

BRIAN BARCELONA



**DON'T
SCROLL**

**EVANGELISM IN
THE DIGITAL AGE**



DON'T SCROLL

**EVANGELISM IN
THE DIGITAL AGE**

BRIAN BARCELONA



Chosen

a division of Baker Publishing Group

Minneapolis, Minnesota
Don't Scroll • Brian Barcelona

Chosen Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group © 2022 used by permission

© 2022 by Brian Barcelona

Published by Chosen Books
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55438
www.chosenbooks.com

Chosen Books is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

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.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Barcelona, Brian, author.

Title: Don't scroll : evangelism in the digital age / Brian Barcelona.

Description: Minneapolis : Chosen Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2022. | Includes index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021059246 | ISBN 9780800762445 (paperback) | ISBN 9780800762766 (casebound) | ISBN 9781493437177 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Evangelistic work. | Missions. | Witness bearing (Christianity) | Smartphones. | Internet—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Church work with youth.

Classification: LCC BV3793 .B284 2022 | DDC 269/.2—dc23/eng/20220127

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2021059246>

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the (NASB®) New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved. www.lockman.org

Scripture quotations labeled NIV are from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations labeled NKJV are from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations labeled NLT from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Identifying details of certain individuals have been obscured to protect their privacy.

Cover design by Manny Gatian

Baker Publishing Group publications use paper produced from sustainable forestry practices and post-consumer waste whenever possible.

22 23 24 25 26 27 28 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To my wife, Marcela,
my children
and the One Voice team.

You are the people who have been behind this book
and who have faithfully lived out these chapters.
Because of your yes since 2009, and especially in 2020,
digital missions have a road that has been paved.

Contents

Introduction	11
1. Jesus Is for Everyone	13
2. Live with No Plan B	30
3. When God Looks Different	44
4. Digital Missions	58
5. What Is the Gospel?	73
6. Long-Term Evangelism	93
7. The Rules Have Changed	109
8. The Word of Your Testimony	120
9. Character to Carry the Call	138
10. Decentralized and Unified	149
Afterword	163
Acknowledgments	167
Appendix: How to Lead Someone to Christ	169
Notes	173

Introduction

What if the next Jesus movement is digital? What if the next Explo '72—the massive youth gathering that took place in Dallas, Texas, with the late Billy Graham—is digital? What if the question posed in Isaiah 66:8 of a nation being saved in a day was God's invitation to our generation?

Crazy words from God can only be fulfilled with crazy faith that can only be carried by men and women who are crazy enough to believe that Jesus has called us for greater things.

I have heard many stories of people saying that evangelism was easy in the 1960s and 1970s. People would ask, “What time is it?” In response, Christians would say, “It's time to get saved,” and people would get saved. I believe that those are the times we are in, again.

Back when my grandma was young, Christians handed out tracts, which were booklets that were about hell, sin, salvation and the Gospel message. People would flip through the pages of the tract, and it would tell the story of Jesus

in a minute or less. Many people came to Christ reading those tracts.

What if I told you that the modern-day tract is not a ten-page booklet but a sixty-second video?

Every revival leader from the book of Acts onward has used the media of their time. Paul wrote letters, William J. Seymour used the printing press to advertise the Azusa Street Revival¹ and Billy Graham televised his crusades.² The use of media now is nothing new. A Jesus movement for which many have prayed is here.

**What if I told you
that the modern-
day tract is not a
ten-page booklet
but a sixty-
second video?**

A fresh wave of evangelists has risen up. This time, it is not one but thousands of evangelists who are sharing the Gospel. It is not crusades built around a man people flock to hear, but it is an army of people who are dressed in ordinary clothes who have ordinary jobs living in ordinary homes who serve an extraordinary God who does extraordinary things through them.

Those ordinary people are you and me. What are we waiting for?



