



Session Notes: 03_SIGN writers

How Do I Get the Message Out? What's My Personal Plan?

setting the scene



Well written Signs always get read. If you want to get a message out, then you've got to be intentional with how you write your Sign. *Who am I trying to reach? What draws people to engage? Where will I place the Sign?* Now, God is arguably the best Sign Writer of all: the Rainbow, the Passover, the Sabbath, the Tabernacle, and the Virgin Birth, to name just a few. Jesus follows suit: water into wine, blind made to see, mountain-top transfiguration, destruction of the Temple, and—for the pièce de résistance—the Sign of Jonah in resurrecting from the dead. All of these Signs were written in spectacular fashion. They were impactful and memorable; they *married* actions and words that drew people's minds back to God. But what about me? *Who would ever read a Sign I wrote? I'm unskilled, I'm weak, and I'm simple.* Maybe. But you're just the kind of person God wants to use (1 Corinthians 1:17-31; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10; Ephesians 2:8-10). He wants to write Signs through you (Acts 4:29-31).

If God could use Arthur Stace, then God can use you. ...

Arthur was a loser. Forgive the bluntness, but there's no better way to describe four decades of wasted life. A Sydney local, Arthur followed in the footsteps of his alcoholic parents. Living in poverty, he stole to survive, and by the age of fifteen Arthur was an illiterate ward of the state on his way to jail. By his twenties he would mind his sister's brothel and warn of police raids. Forty-six years passed and Arthur was going no-where, noticed by no-one. Except God.

So one day drunken Arthur wanders into a church, and hears the preacher go on about *eternity*: "Eternity, Eternity, I wish that I could sound or shout that word to everyone in the streets of Sydney. You've got to meet it; where will you spend Eternity?" Arthur's heart was gripped by God. He committed his life to the Lord, only to discover that God had big plans for Arthur to write Signs. As Arthur explained, "Eternity went ringing through my brain and suddenly I began crying and felt a powerful call from the Lord to write Eternity." Arthur could hardly write his own name legibly, but the word *Eternity* "came out smoothly, in a beautiful copperplate script. I couldn't understand it, and I still can't."

Sunday's Sign ... The LIFEGUARD

(Matthew 5:13-16; Luke 15:1-10; John 3:16-18)

Remember the shepherd leaving the secure 99 to save one lost sheep? He totally left his comfort zone to track it down, and threw a huge party when all was well. There are no two ways about it: Jesus came to seek and save those who are lost—and He sends us to do the same. *Do I care about those away from Jesus? Does my diary reflect this? How am I throwing a life-line to those sinking all around me?* Salt's for meat going off, not for heaping in a pile; light's for dark places, not for one more bulb in an already bright room. True Christians aren't stuck in a "Church" building; the true church is a people who, like Jesus, are willing to cross the universe out of love to save a wayward planet. **So if you want to point people to Jesus, then be a LIFEGUARD ... Leave the "Church" to embrace the world.**

☞ What challenged you most in this message?

☞ How would your life and witness look different if you took on the Sign of the **Life Guard**?

So, picture this: for 35 years Arthur would pound the pavements of Sydney every morning at 5am to avoid attention, and chalk the word Eternity ... on side-walks, train stations, and wherever else God directed: **500,000 beautifully written Signs all pointing people to Jesus**, the source of eternal life (John 3:16; 10:10; 17:3; 1 John 5:10-12). If not for a journalist snapping four photos of Arthur towards the end of his life, publishing his story, the legend of “Mr. Eternity” would remain a mystery.

Okay, so what’s the big deal? Did anyone even read his Sign? Actually, yes. Arthur never knew the full extent of his impact. But hundreds of people have since testified that it was Arthur’s beautiful Sign Writing that prompted their search for God and subsequent commitment to Jesus. If you go to the National Museum of Australia in Canberra, you’ll find one of Arthur’s Eternity Signs featured in an “Eternity Gallery” telling the story of not-so-ordinary everyday Aussies. Add to this an opera, and the lighting of the Sydney Harbour Bridge to kick off the year 2000, and you have Mr. Eternity’s legacy held high for all to see.

