

Evangelism for Ordinary Christians

How to Share the Gospel Without Scaring Yourself or Others
Mid-Atlantic Summer Conference, 2021

Outline

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| 3 | The Responsibility for Evangelism | Eph 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:1-4; Matt. 16:18 |
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Session 1
The Good News

Romans 1:16; 5:1; 8:1, 31-37

1. Why are many Christians afraid of evangelism?
 - fear, ignorance, busy, calling, lazy, apathy
2. Is one of these fears true of you?
3. Do you talk to people? About anything? Do you *like* talking to people?
4. What do you talk about with others?
5. What do you *like* talking about with others?
6. Why are those discussions pleasant?
7. Why do many people find it unpleasant to talk about the gospel?
8. The word “gospel” means “good news.” The word “evangelism” is derived from “evangel,” which is an English form of the Greek word we translate “gospel. So evangelism is “goodnewsism.” The essence of evangelism is announcing good news.
9. When was the last time you told someone good news? What was it?
10. Were you afraid? Why or why not?
11. What are the good news items people like to share?
12. Is the gospel as good as these things?
13. What is good about the gospel?
14. Does this sound good to everyone?
15. The gospel sounds especially good to people who are desperate – people with an incurable disease, deep poverty, deeply fractured relationships, persecution and imprisonment, etc. The gospel is wonderful news to everyone who is tormented by sin and oppression.

16. Let's read some scriptures and list the good news they contain.

- Luke 4:16-21
- Luke 15:1-7; 19:9-10
- Romans 1:16
- Romans 5:1, 8; 8:1, 15-17, 31-37
- 1 Corinthians 15:1-6, 51-58

17. Does all this sound like good news to you? Is this something you'd like people to know?

18. Evangelism is announcing good news. If you have no good news to announce, you cannot do evangelism. But if you do have good news, evangelism is as simple as telling people that good news. Now there *is* good news, so if you have no good news to announce, you have lost your focus on Jesus. You are not living in the real world. The real world is a world which Jesus loves and died for. Reality is Jesus saving the world, and a universe permeated by the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. Any other concept of the world is a fantasy – and not a good one.

19. The first step in evangelism is for you to be clear about the good news. And if you grasp the good news, you will also be eager to share it. If you are not eager to share it, then you have not grasped the good news very well. The first step is to draw near to Jesus in prayer, scripture, and the Lord's Supper. Ask Jesus to open your eyes, unplug your ears, soften your heart, and sharpen your mind so that you will cease living in a fantasy world. Ask Jesus to enable you to perceive the real world and grant you a solid grasp of His good news.

Lesson 2

Jesus the Evangelist and the Witness

Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 10:17; Mark 1:15, 38-39; John 3:11-13

1. Does anyone have good news to share this morning?
2. What is the essence of evangelism?
 - Announcing good news
3. What are some good aspects of the news of the gospel?
4. Evangelism is announcing good news. In order to do evangelism, you must have some good news to announce. In particular, evangelism is announcing the good news about Jesus' conquest of sin and death, and the opportunity for everyone to be forgiven of their sins and to share in the new life of the resurrected Christ. When that becomes real to you, when that reality excites you, you be so moved that you will tell people. You may have limited opportunities to tell others about Jesus, or perhaps you aren't that good with words. But if you frankly do not *want* to tell others about Jesus when you have the opportunity, you have a spiritual problem deeper than evangelism. That is something for you and God to sort out, perhaps with the help of a friend or a pastor.
5. Today we will look a little deeper into the work of evangelism, and we will start by reviewing the process of salvation.
6. The first question is, Who saves people?
7. Let's look at Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In chapter two Paul reminds the Ephesians what they were like before they became Christians. "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins...But God, being rich in mercy... made us alive together with Christ..." We begin life spiritually dead. This is the entry condition for everyone. Adam's sin has infected the human race, and no one is born without sin at work in them making them spiritually dead.
8. In chapter one, verse four Paul tells us that God chose us to be saved even before He created the world. Let's read Ephesians 1:3-7, 13-14.
9. So God chose us for salvation even before He created us. 2,100 years

ago God sent His Son Jesus into the world to die in our place for our sins. God forgave us of our sins, adopted us as His children, and sent the Holy Spirit to help us. God did all of this. We did none of it. Who saves people? God saves people. If anyone will be saved, God has chosen him or her, died for him, and will give him the Holy Spirit in due course.

10. So are we helpless puppets? Are we saved against our will? And what about faith? Isn't faith what saves us?
11. God saves us, and God alone. Not God plus faith, or God plus repentance or God plus the sinner's prayer, or God plus the sacraments, or God plus the church, etc. Count on Paul to make this real clear and concise: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)
12. **God is the *agent* of salvation. He does the work. Faith is the *instrument* of salvation.** We are not saved by faith; we are saved by grace. But grace works through faith. Faith is the instrument that God uses to save us.
13. Remember what faith is: faith is trust. We are saved as we trust Jesus. We trust that what He says about Himself is true, and what He says about His work is true. Jesus is the divine-human Son of God who died to pay for our sins and rose to give us new life. No one conceived in this world trusts Jesus. We enter this world suspicious of Jesus. We might like Him or His words, but we don't trust Him or them. No one ever does and no one ever will. It is who we are. We are conceived as human beings with a sin nature, which is incapable of trusting Jesus.
14. This is why Jesus said we must be born again, born from above. Man as born is eternally incapable of trusting Jesus. So God rebirths him. God keeps the same body, but gives him a new spiritual nature. This new nature has powers the old nature did not have. This new nature *is* capable of trusting Jesus. With a new spiritual nature, man is capable of trusting Jesus when He claims to be the Son of God who died for man's sin. As that trust is activated, salvation unfolds in his life.
15. Note that Jesus does not tell Nicodemus that he must believe in order to obtain eternal life. Eternal life comes only through rebirth. Faith

does not produce eternal life. Eternal life produces faith.

