

SPREADING FAITH

Rev. Tom McElroy

Arden C. Autry, PhD, editor

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SPREADING FAITH

By Tom McElroy

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Introduction

Spreading Faith is a series of lessons on evangelism. The lessons are written with an awareness that many Christians would say “evangelism is not my area.” A main objective of this study will be to emphasize that being a witness for Jesus Christ—*Spreading Faith*—is an integral part of Christian discipleship, and a ministry to which every believer is called.

The purposes of these lessons are as follows:

- To enable believers to grow in their understanding of evangelism, and especially in their understanding of the variety of forms which evangelism can take.
- To help believers understand various styles of faith-sharing, as it relates to individual personality styles and God-given abilities.
- To equip believers with practical tools for engaging in evangelistic conversations and spreading faith.
- To enable believers to recognize that our individual efforts function in concert with the Holy Spirit—working through other people and through events in the life of the persons we speak to—to lead people to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ. In other words, the study emphasizes that our efforts to “spread faith” participate in what God is already doing to draw people to Himself.

[Other than incidental, minor editing, additions to Rev. McElroy’s text by the editor are identified as AA (Arden Autry).]

Note: Slides for powerpoint or overhead transparencies are available. Please request them if you would like the option of using them.

SPREADING FAITH
Lesson 1 – Why Evangelism Matters

As we begin this study on *Spreading Faith*, we start by addressing a fundamental question: “Why does evangelism matter?” Why should churches devote attention to evangelism, and invite individual believers to get involved in evangelism? To answer the question, we will look to the biblical motivation for evangelism.

First, evangelism matters because lost people matter to God.

A key biblical text that makes clear this point is Luke 15. In that chapter, Luke tells us that the Pharisees and scribes weren’t happy that sinners were hanging around Jesus and listening to him. Their complaints prompt Jesus, who was aware of their grumbling, to tell three stories, each of which is about a lost thing: the story of the lost sheep, the story of the lost coin, and the story of the lost son.

In each of these stories there are three recurrent themes:

1. Something of value is lost;
2. That which is lost warrants an all-out search (In the third story, while the father doesn’t actually go out in search of the lost son, the story clearly implies the father’s prayerful longing for the son’s return, as evidenced by the father’s running out to meet and embrace the son, even before his arrival); and
3. When the lost thing is found it results in exuberant celebration.

In the immediate context of Luke 15, Jesus wanted the complainers to understand why he “welcomed sinners” (Luke 15:2), and to understand that all heaven rejoices “when one sinner repents” (15:7 and 10). And just so that no one misses the point, Jesus tells not one, but three stories in succession to emphasize the point. Clearly, through these stories Jesus wanted the complainers, and us, to know God’s heart for lost people. [AA: The drama is heightened as we go through the three parables: 1 out of 100 sheep; 1 out of 10 coins; 1 out of 2 sons—or is it 2 out of 2 who have to learn the Father’s heart?]

In effect Jesus was saying, “Take the most precious object, creature or child that you could think of. Dwell on it until you can capture some of the emotion that would happen if you thought you had lost that one forever, and then they were restored to you. Then you begin to understand God’s heart for lost people.” Not only in this passage, but time and again the Bible tells about God’s heart for lost people.

That is the first reason evangelism matters: Because lost people really matter to God.

Every person that meets our eyes is a person of significance to God; a person with whom God desires to have a relationship; a person for whom Christ died. Lost people matter to God. And God is looking for people who have a heart for lost people, like his heart for lost people.

If you have ever influenced a person to commit their life to Christ, then you know nothing compares with the thrill of being used by God in this way. There is nothing as important as helping someone find God's forgiveness and the new life He offers. There is nothing as rewarding as knowing that our efforts have made a difference in someone's eternity.

A second reason evangelism matters is because Christ commands it.

The word "go" appears 1,514 times in the Bible (Revised Standard Version), 233 times in the New Testament and 54 times in Matthew's Gospel. Jesus tells us to "go":

- "Go to the lost sheep..."
- "Go and tell John..."
- "Go and invite all you meet..."
- "Go and make disciples..."

In fact, listen to the last recorded words of Jesus according to Matthew's Gospel:

"Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all that I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day, right up to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20, The Message).

That same mandate to reach others for Christ and for His Kingdom is found in the words of the Risen Jesus, in both the Book of Acts and in Luke's Gospel:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

"...repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in (my) name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:47).

The biblical testimony is clear: Jesus' followers—both individually and corporately as the Church—are to evangelize.

It's true that there is a specific ministry to which some—but not all—are called, which is the ministry of an evangelist. The office of evangelist is a specific office commissioned for the good of the church as a whole and filled by those who are called and gifted by God for that task. Examples of this call to specialized ministry are when Timothy was called an evangelist (2 Timothy 4:5) and when Philip was given that specific charge (Acts 8:29; 21:8). Also, the Book of Acts is full of the trials and travels of the greatest evangelist of all, the apostle Paul.

At the same time, every believer is called to evangelize. The word evangelism comes from the Greek noun *euangelion*—meaning "good news" or "gospel"—and the verb *euangelizomai*, "to announce or proclaim or bear good news." Every believer is called to evangelize—to bear the good news of God's saving love for men and women.

As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:19b-20a:

"And (God) has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us."

And we read in 1 Peter 3:15: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect....”

Every member a minister and every member a witness: This is God’s plan for fulfilling His kingdom purposes.

You may have heard the legend that says when Jesus ascended into heaven he was asked by an angel, “How do you propose to make known to the world that you have died for the sins of all?” In reply, Jesus said, “I have my followers on earth, and I have commanded them to go into all the world and preach the gospel.” “But,” said the angel, “What if they should fail?” “If they fail,” concluded the Savior, “I have no other plan” (R. C. Rein, *Treasury of Themes and Illustrations* [Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1983], pp. 257-58).

Evangelism matters because lost people matter to God, so much so that He sent Jesus Christ to earth to redeem the lost people of the world (including you and me). And evangelism matters because God has a plan for continuing His saving work through everyone who has received Christ as Lord and Savior. So Jesus has commanded His followers to be just that: followers of His example by taking the Good News of grace, forgiveness, transformation, and eternal life to others.

SPREADING FAITH
Lesson 2 – Fear of the “E Word”

We have seen so far in this series that evangelism is the ministry of every believer to bear the good news of God’s saving love for men and women. This is God’s strategy for fulfilling His kingdom purposes.

As it says in Romans 10:13-15:

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

This scripture says in effect, “How will people know—how will they come to faith—if no one tells them?”

But the reality is that many Christians today are uncomfortable with evangelism.

You may have heard the old joke that goes like this: “What do you get when you cross a Jehovah’s Witness and a United Methodist?” The answer is, “Someone who knocks on doors, but doesn’t say anything.” The joke is funny because, for the most part, it is true. But you could fill-in-the-blank of the second reference with almost any church group in Western Christianity and it would still be true.

As Rebecca Manley Pippert once pointed out, “Christians and non-christians have something in common: We’re both uptight about evangelism” (*Out of the Salt Shaker*, p.15). In fact, many churches today avoid using the “E word” when referring to their ministries to non-believers and the un-churched because of this widespread aversion to the practice.

WHY ARE CHRISTIANS UNCOMFORTABLE WITH EVANGELISM?

First, there are both negative and positive stereotypes about evangelism that make us reluctant to evangelize.

Negative stereotypes that make us reluctant to evangelize:

When many believers think about people who evangelize they envision someone who is pushy and obnoxious, and they conclude that that they will have to be a little obnoxious in order to be evangelists. They assume that the two options for a Christian when encountering a non-christian are either to be sensitive to people and forget about evangelism, or to blast them with the gospel and forget about their dignity as human beings. The result is that many Christians prefer to avoid any possibility of offending people, but then feel guilty for not evangelizing.

