

# “I Can” Evangelism

Taking the “I Can’t” Out  
of Sharing Your Faith

Elisa Morgan



a division of Baker Publishing Group  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 2006, 2008 by Elisa Morgan

Published by Revell  
a division of Baker Publishing Group  
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287  
www.revellbooks.com

New paperback edition published 2008  
ISBN 978-0-8007-3241-7  
Previously published under the title *Twinkle*

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 is on file at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Scripture is taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV® (Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society, used by permission of Zondervan) and Today's New International Version™ (Copyright © 2001 by International Bible Society). All rights reserved.

Published in association with the literary agency of Alive Communications, Inc., 7680 Goddard Street, Suite 200, Colorado Springs, CO 80920.

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is comprised of 30% post-consumer waste.



Elisa Morgan,  
*"I Can" Evangelism: Taking the "I Can't" Out of Sharing Your Faith,*  
Revell Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2008. Used by permission.

# Contents

Foreword 9

This Little Light of Mine 13

*Even a little light changes the nature of darkness.*

## **Part 1 Getting Past the *I Can't*s**

1 *I can't . . .* I have such a small light. 21

*Label your light—know what kind of light you are—and shine brightly.*

2 *I can't . . .* I might fail. 27

*Evangelism is not all up to you.*

3 *I can't . . .* I don't want to get involved. 33

*When we don't get involved, we oppose others' coming to Christ.*

4 *I can't . . .* I don't want to offend. 39

*Choose to either illuminate or eliminate the truth.*

5 *I can't . . .* I don't have a dramatic story to tell. 47

*Every faith story describes God changing a life. Know yours and how to tell it.*

- 6 *I can't . . . I don't know all the answers.* 55  
*Know what you know, and then grow to know some more.*
- 7 *I can't . . . I don't know how to relate to people who aren't like me.* 63  
*God doesn't change, but we may need to change how we express him to others.*  
 From Darkness to Light 73  
*Just as there is a process to conversion, evangelism is a process.*

**Part 2 Grabbing On to the *I Cans***

- 8 *I can . . . accept others the way they are.* 81  
*Expect nonbelievers to act like nonbelievers.*
- 9 *I can . . . be a friend.* 87  
*Belonging comes before believing.*
- 10 *I can . . . be real.* 95  
*Vulnerability is believability.*
- 11 *I can . . . help my children know the Jesus I know.* 101  
*Children give more of what they know of themselves to more of what they know of Jesus.*
- 12 *I can . . . offer hope in the daily minutes of life.* 109  
*Respond to the "strays" in your days. Shine in the unexpected moments.*
- 13 *I can . . . partner with others.* 115  
*Sometimes it takes a village to lead someone to the light.*
- 14 *I can . . . offer help and hope in crisis.* 121  
*Light promises hope in the dark spots of life.*
- 15 *I can . . . serve.* 127  
*Put your faith into action and let others watch.*

- 16 *I can . . . accept the doubts in others.* 135  
*Doubting is a necessary part of the journey to faith.*
- 17 *I can . . . share my faith at holidays.* 141  
*Let the holidays explain themselves through celebration.*
- 18 *I can . . . leave room for wonder.* 149  
*Leave room for the mystery of the unexplainable.*
- 19 *I can . . . keep trying even when it seems hopeless.* 157  
*Never, ever give up. Unreachable stars are still within God's grasp.*
- 20 *I can . . . trust God with the results of my efforts.* 165  
*When you don't know someone's faith decision, trust the One who judges fairly.*
- 21 *I can . . . leave a legacy of light.* 171  
*Light the way home. Even in your absence, you can leave a legacy of light.*
- Discussion Questions 177
- Resources 187
- Acknowledgments 189

## Foreword

**E**vangelism has fallen on hard times—worse than when Humpty Dumpty fell off the fabled wall. In fact, thoughtful people wonder how evangelism can ever be put back together again. It seems like just last week that Billy Graham was in public, beautifully playing his twin role of evangelist and ambassador of sensible, mainstream Christianity—providing all of us ordinary people air-cover, so that as ground troops, we could more easily share our faith. But evangelism today is sinking faster than a dropped cell call, more rapidly than a great high-speed Internet connection. That is probably not news to you, but stop and think about this massive shift for a moment. Who would have dared to predict this much change this quickly?

I've been in ministry and associated with evangelism for three decades. And more substantive change has happened in our culture in the last five years than in *any* other time period of my life. It is enough to leave us out of breath and reeling like we just got off the “Tea Cup” ride at Disneyland!

There is some good news, however, within this challenging context. God has seen fit to insure that there would be scouts out in the field, feeling the rhythms and vibes of this change, understanding how to engage with those outside the Christian faith. Elisa Morgan is one of these expert guides. Her long years working with mothers of preschool children has kept her in the conversation with young people—and not just moms, but their husbands, friends, and coworkers, etc. Conversations with these young, *regular human beings* has alerted Elisa to most, if not all, of the key issues that now surround the awkwardness of evangelism.

