

# EVANGELISM

## LESSONS LEARNED – THE WAY FORWARD

1. **Adjust our Vision.** The first step in becoming intentional in our evangelism lies in understanding...
  - A. Who we are. In Acts 13.47, the apostles take a prophecy of Jesus and his mission and apply it to the church and evangelism. Evangelism is as essential to the church as shining is to light. It is not something we do; it is part of who we are. If we are not evangelizing, we are not being the church.
  - B. Where we are. Whether western societies were ever 'Christendom,' they are now a mission field. This presents us with both obstacles and opportunities:
    - i. *Obstacles.* Christ's exclusivity offends secular pluralistic sensibilities *and* pagan idolatries
    - ii. *Opportunity.* People are still people: desperate for cleansing, immorality, meaning, security (Eccl 3.11). The gospel is most clearly drawn where it cannot be mistaken for a particular cultural establishment.
  - C. What evangelism is. True evangelism is not an impersonal invasive program that violates people. True evangelism is rather a way of living characterized by being "friendly to people, liking people, and talking to people" about Jesus.<sup>2</sup> Even the most introverted among us talk about what we love! Evangelism is about loving Jesus, loving people, and sharing the former with the latter.
2. **Adjust our Expectations.** The second step in becoming intentional in our evangelism lies in understanding...
  - A. There is no silver bullet. In mission situations, there is no single pre-fabricated approach...
  - B. There is a big wheel. On the mission field, the key is connecting to people – and people vary!
    - i. *The Early Church.* Christians in the first centuries used a variety of methods to connect to people, including public proclamation, hospitality, home decorations (ex: *orante*), word of mouth, visits, relationships, and literature.
    - ii. *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church.* Likewise, we should think in terms of a multi-faced approach:
      - a. *Air war.* Use new and existing media to raise awareness of the church and the gospel. People will never attend a church that they do not know exists!
      - b. *Ground war.* Seek to meet people in ways that will facilitate spiritual conversations. Not everybody will be interested. But you will never meet the 1/10 without speaking to the 10!
  - C. Big wheels turn slowly.
    - i. *Americans are impatient.* But evangelism is slow work. Paul waited in prison for two years for an open door (Col 4.3). William Carey labored in India for 7 years before seeing 1<sup>st</sup> convert!
    - ii. *Conversion is often a process.* "There are five significant shifts that tend to go on in postmodern folks as they come to faith. First, [they move] from distrust to trust... they learned to trust a Christian... Second, they moved from complacent to curious... Third... from being closed to change to being open to change in their life... The fourth threshold is the move from meandering to seeking... Finally... [they] cross the threshold of the kingdom itself."<sup>3</sup>
  - D. God turns big wheels. "Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God." (William Carey)
3. **Pray for Opportunities.** The third step in becoming intentional in evangelism is the most important.
  - A. Confess and repent. Confess our fear and weakness, confess and repent of our idol of social comfort.
  - B. Seek expulsive power. Ask God to expel self-protective fear with interested, sacrificial love for others.
  - C. Pray with confidence and expectation: "When I'm praying, then, I'm not praying to a God who is not in the business of doing very much; I'm talking to the God who has a kingdom, and that kingdom comes and moves with power.... The vehicle of the Spirit's working is bold faith... This faith is essentially sure that Jesus is alive and that Jesus is Lord of history. It is sure too, that every time you meet someone, that meeting was appointed by Him, that these are not chance meetings, and that you are part of a great harvesting plan. When you pray for people, you are confident that His Spirit will be working."<sup>4</sup>
4. **Seek the Answered Prayer.** If we pray for opportunities, we should be expectantly watching for them:<sup>5</sup>
  - A. Beware efficiency. "Instead of being 'efficient,' do exactly the opposite. Go out of your way to interact with people... I don't have to go halfway around the world to have an international ministry – all I have to do is walk inside to pray for my gas."

<sup>1</sup> See Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970). Green's description of the 1<sup>st</sup> century missionary situation shows many parallels to the situation of the church today in western societies.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. Eric Watkins, oral presentation to the OPC Regional Church Extension Conference, Lake Sherwood, FL, November 7, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Don Everts and Doug Schaupp, *I Once Was Lost: What Postmodern Skeptics Taught Us About Their Path to Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008), 23-24.

<sup>4</sup> C. John Miller, "Prayer in Evangelism" in *The Pastor-Evangelist*, ed. Roger S. Greenway (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987), 40-43.

<sup>5</sup> Quotes from John S. Leonard, *Get Real: Sharing Your Everyday Faith Every Day* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2013), 113, 112, 47.