Jesus Is for Everyone

There was a buzz on the East Los Angeles high school campus. The week before, the Jesus Club had announced a free giveaway of the expensive Dre Beat headphones. As the lunch bell rang, we opened the doors to the gymnasium. This was the gym that a year prior God had told me He would fill with His presence.

As the doors flung open, hundreds of kids poured in. These were kids from different religions, economic backgrounds and nationalities. But they all had one thing in common: their Creator was waiting to have an encounter with them.

As we started the meeting, I did what I have done many other times. I began to preach with passion and faith. I spoke about the Gospel of Jesus Christ—the value of each person, the price Jesus paid, how Jesus defeated sin and how He now offers a new way of living.

As the time grew near for us to end the meeting, I knew that the kids were anxious for the giveaway we had promised.

After all, these Dre Beat headphones were worth hundreds of dollars. Who would not want to walk away with them? We only had one pair. So as the time was coming near to close, I stopped my message and said, “Who would like these free headphones?”

As expected, the crowd erupted with kids waving their hands in hopes that I would pick them. What they did not know was that I had taken the headphones out of the box and wrapped the empty box. After asking the crowd who wanted it, I grabbed this empty box and placed it in the middle of the gymnasium. These students got ready to jump out of their bleachers to run down.

As they expected, I said, “On the count of three, the first one to come down here and grab these headphones is going to get to walk home with them today.” Before I even began to count, kids began to get out of their bleachers.

I said, “No, you need to sit down. On the count of three, the first one up here gets these.” I knew in that moment the kids were going to lose their dignity. No one was going to care how they looked because there was something that they wanted.

I counted slowly, “One. Two. Three.”

As soon as I said *three*, a kid who was in a gang and sitting in the front row stood up. When he stood up, everyone else sat down. With the slow walk that most gangsters have, he walked to the middle of the gym and picked up the box. I followed him with the mic in my hand and faith in my heart that God was about to do something special.

Into the microphone, I asked him to do me one favor. I asked him to open the box in front of everybody. And like a kid on Christmas, he ripped open the paper—only to find that the box was empty.

With a disappointed face, he said in front of the whole gymnasium, “This box is empty.” He did not realize that he had set himself up for a great explanation of the Gospel.

I replied, “You’re right. It is empty, just like your life. Without Christ you’re a nicely packaged box, but you have nothing inside. Although everything may look good on the outside, you’re empty on the inside.”

The crowd began to make noise as though they could not believe what I had just said to this guy. I quickly said to one of my team members, “Bring me the headphones.” She brought me the headphones, and I handed them to him.

He replied, “Are these real?”

I said, “Of course they’re real. But I have two questions for you before you sit down.”

I asked him, “Do you know me?”

He replied, “No.”

“Do you deserve these headphones?” Now, that second question I asked him probably made him think a little bit more. He possibly pondered the many mistakes he had made in his life and the things he was not proud of.

He responded, “No. I don’t deserve these.”

I pulled the mic back to my mouth quickly and said, “That’s just like the love of God. You don’t know Him, you don’t deserve His love, but He wants to give it to you anyway.”

I handed him the headphones, and he took his seat. I knew at this moment that God was about to do something special. His presence filled that gym. And through this simple example, people understood that the gift of God—salvation—was available for them. They understood that knowing God prior or deserving His love were not qualifications for receiving salvation.

With boldness I yelled into the mic, “If you walked into this room and you’ve never received Christ, there is a free gift of salvation today. You may have walked in here broken, but you can leave healed. You may have walked in here depressed, but you can be set free.” As I looked at the crowd, I could see hope in their eyes.

I said, “If you’ve never received Christ and you would like to, on the count of three I want you to stand. Do not bow your heads or close your eyes on the greatest decision you’re going to make.”

And as I did before when I counted for them to run up and get the headphones, I counted to three for them to come and receive a gift that would not break, that would not rust and that would not become outdated or old. This was a gift that was given, a gift that was slain before the foundations of the earth. This was the gift of Jesus. As I began to count, my heart began to pound. Would they respond?

“One. Two. Three.”

