

Evangelism

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Evangelism is a journey. This journey starts when an individual is introduced to the concept of sin and comes to the realization that they have sinned. As Romans 3:23 says, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Sin separates us from God and introduces us to death. Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (NIV).

The second part of Romans 6:23 tells us that God loved us, and wanted us to be with him so he sent the gift of eternal life into the world in the form of a man named Jesus. This Jesus was fully God and fully human. Jesus lived a sinless life but chose to die. Death, however, had no right to claim him, because he had not sinned, so Jesus came back to life. Because he chose to die when he did not have to, Jesus can substitute his death for the death we deserve, if we ask. John 3:16-18 says:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son” (NIV).

After Jesus left this earth, God sent a part of himself to live in whoever is willing to humble themselves and ask God to take leadership of their life. This part of God is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives guidance and offers direction to those willing to listen.

Acts 1:8 says, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (NIV). Jesus instructs all of his followers to spread the news to the entire world that there is a way we can be close to God.

Humans were created to desire closeness with God. Genesis 3:8 tells us that Adam and Eve would walk with God in the Garden of Eden. Everyone is seeking this closeness. It is the responsibility of all who have found this closeness to God to share it with the world around them.

There is an important progression in the second half of Acts 1:8. Jesus tells his disciples that they will be his witnesses in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is where the disciples were, it was essentially their home base. Then Jesus tells them they will be his witnesses in all Judea and Samaria. Finally Jesus instructs his disciples to spread his name to the ends of the earth. This is like telling a resident of my hometown, Fairfield, Iowa, that they will be God’s witness first in Fairfield and then in all of Jefferson county and the state of Iowa and then to the ends of the earth. It is important to share the news of Jesus with your local community, with the people you come into contact with every day. Then every follower of Christ needs to expand their evangelistic influence in ever increasing circles.

Every follower of Christ plays an important part in determining the eternal condition of all the souls we come into contact with on earth. God, through the Holy Spirit, can use us to save every soul that will ever be on this planet. It is our choice of whether or not we listen to God that determines if some people will be destined to experience an eternity apart from God. God is a timeless entity and knows who will be with him forever and who will be separated from him forever. Humans are not yet timeless; our choices have an effect on the world around us. God wants a perfect world, we are the ones that have messed it up and we will continue to do so.

Sin is our effort to achieve self-salvation. We all attempt to achieve salvation, which is spiritual fulfillment, by our own good works. Repentance is coming to the realization that we must become dependant upon Christ's good work to achieve spiritual fulfillment. Repentance is becoming aware of the sin nature rebelling against it and placing ourselves under Christ's leadership.

The evangelist, a category which must include all those who have repented and found salvation through Christ, has the responsibility to follow the leadings of the Holy Spirit and seek out ways to share the gospel of Christ with others. Each Evangelist must not sit idly by waiting for opportunity to come along, rather, each evangelist must prepare. Ephesians 6 speaks of dressing ourselves in the armor of God. We must have truth, righteousness, faith, the Holy Spirit, the word of God, and salvation through Christ. We must develop and nurture each of these aspects of our lives. We must have "the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace." This readiness only comes from preparation, practice, perseverance and prayer.

To be a "disciple" is to be a follower. Discipleship is the process by which we learn how to follow Christ. Discipleship is what allows all followers of Christ to engage in effective evangelism; however, evangelism is not the sole reason we pursue discipleship. Discipleship is the process by which God teaches us, brings us closer to himself, and enables us to minister to others.

Matthew 13:45-46 says, "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it." We are all merchants seeking for "the pearl." Evangelism is the searching for and finding of the pearl. Discipleship is selling everything we own and buying into the pearl. Discipleship is the process by which we discard all of the things that keep us from a relationship with God. Discipleship is rearranging ones life so that we are living as Christ lived, that is, with the relationship between God and self at its core. The basic components of discipleship are submission, prayer, Christ-centeredness, education, confrontation, collaboration and ministry.