- B. Be friendly and interested. Be “friendly and interested in everyone you come across during the day; you’ll come across dozens of people each day you naturally have interaction with. It isn’t about putting more people into your life; it’s about genuinely seeing more of the people that are part of your everyday routine – who are, for most of us, no more than scenery and sometimes intrusions into our daily lives.”
- C. Be normal. “[The people who most impact the world] have a relationship with Christ that makes them different – ‘crazy’ to the people around them – but who, at the same time, go out of their way to not be weird. They work hard at being like their neighbors in the nonessentials, so that people can imagine that they too can be followers of Christ in the essentials.”
5. **Share Your Faith – and Show Why It’s Worth Sharing.**<sup>6</sup> When God answers these prayers, we should...
- A. Share Your Faith, Not Your Culture. Don’t use Christ to build your own personal, political, or social kingdom.
- B. Share Your Faith. The best witness is to tell somebody honestly what Jesus means to you personally.
- i. “What could the first generation of believers do to share with others who had not been present the new life they enjoyed in Christ? They could bear their witness; that is all. They had two things to say. First, that they had believed, and had found the claims of the divine Teacher to be true in their own lives and experience. Second, they could give the evidence on which they had committed themselves. That is all a historical contemporary can possibly do... for those who were not there.”<sup>7</sup>
- ii. “In a real testimony, you make it clear that your life right now would be a mess if it wasn’t for Jesus – that you would be in the exact same position as the person you are speaking to (and in some ways, still are), if it weren’t for Jesus. You’re not good, but Jesus is great.”<sup>8</sup>
- C. Share Your Faith – with *clarity, sympathy, courage, and respect.*<sup>9</sup> “Salt only works when it makes contact.”<sup>10</sup>
- i. *Use Clear Definitions.* Avoid ‘Christianese,’ give simple definitions for theological terms.
- ii. *Make Real-Life Connections.* Why does Jesus matter to kids, skeptics, and ‘Saxons’?
- iii. *Be sympathetic.* “Express people’s hopes, objections, fears, and beliefs so well that they feel as though they could not express them better themselves... Christianity demands that we have enough compassion to learn the questions of our generation... Immerse yourself in the questions, hopes, and beliefs of the culture so that you can give a biblical, gospel-centered response.”<sup>11</sup>
- iv. *Be courageous.* Give “people the Bible’s answers, which they may not want at all to hear, to questions about life that people in their particular time and place are asking, in languages and forms they can comprehend, and through appeals and arguments with force they can feel, even if they reject them.”<sup>12</sup>
- v. *Ask/Give Permission* (Mt 7.12, 2Cor 5.20). “You’ll probably think this is crazy or offensive...”
- D. Share Why It’s Worth Sharing: “The enthusiasm to evangelize which marked the early Christians is one of the most remarkable things in the history of religions. Here were men and women of every rank and station in life, of every country in the known world, so convinced that they had discovered the riddle of the universe, so sure of the one true God whom they had come to know, that nothing must stand in the way of their passing on this good news to others... The discovery that the ultimate force in the universe was Love, and that this Love had stooped to the very nadir of self-abasement for human good, had an effect on those who believed in which nothing could remove.”<sup>13</sup>
6. **Four Transformative Insights.**<sup>14</sup>
- A. Most of us don't need new contacts. Rather, we need simply to leverage our many existing contacts.
- B. See people as souls. In order to tell people about Jesus, we must learn to see people not as *landscape* (part of the background to my life) or as *machines* (those who serve me), but as *souls* with everlasting destinies.
- C. Expel fear of man with confidence in God. Replace “What will they think?” with “What might God do?”
- D. Remember the “Lucy Principle”. When we love Jesus, we don’t have to *feel* brave in order to *be* brave. Courage is not the absence of fear, it is pressing on despite our fears. When we feel weak, we can still pray for strength. And despite our fears, we can still decide to speak.

<sup>6</sup> This heading borrows part of its title from a book worth reading: C. John Miller, *A Faith Worth Sharing: A Lifetime of Conversations About Christ* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Green, *Evangelism*, 75.

<sup>8</sup> Leonard, *Get Real*, 123.

<sup>9</sup> Green, *Evangelism*, 196, shows how these four attributes characterized the preaching of the apostle Paul.

<sup>10</sup> Rev. Mike Myers, oral presentation to the OPC Regional Church Extension Conference, Lake Sherwood, FL, November 7, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 273.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>13</sup> Green, *Evangelism*, 236.

<sup>14</sup> The first three of these come from Rev. Eric Hausler, a veteran OPC Home & Foreign missionary. The fourth is named for an event that happened to the fictional character Lucy Pevensie in C.S. Lewis’s novel, *Prince Caspian*.