

Xenos Christian Fellowship
Christian Ministry Light Unit 3
Practical Issues
Week 1 – Evangelism

Editors' note:

- *Italics (lower case or ALL CAPS) show what students should write in their student outline.*
- **Bold (including bold italics and bold ALL CAPS) shows what appears in the student outline.**
- Regular text is used for lecture notes; ALL CAPS are used for emphasis.

Overview

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Evangelism and discipleship are 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."

Theologians call this important command "the great commission."

The Great Commission: Jesus commands the church to both evangelize and train people in all the nations (every cultural group in the world).

Carrying out the great commission involves a combination of evangelism and discipleship. Evangelism involves getting more people into his kingdom. Discipleship is more kingdom into his people. Together, evangelism and discipleship are at the heart of the mission of the church. Just before his ascension, Jesus charged the disciples:

(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."

God has given each Christian the role of representing him in the world and leading others to him.

(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.

The purpose of the church is not to perpetuate itself. The church is commissioned as God's instrument to reach lost people. Lost people and not found people, 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 begins ticking toward the breakdown and destruction of that church!

Other things, often good things, can easily usurp an outreach focus:

- Good fellowship—essential, but what happens to our fellowship if it is never invigorated by an excited young Christian?
- Bible knowledge—essential, but when we don't obey Christ and tell people what we are learning, the result is dead orthodoxy.
- Things like promoting family values, protecting our children, corporate worship, and lobbying for social change are not wrong, but the church should not make these its primary focus. The good is often the enemy of the best.

What happens when the church loses an evangelism focus?

May God spare our church from the tragedy of losing our focus on evangelism! The symptoms listed below won't happen all at once or all at the same time. But there are home groups where several indicators are pointing toward a gradual loss of focus. If you sense your group is losing its way in this area, talk with your home group leaders about it and work towards change!

- 1. Vitality and excitement wane** because new converts are the lifeblood of the church. They "validate" the gospel and increase our own confidence in it and God's power.
- 2. No new people means no home group plants** which means no new leaders and workers needed which means less motivation for learning and sanctification among members. People need to step into new roles in order to grow. Planting a group causes everyone to consider what they can do help the new group succeed.
- 3. We get more self-focused** because there are no new converts to care for. This often leads to relational conflict.
- 4. Relational conflict increases** because instead of banding together to help witness and care for the new converts, we start looking at how others aren't meeting our needs. If you've ever seen *Remember the Titans* (a movie about black and white football players in a Virginia high school who were forced to integrate) you understand the unifying power of a common goal. In their drive to win a state championship, most of the team was able to look past racial differences.
- 5. The church gets involved in "brass-polishing" or "gingerbread"**—doing less important things that further detract from our real mission.
- 6. An "ivory tower" Bible-club mentality** develops and people debate nonessential issues and can't relate to non-Christians.

7. A **"ghetto" mentality develops** that justifies lack of contact with non-Christians-which will lead to increased vulnerability to tribalism, materialism, and hidden sin. History has repeatedly shown the tendency of vital evangelistic movements to go inward. This can easily happen at the group level – especially in adult groups where day-to-day life and loss of idealism can quickly sap evangelistic fervor. You must fight against this.

8. **The church becomes calloused to the plight of the lost (apathy).** Not just that they are going to hell in the next life, but that they are 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.”

When we reflect on what God has done for us, what he saved us from, what our lives used to be like, and how they have change since, we remember what great news we have to share.

This awareness, along with deep convictions about the need to share our faith, will heighten our sense of urgency to speak up.

Why we share the Gospel

Our willingness to share the gospel should be grounded in convictions we take from the Word and gratitude for those who had the courage to reach us. Here are two essential biblical convictions related to evangelism.

- *The Gospel is good news* (Mt. 24:14; Mk. 1:15; Acts 15:7)

(Romans 1:16) “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”

The word gospel (Greek: euangelion) means good news and it occurs scores of times in the New Testament. But sometimes we find ourselves treating the Gospel like it is bad news. We shy away from sharing it, or we apologize our way into presenting it (“I’m not sure that you want to hear this but. . .)

We must challenge our thinking on this point. The Gospel is wonderful news, and it is a message that has the power to save eternally those who respond to it. It is a message that brings unbelievable joy and relief to those who are prepared to embrace it (2 Cor 2:15,16). Paul asked for prayer that he would declare the Gospel fearlessly, **“AS I SHOULD”** (Eph. 6:20). We should also declare it fearlessly, **AS WE SHOULD**. It warrents bold proclamation and it is great news.

- *Many people will spend eternity apart from God* (Rom. 6:23; 2Thes. 1:6-9; Heb 9:27; Rev. 20)

(2 Thess. 1:6-9) “...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from

the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.”