There are times when God wants us to grow closer to him by submitting to him and trusting him. There are times in life when you are figuratively hanging from the thirtieth floor of a burning building and God says, "Jump, I'll catch you." In order to grow we just need to jump. In Mark 14:36, Jesus is praying on the night of his arrest. "'Abba, Father,' he said, 'everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.'" Jesus was hanging from a more treacherous place than most people will ever experience, but he had faith and submitted to God's plan.

One of the best ways to allow God to bring us closer to him is by talking to him. Jesus' first act after his baptism was to go into the desert and commune with God in prayer. Jesus spent forty days talking to God. Allowing ourselves uninterrupted time with God is very important. It lets us ask God our questions, tell God our hopes and fears, thank God for all that he has done, and listen to God's leading.

To be a disciple, to be a follower of Christ, you must be Christ-centered. The goal is to live life as Jesus would lead your life. To be Christ-centered is to have allowed Christ to be the leader of your life. Christ-centeredness is a freedom beyond any other freedom we can experience; it is freedom for the soul.

Education is important for a new disciple of Christ, but it is also a process that never stops. A new disciple needs to learn what it actually means to be a follower of Christ. What did Christ teach? What have other church leaders taught? Is what I believe based on what Christ taught or on my culturally influenced sense of right and wrong? What does the Bible say? These questions are never fully answered regardless of how long one studies. Education is, in my opinion, one of the least emphasized aspects of discipleship. When Jesus visited Jerusalem as a boy in Luke 2 he was knowledgeable enough to converse with the teachers. Paul was instructed by one of the greatest Jewish scholars of his day, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). God does not shy away from questions, he encourages them, and the more questions that are asked, the more questions there are to ask. God has provided the Bible, teachers, tradition, and other texts to give us more opportunity to learn more about him and become closer followers of Christ. As disciples we need to take advantage of these resources.

Immediately after Jesus spent forty days with God, Jesus faced confrontation. The devil tempted him. Matthew 4:1-11 is often read as if Jesus was never fazed by the offers the devil made. I am convinced that the devil offered Jesus all the things that Jesus would have most wanted. Jesus was fully God, but he was also fully human. As a human he had wants, urges, desires and needs. I am sure Jesus struggled in refuting the devil's offers. Jesus used his knowledge of God's teachings to avoid falling to the temptation to sin. Jesus trusted God to help him through a treacherous time. Temptations are important for our spiritual growth. If we are not tempted we are not stretched and we do not grow. James 1:2-4 says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

Collaboration is another important aspect of discipleship. We need mentors who can offer us experience. We need accountability partners to hold us to our word. We need encouragers to bring us up when we are down. We need teammates to carry us through the difficult times. In Mark 6, Jesus sends out the twelve disciples for the first time. He sends them in pairs of two. Throughout the book of Acts, Paul always had a traveling partner such as Barnabus, Silas or Timothy. Jesus had Peter, James and John who went with him to pray on the night of his arrest. Collaboration helps us to grow closer to God.

Ministry is at the heart of discipleship. It is impossible to separate Jesus from his ministry. In the same way it should be impossible to separate our ministry from our lives. Ministry is not

something we do, it is something we are. Ministry is what allows us to combine all of the other areas of discipleship and implement them into our lives. Ministry is the primary objective, and ministry is the main point at which discipleship and evangelism overlap.

God created all humans with a desire to be close to him. We need to recognize that even the most ardent atheist or agnostic is seeking God in his own way. We need to ask God to use us in whatever manner he needs in order to reach out to the lost.

In any community there are four groups of people. They are the churching, the lost-churching, the semi-churching and the unchurching. The churching are those in the community that have discovered salvation through Christ's forgiveness and are living their lives to glorify God. The lost-churching have received salvation but are not living their lives to glorify God. The semi-churching have a background in Christianity but have not asked Christ for his gift of salvation. The unchurching have no background in Christianity and no knowledge of Christ.

