

Xenos Christian Fellowship
Christian Ministry 3: Moving Into a Ministry Lifestyle
Week 5 – Loving the Lost: Evangelism

Evangelism and missions: central to the purpose of the church

(Matt. 28:18-20) “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. (19) Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’”

This command, which Jesus gave to his disciples after his resurrection, is known as the GREAT COMMISSION. It involves both outreach and discipleship. Outreach is getting more people into his kingdom; discipleship is getting more of his kingdom into his people.

(Acts 1:8) “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

(2 Cor. 5:18-20*) “Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”

It's God's desire that all people come to know him:

(1 Tim. 2:3,4) “This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

(2 Pet. 3:9) “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”

The purpose of the church is not merely to perpetuate itself. The church is commissioned as God's instrument to reach lost people. It is lost people and not found people, that are the central focus of God's concern (Mark 2:17; Luke 15). Of course, God has great concern for all Christians, but his concern extends to people all across the world who live without him. When a church adopts a mission that excludes evangelism as its central purpose, the clock is ticking toward the breakdown and destruction of that church.

What is at stake in having an evangelistic focus? Consider the opportunities and threats that hinge on a church staying focused on evangelism.

1. *Spiritual vitality, excitement, and confidence in the gospel* tend to flourish in an outreaching church. Experiencing God's guidance and power in sharing our faith is wonderful! And new converts are the lifeblood of the church because they "validate" the gospel and increase our own confidence in it and God's power to change lives. In a non-witnessing church, these elements wane.

2. *Opportunities for new ministry* abound in churches that are vigorous in outreach. New people need to be discipled, new leaders and teachers are needed for new home groups, and new outreach ministries need workers. It is much more difficult to mobilize members in concrete ministry roles in non-growing churches. Without ministry mobilization, people tend to stagnate spiritually and become *more self-focused*. This leads to other problems . . .

3. *Relational conflict often increase* because instead of banding together to help witness and care for the new converts, people often start looking at how others aren't meeting their needs. But an outward-focused church which is "striving together for the sake of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27) finds it easier to stay united.

4. Ingrown churches often proliferate "*brass-polishing*"—focusing on less important things (e.g., recreational activities; corporate worship, etc.)—and/or an "*ivory tower*" *Bible-club mentality* sometimes develops—focusing on non-essential theological issues (e.g., end-times scenarios; speaking in tongues; etc.). These help people feel spiritual, but actually further detract from our real mission. By contrast, sharing our faith and helping new Christians keeps us focused on the central truths of the gospel and a lifestyle of love.

5. A "*ghetto*" *mentality* may develop, which justifies lack of contact with non-Christians, and often rationalizes tribalism, political prejudice, materialism, and other sins. Adults groups can be especially vulnerable to this, since the busyness of day-to-day life and the loss of idealism can sap evangelistic fervor.

6. The church becomes *calloused to the plight of the lost*—not just that they are going to hell in the next life, but that they are deceived and miserable in this life.

(Matt. 9:36) "And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd."

(Eph. 2:12) "Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."

Three participants in evangelism

When we are sharing our faith, we tend to focus on our role: “What should I say? Am I making sense? Can I be persuasive enough?”, etc. Our actions and words are important—but they are just a part of what goes on in people coming to Christ. Being aware of God’s role, the hearer’s role, and our own role will give us a well-rounded picture of what evangelism involves.

God's role

It is difficult to emphasize how important it is to understand and rely on God’s role in evangelism. This is the key to seeing evangelism as an exciting adventure instead of a terrifying or burdensome duty. Keep your focus on God’s role!

- *God creates opportunities for us to share our faith.*

(Col. 4:2,3-6) Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; 3 praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; 4 in order that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak. 5 Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. 6 Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.**

God knows who is seeking him, and he is able to guide willing witnesses into their paths. The New Testament is full of examples of these “divine appointments” (see Jesus in Acts 4; Philip in Acts 8; Peter in Acts 10). Did God bring a Christian into your life to do this? Have you seen him provide you with these opportunities?