Can God use you? Absolutely! But how intentional are you as a Sign Writer? The whole point of this series has been to get our witness outside the four walls of the Church building, so our Sign can be clearly seen by those who need it most. You’ve got a clear Sign Post. Your Sign Language makes sense. It’s time to be an Intentional Sign Writer whose message can be seen. ***This session will guide you toward a clear plan for reaching the five people God has placed on your heart.*** In all, we’ve detailed eight steps:

Learn > Pray > Serve > Extend > Bridge > Share > Connect > Challenge

“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and those who win souls are wise.” (Proverbs 11:30)

8 Steps to Being an Intentional Sign Writer

*****Remember, after each step, flick to the back of this manual (pp. 70-71) and fill out the two-page chart entitled “SIGN STRATEGY: my plan for pointing people to Jesus.”*****

(You may want to pencil it in for now, as after more thought and prayer the plan may change.)

Step 1: Learn

The first step to personal evangelism, *learning*, has been exactly what we’ve been doing for the last three weeks. (If you’re needing encouragement at this point and are feeling apprehensive, give yourself a tick on this one and a pat on the back!) Hopefully through SIGN you’ve gained a better handle on our role as evangelists, the message we carry, and an easy way to communicate the good news minus the religious jargon. *But this is just the beginning.* Use it or lose it! Go back over what we’ve covered, and put these lessons into practice. Then, have a think over where you’re weak and want to keep growing. Perhaps you want some more pointers in sharing the message. Maybe you would like to better understand our cultural context. Or it might be time to face some of the tough questions head on and get into some apologetics? The first two appendices will give you some ideas with this. Whatever it is, make a plan and keep learning.

Step 2: Pray

Hopefully by now you're in the habit of praying for friends and family who aren't following Jesus. The best place to start is to ask God who He especially wants you to reach. (Remember back to the prayer time in session one—who did God lay on your heart?) Come up with a list of **five people from your normal networks** (e.g., family, work, university, school, sports groups) who you feel God brings to mind. Write their names down here ...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Keep praying continually for these five people, that their hearts would be responsive to God's invitation to join him in *The Big Story*. Your commitment is to **pray for these people everyday**.

Step 3: Serve

Between the devotions you've read and some of the ideas we explored last week, it should be pretty plain that **your Sign is only as good as your capacity to love**. Serving is not something we do simply to set a person up to hear the Gospel. The Lord of all Creation crossed the universe to serve, not to be served (Luke 12:37; John 13:1-17; Philippians 2:5-11). And we are sent in like manner to serve the least, the last, the lame, the little, and the lost, absorbing the evil of the world in our bodies as a Sign of God's amazing grace (Matthew 20:25-28; 25:31-46; Mark 2:17; Luke 18:16; 22:26-27; John 12:26; 13:35; 20:19-21; Colossians 1:24). **Being a Sign is always sacrificial**. And it's based on unconditional regard to always do what is in the best interest of the other. That's love. No wonder the Greek word for "witness" is *marturia*, the root word from which we derive the English word *martyr*. The most powerful witnesses are those who have died to their own agenda, and are living sacrifices (Romans 12:1) or literal martyrs for Christ:

***"They triumphed over Satan by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony [marturia]; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."* (Revelation 12:11)**



Jax my best mate



Owner outside the fence with the dogs

If you took your call to serve seriously, what might it look like? Perhaps Coral's story says it best?

*Watch this ...
God's Love in the Dog Park*



I'm giving Paula a hand



Owners enjoying some food together.

Let's get back to your plan to point people to Jesus. The next step in your personal evangelism plan will be to find out **what are some needs** in the lives of those you're trying to reach—needs that you can help meet in a natural way, whether they are physical, emotional, social, mental, or whatever. This is really where the rubber starts to hit the road in terms of your witness.

