

9Marks Journal

Biblical Thinking for Building Healthy Churches





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Jonathan Leeman

Editor's Note

What does it mean to think about the Christian life in a church-centered sort of way? Answering that question is one of our goals at 9Marks. So we take different practices and doctrines and try to think about them from an ecclesial perspective. For instance, what should individual discipleship and growth look like in the context of a church? Or, how should we understand the doctrine of conversion relative to the universal and local church?

Evangelism, of course, is one such topic that deserves such treatment. What does it mean to think through evangelism in a church-centered way?

On the one hand, various parachurch ministries over the last few decades, from Billy Graham's crusades to the organization formerly known as Campus Crusade, have helped Christians think about individual evangelism outside the context of the local church.

On the other hand, revivalistic and seeker-sensitive churches have heavily emphasized the church's role in evangelism in everything from altar calls to attractional programs.

We want to split the difference. Evangelism is a church activity and an individual activity. Churches might or might not use evangelistic programs, but they certainly should cultivate cultures of evangelism by giving their members tools. And the life of our churches should be attractive to outsiders, but they should primarily be attractive through the holy and loving nature of our shared lives.

In this issue of the 9Marks Journal, I get the ball rolling by painting the big picture of how the church and evangelism relate in the Scriptures and might relate in practice. Mike McKinley then swings in with practical help on cultivating an evangelistic culture, as do several other brothers from other churches in the forum on evangelism training.

Tim Beougher offers pastors help for encouraging those members who don't think evangelism is their responsibility. Matt Merker offers pastors advice for their own evangelism. And then McKinley and Kevin McKay talk about the obstacles to evangelism in a church.

Finally, we try to serve our readers by pointing to both the good and bad of several evangelism tools that are popular in churches.



By Jonathan Leeman

Connecting Evangelism and Church

s evangelism an individual sport or a team sport? Really, it's both.

Think of fishing. There are times you might saunter down to the dock by your lonesome, dangle your feet off the side, and cast in a line. But ask the men on an ocean trawler what it takes to haul a ton of wriggling mackerel out of writhing seawaters. They desperately need one another.

The fishing analogy does not say everything we would want to say about the relationship between evangelism and the local church, but it's biblical, and it's a start. Jesus told the disciples to follow him, that he would make them fishers of men, and then he sent them out two by two to preach that people should repent (Mark 1:17; 6:7, 13). Like fishermen on a trawler, we need the church to do the work of evangelism.

Yet there's a bigger picture to see in relating evangelism and the church. Think of the first chapters of Acts, where the apostles proclaimed the resurrection, and behind them was the church, living together and sharing everything in common, "praising God and enjoying the favor of the people" (2:47; also 5:13). Somehow, the life of the church, sitting there as a backdrop to the proclamation of the gospel, served as a witness to the gospel. It caused many in Jerusalem to view the saints with favor, and it seemed to lead to more conversions.

Was it these early days in Jerusalem that Peter had in mind when he later described the church as a people, a priesthood, and a nation "that you may declare the praises of him" who called us out of darkness, and to live such good lives that pagans would see our good deeds "and glorify God" (1 Peter 2:9, 12)?

In both the early chapters of Acts and 1 Peter 2, one gets the feel of the church as a beehive, a buzzing ball of honey-making sweetness, swarming with the comings and going of busy worker bees. The hive is essential to the individual bee's work, and part of the work. What might all this say about the relationship between evangelism and a church?

No analogy goes all the way and captures everything. Let's see if we might sum up the relationship between the church and evangelism in the Bible in four systematic statements, and then ask what practical lessons follow for churches.

1. EVANGELISM POINTS TO GOD, NOT TO THE CHURCH

If you were trying to convince someone to join your club, you would point to all the benefits of the club: the fun members have with one another, the annual table tennis tournament, and so forth. This is not how it works with evangelism and the church.

Evangelism points to God, not to the church. That's the first statement.

Paul tells the Corinthians that Christ had given him (and them) a "ministry of reconciliation" and a "a message of reconciliation." He (and they) were "Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us." And this message of reconciliation is simple: "Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:18-21).

The evangelist's good news is not, "Be reconciled to other people," even though the good news will lead to being so reconciled. Rather, the evangelist's good news is how a person can be reconciled to God. Everything else flows from this.

2. THE CHURCH IS ONE OUTCOME OF EVANGELISM

By the same token, the first hoped for outcome of evangelism is reconciliation with God. But there is a second hoped for outcome: reconciliation with the people of God, the church.

If your doctrine of conversion is missing the corporate element, it's missing an essential piece of the whole. A covenant head must have a covenant people. Our corporate unity in Christ is not just an implication of conversion, it's part of the very thing. Being reconciled to God's people is distinct from but inseparable from being reconciled to God (see my "The Corporate Component of Conversion").

All this is put on display wonderfully in Ephesians 2. Verses 1 to 10 explain forgiveness and our vertical reconciliation with God: "By grace you have been saved." Verses 11 to 22 then present the horizontal: "For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility" (v. 14). Notice that the activity of verse 14 is in the past tense. Christ has already made Jew and Gentile one. It's what they are because God has done it, and God did it in precisely the same place he accomplished the vertical reconciliation—in the cross of Christ (see also Eph. 4:1-6).

In short, we are saved into a people.

The early chapters of Acts demonstrate what this looks like in practice: "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day" (Acts 2:41; see also 2:47; 4:4; 6:7). People trust in Christ and are added to "the number" of the church in Jerusalem. They are counted. Their name gets added. If they had had cameras, a photo no doubt would have gone into the church directory!

The converted life is congregationally shaped. Christians belong in churches, and so this is where the evangelist will send people.

3. EVANGELISM IS THE WORK OF THE CHURCH

Third, evangelism is the work of the church. Once a person is reconciled to God and (therefore) to God's people, he or she gains a new job: sharing the gospel with others. "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men," said Jesus (Mark 1:17; also, Matt. 28:19). Every Christian and church member, in other words, is charged with sharing the gospel (see Timothy Beougher, "Must Every Christian Evangelize?").

The first chapters of Acts emphasize the preaching of the Apostles, but when persecution broke out in Jerusalem and the church scattered, "Those who had been scattered preached the gospel wherever they went" (Acts 8:4).

Local churches exist to worship God and share the good news of Jesus Christ. This is why the teachers teach and the members learn. In fact, Jesus gives the so-called evangelists, pastors, and teachers to the church to equip them to do ministry (Eph. 4:11f), a ministry that surely includes evangelism.

We work together to haul in the fish.

4. THE CHURCH IS AN APOLOGETIC IN EVANGELISM

The life of a converted people, grouped together in congregations, should also commend the gospel that saved them. "Gospel doctrine," Ray Ortlund has written, "creates a gospel culture." And that culture, embodied in our churches, should be attractive to outsiders, at least to some (see 2 Cor. 2:15-16).

This brings us back to the picture of the church as a humming, honey-filled beehive. We see this in Acts and 1 Peter 2. We also see it in Matthew 5, when Jesus talks about the church being salt and light (vv. 13-16). And it's remarkably pictured in John 13, where Jesus observes, "Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (vv. 34-35).

Our good deeds toward outsiders and our love for our fellow church members points neighbors and colleagues to Jesus!

All that to say, the local church is an apologetic in evangelism. The life of the church argues for the gospel. Believers living with one another testifies to the power of God in salvation. As we sit under the preaching of God's Word week after week, and as the Spirit conforms us to the image of the Son little by little, we exemplify what the gospel can do to us as individuals and as a people.

Slowly, we are becoming the new humanity, following after the one who is the firstborn of the new creation (Col. 1:15). And this new humanity serves as a wonderful backdrop or billboard in our evangelism. It offers a contrast culture to the cultures of this world.

PRACTICAL TAKE-AWAYS

What are some practical lessons we can take from these four systematic principles? Often, pastors try to strengthen a church's evangelistic ministry by exhorting people to share the gospel. Surely that's one piece. But it's also critical to grow the church as a contrast culture, which acts as this attractive backdrop for evangelism.

- 1. Evangelism should lead to baptism and membership. Churches should not evangelize and then leave new converts out on their own. Nor should they evangelize, baptize, and then, maybe, someday, get around to bringing someone into church membership. Except for exceptional circumstances (e.g., Ethiopian eunuch), churches should do what the church in Jerusalem did: baptize people into their number (Acts 2:41). Baptism, after all, is the corporate and authorized sign by which a church formally affirms a person as a believer. That affirmation should then be protected and nurtured by the ongoing oversight given through membership and the Lord's Supper. We don't leave new hatchlings outside of the nest, but bring them inside.
- 2. Teach members to integrate their lives with one another. In order to strengthen a church's apologetic power, members should constantly be reminded through the teaching of the word and the celebration of the Lord's Supper that we are one body (e.g. 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 1 Cor. 12). Hardly a Sunday should go by when members are not reminded to build relationships with one another so that they might encourage, build up, strengthen, speak

truth, warn, and love one another (e.g. Rom. 12:9-13; Eph. 4:11-32). They should be exhorted to show hospitality (Rom. 12:13; 1 Peter 4:9). All this creates an attractive witness for the gospel.

