

**EVANGELISM SECRETS OF THE  
UNDERGROUND CHURCH**

[ THE UNDERGROUND PLAYBOOK ]

By Steve Trevino

## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to Christians in closed and restricted access nations who live in a constant state of heightened awareness. The secrets I share in this book are field-tested and battle-hardened on the frontlines by Believers who risk their lives to be followers of Jesus. Disciples in The Middle East have been arrested perfecting the methods I show you here. Some are martyrs. May their sacrifice fuel our obedience and strengthen our resolve to say yes to Jesus.

## **Welcome to the Underground Church**

It's my first trip to the Middle East, and what I'm doing is illegal.

The US State Department refers to it as "Anti-government activity." The people I'm with have fake names and multiple passports from different countries. They use next-generation, fully encrypted, secure technology to communicate. They are criminals.

They are also Christians. Their network spans Shia and Sunni

Muslim capitals. This army of love is infiltrating both Isis and

Taliban strongholds. It's a resistance of a different kind. Invisible

missionaries quietly lead a spiritual revolution from the shadows

with clandestine strategies in hidden locations through covert

operations. The results are astonishing. Mosques are emptying

while hundreds of secret house church gatherings are multiplying

in Islamic cities across The Middle East. They are turning the

Muslim world upside down. This movement is only the beginning.

Marble floors and thirty-foot ceilings create reverb with every step I take. This hotel isn't even the nicest one in town. I'm not sure what I expected, but it wasn't this. I pictured our meetings in a hidden cave nestled in rugged mountain terrain. I imagined our location being more like places where Osama Bin Ladin would shoot terrorist propaganda videos while holding a Russian AK47 assault rifle. Or a grass hut you have to lower your head to enter after walking through a maze of shanty houses, passing up goats tied with old ropes to poles while dodging running chickens, trying to escape from becoming a ceremonial offering. Don't get me wrong; there is still something very unsettling about a four-star hotel in the desert with a thousand empty rooms and a ping-pong table. Although not the unsettling I expected.

The room at the end of a long corridor has my attention, as does my elevated heart rate. Clutching the cold steel lever, I pause to inhale a breath. On the other side of this door are several dozen pastors and leaders. They are leading a movement of Christianity in nations where it's punishable by death to follow Jesus. The

sentence for baptizing new converts is immediate execution.

Secret police will rape women and men with electric batons to make an example out of anyone who would dare dishonor Allah.

I exhale and nudge the door just a crack to peek into the grand hall. How did seminary classes taught by old Bible professors and trips to the beach with teenagers sitting around campfires with acoustic guitars possibly prepare me for this? Meanwhile, in my inbox is an email with the subject line "Concerned." From ten thousand miles away, a church member feels the need to complain (again) about the volume of music or that the guest preacher is wearing jeans and sneakers instead of a three-piece suit and sandals like the early apostles wore in the first century. This is not that. This is not American Christianity. This is not Sunday morning religion. This is something entirely different. The door opens, and believers passionately singing and dancing greet me warmly like the first light of day on my face. Welcome to the underground church.

Leaders of this movement secretly arranged this meeting for a select group of believers risking their lives in Muslim nations, serving as pastors and core disciple-makers. These disciple-makers are also doctors, musicians, shopkeepers, and business owners. In other words, ordinary people are leading the fastest-growing movement of Christianity in the world. These conferences, organized by indigenous leaders, equip secret saints and fuel radical movements.

Back in their homeland, the ayatollah forces the illegal church to huddle behind locked doors with blackout curtains covering windows. The shades keep an unsuspecting passer-by from accidentally glimpsing the unsanctioned worship service and serve as an added sound barrier. They mouth the words of hymns with added hand motions praising the God of the Bible in silence while dreaming of the day they get to worship loudly in public. Today is that day for them. I notice everyone wearing sticky tags on their chest with names like "David," "John," and "Mary" scribbled on them. Even though this group is one church,

fractured into cells spread across multiple cities, they do not know each other's real names. This way, if Secret Police arrest someone, they cannot reveal fellow believers' identities and the location of other secret churches. You can't give up information you don't know.