16. So why do we say we are saved by faith? It is not strictly true. It is theologically sloppy, but in everyday speech when we say we are saved by faith, we mean that our own good deeds do not save us – and this is true. We do not have to be theological speech police! There is place for casual, everyday speech. But this way of speaking can lead people to think that faith is the *agent* of salvation. And if faith is not moored to a person, but floats as an abstraction, it can come to mean anything. So it is preferable to train ourselves to say we are saved by grace, rather than to say we are saved by faith.
17. So salvation is God's work. He chooses someone for salvation, calls him, gives him a new nature, pardons his sin, pronounces him holy, progressively destroys sin in him and increases righteousness, and finally gives him a glorious spiritual body. Man's part in salvation is to exercise the faith that God gives him – in other words to begin trusting Jesus. But that comes "naturally" as part of his new nature – and that new nature was given by God. Man's part is to make use of the new abilities God has given him. And the more he makes use of these new abilities, the stronger he grows spiritually.
18. So if God does all the work, what is the need for evangelism? Here is a mystery: God saves when people hear the gospel. God does not have to do things that way. God could send angels to call unbelievers. God could give people a new nature !poof! like that. But in God's mysterious wisdom, He has chosen to call unbelievers and give them eternal life when they hear the gospel. And when they hear the gospel they initially do not believe. Remember, no one trusts God. The only people who believe are those who have been reborn.
19. Let's read Romans 10:17.
20. "Faith comes from hearing." People trust Jesus when they hear Him – and this hearing is not merely receiving an energy disturbance in the atmosphere. This hearing is the hearing of acceptance. Faith comes as we accept and affirm the gospel. But we do not naturally do this! We cannot accept and affirm the gospel. Our whole being is opposed to it. We have to receive a new nature, one with the power of this sort of hearing. And that sort of hearing comes through the word of Christ. The gospel produces in unbelievers the ability to accept it.

21. So when an evangelist preaches the gospel and people believe, what do we know has happened? God gave these people new life, eternal life, as the evangelist preached. With this new eternal life came the new ability to trust Jesus, and they agreed with the message of the evangelist.
22. **God does all the work, but He ordinarily does the work of salvation while the gospel is being preached.**
23. Note how this all fits together. Unbelievers freely choose to reject Jesus, but they have no ability to accept Him. Unbelievers reject Jesus even when they know all the facts of life and the real world. They do not reject Jesus because they do not know enough. They reject Jesus because they have no ability to accept Him, and they will remain like that forever unless God changes them. An evangelist preaches to people who reject Jesus and are incapable of accepting Him. But as he preaches, God changes some and gives them eternal life. Suddenly these people discover that they can accept the gospel and have the ability to trust Jesus. So they do! Their faith did not save them. The evangelist did not save them. God saved them. **The evangelist was God's human representative of salvation and faith was the instrument of salvation.**
24. So who are the preachers? Is every Christian an evangelist? Only a few? Just pastors?
25. Let's read Matthew 4:17,23; Mark 1:15, 38-39; Luke 19:10
26. Jesus was the first evangelist. There were many prophets, priests, patriarchs, and godly Jews who proclaimed God's message of salvation through the ages. These people told their neighbors and countrymen about God and preached the gospel of salvation by grace through faith. But the object of that faith was shadowy. The Bible describes the Old Testament message as dim compared to the New Testament. The gospel was unmistakably in the Old Testament, but it was muted.

The gospel doesn't shine forth in full brightness until the New Testament, and the difference is Jesus. Jesus came as both the *object* of our faith and also as the *proclaimer* of our faith. Jesus had a message that was not murky. His gospel was not a shadow of a clearer message yet

to come – Jesus’ message was the perfect, complete, clear message of salvation. **Jesus was the first evangelist**, and the beginning of His public ministry was evangelism – proclaiming good news.

27. Let’s read John 3:11-13, 31-36; 5:19-20, 30; 8:28.
28. John never uses the word “gospel” in his account of Jesus’ ministry, and he never uses the cognate word “evangelize.” But he uses the word “witness” and its cognates 31 times in his gospel, nine times in his letters, and four times in the Apocalypse. John only uses the word “gospel” once in all his writings.
29. The core concept of witness is telling what you saw.
 - “I witnessed the accident.”
 - “I witnessed Peter Green singing in the shower.”
 - “I witnessed Pastor Matt’s terrific sermon.”
30. This is the meaning in court. The witness is there, not to share his opinion about the case, but merely to tell what he saw.
31. *Jesus is the supreme witness.* Abraham, Moses, David, and other prophets were witnesses. They heard God’s voice and saw his acts – then told others about it. Moses went to the heavenly court, saw its construction, and brought instructions back to earth which were used for building the tabernacle and temple. Isaiah had a vision of God’s throne room. Daniel and Ezekiel looked into God’s court through the glass floor. But Jesus was not a spectator or visitor to God’s court. Jesus lived there! Jesus has been in heaven for all eternity. He is intimately acquainted with heaven. God is his Father. Jesus and the Father have been talking with each other for all eternity. Jesus is the witness who knows all about heaven and knows everything the Father knows. “No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man...He who comes from above is above all...He who comes from heaven is above all. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard....” Jesus identifies himself in the Revelation as “Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.” (Revelation 1:5) The first thing Jesus says about himself in the Revelation is that he is a witness.
32. The thrust of the synoptic gospels is the ministry of Jesus as *good news*. The thrust of John’s writings is the ministry of Jesus as *true*

news, and this puts a judicial cast over it. If you would be stupid to reject good news, you would be a liar to reject true news.