- 3. Teach members to sacrifice for one another. Even more specifically, Christians should think about how they might better sacrifice for one another, financially and otherwise (e.g. Acts 2:42-46; 2 Cor. 8-9; 1 Peter 4:10). In a consumeristic nation, especially, the example of shared generosity among believers presents a powerful contrast culture. Remember, Jesus told Christians to love one another as he has loved us (John 13:34)—a sacrificial love if there ever was one.
- 4. Practice church discipline. Christian hypocrites and heretics in our midst compromise the witness of the church. When the church members in a community are known as liars, backbiters, and adulterers, that church's evangelistic work will not go so well. That's not to say that a church should discipline every saint who still struggles with sinning in their midst. Then there would be no church left. Rather, churches should confront and discipline unrepentant sin. This serves, ironically, to evangelize the unrepentant member (see 1 Cor. 5:4), as well as a church's city more broadly (see 1 Cor. 5:1-2).
- 5. Equip members to share the gospel. Church leaders should look for various ways to make sure every member can explain the basics of the faith. This can be done from the pulpit, the Sunday School classroom, the membership interview, and elsewhere (see Kevin McKay, "Overcoming Objections to Evangelism").
- 6. Encourage members to live lives that bless outsiders. Church members, hopefully, are known as kind, friendly, and quick to lend a hand. We should be quick to jump in with a rake to help clear the neighbor's leaves, quick to offer help to an office-mate, quick to defend a victim of abuse, quick to work hard at preserving the jobs of hardworking employees in difficult times, quick to bless in all sorts of ways. Good deeds should adorn our evangelistic words.
- 7. Invite people into formal and informal gatherings of the church. Countless stories could be given of how non-believers heard the gospel and then watched the church in motion, both in formal or informal gatherings, and then came to faith. The church's life together compelled them. It pointed to something they had never known in their family, school, or workplace. In other words, inviting outsiders into the life of the church surely must constitute one part of our evangelism.
- 8. Set the example in evangelism. Wherever a church's elders are known for their evangelism, you can expect to find an evangelistic church. Where the elders don't, you won't.
- 9. Brag about your church. The apostle Paul sometimes boasted about his churches as a way of boasting about Christ (see 2 Cor. 9:2; 2 Thes. 1:4; cf. Phil. 2:16). Christians, likewise, should look for ways to speak positively and gratefully—not obnoxiously or pridefully—about their churches around non-Christian friends. When a colleague asks about the weekend, mention how your church gave your wife a wonderful baby shower. Mention something encouraging the preacher said on Sunday. Mention the work your congregation is doing at the shelter when the subject of homelessness comes up. Doing this well, no doubt, takes practice.

CONCLUSION

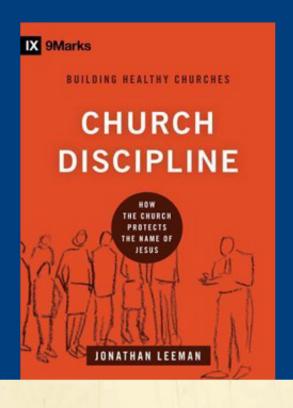
Rightly relating church and evangelism in our understanding and practice requires more than exhorting people to evangelize. It requires attending to matters of polity and governance, membership and discipline. It requires building a healthy church that sits under God's preached Word, and knows what God has tasked the church to do.

It requires godly leaders who teach and set the example. And it requires members who love Jesus and increasingly can't help but sing the praises of him who brought them from death to life—inside and outside the church building.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Jonathan Leeman, an elder of Capitol Hill Baptist Church and the editorial director of 9Marks, is the author of several books on the local church. You can follow him on Twitter.

Church discipline ain't easy.



But it's biblical, loving, and vital for a church's health. Jonathan Leeman presents the nuts and bolts of practicing discipline in Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus.

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By Mike McKinley

Three Ingredients for an Evangelistic Church Culture

'm convinced it's better for your church to have an evangelistic culture than just a series of evangelistic programs.

In a church with a program-driven approach to evangelism, sharing the gospel can become something mostly for certain people at certain times, like when the evangelism team goes out visiting.

But in a church with an evangelistic culture, each member is encouraged to play a role within the larger church's effort to reach the people around them with the message of salvation in Jesus. It becomes a part of every believer's life.

THREE INGREDIENTS OF AN EVANGELISTIC CULTURE

If you are looking to create an evangelistic culture in your local church, here are three ingredients that may help.

1. The Gospel: the Fuel for an Evangelistic Culture

The gospel message is the fuel that feeds an evangelistic culture in a church. We all naturally share the things that excite our hearts. If the Philadelphia Eagles ever won the Super Bowl (I know...), you wouldn't have much luck shutting me up about it. In the same way, if we want to create cultures in our churches where it's natural for members to talk to about the gospel message with non-Christians, then we need to help our members fall deeply in love with the gospel.

That means they must understand the gospel message. It also means that the beauty of the gospel message must be put on display week in and week out in our churches. When Christians truly grasp the depth of their sin, the wonderful holiness of God, the perfection of Christ and the depth of his suffering for them, the power of his resurrection and the gift of eternal life for all who repent and believe, our affections for Christ will grow.

The gospel message also frees Christians from motivations that might lead them to dislike evangelism. The gospel says that we don't have to evangelize in order to earn God's love. Our position in God's family isn't dependent on how often or how well we share the gospel. Instead we can be certain of God's love, which frees us from the overwhelming concern for the opinions of people around us that makes us afraid to speak up about Jesus.

2. Prayer: the Power of an Evangelistic Culture

Second, a church that is sharing the gospel must be committed to prayer. Evangelism seems a hopeless task. We are calling spiritually dead people to embrace life. How are we going to equip and encourage people for that work? It seems utterly futile.

That's why an evangelistic culture must begin with a culture of prayer. In prayer, Christians go to the Lord with a confession of their insufficiency for the task of evangelism and his sufficient strength. God alone can make the seeds that we sow spring up to eternal life in our hearers, and so we must begin with prayer.

In our church, this particularly happens on Sunday evenings. We gather together as a congregation to pray that the Lord would spread his gospel through us. People share gospel conversations that they've had during the previous week, or opportunities that they hope to have in the coming week.

This prayer time serves a few purposes. First, it commits these things to the Lord, who normally has us ask before we receive in these matters (James 4:2).

Second, it involves the whole church in the work of sharing the gospel. It's not a burden or a project that we undertake alone, but we have brothers and sisters to pray and encourage us.

Third, this sharing makes it clear that evangelism is the work of "normal" Christians. The people asking for prayer aren't usually pastors or elders or gifted evangelists. They are just believers who have embraced their calling to share the good news with the people around them.

Finally, this prayer time gives people a good place to begin reaching out to their neighbors and co-workers. If people are nervous or uncertain about sharing the good news, we encourage them to begin with prayer. They can pray that the Lord would give them opportunities, and that he would bring people who need the gospel to their attention. That's a much less intimidating first step than rushing out with a tract in hand.

3. Training: the Blueprint for an Evangelistic Culture.

A third ingredient is training, the blueprint for an evangelistic culture. Remember that the goal is for our churches to have evangelistic cultures rather than merely evangelistic programs. But that doesn't mean that there is no place for church leaders to organize and equip people to share the gospel. In fact, a love for the gospel and prayer may not be enough to motivate Christians to a lifestyle of evangelism.

While evangelism will come naturally to some people in your congregation, there will be many people who love the gospel and pray faithfully but still need to be equipped to share the gospel. Here are a few ways church leaders can equip the congregation:

Recommend good books on the topic. J.I. Packer's *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* and Mack Stiles' *Speaking of Jesus* are two of my favorites. Read these books with the people you are discipling, give them away to people who will read them, or make them available through you church library.

Bring people with you when you have a chance to share the gospel. When I am invited to give an evangelistic talk, I bring a younger person from the church with me. It's a good opportunity to model for them how to share the good news.

Address unbelievers in your sermons. Your people will grow from listening to you engage people who don't know Jesus with the claims of the gospel. Take time to thoughtfully consider the questions or objections that an unbeliever might have to your sermon's message, and then speak to those issues.

Run evangelistic meetings where people can bring friends and get help sharing the gospel. If your church can host an evangelistic coffee house meeting or a program like Christianity Explored, you will give opportunities for your people to invite their friends and observe how they can share the gospel as well.

BETTER THAN THE BEST PROGRAM

There is no program that can create an evangelistic culture in your church. Instead, it will require church leaders to teach, model, and pray until members of the church realize that sharing the gospel is their privilege and responsibility. A church with such a culture will be far more fruitful and effective than a church with even the most effective programs and strategies.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Mike McKinley is the senior pastor of Sterling Park Baptist Church in Sterling, Virginia, and is the author, most recently, of *The Devil Made Me Do It* (Good Book Company, 2013).