Eternal judgment is a reality whether we feel like it is real or not. Those that reject Christ will face personal eternal punishment, away from the presence and power of the Lord. Sometimes we look at a non-Christian and think, “this person's life is basically together; they seem fine without a relationship with Christ.” But in reality, they face an eternity away from God. We should be prepared to suffer a bit of social discomfort to offer rescue to those who face the prospect of God's judgment. Christ paid a phenomenal price to rescue people from this destiny. He placed a very high value on their rescue.

How are you doing in this area?

How many of you have actually given the gospel to someone? In this past week? In the last month? In the last 2 months? The last 6 months? How many of you here today feel intimidated about sharing your faith? Take comfort, because reaching people for Christ is the desire of God's heart.

(1 Tim. 2:4) “Who desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.”

God is committed to reaching people through you and he has already gone to great lengths to help you and your group bear fruit. He has prepared people in advance and helped to make them receptive. He empowers Christians to be bold. He directs us to people who are ready to listen. The Gospel itself has a supernatural, powerful effect on those who hear and God drives the message home with relentless conviction.

To succeed in evangelism and not lose heart, we must have a good understanding of God's role. Armed with this information, we can better understand our own responsibilities and those of our listeners.

God's role

- **The Holy Spirit convicts.**

(John 16: 8-10) “And He, 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.”

(John 12: 32) “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.”

- **God creates opportunities**

(Col. 4:2-6) “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.”**

Paul says that we should pray for “**open doors.**” *Open doors occur when God engineers an opportunity to share the Gospel with receptive people.*

God will at times arrange "divine appointments" for lost people with Christians who are willing to discuss their relationship with Him. But this doesn't mean that the process of leading them to Christ will be rapid or easy.

- **God empowers those who share their faith.**

(Eph. 6:19) “...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, (20) 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. 3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. 4 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.”

Recall Stephen (Acts 6), the religious authorities marveling at the confidence of Peter and John (Acts 4:13), and the Spirit “filling” Christians to give them boldness (Acts 4:31).

Discussion: What happens to your own evangelism and the evangelism ethos of your group if you lose sight of God’s role in evangelism?

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

Some Christians are tempted to take ownership of the person’s choice that they are witnessing to. This is especially easy to do when family members choose not to believe.

Notice how Jesus laments the decision of those who reject him without taking ownership for their free choices.

(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.”

Example: Consider the fact that emergency room doctors lose people all the time. What would happen if they take responsibility for every one who died?

Jesus told us in advance that people will respond in different ways (not all good) when we sow seed (share the Gospel).

Luke 8:5-15 The Parable of the Soils

The heart attitude of a listener affects his/her ability to hear and understand the message.

(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.”

God will answer the questions of the person who is investigating honestly. But they must have a bias of being willing to respond to the truth of God. God responds to that willingness by providing sufficient evidence.

Discussion: What happens to your own evangelism and the evangelism ethos of your group if you lose sight of the hearer's role in evangelism?

Possible answers include: Tying up all your time with a few reluctant people or resorting to manipulation.

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

Our role 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 can freely choose a relationship with Jesus Christ. Therefore they must hear the message to believe. The Body of Christ must do its part to present the message.

(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?”

(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.”

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 what your life is like now.
- *Personally invest in the people around you.* Take an interest in your neighbors, classmates and work associates. Draw them out. Learn 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.

(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.”

- *Don’t forget to challenge people to make a decision.* Can we say we’ve fully given the Gospel if we haven’t extended an invitation to receive Christ? People need to know how God wants them to respond to what he has done on the cross.

Responding to the prompting of the Spirit

Before he ascended to heaven, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would empower Christians to spread the message. Recall **Acts 1:8**:

“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.”

The Spirit gives us opportunities to witness.

As promised, God supernaturally propelled the witness of early Christians! There are many examples in the book of Acts of God directing believers toward receptive people.

•**Philip in Acts 8:** God spoke to Philip and told him, "Get down to the Gaza, there's someone there who wants to know me." Philip obeyed and met an Ethiopian eunuch who was reading the passage in Isaiah 53 about the suffering servant. He was ready to hear the Gospel! At the *eunuch's* bidding, Philip explained the passage to him and led him to Christ. (See Acts 8)

•**Cornelius in Acts 10:** Cornelius was a God-seeking Roman soldier who was always praying and doing acts of charity. Knowing this, God went to Peter and persuaded him to go to this Gentile's home. Peter objected, "No Lord, he's a Gentile. I'll get stained, unclean." God responded: "OK Peter, you're calling someone unclean when I'm calling them clean? Don't argue with me; go and reach this person!" God grabbed Peter by the shirt and dragged him over to Cornelius' house, quite literally a "Divine Appointment!" Cornelius and all of his relatives jammed into his house to hear what Peter had to say. Before Peter could finish explaining to them about Christ, they all received the Holy Spirit. That's how open they were to the Lord!"

When we have an opportunity, we should speak.