- *The Holy Spirit convicts people of their guilt and lostness.*

(John 16:8-10) “And He (the Holy Spirit), when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; (9) concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; (10) and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.”

(Acts 2:37) When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

God is capable of reaching people’s consciences in this way. Sometimes he does this before we share the gospel with people; sometimes, he does it as or after we share. Think often about God did this with you. Do you

consciously count on God doing this when you have opportunities to share the gospel?

- *God empowers those who share their faith.*

(Eph. 6:19,20) And pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

(1 Cor. 2:2-4) For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

God grants us courage and clarity of speech as we by faith open our mouths to share the gospel. See also Stephen in Acts 6; the “untrained men in Acts 4:13; the persecuted Jerusalem church in Acts 4:31-33. How have you experienced God empowering you in this way?

A practical way to rely on God’s role:

Pray regularly (preferably daily) for God to give you an opportunity to share your faith with someone, and for the eyes to see these opportunities. You will be amazed at how God answers this prayer!

What happens if we lose sight of God’s role?

Depending on your temperament, you will tend to EITHER push people inappropriately to make a decision OR withdraw or be too passive because you feel overwhelmed by the task. People who fail to reflect regularly on God’s role tend to pray less about their evangelism efforts. They also often fail to notice what God is doing in the non-Christians around them.

The hearer’s role: *The hearer must choose whether or not to believe.*

When we share our faith and someone is unresponsive or resistant, we may take responsibility for the person’s response. This is especially tempting when the person is a very close friend or family member, or when we care too much about people’s approval.

God gives people the freedom to choose him or reject him. The Bible affirms that the hearer has a very important role to play.

(Mt. 23:37) "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling." Jesus wept (see Luke 19:41) and was broken-hearted about their response, but he did not take ownership of their choice. He also warned us that many will not respond positively (Lk. 8:5-15 – the parable of the sower and the soils).

Emergency room doctors lose people all the time. What would happen if they take responsibility for everyone who died?

We are to rely on God's approval of us in Christ—not on people's approval. Sharing your faith will expose the "fear of man"—but it will also help you to depend on God's approval!

God provides answers to the honest investigator. If the willingness to respond is present, God will provide sufficient evidence.

(John 7:17) "If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself."

What happens if we lose sight of the hearer's role?

We will tend to take on more responsibility than we should. Symptoms of this problem could include (1) tying up all your time with a few reluctant people, (2) resorting to manipulation, or (3) withdrawing from evangelism.

Our role: *To present the message of salvation in a way that the hearer can understand.*

Our part matters! To evangelize means to "verbally share the good news of God's reconciliation through Jesus Christ, and to invite people to receive this gift." People are not likely to place their faith in Jesus Christ if they aren't aware of what he has done on their behalf. Therefore we need to share the message of Christ with others.

(Rom. 10:14) "How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?"

Here are **five practical ways to enhance our role in evangelism:**

- *Write a short testimony:* Summarize how you came to have a relationship with Christ in 3 minutes or less. Describe what you were like prior to becoming a Christian, what led you to place your faith in

Christ, and how Christ has changed your life. You are the expert of your own story, and testimony has a powerful impact on people!

- *Personally invest in the people around you.* Take an interest in your neighbors, classmates and work associates. Learn about them as people and what is going on in their lives. Truly loving others and showing genuine interest in them will yield opportunities to share your faith.
- *Start spiritual conversations.* See the handout we've provided on how to start spiritual conversations.
- *Adorn the gospel.* We can live in a way that makes the gospel attractive or unattractive to others. Ethical conduct and serving individuals in the community enhances our credibility with people we are trying to reach. For more on this, see Gary DeLashmutt's plenary session, "Adorning the Gospel," in our 2008 Xenos Summer Institute audio archive on our website.