33. In Revelation Jesus claims to be an ongoing witness. The vision comes several decades after Jesus ascended to heaven. He had not seen the events on earth with his physical eyes, yet he claimed to be a faithful witness then, and by implication for ever. How can Jesus be a witness if he is not present, either to see or to report?
34. Jesus is most emphatically present in the world today and always. Not “in spirit” the way your grandmother is present when you play her favorite hymn, or your aunt when you bake an apple pie using her recipe, but really personally present. Just not physically present. *Personally* present, but not *physically* present.
35. Let’s read John 14:16-18.
36. On the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus said to his disciples (verse 18), “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” Jesus promised that after he had ascended to the Father, he would come to the disciples. Just before that verse Jesus said, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth...” (John 14:16) Here we have the mystery of the Trinity. Just as Jesus had said in verse nine, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?” (John 14:9-10) so Jesus is saying now that he is in the Spirit and the Spirit is in him. Where Jesus is, the Father and the Spirit are; and where the Spirit is, there are Jesus and the Father. The Holy spirit is in the world and Jesus is in the world. Jesus is the Faithful Witness because He is here and He tells everything He saw in heaven.

37. **Jesus is the Chief Evangelist and the Faithful Witness.** Jesus has been in the world ever since his baptism announcing good news and reporting what he heard and saw in heaven. Jesus is doing this today. Today people become Christians because Jesus speaks to them and they hear.
38. If Jesus is the Chief Evangelist and the Faithful Witness, what is there for us to do?

Lesson 3

The Responsibility for Evangelism

Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Matthew 16:18

1. Evangelism is telling people the good news about Jesus. People normally tell their friends and neighbors good news when it happens. If you do not typically tell others the good news in your life (in other words, if you are not normal...), then there is no way for you to be comfortable as an evangelist.
2. Witnessing is telling people what you have seen and heard from Jesus and about him. If you do not typically tell others the important and interesting things happening in your life (in other words, if you are not normal...), then there is no way for you to be comfortable as a witness.
3. If these things describe you, your next step is to pray for God to change you into someone who talks more to other people about good, important, and interesting things. As you become more like that, the second step is to pray that God makes you aware of his activity in your life and the world so that you can tell others about it.
4. This is not a spiritual maturity test. Some of us naturally talk more than others, and that is OK. God seems to enjoy a world full of vastly different people, and how much we talk is part of that variety. Some of us talk about Jesus not because we are so spiritually advanced, but simply because we talk a lot about everything! The point is not to make everyone like those folks. The point is that it is healthy for everyone to have good interaction with friends, neighbors, and colleagues. And one component of that interaction is Jesus – when he is truly vital part of your life.
5. But some of us are specifically designated to tell others about Jesus. Jesus has appointed certain men in the church who have the responsibility and authority to speak about Jesus. This is clear in Paul's letter to the Ephesians.
6. Let's read Ephesians 4:11.

7. This verse comes in the middle of Paul's teaching on the church. He begins chapter four with a forceful declaration of the unity in the church. Then in verse seven Paul indicates that there are differences among us in the grace that Christ gives. This verse eleven shows one dimension of those differences. Christ calls some to be leaders of various types in the church. One type of calling is evangelist.
8. Nothing has so badly confused the church at large today as the issue of leadership. The Bible lays out some clear instructions, especially in Ephesians and 1 Timothy, but how to apply and interpret those instructions has been devilishly challenging. Some people have so emphasized the importance of church leaders as to conceive of them as possessing supernatural powers. The Roman church is an example of this tendency. On the opposite extreme, others have so emphasized the importance of lay ministry as to consider leaders nothing more than community organizers. The Anabaptists and many evangelical churches fit this description. Both of these extremes are wrong, unbiblical, and dreadfully unhealthy.
9. As we saw last week, Jesus is the chief officer in the church. Jesus is the Pastor, Teacher, Counselor, Evangelist, Witness. Jesus is active in the church now and always, performing these roles by the Holy Spirit – his Spirit. When Jesus calls a man to be a pastor or evangelist, Jesus is enlisting him as an *official assistant*.
10. Let's read 1 Peter 5:1-4.
11. Here Paul is addressing the elders as shepherds, and he calls Jesus the *Chief Shepherd*. Pastors, evangelists, elders – *all human offices are assistants to Jesus*. This provides three very important implications.
12. **First, officers in the church have *real authority*.** Jesus has authorized them to speak for him. Anyone and everyone can repeat what Jesus has said, and argue on behalf of Jesus, but no one has the authority to speak for Jesus except the ones Jesus appoints – the officers in the church. This is why only ordained elders are permitted to preach in Lord's Day worship, and this is why only ordained elders are permitted to administer the sacraments. Other people may speak as well or better than elders, but they are not authorized to do so in Lord's Day worship. This is why the PCA sends ordained men to campus. There are a lot of very good lay campus ministries. I was a lay campus minister once!

And it is a wonderful thing when laymen devote their lives to student evangelism or any form of Christian service. They can effectively tell what they know about Jesus, but they are not authorized to speak for Jesus. Only ordained elders are authorized to do that.