The reality is that spreading faith is the highest form of compassion for people. If I am a physician who is treating a patient whom I suspect has a terminal illness, but who is unaware or has not faced his/her condition, am I demonstrating more compassion by not addressing the issue for fear of offending or overstepping the bounds of our relationship, or do I show compassion by bringing up the subject, and advising that we begin exploring his/her condition together? If I have a friend or acquaintance whom I suspect is engaging in behavior that is harmful to him/herself or others, am I more compassionate if I say and do nothing for fear of hurting their feelings or harming our relationship, or am I showing compassion when I lovingly confront him/her and offer God's truth, and my support and care? Clearly, in both instances, doing nothing for the other person is a failure to show them compassion, rather than the other way around.

As Christians, we know that how one relates to Jesus Christ will make an ultimate difference in their life—both in the way they experience life on earth, and where they will spend eternity when this life comes to an end. To fail to share with a lost family member, friend, or acquaintance information that would make an ultimate and eternal difference in their life would demonstrate a complete lack of care for them. Being a witness for Christ is an act of love and respect for people, and not at all a disrespect or disregard of them as people.

In addition, not only is witnessing for Christ the highest form of compassion for people, but also evangelism does not have to be pushy and obnoxious. The most effective witnessing for Jesus Christ is persuasive but not “high pressure.” We will talk more in later lessons about differing methods for evangelism, but at this point it is important simply to note that almost all experts in the field agree that the type of evangelism and disciple-making that is most effective today happens in the context of a positive relationship, rather than in an exchange that is impersonal and coercive.

Another negative stereotype is that when some people (believers and non-believers) hear the word “evangelist,” they think of one of the several highly publicized instances when a television evangelist has proven to be dishonest, and more interested in people's money than in telling them about Jesus. In other words, they hear the word “evangelist” and think “crook.” As a result, some Christians have not wanted to be identified with evangelism.

This negative stereotype is likely more a reflection of a wider cultural bias that exists in society. Today, there is a definite and pervasive view that individual freedom is the highest value, and that all belief systems and spiritual paths are equally true and valid. And there is a definite bias against any practice or person, like evangelism and evangelists, who suggest otherwise. One way to de-legitimize the validity of Christian evangelism is to de-legitimize the evangelist. So commonly the media will highlight the public failures of real-life evangelists, or portray fictional characters who are evangelists as dishonest people with self-interested motives. To some extent, this cultural bias has found its way into the Christian community and into the perceptions of believers about people who evangelize. The reality is that instances of fraud or deception by

high-profile evangelists have been rare, despite what media attention would suggest. But the negative impression prevalent in our society has found its way into the perceptions of Christians.

There are also positive stereotypes that make us reluctant to evangelize:

For some people, evangelism is something that only those with extraordinary gifts and abilities, or a high level of training and knowledge can do. They believe that evangelism is only a ministry for the “Billy Grahams” of the church. They then believe that since they are not similarly gifted in speaking, and have no special training or higher degree of spiritual knowledge, they are not qualified to be witnesses for Christ. There seems to be an underlying belief in the church that the job of telling the story of Jesus is only for a select few who have been specially trained and equipped. It’s more than the average believer can handle.

In fact, telling others about God’s saving work through Jesus Christ is not just for the professionally trained or exceptionally gifted. The Bible records that the first witnesses were not twelve highly-trained motivational speakers with degrees in speech, debate, logic, and theology. They were common people, filled with the Holy Spirit, who shared from their hearts and from their own experience. God used these ordinary people to touch lives and spread the good news. Scripture is clear that God has intentionally determined that it would be through ordinary “earthen vessels” that He would carry the treasure of the gospel to the world, so that, as Paul says, “it may be clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us” (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Have you ever heard of Albert McMakin? Albert McMakin was a twenty-four-year-old farmer who had recently come to faith in Christ. He was so full of enthusiasm that he filled a truck with people and took them to a meeting to hear about Jesus. There was a good-looking farmer’s son whom he especially wanted to get to a meeting, but this young man was hard to persuade—he was busy falling in and out of love with different girls, and did not seem to be that attracted to Christianity. Eventually, Albert McMakin managed to persuade him to come by asking him to drive the truck. When they arrived, Albert’s guest decided to go in. He was spellbound and began to have thoughts he had never known before. He went back again and again until, one night, he went forward and gave his life to Jesus Christ.

Since that night this farmer’s son has spoken to over 210 million people. He’s been a friend and confidant to nine presidents. Recently he was heard by what some estimate to be 2.5 billion people—one half of the world’s population. That man, the driver of the truck, was Billy Graham. That was in 1934, and since then Billy Graham has led thousands of people to faith in Jesus Christ. Not many of us—if any—have heard of Albert McMakin. Probably all of us have heard of Billy Graham. And while we cannot all be like Billy Graham, we can all be like Albert McMakin—we can share our faith. You never know what impact that may have. (Nicky Gumbel, *Questions of Life*, p.202)

Finally, many people are uncomfortable with evangelism because they fear rejection. Often it's not easy to talk about something as important as our beliefs about God. When we do, we reveal a great deal about who we are and what is really important to us. Evangelizing means making ourselves vulnerable, telling the other person about our pain and struggles, and how God came through for us during tough times.

That can be frightening. What if the person we share with ridicules us, or disagrees, or tells us our beliefs are immature or wrong. Being rejected is very painful. In fact, it's so painful that many simply never risk it.

It is true that there is a risk involved in sharing our faith with another person. What we share may even be rejected. But people who are willing to be faithful witnesses for Jesus must not take the outcome personally. Our goal in spreading faith is not self-promotion, but inviting people to meet Jesus. Rejection does not mean they are rejecting you, but rejecting Him. Besides, we have to remember that God doesn't call us to be successful—but faithful. We are not accountable for the response of another person to God's invitation, but we ARE accountable for our willingness to be used by God to spread faith in His Son Jesus Christ.

In addition, “no” may not mean “no forever,” but it may mean simply “not right now.” Rarely does a person make a decision for Christ the first time they hear the good news. As Cliff Knechtle has pointed out, God rarely uses just one person to bring someone through the process of coming to faith. More often God orchestrates a number of people, places, and events, to lovingly move a person toward Christ. Knechtle uses the image of a chain with many links to depict that process:



He says “A person's coming to Christ is like a chain with many links. There is the first link, middle links, and a last link. There are many influences and conversations that precede a person's decision to convert to Christ. I know the joy of being the first link at times, a middle link usually, and occasionally the last link. God has not called me to only be the last link. He has called me to be faithful and to love all people.”

Cliffe Knechtle. *Give Me An Answer* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1986).

Again, when a faith-sharing conversation does not end in a person making a decision for Christ, we need to recognize the possibility that occasion may just be a link in the chain leading our friend to cross the line of faith at some future point. Believers who are intentional about spreading faith need to seek to build trusting relationships with the people to whom they seek to witness, so that they can get to know them so well that they can witness and invite in ways that will be welcomed and thoughtfully considered, and not merely focus on “closing the deal.”

Above all, believers just need to trust the Holy Spirit who calls us and strengthens us for evangelizing. The reality is, it is the Holy Spirit—not us—who leads someone to faith in Christ. Our job is to initiate conversations and trust the Holy Spirit will work as we bring the message to them. But we have to be willing to step out of the boat. Faith is risking before we see results. It wasn't Peter who failed when he stepped out of the boat and began to sink. It was the eleven who waited to see what would happen to Peter.

One of the great hindrances to Christian evangelism is the belief that says, "If I just live as a consistent Christian, people will see it, figure it out, and come to Christ." But that approach isn't biblical, and it doesn't work. Nor is it an adequate response to Christ's command to "GO and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19). As Paul says in Romans 10:14, we have to go and give people the message. We have to initiate conversations and trust the Holy Spirit, but we need to bring the message to them.

