

STUDENT
EDITION

speaking of Jesus



50 Easy Ways to #sharejesus

carl medearis



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JESUS-CENTERED

Guide your entire ministry toward a passionate Jesus-centered focus with this series of innovative resources. Harness the power of these dynamic tools that will help you draw teenagers and leaders into a closer orbit around Jesus.

Speaking of Jesus: Student Edition

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Contents

Introduction 1

PART ONE: KNOWING JESUS 4

1. Know Nothing But Jesus 5

2. Read About Jesus 6

3. “Eat” Jesus..... 9

4. Practice Acting Like Jesus 11

5. Embrace the Mystery of Jesus 12

6. Accept Jesus for Who He Is 14

7. Follow Jesus Wherever He Goes..... 15

8. Stay Focused on Jesus 19

9. Take the Cuffs Off..... 20

PART TWO: SHARING JESUS 22

10. People DO Want to Talk About Jesus—
So Talk About Him 23

11. Point People to Jesus 25

12. Be *for* Something, Not Just *Against* Things..... 27

13. Choose Friendship Over Manipulation 29

14. Believe in People Like Jesus Believes in People..... 31

15. Remember: The Message of Jesus Is *Good News!* 32

16. Respect Other People..... 34

17. Don’t Live Life With a Circle 37

18. Live Life With a Dot 38

19. Look Beyond “Us vs. Them” 40

20. Jesus-Follower or Christian? 43

21. Focus on Discipleship, Not Evangelism 44

22. Talk About Jesus, Not Christianity 46

23. Get Real	48
24. Hanging Out on the Hard Edge.....	49
25. Invite Outsiders to Be Insiders	50
26. Go Ahead—Be Yourself	52
27. But Don't Be a Jerk	53
28. Hear What People Are <i>Really</i> Concerned About.....	54
29. Share What Matters Most	56
30. Talking Is Better Than Debating	57
31. Be Prepared for All Kinds of Questions	59
32. Convincing People Isn't Your Job.....	60
33. Seize the Crazy Opportunities	61
34. Lean Into Learning When You're Opposed	63
35. Avoid the Defensiveness Trap.....	64
36. Respond With Love—Always	66
37. Reconsider What It Means for Someone to “Convert”	69
38. Practice the Art of Humility	71
39. Be Perfect (Just Kidding!)	72
40. A (Super-Short) History of Christianity	74
41. It's All About Grace and Truth	78
42. Focus on What You Have to Give, Not How Others Respond	79
43. Make It About Jesus, Not About Doctrine.....	81
44. Avoid Christianese, Please!.....	82
45. Describe Rather Than Label.....	83
46. Living the Jesus Way.....	84
47. Friending the Untouchables.....	85
48. Always Default to Jesus.....	86
49. Admit That Jesus Confuses You Sometimes, Too.....	88
50. Jesus Himself.....	89
Endnotes	90

Introduction

One Sunday a pastor wanted to use a squirrel as an object lesson for the children in his Sunday school class. “I’m going to describe something, and I want you to raise your hand when you know what it is,” explained the pastor. The children nodded eagerly. “This thing lives in trees (pause) and eats nuts (pause)...” No hands went up. “It’s gray (pause) and has a long bushy tail (pause)...” The children looked at each other nervously, but still nobody raised a hand. “It jumps from branch to branch (pause) and chatters and flips its tail when it’s excited (pause)...”

Finally one little boy tentatively raised his hand. The pastor quickly called on him. “Well,” said the boy, “I *know* the answer must be ‘Jesus,’ but it sure sounds like a squirrel!”

It seems to me that we all are a little like that boy—we know the answer is Jesus. We believe it. We say it. But the way we describe Jesus sounds scripted, and often doesn’t match the Jesus revealed in the Bible. I hope that in the following pages I can help you overcome that.

I remember the horribly awkward moments of my teenage years. My friend would ask me to come to his house to hang out on Sunday morning and I had to tell him “No.” Why? “Because I go to church.” Ugh.