As I said *three*, the response of the room was not what I expected. Nobody stood up. But it was not because they were not compelled or eager to receive this gift of Jesus. It was as if they were waiting to see who would go first. It seemed as if only after that first person would stand that they would have permission.

The long silence was finally broken by the gang member who had received the headphones. As he stood up and began to make his way toward me, he was joined quickly by more than four hundred others. I remember the sound of hundreds of shoes thundering the bleachers as kids came down. They circled me, and together we prayed the prayer of faith—an

invitation for Jesus to be Lord and Savior in their lives and for them to follow Him wholeheartedly.

That day many were added to the Body of Christ. Jesus became available for anyone who was willing to follow Him. Why? Because the Gospel is for everyone.

From Darkness to Light

Have you ever wondered what it looks like in the spiritual realm when a soul comes out of the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of light?

On earth, we see it in the form of someone choosing to follow Jesus through an altar call or a personal prayer proclaiming Jesus as Savior and Lord. But since God created both the visible and the invisible, that transaction must be one of the greatest spiritual battle scenes in world history. When the disciples went out, preached and then came back to Jesus excited about what they had seen, Jesus said, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like lightning” (Luke 10:18). Jesus responded to their natural actions of preaching and casting out demons with something that took place in the spirit realm. He pointed out that Satan’s domain fell as the Gospel went forth.

Every time someone chooses to follow Jesus, his or her choice extends much further than words that are whispered in a prayer. As weak as our yes is, it is still a yes to God. This yes breaks the hold of the ancient demonic realm that has been here from the beginning of time. In a moment, we become seated with Christ in high places (see Ephesians 2:6).

In a moment, we are grafted into the family of God. In a moment, we become kings and priests. We who were once

sinner and enemies of God are now His friends. The heavenly Father rescues us from the domain of darkness and transfers us into the Kingdom of His beloved Son (see Colossians 1:13).

I love that the Bible paints for us this picture of salvation as an epic rescue moment from the kingdom and domain of darkness. In the natural, however, it could be as simple and as powerful as a few stories that I will share with you.

The message I want you to get is that Jesus is for everyone, and He comes to people in many ways. Whether you or a person you love comes from a background of atheism or another religion, there is hope. Jesus loves you and welcomes you to come to Him.

I have seen Jesus meet people in public high schools, in church services, at skate parks, in restaurants, and, in the past two years, on TikTok and Instagram. He meets people where they are and however they need to experience Him.

Whether you or a person you love comes from a background of atheism or another religion, there is hope. Jesus loves you and welcomes you to come to Him.

God's methods change consistently. He is not boxed into a system or a particular method. If we understand this, we will understand why He is now moving using digital platforms. The stories you will read in this book are all unique. They are from people who come from

totally different lives, backgrounds and cultures. What is the common theme? Jesus is for everyone! Even a child can encounter almighty God.

Let the Little Children Come

When, Zoe, my oldest, was three, she hopped into the car excited about something that had happened earlier in the day.

“Dad, you will not believe what happened today. I had so much fear. When I told Mommy, she said Jesus would take away my fear if I would give my life to Him.” This is true, of course, since perfect love casts out fear (see 1 John 4:18).

I said, “Go on. What happened?” With great joy, Zoe began to tell me how she had asked Jesus into her heart and that she wanted to follow Him. She talked about this decision so simply, not really realizing what had happened. She did not understand that she had been ripped from the kingdom of hell and welcomed into the Kingdom of light.

As she told me this, my heart nearly burst with joy.

I said, “That’s amazing! You’ll never regret giving your life to Jesus. I’m so proud of you. Jesus will never leave you nor forsake you.”

For those of you who would ask, “How can a child know of the decision they are making?” remember that salvation has little to do with your mind and much to do with your heart. There is a reason you believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord. But nowhere does that verse say that your mind plays a part in your salvation. Jesus welcomes the young and innocent who come to Him in simplicity and faith.