Step 4: Extend

Time for me to mount my favourite hobby horse. Jesus said “Go!” into all the world, but most Christians and Churches stay comfortably in our cliques and expect outsiders to “Come!” (Matthew 28:18-20). Jesus said the Good Shepherd leaves the 99 to save the 1, so we must be pretty poor farmers as the vast majority of us Christians—myself included—are chilling in the safety of the fold (Luke 15:1-10). Just once I’d like someone to genuinely say of me, like they did of Jesus, “You’re a friend of some shady characters.” (And the more vitriol in the tone, the better!) The sad fact is that *the longer we’re saved, the fewer non-Christian friends we have*. Church community is comfortable (at least for most Christians, it is—pity the outsider who tries to break into a defined friendship group). We get fed and feel satisfied as we serve through all of our Church programs. This isn’t rocket science: To reach *people outside the Church, we need to spend time outside the Church*. I’m pulling no punches here, and in the process I’ve just given myself an uppercut. ***Evacuating the Christian bubble is tough, especially if you’re paid to serve the church.***

Perhaps you easily identified five people you want to point to Jesus. Genuinely, that’s great! But can I let you in on a secret? *Friendship evangelism by itself won’t cut it*. Have you noticed that, in general, most of your non-Christian friends are a lot like you—in dress, values, wealth, ethnicity, and so on? It’s a basic social pattern that we naturally form friendships with those like us. And here in lies the problem. Presently the Church is a skewed population, not reflecting the diversity we see in our country as a whole. We’re older, we’re whiter, we’re richer, and we’re more politically conservative. There’s nothing essentially wrong with any of these factors. **But if we only reach out to people like us, then who’s reaching out to immigrants, poor people, people with disabilities, blue-collar battlers, children and youth, skaters, Goths, LGBTs (Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgendered), drug addicts, prostitutes, and tax collectors.** (Okay, the last two were Jesus’ main priority, but you get the picture.) ***If all we do is expect people to “Come” to us, or “Go” to those like us, then we’ve copped out on the Great Commission. We must EXTEND and build new networks that reach those on the margins.***

Step 5: Bridge

Now that you have built some rapport with the people you are reaching out to, this step is where your witness takes on a much more intentional flavour. This *bridge* could be a number of things...

- 1) **Questions:** Get in the habit of taking conversation deeper by asking insightful questions. What was their happiest moment in life? What’s the biggest challenge they’ve faced? What are their hopes and fears for their family? What do they want their lives to be remembered for when everything’s said and done? You can ask more directly whether they’ve ever thought about the point of life, or God, or what happens when this life is over, or about their impressions of Christianity. These sorts of questions can lead to meaningful conversation. Articles from sites like *wonderingfair.com* can be great discussion starters.
- 2) **Gifts:** You may give them a gift that is relevant to their needs but that also relates to faith (e.g., a good book, or a music CD). But, always choose wisely and be careful to offer something clearly related to what you’ve talked together about before. In general, you’re best to offer them something that has genuinely been helpful in your own life.
- 3) **Tickets:** Perhaps there you could buy them a ticket to an outreach event run by the Church, like a musical performance, or an International Student Bush-Dance/Beach-Day. Maybe there’s a movie showing or band performing that you know will bring up important themes as a springboard to exploring aspects of *The Big Story*? (For example, the *Narnia* Series is a natural link.)
- 4) **Invitation:** Why not invite them to a social gathering with other Christians where the environment will likely spark questions. You could host a dinner for eight, meet with some guys down the pub, with girls at a café, or organize a BBQ and game of backyard cricket.

(SOME RECOMMENDATIONS for READING GIFTS suited to the SCEPTIC and SPIRITUAL SEEKER)

1. Tim Keller (*The Prodigal God; The Reason for God; Counterfeit Gods*)
2. Philip Yancey (*Rumors of Another World; What's So Amazing About Grace; Disappointment with God; Where is God When it Hurts?; Soul Survivor; The Jesus I Never Knew; Reaching for the Invisible God*)
3. Lee Strobel (*The Case for Christ; The Case for Faith; The Case for a Creator; The Case for the Real Jesus; God's Outrageous Claims*)
4. C. S. Lewis (*Mere Christianity*); G. K. Chesterton (*Orthodoxy; The Everlasting Man*)
5. N. T. Wright (*Simply Christian*)
6. Roy Williams (*God, Actually ...* mostly orthodox, but written for the Australian context)
7. Rob Bell (*Sex God*); Brian McLaren (*A Search for What Is Real*); Donald Miller (*Blue Like Jazz*)

Step 6: Share

The point of this step is really to make good on your bridge, **finding a natural way to share your testimony with your friends by using simple and helpful analogies so they understand the Gospel and have an opportunity to respond if they want to.** Sometimes this will happen in your first couple of meetings with a person, other times it will take a whole lot longer to get to this point. Sometimes you will feel like you shared well, other times you will feel like you screwed up. The whole point of sharing your testimony, though, is to share how God has changed your life. ... And if you're straight-forward and humble in the delivery, this is a message no-one can refute.