The gospel affirms that how one relates to God makes an ultimate and eternal difference in one's life. Separated from God, a person can never experience true joy and fulfillment, either in this life or in the life to come. The good news is that Jesus Christ came into the world to bridge the gap between us and God. Therefore, it is vitally important that people have an opportunity to hear the good news of God's love in Jesus, and to consider their own relationship with God. You can share your faith in a way that can make an eternal difference in the lives of others. Again, to paraphrase Romans 10: "How will people know—how will they come to faith—if no one tells them?" Think of the people you know—in your family, at your work, at your school, in your neighborhood—if you don't share your faith with the people around you, who will? How will they know, if you don't tell them?

SPREADING FAITH
Lesson 3 – Living In A Mission Field

“After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” Luke 10:1-2

Luke’s Gospel tells us that Jesus sent seventy-two followers to go out to heal the sick and proclaim the kingdom (Luke 10:9). This scripture has had a programmatic influence on the missionary movement, which for most of the modern period has been a movement from the “Christian West” to non-christian countries in other parts of the world.

The purpose of this lesson is to focus on the social setting in which we live, and especially on the mission field around us. In America today, there is a growing percentage of people who have never really heard the good news of Jesus Christ, nor had an opportunity to respond to Him. There is also a growing percentage of people who have had some exposure to the Christian religion, but who do not have any affiliation with a community of believers, nor do they have a relationship with Jesus Christ.

We are living in a mission field.

Contrary to popular perception, U.S. Christians don’t need to move to a Third World country in order to make a significant contribution to the kingdom of God and help fulfill the Great Commission. Possibly the most significant mission field in the world is right under our nose.

It is estimated that there are between 55 and 78 million unchurched adults living in America. (Lee Strobel, *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry & Mary*). And the percentage of people who are unchurched in America is growing rapidly. According to recent studies by the Barna Group, while the adult population in the United States has grown by 15% since 1991, the number of adults who do not attend church has nearly doubled, rising from 39 million to 75 million—a 92% increase. Their research also indicated the increasing secularity of American culture, and how the life of the church is increasingly viewed by unchurched people as “both counter-cultural and counter-intuitive.” In other words, if there has ever been a time when ours could be called a “Christian culture,” then definitely the trend today is that more and more people in our society view Christianity as odd.

Barna researchers also describe the increasing number of people who are “...wholly disinterested in church life—often passionately so. Church events cannot effectively compete with what the world has to offer. The only thing the Church can provide that no one else has is a life-changing, practical encounter—and on-going relationship—with the living God and with people transformed by similar encounters.”

For that reason, the Alpha course, an evangelistic effort particularly designed to address today's non-Christian, secular person begins with a session entitled, "Christianity: Boring Untrue, Irrelevant?" That is the perception of Christianity and the church held by many people today.

Part of the problem, which Strobel identifies, is that "Unchurched Harry/Mary" is a "Christianity illiterate." "Although he probably owns a Bible, the chances are he has never made an honest effort to read and understand it. He is full of misinformation, such as the Bible says the earth is 10,000 years old, or that Scripture is chock full of contradictions" (Strobel, *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry & Mary*, p. 51).

Most Americans can't name the four gospels; six out of ten don't know who delivered the Sermon on the Mount (Barna, *The Church Today*, The Barna Research Group, 1990, p. 29). When non-Christians were asked if they knew why Christians celebrate Easter, 46% couldn't give an accurate answer ("Did They Know They Were Celebrating Easter?" *Emerging Trends*, April 1991, p.5).

At the same time, there is a renewed interest in the spiritual life. Between 70 percent and 85 percent of unchurched people state that spirituality is important or very important to their lives. Another recent survey revealed that between 40 percent and 60 percent of unchurched people reported that they pray to God daily or weekly.

These are neighbors, co-workers and teens who sit next to you at a ballgame, people who describe themselves as "spiritual" but "not religious." Most people who grew up in the church have great difficulty understanding this distinction. Why would anyone who believes in God not want to go to church? This, however, appears to be true for more than 70 million people living in the United States.

The encouraging news is that today's culture does offer many new opportunities to witness to the gospel. Community is in short supply in contemporary life. More and more people are finding our world a frightening place in which to live and are looking for a safe haven. Individuals and families are seeking support for such problems as dealing with divorce, drugs and alcohol, or child rearing. Most important is that people are longing for hope.

The bottom line is, most of us have friends, family members, co-workers, or neighbors who have not accepted Jesus as Lord. How do we reach them? What are the most effective evangelism strategies today?

To begin with let's take an informal class poll. If you came to Christ primarily through a less personal approach like religious radio or television, or a tract from a stranger, raise your hand. ("That's great! Thank God for all the methods He has used to bring people into the kingdom.")

Now, if you came to Christ mainly through the efforts of a friend, a family member, or a co-worker—a relationship with someone—raise your hand. (Generally, the majority will have their hands in the air. Ask them to keep their hands in the air and to look around.)

I hope this quick poll helps us to see why the personal approach is so important. In today's culture, people are generally less trustful of strangers and institutions. But friends listen to trusted friends. For that reason, the most effective method of reaching people for Christ is through an authentic relationship with them.

Evangelism that is Relational

People today seem to be growing immune to many of the less personal methods of communicating the good news, such as tracts, religious radio and television, billboards, bumper stickers, and even to some degree evangelistic rallies. People are, however, open to talking with a personal friend.

Characteristics of Relational Evangelism:

Authentic – Effective evangelism flows out of a genuine, living relationship with Christ where His love for lost people passes through us to others. The truthfulness of Christianity is demonstrated by a life that has been noticeably marked by God's love and leadership. As Jesus says in John 15:5, as we “abide in him, we will bear much fruit.”

Natural – Relational evangelism reflects our own personality and design, rather than asks us to act in a way that is unnatural to us. This puts us at ease and gives others the assurance that what we have is real and worth looking into. (The whole next session will be devoted to helping us learn what our natural styles of evangelism are.)

Personal – When it comes to reaching people for Christ, there are two possible approaches: personal or impersonal. People today are most open to talking about important matters with a friend. Think of what we do when we need advice on an important decision or need help with a problem we are going through. Where do we turn? Generally, we talk to someone we know and trust. If that is true of us, it is certainly true of non-believing people we know. They do not want to talk about personal matters, especially spiritual issues, with just anyone; they want to talk with a faithful friend.

Verbal – We are talking about relational evangelism, which involves more than just building friendships and hoping others notice the difference in our lives and figure it out for themselves. For people to really get the message, someone has to go and explain it to them. Just as words without actions are empty, so are actions without words. We have to live and explain the Gospel.

Process-Oriented – To be effective, we must not inappropriately rush or push a person. It takes time to understand the message, believe it, and act on it. Seldom do people hear the message for the first time and commit their lives to Christ. The Bible uses the terms “new birth” and “born

again” or “born from above” to describe what it means to come to faith (see John 3). Babies do not come into the world fully developed, but must grow into adulthood. Even the birth event is preceded by a nine-month long process during which the baby develops. In the same way, accepting Jesus into one’s life is not the end the story, but rather the beginning point. And most people who “cross the line of faith” do so following a series of encounters the Good News. Faith is a process, and we must be willing to patiently bring people along, step by step.

Team-Oriented – God rarely uses just one person to bring someone through the entire process of coming to faith in Him. More often He uses a number of people, places, and events to move a person toward Christ.

Conclusion

A recent poll by researcher George Barna showed that about 25 percent of the adults in the United States would go to church if a friend would invite them. Think about that—one in four of your unchurched, de-churched, or non-christian friends would be willing to join you if you would invite them.

