

INTENTIONAL PRE-EVANGELISM: GAINING A HEARING FOR THE GOSPEL

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Abstract

There is a problem with pre-evangelism in our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) churches. The lost unbelievers of this world are not hearing the gospel message. Left on their own they do not know where to find this life giving message. In their ignorance and unbelief they remain lost unless someone comes to guide them to the Word of God.

Pastors are called to proclaim the Word of God. Their calling is not only to the flock, but also to the lost sheep. Lost and helpless, unbelievers are in desperate need of someone trustworthy who can share the gospel with them.

Pre-evangelism skills are necessary for pastors seeking to save the lost among the two primary groups of this generation, the millennials and post-moderns. Pastors cannot remain aloof to the needs of the millennials and post-moderns. They must work to gain a hearing among the lost by understanding the mentality of this generation and remove unnecessary obstacles that prevent someone from hearing the clear gospel message and allow the Holy Spirit to do his work. Furthermore, pastors must strive to connect and communicate effectively by improving pre-evangelism skills. Pastors who can connect with people pave the way for meaningful conversations in which the gospel may be presented and heard allowing the Holy Spirit to do his work.

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Introduction

κηρύξατε το ευαγγέλιον. This phrase appears above the chapel doors at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. The phrase is an imperative. It is a calling, a command for someone to “preach the gospel.” But who will go? What is the context? Where will the preacher go to preach? This phrase above the chapel doors does nothing until someone reads or hears the call and acts. Then the imperative has done its work. Alone on a white wall, the words “preach the gospel” do nothing. Without someone expounding and communicating what the gospel means for all people it can do nothing. Not that the gospel has no power to work, but the simple fact is that the gospel has no opportunity to work if it is not preached, if it is left written on a white wall or white pages and not shared with those who need to hear it. For that very reason these words appear above the doors of the chapel at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, a place where men are trained to, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation,” as Mark wrote in the final chapter of his gospel.¹

This three word phrase, preach the gospel, only appears once in this way in all of Scripture. It is a clear and simple call to share the message of Jesus Christ the Savior. All the world needs to hear this message. Believers and unbelievers need to hear the message of Jesus. Believers need to be reminded of their Savior Jesus, while unbelievers need to hear about their Savior Jesus so that they might come to a knowledge of him and faith in him through the power of the Holy Spirit. Believers understand they need to continue to hear the gospel message for the strengthening and maintenance of their faith. Unbelievers do not know what the gospel can do for them. Therefore, believers need to carry this message to the unbelievers in order to give the Holy Spirit the opportunity to work through the word to create faith. After all, the commission to preach the gospel is one of the primary tasks of all believers, especially pastors.

Pastors are called to not only tend the flock, but to go after the lost sheep. The flock are those who have been called to faith already and need the pastor to share the word with them for the Holy Spirit to continue his work through the word to preserve them in the one truth faith. The lost sheep are those who have not heard or who still do not believe in the gospel. They are lost and condemned. They need a pastor to preach the Word of God to them so that the Holy Spirit can bring them into the flock. God does not want any to remain lost, but to come to a

¹ Cf. Mark 16:15

knowledge of their Savior.² “Preaching the gospel and making disciples are closely connected. Making disciples is the end goal, or the result, our Lord had in mind. He does not want any to perish, but all to come to repentance and faith. He wants all to be saved, to come to a heart knowledge of the truth.”³ Pastors have a call to both the flock and the lost for the same purpose. God wants both to come to and remain in the saving faith that they might live eternally with him in heaven and escape eternal condemnation in hell.

One aspect of the pastoral office is the full time call to which all believers share, the call to share the gospel. The pastor is publicly called to preach the gospel. Called to preach to his congregation and to the lost community around him. His calling comes with a reference and a context. He can reference Jesus who constantly reached out to unbelievers with the message of the coming Messiah. He can look at the context he lives in and see the unbelievers in his community who need to hear about the Savior who has come to save them from all their sins and give them eternal life. For pastors, the questions of who, what and where regarding the call to preach the gospel are answered. He is called to the people in his community to share the gospel.

