

Leadership Principles & the Pastoral Epistles – 2015
WEEK 9: DO THE WORK OF AN EVANGELIST

Interpretive comments on 2 Tim. 4:5

As one of the four final exhortations Paul gives to Timothy, he says: “Do the work of an evangelist.”

The first three exhortations may be a concise explanation of how to fulfill the fourth: “Fulfill your ministry” by being sober (vs. being drawn into doctrinal tangents), enduring suffering (vs. compromising sound doctrine), and by doing the work of an evangelist (vs. defending and expounding the Word only among Christians).

It is possible that evangelism is the spiritual gift to which Paul refers in 1 Tim. 4:14 and 2 Tim. 1:6. More likely, it is a reminder (see above) that personal evangelism is a crucially important element of Christian leadership. Why is this reminder so important and appropriate to us?

Leaders are often tempted to neglect personal evangelism because of their other pastoral responsibilities. This is especially easy to do during “in season” times. We can rely so much on “bridges” and “come and see” events that we neglect this ministry ourselves and do not adequately emphasize that every Christian should have an evangelistic lifestyle (e.g., STUDENT MINISTRY LEADERS WHEN THEY TRANSITION TO ADULT MINISTRY).

Staying involved in personal evangelism is crucial for your own spiritual vitality and love for lost people. Nothing takes the place of our own personal initiative into the lives of lost people. This will help us immensely to resist the ever-present tendency to become an ingrown church (especially during “out of season” times), and to cultivate and sustain a culture/ethos of outreach.

How can we motivate our people to embrace a lifestyle of evangelism? Before we look at a passage that gives specific practical answers to this question, let’s think about a more foundational answer . . .

The context that motivates evangelism

What comes into your mind concerning motivating others to embrace an evangelistic lifestyle? Reminding them to witness and/or invite people to meetings? Scheduling outreach events? Promoting evangelistic training? Having special evangelistic campaigns? These things definitely have their place, but they are not the main way. In fact, when we emphasize them rigidly in the absence of the main way, we become *managerial* leaders and our leadership will therefore be legalistic and/or ineffective. On the other hand, many of us, sensing that the above leadership style is legalistic, become *transactional* leaders by accepting (or even making) excuses for members who do not share Christ with lost people. *Transformational* leadership is very different . . .

Many of the New Testament letters to churches provide a pattern that suggests a healthy context that motivates Christians to evangelize. The three main sections of these letters (in order) are: exposition of the provisions of God’s grace (e.g., Col. 1,2), exhortations to high engagement in Body-life (e.g., Col. 3:12-16), and exhortations to represent Jesus well in our social roles (Col. 3:17-4:6).¹ One implication of this instructional pattern is this: If we do a good job of helping our people grow in their grasp of God’s grace, and of building Christ-centered friendships with one another, and of representing Christ well in their social roles, our church *will* have evangelistic impact. Chuck Smith says in this regard: “Healthy sheep make more sheep.” Luke describes this same pattern in Acts 2:42-47 (God granted them favor with all the people

¹ This pattern is very evident in this order Romans, Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Peter. It is there in a slightly different order in Philippians. Paul also emphasizes the first and third elements of this pattern in all three of the Pastoral Epistles.

and added to their number as they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to quality community). Think about why this is so.

Grounding Christians deeply in God's grace motivates them to serve God and love people in all areas (including evangelism) in a way that nothing else can (see Col. 1,2 and especially 2 Cor. 5:14-19). As we appreciate the how sinful and undeserving we are, this increases our appreciation of God's grace—and this strongly motivates us to live for Christ and persuade lost people to believe in Him.

"If, in your own mind, you have limited your need for the gospel, you will hardly identify with sinners in obvious need of saving grace. You feel removed from them, as you feel removed from the full impact of the gospel. The distance you feel from both the message and those who need to hear it soon disengages you altogether from the enterprise of evangelism . . .

A daily awareness that we must never stray from (the gospel) ourselves is the most important element in a God-honoring evangelism. As I experience the gospel as a message of a righteous God's total forgiveness, and Christ as the magnetic, personal center of my life, evangelizing with a gospel of forgiveness is a natural . . . outgrowth. It breaks down my blinding pride; it reminds me of what our God of love has done for me . . . Having been humbled ourselves by our own *present* need, we approach the lost person with a new welcoming attitude . . . We will not be trying to do something alien to us. Personal witness will issue from our delight in God and appreciation of His grace in Jesus Christ. We will be able to receive strangers as friends . . ."²

"The gospel produces a constellation of traits in us. First, we are compelled to share the gospel out of generosity and love, not out of guilt. Second, we are freed from fear of being ridiculed or hurt by others, since we already have the favor of God by grace. Third, there is a humility in our dealings with others, because we know we are saved only by grace alone, not because of our superior insight or character. Fourth, we are hopeful about anyone, even the 'hard cases,' because we (ourselves) were saved only because of grace, not because we were likely people to become Christians. Fifth, we are courteous and careful with people. We don't have to push or coerce them, for it is only God's grace that saves them, not our eloquence or persistence or even their openness."³

Quality Body-life (Col. 3:12-16) motivates an evangelistic lifestyle for three reasons:

Christians naturally want to expose their non-Christian friends to such a community because they know their friends will sense the presence of Jesus in this setting (Jn. 13:34,35).⁴

Christians are powerfully built up through this kind of community to be more spiritually potent in their social roles (Heb. 10:23-25).