SPREADING FAITH
Lesson 4 – Evangelism in a Style That Fits You

(Note optional Evangelism Styles Handout provided at the end of this lesson.)

One of the greatest barriers to Christians getting involved in evangelism is their misunderstanding of what it entails. So many view evangelism as an unnatural activity. The premise of this lesson is that we can effectively spread faith in Jesus Christ without having to fit a mold that isn't us. We will learn that we can be involved in evangelism while still being ourselves.

Here is great news that is both freeing and empowering to your life: God knew what He was doing when He made you. He custom-designed you with your unique combination of personality, temperament, talents, and background, and He wants to use you to reach others in a fashion that fits your design.

What might that look like for you? For the answer, we will consider how God used six people in the New Testament to spread His love and truth. In the process, we'll learn about six biblical styles of evangelism. As we look at the description of each one, think about whether it might fit you. (There is an inventory handout that goes with this lesson that may help you to identify your style.)

Peter's Confrontational Approach

Peter had a "ready-shoot-aim" personality. Whatever he did, he did without hesitation and with full force. When Jesus asked the disciples in Mt. 16:15 who they thought He was, Peter didn't mince words; he declared flat-out that Jesus was the Messiah. Then a few verses later when he disagreed with Jesus' stated mission, he challenged it head on. Can you imagine that—trying to correct the Son of God? You might, if you have a confrontational style yourself!

When Peter was in a boat and wanted to be with Jesus, he didn't hesitate to do whatever it took to get close to Him, even if it meant swimming to shore or trying to walk on water. And remember when Jesus' enemies came to get Him in the Garden of Gethsemane? Peter became quite confrontational with a sword in his hand!

If Peter was convinced he was right, there was almost no stopping him. He was direct, he was bold, and he was to the point.

Is it any wonder God chose Peter as His spokesman on the day of Pentecost? God wanted the people to know in no uncertain terms that they had crucified the Messiah, and that they needed to call on Him for His mercy and forgiveness. Peter's personality was custom-designed to fill the bill. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, he stood and confronted the people with the facts. And 3,000 people trusted Christ and were baptized that day.

There are people in your world who won't come to Christ until someone like Peter holds their feet to the fire. Some people are just waiting for a confrontational Christian who will present the truth of Christ and challenge them to do something about it. Could that Christian be you?

Paul's Intellectual Approach

Though Paul certainly could confront when necessary, the hallmark of his approach was a logical presentation of the gospel message. Read any of his letters—Romans being the best example—and you'll see that he was a master at clearly explaining the central truths of the faith. This intellectual approach fit highly-educated Paul, with his heart for debating any and all foes who might challenge his positions.

There could not have been a better person for God to send to the philosophers in Athens. In Acts 17, Paul presented a powerful argument for the truth, starting with the Athenian idol to an unknown god and moving all the way to the only true God and His resurrected Messiah. Paul's approach was effective, and some of his listeners became believers.

These thinker types in Athens would not have related well to Peter's direct, "turn-or-burn" approach. They needed logic that conclusively proved the point.

There may be people in your circle who are like that. They don't want easy answers or platitudes such as, "You'll just have to accept it on faith." They need to see the solid facts that back up that faith.

The intellectual approach to spreading faith may be one that fits you. Are you an inquisitive type who enjoys working with ideas and evidence? This is an important style today because of increasing secularization. So many people need to hear the gospel not only declared, but also defined and defended. God uses people who, like Paul, have an interest in philosophy and apologetics, to share their faith with those who need an intellectual approach.

The Blind Man's Testimonial Approach

Though we know less about him than about Peter or Paul, we can be sure of this: The blind man healed by Jesus (John 9) had seen something worth talking about! Blind since birth, he regularly begged from people passing by. His routine quickly changed when Jesus came along and gave him the gift of sight. Before he knew it, he found himself in front of a hostile audience being asked to explain what had happened.

Notice the diversity of evangelistic styles. When Peter stood in front of a similar audience, he confronted them with the truth and told them he would obey God over people. Paul reasoned from the Scriptures with his listeners to show them that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. But the formerly blind man took neither of these approaches. Instead, he spoke from his experience and confidently declared: "One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" That's hard to argue with.

Notice that in verse 3 Jesus said this man had been born blind “so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.” That's an example of what we have been saying—we are custom-tailored for a particular approach. God had been preparing this man all of his life to use his story to point people toward Christ.

There are many people around you who need to hear a similar story about how God is working in a believer's life. They might not respond very well to a challenge or an argument, but a personal account of someone's coming to faith would influence them powerfully. Could that story be yours?

Effective testimonies don't have to be dramatic. Don't exclude yourself from this approach because you have an ordinary story—ordinary stories relate well to the ordinary people in your neighborhood and workplace.

Matthew's Interpersonal Approach

Tax collectors were not known for becoming evangelists. But that is exactly what happened to Matthew. After accepting Jesus' call to become one of His followers, Matthew decided to do whatever he could to bring along as many of his friends as possible.

In Lk. 5:29 we find him putting on a big banquet for his tax-collecting buddies in an effort to expose them to Jesus and the new life He offered. He relied on the relationships he had built with these men and sought to further shore up their friendships. He invited them into his home. He spent time with them and ate with them. He genuinely cared about them and wanted to employ the trust and respect he had earned over the years to influence them to consider the claims of Christ.

The vantage point of friendship gives us the highest possibility of influence in the lives of others. Those who have the interpersonal style of evangelism specialize in this area. They tend to be warm, others-centered individuals who enjoy deep levels of communication and trust with those they're reaching out to.

Do you enjoy having people into your home, sharing a meal, and spending time in conversation? Many people will never be reached until someone takes the time to build that kind of closeness with them.

The Samaritan Woman's Invitational Approach (John 4:28-42)

It didn't take long for the Samaritan woman to realize that the man she was talking to was no ordinary teacher. His prophetic insights and authoritative answers convinced her of His claim to be the Messiah.

So what did she do? She immediately went to her town and brought her friends to the well to hear Jesus for themselves. This simple invitation resulted in His staying in their town for two days. Many of these men and women became His followers.

There are people who would make great strides in their spiritual journey if someone would strategically invite them to a church service or outreach event. And a lot of non-christians are open to this approach.

A recent poll by researcher George Barna showed, for example, that about 25 percent of the adults in the United States would go to church if a friend would invite them. Think about that—one in four of your unchurched, de-churched, or non-christian friends would be willing to join you if you would invite them!

Some people, like the woman at the well, have a knack for getting people to go places with them. You might you be one of them.

Dorcas's Service Approach

The Bible says in Acts 9:36 that Dorcas was “always doing good and helping the poor.” She was well known for her loving acts of service performed in the name of Christ. Specifically, she made robes and articles of clothing for widows and other unfortunate people in her town.

She was, in effect, a quiet practitioner of the service approach to evangelism. It would have been very hard for people to observe her activity and not get a glimpse of the love of Christ that inspired her. In fact, her work was so important that when she died a premature death, God sent Peter to raise her from the dead and put her back into service!

People who take this approach are motivated to humbly serve others. They notice needs others overlook, and they find joy in meeting those needs, even if they don't get credit for it. Often more quiet types, these people enjoy expressing compassion through tangible forms of assistance.

Though this style often takes longer to produce spiritual results, it's one of the most important of all the evangelistic approaches. That's because service-style evangelists touch people nobody else can reach.

You probably know people who brought others to Christ simply through their acts of service which demonstrated the love for Christ. God uses their efforts to populate heaven with people that might not have been reached by other means.

You might feel you're not very good at spreading faith. All you know how to do is make soup, fix cars, or send cards. But God can use those things, and so many other acts of service, to draw people to Himself.