In order to go out and preach the gospel to the lost in his community, the pastor needs to be committed to putting in the time it takes to learn who the lost are in his community. This extends beyond identifying demographic groups. Sharing the gospel means meeting individuals who are lost and need to hear the good news. Meeting individual people, assuring them you are trustworthy and showing them you care about their eternal soul takes time. The imperative to preach the gospel has no time limit, so pastors cannot put a time limit on their efforts to preach to the lost.

Before pastors actually share the gospel message and evangelize the lost, all their time and effort can be summarized as pre-evangelism. It is the time spent learning and developing relationships with the lost that precedes sharing the gospel. It is gaining the trust and willingness of an individual to listen to a pastor share the gospel. This pre-evangelism fits with the loving desire in the heart of a pastor to do all he can to become a gospel shepherd for the lost. Although this call to preach the gospel to the lost remains a part of the pastors' call, other aspects of the call may detract from pastors' efforts at pre-evangelism.

WELS pastors have room to grow in pre-evangelism planning and implementation. In fact, the WELS Statistical Reports from 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2014 show just over fifty percent

² Cf. 1 Timothy 2:4.

³ D. J. Valleskey, *We believe, therefore we speak: The theology and practice of evangelism*, (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 1995), 134.

of churches average one or less adult confirmands per year and close to ninety percent have one or less adult baptisms per year.⁴ These raw numbers do not directly measure pre-evangelism and evangelism. These statistics are affected by a wide range of variables and situations, but pre-evangelism does have some correlation. With an increased effort to improve pre-evangelism strategies, pastors would increase the number of individuals who are willing to hear the gospel. Admittedly, hearing the gospel does not mean immediate conversion, persuasion or decision theology. Even with the best strategies or methods, faith can only be wrought in a person's heart by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, an increase in pre-evangelism may not affect the number of adult confirmands or baptisms. However, pastors who create more opportunities for individuals to hear the gospel in a clear and approachable way show that they are working to remove obstacles for the Holy Spirit to do his work.

Pastors with a myriad of pre-evangelism skills still need to identify the people to whom they hope to share the gospel. At this point in time, pastors will run into more and more millennials and postmoderns in their pre-evangelism work. Millennials and postmoderns tend to be skeptical and any pastor who hopes to effectively communicate the gospel will need to spend time earning trust and showing he truly cares for the individual before they can gain a hearing for the gospel. Gaining a hearing is at the heart of pre-evangelism. The willingness of an individual to give a pastor time to present the gospel allows the individual to hear the words of Scripture. Through these words the Holy Spirit is able to work faith. Without putting in the time with individuals, any presentation may fall on deaf and unreceptive ears.

Pre-evangelism strategies attempt to combat ineffective communication and create an amiable relationship. Effective communication and a friendly relationship mean listening to one another. A general understanding of the Millennial Generation, “a group of young people whose birth years range from 1980 to 2000,”⁵ made up of individuals with millennial and postmodern mind-sets will help pastors make connections and form relationships (pre-evangelism) that create a willingness to actively listen to a pastor present the gospel (evangelism). Strategies for reaching out to millennials and postmoderns vary greatly allowing for pastors of all temperaments to find methods that feel comfortable to them. For example, a calm and collected demeanour will go far when creating and nurturing relationships during pre-evangelism meetings and throughout a lasting relationship. These strategies or methods are not meant to end at

⁴ Appendix I.

⁵ Rainer, Thom S., and Jess W. Rainer. *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation*, (Nashville, Tenn: B&H Pub. Group, 2011), 8.

evangelize. Rather pre-evangelism is the foundation from which a pastor proceeds in a life-long journey with an individual. Ideally, pastors will begin with pre-evangelism, move on to evangelism and after the Holy Spirit creates faith continue to shepherd new believers through a greater knowledge of the word until they are taken home to the green pastures of heaven. All the while, giving glory to God.