² C. John Miller, *Powerful Evangelism for the Powerless* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1997), 44, 45.

³ Tim Keller, "Practical Dimensions of Gospel Application" (no publisher)

⁴ "God's plan is that local bodies of believing Christians . . . provide a dynamic community in which both personal witness and evangelistic communication become intensely productive. The church that convinces people that there is a God is a church that manifests what only a God can do, that is, to unite human beings in love . . . There is nothing that convinces people that God exists or that awakens their craving for him like the discovery of Christian brothers and sisters who love one another . . . The sight of loving unity among Christians arrests the non-Christian. It crashes through his intellect, stirs up his conscience and creates a tumult of longing in his heart because he was created to enjoy the very thing that you are demonstrating." John White, *The Fight* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), pp. 149,150.

Christians learn how to really love people in Christian community, and this makes them more effective in loving the non-Christians they encounter in their social roles (e.g., OTHER-CENTERED; HUMBLE & GRACIOUS).

Along with a focus on helping our people keep growing in God's grace and building quality Body-life, we should consistently exhort them to represent Christ well in their various social roles (Titus 2:15 – see preceding and following context; Col. 3:17 – see following context; e.g., FAMILIES; WORK-PLACE; NEIGHBORHOODS; etc.). We should also urge them to pray consistently for opportunities to share about Christ, and to make the most of every opportunity that God grants (Col. 4:3-6).

So if we find that our home group is unmotivated to share Christ with non-Christians, the *first* thing we should check is this context! Are we getting our people focused on and deeper into God's grace? Are we doing our best to build genuinely loving community? Are we persuading our people to represent Christ well in every social setting? Are we teaching them to pray consistently for opportunities to share their faith?

Along with this foundational emphasis, we should *also* initiate practical ways to facilitate outreach (e.g., outreach events, teaching practical evangelistic principles, etc.).

Championing evangelism as a leader

Within the above context, we should do our best to champion evangelism among our people. Paul gives us an example of how to do this in Phil. 1,2.

Express genuine excitement about their efforts to spread the gospel (1:3-7). Why is Paul so thankful and joyful for the Philippians? Because they have been participating in the gospel from the time they came to Christ. This probably refers specifically to their financial support of Paul (4:15)—but the main point is that they were involved in spreading the gospel to others. This gives Paul profound gratitude and joy—and he tells them this directly.

When you express genuine excitement about others' attempts to reach out, you are verbalizing God's heart – that He is delighted at their love for lost people and their willingness to step out in faith to share. Outreach is emotionally and spiritually difficult (EXPLAIN), and we are all easily intimidated and discouraged. But when your home group has people who create a strong culture of encouragement and affirmation in this area, people are emboldened to share their faith.

EXAMPLES: Home group members signing up for any kind of missions support; young Christian asking questions about an objection to Christianity so he can answer a non-Christian associate; “amening” someone's prayer for friend/family member at prayer meeting; “gossiping” about witnessing attempts to others; affirming new/shy Christians' “coming out” to friends or family

Share your own recent experiences in sharing Christ, emphasizing God's sovereign involvement (1:12-14). Paul, the missionary for whom mobility was so important, is imprisoned—yet he now has a “captive audience” to share Christ with (see 4:22)! But *why* does Paul tell them how God has advanced the gospel through his imprisonment? So they can marvel at how special Paul is! No—to draw their attention to God's wonderful sovereignty that is operative for all Christians! If God is the God who opens doors for Paul when he is imprisoned, then God can open doors for them in spite of their difficult circumstances.

This is why the Roman Christians had more courage to witness without fear because of Paul's example (1:14 - “If God can empower Paul to witness to his guards, certainly he can empower me to witness to my neighbors!”). Paul shares both of these experiences so that the Philippians will be encouraged in the same way.

This is the power of modeling. Satan is always whispering to Christians that their life circumstances prevent them from effective in outreach. But when they hear a brother or

sister who is busy, has tough circumstances, etc.—and yet excitedly report opportunities to share their faith—they are encouraged to believe that God can do the same for them.