(Titus 2:9,10) "Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, 10 not pilfering, but showing all good faith that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect."

- *Be willing to challenge people to make a decision.* People need to know how God wants them to respond to what he has done on the cross. Many people need to be challenged several times before they "get it" that they need to personally entrust themselves to Christ.

Harvest vs. Search Theology

Harvest and Search Theology are two different perspectives on our responsibility in evangelism. Search theologians focus on man's responsibility to proclaim the Gospel and leave the results entirely to God. Harvest theologians agree that the church is called to proclaim the message. They also agree that God provides the harvest. But they measure the outcome of their efforts and modify their approach to evangelism in an attempt to be more effective. If a harvest and a search theologian were chopping wood together, the search theologian might say, "All that matters is swinging the ax." This might provoke a harvest theologian to reply, "Yes, but is the woodpile getting bigger? If not, we ought to look at how we are swinging, how sharp the blade is, and what kind of wood we are chopping."

Christians often disagree on the degree to which individuals are responsible for evangelistic results. Some consider results to be vital and would consider their church as failing if there were prolonged periods of time without evangelistic fruit. Others consider a focus on counting attendance, conversions, church growth, etc. to be ungodly. We introduce these terms to initiate you into this debate.

Search Theology

Definition: Searches for lost people through the faithful proclamation of the gospel, leaving results between God and the hearer.

Examples: Go door to door or hand out tracts (OR ANY OTHER METHOD). If it doesn't yield, you don't question it because results are up to God.

Search theology is flawed because:

- It does not go far enough because it neglects analysis of results.
- The Great Commission provides a command which includes results that we can measure (“MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL *ETHNOS*”).
- The example in Acts: Luke includes numbers and ethnic progress in his report of the early church (2:41; 6:7, 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:10,20).
- It can lead to a wooden or mechanistic approach to evangelism and therefore its adherents may not persuade (Acts 17:2-4; 18:4; 2 Cor. 5:11, 20), persist (Acts 17:17), or adjust (1 Cor. 9:19-23-CULTURAL FACTORS).
- Search theology has been used to justify failure in evangelism. There is such a thing as a proper dissatisfaction in this area. Though the reasons for failure are often complex, they should be explored. Such reasons include:
 - Sin (including sin of omission such as a lack of outreach effort)
 - Focus on an unresponsive field
 - Wrong or unstrategic methods

Harvest Theology

Definition: Finding and winning receptive people (harvesting) through faithful proclamation of an understandable gospel, keeping an eye on results to determine effectiveness and future methods.

Examples: FRIENDSHIP EVANGELISM vs. DOOR-TO-DOOR WITNESSING IN A LOW-COMMUNITY CULTURE; MOVING ADULT WORKERS FROM ADULT FIELD TO HELP WITH THE HARVEST IN COLLEGE; ANALYZING A CULTURE TO COMMUNICATE THE GOSPEL MORE EFFECTIVELY (SEE NEXT WEEK)

Harvest Theology is biblical because:

- It does reflect on results
- It is dynamic
- It focuses on the responsive field (while also initiating into new fields)

Dangers in Harvest Theology:

- Results are not always immediate (2 Tim. 4:2 “. . . in season and out of season”).
- God's part may be minimized, resulting in problems discussed above.
- Taking your identity from results. How would you know if you were doing this? (INORDINATE ANXIETY OVER WITNESSING; DESPONDENCY OVER UNRESPONSIVENESS) However, having a firm identity in Christ enables us to face the reality that the lost are not being found.
- A numbers-focus can lead you to take your eyes off the serving task at hand (e.g. fretting over low home group attendance vs. loving the people that did show up; neglecting culturally distant fields).
- You could cheat to get more decisions/numbers (becoming market-driven by avoiding unpopular biblical truths, church discipline, neglecting discipleship; etc.).