Two months earlier, I was sitting in my office writing a sermon for the upcoming Sunday, secretly thinking about quitting my pastor job. Not because I didn't want to be a pastor but because I was bored, frustrated, and felt like God called me to a global mission, but I didn't know where to start. I wanted to reach lost people and impact lives. I became a pastor because I am passionate about bringing hope to the world. Yet, at that moment, I was the one who needed hope. That's when I received a phone call that changed my life. A local businessman who had recently become a good friend asked, "Would you like to meet an Underground Church leader in Iran?" Confused, I responded, "Sure. What's the Underground Church?" I wasn't even aware that God was moving in places where Christianity is outlawed. Little did I know meeting the

leader of the Underground Church would ignite an evangelism and disciple-making flame that would revolutionize my approach to ministry.

Since that first underground meeting over fifteen years ago, I've had the privilege of planting churches in the US and the Middle East. God has allowed me to serve alongside courageous and mission-driven teams passionate about seeing the Gospel infiltrate unreached people groups. Together, these teams have planted over 800 churches and helped lead the fastest-growing movement of Christianity in the hardest and darkest regions, as featured in the documentary films *Sheep Among Wolves Vol. 1* and *2*. For over a decade, I have helped ordinary Christians learn mission-driven strategies that empower purpose and unlock unprecedented effectiveness in reaching unchurched people, making disciples, and transforming communities. I've trained refugees, frontline workers, pastors, missionaries, and persecuted Christians on every continent except Antarctica. Now I want to help you.

## **Evangelism and disciple-making are for everyone.**

Helping a friend or loved one encounter the grace of God and step into a life of faith is one of the most exhilarating experiences for a Christian. When done right, evangelism and disciple-making can be highly effective and fun! Sharing Jesus doesn't have to be awkward, weird, or pushy.

Every follower of Jesus deserves to experience this. I wrote this book to encourage people like you to have faith to enter the incredible mission-driven adventure God designed for you. Also, I want to start a relationship with you that goes deeper. If there is one thing I have learned over two decades of disciple-making, coaching, and mentoring, it's this; no one can make it on their own. Most Christians desire to make an impact and be used by God. I've watched Christians confidently step into their calling when given the right tools and resources.

God has a mission for you. Yes, you! You don't need a seminary degree or need to be a pastor or licensed minister to be effective. Remember, Jesus took twelve ordinary, unlearned men and started the most significant movement in the history of the world! Together we can keep the momentum going! You might be thinking, why would I want to help you? The reason is that throughout history, ordinary men and women are the ones who led the most significant works of God. Many of these men and women weren't qualified to do what God called them to do. The Apostle Paul said it best, "Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God." 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 NLT

Let's discuss three evangelism secrets used by the Underground Church in The Middle East to reach non-Christians and carry the Gospel into hostile environments. The three secrets might differ from what you expect but stick with me, and I'll explain each one. We have so much to discover together! Thanks for trusting me enough to share this with you.

**Three evangelism secrets to use when talking with non-Christians about Jesus.**

By the way, the three secrets I'm about to share with you are field-tested and battle-hardened on the frontlines by Christians who risk their lives to be followers of Jesus. Believers in the Middle East get arrested for practicing the methods I will show you. Some are martyrs. May their sacrifice fuel our obedience and strengthen our resolve to say yes to Jesus. What I share with you here, I teach in greater detail in my coaching and mentoring program. More on that later.

The three secrets are:

1. Don't talk to everyone.
2. Don't go too fast.
3. Don't start with Jesus.

**Secret # 1- Don't talk to everyone.**

The Gospel is for everyone. Jesus is for everyone. You are not for everyone. Just because God wants everyone to hear the Good News of the Gospel doesn't mean we preach to everyone. Do you know your responsibility is to learn how to share Jesus with the right people? The right people are the ones God has prepared for you. Notice when Jesus sent out His disciples, He told them to look for specific people.

"And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. As you enter the house, greet it.

And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town." Matthew 10:11-14 ESV

Jesus instructed the disciples to "find out who is worthy." At first glance, this seems strange. Isn't everyone worthy? Does that mean some people are not worthy? What makes someone worthy or unworthy? It's pretty simple. Instead of "worthy," think "ready." When you go into a town or village, find out who is ready and spend your time with them. Ah, that makes sense. Of course, some people are "ready" for the Gospel, and others are not. It's about timing. It's about heart posture. Jesus was giving the disciples an evangelism hack.