Being Yourself

Nobody perfectly fits into just one of these styles. Every believer probably has a mix of several of them. And you might be able to identify additional styles as well. These six approaches are presented not to limit you, but to encourage you with the value of diversity on God's team.

Especially, our purpose here is to encourage you that YOU can share your faith, and you can do so and still be yourself. So work within your style. Let God lead you to express your faith naturally to those around you. Also, team up with other Christians whose styles will complement yours.

One final point should be made concerning styles of evangelism: Each evangelistic style is only authentic when it flows from, or is an outward expression of a life that is surrendered to Christ. That is the starting point for identifying one's evangelistic style: "I have surrendered my life to Jesus Christ—what about me can be used to honor and worship him with my life, and to help others come to know Him?"

That may mean that at times we must be willing to take some risks in our relationships and let God work through us. We must be willing to step beyond our comfort zone when the Spirit leads and the opportunity exists; even willing to try other evangelism styles when the situation calls for it. And remember that in the process, you'll enjoy the adventure of spreading faith in Jesus Christ, and you could make an eternal difference in the lives of people you love.

HANDOUT

What Is Your Evangelism Style?

Each of us has a role to play in leading people to Christ. Being a witness for Christ doesn't mean becoming something weird that you don't want to be, or trying to be something great that you feel you may never be. It means being yourself, and letting God work through the natural abilities and the personality He has given you. The Bible has examples of at least six different approaches to evangelism. There may be more, but most people identify with at least one of these. Which one fits you best? Place a check mark alongside those traits that sound most like you. Visually determine which style is most like you by the number of checks. You may discover that you operate out of more than one preferred style. Note: this is not a scientific instrument of accuracy. You should, however, be able to discern in broad strokes how God has wired you as an evangelist.

Confrontational

- Confident
- Bold
- Direct
- Skips small talk, gets right to the point
- Has strong opinions and convictions

Intellectual

- Analytical
- Logical
- Inquisitive
- Likes to debate ideas
- More concerned with what people think than what they feel

Testimonial

- Clear communicator
- Good listener
- Vulnerable about ups and downs of personal life
- Overwhelmed by account of how God reached them
- Sees links between their own experience and others'

Interpersonal

- Conversational
- Compassionate
- Sensitive
- Friendship-oriented
- Focuses on people and their needs

Invitational

- Hospitable
- Persuasive
- Enjoys meeting new people
- Committed to things he/she believes in
- Sees outreach events as unique opportunities

Serving

- Patient
- Others-centered
- Sees needs and finds joy in meeting them
- Shows love through actions more than words
- Attaches value even to menial tasks

SPREADING FAITH
Lesson 5 - Learning To Tell Your Personal Faith Story

“Through thick and thin, keep your hearts at attention, in adoration before Christ, your Master. Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy.” (1 Peter 3:15)

Possibly the most significant resource you may have for spreading faith is your personal faith story.

There Are Three Reasons Why Your Story Is Important:

1. Your friends are INTERESTED.

A natural outflow of our showing interest in them, listening to their concerns, and building an authentic relationship, is that they will want to reciprocate and find out more about us. Real friends want to understand each other's thoughts and values and backgrounds.

2. Next, your story is important because your friends can RELATE to it.

We naturally tend to get close to people with similar interests and backgrounds, and it is likely that our friends will be able to relate our experience to their own.

Don't discount your story if it is not sensational or dramatic. For example, if you spent most of your life as a “good person,” maybe even going to church, but without knowing Christ personally, then yours is a story many people will be able to identify with. God can use your story to reach the many people with similar histories who need to find Christ just as you did.

In the same way, if your story is one in which you experienced a more dramatic conversion, God can use that as well to reach people for Him.

3. Finally, your story is HARD TO ARGUE WITH.

When people see the way God has changed our lives, it becomes harder to deny the evidence that Christianity is true. As Chuck Swindoll put it in his book, *Come Before Winter*, “The skeptic may deny your doctrine, or attack your church, but he cannot honestly ignore the fact that your life has been changed.”

HOW TO ORGANIZE YOUR STORY FOR RE-TELLING IN FAITH-SHARING

To help you think through and organize your personal faith story, we will use the method Paul uses in Acts 26 to tell his story. In Acts 26, Paul tells many important details in his story, but there are essentially three sections, or what we call three “handles.” We will build our stories around the same three handles so that you only have a simple three-part outline to remember.

(Leader: See transparency or chart for this part of lesson.)

1. First Handle: BC – Paul's life BEFORE CHRIST

In Acts 26:4-11 Paul tells about his life growing up. He was a Pharisee, and he was convinced that he should do everything possible to oppose the teachings of Jesus, including putting Christians in prison and even condemning them to death.

2. Second Handle: † (cross)

The second handle, represented by the cross, is Paul's **CONVERSION**. In Acts 26:12-18 Paul tells how he was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians, when Christ appeared to him and appointed him to be his servant and spokesperson.

3. Third Handle: AD

The third handle is represented by the letters AD, and is Paul's life AFTER CHRIST.

We borrowed the letters AD from the calendar-makers, who divided time into BC (Before Christ) and AD, which stands for *Anno Domini* and means "in the year of our Lord."

We see this handle in Acts 26:19-23, where we read about Paul's life since coming to Christ, and how he preached that people should repent, turn to God, and prove their repentance by their deeds.

Using a Concluding Question

When telling your faith story, it is helpful to end with a question that invites a response. Paul does that in verse 27, when he says to Agrippa, "King Agrippa, do you believe in the prophets? I know you do." At the conclusion of the story, Paul asks his listener to respond or reply to what he has just said, which is what King Agrippa does in verse 28.

Highlighting a Unifying Theme

Finally, as we read through Paul's story, we find a unifying theme, which is his **ZEAL FOR SERVING GOD**. BC, Paul's zeal was misplaced and destructive. AD, his zeal was positive and directed to building the church.

Now you are ready to work on your own story. We have developed six questions to help you organize it under the same three handles. Don't worry about it being fully developed the first time through. Right now you just want to get the main idea.

QUESTIONS:

BC – Before Christ

1. Where were you spiritually before receiving Christ, and how did that affect you—your feelings, attitudes, actions, and relationships? (For those of you who became Christians as young children, you may not have much BC history to talk about. You can start with the next question.)
2. What caused you to begin considering God/Christ as a solution to your needs?

†- Conversion

3. What realization did you come to that finally motivated you to receive Christ?
4. Specifically, how did you receive Christ?

AD – After Christ

(Note: For those of you who became Christians as children, the emphasis in the next two questions is on the benefits Christ has made in your life compared to what you think it might have been without your knowing Him.)

5. How did your life begin to change after you received Christ?
6. What other benefits have you experienced since becoming a Christian?
7. Write a concluding question that fits your story.

8. What would be a unifying theme in your story?

Tips for Organizing Your Story

- A theme is an aspect of our life that reflects the CONTRAST in our spiritual outlook before and after knowing Christ.
- Concerning your conversion (handle 2) – Some people can name a date on which they received Christ. For some people, they came to faith over time and it's difficult to identify a specific date. The important thing is not whether you can name the exact moment in which you crossed the line of faith. The important thing is that you know in your heart that you have. You can focus the telling of your story on how you began to open your life to Christ's forgiveness and leadership.
- Concerning the conclusion – It is best if you end your story with a question or statement that requires a response, as Paul did in Acts 26:25-29. We can do that by asking the hearer if they can relate to what you have just shared.
- If there is a key Bible verse that opened your eyes, or that has been particularly meaningful to you, use it. Scripture can reinforce and validate our story. But don't use scripture in a forced way.
- Try to translate religious language in a way that can be understood by non-christian people. Phrases like "getting into the Word" may be understood by believers, but for non-christians they aren't clear, and may actually create a barrier to a person's hearing and responding to the gospel. For that reason the method described here replaces "accepting Jesus as Lord" with "accepting Jesus' leadership of my life." Obviously, there is nothing wrong with the biblical language referring to the Lordship of Jesus, but the concept of "lordship" is often not something that a secular, non-christian person can comprehend.
- Keep your story brief and to the point. It is best to try to keep your story to 3 or 4 minutes in length.
- Initially, we have thought in terms of organizing our stories BC – CONVERSION – AD. But with practice you will be able to start the story and end at any one of the handles, depending on the situation. For example, in some instances it may be more appropriate to start your story with your AD life and then to say, "But I wasn't always like that," then go to your BC life, then to your CONVERSION experience. The point is, you can be flexible once you have gotten to know the three handles of your story.
- Finally, the principle of "putting others first" is important in telling your story. We need to earn the right to tell our story by first encouraging our friend to talk about his or her own spiritual background.