Be natural. Be intentional. Be brief. The more opportunities you get to share, the more you'll find yourself picking up on different themes in your story to connect with the other person (e.g., how God changed your heart, how God helped you through a tough time, or how belief in the Christian God gave solid answers to your biggest questions). Ultimately, evangelism is sharing the Gospel—the Good News of God's reign through Jesus—so don't be shy. The *Epic Story* tract will help carry the conversation forward.

Step 7: Connect

Most people today prefer to belong before they believe. They want to build friendships, see if we're a weird cult before they commit any further, and scrutinize our lives closely for evidence that the whole Jesus thing really is "good news." This has huge implications. Our Christian community is the most powerful apologetic for believing, *and disbelieving*, the Gospel message. You know what I mean. Ever been to a "Christian" party, where you were glad your non-Church friends didn't come? People were tanking up and making out just like any regular party. To quote Brennan Manning, *"The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians. They acknowledge Jesus with their lips, and then deny Him by their lifestyle. That's what an unbelieving world finds so unbelievable."*

The label of "hypocrite" is freely tossed around our society, but way too often it rightly sticks. Like Paul said to the religious folks of His day,

"It's because of you that the outsiders are down on God" (Romans 2:24, MSG).

If you want people to read your Sign, then it'd better stand out from the background. Same with our lives. Earlier on I had a shot at the stupidity of salt staying in a big heap while the meat outside rots; likewise, you wouldn't put all the light bulbs in one room while the rest of the house is dark. Spread it around. But here's the opposite problem. *You're in the world, but you're of the world.* Jesus' teaching on salt and light deserves spelling out:

“You are the salt of the Earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven.” (Matthew 5:13-16)

So, be *in the world, but not of the world*. We’re sent to rub ourselves into a world that would rot without some Godly preservatives. We’re sent to shine some light in a world where way too many people stumble in darkness. Stick close to God, and build Godly community that is a positive witness to the ones you’re trying to reach.

The truth is, *when our lives reflect the radical love and inclusive attitude of Jesus, there is nothing more attractive than connecting in with Christian community*. So, this step is really for those who respond well to your Sign and are interested in checking out this Christianity thing a little deeper. You need to help them belong, and give them opportunities to explore their doubts and questions in a safe and low-pressure environment. Perhaps you could invite them along to an *Alpha* or *Christianity Explained* night, or even bring them along with you to a Church Service for a baptism or outreach. Some people have even seen a positive response by connecting friends into their small group where they can see and hear the everyday reality of living in Christ (but check with your small group leader first!). Check the Church calendar, and note upcoming events that might serve as a good connection point, and then start inviting your friends along.

Step 8: Challenge

Lucky last! Remember last week when we explored the *gift analogy*? Just as a gift is not yours until you reach out and receive it, there comes a time when we need to consider our response to Jesus. For all who recognize they’ve missed the mark—that our sin puts us on the wrong side of a just God who will one day deal with all evil and set everything right—we still have to acknowledge our failures and rebellion against God and rethink our ways to align with Christ and His Kingdom. (That’s *repentance*—saying sorry and turning to go God’s way.) **Repentance is the gateway to reconciliation with God.** In an age where we don’t want to ask anything of anyone for fear of offending, this is an issue.

Granted, if you’ve clearly Sign Posted the way to God, then your friend should have enough knowledge to be saved. That said, *most people are unsure exactly what’s involved in entering God’s Kingdom, and they need someone to gently guide them through.*

So here are a few simple suggestions:

(1) If you’ve previously shared *The Big Story*, and you sense in the Spirit that your friend wants to follow Jesus, just ask them this basic question:

Is there anything right now stopping you from getting right with God and following Jesus as Lord (Boss/King/Ruler/Master) of your life?

