PERSPECTIVE



NOVEMBER 2018

The Evangelist's Mission

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The Evangelist's Mission

In 2017, George Barna reported on the state of evangelism¹. This news is not good. Less than 40% of those who claim to be born again Christians believe they should share the gospel. Meanwhile, the percentage of young Americans who profess faith is shrinking.

The theology of many who profess faith in Christ is more than a little unsettling. Nineteen percent of those who say they were saved by grace alone "strongly agree" one can be saved simply by being a good person. Furthermore, only 40% "strongly reject" this claim. That means 60% of those who say they've been saved by grace alone are open to the possibility God will save people on the basis of their good works.

A CONFUSED AND COMPLACENT CHURCH

What does all this mean? Far too many Christians are confused and complacent. They are confused about the most basic of things, like the definition of the gospel. They are confused about the most basic of duties, like the call to evangelize.

This is ironic because we live in a golden age of evangelical faith. Never in history have there been more resources to explain the meaning and implications of the gospel. Christians are to fight confusion, resist complacency, and take Jesus' words to heart:

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5:14–16).

This essay is a plea for Christians to engage in the glorious work of gospel proclamation. God has given us a profound and beautiful message. It's a message we are not to keep to ourselves.

The good news is that God-in-the-flesh, Jesus Christ, came to earth and lived a perfect life. He never rebelled against his heavenly Father. He truly deserved God's favor. Yet he went to the cross where he died the death of a criminal. He bore the wrath of God for everyone who would ever repent and believe in him. Jesus' resurrection is evidence of his power to conquer sin and death. Through Christ, salvation is available to all who would

trust in him alone—not in their baptism, not in their church attendance, not in their giving, but in Christ alone.

When this good news hits you, when it grips your soul and fills your heart, you will want to share it with others. Evangelism is most common when Christ is most treasured. We should all see ourselves as evangelists.

I'm using the word "evangelist" broadly. I'm not using it in any specialized sense. God has certainly raised up men and women who are uniquely gifted to spread the good news (Eph. 4:11). We can be thankful for Phillips (Acts 21:8) and Whitefields and Grahams.

But every Christian really is an evangelist. With the Great Commission on the forefront of our minds, let's labor faithfully to make Christ known. Let's discipline ourselves to share the gospel naturally, regularly, and with a sense of urgency. This is our mission.

SHARE THE GOSPEL NATURALLY

Evangelism should be a natural part of your everyday life. It's tempting to leave evangelism to the professionals—apologists like Ravi Zacharias or pastors like me. But this would be unbiblical since God uses all Christians to spread the glory of his great name. Consider Paul's words to his young disciple, Timothy:

³ I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. ⁴ As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. ⁵ I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well (2 Tim. 1:3–5).

Lois and Eunice planted seeds of truth in Timothy's heart. As God-fearing Jews, they taught him the Word of God. They may even have come to faith in Christ before Timothy and encouraged him with the gospel. Through the daily routine of family life together, they pointed Timothy to the Lord.

The most natural place to share the gospel is with our families. Most of us have a mom and dad, brothers and sisters. You may even have children or grandchildren. These are **your** family members. It should be natural for you to point the people you love the most to the Savior.

I grew up in a non-Christian family, and I know how hard it can be to share Christ with those who knew me before I was a Christian. I appreciate how Randy Newman says evangelizing family members is hard but good work:

Our goal, whether talking to family members or anyone else, should not be for "comfortable evangelism" or "natural evangelism" or "easy evangelism," but rather evangelism that heralds accurately and powerfully the goodness of the gospel—regardless of the difficulty for us in proclaiming it or the resistance from those who hear it.2

Sharing the gospel with family members and close friends is difficult. When I'm visiting home, I strive to be bold and gentle. I often fail, but I pray for opportunities to powerfully herald the goodness of the gospel.

But whether it is with family members or others God placed around us, we should all try to share the gospel naturally. In other words, we should make every effort to share where we are, among the people in our sphere of influence. This could be our family, friends, co-workers, or our neighbors.

The church in Thessalonica did this well.

² We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, ³ remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything (1 Thess. 1:2-8).

Paul preached the gospel, but the Thessalonians received it "in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction" (v. 5). The gospel overwhelmed them and filled them with joy. It's like God wrote the gospel into their DNA.

In light of this, verse 8 makes complete sense, "For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything." The church spoke up about Christ. They shared the gospel that saved them. It went everywhere, to the market, the workplace, and city hall.