The outline and much of the content for this lesson was taken from the study *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, by Mittelberg, Strobel, and Hybels (Zondervan Publishing House, 1995).

SPREADING FAITH

Lesson 6 – Learning To Tell The Basic Content Of The Gospel

In previous lessons we have:

- talked about why evangelism is important
- addressed common misconceptions about evangelism
- looked at the opportunities for spreading faith in contemporary society
- looked at various styles of evangelism

We begin this lesson with a question: “If you had only 45 seconds to communicate the gospel, what would you say?” If someone asked you, “What does becoming a Christian mean?” could you communicate the central message of the Christian faith? Most of us would feel uncomfortable being in this kind of situation. In this lesson, we want to provide you with a way of re-telling the basic outline of the salvation story so that it can be available when needed during faith-sharing conversations. We also want to provide a resource for sharing the gospel in a way that invites a response from the hearer, as well as a resource for helping people cross the line of faith.

To make the gospel message easier to understand, we will break it down into "Four Major Points" so that we can gain a deeper understanding. By understanding these four points, we will then be able to communicate the gospel story more effectively to our families, friends, and others. The four points are:

- God
- Us
- Christ
- You

GOD

There are three qualities we need to know about God.

1. **The first quality of God is LOVING.** I John 4:16b says, “...God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God lives in him.” Most people want to believe this about God, and few will argue with it. They say God is love, then quit, as if that is the end of the story. It is as though their image of God is of a kindly grandfather, who pats us on the head and says, “I don’t care what you do; you’re okay because I love you.” But that is an incomplete view of God because...
2. **The second quality of God is HOLY.** By holy we mean absolutely pure. I Peter 1:15-16 says: “But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’” Anything impure stands in stark contrast to God, since He is without sin or impurity of any kind. The brilliant, shining light of His holiness exposes and rejects anything that falls short of His perfect standard.
3. **The third quality of God is JUST.** That means that God is a good and perfect judge. “God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you” (2 Thess. 1:6). Not only does God’s holiness expose and reject anything impure or sinful, but His justice

has to deal with it. He must punish rebellion, sin, and imperfection because a good judge does not let lawbreakers go without paying for their misdeeds.

US

The next point has to do with us.

We are the **Lawbreakers** who have rebelled against the **Loving Father**.

1. **We were created good, but became SINFUL.** “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of the God” (Romans 3:23). Human beings were originally created good, but became sinful as a result of Adam and Eve’s rebellion against God’s law. But it did not stop with them. All of us continue to rebel against God and break His laws.
2. **We deserve DEATH**, both physical and spiritual. Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death.” The debt we owe God requires payment, and the payment is death. This death is not just physical; it is also spiritual. It is separation from God for all eternity in a place the Bible refers to as hell.
3. **We are spiritually HELPLESS**, or morally bankrupt. Isaiah 64:6 says, “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.” We have incurred a debt that must be paid, and there are no funds in our moral bank account to buy our way off death row.

So far, the news is entirely bad. But is it important to understand what we face apart from Christ. It can be a mistake to jump ahead too quickly and tell people they can be saved through Christ before they really understand that they are sinners who stand before a holy God. If our friends don’t understand this, they will not see their need, or the relevance of the gospel to their lives.

This is where the good news of the gospel fits in. The word gospel actually means “good news,” and refers to what Christ did for us.

CHRIST

Christ is the one who provides the opportunity for forgiveness and reconciliation between the **Loving Father** and **Us**, the lawbreakers.

1. **The first thing to remember is that Christ is GOD**, who also became man. John 1:1, 14 state: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the father, full of grace and truth.” God, the Creator of the universe, actually became one of us and lived among us.
2. **And Christ died as our SUBSTITUTE.** “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed” (I Peter 2:24). This is the central idea of the gospel. The debt of death that we owe was paid for by Christ who died in our place. He made it possible to offer us the greatest gift in the world. He will give us His righteousness, forgiveness, and life in exchange for our sins, guilt, and death sentence.

Now, there are two questions that often come up at this point. The first question is, “Why did any price have to be paid at all?” “Why couldn’t God just forgive and forget, like we can?” To answer that, suppose your neighbor accidentally ran into your brand new car, which was parked in front of your home. Although you could forgive your neighbor, you would still have a dented car and have to pay for the repairs yourself. In the same way, our sins have done damage that has to be paid for. God can forgive and forget our sins, but He is left holding the debt—which is the death penalty.

The second question is “Why did Christ have to die? What kind of justice is there in having Jesus, an innocent bystander suffer instead of me?” This is why Christ’s identity is so important. He is not some unwilling bystander who God forced onto the scene to take our punishment. He is actually the God we have sinned against, who says to us, “I love you, I’m willing to forgive you, and I’ll pay the debt you owe.”

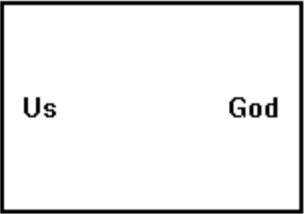
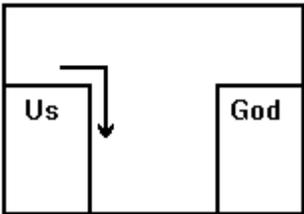
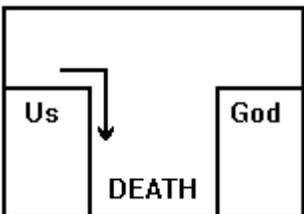
3. **Finally, Christ offers His forgiveness as a GIFT.** Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one may boast.” In spite of the enormity of our debt and the high cost Jesus paid to buy us forgiveness and life, the whole package is offered to us freely. It is literally a gift waiting to be opened.

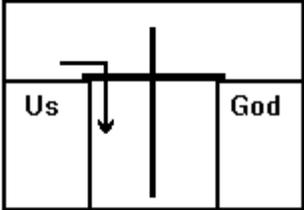
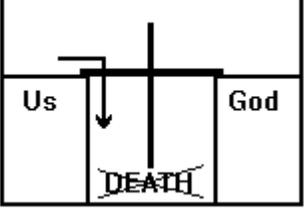
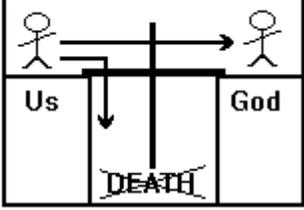
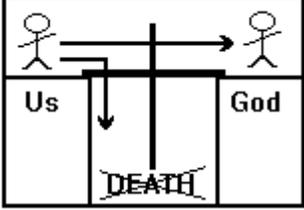
YOU

The fourth and final point relates to YOU and me and our friends. Individually, each of us decides the outcome of our own story, which is whether or not we will end up being reconciled to the Loving Father. Each of us has to make a decision. We can know all about the other three major points, yet still not be taken off death row if we do not respond to the Gospel.