As I spoke with Zoe, I could not help recalling when I was her age. Memories flooded my mind as I tried to recall one godly moment from my childhood, but I could not think of any. I only remembered experiencing depression and sadness. I could only think of the times I had sat in a

corner screaming, angry at all the things I had grown up seeing. I remembered the times when I wanted to end my life, because I thought everything was my fault. I recalled the period around age fifteen when I spent time in a hospital because I stopped eating and developed anorexia. My life had been very different from Zoe's. I did not grow up with an ideal home situation.

Godless and Broken

Before I share my story, I want to say that my father and mother were young and did their best. Today they are both amazing, changed and loving parents who have grown so much, and I honor them. Most of what I went through as a child was because our home was godless and broken.

I was a surprise to everyone but God. My mom was fifteen, and my dad was a few years older. When they found out my mom was pregnant, from what I have been told, they were both terrified to tell their parents, because they did not know how they would react. That fear was so strong that they ran away from San Jose, California, to Anaheim, California, nearly six hours away by car.

My mom told me that they loaded up my dad's blue Ford truck with his camper shell on the back and just drove. They did not tell anyone they were leaving. When they arrived, my parents had no money and no place but the camper shell to live. Being the hard worker that he is, my dad got a job at a grocery store working night shifts while my mom slept in the car.

What I remember the most from my childhood is my parents fighting, the anger, the yelling and the times when I felt

worthless. I did not have a godly father or mother at that time. I do not ever remember feeling safe. And I thought my parents' situation was my fault. After all, if I had not been born, they would not have been in all this trouble.

My younger brother came into the world, but that was still not enough to get my parents to love each other. After all, they were missing the One who is love.

Although my family was majorly dysfunctional and full of brokenness, it still was my family. I dreamed of my dad and mom getting along and loving my brother and me. Somewhere deep inside the kid who would cry himself to sleep was a small flame of hope that having a normal family was possible.

But things only got worse. When I was nine, after many years of seeing my parents not getting along, they decided to get a divorce.

Divorce, no matter the reason, destroys. Among its many casualties are the children. I am not saying that you should remain in a bad home situation if you are in one, but the moment a divorce happens, everything within a child that dreamed of change, every ounce of hope that they would have a normal life, and every bit of faith for a loving home is gone.

To think that divorce does not affect children too much could not be further from the truth. It does not simply affect children; it destroys them. And although these words seem very strong, this was the reality of my life before Christ. It is important that you understand that truth as you read this, because this has been what has kept me in the faith all these years. I am thankful for where Jesus has brought me, but I am more grateful for what He has taken me out of.

The word *divorce* ripped all hope from my life. What seemed like years of court battles quickly shifted everything I knew. Finally, my dad won the court case, and the every-other-weekend cycle began. If you do not know what that term means, that is when a child's parents become divorced. and the child sees one of his or her parents every other weekend.

Through a series of unfortunate events and lies, I found myself no longer believing that my mom loved me. I did not see or hear from her for five years. That was from the ages of ten to fifteen.

Fast-forward—I am fifteen and am hanging out with the wrong crowd. While at an event with my friends, I ran into someone I did not expect to see. It was Lupe, my old babysitter.

“Your mom has been looking for you!” Lupe told me. “She’s been sending cards and calling.” As she said that, I could not recall one call or card in those five years.

“Lupe,” I said, “let me call my mom.” And although I was nervous because we had not spoken in so long, I felt a wave of emotions. Anger, confusion, but deep down inside I wanted to know if this was true. Did my mom really want to talk to me and see me? Because what I had heard was the complete opposite.

As the phone rang, it was as if the world around me slowed down. I was about to hear the voice of my mom for the first time in five years, and she was about to hear mine. The ringing stopped with the answering of the phone from my stepdad saying hello. With very few words exchanged between us, I told him it was Brian. He called my mom over and passed the phone to her. We both immediately started weeping.