But how did this happen? Did they schedule a revival? Did they hold a tent meeting? Did they plan a Family Fun Fall Festival? No. They were so overcome by who Jesus is and what he's done that they talked about him, naturally, as part of their daily lives. They spoke so freely about Jesus that they gained a reputation, far and wide, as a people whose own lives had been changed by the gospel.

Do you share the gospel naturally, where you are, in the daily routine of your life?

Please don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying there is anything wrong with evangelistic events: a tent meeting, a door-to-door campaign, and contact evangelism on the city streets. I am simply pointing out God has given us relationships, and the most natural means of spreading the good news is opening yourself up to the very people God has put near you.

Barna found the most effective means of evangelism are family and friends. After that, it's a gathered church; the church simply being the church by singing, preaching, and praying God's Word.

Your home and your congregation are natural places for evangelism to happen.

Have you thought about opening your life and home to non-Christian friends and neighbors through the biblical practice of hospitality? God has put many people in your life who need Christ. They may be lonely, confused, and looking for meaning (even if they wouldn't admit it). All your needs have been met in Christ. The unsearchable riches of Christ belong to you. You are a spiritual billionaire. Use hospitality to serve a spiritually impoverished neighbor.

Rosaria Butterfield became a Christian, in part, through the hospitality of believers. They welcomed her into their home. She describes Christian hospitality as a unique opportunity to welcome those who are on the fringes and alone.

We make gospel bridges into our home because we notice the people around us and their needs. We see people whom God has put into our lives—especially the difficult ones—as image bearers of a holy God and therefore deserving of our best. Hospitality is imagebearer driven-not time, convenience or calendar driven. If it were, none of it would happen. 3

God uses our homes. He uses friends and family to lead people to Christ.

God also uses our gatherings. He uses the ordinary means of grace like preaching and singing to bring unbelievers within earshot of your testimony. Are you sensitive to the fact that God often brings unbelievers to your church gathering? Are you thoughtful to reach out to visitors, to seek to get to know them, to not assume they know Christ, but to gently and kindly see what they believe about our Savior?

Through hospitality in the home and the gatherings of the church, you have many natural opportunities to share the gospel.

SHARE THE GOSPEL REGULARLY

Christians love to count. Let me speak for my own tribe for a moment: Baptists love to count! We count how many decisions made for Christ, how many people baptized, how many missionaries sent, and how many churches planted. We are a counting people.

Counting is not inherently wrong, keeping records and tracking results has its place (though I would encourage you to read 2 Samuel 24 carefully). But let's avoid equating physical, tangible results with spiritual success. The most faithful evangelists don't always see the most fruit. Through Jonah's preaching, the pagan city of Nineveh repented. Under Jeremiah's preaching, the city of Jerusalem fell to Babylon. But who would argue Jonah was more faithful than Jeremiah?

As Christians, let's be wary of using simple metrics to define spiritual success. Let's strive to be faithful. In the context of evangelism, this means sharing the gospel regularly. Instead of counting the results, simply work on being consistent in your gospel proclamation.

Thankfully, we have in the apostle Paul a wonderful model. He shared the gospel regularly in the midst of great suffering.

⁸ For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were

so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. 10 He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again (2 Cor. 1:8-10).

Paul endured great pain in his evangelistic work throughout the Mediterranean. When he asks for prayer, he doesn't request safety or healing. He wants God to change hearts, "You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many" (2 Cor. 1:11). This blessing is salvation granted through the ministry of Paul and his friends.

It was never easy for Paul to evangelize. He needed divine help. Paul always faced persecution. But in the midst of rejection, he shared the gospel regularly. He pled with churches to pray for regular, gospel opportunities.

- Ephesians 6:9–10, Pray "also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak."
- Colossians 4:3–4, "At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak."
- 2 Thessalonians 3:1, "Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you."

In his overriding concern for the souls of men and women, Paul followed in the footsteps of his Savior. Jesus proclaimed good news. Paul couldn't follow Jesus in every way; only Jesus could atone for the sins of his people. But Paul did everything he could to carry on the proclamation ministry of Christ. We should regularly share the gospel too.