13. Now God is kind and merciful. God knows our struggles because he has also been a man ever since Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb. God does not punish people who get this wrong, and God does not terrorize people who overstep their authority. And as we said, it is a marvelous thing when laymen devote their lives to ministry. This is how the monasteries began, and they have been a powerful blessing to the church. So God is not angry with the uninformed zealous young man who starts preaching, but his words, no matter how persuasive, do not have the spiritual weight of an ordained elder.
14. **Second, officers in the church have limited and derived authority.** Just as Jesus could say or do nothing but what he received from the Father, so the officers of the church can say or do nothing but what they have received from Jesus. This means they cannot make laws and bind Christians to obedience.
15. For any social organism to function effectively there must be some rules, policies, guidelines which are accepted by all and enable us to work together. Without shared policies and procedures the group becomes stuck in endless argument and is unable to accomplish much. But – and here is the vital qualifier – these rules, policies, and guidelines are *social expedients*. They do not have spiritual power or ecclesiastical authority. It might be beneficial for the whole church to abstain from meat on Fridays during Lent, but the officers of the church cannot require it. It might be healthier to abstain from cigarettes always, but the church cannot require it. During this pandemic our church has required masks when you enter the building, but as a social expedient. We are healthier when wearing mask – so our leaders think. Mature people will comply with this regulation as a health measure, but it has nothing to do with salvation. The Roman church errs grievously by pretending to pass laws which govern the conscience. No! That is an outrageous usurpation of authority that belongs exclusively to God. The evangelical church errs by refusing to exercise the authority it does have.
16. Regarding evangelism, this principle puts the focus on preaching. The

essence of preaching is not to entertain people. It is not primarily to teach. Entertainment and teaching are very good activities, but they are not preaching. The essence of preaching is speaking for Jesus. The preacher is authorized to say what Jesus says – no more and no less. In preparing his sermon the preacher is asking himself, “What is Jesus saying in this scripture?” and “How does Jesus want to explain and apply this text to these people this week?” This is why it is such a grievous error to address politics from the pulpit. A scripture might address matters that bear on the political issues of the day, and Jesus may wish to speak to those spiritual and moral principles, but scripture says nothing about whether or not you should vote for Donald Trump – and the preacher is not authorized to say anything about that matter.

17. **Third**, if the work of the church is to be done, **it requires the energy and commitment of everyone**. This passage and others in Romans, 1 Corinthians, and elsewhere mention the wide range of gifts Christ has given the church. If everyone were called to be an evangelist, the church would implode. To be healthy, the church must include people who are not gifted evangelists, but are gifted in other ways. This provides two sub-points.

- Evangelism is most effective when **everyone uses his own gifts** with zeal, energy, love, and commitment. When you play the organ well, or clean the church well, or handle the money well, etc. the whole church thrives and the message of the gospel is most powerful. Those who are called to preach can devote themselves to that calling without worrying about these other matters.
- **Everyone can – and should – tell others** what he knows about Jesus, as opportunity presents itself. This is not their primary responsibility. They have their own special calling, and it is their responsibility to pursue that calling with zeal and commitment. And as they are doing so, they will have opportunities to talk to people, and they should talk about Jesus.

18. Conclusions.

- Most Christians are not and should not be Evangelists and Witnesses.
- Jesus has appointed some men to assist him as Evangelists and Witnesses.
- Jesus has called everyone else to other roles in the church.
- Evangelism is most effective when everyone is faithful to his own calling.

- In going about that calling, everyone should tell others what he knows about Jesus.

19. Application questions

- What is your gift and calling in the church?
- How zealously are you pursuing your calling?
- Do you need to discuss this with your pastor?
- Do you talk about Jesus with the people around you?

20. Who is responsible for proclaiming the good news? To put it another way, who should we blame when evangelism is not happening, or is poorly done?
21. Sovereignty works both ways. If God is absolutely sovereign over all things, including salvation (and He is), then God gets the credit for success and God takes the blame for failure. It is illogical and unbiblical to credit God for spiritual success, but to blame people for spiritual failure. Of course, people are involved and often fail in many ways. But the primary blame must fall on the one with primary responsibility. If Christians are primarily responsible for evangelistic success, then they are sovereign over salvation.
22. How does this work? How could God, who desires all men to come to a knowledge of the truth, fail in evangelism?
23. So again we come to the mystery of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. God sovereignly chooses some for salvation, calls an evangelist who effectively proclaims the gospel to them, grants them new life, and they place their trust in Jesus and are saved. God sovereignly acts, and human beings make real choices that make a difference. This does not fit into the Aristotelian logic system, but it is what the scripture teaches.
24. What appears to be a failure of evangelism has two sides to it. **First** God is executing His eternal plan flawlessly. We do not know the details of that plan. We are not supposed to, and never will. The plan is for some to be saved and others not. Jesus is the Chief Evangelist, and He never fails. He saves everyone chosen for salvation. **Second**, human beings do sometimes fail. We refuse to speak about Jesus, we say mean and offensive things to people, we are lazy and afraid of unbelievers, we sin in many ways which impede the progress of the gospel. These

are real sins which have a real effect on the growth of the church. But **third**, God somehow succeeds in His perfect plan in spite of our sin and failure, even including our sin and failure in His plan without robbing us of real choice.