“I have to see you,” I said. We set up a time to secretly meet in a park near my home so nobody would find out. I borrowed phones from my friends at school that whole next week so that I could call my mom.

And that week, my mom and I talked about a way that I could spend the next weekend with her. We came up with a plan. She was going to come to my house on the weekend when she had visitation rights to pick me up. Many dramatic things happened the Saturday that she showed up, things that would change my life over the next two years. But pressing through great fear and anxiety, I walked out of the home I had lived at with my dad and away from years of hurt and pain.

That day was so much like the day I got saved. In my salvation experience, Jesus brought me out of the life I had once lived and to the place of freedom.

Over the years and through many tears, my father and I reconciled. I honor him and am very thankful that God chose him to be my dad. But little did I know that move would lead me to the most epic encounter I would have with God about a year later.

My life and my daughter’s life both point to the goodness of God. We demonstrate that Jesus truly is for everyone, regardless of what kind of background you come from.

Jesus Seeks and Saves

After preaching many years in schools and seeing Jesus encounter kids in gyms, auditoriums, cafeterias and hallways, I felt as if I had seen it all. I believed that I had, until 2019, when a phone call with my sister would show me that Jesus does not move the same way in each person’s life.

One night, as I sat on the couch with my wife watching a movie, my wife randomly said, “When is the last time you talked to your sister?”

“It’s been a while,” I said.

“Why don’t we invite her over?”

“I don’t think she’d want to come.”

“Why don’t we try?”

I said, “If you want to invite her, feel free,” hoping that the conversation would end there. I felt as if I had failed my sister as an older brother. I had spent many years traveling and preaching, but I did not know how to love my family well.

My wife, however, asked for my phone and called my sister. I was sure she would not answer. After all, it had been a while since we had talked. Nothing bad had happened, but life had gotten busy. To my great surprise, she picked up.

I could hear them talking, catching up and laughing. Even still, I believed that my sister surely would not come all the way to Los Angeles to see me. After my wife invited my sister, I was shocked when she said she would love to come visit us. Still not believing this, I thought that she would come for only a day.

My thoughts were interrupted by my wife as she said, “Why don’t you come for four days?”

Four? I thought. *That is such a long time. What will I talk to my sister about for four days?* We agreed that in about a week she would fly to my home in Los Angeles.

I did not know why God was reconnecting us or what He was going to do, but as the day of her visit drew near, I recognized a sense in my heart that He was going to do something special.

When we picked my sister up, my first impression was that she was no longer the little girl I'd grown up with. She was now eighteen. From what she shared with me, she had dabbled in alcohol and drugs and had been in a relationship with a woman for the past two years. After hearing what my sister had gone through and the pain she had endured, I could see why she had made some of the choices that she did. At that moment, though, I did not see any of that. I just saw my sister—hurt, broken and fatherless. My heart moved deeply with compassion. I wondered, *What I have been doing all these years? I have been preaching to so many people, yet my own sister is lost.*

We began with small talk as we drove through the dense Los Angeles traffic. When we arrived at my home in Pasadena, California, I unloaded her bags. We spent the day together having random conversations, laughing and reliving memories. But in the back of my mind, I wondered, *How did my sister arrive at this place?* I wondered how the enemy had worked so hard to destroy her life. He must have anticipated the greatness my sister would live out.

That night, we sat on the couch and talked for hours. My sister poured out her heart about things she had gone through and the trauma she had experienced. I was so moved that my response was to run into my bedroom, wake up my wife and ask, “Honey, can my sister stay a few more days than planned? I really believe God wants to meet her.”

Being the incredible woman she is, my wife said, “Of course.”

That four-day trip turned into four weeks. And within those four weeks, I would see that God does not act with cookie-cutter responses to our individual troubles. I would

witness one of the greatest miracles I had seen. At the time, I did not realize that this story would give me language to describe what I would live out in 2020.

God met my sister in the most unlikely place. One night, I felt prompted by the Holy Spirit to talk with her about the Gospel. Terrified to go by myself, I grabbed my wife. I walked to my sister's bedroom and knocked on the door.