I'm glad a girl by the name of Brenda took the opportunity to share the gospel with me. Many years ago, when I was still a teenager, I discovered she was a Christian. Growing up in the Pacific Northwest, I didn't know any Christians; I thought they were a dying breed. I never noticed anyone praying before a meal, and I

certainly didn't think the smartest girl in my high school could be a Christian. When I found out about her faith, I asked her, "Do you think I'm going to hell?" She could have chickened out. She could have tried to change the topic. But instead, she said, "Yes, Aaron, if that's how you live (in rebellion against God) and that's what you believe (that Jesus is just a man), I think you're going to hell."

I don't know if Brenda regularly shared the gospel, but she shared it with me. God used her words to bring me to saving faith in him. I want conversations like this to mark my life. And not because I'm a pastor, but because I'm a Christian. I want to share the gospel regularly because Jesus is more important to me than anything or anyone.

SHARE THE GOSPEL WITH A SENSE OF **URGENCY**

The fact that Brenda believed hell was a real place made me think hard about Jesus. Belief in hell will give you a sense of urgency. Hell isn't easy to talk about, but it can't be neglected, not by faithful Christians. And it would be foolish to try.

We can't ignore hell because our non-Christian family and friends think about it. Not long ago, I went to my nephew's high-school graduation party. My brother introduced me to a realtor at the party, a realtor who had recently found homes for two pastor-friends of mine. My brother, who is not a Christian, found this interesting. Small talk ensued, and the realtor commented on just how nice my friends are. My brother, not skipping a beat, blurted out, "Of course they're nice; they have to be. If they're not, they'll burn in hell!" Awkward laughter followed. Our neighbors are thinking of hell, even if they consider it comic relief.

Hell is no laughing matter, and it's the clear teaching of the Bible.

- John the Baptist said Jesus would come both as Savior and Judge. Unbelievers, John said, would be burned like chaff in "unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:12).
- · Jesus referred to a place of judgment. He called it a "hell of fire" and a land where "the fire is not quenched" (Matthew 5:22 and Mark 9:48).
- Jesus repeatedly warned hypocrites of hell. He called it a place of "eternal punishment" (Matthew 25:46).

- The earliest Christians carried on this teaching about hell. Paul referred to hell as a place where God's vengeance is poured out against all who don't know him and refuse to obey the gospel. He wrote of those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. "They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed" (2 Thess. 1:8–10).
- The author of Hebrews, likewise, predicted a day of reckoning: "It is appointed for man to die once and after that comes judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

Most people say they don't know what will happen when we die. Many argue we simply cease to exist. Scores believe eternal bliss is everyone's final destination regardless of how they've lived or what they believe. But to fully side with Jesus, you must believe hell is real.

Hell is a real place of painful darkness where unrepentant sinners live eternally outside the beautiful and glorious presence of God. This life is our only opportunity to avoid hell. God has given us words to share, and they are words of life ordained by God to bring sinners to repentance and faith and everlasting life. It is crucial and urgent that we speak this gospel (Rom. 10:14-15).

Hell is not the only motivation for evangelism, and it isn't even the best. Will Metzger argued God's glory is the best motivator for evangelism: "The supreme motive in witnessing is to glorify God, to see his perfections manifested through the joyous praises of his redeemed people."4 Amen! Yes, God's glory should be our ultimate goal.

Still, I acutely feel the urgency of the evangelistic task when Hebrews 9:27 sinks into my bones: "It is appointed for man to die once and after that comes judgment."

MOVING FORWARD

What practical steps can we take to move forward? How can we increasingly devote ourselves to the fulfillment of the Great Commission? Here are a few points of practical, pastoral instruction. There are, of course, a myriad of ways to make evangelism a priority. These are just a few suggestions. Please know each imperative must be undergirded by the reality of God's sovereign grace.

- 1. Love the lost. See people as image-bearers—valuable and worthy of dignity and respect. Want good for them. May the Holy Spirit give you a deep and real love for the lost.
- 2. Devote one night each month to hospitality. Consider teaming up with someone else if that would help. Give over an evening to spend time in your home with unbelieving family members, co-workers, friends, or neighbors.
- 3. Go on a local or international short-term mission trip at least once every three years. Jesus told us "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." Jesus cares for the nations, and so should we. The nations have come to Atlanta and many other US cities. Let's work hard to reach them with the gospel. Plan now to give up some of your time and resources to go—across the city or even across the world.
- 4. Read at least one book each year on the topic of evangelism. There are so many good books, and they can help keep evangelism on the front-burner of your heart.
- 5. Pray with Mount Vernon on Sunday evenings. Come and pray with us for evangelistic opportunities. Come pray for boldness. Let's remind each other we aren't just the church *gathered* on Sunday; we're the church *scattered* throughout this city with a mission to share the gospel.
- 6. Share the gospel at least once a week. What a good goal this is! If you take it seriously, it will lead you to pray hard for doors of opportunity to open and for the boldness you need to walk through those doors. Start the day by asking God to make a way for you to share the gospel today.
- 7. Have the hard conversation. You probably know what I mean. Most of us have been putting off at least one spiritual conversation. It could be with a father, a grandmother, a co-worker, or a friend. Maybe the conversation (or, perhaps, a letter) could start like this: "I'm sorry it's taken so long for me to bring this up. I need to talk about something important. I'm bringing it up because I love you." I can't guarantee this conversation will go well! I can guarantee God put this person in your life for a reason.