Many Christians feel obligated to tell everyone about Jesus. While some people have negative experiences and even trauma from failed attempts to share their faith with others, some may even

have a type of evangelism PTSD from these encounters. If that's you, let me offer some relief. It's not your responsibility to convince people. You don't have to sell Jesus or Christianity to anyone. Thank God! I hate selling, and you probably do too. Do you know who also hates selling? People who feel like we are trying to sell them something. It's kind of like when you walk into a department store or a car dealership, a salesperson approaches and asks, "Can I help you find something today?" We instinctively respond, "No, I'm fine, thank you." For some reason, automatic sales resistance triggers, and a wall immediately goes up. We don't like it when someone tries to sell us something. In the same way, non-Christians will often resist or hesitate to engage in conversations if their hearts aren't ready.

God's responsibility is to prepare people's hearts for the Gospel, not yours. And guess what? He's way better at it than we are. He's way better at preparing people because He loves people more than we do. Do you realize that God wants people saved way more than

you do? God wants to rescue people way more than we do. Our responsibility isn't to save or convince people to repent and believe. The following statement is so important I want to underline it.

Our job is to identify who is worthy.

God is already at work preparing the hearts and minds of people.

God is creating the necessary conditions in people's souls so they

can respond positively to the Gospel. Our job is to learn how to

identify who those people are. Every day, all around you, there are

people at work, school, or in your neighborhood that God has

already prepared to receive the Gospel. What if your superpower

was identifying who these people are (with pinpoint accuracy) and

engaging with them highly effectively?

**So how do you find the right people?**

The idea of talking about Jesus with strangers used to cause me severe stress and anxiety. Then a mentor told me, "You can't say the wrong thing to the right person, and you can't say the right thing to the wrong person." In other words, when you find the right person, they will receive what you have to say even if you stumble over your words and story. Conversely, you can say all of the right things with flawless execution, but if you are speaking to the wrong person, it will have zero impact. Most Christians falsely believe they need a perfectly buttoned-up Gospel presentation equipped with every answer and a rebuttal to every possible objection. Sure, having your theology ironed out is essential, but it's not as important as you think it is. Finding the right people is far more effective than theological bullet points. Why is this? It's more effective because you are working smarter, not harder. God has already done the heavy lifting. God had gone before you and prepared their heart. Jesus told His disciples to look and see how the field was ripe and ready to be harvested. Then He told them to go and find a "Son of Peace."

"Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you." Luke 10:5-6 ESV

The word "Peace" comes from the Hebrew word "Shalom." It can also be a greeting meaning "Hello." Let's consider this for a moment. Jesus is teaching His apostles how to evangelize and make other disciples. They would employ these tactics and strategies to reach the known world with the message of Christianity. We see Jesus coaching his team on a straightforward yet highly effective technique. Say Hi to people. Jesus told his disciples to go into towns and villages and say hi to people! Imagine that! How do you find a "son of peace"? Start by saying Hi. The power of natural conversations is one of the most overlooked tools for evangelism and disciple-making. You find the right people by initiating conversations, actively listening, and identifying positive responses.

Here is a conversation road map to follow when identifying persons of peace. You want conversations to go from simple to serious to spiritual.



**Conversation roadmap; simple, to serious, to spiritual.**

How do you know when the person you interact with may be open to hearing about Jesus? Actively listen for the person to naturally transition from a simple conversation to a serious conversation to a spiritual one. If you started talking about the weather and ended up talking about prayer, you might have found a person who is ready. If you started talking about sports, then started discussing marriage issues, and ended up discussing why God allows pain in the world, you might have someone ready. The key is to have conversations with people.

Actively listen and ask questions, and follow the conversation roadmap. You're ready for the next step if it leads to spiritual talk. Remember, don't get pushy or try to rush it, which leads to our next point.

### **Secret # 2- Don't go too fast.**

Disciple-making, when done right, means you go slow to go fast. It's falsely taught that an effective missionary encounter meant having people pray a prayer, asking Jesus into their hearts. It was only a successful effort if we did that. This approach often resulted in forced pseudo-conversions that failed to produce lasting results, leading to awkward or even negative interactions with people who weren't ready for the Gospel. A slow approach is a high view of the Gospel, and a fast approach is a low view of the Gospel. Here is an analogy to help illustrate.

Let's say you are a huge science fiction buff, so much so that you

are flying to Las Vegas to attend a big sci-fi convention. Seated next to you on the plane is a young man on his way to the same conference! The young man shares that he is a new devotee and has recently become interested in sci-fi. As you arrive at your destination and the plane screeches onto the runway, you ask your new friend, "So, what do you think of the Star Wars films?" He quickly responds, "I haven't seen them yet ."