1. **You and I must RESPOND.** John 1:12 says: “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” It is not enough to hear the Gospel, simply understand it, or even intellectually agree with it.
2. **You and I must ASK Christ to be our FORGIVER and LEADER.** 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sin and purify us from all unrighteousness.” As forgiver, Christ takes away our death sentence and gives us eternal life with Him. As our leader, Christ has control of our life. It is important for people to understand that they are coming to Him not only for forgiveness of past sins, but also for the strength and guidance they will need to make a fresh start and to begin living the way God wants them to live.
3. **Finally, the result is a spiritual TRANSFORMATION by the Holy Spirit.** “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). When we respond by receiving Christ as forgiver and leader, a spiritual transformation takes place in us. The Holy Spirit comes into our lives and changes us from the inside out so that we begin to desire to follow Christ.

Now we will look at an illustration that can be used to explain the gospel message.

Salvation - The "Bridge" Illustration	
1. God wants to have a relationship with us.	 <p>1</p>
2. However, we have rebelled against Him and have broken off that relationship.	 <p>2</p>
3. Most of us are aware of this and try to do things to get back to God, but it doesn't work.	 <p>3</p>
4. Furthermore, the sins we have committed have to be punished, and that punishment is death.	 <p>4</p>

<p>5. But God did for us what we could not do, and that is build a bridge back to Himself.</p>	 <p>Diagram 5: A rectangular box is divided into three vertical sections. The left section is labeled 'Us' and the right section is labeled 'God'. A vertical line runs through the center. A horizontal line is drawn across the top, and a vertical line is drawn down from the center of this horizontal line to the bottom of the box, forming a cross. A downward-pointing arrow is on the left side of the vertical line, pointing towards the bottom. A small box with the number '5' is in the top-left corner.</p>
<p>6. And He did that by paying our death penalty when He died on the cross.</p>	 <p>Diagram 6: Similar to Diagram 5, but the word 'DEATH' is written in a stylized font at the bottom of the vertical line, where it meets the bottom of the box. A small box with the number '6' is in the top-left corner.</p>
<p>7. One last thing. - It is not enough just to know this, we have to act on it, by admitting that we have rebelled, and that we want His forgiveness and leadership.</p>	 <p>Diagram 7: Similar to Diagram 6, but a stick figure is on the 'Us' side of the bridge, with an arrow pointing across the bridge towards the 'God' side. A small box with the number '7' is in the top-left corner.</p>
<p>8. Concluding Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does this make sense to you? • Where do you think you are? • Is there any reason why you wouldn't want to cross over to the other side? 	 <p>Diagram 8: Similar to Diagram 7, but the stick figure is now on the 'God' side of the bridge, with an arrow pointing back towards the 'Us' side. A small box with the number '8' is in the top-left corner.</p>

Additional Resources: Another excellent resource is the booklet entitled *Why Jesus?* which is utilized by the *Alpha Course*, and is available from our church or through Alpha Resources, David C. Cook Publishing.

The outline of the salvation story used in this lesson is adapted from the study *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, by Mittelberg, Strobel, and Hybels (Zondervan Publishing House, 1995). The Bridge illustration is adapted from *The Bridge*, by the Navigators (NavPress, 1981).

SPREADING FAITH

Lesson 7 – Sharing Your Faith with The People God Has Placed Around You

“Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.

*Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand--shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:13-16, *The Message*)*

You may remember the television commercial for Mercedes-Benz automobiles from a few years ago. The commercial showed a Mercedes crashing into a concrete wall during a safety test. An engineer in a white lab coat walks over after the crash and kneels down to examine the damage, which is minimal. A reporter then asks the engineer about Mercedes' energy absorbing car body. After the engineer tells all about the unique design the reporter asks him why Mercedes doesn't enforce their patent on the design, a design evidently copied by several other companies because of its success. The engineer then replies, “Because some things in life are too important not to share.” How true this is. There are many things in life that fall in the “too important not to share” category: advances in science, in medicine, in technology. But all of these pale in comparison to the importance of sharing our faith.

In Matthew 5, Jesus tells us that we are to be “salt” and “light.” He desires to change our lives by His impact on our lives and relationships. We are able to make a difference in the world then, because we are different. And when we live in Christ, having our lives conformed to His will and way, He will change the world through us.

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE WITH WHOM WE MIGHT SHARE OUR FAITH?

People We Already Know

What are some examples of relationships that we already have that we could develop further? (Family, neighbors, friends, co-workers...) There are non-believing persons around in this category with whom we could spread faith.

Including Them in Activities We Are Already Doing. Like sharing a meal, doing things with the kids, watching the game, etc. In other words, we don't necessarily have to start new activities through which to share our faith. We can involve them in things we are already doing.

Organize a Matthew Party. This suggestion is derived from Luke 5:29, where Matthew throws a banquet to which he invites his friends so that he can bring them to Jesus. Instead of being overtly evangelistic, a Matthew Party is a social event strategically designed to mix our unchurched friends with some of our Christian friends for the purpose relationship building.

Barbecue First – Mark Mittelburg, one of the authors of the *Becoming Contagious Christian* course tells of the experience of inviting his new neighbors to an outreach event at church. They politely declined, but said that they would be willing to get together for a backyard barbecue. After a couple of these backyard barbecues together, then the couple were the first to initiate a conversation on spiritual matters.

PEOPLE WE USED TO KNOW

This is renewing with non-Christians that we had grown apart from (examples: classmates, former work associates, previous neighbors, friends with whom we've lost touch).

People We Would Like to Know (civic clubs, health clubs, sports leagues).

Strategic Consumerism – This is an effort to frequent the same restaurant, gas station, etc, in order to get to know the people who work there. These people are people who matter to God and who need help finding a relationship with Him.

HERE ARE SOME PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVELY SPREADING FAITH:

1. Seek an authentic relationship with God in your own life.

Christian maturity - Not that you must have all the answers or have arrived at perfect understanding. But rather that you have committed your own heart and life to a faithful following of Jesus Christ. You can't share what you do not have.

As Joe Aldrich has said in his book, *Lifestyle Evangelism*: "Christian are to be good news before they can share good news."

2. Be sensitive to those around you and to opportunities to begin faith-sharing conversations.

- When a friend, co-worker, etc. shares a struggle they are going through and confides that they "don't know what to do." This may be an occasion for you to begin a conversation by saying, "Here is what has helped me when I have had troubles..." Or you might just ask them, "Have you tried talking with God about that?" Again remember that God may have strategically placed you in that conversation to reach that person through you.

3. Put others first. Listen to their opinions before giving your own. Whatever you do, don't argue! We cannot build relationships with people without being great listeners. This means taking a genuine interest in them, their life, their concerns. It also means being transparent or vulnerable with them. Most people have very few friends who care enough to listen to them, take the time to really understand, and who will share personal matters with them. Really care for others.

4. Persuasion – not pressure. We must not inappropriately push or rush a person.

5. Be patient. It takes time to understand the message, believe it, and act on it. Seldom do people hear the message for the first time and commit their lives to Christ. Remember that coming to faith is more a process than an event.

6. Pray. As you make contact with people, ask God whom He wants you to develop friendships with. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you to those people He has prepared for you to share your faith with, and to help you access where they are spiritually—what they are ready for, and what they are not ready for.