These are few, simple ways to devote yourself to a life of

evangelism. Whatever the results, your efforts will not be in vain.

GOD WILL BE PRAISED

As you put this essay down, don't fall into the trap of seeing evangelism as a sacrifice. It's not a burden to be born. Evangelism is a joy. Be eager to talk about the God who loves you and saved you and will one day glorify you.

Toward the end of his ministry, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. He looked like a king, and his disciples cried out for joy. They began "to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen" (Luke 19:37).

When the Pharisees heard this, they demanded the disciples close their mouths. But Jesus responded, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out." It's good to remember God will be praised. Period. Full stop. He will be praised.

God's glory can't be kept in a sealed envelope. His message will be delivered because his name will be exalted. And we, his church, are the means God has chosen to declare his praises. It's not just that we *have* to evangelize; it's that we *get* to.

Praise God he is so good, praiseworthy, and deserving of all worship. We have a great message about a great God who is a crucified and risen Savior. It is both our mission and our privilege to share this gospel naturally, regularly, and with a sense of urgency.

- Aaron Menikoff

¹ George Barna, "Survey: Christians are Not Spreading the Gospel" (20 November 2017). Found at http://www.georgebarna.com/research-flow/2017/11/30/survey-christians-are-not-spreading-the-gospel.

²Randy Newman, Bringing the Gospel Home: Witnessing to Family Members, Close Friends, and Others Who Know You Well (Crossway, 2011), 45.

³ Rosaria Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes With a House Key* (Crossway, 2018), 63–64.

⁴ Will Metzger, Tell the Truth (IVP, 1984), 115.

Everyday Church

Written by Tim Chester & Steve Timmis

Bookstall Price: \$14



Everyday Church is a follow-up and expansion to Total Church written by the same authors. In generations past, the local church was a central fixture in the community with abundant opportunities for the natural spread of the gospel. However, the post-Christian era of western culture has thrust the church into the margins of society. Chester and Timmis explore the book of 1 Peter to remind the contemporary church of the apostle's exhortation to the early church facing similar conditions with the aim of sparking more intentional, daily engagement with those in need of the gospel.

Chester and Timmis helpfully challenge believers to come to terms with the post-Christian culture. Christians can no longer assume a shared worldview with the western world. As "elect exiles" we must learn to engage and love those in our community. "Viewing the culture around you as a threat is not a good starting point for reaching people with the gospel" (45). The authors challenge popular approaches to reinventing the church gathering to make it attractive to outsiders by updating style and presentation. "Our missional cutting edge is not events that are like the culture but a life and message that are *unlike* the culture" (49). Readers are helped to think through their ongoing weekly activities in light of engaging their neighbors/communities. Chapter 5 is worth the purchase of the book. Chester and Timmis provide page after page of gospelcentered, practical application for personal evangelistic efforts. They utilize the Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation grid to provoke readers to recognize the limitless ways gospel conversations can happen everyday.

Thoughtful readers should be attentive to the ecclesiological nuances of the authors. Chester and Timmis rightly emphasize daily pastoral care and discipling throughout Chapter 3. Yet, their focus on daily mission in the following chapter may unintentionally deemphasize the weekly gathering in favor of "being the church" throughout the week. "One of the central contentions of this book is that our marginal status as Christians in the West requires us to think differently about mission. One way is by dropping our preoccupation with church" (85). "A gospel community can be a church in its own right, or it can be part of a larger congregation... The gospel community is the core unit, the place where evangelism, pastoral care, discipleship, and life take place," (104). These quotes are representative of their view. The fuller context of the chapter maintains a degree of balance, but greater clarity and care could avoid the potential of miscommunicating what a church is.