Evangelism focuses primarily on the last three groups, the lost-churching, the semi-churching and the unchurching. All those in the first category, the churching, are called to be evangelists.

The mission of the church is to move the community out of the lost churching, semi-churching and unchurching groups and into the churching group. Within the churching group, the goal is to be ever moving toward a closer relationship to God.

The lost-churching need to be provided an opportunity to rediscover the glory of God. This can be accomplished by small groups led by the churching that focus on building community and exploring what Christianity actually is.

The semi-churching need to be given a reason to re-explore Christianity. They need an event that will do four things. First it will interest them, second it will not scare them away, third it will assuage some myths they have heard about Christianity and finally it will give them a desire to seek out spirituality in a Christian context.

The unchurching need to be befriended and shown the love of Jesus. Generally, this group has no conception of sin. With no knowledge that sin creates a problem, the unchurching see no need to correct it.

The church is obligated to facilitate the growth of healthy groups in which the churching can provide education, encouragement, prayer, accountability, and ministry and evangelism opportunities. The church also needs to recognize that the events they create to reach out to the lost-churching will not appeal to the unchurching; the reverse is also true. The church needs to create opportunities for ministry that will help all four groups grow closer to God.

It is important for the church to emphasize that at one time we were all lost. Some have been found, but it is our duty to ensure that we give others the opportunity to find this salvation. Finally, it is important that we focus on our immediate community, that we be involved with our larger community and that we be active in evangelizing the world.

Finally it is important to nurture a culture of evangelism inside the church. The attitude around evangelism needs to be changed from “that’s something those people do,” to “that’s what I do.”

Discipleship focuses mainly on the church group, although, it is often an effective tool in educating and reaching out to the lost-church and semi-church. Discipleship and evangelism cannot be separated; one naturally flows into the other.

The mission of discipleship should be to make a fully devoted follower of Christ. We do this in three ways: by connecting with Christ, by being a part of the body of Christ, and by engaging in the mission of Christ.

We connect to Christ by submitting to his will. Our first act of submission is when we admit to God that we cannot save ourselves and we ask for the free gift of Salvation that Christ offers us. The rest of our lives need to be led in such a way that we submit to the leadership of Christ.

We discover where Christ is leading us by communing with him in prayer on a regular basis. God has left the Holy Spirit to be the light that will guide us closer to God if we admit that we do not naturally know the way. We must continually ask God to lead us and we must continually be listening for God’s leading.

The eventual goal is that, through submission and prayer, God will transform us toward the character of Christ. Few, if any, ever achieve this Christ-centeredness in life, but it is the eventual goal. We need to want to lead our lives as Christ would lead in our place.

We become a part of the body of Christ by engaging in education, collaboration and confrontation.

We educate ourselves by studying the Bible, understanding church tradition, listening to and reading from church leaders both past and present and engaging in conversation with those around us who are also on this journey of discipleship.

Each of us experiences confrontation every day. We will always be tempted and, while we should not seek out temptation, we should be thankful when it comes our way. Temptation represents an opportunity to glorify God by submitting to his leadership and, through his power, resisting the things that most tempt us. As we confront these things and, through God’s grace, resist them, they begin to have less power over us. Through this process of overcoming we move closer to the goal of Christ-centeredness.

We collaborate by meeting with other disciples in groups of various sizes. We gather in large group services and corporately worship God. We gather in small groups and gain insights as to how God is working in others’ lives. We gather in groups performing some form of ministry and grow in our faith through our experiences.

Finally, we connect to the mission of Christ by performing ministry. Ministry is both evangelizing the lost and discipling those that have already submitted to Christ’s leadership. It is important to be engaged in both evangelism and discipleship, because both help us grow more

Christ-centered. A balanced ministry that reaches to those both inside and outside the church is necessary for a healthy disciple.