Answers from University Reformed Church, Sterling Park Baptist Church, the Village Church, and the Church at Brook Hills.

Pastors' Forum: Four Approaches to Evangelism Training

e asked four churches to tell us how they equip their people to evangelize. Here are their responses.

Ben Falconer, University Reformed Church, East Lansing, Michigan

If we're going to evangelize faithfully, we need to talk, pray, and be challenged about it. With that in mind, at University Reformed Church we attempt to keep evangelism at the forefront of our ministry as much as possible.

The foundation is laid with regular admonition and encouragement from the preached Word on Sundays. As often as the text gives us opportunity to trumpet our responsibility to be heralds of the good news, we take it. Evangelism and praying for the lost are repeated applications that we as pastors make from the text.

Another way we teach on evangelism is by including it in our new members class. We want those interested in the church to hear right from the beginning that the Scriptures expect believers to share their faith. We take class time to walk through a gospel tract that our senior pastor Kevin DeYoung and the staff developed a number of years ago. Then we give each new member time to practice sharing with a partner.

A third way we have sought to equip the congregation in evangelism is by making it our theme for a given year. We have identified four basic disciplines of the Christian faith (prayer, Bible study, missions, and personal evangelism) and we aim to focus particularly on one each year. For each theme, we offer specific training, have a corresponding sermon series, and provide other opportunities for practice or accountability. When we focused on evangelism a few years back, we also had the entire church read through Mark Dever's book *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism* and discussed it in our small groups.

Ben Falconer is associate pastor at University Reformed Church in East Lansing, Michigan.

Mike McKinley, Sterling Park Baptist Church, Sterling, Virginia

At Sterling Park Baptist Church we offer training to our people on how to share the gospel with the hurting and needy. Our mercy ministry and outreach to "at-risk" youth generate a lot of gospel opportunities, but we realized pretty quickly that most of our members weren't naturally comfortable interacting with and sharing Christ with people who seemed so different.

We try to train our people to listen and ask good questions so that they can identify how this person understands what has gone wrong in their life and what they think will fix it—that is, their version of the Fall and Redemption. Once our member understands how that person understands their "story," they can share the true story of Christ with them: their real problem is that they are enemies of God, but the good news is that God has made a marvelous salvation available through Christ.

We also have about 30 minutes set aside in our Sunday evening service to pray for evangelistic opportunities that have come up in the previous week, or that we hope will come up in the following week. Members share about conversations that they've had or plans they've made to share Christ with people in their lives, and then we ask God to give more opportunities to us and bear more fruit through us. This helps make evangelism seem like a normal part of the Christian life, rather than something done by the professionals. It also drives home the point that evangelism begins with prayer.

Mike McKinley is the senior pastor of Sterling Park Baptist Church in Sterling, Virginia, and is the author, most recently, of The Devil Made Me Do It (Good Book Company, 2013).

Josh Patterson, The Village Church, Flower Mound, Texas

At The Village Church, we try to equip our people to fulfill the Great Commission in three ways: we model it, preach and teach it, and celebrate it.

First, the church leaders model evangelism. We are not asking our people to be involved in something that we ourselves are not doing. The pastors and elders are sharing Christ with their neighbors, friends, and family members.

Second, the pastors preach it and teach it. The preaching of the Word stands as a constant reminder of God's call for his church to be his ambassadors in the world as he makes his appeal through us. Also, we teach evangelism in a variety of contexts. A primary equipping venue for us is our home group groups. Here we have a "multiplication guide" that walks a home group through six-month evangelism training course.

Finally, we celebrate it. What is celebrated is cultivated. And a culture of evangelism is stronger than any evangelistic program. We celebrate evangelism through stories of conversion and faithful members who bear witness to Christ. Four times a year we have "Celebration Weekends" where the bulk of the worship gathering centers around the proclamation of the gospel through baptism. At The Village, we ask those who were integral in the conversion of the individual being baptized to perform the baptism. In other words, our members baptize those they lead to Christ.

Our desire to celebrate, teach and preach, and model evangelism serves to reinforce this biblical call that for disciples of Jesus, evangelism should be normal.

Josh Patterson serves as Lead Pastor for Ministry Leadership at the Village Church in Flower Mound, Texas.

J.D. Payne, The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham, Alabama

At Brook Hills, we recognize that the best evangelism equipping strategy is multifaceted. This requires:

- regular biblical teaching that provides a Great Commission foundation;
- ongoing exhortation to share the gospel in Birmingham, across North America, and throughout the world;
- personal examples set by the leaders of the church;
- and regular, practical equipping in the area of personal evangelism.

While we spend a great deal of time in multiple venues talking about sharing the gospel, we know it is not enough to just talk about evangelism. All of our elders are required to develop and submit an annual personal disciple-making

strategy, and all of our members are encouraged to do the same. This past year, two of our pastors preached a several-week series on personal evangelism. At least twice a year, we offer a six-week personal evangelism training, with plans to offer it three times per year starting in 2014. I also do a weekly 5-10 minute vodcast called "Multiplication Matters," addressing issues related to evangelism.

J. D. Payne is Pastor of Church Multiplication at The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham, Alabama.



By Timothy Beougher

Must Every Christian Evangelize?

Church members sometimes wonder if they should just leave evangelism to the "professionals." After all, isn't evangelism a spiritual gift?

In this article I offer quick guide for pastors to know how to answer them.

ANSWERING TWO COMMON ARGUMENTS

Must every Christian evangelize? The scriptural answer is "yes." But I have encountered two main reasons for why some argue the answer is "no."

The Great Commission was only given to the apostles and therefore does not apply to us today.

First, some argue that the Great Commission was only given to the apostles and therefore does not apply to us today. While it is true that contextually the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) was given *to* the apostles, it was not *only* for the apostles. The command "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" certainly includes the command to make disciples. D.A. Carson notes that the Great Commission does not record Jesus saying to the apostles, ". . . teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you, except for this commandment to make disciples. Keep their grubby hands off that one, since it belongs only to you, my dear apostles."

What had Jesus commanded the apostles? Among many other things, he commanded them to preach the gospel to the whole creation. So this command of Jesus given to the apostles also applies to every believer today. In addition, should we try to limit Jesus' promise "I am with you always, to the end of the age," as only applying to the apostles, or does it apply to us today? Certainly it applies to us today!

2. Since only some people have the "gift of evangelism," not everyone is obligated to witness.

Second, some claim that since only some people have the "gift of evangelism," not everyone is obligated to witness. Space prohibits a full discussion on the topic of "the gift of evangelism," but a few observations are in order.

First, evangelism is not recorded in the common spiritual gifts listings in Scripture; instead, the office of evangelist is mentioned in Ephesians 4:11. Some (myself included) question whether "evangelism" should be seen as a distinct spiritual gift, such as giving, serving, and so on.

In addition, even if evangelism is a spiritual gift, it is also a command for all believers, just like giving, serving, and so on. Not having "the gift of evangelism" does not excuse a believer from his or her call to share Christ with others.

FOUR BIBLICAL REASONS WHY EVERY CHRISTIAN SHOULD EVANGELIZE

Does Scripture mandate that every believer should evangelize? I argue "yes," for the following four reasons.

1. The commands to witness are given to all followers of Christ

First, the commands to witness are given to all followers of Christ. Acts 1:8, for example, reads, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." This verse gives a command from the risen Lord to all his followers. As John Stott argues, "We can no more restrict the command to witness than we can restrict the promise of the Spirit."²

In writing to the Corinthian believers, Paul maintained,

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor. 5:18-20)

It's not only apostles that have the ministry of reconciliation and the role of Christ's ambassadors—all believers do! Other verses that reflect on this ministry of witness for all believers include Matthew 5:14-16, 1 Peter 3:15, Philippians 2:14-16, Colossians 4:5-6 and 1 Peter 2:9.3

2. The example of "ordinary believers" in the early church

Second, consider the example of "ordinary believers" in the early church. As we follow the storyline of the early church it is obvious that the apostles sought to evangelize and disciple others. But we see ordinary believers sharing the gospel as well.

Following the stoning of Stephen we read in Acts 8:1, "And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." And what did those ordinary believers do? Acts 8:4 tells us: "Now those who were scattered went about preaching (euangelizomenoi) the word." They went about sharing the gospel with others.

Noted historian Kenneth Scott Latourette makes this observation about the spread of the gospel:

The chief agents in the expansion of Christianity appear not to have been those who made it a profession or a major part of their occupation, but men and women who earned their livelihood in some purely secular manner and spoke of their faith to those whom they met in this natural fashion.⁴

3. The stewardship the gospel imposes on us.

Third, consider the stewardship the gospel imposes on us. Jesus reminds us, "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required" (Luke 12:48). We have been given no greater gift than the gospel, and we have no greater

stewardship than to share that message of good news with others. Paul expresses it well in 2 Corinthians 5:14: "for the love of Christ controls us."