25. How do these things affect our attitude toward evangelism?
26. **First**, we are comforted that God is in control and Jesus always gets His man or woman. Evangelism is not primarily our responsibility! There is no cause for worry or anxiety about evangelism or church growth or the salvation of others. There is no doubt; God loves the world and will save all His people. We can rest and relax in God's sovereignty.
27. **Second**, we are urged to be involved. In some mysterious way, our actions make a difference. This is not a word game or logic trick. God will use your work to build His church. This gives real meaning and significance to what you do. Your efforts are not a waste of time! And your sin is a real problem. Christians absolutely must get busy and serve Jesus.
28. I know it sounds like the encouragement of God's sovereignty is taken away by the burden of responsibility. No! They coexist. We may rest, relax, and rejoice while we get busy in service and struggle with our sin. This is not a binary choice. Just as God's sovereignty and human responsibility are simultaneously real, so are resting in Jesus and working with Jesus simultaneously real. Practically speaking, there is a time to work and a time to rest. When it is time to work, we are commanded to get busy and work. Our work will be marred by inadequacy and tainted by sin, but God will use it anyway. We must work hard to serve to the best of our ability. We may be called on to do something for which we are neither gifted or prepared. Our performance may be poor. That is not our concern (at the moment. We want to improve over time.) It was Jesus' idea to save you and put you to work. How well the work goes is His responsibility. Sometimes sin is so powerful that it is difficult to accomplish much. That does not matter. How much is accomplished is Jesus' concern. Our concern is to work as well as we can.
29. When it is time to rest, we can do so with a happy heart and a clear conscience. There is always more to do. If you do not see the fields

ripe for harvest, you are not paying attention. If you *do* see the multitudes who do not know Christ and all the brokenness in this world, it can be hard to rest. Some of us are tempted to work non-stop, especially when it seems obvious that a little extra effort will make a big difference. It can seem callous and cruel to rest when people are hurting so much. But if it is true that the salvation of the world is not your responsibility, the truth is that your extra effort will not in fact make things better. Jesus is saving the world. He will use you in that work, but you are not the critical element – and Jesus can succeed without you at all.

30. So in evangelism, as in all aspects of life, Christians are called to work hard and rest hard. Exert yourself to accomplish your work to the best of your ability. Then stop, rest, relax, and trust Jesus to finish the job.
31. So what is our job in evangelism? We have established that Jesus is the Chief Evangelist and Faithful Witness. Who are we ?
32. Christians fall into two broad categories: officers and members. These are real, biblical distinctions. Officers have real, but limited authority. In other words they can, and should, do things the rest of us cannot do and should not attempt, but they cannot do whatever they wish. Officers have been called and appointed by Jesus to be His assistants. Jesus is the Chief Evangelist, and certain men are junior evangelists. Jesus is the Faithful Witness, and certain men are support witnesses. Jesus proclaims the good news and evangelists proclaim what Jesus says. Jesus testifies to what He heard and saw in heaven, and evangelists repeat what they heard from Jesus. Now since officers have authority, they are also responsible – but only for their calling. Officers are not Chief Evangelists, so the salvation of the world (or their community) is not their responsibility. They are responsible as junior assistants to proclaim what they heard from Jesus. They are responsible to do this faithfully and well.

33. Paul urged Timothy to “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15) In 2 Timothy chapter 2 Paul holds up a soldier, and athlete, and a farmer as examples of dedicated, focused training for excellence. If evangelism is weak in a church or ministry, the first place to look is in the preaching of the pastor. When the pastor is ministering the means of grace with skill and dedication, the church will grow in size and strength over time.
34. The officers in the church are Jesus’ junior assistants. They are not responsible for the growth of the church. They are responsible for assisting Jesus with skill, focus, dedication, and excellence. Officers must devote their lives to this and seek constantly to improve. When they do, the church will grow in numbers and strength over time, but the results are Jesus’ responsibility.
35. So are the rest of us off the hook? No. Everyone is responsible for his own calling. No one is called to be the Chief Evangelist and Faithful Witness except Jesus. Jesus alone is responsible for the growth of the church, as He said, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” Church officers are called to assist Jesus, and they are responsible to do so with skill and dedication. Everyone else is gifted and called to play a great variety of roles. Some of us are called to be teachers, some to cook, some to organize, and so forth. We are responsible for those tasks and for performing them well.
36. There is no blanket commend in scripture that everyone should be an evangelist, but Jesus does give everyone a gift and calling – so everyone plays some role in the church. Everyone, including children and old people. If you feel inadequate to preach the gospel and guilty for not evangelizing, that is false guilt. You are not called to evangelize. Normal people tell others good news when they get it, and we would expect you to talk about Jesus when you get a chance, but you are not an evangelist. But you are something, and that something is terrifically important. The church needs your gift and we will be weak and struggling without your contribution. And if you refuse to exercise your gift in the church, that is real guilt.

37. If you do not have a role in the church, this is an important matter of prayer. You should also discuss this with your pastor and elders. It is part of their job to help you find your calling, execute it well, and support you in it.
38. When the church is not doing evangelism, who is responsible?
- Jesus holds primary responsibility, and we can rest in the confidence that, whatever the appearances, Jesus is building the church as He promised.
 - Officers are responsible for assisting Jesus, and they must watch themselves so that they do this with skill and dedication. Weakness in evangelism may be due to unskilled or unfocused officers.
 - Members are responsible for the gifts and callings they have received, and they must perform those roles with skill and dedication. Weakness in evangelism may be due to members failing to exercise the gifts they have been given.
 - All of us tell others good news when we get it. This is not something that has to be studied or learned. It is a fact of human nature. Weakness in evangelism may be due to the church not receiving good news.