God receives all the praise for the work of pre-evangelism as it is by his power any are called to preach the gospel. There is a danger in focusing too heavily on the strategies and methods of pre-evangelism. Pastors may put all the hope in their efforts. In the end they may praise themselves for an increase in members or begin to doubt the power of God if it seems that numbers stagnate. This danger is real and so is the opposite. The opposite danger is to focus too much on giving God the credit for the work of conversion that pre-evangelism becomes a meaningless word and therefore a meaningless endeavor. If this happens, then pastors may give up working on their skills of pre-evangelism and lose any intentional behaviors that seek to gain a hearing for the gospel. Instead, the desire of pastors must be a simultaneous work to gain a hearing for the gospel as if gaining souls depended solely on them, while giving all the credit to God. Pastors need to make pre-evangelism intentional for the work of evangelism to be an effective communication of the gospel by which the Holy Spirit works to create faith when and where he will.⁶

Literature Review

Professor David Valleskey in his book *We Believe Therefore We Speak*, gives detailed encouragement and guidance in the area of pre-evangelism and evangelism. He reminds the reader that both are a natural result of faith. Both are something all believers are called to do. In his beginning chapters, Valleskey gives a breakdown of the natural knowledge of God and apologetics as they apply to pre-evangelism and evangelism. These tools are appropriate at certain times in pre-evangelism work. Valleskey moves on to discuss the means of grace which are necessary for the work of evangelism after the work of gaining a hearing for the gospel has been done in pre-evangelism interactions. Putting these into practice, he discusses the manifestation of an outreach mind-set for the church. Pastors play a vital role in the

6 Cf. John 3:8.

development and implementation of an outreach mind-set in a congregation. This resource systematically presents the role of a pastor in pre-evangelism. The pastor is called to preach the gospel to those who have not heard it. Some who hear will believe while others will reject. Anything that can be done by the pastor to improve his ability to communicate the gospel will only help provide a hearing for this life giving message.

Pastors who want to make pre-evangelism intentional in their ministry need to understand the unbelievers surrounding them. Two major groups pastors will want to understand are the millennials and the postmoderns. For an insider's look into the postmodern mind, Don Everts and Doug Schaupp provide the journey to faith of a postmodern in their book *I Once Was Lost: What Postmodern Skeptics Taught Us about Their Path to Jesus*. The primary focus of the book is a five threshold model created from years of researching postmoderns. These thresholds are true for the majority of postmoderns and allow anyone's pre-evangelism attempts to become more measurable in the context of the postmodern's mindset. The five thresholds are: move from distrust to trust, from complacent to curious, from being closed to change to being open to change, from meandering to seeking and finally to cross the threshold into the kingdom.⁷ These insights into the typical postmodern journey afford pastors the chance to plan and anticipate the journey a postmodern takes to becoming open to hearing the gospel presentation. Consequently, pastoral pre-evangelism and evangelism efforts will be better received by the postmodern and millennial generation.

Drew Dyck studies the reasons behind the postmodern apathy to one common faith in his book *Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults Are Leaving the Faith-- and How to Bring Them Back*. He concludes that postmoderns are not all on the same page when it comes to their belief system. It seems like many may share some commonalities, but for more their beliefs are a mixture of ideas from many religions. This has come about through the postmodern rejection of the modern period. While the modern period made reason and logic their kings, the postmodern appeals to the opposite end of the spectrum. Logic and reason are not their instruments of choice for understanding the world. Rather, their own experiences shape what they are willing to accept as truth. Connecting with this generation means forgoing the logical dissertations and systematic presentations of faith apologetically categorized. Instead, this generation needs to experience what faith means. Because of this, pastors have an opportunity

⁷ Don Everts and Doug Schaupp. *I Once Was Lost: What Postmodern Skeptics Taught Us about Their Path to Jesus*. (Downers Grove, IL.: IVP Books, 2008), 23-24.

waiting for them with the postmodern if they are willing to take the time. Postmoderns need to see that you care about who they are as an individual. Then pastors can share with them the various accounts of real individuals in the Bible who experienced faith and life through hearing the gospel. That same gospel is for postmoderns to experience first-hand.