4. The "work of ministry" in Ephesians 4.

Finally, consider what Paul calls "the work of ministry" in Ephesians 4. In this chapter Paul notes different offices in the church (apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers). He declares part of the reason God "gifts" the church with such leaders is so they will "equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12). And we should certainly include evangelism in "the work of ministry."

Ephesians 4 raises a challenge for pastors: Are we training our people to do evangelism? Are we setting an example for them in our own personal evangelism? Some people run from the idea of evangelism because they assume it means they must be obnoxious and pushy. There are many approaches to sharing the gospel. The only fixed method is the message: telling others about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

LEAD BY EXHORTATION AND ESPECIALLY EXAMPLE

Pastors, we can say to our people with confidence, "you are called to be a witness for Christ in both word and deed." As leaders, let us challenge other believers not only with our exhortations but also with our example. And let us take great confidence in the gospel, "for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

- 1 D.A. Carson, "Ongoing Imperative for World Mission," in *The Great Commission: Evangelicals and the History of World Missions*, edited by Martin I. Klauber and Scott M. Manetsch (Broadman & Holman, 2008), 179.
- 2 John R.W. Stott, Our Guilty Silence (Inter-Varsity Press, 1967), 58.
- 3 While the context of 1 Peter 3:15 is what can be called "passive evangelism" (responding to a question that an unbeliever asks), this command is clearly given to all believers "to be ready" to answer when asked.
- 4 Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of the Expansion of Christianity (Harper & Brothers, 1937), 1:116.
- 5 Among the many helpful resources for personal evangelism. I highly recommend: Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth*; Mark Dever, *The Gospel & Personal Evangelism*; and J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. In short, one can tell a lot about how a particular church understands scriptural sufficiency by looking at her form of government, the content and emphases of corporate worship, and the way in which the elders pastor the congregation.

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By Matt Merker

The Pastor and Evangelism: Finding an Audience

What do you need in order to do evangelism? The ingredients aren't many. You need the evangel, the good news of Jesus Christ. You need an evangelist, someone to herald that good news. And there's one more thing: you need an audience—at least one person who hasn't yet believed the gospel.

For many pastors, this last one is the hard part. In a week crammed with preaching preparation, meetings, counseling, administration, hospital visits, and late night calls for help, not to mention caring for his own soul and family, how is a preacher to find time for sharing the good news with unbelievers?

In one sense, this is a good and necessary tension. When he answers a call to the pastorate, a minister kind of moves from the front line of evangelism back to the supply camp. No longer just a soldier in hand-to-hand combat, his priority now is to act like a general: his work involves strategizing, equipping, and delegating (see Eph. 4:12). The hope is that by training evangelists, teaching on evangelism, and proclaiming the gospel each week to the gathered church, the pastor's evangelistic ministry multiplies rather than diminishes. This is good and right, and pastors shouldn't feel guilty for prioritizing their unique, God-given role to care for the sheep and train them up in ministry. A pastor isn't an evangelism hog but an evangelism enabler.

But this doesn't mean that his personal evangelistic ministry should vanish into thin air. Paul instructed the young pastor Timothy to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. 4:5). Even the greatest general is still a soldier at heart. A pastor must never become so comfortable teaching others how to evangelize that his own zeal for sharing the gospel evaporates from simmering too long on the back burner. Pastors who are zealous for evangelism tend to have congregations that are zealous, while pastors who seldom evangelize just might find that their congregations are similarly disinclined.

FIVE WAYS FOR A PASTOR TO CULTIVATE EVANGELISM

How then can a pastor cultivate opportunities for evangelism? Since I need as much growth in this area as the next guy, I contacted a bunch of pastor friends to ask how they prioritize evangelism in their busy schedules. Based on their responses, here are five suggestions:

1. Be Creative

First, be creative. To meet more unbelievers, you've got to be willing to think outside the box. One pastor in a small town told me that he and his elders often do their elder meetings in lawn chairs on his front yard. They're willing to sacrifice efficiency for the opportunity to chat with neighbors who might walk by—and they were thrilled when someone came over wanting to talk about Kabbalah. It was an instant opportunity for the gospel.

Others mentioned leveraging hobbies or errands as ways to maximize evangelistic opportunities. Rather than shooting hoops with Christian buddies, one might find a group of local businessmen to play with, opening the door for new friendships. A preacher from the Arabian Peninsula said that family time at the local pool is one of the best ways to make friendships with those in his community.

Creativity also comes in useful when trying to turn an otherwise mundane conversation with a clerk, neighbor, or restaurant server toward spiritual matters. If someone is chatting about the news, sports, or even the weather, there's usually an opening to present a relevant truth about God or our fallen world that can lead to deeper discussion. For this, of course, we need not only creative thinking but Spirit-wrought boldness and love to overcome fear of man and share Christ even when it's awkward to do so.

2. Be Consistent

Second, be consistent. Are you willing to forsake variety and eat at the same restaurant over and over again in order to get to know its staff? For years now, my own pastor has modeled this consistency for the sake of the gospel, so much so that we joke about him being the chaplain of the modest diner where every server knows his name and comes to him with spiritual questions.

Another friend told of the fruit that he enjoyed from visiting the same dry cleaner week after week and praying for opportunities to speak about Christ with the staff. Eventually one of the employees visited his church, joined a Bible study with some of the women there, and recently made a profession of faith in Jesus.

3. Be Conscious

Third, be conscious. We need to pray for awareness of the lost that surround us. A seminary student in England noted that when he's conscious of how many people—most likely unbelievers—are sitting near him on the train, he'll open his Bible and read it conspicuously. Conversations about God often ensue.

On this note, it's worth being conscious of the usefulness of the pastor's title. So many conversations begin with, "What do you do for a living?" Answering "I'm a Christian pastor" might feel like a liability, so instead use it as an asset. For example, I've tried to include some version of this follow-up phrase. I say something like, "I'm a pastor-in-training at a church. And so I love hearing from all sorts of people about their thoughts on God, spirituality, and who Jesus is."

And don't forget how you as a pastor can serve unbelievers in your community in "pastor-specific" ways, which almost always contain ripe evangelistic opportunities. A neighbor's relative passes away? Offer to preach the funeral.

4. Be Collaborative

Fourth, be collaborative. Find ways to participate in the evangelism your congregation is already doing in the workplace and the community. One pastor mentioned how some businesspeople in his church formed a "God investigation group" that met regularly during lunch at the office, and invited him to attend from time to time to build relationships. Your hospitality ministry is a great way to conspire with fellow believers for evangelism. Host a barbecue, dessert, or game night, and tell all the church members you invite to bring along a few non-Christian friends.

5. Be Committed

Fifth, be committed. No pastor should adopt all of the specific ideas suggested above—that's not the point. The point is that an under-shepherd's ministry should resemble that of the Great Shepherd, who came to "seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). The pastor's unique calling and schedule certainly make this challenging, though we should also admit that often our own laziness and selfishness keep us from evangelism more than tricky circumstances.

STUDY AND SAVOR THE GOSPEL

So, pastor, what would a commitment to evangelism look like in your weekly routine? For starters, let me encourage you to pray regularly for opportunities. Get accountability in this area. Be aware of your tendencies to shrink away.

But most of all, study and savor the gospel. "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all..." (2 Cor. 5:14). Treasuring the precious message of Christ and knowing its power in our own lives is the best antidote to evangelistic atrophy.

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By Mike McKinley

Five Reasons We Don't Evangelize

he New Testament compels God's people to take the gospel out into the world. Jesus gave his disciples a standing order to go and make disciples (Matt. 28:19). He told them that they would become fishers of men (Matt. 4:17). Peter advised the churches of Asia Minor to be ready with an answer when people asked them about their hope (1 Pet. 3:15).

But it seems like something has gone wrong. Many Christians do not live like fishers of men. Not many people ask us about the hope that we have in Christ, and when they do we're not really ready to give an answer. Evangelical churches talk a lot about evangelism, but according to popular surveys and anecdotal impressions most church members don't share their faith very often.

WHY DON'T WE EVANGELIZE?

I'd like to suggest five reasons that churches and church members don't share the gospel as part of their normal course of life. Other articles in this Journal suggest ways to remedy this situation, but for now let's stick with diagnosing the problem.

1. Churches Isolate Christians from unbelievers.

First, churches isolate Christians from unbelievers. Simply put, a lot of Christians don't know any unbelievers. Though our daily lives put us into regular contact with many people who don't know Jesus, it's easy to go through life without having close relationships with any of them.

Churches enable this isolation in a couple ways. Many churches run a host of weeknight programs and then define being a good church member in terms of attendance at those programs. As a result, the calendars of many Christians are filled up with church activities and there is little time to have neighbors and co-workers into their homes.

In addition, some congregations cultivate hostility toward the world. As our culture becomes more explicitly hostile to Christianity and biblical morality, it's easy to allow a bunker mentality to set in. When that happens, the outside world becomes a bogeyman and the way for God's people to be holy is to keep their distance from it. So Christians live lives

on parallel tracks from the world, with their own schools and businesses and sports leagues and scouting programs, but very few chances to build relationships with unbelievers.