When I think of Elisa, I simply think: *she gets it*. In spite of her protest that “she is not an evangelist,” her evangelistic instincts are right at the top of the class. Elisa knows how we feel about evangelism. She knows that we believe we are not spiritual enough; that we are afraid to fail; that we are scared to death—for good reasons—to offend anyone or to push our faith on others. Elisa knows we struggle to relate to people who are not like us and that we are petrified of being asked questions we cannot answer. In short, though I don’t usually like “us and them” categories, she knows we are as afraid of *us* as we are of *them*! These are all everyday feelings and normal self-judgments. So in “*I Can*” *Evangelism*, Elisa peels back our various “I can’t” self-defeating prophesies to reveal how we *can* fit into place in the process of evangelism.

Elisa, though she’s one of us, struggling to engage in effective evangelism, also knows how seekers feel. The best gift of “*I Can*” *Evangelism* is that all the solid evangelistic advice and tips she gives are rooted in the rhythms and routines of our lives and the real lives of seekers. Evangelism cannot be something one adds to an already over-busy, out-of-control life. None of us can add more religious stuff! Rather, we need to infuse the existing stuff of our lives with meaning. Elisa shows us how—how to accept others as they are; how to be a friend; how to keep it real; how to

be present to the people and events of our actual lives; and how to serve others in simple, humble ways.

I cannot commend *"I Can" Evangelism* more highly. I hope it gets the widest possible reading. It is down to earth; it presents rock-solid insights into how evangelism actually can work in our rapidly changing times.

*Todd Hunter*

*March 1, 2008*

*Eagle, Idaho*

*Founder and President, Society for Kingdom Living  
and Three Is Enough Groups*

“When people are placed in darkness,  
crimes will be committed.  
The guilty are not just those who commit the crimes  
but those who create the darkness.”

*Martin Luther King Jr.*

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.  
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.  
It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.  
We ask ourselves, Who am I to be  
brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?  
Actually who are you not to be?  
You are a child of God.  
Your playing small doesn't serve the world.  
There is nothing enlightened about shrinking  
so that other people won't feel insecure around you.”

*Marianne Williamson*

## This Little Light of Mine

“Don’t ask for the moon when you have the stars.”

*Anonymous*

I’ve not really led that many people to Jesus. Maybe three or four directly. If you count family, maybe a couple more. (It depends on the day with teenagers, you know.) I’ve been to seminary. I lead an international nonprofit with the focus of helping moms of preschoolers come to see the help and hope they can have in Jesus. I write and speak, and yes, I guess there are probably people who’ve asked Jesus to be in their lives as a result of various talks and sermons I’ve given over the years.

But personally, in the day-to-day of life, I don’t have a big tally of conversions. The number of individuals who have directly prayed to receive Jesus in my presence is few.

Three or four converted souls hardly qualify me to write a book about sharing faith with others. But conversion isn’t really what this book is about.

I have a theory—about the effect of light on darkness.

Not long ago I was looking for a dark place to test my theory. So I grabbed a pack of matches, the ones I use to light my sometimes romantic but always soothing bath candles, and headed into my closet. I shut the door, turned out the light, and peered about in the darkness. Nothing. Darkness is a weird thing. Even if I opened my eyes WIDE, I just couldn't see anything. Zip.

Then I struck a match. Where there had been darkness—impenetrable, dense, and black—there was now light. Suddenly I could make out the contents of my closet. Shoes. Shirts. Laundry on the floor. Under the hanging garments, a pile of stuff to give away. Just as the match started to scorch my fingers, I blew it out. Darkness returned.

Voilà. Just as I suspected. Light changes the very nature of darkness. With the smallest dot of light, images become evident, shapes are revealed. Darkness withdraws in the presence of light.

We live in a dark world. Terrorists. Tsunamis. Hurricanes. Child molestations. Pornography. Both globally and personally, we live in a dark world. I have faced seasons of darkness where I have bumped into unrecognizable objects. Divorce. Alcoholism. Death. Rebellion. Rejection. Infertility. Homosexuality. Unemployment. Cancer. Learning disabilities. Drugs. Tragedy. Legal issues. Transitions. Teen pregnancy. Abuse. Through my own choices or the choices of those I love, darkness has hemmed me in, threatening to snuff out any source of light. In such moments, I'm left to feel my way blindly along walls that seem to lead nowhere.

I need the light of hope. I need to know that I can find my way to someplace less dark. And I'm not alone in this need. You and I are a hope-dependent people. We live in a world that longs for the light of life.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. . . . In him was

life, and that life was the light of men” (John 1:1–2, 4). Way back in the beginning of everything, God’s first act of creation was to bring light into the darkness. “Let there be light,” he pronounced in Genesis 1.