People within your sphere of influence should hear you talking about what you're doing in this area, how you feel about it, what God is teaching you, etc. Are you in the game here? Are you praying consistently for open doors and following God's promptings (HYBELS; EXAMPLES)? Do you talk about your experiences with other Christians—including your *frustrations and disappointments* as much as talking about your "successes?"

Report and rejoice in the spread of the gospel through other imperfect Christians (1:14-18). Notice how Paul reports the evangelistic vigor of the Roman Christians. And notice how he rejoices even though some of these Christians are guided in part by base motives (competition with Paul). The point is that God is able to work through very imperfect Christians who are willing to share their faith--and we can never hear this often enough!

News of every advance confirms Jesus' promise of victory and heartens his people to press forward. We are weak, the enemy is strong, his fortresses against the knowledge often seem impregnable. But Jesus is building His church, and the gates of Hades will not be able to withstand it! The authority of heaven and the presence of Jesus are with us--and He is leading His church in His triumph. Whenever we find confirming evidence of this, we should share it so that those around us can take heart.

We can keep an ear out for this news from other parts of our own church (EMAILS), from other churches in our area, and from around the world ("Operation World"; *The Church Is Bigger than You Think*; AD2000.org). When the gospel is being shared and when people are responding, we should lead the way in rejoicing and taking heart that God is very powerful and very gracious!

Challenge them to be witnesses and remind them of God's promise to empower them (2:12-16). Christians commonly lift 2:12,13 out of its context and interpret it as exclusively about spiritual growth. But it is part of a whole paragraph that challenges the Philippian church (echoing Jesus in Matt. 5) to be lights for Christ in the midst of a lost humanity. This is such an urgent priority that their failure be lights for Christ would make Paul's work with them "for nothing."

Therefore, it may be better to understand 2:12 to mean: "Bring your salvation out into the open so that others can see it and be drawn to Christ." The verb *katergazomai* can bear this meaning (STRABO ON MINING). 2:14-16 unpack the command in 2:12 to involve both *showing* non-Christians a positively different way of life (2:14,15) and *sharing* the word of life (2:16a NIV - OFFERING WINE TO A GUEST).⁵

Notice that the emphasis is on being good witnesses—not on how people respond to our witness. Of course, we should celebrate positive responses, like God and the angels do (Lk. 15:7,10). And we should learn what we can to witness more effectively. But, as Bill Bright says: "Success is sharing the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit—leaving the results to God." Bill Hybels reminds us that our main job in evangelism is to be alert and responsive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit (*Just Walk across the Room*). When Christians get more focused on how people respond to their witness than on being good witnesses, this tends to lead either to pushiness or timidity (depending on one's personality). But when we focus on being good witnesses by following the Spirit's leading and trusting in His power, evangelism becomes less intimidating, more exciting—and ultimately more fruitful!

For more on the role of the Holy Spirit in evangelism, see Gary DeLashmutt, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Evangelism."

⁵ Phil. 2:14-16 is an abbreviated version of passages like Col. 3:17-4:6, which emphasize representing Jesus well in our social roles—both in deed (conduct) and in word (sharing as we have opportunity).

Extol other Christians who work hard to spread the gospel (2:19-30). Have you ever wondered why Paul put this section in the letter? Both Timothy and Epaphroditus were already well-known to the Philippians, so these are not “letters of commendation.” One reason seems to be to hold extol these men for their devotion to evangelism. Timothy is worthy of their respect because of “his proven worth that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel” (2:22). Epaphroditus should be held in high regard because “he came close to death for the work of Christ” (2:30) in order to get their money gift to Paul so he could continue his evangelistic work.

This is different than praising people directly; this is “good gossip”—telling others why you respect certain people. Are you fortunate enough to have people in your home group who are consistently excited about evangelism? Sadly, these folks often get a chilly response to their excitement by others who aren’t reaching out. Counteract this by telling others how much you admire and respect these folks.

Pray with and for them with an evangelistic “bottom line” (1:9-11). Notice how Paul prays for the Philippians. He prays that they become more loving, that they abound in knowledge and discernment, that they be blameless and filled with the fruits of their salvation. But why? “For this will bring much glory to God.” In the context (both preceding and following), Paul is thinking about the advancement of the gospel. God is glorified as people see His work in our lives and turn to Him (Matt. 5:16).

People within your sphere of influence learn values by what you pray for when you pray with them. When more mature Christians pray with less mature Christians along these lines, the less mature Christians begin to forge convictions about becoming more effective in reaching out to others for Christ. There is something about talking to God together and hearing Spirit-filled Christians pray this way that lifts us out of our self-absorption so that our hearts want to glorify God and see others glorify him.

This is one reason why home group prayer meetings are so important. Discuss ways to keep home group prayer meetings focused (though not exclusively) on evangelism.

All of us, regardless of our specific gifting, can become more effective in championing evangelism among our people. This is a powerful and fulfilling ministry!