Conclusion

I close with this observation by Bill Hybels:

Deep in the heart of every true Christian there is an awareness that we are on this planet for purposes greater than having a career, paying the bills, loving our families, and fulfilling our role as upstanding citizens. Even going to church and worshiping God—important as these are—sometimes leave us feeling that something is missing. . . . What is it that's absent in the lives of so many believers who are crying out for fulfillment? What on earth is God asking us to do? God wants us to become contagious Christians—His agents, who will first catch His love and then urgently and infectiously offer it to all who are willing to consider it. (Becoming a Contagious Christian, Hybels and Mittelburg)

SPREADING FAITH
Lesson 8 – Evangelism as A Team Effort

“³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4, NIV)

This is Paul’s prayer as he wrote to the church in Corinth. Earl Palmer first noted that the word in this passage frequently rendered “comfort” in other translations, most accurately can be described like this: “a person is walking down a road alone and he is then joined by another who walks alongside so he does not have to walk the rest of the road alone” (quoted from Pippert, *Out of the Salt Shaker*, p.177).

For that reason *The Message* version translates it like this:

“All praise to the God and Father of our Master, Jesus the Messiah! Father of all mercy! God of all healing counsel! He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us.” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4, The Message)

That is what God is like—He is the One who walks alongside. And that is what He calls His followers to do.

As a follower of Jesus Christ, remember—**you are not alone**. Christ walks beside you as you follow where he leads. His life within infuses you with compassion for the lost. His joy in your heart moves you to tell others about the great things God has done.

Also, you are not alone because the Christian life is a life in community – other Christians walk beside you, offering care and support, mutual accountability, and partnering with you to glorify God and serve His purposes.

Christianity is not a solitary religion. Neither are our efforts to spread faith something we engage in as a solo activity. How is evangelism a team effort?

First, remember that you are one link in the chain.



Cliff Knechtle uses the metaphor of a chain made up of links to describe the process through which a person comes to Christ. He points out that God rarely uses just one person to bring someone through the process of coming to faith. More often God orchestrates a number of people, places, and events, to lovingly move a person toward Christ.

Here is how he describes this illustration:

“A person’s coming to Christ is like a chain with many links. There is the first link, middle links, and a last link. There are many influences and conversations that precede a person’s decision to convert to Christ. I know the joy of being the first link at times, a middle link

usually, and occasionally the last link. God has not called me to only be the last link. He has called me to be faithful and to love all people.”

Cliffe Knechtle, *Give Me An Answer* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1986).

Knechtle reminds us that when we spread faith, we can be a link or two in the chain that God himself is forging. And that the result is that all the “links” from first to last can celebrate together with all the angels in heaven when a person finally crosses the line of faith.

God's plan is that evangelism be a group effort. The church as a whole is to go and make disciples. We can intentionally partner with other Christians to “link up” our strengths and abilities in order to lead people to Christ. For example, Mary has a passion to pray and intercede for the lost. Mark wants to win his friend John to the Lord, so he asks Mary to pray as he takes John fishing on Thursday. When John gives his life to Christ and stands to share his newfound faith in Christ, it is because Mary and Mark worked as a team, like a body functioning together (1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesians 4:16). The apostle Paul saw the process of evangelism as utilizing the gifts of each member in the Body. Every person has one purpose, reaching the lost, but each does so with the gifts and opportunities God gives.

The church that succeeds in spreading faith recognizes that it is successful as each member does his part in the harvest. Some pray, some build relationships, some minister to needs, while others share the gospel and lead a person to Christ. The power of an evangelistic church is in its ability to see evangelism as a team effort rather than a solo obligation.

Partnering with the Church's Wider Ministries

Spreading faith is also team effort as we are intentional about partnering with the church's wider ministries. Our efforts benefit as we encourage people to get involved in the various activities and ministries of the congregation. There is a synergistic effect when we act in tandem with our church's larger efforts to reach people for Christ. We can do that by inviting and bringing people to Sunday morning worship services, special worship services, concerts and musical events, sporting activities, fellowship activities, or mission projects. Many churches, including ours, hold occasional fellowship events not only for the benefit of its members, but also as opportunities to introduce non-christian or unchurched friends to the life of the church and to Jesus Christ. These “excuse events” offer members an opportunity to invite others, and can be extremely effective in helping us reach our spiritually lost friends, relatives, neighbors, etc. In fact, almost any activity or ministry of the church can be part of the evangelistic mission of the church.

The Vital Role of the Holy Spirit

Finally, spreading faith is a team effort because of the vital role of the Holy Spirit in our efforts to bring lost people to Jesus.

Recall the words of the Resurrected Jesus to the first believers who were given the task of spreading faith:

“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.” Acts 1:8

Jesus instructed them to “wait” for the filling of the Holy Spirit so they would be empowered to be His witnesses. Likewise, people who seek to spread faith should first experience the infilling and empowering of Pentecost. Evangelism is the Holy Spirit at work through believers. We are merely instruments that God will use. The power comes from Him. The lack of the Holy Spirit’s power in the life of the believer is the single greatest barrier to effective evangelism.

Oftentimes, evangelism is defined as man’s work, and this man-centeredness leads to many mistakes about it; but the basic biblical perspective is that evangelism is God’s work. “*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*” (John 3:16). He is the God who in love sends. The Father “loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1John 4:10); the Son brought us knowledge of the Father (John 14:9); now the Father and Son have sent the Holy Spirit to testify and give knowledge of the Son (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:14). It is through the Holy Spirit that blind eyes and hard hearts are opened, and “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3). As R.B. Kuiper puts it:

“God has a passion for souls, and this is how God expresses and satisfies it: He made us; he loved us; he ransoms us; he reclaims us. ‘Salvation is from the Lord’ (Jonah 2:9).” (R.B. Kuiper, *God-Centered Evangelism*, Baker Book House, 1963, 95)

The first step in our partnering with God in spreading faith is to pray that God will lead us naturally into the lives of others. Joseph Aldrich points out that we might begin by visualizing the Spirit of God hovering over others (Joseph C. Aldrich, *Life-Style Evangelism*, Multnomah, 1981, 20). We can begin by praying individually for our neighbors and praying for those people we will meet today. This prayer could include not only intercession, but also a prayer that God would open the lives of the lost, and that we would be willing to be present at the right moment. Remember that your witness for Christ is a participation in the work that God is doing to draw people to Himself.

Evangelism is a team effort. No one brings anyone to Christ “all by themselves.” Some sow, some reap, but all can rejoice when the harvest comes. The Holy Spirit draws, convicts, and transforms. Faith spreads as our individual efforts to reach out to the lost, to seekers, and to the unchurched, work in concert with the efforts of fellow Christ-followers and the wider church, and especially in partnership with the person, work, and power of the Holy Spirit to bring people into the Kingdom.

I believe the church has no greater need today than that of being empowered and filled with the power of God’s Holy Spirit for greater mission and service. As in the days of Jesus, as in apostolic times, we too must be Spirit-filled, Spirit-empowered, and Spirit-led so that we can become effective witnesses, effective evangelizers, and effective agents of transformation and growth. The more we rely on the power of the Holy Spirit, the more we are empowered to do what Christ himself has called and commissioned us to do – to be His witnesses.

Class Summary:

- Being a witness for Jesus Christ – *Spreading Faith* – is an integral part of Christian discipleship, and a ministry to which every believer is called.
- God custom-designed your unique combination of personality, temperament, talents, and background, and He wants to use you to reach others in a fashion that fits your design.
- Our efforts to spread faith are a participation in what God is already doing - through other people, events, and especially His Holy Spirit - to draw people to Himself.

We close this session and this study by recalling what King David wrote as he began Psalm 40. His words are an appropriate ending for these lessons on *Spreading Faith*, because they emphasize the incredible, undeserved work God has done *in us* – and the tremendous things He will do *through us* as we follow Him closely:

*I waited patiently for the Lord.
He turned to me and heard my cry.*

*He lifted me out of the pit of destruction,
Out of the sticky mud.*

*He stood me on a rock
And made my feet steady.*

*He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.*

*Many people will see this and worship him.
Then they will trust the Lord.*

Psalm 40:1-3, *New Century Version.*