Into the darkness, God brought light. And our world has been forever changed. After a long night, morning comes, bringing the sun’s rays into our days. Light beckons us into stores and restaurants. It allows us to read and work. It shines over operating tables, enabling a surgeon to repair the wounds of life. It glows in a baby’s room at night, promising the safety of love nearby. It illuminates the pavement as our car glides down the freeway, lighting the way home.

Light changes our world. And it changes us. God has brought physical light into our world, and through his Son he brings spiritual light into our lives. And now, we who have this light in us are called to shine his light in such a way that those around us see the light and are drawn to its source. In Philippians 2:14–16, Paul writes to this group of first-century believers, “Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life.”

Get it? What a contrast God’s light in us is against the inky blackness of the dark sky! As effortlessly as a star hanging in the night sky, our light makes a difference simply because of what it is: LIGHT! When we shine, we hold out the Word of life to a world in deep need. When we shine, we draw others to the source of our hope. Even a single speck of light alters the very nature of darkness. So . . . twinkle, twinkle, little star! Shine the hope of light into this dark world!

In the face of such a challenge, our knees wobble and our eyes roll back in our heads with a “yeah, right” response. All we can see are the *I can’t*s:

I can't . . . I have such a small light. How could I possibly make a difference?

I can't . . . I might fail. I might mess up at sharing my faith.

I can't . . . I don't want to get involved. Sharing with others is risky and expensive in terms of time and energy.

I can't . . . I don't want to offend. I don't want to stick out in the crowd. Besides, isn't faith a personal thing?

I can't . . . I don't have a dramatic story to tell. It'd be different if I did.

I can't . . . I don't know all the answers. What if someone asks me something about God that I don't know? Besides, isn't this my pastor's job?

I can't . . . I don't know how to relate to people who aren't like me. People don't even believe in the Bible anymore; how are they going to believe me?

Does any human soul feel up to the task of sharing their faith?

And yet, we who have God's light burning within us are asked to share that light with others. All of us. I have this gut conviction that God wouldn't invite us to be a part of something impossible. In my soul, I have a feeling that we make the whole share-your-faith thing much more difficult than God makes it. I have this suspicion that our *I can't's* won't hold up in real life when we meet a person stuck in a dark and hopeless situation. We can hide behind them, but God's light will poke out of our very beings—if only from our very real human cracks.

This book is about the fact that even a tiny speck of light changes the very nature of darkness. It's about moving from the *I can't* to the *I can* of relational evangelism. It's about shining in the day-to-day in such a way that

we help others move one step closer to Jesus. It's about sharing our faith one light at a time. It's about the difference we can make by twinkling.

This little light of mine, inadequate as it may seem at times, has changed the darkness of our days and has changed the darkness in the lives of those we love.

Open your front door and head down the street in your neighborhood. Notice the mom pushing a stroller, the retiree walking his dog. At a stoplight, look over at the person driving in the car next to you. Watch the shoppers at your local mall. Meet the gaze of the grocery clerk bagging your vegetables. In our dark world, people need light. The light of God in us changes the very nature of darkness. God challenges us to shine like stars in the universe as we hold out the Word of life.

What would that look like for you? What would it mean for you to shine?

“Shine like stars in the universe as you  
hold out the word of life.”

*Philippians 2:15–16*



# Getting Past the *I Can't*s

*There was once a dark cave, deep down in the ground, underneath the earth and hidden away from view. Because it was so deep in the earth, the light had never been there. The cave had never seen light. The word "light" meant nothing to the cave, who couldn't imagine what "light" might be.*

*Then one day, the sun sent an invitation to the cave, inviting it to come up and visit.*

*When the cave came up to visit the sun it was amazed and delighted because the cave had never seen light before, and it was dazzled by the wonder of the experience.*

*Feeling so grateful to the sun for inviting it to visit, the cave wanted to return the kindness and so it invited the sun to come down to visit it sometime, because the sun had never seen darkness.*

*So the day came, and the sun came down and was courteously shown into the cave.*

*As the sun entered the cave, it looked around with great interest, wondering what "darkness" would be like. Then it became puzzled, and asked the cave, "Where is the darkness?"*

*Source Unknown*



**I can't . . . I have such a small light.**

I might fail.

I don't want to get involved.

I don't want to offend.

I don't have a dramatic story to tell.

I don't know all the answers.

I don't know how to relate to people who aren't like me.

“A saint  
is someone  
who  
lets light shine  
through them,  
like  
a  
stained glass window.”

*Robert Gelinis*

I used to listen to a radio preacher on my way in to work each day. Morning after morning he would tell stories of conversations he'd had with people who were "on their way" to Jesus. On planes. In checkout lines. One day he even shared how his doctor had voiced an interest in knowing Jesus, and while stripped down to his skivvies on the examination table, the evangelist had told him how he could know God.