"You haven't seen Star Wars!" you gasp. "Nope," he says. "Well, as soon as you get to your hotel, you have to watch it! No sci-fi enthusiasts should go without watching Star Wars". Just as you are about to exit the plane, you turn and say, "Oh, and by the way, Darth Vader is Luke Skywalker's father!...Enjoy!" I hope you get my point here. If you were a fan of the George Lucas masterpiece, there's no way you would spoil it for anyone. You would want people to go on a journey of discovery and experience the story unfolding the way you did.

The more value you have for a story, the more carefully and thoughtfully you will approach it. A slow approach is a high view of the Gospel, and a fast approach is a low view of the Gospel.

When talking to non-Christians about Jesus, people make a common mistake: they cut to the chase and reveal the punchline too early. This impatience often triggers resistance from people. They feel like they are being prospected. Remember, no one wants to feel like a target. Listen to this fantastic strategy from Jesus.

"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves." Matthew 10:16 NKJV

Jesus sends us into hostile environments. We will feel like sheep among wolves. Here is the strategy He gives us, "... be wise as serpents and harmless as doves". Leadership is influence. If that's true, then the influence is gained by access, and access comes through finding and meeting people's needs. Meeting people's needs is also called serving others. In other words, leadership is

serving others. When we become a threat to a group or individual, their guard goes up, and we lose access. It's hard to help someone when you don't have access to them. So if you are interested in influencing a person or group, walk among them harmless as doves. Be gentle in your attitude and actions. Strive to serve others rather than being served, seek to understand rather than be understood, listen rather than be heard, and be impressed by others rather than trying to impress them. Servanthood and humility are the lifestyles of a disciple-maker. We go slow to go fast.

### **Secret # 3- Don't start with Jesus.**

This last secret might be the hardest for some to accept, yet it's also the most important. The underground church in the Middle East is currently experiencing the fastest-growing movement of Christianity worldwide. The church is seeing explosive growth without buildings, advertising, marketing, social media, or

websites. How is this happening? It's happening because thousands of these believers are trained and equipped with these secrets. Christians learn to gain access to unbelievers through everyday, regular interactions. They do not force people to repeat prayers. They are not inviting lost people to Sunday church services and hoping the pastor preaches a good sermon and gives an invitation at the end. The underground church makes disciples. Church members understand they are bi-vocational missionaries who accept responsibility for fulfilling the great commission. We teach followers of Jesus to operate as a spiritually conspicuous yet non-religious presence in their community. They intentionally infiltrate spaces where unbelievers work, play, and do life, asking questions, sparking conversations, and searching for persons of peace. By talking less about Jesus, they lead more people to Him. As an underground church leader says, "We don't reveal Jesus until Jesus reveals Himself."

Think of it this way. God took 4,000 years to reveal Jesus. From

Adam's creation to the arrival of Jesus in Bethlehem, it was roughly 4,000 years. God's painstakingly slow process of crafting and nursing the perfect story, every element, bit by bit, shows that He was in no hurry. God played the long game. So why do we think revealing Jesus in our first conversation is necessary? Slow down. Don't rush the process. Conversing with non-Christians may take six months of small talk about the weather and sports before they open up. One day out of nowhere, you ask, "How are you doing today?" They might say, "I'm not so good ." Remember the roadmap; simple, to serious, to spiritual.

The key to being an effective disciple-maker is training and coaching. If you have read to this point, congratulations. You are serious about reaching lost people and making disciples. You can teach people and make disciples as Jesus did with the right tools, training, and coaching. Whether you want to be more confident talking with friends and family about Jesus, or you feel called to make disciples and reach your city, whatever your goals are, I

want to help. I've created a program designed to equip you for the journey. Let us know if you want to learn more, be discipled, or be trained and coached. Feel free to email us or visit our website to start a conversation. Jesus started the most incredible movement in the history of the world. Let's keep the momentum going!



**Steve Trevino**  
Creator of  
***“The Underground Challenge”***

Steve is married to Julie, his high school sweetheart. Steve has planted churches globally and trained frontline workers, missionaries, non-profit and business leaders on every continent except Antarctica, including persecuted Christians of the Underground Church in China, India, and the Middle East. Steve helped lead the fastest-growing movement of Christianity in hard-to-reach places like Iran and Afghanistan. Steve is the founder and CEO of Disciple Global and lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.

**Contact:** [steve@disciple.global](mailto:steve@disciple.global)