Lesson 4

Free to be Our True Best Selves

Acts 9:22; 1 Peter 3:15; James 2:8, 15-16; Hebrews 12:18-29

1. This week we have been discussing evangelism. Let's review our main points.
 - Evangelism is telling people good news about Jesus.
 - If you do not have any good news about Jesus to tell, you are spiritually impoverished and should seek some help.
 - God does all the work of saving people.
 - People respond to the gospel when God gives them new life.
 - God ordinarily grants new life to people as they hear the gospel.
 - Jesus is the Chief Evangelist and Faithful Witness.
 - Pastors are the junior assistants to Jesus.
 - Members have been given gifts for meeting other needs in the church.
 - Members are responsible for using their gifts with energy and dedication.
 - Pastors are responsible for preaching the gospel with energy and dedication.
 - Jesus is responsible for building the church.
 - Everyone should talk about Jesus as they have ability and opportunity.
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2. Today we will cover three topics that are related to evangelism: apologetics, service, and worship. Each of these topics is big enough to justify a seminar in itself. We will just touch a few points related to evangelism.

3. **Apologetics**

4. Evangelism is 100% God's work, and 100% requires our participation. This means that our participation is meaningful. True, God does all the work, but in some mysterious way, our efforts make a difference. Our role is not spectators, nor idle participants, but hard-working partners with Jesus. As God gives opportunity and ability, our job is to labor with all our energy in evangelism. There are three aspects to our work in evangelism.

5. **First, we are called to know the scripture.** Scripture is the word of

God, the good news of eternal life, the message of salvation, and the power to save. This is pointedly true for pastors. Paul urged Timothy to study the scriptures so that he would be approved as a workman skilled in the word of God. For the rest of us, we should pursue knowledge of the scripture *as we have opportunity*. God will use however little or much you know of the Bible. God can work with whatever knowledge you have. But as God gives opportunity, it is good to expand our knowledge of scripture.

6. **Second, we must know our audience.** The gospel is not abstract good news. It is good news to all people in their own unique circumstances. People come to Jesus because they need food, or healing, or forgiveness, or love, or a million different needs – and these are all different in each time and place for each person. Jesus’ promise to set the captives free is meaningful to prisoners in ways that it is not to suburbanites with good jobs. The reason that Tim Keller and others like him are so successful in ministry is that they have a strong grasp on the people in their communities.
7. Most friendships are superficial. I am not talking about spiritual matters. I mean that most people know little and care less about the families and joys and hardships of their friends. When you show a sincere interest in others, people are drawn to you and are receptive to what you say. So part of the work of evangelism is learning about the people around us.
8. **Third, we must learn how to persuade unbelievers.** This makes perfect sense to those who think salvation depends on us. They invest huge energy in learning how to persuade unbelievers. They study apologetics and learn techniques of argument designed to coax agreement out of unbelievers. However those who think salvation depends on God, and who recognize the power of salvation in the scripture, may think that persuasion is an illegitimate intrusion into God’s domain.
9. Let’s catch a few snapshots of the apostolic evangelists. Let’s read Acts 9:22; 17:3, 22-31, 19:8.

10. Here we see Paul in his preaching ministry. The content of his message is the scriptures – nothing more and nothing less. But Paul was not merely informing his audience of the teaching of scripture. Paul was energetically involved with his audience. He was “proving” and “reasoning” and “persuading” them of the gospel. Paul studied his audience. He knew that, as Luke the author says, “all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.” (17:21) Paul may have thought that they were a bunch of spoiled rich kids who were wasting their time on useless poetry, but he did not let his feelings and opinions intrude into the opportunity to preach the gospel. Paul knew his audience, and he connected the gospel with the things that were meaningful to them.
11. Notice the strength of the words here: proving, reasoning, persuading. You get the image of Paul as a relentless hunter who will not give up the chase no matter how long and hard his prey runs from him. Here is another gospel mystery: *God sovereignly saves people as we strenuously persuade them of the gospel.* It is always God who does the work and gets the credit. But somehow our diligent labor contributes to evangelism. This means that we can and ought to work hard to convince people of the gospel, but the results rest with God. We cannot convince them. Only God can. And if God has not chosen them for salvation, no efforts of ours will save them. But if God *has* chosen them for salvation, he will certainly save them, and he will use Christians in the process.
12. This is where apologetics comes in. Apologetics is loosely defined as defending the faith against unbelief. The word is derived from Latin *apologia*, which means reason. Apologetics is providing a reason for the faith, and the proof-text of apologetics is 1 Peter 3:15, “always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” Apologetics is going outside a simple declaration of what scripture says and explaining our beliefs and answering the false teachings of unbelievers. Apologetics contributes to evangelism in three important ways.
13. **First, we seek to provide reasonable answers to honest questions.** If a Muslim says he cannot accept the gospel because Christians worship three gods, he is simply repeating what he has been taught all his life. And of course he *should not* worship three gods! No one should. This is an honest misunderstanding which is preventing someone from

listening to the gospel. This man deserves a simple explanation of true Christian belief. As an unbeliever it will not make complete sense, but your explanation may make him more receptive to further discussion.