In order to understand millennials, Thom and Jess Rainer supply a thorough presentation of the millennial mindset in their book *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation*. Millennials are studied in depth as the emerging generation in the United States. The Rainers briefly describe the other generations found in society, while delving into all the unique qualities of a millennial. This generation is most of all unique from others in their overwhelming diversity. Out of this diversity there are some common traits that will be helpful for pre-evangelism. One of the greatest traits of this generation is their desire to give back and make a lasting impact in this world. These highly motivated and well educated individuals make highly motivated and well educated believers if one is willing to spend the time to gain a hearing among them for the gospel. Pastors can find a comprehensive survey and strategy for reaching one of the largest segments of society in need of the gospel through this book.

For further insights into saving the Millennial Generation, those born after 1982,⁸ Dawson McAllister and Pat Springle offer a new take on saving the millennials in their book *Saving the Millennial Generation: New Ways to Reach the Kids You Care about in These Uncertain times*. After introducing the mindset of the millennial generation, the book looks into the options for outreach to the lost among the millennials. McAllister and Springle offer three choices an evangelist has when beginning to pre-evangelize the typical millennial. First, when met with scepticism or aloofness from millennials, an evangelist can respond with condemnation and assume any effort spent on this generation is useless. Second, when the millennials seem to have nothing in common with the evangelist and the church, an accommodating response may seem like the right choice because it feels the most welcoming. However, it compromises the core beliefs of the evangelist in the hope that by changing just enough the millennials will see themselves fitting in with Christianity. The third option is the ideal response of empathy. Empathy will see the lost millennial, reach out in love and carefully explain the truths of God's Word. Understanding the pitfalls of the first two responses and the need to respond with the third response will bolster any pre-evangelism efforts. Pastors looking for motivation and

⁸ McAllister, Dawson, and Pat Springle. *Saving the Millennial Generation: New Ways to Reach the Kids You Care about in These Uncertain times*, (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson, 1999), 91.

methodology for pre-evangelism to the millennials will find those in this book.

The time taken in reaching the lost is a key role in pre-evangelism according to George Hunter *Radical Outreach: The Recovery of Apostolic Ministry and Evangelism*. Although generalizations help in preparing to pre-evangelize certain demographics, in the end each individual person must be treated as an individual. Generalizations at the expense of taking the time to listen and develop relationships with postmoderns shatter a foundation for meaningful communication. Hunter emphasizes the point that effective pre-evangelism happens when the pre-evangelist is hospitable. A warm and welcoming demeanor show the lost that there is a heart of love eager to express a life-changing truth to another heart devoid of the love only God can give. This heart of love excludes charming or convincing from false motives, but rather reminds the pre-evangelist that the end result of gaining a hearing for the gospel may be gaining a Christian brother or sister. It is this hope that allows the pre-evangelist to take the time to lay the foundation prior to evangelizing. This book is a valuable reminder for pastors that pre-evangelism will take time, but the rewards are a meaningful relationship in which the gospel may be communicated and listened to thus removing as many obstacles from the Holy Spirit in his work of converting unbelievers.

Marshall Shelley describes evangelism as a journey again, alluding to the necessity of time and space when reaching out to postmoderns in his book *Growing Your Church through Evangelism and Outreach*. He recognizes the time it takes to break through to the American unbeliever and postmodern mind-set. Pre-evangelism will be a journey with more and more people who grew up with less and less biblical knowledge. Conversations and relationships that are developed with this generation carry great weight when finally opening up and sharing faith. Taking the time to join others on their journey also allows the pre-evangelist to better understand each individual's pain and therefore best apply the wonderful healing balm of the gospel. Pastors looking for a way to connect with the postmodernist can find valuable insights in this book.