If “yes,” then this gives you an avenue to talk over the particular issue, or objection. You might circle back through sharing *The Big Story* with some timely analogies that speak to their concern. *Remember, you’re not a sales-person using any bait-and-switch strategy to secure a deal and make a sale. Help them count the cost, and understand that a “Yes” to Jesus means “Yes” for life and a “No” to placing other things at the centre of your identity. It’s the equivalent of a marriage vow: “For better or worse, richer or poorer, till death do we part.” God’s not joining their team to make their life great. Instead, God’s calling them to join His team, align with His Kingdom (Matthew 6:33), and only then will they find the real “me” God had in mind when He called their life into being. God accepts us just as we are, and we can only change through His grace. That said, Jesus didn’t downplay His Lordship when the Rich Young Ruler refused to bow his knee and kept idolising money. ... Jesus let him walk (Luke 18:18-30; cf. Luke 9:57-62).*

You get the point. We're not called to make converts who use Jesus for some get-out-of-Hell-free-card and a cheap ticket to Heaven. We're called to make disciples—people who understand that Jesus is the true King of the Universe. He will one day be worshipped as Lord by every tongue and bent knee, so being a Christian is about living under God's reign right now as a Sign of what is to come. To borrow another metaphor, we're to stick so close to Jesus our teacher, walking in His very steps, that we become covered in the dust of the Rabbi (1 John 2:6).

Forgiveness is free, but it costs our whole life. But this is no dud-deal. In Christ we find the pearl of great price for which we're wise to give up all we have to gain this treasure. In Christ we're forgiven of our sins, given a new heart and mind that increasingly desires to walk in ways that bring life, empowered by the Spirit to help heal a hurting world, grafted into a community of unconditional love, and looking forward to the day when God rewards His faithful servants and resurrects this whole cosmos and us with it to a world without pain and suffering where we rule with Christ. Your story of transformation is just a taster of the abundant life to come. *So even as you challenge them to count the cost, make sure you explain why the Gospel really is good news.*

(2) If, after counting the cost, they can honestly say there is nothing stopping them from following Christ, then ask them something like this:

Would you like to give your life to Jesus right now?

If Yes, then lead them in a basic prayer that includes the following elements:

1. Admit your need (*I am a sinner*).
2. Be willing to turn from your sins and align with Christ and His Kingdom (*repent*).
3. Believe that Jesus Christ died for you on the Cross and rose from the grave (*trust*).
4. Through prayer, invite Jesus Christ to come in and control your life through the Holy Spirit, now living for Him (*receive Him as Lord and Saviour*).

The exact wording isn't the key—it's the person's heart. The shortest prayer of repentance was on the cross next to Jesus: "Lord, remember me when you enter your Kingdom" (Luke 23:42-43).

So, they could pray something straight from the heart. Or, you could pray something like the following, leaving gaps for them to repeat after you.

*God, I'm sorry for the wrong things I've done. I've been going my own way. Forgive me.
Thank you Jesus for standing in for me, dying on the cross and rising again so I can be free.
Take my life and restore it to what you made me to be. I want to go your way now.
Thanks that I'm part of your family. Fill me with your Holy Spirit, and give the power I need to be healed,
and to help heal others. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

You can even use *The Big Story's* five key phrases as your guide.

Honestly, there is nothing more miraculous or exciting than a person being transferred from the Kingdom of Darkness to the Kingdom of Light—from being lost and bound by their own self-obsession, to being freed and focused outwards to love God, love others, and cultivate this planet. All Heaven throws a party. So whether they feel anything or not, get excited with them!

And be sure to give them lots of support, especially over the next month. Connect them into a discipleship program through the Church, and link them into a supportive group of friends. Walk with them in the everyday rhythms of grace, through prayer, reading the Word and applying it in their life, corporate worship, and sharing of their faith. And above all, pray for them daily and love them with all you've got.

So, don't be afraid to challenge your friend to respond to Jesus. This may be the one thing holding them back from entering into eternal life right now.

