work with them. But besides being shaped by their culture, all people have two other things in common that make them susceptible to the gospel no matter what their culture: **They are made in God's image, and they are fallen.**

*Man is created in God's image.* God has made man unique, significant, and godlike in certain ways. He is able to relate to God as a person to Person. He is conscious of himself and is able to make moral choices, and there is something within him that keeps him struggling with the riddle of his own consciousness – until he acknowledges God. That struggle is a built-in receptor for spiritual truth.

*Man is fallen.* When he fell, three calamities occurred:

- He came to know good and evil.
- His life became futile.
- He died.

The knowledge of good and evil shifted man from God-centeredness to self-centeredness (Genesis 3:5, 22). Self-centeredness gave birth to guilt. Guilt alienates. Man was estranged from himself, from others, and from God. We can count on guilt being within everyone we try to reach with the gospel, and that feeling prods him to seek a resolution for it.

Futility makes life a pointless struggle (Genesis 3:17-19, Ecclesiastes 2:22-23). We expend our lives just managing to exist, and then it is back to dust. But the desperate pain of futility drives us to the question, "Why am I doing all this?" and urges us to seek reconciliation with a God who gives meaning to life.

At the Fall, man died in every sense of the word. In his relationships and in his spirit, it was sudden death. His physical death was slower. Man resists death with everything he has. He is obsessed with fear of it. He just cannot make peace with the idea of mortality. Why? Because God has set immortality in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11). This flight from death and longing for endless life provides another receptor for the gospel.

These built-in receptors provide common ground between believer and unbeliever and give us hope that even stubborn hearts can be reached. We can face our neighbor's cultural barriers, knowing that they are not the whole story.

If we are to be effective ambassadors for the true King, we must understand and care about the people to whom we are sent. Grieve for them. They have been trained since birth to believe falsehood and are surrounded by those who agree with them, but their beliefs are a dead end. It will take something drastic for them to turn their back on what “everybody” believes. It will take something drastic, like a love that understands.

**For Further Reading**

Jim Petersen, *Living Proof*, chapter 1-6.

Joe Aldrich, *Life-Style Evangelism*, introduction, chapter 3.

Joe Aldrich, *Gentle Persuasion*, introduction, chapter 1.

Richard Peace, *Small Group Evangelism*, chapter 1.

Rebecca Pipper, *Out of the Saltshaker and into the World*, chapter 1.

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**NOTE:**

<sup>1</sup>Os Guinness, *The Gravedigger File* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983), pages 52-53.