

SECOND EDITION, ABRIDGED

*The*  
MASTER  
PLAN  
*of*  
EVANGELISM

ROBERT E. COLEMAN

Foreword by BILLY GRAHAM  
Introduction by PAUL S. REES

SPIRE

*The Master Plan of Evangelism*

© 1963, 1964, 1993 by Robert E. Coleman

Published by Revell

a division of Baker Publishing Group

P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287

www.revellbooks.com

New Spire edition published 2010

ISBN 978-0-8007-8808-7

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture is taken from the *American Standard Version* of the Bible.

Scripture marked AMP is taken from the Amplified® Bible, Copyright © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

10 11 12 13 14 15 16            7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# CONTENTS

Foreword by Billy Graham	9
Introduction by Paul S. Rees	11
Preface: The Master and His Plan	13

1. Selection	21
2. Association	37
3. Consecration	49
4. Impartation	61
5. Demonstration	71
6. Delegation	79
7. Supervision	91
8. Reproduction	99

Epilogue: The Master and Your Plan	111
------------------------------------	-----

Notes	123
-------	-----

Selected Bibliography for Basic Evangelism and Discipleship	141
---	-----

## FOREWORD

Few books have had as great an impact on the cause of world evangelization in our generation as Robert Coleman's *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. For many years this classic study has challenged and instructed untold numbers of individuals in reaching our world for Christ. I am delighted it continues to be reprinted.

The secret of this book's impact is not hard to discover. Instead of drawing on the latest popular fad or newest selling technique, Dr. Coleman has gone back to the Bible and has asked one critical question: What was Christ's strategy of evangelism? In so doing, he has pointed us to the unchanging, simple (and yet profound) biblical principles which must undergird any authentic evangelistic outreach.

For that reason there is a timeless quality to this book, and just as it has spoken to men and women for decades, so it now deserves to be discovered afresh by a new generation of Christians who have glimpsed the heartbeat of their Lord for evangelism.

May God continue to use this book to call each of us to God's priority for his people—the priority to reach out in love to a confused and dying world with the good news of God's forgiveness and peace and hope through Jesus Christ.

Billy Graham

## INTRODUCTION

“Philosophers,” wrote Karl Marx, “have only *interpreted* the world differently; the point is, however, to *change* it.”

However unlike they are in fundamental affirmations, the Christian gospel and communism are at this point in agreement. But the agreement goes little further. Distinctively, the church proclaims the changed world as the consequence of changed men. Reflective man produces new philosophies; it is only regenerate man who holds the clue to a society that is really new.

It is the conviction, grounded in the good news that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself,” that makes evangelism immensely more than a theory or a slogan. It brings it into focus as a necessity.

At this point, however, the question rises: How do we go forward with an evangelism—a widening of the circle of faith so that it includes more and more people who have transformingly trusted Christ as Savior—that is continuous, contagious, and compelling?

Robert E. Coleman has presented a set of principles and sketched a scheme that, if studied carefully, will go far to-

ward rescuing the concept of evangelism from the realm of the “special” and the “occasional,” and anchoring it where it belongs in the essential, ongoing life and witness of the congregation.

There is nothing in the following pages that belittles what the Spirit of God has done, and continues to do, through the colossal, concerted, temporary undertakings of such evangelistic specialists as Moody, Sunday, or Graham. On the other hand, there is much that beckons us to the disciple winning that works through small groups and builds toward congregational witness—all of it calculated to demonstrate the connection between the gospel to which we bear testimony and the life which that gospel enables us to live.

The author’s work, concentrating as it does on the pattern we see in our Lord and his disciples, is saturated with Scripture. His style is unembellished. It is plain. It is direct. It unfailingly echoes the transparent sincerity of the mind that has thought long on the theme with which it is at grips.

Only this morning I heard a radio speaker make the observation that, in most matters, we move in either of two directions: from *words* to *things*, or from *things* to *words*. That is to say, if we do not make the journey from theories and ideals to concrete situations, then the concrete situations will be lost under a smog of words.

From the latter peril I believe this earnest volume can help deliver us. It is therefore a pleasure to commend it.