The guy amazed me, intimidated me, and to be honest, kind of ticked me off. I felt so inadequate in comparison. He's a floodlight. I'm a penlight. I stumble over what "door-opening" questions could start up such a dialogue. On airplanes I like to read *People* magazine. It's my "five minutes of peace" in my chaotic world. And doctors, whether they're male or female—no way I'm going to talk about Jesus while clad in only a paper sheet. My light is too little!

And yet . . . while I stumble in starting a conversation, once finally started, I manage to keep it going. (Not everyone can accomplish that!) On airplanes, my *People* magazine has grabbed more than one seatmate into a fascinating dialogue on the latest gossip, even leading to deeper issues! As for doctors . . . once dressed and forking over my insurance co-pay, I can actually look them in the eye.

So many of us face this *I can't* in relational evangelism. *I can't . . . I have such a small light!*

Floodlight and penlight. They're different to be sure. But is one *better* than the other in making a difference in a dark world? Do we have to be BIG lights to twinkle?

When we come to know Jesus, his light comes into us. He is the light of the world. He brings his light into the darkness of our less than perfect souls and offers forgiveness and hope. God's light in us, then, becomes his light in our world.

But then God goes a step further. Buried in the Psalms is a verse that underlines God's tender customization of his light in our personalities. "He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name" (Ps. 147:4). Identifying your kind of light and shining its offering kills the first *I can't*. As there are both strengths and weaknesses in all personalities, so there are both in our expression of God's light to our world. We do well to label our light, to understand its offering, and then to wield it well in lighting the way for others.

What kind of light are you?

Are you a candle? Do you light the room around you? Are you vulnerable to other influences that might snuff you out?

How about a flashlight? Do you click on in emergencies? Are you good at shining in a pinch but turn off in the everyday?

Are you a desk lamp? Do you provide light for people to work by but need to be atop a steady surface to do so?

Maybe you're a headlight. You light the path for a journey, but you have to be moving in order to not run your battery down.

Could you be a neon light? Do you shine with an appealing hue, but in your offering do you make your surroundings look different than they really are?

How about a pilot light? Are you necessary for others to be lit, but when you go off they go off too?

Might you be a searchlight? Shining in order to discover who is lost in the darkness?

Are you a spotlight who makes another more visible than yourself?

Or a stoplight controlling the flow of life around you?

Think about a lantern. Do you light your surroundings with a gradual glow?

You might be a sunlamp. Do you provide color to the mundane of life at the risk of danger?

Are you a taillight? Visible only when exiting?

How about a flare? Are you short-lived, rising up only to signal danger or to call for help?

Might you be a chandelier? Do you reflect light from your many facets to illuminate the room around you?

Or a lighthouse? Do you provide light as a direction into a safe harbor?

Are you a glowworm or a lightning bug?

A firecracker or a rocket?

Floodlight or penlight?

What kind of light are you?

We discover great freedom in understanding and accepting our own light "container." Freedom to be me instead of you or you instead of me. Because each light presents a customized offering, contained within the strengths and weaknesses of our individual personalities. They exhibit Jesus uniquely to our world and work best in specific situations.

Floodlights are terrific for shining light on an actor on the stage so that even the last row of the audience can see, but they are not so great for the flash on a camera. While my radio preacher friend's floodlight may show others the way to God, it might "blind" some of the shyer types. Penlights are perfect for reading a ticket stub in a theater but are less than helpful in flagging down help when stranded on a dark roadside. My penlight offering

may be too weak for some souls to notice, but it can attract quieter souls to the hope they might not even have recognized they need.

When labeled and lit, our lights can offer just the right light to meet someone else's need for light in a dark place.

Admittedly, there are days when even after labeling our light, we still wonder how successful we'll be in helping others hope. On those days our light is not just little—it's dim. Life eats away at our confidence, our stamina, even at our own conviction of hope. We all experience dark seasons where we can barely light the next step for our own foot. And we wonder how we can light the way for another caught up in a storm.

In such moments, we're helped when we remember that even the dimmest light is brighter than darkness. A little bit of light makes a big difference.

In the aftermath of one of the Florida hurricanes, people from all over the country enlisted to help. One woman took it as her passion to provide flashlights for the children who were left without electricity. Worried that they would be afraid in the darkness, she rallied her forces to provide a flashlight for every child. She knew the loneliness and fear brought on by darkness. And she determined that she would bring light to those who so desperately needed it. She conquered one giant *I can't . . . I have such a small light*. By labeling her light as a flashlight, she brought hope into the hands of those stuck in the darkness.

God is light. He places his light in us that we may have hope for ourselves and hope to share with others. So label your light and hold it up bravely so that others may see and follow after its glow.

“He determines the number of the stars  
and calls them each by name.”

*Psalm 147:4*