Once, in sixth grade, my science teacher was going on and on about evolution—he said that if you believed in “creation” you must be some kind of idiot. To be honest, I wasn’t sure exactly what I believed about that—but I didn’t like his tone.

So as terrified as I was, I cleared my throat, thrust my hand in the air, and mumbled something incoherent like, “I do.” The teacher asked, “I do WHAT?” I think I’d forgotten to connect “I do” with anything specific. “Uh,” I said, “I believe in God.” And I’ll never forget his response: “Well, congratulations. Does anyone else here believe in GAWD?” Of course, several of my friends did, but guess what? Not one of them raised a hand, and I went down on my very own private sinking ship. I’m still not a big fan of science-class teachers...

Now that I think of it, I could probably fill this book with similarly embarrassing scenarios. You know the type of situation. You’ve been there, lived that. You tried to be brave and got shot down. So the next time you chickened out, only to feel awful about it later.

There has to be a better way, right?

There must be a way to talk to others about the most important relationship in your life without getting a graduate degree or channeling C.S. Lewis or some other great Christian thinker. There must be a way to share Jesus with your friends and family and people you meet that won’t kill you with embarrassment—at least not every time! There must be a way to have a conversation about Jesus that makes sense. That relates. That is honest and fair and kind and gentle, yet strong and firm and real.

So I suggest we follow the way of Jesus. Maybe you’ve missed the simplicity of Jesus’ way. It’s sometimes bold and brash, but other times it’s so gentle that you miss it. It’s inviting. At times, it’s fun and even playful. It hints and suggests and only beats you over the head with “truth” if you’re a religious zealot. Otherwise, the way of Jesus simply invites you to come to him. And your friends will come. Many will come. Maybe all of them. I’d assume nothing less.

So, no guilt. No five points. No six diagrams.

Let's speak of Jesus.

And another thing...

Because “sharing Jesus” with your friends and enemies and frenemies is the point of this book, at the end of each these 50 ideas I've given you a short (140 characters or less) #sharejesus nugget that you can post on Twitter or Facebook or Instagram. Or, alternatively, I guess you could hire a pilot to sky-write each #sharejesus nugget. Your call.



PART 1:

Knowing Jesus

If you're reading this, you now know me. At least, you know my name. You may have heard someone recommend "this book by Carl Medearis" and so you picked it up. Or maybe someone who cares about you, and knows something about me, decided to give you this book. At the very least, after you're done reading this book, if someone asks if you know "that Medearis guy," you could answer "yes." Fair enough.

But not really.

You don't know me. You don't know what really motivates and drives me. What lies beneath the big outer shell. How I treat my wife and kids. You don't even *really* know if my great stories are totally true. Maybe I made them up. You don't know my deepest dreams and desires, or if I'd want to have coffee with you sometime to talk about them. You know me, but not really...

And so it is with us whenever we say we "know Jesus." We might know him because we've gone to church all our life, or we read the Bible from time to time. We might even know him as our Lord and Savior (a good idea, by the way). So we believe in Jesus. That's good. But do you believe what Jesus believed? What *did* he believe? What were his dreams and passions and goals? Why did he talk to some people one way, and others in a totally different way? Not just what did Jesus do, but *why* did he do it? Does he consume your mind and heart? Do you wake up with him on your mind and drift off at night thinking about him?

If not, you can. And when you do, it'll change everything.

1: Know Nothing But Jesus

I'm going to make this book-reading thing really easy. If you remember just one sentence from this entire book, this is it:

During all my years of sharing my faith with others, I've learned that there's really only one thing that's important, and that is Jesus himself.

Yup, that's it. The most important sentence in this book.

Obviously, I still want you to keep reading because we're going to talk about a lot of other important, relevant things. But it all comes back to that one, simple idea: knowing Jesus.

I often have to force myself to remember the straightforward resolution of the Apostle Paul: "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). Life for Paul was all about simply knowing nothing else but Jesus. I know the one place I can't go wrong is the place where Jesus is. I can be weak, sinful, foolish, and even rebellious. I can fail others, foul up my relationships, and fumble my work—and still, I can't go wrong when I'm determined to know only Jesus Christ.