Paul S. Rees



## PREFACE



### *The Master and His Plan*

*I am the way.*

John 14:6

### **The Problem in Evangelistic Methods**

Objective and relevance—these are the crucial issues of our work. Both are interrelated, and the measure by which they are made compatible will largely determine the significance of all our activity. Merely because we are busy, or even skilled, at doing something does not necessarily mean that we are getting anything accomplished. The question must always be asked: Is it worth doing? And does it get the job done?

This is a question that should be posed continually in relation to the evangelistic activity of the church. Are our efforts to keep things going fulfilling the great commission of Christ? Do we see an ever-expanding company of dedicated

people reaching the world with the gospel as a result of our ministry? That we are busy in the church trying to work one program of evangelism after another cannot be denied. But are we accomplishing our objective?

### ***Form Follows Function***

Concern at this point immediately focuses the need for a well-thought-through strategy of movement day by day in terms of the long-range goal. We must know how a course of action fits into the overall plan God has for our lives if it is to thrill our souls with a sense of destiny. This is true of any particular procedure or technique employed to propagate the gospel. Just as a building is constructed according to the plan for its use, so everything we do must have a purpose. Otherwise our activity can be lost in aimlessness and confusion.

### ***A Study in Principles***

That is why this study has been attempted. It is an effort to see controlling principles governing the movements of the Master in the hope that our own labors might be conformed to a similar pattern. As such, the book does not seek to interpret specific methods of Jesus in personal or mass evangelism.<sup>1</sup> Rather this is a study in principles underlying his ministry—principles that determined his methods. One might call it a study in his strategy of evangelism around which his life was oriented while he walked on the earth.

### ***More Research Needed***

There has been surprisingly little published along this line, though, of course, most books dealing with evangelistic methods will have something to say about it in passing. The same could be said for studies in Jesus' teaching methods,<sup>2</sup> as well as the general histories treating the life and work of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Probably the most careful study to date in the Master's larger plan of evangelism has been done in reference to the training of the disciples, of which A. B. Bruce's *The Training of the Twelve* is the best.<sup>4</sup> First published in 1871 and revised in 1899, this narrative of the disciples' growth in the presence of the Master is still unsurpassed for wealth of insights into this subject. Another volume, *Pastor Pastorum* by Henry Latham, written in 1890, gives particular attention to Jesus' way of training men, though it is less comprehensive in its analysis.<sup>5</sup> Since the time of these earlier studies, a number of other smaller volumes have appeared that offer helpful stimuli in pursuing this theme.<sup>6</sup> Not all of these works have the same evangelical theological viewpoint, but it is interesting to note that they come out at about the same place when it comes to evaluating the central thrust of Jesus' work with the disciples.

This is likewise true of numerous practical works on various phases of the church life and ministry that have been published in recent years, most notably in the literature pertaining to the growing small group and lay witness movement in the church. While aware that these authors have not written primarily from the standpoint of evangelistic

strategy, we must acknowledge our indebtedness to them for their reckoning of fundamental principles in the ministry and mission of our Lord.

However, the subject of Jesus' basic strategy has rarely been given the attention it deserves. Though we are appreciative of the labors of those who have considered it, and are not unmindful of their findings, the need for further investigation and clarification is always with us, and this is especially true of study within the primary sources themselves.

### **Our Plan of Study**

One has to go to the New Testament, and the Gospels in particular, to really see the plan of Jesus. They are after all the only eyewitness accounts that we have of the Master at work (Luke 1:2–3; John 20:30; 21:24; 1 John 1:1). To be sure, the Gospels were written primarily to show us Christ, the Son of God, and that by faith we can have life in his name (John 20:31). But what we sometimes fail to realize is that the revelation of that life in Christ includes the way he lived and taught others to live. We must remember that the witnesses who wrote the books not only saw the truth; they were changed by it. For this reason, in telling the story they invariably bring out those things that influenced them and others to leave all that they had to follow the Master. Not everything is reported, of course. Like any historical narrator, the Gospel writers paint a picture of the whole by elaborating upon a few characteristic persons and experiences, while bringing out certain critical points in the development of

events. But of those things that are carefully selected and recorded in absolute integrity under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we can be sure that they are intended to teach us how to follow in the way of the Master. That is why the scriptural accounts of Jesus constitute our best, and only inerrant, textbook on Evangelism.