2. We believe that evangelism is extraordinary.

A second reason Christians don't evangelize is that we believe it's extraordinary. We suspect that evangelism is only for those who have the gift of evangelism, or for pastors and other professional Christians. And so they simply don't feel like they are capable of sharing the gospel. From time to time people in my congregation will bring their friends or family to me so that I can tell them about Jesus, and I have to challenge them to step up and do it themselves! After all, in Acts 8:1-4 it's not the apostles but the "normal" Christians who take the message about Jesus out of Jerusalem and into the wider world.

3. Churches don't talk about the cost of following Jesus.

Third, our churches don't talk about the cost of following Jesus. Yet evangelism will be costly. There's really no way to tell people that you believe God took on human flesh by being birthed by a virgin and then, after dying on a cross, rose from the dead and soared back up to heaven without at least running the risk of losing their favor. But that's okay. The apostle Paul says that God intentionally saves us in a way that will seem foolish to the "wise" of our world (1 Cor. 1:18-29). Our message will not be well received by those who are perishing, but will be like a stench in their nostrils (2 Cor. 2:14-16).

If I understand Paul correctly, it's actually God's plan for you to suffer some as you share the gospel. If you don't agree, read through the book of Acts and just make a note of every time someone shares the gospel and something bad happens to them.

But many churches never confront their people with the reality that following Christ will cost them. We teach them that God is all about them and their sense of personal wellbeing. So when it comes time to pay the price and share the gospel, many of us simply aren't willing to lose our reputations.

4. We look for immediate results.

Fourth, we look for immediate results. Of course, it's easy to become discouraged about our evangelism. Maybe we read a book or listened to a sermon and went out and shared our faith, only to grow discouraged when nothing visibly happened. I think many Christians have simply given up on evangelism because they made an effort and didn't see any results.

But we simply aren't in a position to judge what God is doing in any given situation. It may be that in God's plan we are supposed to be the first in a long line of people who evangelize a person before they come to Christ. I can think of plenty of examples of evangelistic conversations and efforts that seemed like a waste at the time. It was not until much later that I found out that the person had come to Christ.

The gospel is the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16), and the word of God is alive and powerful (Heb. 4:12-13). We must cultivate confidence that the Lord who causes the growth will accomplish his redemption. He will save souls. He often does not do it according to our timetables, and he may not choose the people we would choose. But he will use us if we are faithful.

5. We aren't clear on the message.

A final reason we don't evangelize is that we aren't clear on the message. When someone asks to join our church, one of the things that I ask is for them to briefly summarize the gospel message (think 60 seconds). And I am consistently surprised by how many Christians find it difficult to do that. It's not that they don't believe the gospel—they do.

It's not that they are ignorant—many of them know their Bibles very well. And while they might be nervous or surprised by the question, it's still a disturbing trend. There's no way to share the gospel if you aren't prepared to share the gospel.

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By Kevin McKay

Overcoming Objections to Evangelism

Our churches love to see conversions and hear the testimonies. But why don't they want to share the gospel?

OBJECTIONS OVERCOME

Here are three common objections to evangelize I've heard people offer, and some guidance for helping our people overcome them.

1. I don't know what to say.

Objection 1: "I don't know what to say." People object because they don't know the gospel well enough to share it. No one in your church may actually verbalize this objection, but they may feel it. They do their best by inviting friends to church and praying for them.

What's the solution? We can instill confidence in our members by making sure that they understand it, and teaching them to explain it.

In the church that I pastor, we ask every person who wants to join the church to explain the gospel. This helps to ensure a regenerate membership, but is also how we begin training our members for evangelism. Some members struggle through explaining the gospel, and that struggle prompts them to listen more closely on Sunday mornings, or to read a book like *What Is The Gospel?* by Greg Gilbert.

Others share the gospel clearly, and I simply respond to their explanation with something like: "Praise God. You have a good understanding of the gospel. I'd encourage you to look and pray for more opportunities to share it with others."

Another way that we can meet this objection is to use every sermon to share the gospel with non-Christians, and this catechizes our congregation in the gospel. I want to preach gospel truths throughout the message, but I also want them to hear the gospel packaged in a way that can easily be reproduced in a minute or two.

If there's anything that Christians should be able to explain, it's the gospel. If we do not clearly preach the gospel on Sunday, then how can we expect our people to preach it during the week?

2. I don't want to.

Objection 2 is a quiet "I don't want to." This is another one that is often felt than verbalized. In our church, we try to address this in the preaching, discipling relationships, and prayer.

- We preach the realities of heaven and hell along with the temporary nature of this world. Against that backdrop, truths like forgiveness become more treasured and celebrated.
- We ask each other about how we are obeying God's command to share the good news of Jesus Christ.
- · And finally we pray regularly that the Spirit would create a culture of evangelism in our church.

In these ways, we're exhorting one another and asking the Spirit to fix our minds and hearts on eternity, and to see people from this perspective.

3. I don't know what to do.

Objection 3 is an honest "I don't know what to do." Some members know the gospel well and want to share it. Yet they're so given to thinking of a program or system that will make evangelism happen that they find themselves frustrated by their lack of evangelism. They don't evangelize because they don't have the time to create a new event. Or in churches like ours, they can't find the programs that will do it for them.

But the church body is God's program for evangelism. Jesus said that people would know that we are His disciples by the way that we love one another (John 13:34-35).

So we tell our members to reach out to their unbelieving friends by living as faithful church members who love one another in Christ, and then inviting those friends to be a part of their lives. The Spirit uses this to make the gospel heard.

A friend who had served as a missionary in central Asia among Muslims told me that his team had discovered **the silver bullet** in converting Muslims: prolonged exposure to the Bible and prolonged exposure to Christians. That principle works everywhere, because God works through his Word and his people.

By his grace we have seen a young man raised as an atheist begin to open up to Christianity because of the marriages he saw in the church, and later come to faith. We've seen a young man raised in a Christian home realize that he was not a Christian because he saw members of our church committed to living holy lives together in a way that he wasn't. As Francis Schaeffer once said, Christianity is an individual matter but it's not individualistic. By inviting people to witness the corporate life of the church, non-Christians get a better picture of the gospel itself.

The power of the corporate witness of the church doesn't completely replace the personal aspect of evangelism. If anything, it serves to overcome the specific hurdle of not knowing how to begin the conversation. Evangelistic conversations often spring from the attractive apologetic of the Christian life. When our lives embody sound doctrine, they help make sense of what's good and right in the world the same way that the doctrine of sin makes sense of everything that is wrong with the world.

It's not just new Christians who want to share their faith. It's Christians growing in their knowledge and love for the gospel together who want to be more than just spectators—and so they speak.

1 Francis Schaeffer, The God Who Is There (InterVarsity Press, 1998), 176.

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By Geoff Chang

Evangelism Tool Review: Two Ways to Live

very Christian should know the gospel and be able to present it to others (1 Pet. 3:15). Now, our circumstances, personalities, and gifts will vary hugely. Nonetheless, if you are a follower of Jesus, you should know the central message of Christianity, and be able to articulate it faithfully and clearly. *Two Ways to Live* by Matthias Media is an excellent resource to help you do just that.

PRESENTATION

Two Ways to Live summarizes the message of Christianity in six steps, following the logic and storyline of the Bible.

- 1. God, the loving ruler and creator. God made the world and made mankind to rule under him.
- 2. Humanity in rebellion. This world is not the way it should be because all people have rebelled against God.
- **3.** God won't let people keep on rebelling forever. God is good and will call all people to account. The punishment for our rebellion is death and judgment.
- **4. Jesus, the Man who dies for rebels.** Because of his love, God sent his Son Jesus Christ to offer his life on the cross, taking our punishment and bringing us forgiveness.
- **5.** *Jesus, the risen ruler.* God accepted Jesus' death as full payment for our sins, and raised him from the dead to prove it. Jesus now reigns and will one day return to judge the world.
- **6.** *The two ways to live.* We can continue living our way, rejecting God's rule and running life our way, or we can live in God's new way, submitting to Christ and relying on his death and resurrection.

First, this is an excellent gospel presentation. Most importantly, it is faithful to Scripture. This is the good news of Jesus Christ, as foretold by the Old Testament and proclaimed by the New.

Second, it's easy to remember. It is two points longer than the "God, Man, Christ, Response" outline that I'm most familiar with. But the additional points are simply an expansion on Man (points 2 and 3) and Christ (points 4 and 5). In a culture resistant to the idea of sin and judgment, it's good to give a little more time to the reality and consequence of our rebellion. And given how easily we can treat the resurrection as an afterthought, it's helpful to have a separate discussion of its significance, both in our salvation and in the coming judgment.