14. Many people say they cannot believe in the God of the Bible because of the evil in the world. If God is good, he must not be all-powerful; but if he is all-powerful then he must not be good. This is actually a good point, and it demands a response. Again, a strong, biblical answer will not save anyone, but it may help such a person to consider the gospel.
15. This leads to the **second** role of apologetics: it **clears away issues which distract from the gospel**. Answers to the questions of unbelievers are not the gospel. But these questions can so confuse and disturb people that they cannot pay attention to anything else you might say. Knowing that they are not alone, that other people have and are asking these questions, and that there are sensible answers (even if they do not entirely buy them) can open an opportunity to focus your conversation on Jesus.
16. The **third** role of apologetics is the most compelling. By engaging the questions and objections of unbelievers, you **demonstrate that you care about them**. These are real people with real concerns. Their concerns might not be your concerns, but they matter to those who have them. Apologetics is not about winning an argument, and evangelism is not about a headcount of converts. At its core, evangelism is about loving God and loving people. Discussing their issues is one way of loving people.
17. But let's look again at our apologetic proof-text. While it is good and valuable to discuss the problems unbelievers have with the faith, that is not actually what this verse addresses. This verse says you should be ready to explain your hope to those who ask. This means that you have a hope and that it is visible to others. Christians who convey worry about politics or climate or career are not displaying hope. They are conveying despair, which is the opposite of hope and is part of the world's problems. We do have a hope. We know that Jesus has all authority, that he is directing history the way he wants it to go, that he loves and protects his church, and that we have a glorious future. Do you know that? Is this your hope? You will be a poor evangelist if your life is consumed with anxiety.

18. The best foundation for evangelism is hoping in Jesus. When your hope is in Jesus, you can engage the world's problems without anger, despair, or coercion. When your hope is truly in Jesus, your behavior will be radically different from everyone else. You will be a refreshing presence everywhere you go. People will notice and wonder. More productive than poring over apologetic texts is rooting your hope so deeply in Jesus that people around you cannot hold back from asking you about it.

19. Service

20. Service is not evangelism. Service is acts of mercy meeting the needs of people. Serving others is a task given to every Christian, but some will be especially gifted in various areas of service. Service and evangelism are completely different, but are joined in the work of the church.

21. Let's read John 13:34-35.

22. Love is the central command of Christianity, and love for each other is the identifying characteristic of Christians. Now, love takes in a lot of territory, and we can legitimately claim that love includes telling unbelievers the good news of salvation in Christ. And of course it includes the activities that normally go into the category of service. James elaborates on this.

23. Let's read James 2:8, 15-16.

24. Now not everyone has an extra coat to give to the one who has none, and not everyone is called to provide food to the hungry. These are examples of love in action. And there are lots of needs out there. This is not evangelism. This is loving people. This is basic human kindness. Sinful people are greedy, selfish, lazy, hateful, and sinful. Christians are being remade into the image of Christ. Christians serve others because that is who we are. It is our nature.

25. Let's read 1 John 4:7-12, 20-21.

26. Christians ought not to serve others merely because it is commanded, nor because it makes evangelism more effective. Christians serve

others because that is our nature. God is love, and God's children are characterized by love. So we love those around us, Christians first and also the world. But as we love those around us, we find that evangelism becomes effective.

27. Let's read John 17:20-23.

28. "So that the world may believe that you have sent me." "So that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me." How can we convince unbelievers that Jesus is God in the flesh and trust Him for salvation? By loving each other. Francis Schaeffer called this the ultimate apologetic. No one can believe the gospel unless he hears it. Evangelism (preaching) is essential. But what gives power to the preaching, what pushes people over the edge is the love they *see* in Christians.

29. A classic text demonstrating this is Acts 2:41-45 in which the hospitable life of the first Christians attracted thousands and gave power to the gospel.

30. Service cannot take the place of evangelism. But *evangelism without service is hollow and unpersuasive*. Evangelism without service is a message of love without acts of love. It is hypocritical and offensive.

31. I am including hospitality here because hospitality is such an important element of service. Christians have always welcomed all sorts of people into their midst – not as an evangelistic strategy, but because God welcomes all sorts of people and we have become like God. The church in the second century grew rapidly in the face of periodic persecution because it provided refuge for people who were misused by Roman society. The church was especially known for taking in babies who were cast out by their parents, and for feeding the hungry. Sounds like Jesus, doesn't it?

32. Speaking of Jesus, it seems that every page of the gospels has Jesus preaching and healing or preaching and feeling, or something similar. It is impossible to imagine the ministry of Jesus as only preaching, or only healing and feeding. Evangelism and service are so intertwined in Jesus' ministry that to separate them would misconstrue his work. Of course we are not Jesus, and we are not called to validate our ministry by miraculous signs. But as followers of Jesus, it is appropriate to

strive to follow His ministry pattern.

33. Furthermore, the gospels are clear that a big reason why people came to Jesus was because they were sick or hungry or demon possessed. And Jesus did not turn them away because they were less interested in His message than His food. My observation is that most people do not seek a ministry for it's teaching. Some do. But most people are more interested in friends – especially opposite-sex friends! – or a gratifying experience or a religious event which is easy and convenient. Sounds just like Jesus' audience! And if Jesus welcomed people who wanted food and healing, we should welcome people who want friends. Jesus fed and healed needy people, but He always preached a challenging sermon.
34. Service and hospitality are not evangelism and are no substitute for evangelism, but effective evangelism is joined to service and hospitality. Together they reveal Christ's love for the lost. Apart they land on unbelievers with a thud.