Regarding methods of pre-evangelism, Scott Dawson in his book *The complete evangelism guidebook: expert advice on reaching others for Christ*, presents the gathered insights of many different authors to provide a wide range of evangelism methods for people of all different temperaments seeking to reach out to the lost. Some of the major points addressed in the guidebook include living in a way that provides daily opportunities to create and sustain conversations with the unchurched. These situations can vary widely and include anything from

bringing up the hard to answer questions concerning faith in God, using pictures from everyday life to illustrate a teaching from the Bible or simply befriending unbelievers and patiently waiting for a chance to share your faith with them. The suggestions for pre-evangelism techniques provided in this book are a practical resource for pastors.

Another resource for pastors looking to expand their methods of pre-evangelism is Carl Simmons' *Outreach Ministry in the 21st Century: The Encyclopedia of Practical Ideas*, a broad offering of brief ideas for people of all backgrounds doing outreach to people of all ages. Though this book is limited in the depths to which topics are explored, the volume of ideas is extensive. It provides pre-evangelism ideas ready to be tested and molded into a program that works to establish a community that is ready to give their ear to someone familiar and trustworthy. Some of the ideas in this book are not revolutionary, pointing out the simplicity of reaching out to the lost. Efforts to reach the lost can and ought to be simple so that we remember we are only seeking to gain a hearing for the gospel, not convince or coerce the lost into the faith.

Being your real, ordinary self when doing pre-evangelism is effective according to Kevin Harney in his book *Organic Outreach for Ordinary People: Sharing the Good News Naturally*. He drives the point that a person must self-assess their outreach temperature as hot or cold. If someone is hot then they are motivated and actively doing outreach, if cold, then the opposite is true. Harney goes on to examine the various ways ordinary people can lay the foundation for evangelism. Organic options for gaining a hearing for the gospel range from developing a ready-to-go personal testimony for unplanned encounters with unbelievers, to hosting a mixed party of believers and unbelievers creating opportunities for pre-evangelism, to living the countercultural heaven seeking life of a believer, then welcoming the questions of those who are living of the world and without hope because believers know where to point unbelievers. This book may be directed at ordinary people, but an ordinary pastor can learn and grow in his pre-evangelism efforts through it as well.

Part One: Why Distinguish Between Pre-Evangelism and Evangelism?

In order to understand the important role pre-evangelism plays in a pastor's work to bring a person to faith, the distinction between pre-evangelism and evangelical must be understood.

The purpose of pre-evangelism is to allow evangelism to happen effectively. Pre-evangelism sets the stage for a believer and an unbeliever to have a meaningful exchange of ideas regarding faith. In the case of the believer, the idea is not self-generated. The message shared by the believer is the gospel message. Pastors can be more effective in their efforts to share the gospel by developing a relationship of trust, generating interest or showing Christian love. This is the work of a pre-evangelist. Pre-evangelism prepares the unbeliever for a time when the gospel can be shared. The time or meeting when the full message of the gospel is shared is evangelism. The goal in evangelism is to share the gospel so that the Holy Spirit may do his work of creating faith through the word.

Using pre-evangelism skills in order to pave the way for evangelism in no way asserts that bringing someone to faith, conversion, is a process. “Conversion is, therefore, in the strict sense, the decisive step of a sinner out of the state of sin into the state of grace through faith.”⁹ Conversion only happens by the power of the Holy Spirit who at once in a single moment brings a lost sinner to faith. Pre-evangelism prepares the unbeliever to hear. Evangelism shares the gospel. Then, if the Holy Spirit is willing the unbeliever will be brought to faith.

In a wide sense, pre-evangelism begins the process of bringing someone to faith. In this sense, conversion can be spoken of as a series of stages that bring an unbeliever to faith:

Quenstedt: Conversion is an act of the applicatory grace of the Holy Spirit by which He, together with the Father and the Son freely, namely, by grace based on the merits of Christ, through the preached Word of God delivers a mature man who is spiritually dead out of the state of sin into the state of grace, by stages, so far as the preparatory acts are concerned, but instantaneously, so far as the final act is concerned, by a power that is indeed supernatural and divine yet resistible, so that he, repenting, obtains forgiveness of sins by faith and becomes a partaker of everlasting salvation (TDP, Part III, p 500).¹⁰

Unbelievers must have the Word of God preached to them if there is any chance for the Holy Spirit to work through the means of grace to create faith in their heart. By no means does this imply that simply reading Scripture in front of an unbeliever on any street corner is an effective sharing of the word. Rather, in order to have the Word of God heard in a way that makes it understandable and applicable, there will be stages in an unbeliever's conversion. There will be a series of preparatory acts such as an introduction to a believer, further communication and the development of trust. These actions serve to invite someone to want to hear more about God. Not that the person wants to learn more about a God of whom they already have a spark of faith

9 Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Order of Salvation Notes, Mequon, WI: Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 41.