Third, as people are increasingly illiterate when it comes to the Bible, *Two Ways to Live* presents the gospel in language and ideas that are understandable. By talking about God as king, sin as rebellion, judgment as being cut off from God's goodness and punished by God, repentance and faith as submitting and relying, *Two Ways to Live* presents the gospel without using too many Christian-y terms, but without watering it down either.

RELATED RESOURCES

So the content of TWTL is faithful and useful. Even more useful, there are three categories of resources that go with it:

- 1. Training Christians to share the gospel. Two Ways to Live: Know and Share the Gospel is a seven-week course (with a Leader's Manual, Workbooks, and DVDs) designed to train Christians in sharing the gospel. What I appreciated about it is that it doesn't just train students to give rote presentations, but to use it as a framework for presenting the gospel thoughtfully in various situations.
- **2.** Evangelistic resources to give away. Two Ways to Live booklets come in many varieties: for adults, for children, in digital formats (CD-ROM, iPhone app, web), and in various translations (Chinese, French, Japanese, Spanish). There is also a Two Ways to Live booklet in Bible study format that allows a seeker to open a Bible and walk through the presentation interactively. All these are excellent.
- **3. Longer evangelistic Bible studies.** The Essential Jesus presents the life of Jesus through the Gospel of Luke, and then explains it using *Two Ways to Live*. This would be great to give to someone who has never read the Bible before. There is also a longer children's book, *Gumtree Gully* by Kel Richards, which presents *Two Ways to Live* as a children's parable. *Two Ways to Live* is also simple enough so that any church could easily develop a 6-week study through it in order to train members in evangelism. (See, for example, Capitol Hill Baptist Church's *Two Ways to Live Core Seminar.*)

In other words, there is no shortage of ways you can use this in your discipleship and your evangelism.

BOTTOM LINE

Bottom line? Use *Two Ways to Live*! We want to be prepared to give the reason for the hope that we have to anyone who asks. *Two Ways To Live* is a great place to start.

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By Erik Raymond

Evangelism Tool Review: New World Gospel Presentation

nterVarsity's "New World Gospel Presentation" is an evangelism outline "designed to lead others to make a decision for Jesus Christ and join his mission to heal the world." As of today there are training materials on their website, Vimeo and YouTube. Additionally, they have developed a free app (iOS and Android) to help illustrate the main points of the presentation during a gospel conversation.

ENGAGING THE "FOUR WORLDS"

The presentation is built on the premise that most people ache for a better world. The outline works through the paradigm of a world, using four worlds to communicate the biblical story. These four worlds are the four points for the conversation. Like many other presentations, they aim to frame redemptive history in their main points:

- World 1: The world and all that's in it was designed for good.
- World 2: We—and the world—were damaged by evil.
- World 3: Jesus came to restore the world and everything in it to what God intended.
- World 4: Jesus invites us to join him and his community to heal the world.

InterVarsity ambitiously attempts to pull off the evangelistic version of a hat-trick with this presentation. They aim to listen to people's stories (especially their scars and wounds), frame them within the context of the Bible's story, and clearly communicate how Jesus answers their aches and pains. All of this they do while aiming to be faithful, winsome, compelling, clear, and understandable. Do they pull it off?

In communicating the first two worlds they do a fairly good job showing the divine design for creation and the problem we brought through human rebellion. "This better world really did exist," they say, "and was designed for flourishing and intimacy with God. However, we rejected God, put ourselves in the place of God and as a result damaged the world."

Yet here we see the good and the bad of contextualization. The good is seen in how they unpack words like idolatry with the helpful phrase "putting ourselves in the place of God." The bad is in what they do not say. After all, why is it a problem that we put ourselves in God's place? Is it bad simply because it wrecks our world or because it breaks his law, lies about his glory, and earns his just wrath? In an attempt to simplify the presentation many crucial questions go unanswered.

In world three we learn, that

Instead of leaving us in our brokenness God sends Jesus to be like us, to die on the cross and to rise from the dead. In this Jesus identifies with us, owns our judgment we deserve for damaging the world, and releases his power to restore the world for better.

Again, all of these statements are true but they are dangerously reductionistic. How does Jesus become like us? After all, we are the ones who messed everything up (see world 2). Did he contribute to this? Why did he have to die on the cross? How does this intersect with how I have "damaged" the world?

The fourth world is the invitation to join Jesus and his community in healing the world. In order to do this we must do three things:

- 1. Identify with Jesus; believe that his death and resurrection broke the corruption in the world and in our hearts.
- 2. Own our responsibility for the damage and the scarring in this world.
- 3. Overcome by choosing to follow Jesus. Jesus does not leave us alone; he gives us himself, the Holy Spirit, and his people to go together and follow people.

These things are not untrue but they are, in my view, unclear. Following Jesus is reduced to becoming a conduit of healing. If we have not explained who God is, what sin is, and how the reconciliation is exclusively achieved through the cross of Christ, then we are not being totally forthright. At some point Christians have to agree that the gospel has irreducible components. These categories need to be developed and explained; they cannot be glossed over and certainly cannot be replaced with vague phrases like becoming "a conduit of healing."

Another point that I found troubling in reviewing the material was the sheer lack of Bible. The videos I reviewed were curiously devoid of any mention of Scripture, even in passing. Yet the Bible should feature prominently in our evangelism. After all, it is the word of Christ that brings faith (Rom. 10:17).

BOTTOM LINE

What's my bottom line?

I appreciate and even applaud the four worlds, the drawings, and the goal of listening to people's stories in order to show how they fit within the big picture of God's story. However, in setting out to do this, we must exercise great care about what we say, not just how we say it.

While it's set in the Bible's storyline, the New World Gospel Presentation is so user-friendly that it is simply not Christian enough. I would imagine that Roman Catholics and even Mormons could use this material within their doctrinal framework without violating their convictions. While helpful in some points, the New World Gospel Presentation simply lacks the main ingredients of the gospel. I would not recommend this program for use in your church.

1(back to top) http://evangelism.intervarsity.org/how/gospel-outline/new-world-gospel-presentation; accessed 8/5/13.

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By Mike McKinley

Evangelism Tool Review: The Story

he Story is a gospel presentation tool designed by SpreadTruth.com. It is a popular tool for sharing the gospel; half a million people have viewed the gospel presentation online and The Story ESV Bible was published by Crossway in 2013. The Story can be accessed online (at http://www.viewthestory.com) through an app or via traditional printed tracts.

But is it any good? Well, leave it to us here at 9Marks to criticize the way other people share the gospel. I'll discuss a few strengths and a few eyebrow-raising issues, then give a bottom line.

STRENGTHS

- 1. Biblical theology. The Story begins at creation and works its way through to the consummation of all things. This is a very good thing. The gospel is a message that comes to us with a context. The Story does a great job with that context.
- **2. Penal substitution.** The Story gets the heart of the gospel right: on the cross Jesus bore our guilt and the wrath that our sin deserved. A lot of gospel presentations develop "alligator arms" at this point, so it's nice to see that clearly presented.

EYEBROW-RAISERS

- 1. Visuals. This is the least important quibble, but the pages of the online version of The Story switch back and forth between visual styles in a way that is distracting. Sometimes the colors and bright and the font is crisp, at other points it feels gothic and grim in a way that doesn't aesthetically connect with what came before it. Just a small peeve, but it feels like a missed opportunity to create something that is visually arresting.
- **2. Soft-pedaling condemnation.** The way The Story talks about the consequences of sin is less than the full truth. The ultimate consequence of sin, it says, is "eternal separation from a loving God, in terrible misery and unhappiness." And it refers to hell as a "painful separation." That's just not good enough. The Bible teaches that sinners aren't merely separated from God; they are under his wrath. I fear that by soft-pedaling condemnation, The Story's presentation of the gospel sells God's holiness short.

BOTTOM LINE

While I'm grateful that The Story gets the heart of the gospel right and frames the gospel in the biblical narrative, I won't be switching over to use it. Instead, I'd recommend <u>Jesus. Who, Why... So What?</u> or <u>Two Ways to Live</u>. Both of those resources do a better job communicating the gospel with sharp edges intact.

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By Greg Gilbert

Evangelism Course Comparison Guide

Simply Christianity would be a good introduction for people who are completely unfamiliar with Christianity. You would have to be careful, though, to use biblical words like "faith," since the course seems deliberately to avoid them sometimes in order to speak the language of the student. The most useful aspect of this course is its session on why the Bible is reliable, along with the supplementary information for that session, though Alpha includes the same information as well.

Alpha is a long course and would probably be better for discipling one who is already a Christian. A decision is asked for by the end of the third of fifteen sessions, even though neither faith nor repentance is discussed until the fourth. My concern is that the course seems to want to ease people into being a Christian almost before they know what's happened. Repentance and faith are treated in passing under the heading "How can I be sure of my Faith," which seems like a strange place to handle those. Even then, repentance gets one sentence, and faith gets about a page. Most of the other courses are much better at explaining clearly and up-front that you must repent and believe to be a Christian. My other concern is that by session 6, the course assumes that all the participants are Christians. By that time, the goal is to lead students to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to speak in tongues at a weekend retreat. Even bearing with what is certainly debatable theology in those sessions, it seems a little presumptuous to so solidly assume conversion after only six weeks of an introductory course.