35. **Worship**

36. Another topic of great confusion and disagreement in the church is the role of public worship in evangelism. Baptists tend to think public worship, as well as all occasions, is an opportunity to preach the simple gospel and call for conversion of sinners. Seeker-sensitive churches and their relatives think that public worship should be comfortable to all people and easy for unbelievers to understand and participate in. Roman and Orthodox believe that public worship is when they sacrifice Jesus again and participate in the salvation of the world. Reformed Christians view worship primarily as a teaching event. In most congregation you have several of these views competing with each other.
37. The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America states that, "A service of public worship is not merely a gathering of God's children with each other, but before all else, *a meeting of the triune God with His chosen people.*" (47-2) It continues, "The end of public worship is the glory of God...[it] has as its aim the building of Christ's Church by the perfecting of the saints and the addition to its membership of such as are being saved..." So public worship should be for both Christians and non-Christians. But the fundamental nature of public worship is meeting with God. The Book of Church Order

specifically rejects the view that public worship is merely a gathering of God's people. Now, God's people can and should gather in many times and places: dinners, work days, hymn sings, etc. A church in which God's people do not gather for such events is a sad, impoverished church. God's people ought to *want* to gather with each other, and if they do not, something is dreadfully wrong. But public worship is different than all other events. In the Lord's Day service, God is present in a way that He is not present in any other time or place. The Lord's Day service is "a meeting of the triune God with His chosen people." This changes everything about how we look at such a service.

38. The book of Hebrews is our chief New Testament text on public worship. Lord's Day worship is concisely described in chapter 12.
39. Let's read Hebrews 12:18-29.
40. First the author describes Old Covenant worship. When God came close to His people, they were terrified. God revealed Himself in terrifying signs: fire, darkness, an ominous trumpet, and worst of all, a voice. The people were so frightened that they begged Moses to meet God for them and report back so that they would not have to face this awesome Deity. But now that Jesus has entered the heavenly sanctuary, there is no more terror. We may come peacefully, joyfully right into God's throne room, with angels and archangels and all the host of heaven, and join them in singing to the Lamb. When Jesus presented his blood before the Father, the doors of heaven swung open to all believers and all Christians have free access to the Father.
41. New Covenant worship is a peaceful, joyful experience, but it is a serious matter. Verse 25 warns us not to refuse the invitation to heaven, and this passage ends by reminding us that the God who welcomes all believers is still a consuming fire. Worship out of sync with scripture is absolutely wrong, even dangerous – no matter how sincere.
42. So when we assemble to worship on the Lord's Day, we enter heaven and sing with the angels. We hear Jesus speak to us in the scripture and sermon and we speak to Him in our prayers. Then we all eat the marriage supper of the Lamb as a celebration of the salvation purchased by Christ's death. This is real. It is not physical. It is spiritual, but just as real as if it *were* physical. Just as Jesus is physically in heaven but spiritually among us, so we remain physically on earth but spiritually

with the angels in heaven. This is what really happens in Lord's Day worship.

43. This means that **1)** unbelievers cannot participate. They are not covered by the blood of Jesus and have no access to heaven. They may join us physically and watch our worship and sing with us on earth, but they cannot participate in spiritual worship. **2)** Unbelievers would never survive if they *did* join us. Our God, who is a consuming fire, would consume an unbeliever if it were somehow possible for him to enter heaven. **3)** Unbelievers cannot comprehend what is happening. They will understand bits here and there, but they are not with us, they don't see what we see, they don't hear what we hear. They are dead spiritually and do not have the spiritual organs to see God's works and hear His voice. Lord's Day worship will be confusing to unbelievers until God gives them eternal life, opens their eyes, and unstops their ears to see God's works and hear his voice.
44. Therefore it is very foolish to attempt to make Lord's Day worship accessible to unbelievers. In fact, *the more unbelievers understand what is happening, the less authentic Lord's Day worship is.*
45. Now this does not mean that we should have no concern for how well worship can be understood. Worship should be adapted to the culture around it, and this includes language, music, architecture, etc. What doesn't change is what we do with those cultural elements. Worship always involves scripture, prayers, preaching, the Lord's Supper, and music focused on Jesus. So the inability of unbelievers to comprehend our worship ought not to be because we speak in a language they cannot understand or music that makes no sense to them or architecture which is culturally foreign. The inability of unbelievers to comprehend our worship is a *spiritual inability*. It ought not to be a cultural barrier.
46. So are we denying that public worship ought to have an evangelistic purpose? Absolutely not! Unbelievers will not be able to comprehend our worship, but they will understand parts. And preaching is the opportunity in which God grants hearing to unbelievers.
47. But even if an unbeliever does not that day receive eternal life and new understanding, he will see something he cannot see anywhere else. He will see God's people enter heaven. He will not understand what is going on, but he will see that *something* is going on – something

strange, something mysterious, something wonderful; something that is better than anything on earth. The reprobate will hate God more than ever, but the elect will be drawn to their creator and redeemer and lover. The reprobate will flee the sanctuary and never return, but the elect will be unable to stay away. This is what Jesus said happens in gospel ministry. (Matthew 10:34-39)

48. The most evangelistically effective Lord's Day service is not one which appeals to unbelievers. In fact, the more it appeals to unbelievers, the less evangelistically effective it is. The most evangelistically effective Lord's Day service is one which is true to its nature. It is a service which comfortably, naturally, constantly draws all the people together close to God around the throne. Although unbelievers will not comprehend what is happening, they will see – in a way they will never see elsewhere – the gospel in action. They will enter the service with hard hearts and leave with laughter.
49. The pastor is responsible for leading us into heaven each Lord's Day. The only thing that ordinary Christians are responsible for is inviting their friends and neighbors to church. Let's every one of us resolve to be more diligent about that.

50. Conclusion

51. Ordinary Christians are not evangelists. They are not supposed to be. All Christians are responsible for using their gifts to the best of their ability. That is all. As God increasingly excites us with the gospel – as we get closer and closer to Jesus and are increasingly captivated by Him, we will tell others the good news we hear and report what we see Jesus doing in our lives and in the world. Ordinary Christians are most evangelistic when they are exercising their gifts well and talking about what they know of Jesus. We are free to be who God made us to be.