10 WLS, 6-7.

in or a synergistic partnership in which together God and man will work to establish their relationship. Rather, the believer pre-evangelizing the unbeliever will use a variety of methods to gain a hearing for the gospel. “Quenstedt: The aforementioned types of call, rather than being a call in the proper sense, are certain invitations and inducements to inquire about the true worship of God and about the congregation in which that worship flourishes (TDP, Pt III, chap. V, sect. I, thesis III, note II, p 461).”¹¹ The amount of time invested in pre-evangelism work will vary by individual and may all come to nothing after gaining a hearing. The presentation of the gospel may fall on deaf ears, but the evangelist who works to present the gospel in a way that the unbeliever psychologically understands walks away from the unbeliever confident the Holy Spirit now has ample opportunity to work:

Jesus himself taught that when the Word is heard but not understood it does no spiritual good. “When anyone hears he message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.” Since the Word only has spiritual benefit when it is perceived, St. Peter writes, “We have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it...”¹²

Pre-evangelism carried out intentionally entices the unbeliever to be curious about the Word of God and ready to listen to the preaching of the gospel. Pastors who make the effort to plan their pre-evangelism efforts out uphold the qualification for the pastor to be a teacher.¹³

A pastor who is able to teach presents his material in a way that is meaningful to his hearers. He will take the time to understand how best to present the gospel to an individual in their pre-evangelism meetings. During these meetings a pastor can find out how best an individual learns and what a comfortable learning environment means for them. If pre-evangelism is left out and a pastor jumps immediately into evangelism the unbeliever may not be ready to trust the pastor to share this life-changing news. Effective teachers take the time to understand their students. Effective outreach pastors intentionally spend time in pre-evangelism so that they can become the most effective communicator of the gospel for each individual lost soul they meet.

Rejection of pre-evangelism by defining it as a crutch for the Holy Spirit discounts its validity as a part of the pastor's qualification to be able to teach. Complete rejection of any means by which a pastor makes the message of the gospel psychologically appealing to

11 WLS, 6-7.

12 Hein, Jonathan R. *Treasure in Jars of Clay: The Synergy Between Instrumental and Ministerial Causes in God's Plan of Salvation*, (Mequon, WI: WLS Essay File, 2011), 6.

13 Cf. 2 Timothy 2:24.

unbelievers fails to carry out the quality of able to teach:

Does “able to teach” simply mean that we share God's Word accurately, without twisting it or perverting it? Let's carry that to the logical conclusion. If that were all that is required, then Gospel ministry could be reduced to reading of the Word. Do not write a sermon. Why risk that you don't say things as well as the Spirit? Just read enough of God's Word, so that both Law and Gospel are proclaimed. Do not learn God's Great Exchange, which requires interaction with a lost soul. When you are sitting in someone's living room, simply pull out your Bible and read Romans, chapter 3, or perhaps a portion of the Gospels. Do not write any hymns. Just chant the Scriptures.¹⁴

A pastor who assumes a blanket reading of the Bible in the presence of an unbeliever will be enough to fulfil his role to preach the Word of God and enough for the Holy Spirit to do his work fails to correctly handle the word.

Using only the words of Scripture in order to evangelize confuses two separate truths. One that the Holy Spirit works faith through the word and second that man does not receive the credit in working faith in an unbeliever's heart. This mentality sets up limits not found in Scripture. Each of these truths can remain unaffected by being intentional in pre-evangelism efforts. A pastor who ignites an interest to hear the gospel does not take away from the work of the Holy Spirit nor is he forced to think more highly of himself for having been the one to convince someone to believe.