Coming Alive will not be very useful to anyone. It is too long at ten sessions to be an evangelistic course, and the concepts are utterly confusing. Substitutionary atonement is handled, but only as one aspect of the cross along with moral example and others. The course would be immediately confusing to anyone not already familiar with Christianity. The first session asks the student to engage in a little biblical theology to kick things off. Again, very little of the course is actually evangelistic; 70% of it assumes the person is already saved. That means that if the person isn't converted after three weeks, the rest of the course will be fairly irrelevant.

I was at first excited as I began reading *Discovering Christianity*. The first couple of sessions were excellent, dealing with Christ's claims to be God and with His resurrection. The idea was to establish Christ's authority in the minds of the students. As the course came to discuss the heart of the gospel, though, it dissolved. The authors were reluctant to use the words "sin" or "repentance." I understand the desire to use words that are understandable, but saying that we "have not lived moral lives" and that we "are not good people compared with Jesus" does not begin to explain the concept of sin. Much better is to use the word like so many generations of Christians before us have, and then explain

it. The course seems to deliberately avoid any discussion of Reformed theology, even going so far as to omit reference to uncomfortable verses in John's gospel. The discussion of atonement is confused, I think, and spends too much time on peripheral questions. For example, it spends a huge chunk of the time explaining why Jesus's death was loving—because it saves us—but gives almost nothing to explaining exactly how that was.

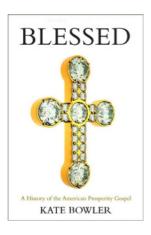
Christianity Explained is over-all the best of the courses I have seen. It is a good length, six sessions, each of which carefully explains one aspect of the gospel. It doesn't rush a decision, but the student's understanding of the gospel will become progressively clearer with each session. The core doctrines of the gospel are discussed in detail. This course is by far the best at describing that salvation is by grace, not works. A full session is given to the topic, and it is masterfully done. That is usually the session where the penny drops and students begin to really understand the gospel. My only concern with the course is that sin is not sufficiently dealt with. Of course it is mentioned, but only as a caveat to the cross. In using this course, I have had to explain again later that sin was the reason Christ had to die. I would recommend using this course, but with a session about sin added before the one on the crucifixion. You might profitably insert the session on sin from Christianity Explored.

Christianity Explored is impressive-looking program that is plainly an answer to the Alpha course. It is a seven-week course with an accompanying DVD. The course works through the Gospel of Mark and is designed to take place over a meal. The teaching component can be either a live talk or the DVD presentation, and leads to discussion afterward. Christianity Explored is faithful to Scripture, presents the gospel clearly, and calls non-Christians to a life of repentance and faith. This is an excellent resource.

One further note—Christianity Explained is great in that it can very effectively be used in one-on-one relationships. There is no retreat to be planned, no monologue to be given. The truths of the gospel can be discussed easily sitting over a table at a coffee shop.

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BOOK REVIEW:

Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel

Reviewed by Jonathan Baer

Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. 337 pages. \$34.95

lip to just about any TV channel with religious programming and you are likely to encounter the prosperity gospel. From Joel Osteen's perma-smile to T. D. Jakes's mopped brow, from Jan Crouch's bouffant cotton-candy hairdo to Benny Hinn's Nehru jackets, America's electronic preachers tell us there is a God of inexhaustible abundance ready to bless us with our own personal miracle. Whether our troubles are financial, physical, or emotional, God will change our fortunes if we will just pray in faith for the desired outcome, proclaim it ours, and then act on the certainty of its arrival in our lives.

Of course, it helps to sow seeds if you want to reap a harvest, so a gift given to the ministry is a tangible sign of our faith that God will do as we say. And the bigger the gift, the larger the faith. Lest we doubt this simple spiritual formula, we need only look at the extravagant lifestyles with which the good Lord has blessed prosperity preachers. It's all so straightforward and appealing, as American as mama's apple pie and a 30-year mortgage. Evidently, we can't get enough of the stuff.

THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

In a thoughtful and engaging work, Kate Bowler unravels the origins and development of the prosperity gospel into a multi-billion dollar industry. Although there are several varieties of prosperity gospels with subtly different animating convictions and practices, Bowler sensibly lumps them together as birds of a feather, a range of species in the same genus. "Word of Faith," "Positive Confession," "Health and Wealth," and so forth, they all share a bedrock conviction that God chooses to bless his children with material prosperity in body, mind, and brokerage account, awaiting only our willingness to get on board.

Origins: Pentecostal Healing and New Thought Mind Power

Bowler locates the origins of the prosperity gospel in turn-of-the-century Pentecostal healing and New Thought mind power. Nurtured in the radical Holiness movement of the late nineteenth century, divine healers insisted that Christ's atonement secured health for our bodies along with salvation for our souls. Just as prayer in faith would bring forgiveness of sins, prayer would release Christ's healing power for aching backs, cancers, and tuberculosis, all of which arose from sin, personal or collective. The key was to believe. Pray and hold onto it, believe that it is yours, and act out the healing even if "lying symptoms" persist.

Meanwhile, the monistic New Thought movement viewed divinity as an impersonal power that people could access through right thinking. The key to a healthy body and a successful life was to eliminate harmful negative thoughts and use mantras and other techniques to reinforce positivity.

Both Pentecostal healing and New Thought mind power relied on a perfectionist anthropology. Human beings are troubled by sins and failings, but through our choice to apply the right knowledge and techniques we can be empowered and fulfilled, perhaps even releasing divine attributes within ourselves.

Early Twentieth Century Through the Bakkers

In the first half of the twentieth century, E.W. Kenyon united Holiness-Pentecostal and New Thought themes by combining divine healing and the power of the mind to shape reality into an incipient prosperity gospel. Along with Kenyon, Pentecostal healing revivalist John G. Lake added the notion that God intends us to be "god-men" through our faith, while F.F. Bosworth and others provided a bridge to the healing revivals of the late 1940s and 1950s, which rejuvenated the audacious supernaturalism of early Pentecostalism.

Mid-century positive thinkers like Norman Vincent Peale also united New Thought with at least a veneer of Christianity. His Power of Positive Thinking (1952) sold millions of copies to those eager for peace of mind and bountiful harvests. Thereafter, the Charismatic movement of the 1960s and following brought Pentecostal sensibilities to many mainline and evangelical churches, priming believers for the gifts of the Spirit and the tangible presence and power of God.

Planted in this fertile soil, the prosperity gospel took root in the 1950s and 1960s, then grew apace in the following two decades. Key figures included Kenneth Hagin, Oral Roberts, and Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker. Hagin taught that God established basic spiritual laws such that our words spoken in faith shape the reality of our lives. His Rhema Bible Institute in Tulsa has been a major launching pad for prosperity ministers, while Roberts's eponymous university combined with his popular television ministry to lend support to (and draw support from) the movement. For a time, the Bakkers were prosperity superstars, until Jim's extramarital activities and misappropriation of ministry funds proved his downfall. Humbled by a prison sentence, Jim Bakker not only repented of his sins but rejected the prosperity gospel, seemingly one of the few figures to turn away from the lucrative trade.

From "Hard" to "Soft" Prosperity Preaching

Bowler identifies the 1970s and 1980s as a period dominated by "hard prosperity" preaching involving the straightforward proposition that a prayer for blessing offered in faith will automatically bring that blessing, usually health or wealth. By the 1990s, prosperity preachers broadened their appeal by offering a "soft prosperity" infused with therapeutic themes of emotional healing, fitness and weight loss, improved self-esteem and capacity for work, and more. Health and wealth were still front and center, but they shared the stage with inner peace, shapely bodies, and a positive self-image.

One prominent example of this trend is Joyce Meyer, whose personal account of triumph over childhood abuse and marital failure shapes her ministry to audiences composed mainly of middle-aged women whose pain and hardship includes struggling with weight loss, relational challenges, and anomie.

CRITICALLY ENGAGING THE BOOK AND THE MOVEMENT

The prosperity gospel spreads through relational networks built around telegenic stars, with electronic media, schools, conferences, and megachurches like Osteen's Lakewood Church in Houston and Creflo Dollar's World Changers Ministries outside Atlanta as crucial nodes of influence. Bowler visited several dozen of the 115 megachurches that she identifies as prosperity-centered, and she engaged in sustained ethnographic participant-observation of a small prosperity church in Durham, North Carolina. Bowler conducted interviews, though she acknowledges that it is hard to get people to speak openly about their continued struggles with health or finances. To speak a negative word is to undercut the coming blessing, so people sugar-coat their experiences with spiritual bromides.

What Happens When It Doesn't Work?