- RECOMMENDED BY CHAD IRELAND

Excerpts From the Book

"Evangelism will not take place until we go out to connect with them where they are, where they feel comfortable, on their territory." - Life at the Margins, p.28

"As foreigners, Christians are to treat their culture with respect, honor authority, and seek its prosperity. But we will never feel at home in the culture." - Everyday Community, p.41

"Opportunities arise when a person's interpretation of life begins to break down. Any view of life not governed by God's Word is going to fail at some point." - Everyday Evangelism, p.110

She's Got the Wrong Guy

Written by Deepak Reju

Bookstall Price: \$18



Deepak Reju's She's Got the Wrong Guy helps single, Christian women understand why they might choose to settle for less than God's best and provides godly encouragement to pursue Christ over marriage. The first section of the book details the problems of dating in today's world and the factors that can contribute to settling into a relationship and marriage that do not honor God. Next, Reju presents a series of case studies demonstrating ten types of men whom it would be unwise to date or marry as a believer. In the final section, Reju helps the reader understand

how to break off an unwise relationship in a godly way, what to look for in a godly man and where to ultimately place our hope. Above all, Reju points us to the truth that navigating relational waters and pursuing holiness are only possible with God's grace.

I found Reju's ten case studies to be the most insightful portion of the book. In this section, he helpfully demonstrates sin struggles often seen in men (i.e., the "Unchurched Guy", the "New Convert", the "Promiscuous Guy", the "Control Freak", etc.). Though this section was designed to help us spot sin patterns in the lives of those we might choose to date, it also helpfully reminded me as I read to be evaluating my own heart and sin struggles. As I read about the "Control Freak", I was convicted about my own struggle with control and my need to put my trust and confidence in Christ.

When I was first assigned to review this book, I questioned, "Why would a happily married woman be asked to review a book on singleness and dating?" Yet, I recognize that sometimes it is good to read books for the purpose of discipleship. This book will not be for everyone, but it can be a very insightful resource for someone who struggles particularly in the area of dating. There are several women I can think back to in college who would have greatly benefitted from reading this book, and there are women in my life now who could benefit from reading this book – both younger and older sisters alike. If you have a daughter or granddaughter who has been in and out of relationships with guys who are clearly not ready to lead them in a godly way, this could be a helpful book. If you are single - whether in your twenties or your fifties - and see a pattern of entering into relationships with guys you know are not godly, it may be a wise decision to pick up this book. It will helpfully encourage you to trust and treasure Christ in all things, but especially in dating.

- Recommended by Abbey Tillman

Excerpts From the Book

"We come to know Christ through his Word, so the Word must matter for you in every area of your life, including how you evaluate your dating relationship." - Breaking Up for the Glory of God, p.126

"If he is not willing to confess his sins to God and others, don't stay with him. Repentance is key to a good marriage; and deliberately choosing to marry an unrepentant man is a recipe for disaster."

- Breaking Up for the Glory of God, p.127

"Waiting isn't easy because the enemy would have you believe that you are being denied the one thing that would make you happy." - Why Waiting Is Ok, p.141

NOVEMBER

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

November 1	Proverbs 1:1-7
November 2	Proverbs 1:8-19
November 3	Ephesians 4:1–15
November 4	Proverbs 3:34
November 5	1 Chronicles 28:9–21
November 6	2 Chronicles 1:7–13
November 7	2 Chronicles 9
November 8	Proverbs 1:19–33
November 9	Proverbs 11
November 10	Colossians 3:12–17
November 11	Proverbs 11:14
November 12	Acts 10:1 <mark>-8</mark>
November 13	Acts 10:9–33
November 14	Acts 10:34–48
November 15	Acts 11:1–18

November 16	Genesis 11:31–12:9
November 17	Genesis 15:1-6
November 18	Acts 10:1-11:18
November 19	Acts 7:54-8:3
November 20	Acts 11:1-18
November 21	Acts 11:19-30
November 22	Psalm 10
November 23	Galatians 2:1–10
Nov <mark>emb</mark> er 24	Leviticus 23:15–22
November 25	Acts 11:19-30
November 26	Mark 14:1-11
November 27	Mark 14:12-26
November 28	Mark 14:32-42
November 29	Luke 22:39-46
November 30	1 Kings 19:1–8

*Sermons in bold





Contents Article Book Highlight Take Up & Read New Members

NEW MEMBERS







Kimberlee Lucas



Kim Moore