Hence the plan of this study has been to trace the steps of Christ as portrayed in the Gospels without undue recourse to secondary materials. In this pursuit, the inspired account of his life and work has been examined many times and from many angles, trying to discover a motivating reason for the way he went about his mission. His tactics have been analyzed from the standpoint of his ministry as a whole, hoping thereby to see the larger meaning of his methods with people. Admittedly the task has not been easy, and I would be the first to acknowledge that there is more to learn. The boundless dimensions of the Lord of glory simply cannot be confined within any human interpretation of his perfection, and the longer one looks at him, the more one sees this to be the case.

### **Christ, a Perfect Example**

Yet recognizing this fact, there is no study more rewarding. Limited as our faculties of perception may be, we know that in the Master we have a perfect Teacher. He never made a mistake. Though partaking of our life, and being tempted in all points as we are, he was not bound by the limitations of the flesh which he accepted for our sake. Even when he chose

not to exercise his divine omniscience, his mind was clear. He always knew what was right, and as the perfect Man, he lived as God would live among humans.

### ***His Objective Was Clear***

The days of his flesh were but the unfolding in time of the plan of God from the beginning. It was always before his mind. He intended to save out of the world a people for himself and to build a church of the Spirit which would never perish. He had his sights on the day his Kingdom would come in glory and in power. This world was his by creation, but he did not seek to make it his permanent abiding place. His mansions were in the sky. He was going to prepare a place for his people that had foundations eternal in the heavens.

No one was excluded from his precious purpose. His love was universal. Make no mistake about it. He was “the Saviour of the world” (John 4:42). God wanted all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. To that end Jesus gave himself to provide a salvation from all sin for all men. In that he died for one, he died for all. Contrary to our superficial thinking, there never was a distinction in his mind between home and foreign missions. To Jesus it was all world evangelism.

### ***He Planned to Win***

His life was ordered by his objective. Everything he did and said was a part of the whole pattern. It had significance because it contributed to the ultimate purpose of his life in redeeming the world for God. This was the motivating vision

governing his behavior. His steps were ordered by it. Mark it well. Not for one moment did Jesus lose sight of his goal.

That is why it is so important to observe the way Jesus maneuvered to achieve his objective. The Master disclosed God's strategy of world conquest. He had confidence in the future precisely because he lived according to that plan in the present. There was nothing haphazard about his life—no wasted energy, not an idle word. He was on business for God (Luke 2:49). He lived, he died, and he rose again according to schedule. Like a general plotting his course of battle, the Son of God calculated to win. He could not afford to take a chance. Weighing every alternative and variable factor in human experience, he conceived a plan that would not fail.

### ***Worth Careful Consideration***

It is tremendously revealing to study it. Serious reflection at this point will bring the student of Christ to some profound and perhaps shattering conclusions, though the realization will likely be slow and arduous. In fact, at first glance it might even appear that Jesus had no plan. Another approach might discover some particular technique but miss the underlying pattern of it all. This is one of the marvels of his strategy. It is so unassuming and silent that it is unnoticed by the hurried churchman. But when the realization of his controlling method finally dawns on the open mind of the disciple, he will be amazed at its simplicity and will wonder how he could have ever failed to see it before. Nevertheless, when his plan is reflected on, the basic philosophy is so different from that

of the modern church that its implications are nothing less than revolutionary.

The following pages attempt to clarify eight guiding principles of the Master's plan. However, it must be said that the steps are not to be understood as invariably coming in this sequence, as if the last were not initiated until the others had been mastered. Actually, all of the steps were implied in each one, and in some degree they all began with the first. The outline is intended only to give structure to his method and to bring out the progressive logic of the plan. We will observe that, as the ministry of Jesus Christ develops, the steps become more pronounced and the sequence more discernible.