It's important when we pray along these lines to be ready to respond when opportunities arise. Why would God engineer an open door for us when we're not willing to speak up? It's been our experience that folks who are praying for and *acting on* opportunities tend to have more opportunities than most. If we don't take the initiative when God presents an open door, then he will use someone else. He has other servants. We may need to repent if we have rejected his voice and then be open to the Lord's will in the area of evangelism.

God is ready to direct you, through his Spirit. You may have sensed God prompting you to speak up and talk to someone. Take these promptings seriously and act on them! To see just how simple (and important) it is to respond to the promptings of the Spirit, consider what Bill Hybels has to say.

Bill Hybels: Walk Across the Room

Bill Hybels is the senior pastor 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.

START...

4:00-5:00 What would someone far from God think or feel at our meeting?
5:00-6:45 What is the highest value in personal evangelism? Being sensitive to leading of HS
6:46-12:10 Car ride to camp
12:10-15:25 Recalling conversion at the camp
15:25-18:50 Conversation on car ride back
18:50-19:30 Summary – being led by HS

STOP & DISCUSS:

- How does one get ready to hear the HS?

START...

19:30-25:15 Conversation at lunch story
25:15-28:50 Walk across the room (circle of convenience, zone of the unknown)
28:50-30:20 Churches die because they are committed only to the circle of comfort
30:20-31:28 Phil 2: Christ leaving comfort circle of the trinity
31:28-32:15 Follow Christ's example! You can do this!

STOP & DISCUSS:

- Discuss the meaning and significance of the terms “circle of comfort,” “crossing the chasm,” “the zone of the unknown.”

START...

32:15-44:00 Cul de Sac story
44:00-45:50 The buzz of being used by God

STOP & DISCUSS:

- Receiving God's prompting “mid-turn.” Understanding the choice we have to respond or ignore.
- You have no idea what's at stake in that moment's choice
- Notice that the results were not immediate. Even with leading of the Holy Spirit, it took years for Hybel's neighbor to come to Christ.

OPTIONAL...

45:50-53:45 The urgency – son's friend's funeral story
53:45-54:40 Closing challenge

Teachers: Drive home the simple point of Hybels' talk: they can do it. When God prompts us to speak, we need to obey. As we do this, we'll have a heightened awareness of God's activity. Praying that God would put receptive people in our path will also raise our awareness. When opportunities do come, we'll be more effective if we've learned in advance how to clearly present the message.

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

Imagine what it would be like if every Christian in your home church was actively cooperating with God in evangelism, if everyone knew, that despite the challenges, God has gone before them preparing people's hearts and empowering Christians to speak with boldness. Imagine people coming to home church on a regular basis to hear the Gospel and seeing several come to Christ. This is something we all want. Here are a few things you can do to move your group in that direction.

1. *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.
2. *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.
3. *Praise 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*:

(Bill Bright) "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."¹

4. *Pray for the lost corporately.* In our home group's weekly prayer, we make sure that we pray by name for the people we're reaching out to. And we weave this theme through our entire prayer time so that younger Christians learn that reaching others is ultimately why we're here.
5. *Share what you've learned about evangelism.* Christians will be more equipped and motivated to evangelize if you do this periodically...
6. *Model outreach.* 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.

Memory Verses

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

Col. 4:3-6 – Pray for open doors.**

Matt. 28:18-20* – The Great Commission, in which Jesus commands the church to both evangelize and train people from every people group.

Assignment

- Complete the *Ministry to the Poor Assignment*.
- Read the missions article we've provided and write a one paragraph response.
- Begin working on the *Church Visitation Assignment*.

Tools for evangelism & discipleship available at the Study Center

Handouts:

- Starting Spiritual Conversations.*
- Responding to Common Objections.*

Evangelism:

¹ Bill Bright, *Witnessing Without Fear* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), pp. 68, 69.
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• ***Common Objections to Christianity*** teaching series: We have excellent central teachings on objections that people typically raise to Christianity. Topics include:

- ***How Can There be Only One Way to God?***
- ***Does Evolution Discredit the Bible?***
- ***How Can a Loving God Allow So Much Suffering?***
- ***How Is the Bible Different From Other Scriptures?***
- ***How Can Anyone be Certain of the Bible's Meaning?***
- ***Can't You Interpret the Bible Any Way You Want?***
- ***What Do Christians Believe About the Afterlife?***
- ***Is the Bible Historically Accurate?***

• Bill Hybels, ***Just Walk Across the Room*** (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2006). Watch this very practical, four-session workshop with your cell group.

• Bill Hybels and Mark Mittleburg, ***Becoming a Contagious Christian*** (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996). This is the book used in the Sharing Your Faith class – a five week course that helps students share the gospel confidently and effectively.

• William Fay with Linda Shepherd, ***Sharing Jesus Without Fear*** (Nashville, Tennessee, B&H Publishing Group, 1999).

Discipleship:

- ***Organic Disciplemaking***, by Jessica Lowery and Dennis McCallum.
- ***Organic Disciplemaking*** class, taught each fall by Jessica Lowery.