In an environment of relentless claims of miracles and changed lives, outsized expectations of endless and appropriable divine abundance create palpable excitement, but one suspects there is a deep well of sadness, fear, and personal anxieties. Unseen and unheard, forcibly silenced by a theology that insists the only plausible reason for their inability to grasp money, power, and health is their own failure to hold onto true faith, these folks carry on in the hope of better results or slink away disillusioned.

Bowler's work would have been strengthened by giving a microphone to some of these voices. If the power is in your hands and the results don't materialize, what then? Who do you have to blame but yourself? What does that do to one's faith in God?

Quintessentially American Movement

Bowler nods toward the enormously influential overseas spread of the prosperity gospel, but her focus remains on the American context. This quintessentially American "gospel" has ridden several major cultural currents: incorrigible optimism, individualism, the consumer culture of advanced capitalism, our coddled self-esteem, and an undying conviction in the world-changing power of one's personal will.

How many of us grew up hearing that we can be anything we want to be, as though will-power were the only agency needed to shape our lives and the world to our liking? The prosperity gospel offers a divine wingman to smooth the ride.

Muted Critical Voice

Although clearly not a prosperity adherent, Bowler's fair-mindedness keeps her critical voice muted. It is easy to take shots at the gauche vulgarities of prosperity preaching but harder to take the movement seriously. Bowler succeeds in this important task, though one might wish for a more robust analysis of its failings.

Classic Heresy

From a Christian standpoint, the prosperity gospel is a classic heresy based on the primordial sin: you will be as gods. It takes several truths—the goodness of God, divine blessings, the importance of human choices, and more—and distorts them out of all proportion, rendering a grotesque program of personal advancement in lieu of Christ's gospel. In the name of prosperity, it robs the gospel of its true riches; in the name of power, it offers spiritual impotence.

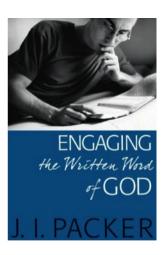
RESPONSE? PREACH CHRIST AND PREACH HEAVEN

Yet it is impossible to ignore the prosperity gospel's pervasive influence, including in the lives of the people in our pews. In the face of deceptive and tempting prosperity thinking, posing in both Christian and secular garb, let us preach Christ crucified, the hard but nourishing truths of a loving God in the midst of a suffering world.

And let us proclaim the hope of heaven. Indeed, God will perfect us in Christ, but this side of glory we struggle with sin, disappointments, broken dreams, and damaged bodies. "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness'" (2 Cor. 12:9; NIV).

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BOOK REVIEW:

Engaging the Written Word of God

Reviewed by Noah Braymen

J.I. Packer, Engaging the Written Word of God. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012. 331 pages. \$16.95

Ingaging the Written Word of God is a collection of J. I. Packer's essays outlining his distinctly evangelical answers to questions about the Scriptures. This collection has three parts: God's Inerrant Word (chs. 1-9), Interpreting the Word (chs. 10-16), and Preaching the Word (chs. 17-23).

Packer has witnessed the poisonous fruit that biblical relativism has borne. He saw the pioneer "Liberal Evangelicals" in the 1940's, and then in the 1970's witnessed their children and grandchildren reject core evangelical tenets (123-4). He asks his readers to remember that he is "a burned child who dreads the fire" since he saw the damage the sub-orthodox view of Scripture did in England (153). He also writes that his aim is to make disciples of Christ, not himself: "nobody is going to become a Packerite if I can help it" (204).

HOLY SCRIPTURE IS GOD PREACHING

Packer describes the Bible as God preaching by opening his mind and heart to readers (81, cf. 298, 310). Throughout each essay Packer calls the reader to a confidence that the Scriptures are the necessary, inerrant, infallible, inspired, and authoritative Word of God. This informs how he describes the divine character of the Bible: Scripture has God for its source, God for its theme, and God as its user (155). This informs how Packer thinks about every area of life:

I listen to Scripture to hear God preaching and instructing me in matters theological and practical, matters of belief and matters of behaviour, matters of doctrine, matters of doxology, matters of devotion, matters of orthodoxy (right belief), and matters of orthopraxy (right living). (162)

Even as God is unchangeable, so is the Word of God. Packer argues that the Word relativizes men rather than vice versa, "for God's Word is the absolute and we sinners are more or less off-centre in relation to it. So it must be allowed to come

into our minds and hearts to set us straight" (163). He repeatedly proposes that we engage with the Scriptures using the analogy of faith/Scripture (128, 214, 240, 257, 286) and grammatical-historical exegesis (147, 158, 163, 303, 311) with sensitivity to genre (17, 143, 166-7, 192-3, 214, 305), the literary or natural sense (58, 143-4, 303), and harmonizing the original divine and human authorial intent (143, 303-4). These are the proper bounds of engagement with the written Word of God.

Packer's convictions concerning Scripture control how he believes Christian preachers ought to approach their task: "The Bible text is the real preacher, and the role of the man in the pulpit or the counselling conversation is simply to let the passages say their piece through him" (244). This is one of the reasons he defends and unashamedly advocates expositional preaching.

What is the main point of God's preaching in the Bible? Jesus Christ. Again, this informs how Packer describes the task of preaching:

[The preacher] will never let his exposition of anything in Scripture get detached from, and so appear as unrelated to, Calvary's cross and the redemption that was wrought there; and in this way he will sustain a Christ-centered, cross-oriented preaching ministry year in and year out, with evangelistic as well as a pastoral thrust. (238)

Packer calls his readers to follow the "old paths" of the Reformation: "The Reformation itself grew out of practical preaching with Christ at the centre" (263). This is one of the reasons he argues that preaching without application is not preaching at all. Positively, "As preaching is God-centred in its viewpoint and Christ-centred in its substance, so it is lifecentred in its focus and life-changing in its thrust." (239)

Applicatory preaching exposes sin and proclaims God's remedy in the gospel. Packer quotes David Clarkson's sermon titled *Public Worship to be Preferred before Private* to this end: "It is true indeed, the Lord has not confined himself to work these wonderful things only in public; yet the public ministry is the only ordinary means whereby he works them" (242). The local church is central to Packer's understanding of how a believer engages with the Word of God (4, 94, 96, 149, 172, 192, 229, 245-6, 262, 274, etc.). This is why application and persuasion is what defines preaching: "[Preaching] is teaching *plus* application...it is a kind of speaking aimed at both mind and heart, and seeking unashamedly to change the way people think and live. So it is always an attempt at persuasion" (247, cf. 264, 269, 289, 291, 294-5, 300, 311-4). Thus, preachers are God's mouthpieces (251, 268, 310).

As should be evident from this brief survey, Packer is one of the best contemporary exponents of a robust, faithful, classically evangelical doctrine of Scripture. And his explanation of preaching as applicatory exposition is not only pastorally on-point, but it flows directly from his convictions about the nature and role of Scripture.

THREE MINOR CRITIQUES

With this in mind, my three critiques are very minor. The first and third relate to format; the second is substantive.

First, because this is a collection of essays, it does not have a sustained flow of thought throughout, and it lacks cohesion from chapter to chapter (with the exception of chapters 11-14). It also makes the book fairly repetitive. A few examples: the repeated use of Phillips Brooks' definition of preaching (243, 262, 291, 311), quoting the Anglican Article 20 repeatedly to buttress the same or similar points (128, 144-5, 208, 244, 267), and often clarifying that he does not define preaching institutionally and sociologically but theologically and functionally (237, 261, 288). Some sections of chapter 20 repeat portions of chapter 18, almost verbatim.

Second, I appreciate his analogy that Scripture is incarnational (122, 158-9, 205), but I am hesitant to apply this category to preachers as he does (243, 262, 291). His point that a preacher ought to seek to embody, apply, internalize, and be affected by the text he is expositing is good and right. Further, preachers do serve as the mouthpieces of God and as

models for the congregation. But one should be careful about using the category of incarnation. Christ's incarnation is unique. Packer clearly explains throughout the book that men are fallible and errant (66, 89, 95, 154). He is not saying preachers are inerrant or infallible, so it seems wise to limit the incarnation analogy to the Scriptures.

Third, many of the book's insights would be more accessible if it had a topical and scriptural index.

A HELPFUL COLLECTION, THOUGH NOT FOR BEGINNERS

Engaging with the Written Word of God is a helpful collection. I appreciate how clearly Packer exposes liberal engagement with the Bible based on unreliable "private hunches" (53), "foggy uncertainty" (99), and "guesses" (78, 219), and how he regularly brings historical perspective to bear (ch. 1, 51-53, 58-62, 73-4, 86-7,133, ch. 19). I also appreciate his admonitions about "pulpiteering" and "sermonizing" (238, 242, 262, 290), and to not impose extra-biblical, philosophical "strait-jackets" on the text (51, 158).

This book would not be my first recommendation to someone who is wrestling with the doctrine of the Word of God—although Packer's own 'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God is an accessible introduction to Scripture's inspiration, authority, and inerrancy. The present volume is probably most accessible to elders, more serious Bible students, and seminarians.

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