With a loud voice she yelled, "What do you want?"

"It's Brian. Can we talk?"

I could hear her through the door getting off a phone call with her girlfriend, saying, "It's my brother, let me call you back."

My wife and I walked into the room and sat on the floor. I began to share what Jesus had done in my life. There was no altar, no worship team, no lights and no piano player like most services we attend. It was just my sister, my wife, me and Jesus. After sharing the Gospel with my sister, I asked her what I had asked many people over many years.

"Zelia, would you like to accept Christ? Would you be open to giving Him your life and following Him?"

With tears in her eyes, she put her head down and said, "Why would God want me? Look at me. I drink, and I'm in a lesbian relationship. Why would God want this?" I began to cry as I felt God share His heart with me in that moment.

I said, "Jesus made the decision that He wanted you two thousand years ago."

And on the floor of that bedroom, my sister received Christ. Not long after that, she went to Kona, Hawaii, to complete a Discipleship Training School at Youth With a Mission (YWAM). It was there that she ended the relationship with her girlfriend and began to follow Christ. I could

not be prouder of her. I know that she is still on the journey of God mending her heart and discovering who she is in Christ, but I hope she knows that she is one of the greatest threats to the kingdom of hell, and that her life is one of the greatest signs and wonders I have ever witnessed.

There are moments when God does things differently. There are times when He chooses to break all the rules that we think He needs to follow. The story of my sister has marked me forever, because God did not meet her in the place I thought He would. He did not meet her at a conference or in a church. He met her in a home with a family.

Jesus Draws Close to the Lost

When God desires to draw close to those who are lost, He will meet them where they are. To the disciples, for example, who understood the world of fishing, He told them they would be fishers of men. He related His message to something they understood.

Jesus did this many times in parables. In one example, He related His vast, mighty and humanly incomprehensible Kingdom to something as simple as a mustard seed (see Matthew 13:31–32). If Jesus walked the earth today and wanted His message to be understood by everyone, He might speak about a video or an app as opposed to a mustard seed.

**When God desires
to draw close to
those who are lost,
He will meet them
where they are.**

Jesus always put Himself in dark places without compromising His light. You can see this by observing in Scripture the people He chose to hang out with,

whether it was prostitutes or tax collectors. He brought light into every situation He was in.

Jesus was always about diversity and getting His message to everyone. You could see that by the image of the cross. The inscription above Jesus' head was translated into three different languages (see John 19:20). To me, that screams that He wants as many people to know about Him as possible.

What would you say if I told you that Jesus would not reach this present generation by riding in on a donkey, but He would get their attention by riding in through social media? What if His hands and feet stretched into the digital space?

We are living in a digital generation, so if Jesus truly is for everyone, then maybe the digital space is part of Jesus' Great Commission in which He said to go (see Matthew 28:18–20). He instructed us to go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth. What if the way to get the Gospel out to the ends of the earth is not limited to horseback or even a plane? What if it is through your phone?

YOUR DIGITAL MISSION

You cannot win people to Christ if you are angry with them or offended by them. Nor can you truly understand God's love for someone until you have received God's heart for them. Stop for a moment and pray this with me:

Jesus, I ask that You give me Your eyes to see and Your ears to hear. Forgive me for any offense I have carried against my family or my friends who do not know You. Forgive me for not giving mercy when I should have.

Forgive me for being angry at people for not looking like or acting like Jesus, whom they have never met. Give me Your compassion that You demonstrated in Matthew 9, and let me be the laborer who is sent. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Write down the names of three people you are believing God to save. I believe that as you read this book, He is going to give you the method they need to see the Gospel have an impact on their lives. Commit to pray for these people, and look for ways to share the Gospel with them before you finish reading this book.

Go to brianbarcelona.com/dontscroll/ if you would like to hear my testimony live. I hope it encourages you to be bold and to share your testimony with others, as well.