Bill Hybels: “Walk Across the Room”

Bill Hybels is the founder of Willow Creek Community Church, a large church near Chicago. In this video, recorded at the 2005 Xenos Summer Institute, Bill shares his own experiences sensing and responding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Note: You can obtain this video at the Study Center. Ask for Athena # v01514. You can also view it on the Christian Ministry 3 Module 1 Week 3 class DVD – Athena # v01889. The times in **bold** correspond to v01514. Times in parentheses correspond to v01889. This video is not part of Willow Creek’s *Just Walk Across the Room* course (Athena # SET s01468).

INSTRUCTORS, YOU MAY ONLY HAVE TIME TO WATCH THE FIRST 30 MINUTES IN CLASS.

0:00 – 17:16 (1:54:48 – 2:12:05)

- Hello and intro.
- What would someone far from God think or feel at our meeting?
- What is the highest value in personal evangelism? Being sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.
- Car ride to camp.
- Recalling conversion at the camp.
- Conversation on car ride back.
- Summary – being led by Holy Spirit.

STOP & DISCUSS

- How does one get ready to hear the HS?

17:17 – 30:03 (2:12:06 – 2:24:51)

- Conversation at lunch story.
- Walk across the room (circle of convenience, zone of the unknown).

- Churches die because they are committed only to the circle of comfort.
- Philippians 2: Christ leaving comfort circle of the Trinity
- Follow Christ's example! You can do this!

STOP & DISCUSS:

- Circle of comfort, crossing the chasm, the zone of the unknown

What you can do to help build and maintain an outreach ethos in your home group

1. *Communicate and celebrate conversions.* People learn what is important (in part) by what we get excited about. We want them to know that we share the joy of the angels when one sinner repents. We want them to share our awe at the power of the gospel to penetrate all barriers.
2. *Pray for the lost corporately.* In your home group's prayer, make sure that you pray by name for the people you're reaching out to. Weave this theme through your entire prayer time so that younger Christians learn that reaching others is ultimately why we're here.
3. *Be an example.* Reach out to your neighbors, get to know your kids' friends and their parents, witness to the non-Christians other church members are bringing around, etc. God will honor your example to convince other Christians of the importance of reaching out.
4. *Discuss evangelism regularly.* Matt 24:34b – “For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.” If this is important to you, you will talk about it.
5. *Praise others' evangelistic efforts.* We transmit values (in part) by whom we admire. Sharing our faith is emotionally and spiritually difficult, especially when people don't respond. People easily get discouraged, and they need to hear us express God's heart—that he is delighted at their love for the lost and their willingness to step out in faith to share their faith. Consider Bill Bright's adage in *Witnessing Without Fear*: “Success in evangelism is sharing your faith in the power of the Holy Spirit, leaving the results to God. Failure in evangelism is failure to witness.”
6. *Share what you've learned about evangelism.* Others will be more equipped and motivated to evangelize if you do this periodically.

Maintain evangelism as an important “family value!”

Our children will learn to value what we value. If we regularly discuss our burden for the lost, they will “catch it.” If on the other hand we prioritize other values they will catch those instead. If we want our kids to be godly, we can't just protect them from the dangers of culture—we must also teach them how to live victoriously in the spiritual battle. If we have not modeled a love for lost people and an excitement about outreach, we have failed in a foundational area of parenting!

Memory Verses

2 Cor. 5:18-20* - We are ambassadors for Christ.

Col. 4:3-6 - Pray for open doors.**

Assignment

Talk to a non-Christian and record their answers to the following questions:

- **Do all religions basically teach the same thing? Why do you think that?**
- **What does it mean to be a tolerant person?**

Write a full paragraph response to each of these common objections to Christianity:

1. "Why should I regard the Bible as God's Word? What about all of the other scriptures?"

2. "How can your religion consign people to hell if they have never even heard about Christ?" HINT: There are really two distinct issues in this objection—God's judgment and whether he judges all people who didn't have access to the Bible.