If you and I hung out with Paul, he would talk about one thing above all. He would speak of Jesus. If Paul could make one declaration to those of us who call ourselves Christians today, he would simply plead with us to stick close to Jesus. He would say, "Get this: There is one thing that matters above all. Jesus Christ."

That's why I believe in speaking "of Jesus," not "about Jesus."

Paul wrote that he "preached Christ," not "about Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:23). What's the difference? I talk *about* Denver Broncos football because I'm not exactly on the team. I talk *about* politics because I'm not exactly a politician. But I speak *of* Jesus because I'm "in" him. I only speak *of* the things that I know from

the inside out. Do we know him? Really know him? If we do, then we can speak *of* Jesus, not *about* Jesus.

Those of us who are followers of Jesus know the creator firsthand. You could even say we're BFFs with the King. We know where truth is found, and we know its name. We know what brings life and what gives life and where eternal life can be found. If you think about it, it really isn't fair. While others are explaining and defending various "isms" and "ologies," we're simply pointing people to our friend: the One who uncovers and disarms, the beginning and the end of the story.

What if we were to take Jesus at his word: "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself" (John 12:32, NKJV)? What if our complicated explanations about the Bible and the Christian life are wrong, not because they are incorrect, but because they do not primarily focus on the person of Jesus?

#sharejesus:

**I believe in speaking "of Jesus," not "about Jesus."
I only speak of the things that I know from the inside out.**

2. Read About Jesus

I grew up with a kind of "Navy SEALs" mindset about the Bible—the tougher the better. So I camped a lot in the Old Testament, and pored over what the Apostle Paul had to say. For some reason, the Gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry on earth felt like the background story to the good stuff. You know, Hebrews and Romans and Galatians and then that crazy book of Revelation (once you reach mega-mature status).

I didn't spend a lot of time in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And when I did, it was mostly in John. The synoptic Gospels (the first three) didn't have much theology in them—just a lot of stories about Jesus doing stuff, plus parables that seemed odd and

confusing to me. I wanted the meaty stuff. *Of course, of course, we need the Gospels to give us the basics—yeah, Jesus died and rose again—but then let's move on as fast as possible to the stuff we can really sink our teeth into: "thick" ideas like justification, atonement, salvation, and redemption.* Looking back, I was more interested in the recipes of Jesus than the cook himself—it all seems funny when I think about it now.

Today I tell people that if you want to get to know Jesus, the actual person, then read the four Gospels. Read them until they become part of you. Eat and breathe them. That's what I did for a long season in the mid-'90s—I read nothing but the Gospels for several years. I mean it—I never strayed outside the accounts of what Jesus actually said and did for a very long time. And even then, I felt like I'd only scratched the surface of Jesus.

Now, don't get distracted or misunderstand my point: I think *all* the books of the Bible are important—all 66 of them. They're all helpful. They're all inspired by God. Together they make up his Word. But two things are called "the Word": the Bible and Jesus. All of Scripture points to him.

I remember hearing a story about the great 19th century British pastor Charles Spurgeon giving feedback to his pastoral intern, at the young man's request, after he'd delivered his first sermon at Spurgeon's church. Spurgeon told the young man that he did a great job, but that he'd missed one key element. The young preacher asked what that was. "There was no Christ in your message, son. We preach Christ here at New Park Street Church." The intern was shocked. "But, sir," he replied, "I was preaching from the book of Ezekiel." Spurgeon responded, "Son, until you can find Christ in Ezekiel you will not share my pulpit again."

Jesus, the Word, became flesh and lived with us. And now dwells in us. All of the Bible is helpful, but it is a signpost to the ultimate Word of God: Jesus, the Christ. We do not follow the Bible. We don't worship the Bible. We love it because it directs us toward the One who is everything. So while all of the Bible is God's Word, it is not all equal in weight. Is Matthew more important to know than

Numbers? Yes. Numbers has its place, and it's part of the story and from God's Spirit, but that doesn't mean it carries the same weight of importance that the Gospel account of Matthew does. I used to think that in order to share my faith effectively, I had to know and defend the entire Bible. Every single word!