The positive psychological impact of a pastor using his own words to generate interest in the Word of God makes improving pre-evangelism skills a worthwhile pursuit in an effort to reach the lost. Pastors need to generate and attract interest in the Word of God since man is born spiritually dead and without a true knowledge of God.¹⁵ Pre-evangelism peaks the interest of the unbeliever so that they are willing to listen to the gospel message. Not that they become willing to listen to what they know will be of great benefit to them, the life-giving gospel. Rather they become willing to listen to something that may or may not be beneficial to them.

Basically, pre-evangelism is like the unbuttoning of a shirt in order to use a defibrillator on someone in cardiac arrest. The electrodes in a defibrillator deliver the life giving electric shock from the battery. These electrodes are most effective when they make complete contact with the bare skin meaning removing the individual's shirt will significantly increase the chance that the electric shock will be effective. In the same way, pre-evangelism allows the presentation

¹⁴ Hein, 12.

¹⁵ Cf. Colossians 2:13.

of the gospel message to be most effective. Pre-evangelism does not make the gospel more effective just like the unbuttoning of a shirt does not make electricity more effective. Pastors do not make the Holy Spirit more powerful by doing pre-evangelism, rather they make themselves more effective at presenting the Word of God to unbelievers.

The qualification for pastors to be able to correctly handle the word of truth means pastors understand that preparations for the presentation of the word is important.¹⁶ These preparations unfold in various forms depending on the person and circumstances. Pastors who are willing to treat every unbeliever as an individual with a unique personality, learning type and history are better prepared to navigate conversations toward a sharing of the gospel despite the lack of a universal procedure from the Bible to begin and guide conversations to a sharing of the gospel with unbelievers. A faithful effort to increase pre-evangelism skills are a manifestation of a pastor's ability to correctly handle the word.

Properly distinguishing between pre-evangelism and evangelism allows pastors to isolate pre-evangelism strategies that are beneficial for setting the stage for opportunities to share the gospel, evangelism. Pre-evangelism efforts are only meant to gain a hearing for the gospel. These efforts do not usurp the power of the gospel, but effectively precede the gospel. The efforts of pre-evangelism prepare the intellect while evangelism presents to the intellect. Sharing parables, using apologetics or pointing out the wonder of nature are the work of pre-evangelism. They pique the interest of unbelievers, allowing pastors to share the gospel message with an attentive unbeliever. In this way, the attentive unbeliever will come to an intellectual understanding of the facts of the gospel. From there the Holy Spirit may work faith in that individual.

Part Two: Who Are The Millennials And Postmoderns?

Pre-evangelism today means pre-evangelism to millennials and postmoderns. In order to prepare to go out and pre-evangelize, pastors need to understand the people they will meet. Taking the time to learn some general truths about millennials and postmoderns will equip pastors for interactions with their communities. While broad generalizations are not the catch all for understanding this vast group numbering close to eighty million,¹⁷ they are helpful for

¹⁶ Cf. 2 Timothy 2:15.

¹⁷ Rainer, 8.

anticipating general thought patterns and outlooks on the world. With a general understanding of millennials and postmoderns combined with the patience to get to know the individual for who he or she is, pastors will lay the groundwork for the opportunity of conversion.

Postmoderns

Postmodern thought is the other current major mind-set awaiting pastors doing pre-evangelism to the lost. This group may be understood with the five thresholds laid out in Don Everts and Doug Schaupp's book *I Once Was Lost: What Postmodern Skeptics Taught Us about Their Path to Jesus*. The five thresholds that are true for the majority of postmoderns are: move from distrust to trust, from complacent to curious, from being closed to change to being open to change in their life, from meandering to seeking and to cross the threshold of the kingdom itself.¹⁸ These thresholds identify five key aspects of the postmodern mind-set. These thresholds can be interchangeable and will span different amounts of time for each postmodern, but the majority will present these thresholds or attitudes to the pre-evangelist. With a better understanding of these thresholds, pastors will be better prepared to meet and interact with the postmodern individuals.