Has this ever happened to you? You muster up the courage to finally talk to that person you've wanted to share your faith with, and before you know it, wham! They pull out the clobber questions: *How can you believe that God created the universe in six days when everybody knows the universe is 14 billion years old? What about all those people God commanded the Israelites to kill in the Old Testament? Do you actually believe that a whale swallowed Jonah?*

I feel your pain. It's happened to me, too. I used to get so frustrated, until it dawned on me that I don't have to defend or understand everything in the Bible in order to share my faith. Jesus is the point of the Bible. It all points to him. I don't have to be the Bible's defense attorney. All I have to do is speak of Jesus, and he will draw people to himself. The campground where Jesus lives is in the Gospels, so camp there if you want to get to know him.

#sharejesus:

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3. “Eat” Jesus

Here’s one of the many ridiculous things Jesus says to people in the Bible—at least, it *seems* ridiculous on the face of it:

“I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him” (John 6:53-56).

That’s crazy talk. This is exactly the kind of stuff that got Jesus killed. In fact, a few verses later, we see that many of the disciples no longer followed Jesus. This teaching was just too weird. *Is this guy a cannibal, or what?* But in the Gospel of John, Jesus uses “bread” as the primary metaphor to describe himself—he wants us to have the kind of intimate relationship with him that we have with our food.

Think about it. You take something from outside yourself and put it inside yourself. If we weren’t so used to eating stuff, we’d be freaked out by the whole thing. It’s pretty clear Jesus wants something more than a casual relationship with us. He’s inviting us to understand him, not as a theological exercise, but to know him the same way we know what an apple tastes like when we take a big bite. He wants us to inhale him. So exactly how does that work?

I have no idea.

But here are a couple of my best guesses.

First, I think we need to believe that it’s possible to have him in us. Really inside of us. Believing that what Jesus asks of us is possible should always be Point Number One. When he heard the disciples

grumbling (John 6:60-64), Jesus said that he knew some didn't believe. There's a direct connection between eating Jesus and having faith in Jesus. Maybe they're even the same; I don't know. I know that when I'm consciously aware that Jesus is alive in me right now—at this moment—it helps me to pursue a relationship with him. I often (sometimes several times a day) ask myself this question: “If Jesus were living my life right now and he were here doing what I'm doing, would he be pleased or would he want to do something else?”

I think that's a better question than “What would Jesus do?” We can never be sure what Jesus would do if he were here right now. But we do know what Jesus *did*. So I think we should ask this question: “Based on what Jesus did (which requires me to know some of that), what might he want to do through me right now, since he lives in me?” Or ask it this way: “If Jesus had my life to live today, how would he be living it right now?”

#sharejesus:

Jesus wants us to know him the same way we know what an apple tastes like when we take a big bite. He wants us to inhale him.





In a diverse society where tolerance is preached as the highest of cultural values, it's tough for you to find "acceptable" ways to share your faith. In fact, Christianity is now a highly polarizing word—followers of Jesus are known far more for what we're against than what we're for. And that makes it extra hard for you as a teenager to engage friends and classmates in conversations about the most important thing in your life.

What we are for is a person—his name is Jesus. And Jesus is not only our salvation, but also the most compelling person who's ever walked the earth. But that epic truth is overshadowed by the distractions surrounding Christianity's "public face." It's been turned into a political/social/moral word, not a simple description of Christ-followers.

In this edition of his bestselling book *Speaking of Jesus*, author Carl Medearis maps out a path that will forever change the way you think about "sharing my faith." Using strategies and ideas gleaned from his decades of experience as a missionary in the Middle East, Carl will give you a new vocabulary and a new way of engaging the people in your life—you'll discover the freedom "speaking of Jesus" brings, flavoring all your interactions with Jesus' compelling presence.



CARL MEDEARIS is an international expert in Arab-American and Muslim-Christian relations. He acts as a catalyst for movements in the Middle East to promote peacemaking and cultural, political, and religious dialogue for reconciliation. He works with leaders in the West and in the Arab world with the hope of seeing them experience full and fruitful relationships through the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.



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