The first threshold to cross with a postmodern is to move from distrust to trust.¹⁹ This generation is not willing to trust a Christian simply because he is a Christian. They are willing to trust someone because they are trustworthy. As previously stated, postmoderns develop their beliefs based on their own experiences. Therefore, if a postmodern individual has never experienced a trusting relationship with a Christian, then this will be an obstacle to overcome in order to gain trust so that the opportunity to share the gospel will come. Beginning a conversation with a postmodern with Bible verses and a well-rehearsed testimony is not likely to bear much fruit. Bible verses and a personal testimony are great tools, but they have to come later when dealing with the postmodern mind-set. In the beginning, the postmodern individual needs to experience a person who cares about them. They need to experience someone who is investing in them without an agenda, who is giving and expecting nothing in return.²⁰ They need not to have ideas forced upon them with the expectation of regular church attendance and a

¹⁸ Everts, 23-24.

¹⁹ Everts, 30.

²⁰ Dyck, Drew. *Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults Are Leaving the Faith-- and How to Bring Them Back*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), 37.

weekly offering. Only after the distrust is removed and the agenda set aside can the real conversations begin.

The second threshold to cross is from complacent to curious.²¹ Although a postmodern can overcome their distrust, it does not mean they immediately are filled with questions for their Christian friends. Rather, the opposite is true. Postmoderns may have lots of Christian friends that they trust, but have no desire to know or experience their faith.²² The major task in the second threshold is to provoke the comfortably complacent to realize that they may be missing something. This process will take some planning and patience as the relationship continues to develop, but in the end it is worth the time. A pastor can encourage this curiosity by intentionally nurturing a postmodern to notice God's work in the world.²³ As the complacent postmodern becomes the curious questioner, the aloof and content attitude will fade. The desire to grow in their knowledge about Christianity, rather than remain in their perceptions of society is the key in this threshold.

The third threshold is the move from being closed to change to being open to it.²⁴ Openness may be one of the bulwarks of the postmodern mind-set, but that does not mean it is always easy for a postmodern to be open to change. Postmodern thought prides itself on the willingness to be open to new and different ideas but, “even for postmodern folks who proudly wave a banner of “openness,” being open to real change is a tough thing.”²⁵ Being open to change means being open to changing the way they have grown to view the world. This means the postmodern is open to changing the answers to some of the unanswered questions ignored for years, “Where is the drinking taking me? How do the one-night stands feel the morning after? Why isn't the anger and bitterness toward my parents dissipating with time? What meaning might there be in the twinges of guilt after I rip into my roommate?”²⁶ This kind of openness exposes postmoderns to the fact that their worldview does not have all the answers and that is a scary place for them to be.²⁷ At this point Christians are looking at a very vulnerable postmodern to whom they get to reveal the truth of the good news about Jesus found in the Bible.²⁸

The fourth threshold is the move to seeking after God.²⁹ Now that the can of worms has

21 Everts, 51.

22 Everts, 51.

23 McAllister, 106.

24 Everts, 66.

25 Everts, 69.

26 Everts, 70.

27 Dyck, 100.

28 McAllister, 122.

29 Everts, 84.

been opened, it is time for the postmodern to find out how to answer the difficult questions. These questions really have to mean something to the postmodern in order for them to pursue the answers. Questions about the frivolity of partying and promiscuity may get them on the path to being open to a different way of life, but seeking after God to give them the answers is a big step. Without a Christian guiding them, the postmodern falls back into the pattern of the world and will find answers outside of the Bible. With the risk of backsliding in place, this threshold requires challenging and timely engagements between the pre-evangelist and the individual so that the postmodern does not stagnate.³⁰ Stagnating means having all the questions ready, but not having God-centered answers. For the pre-evangelist, this threshold means it is time for the postmodern to find out who God is and what he promises to do for them. Left on their own, postmoderns would not be able to find God, they need someone to guide them as they seek out the answer to who God is. God is the God of the Bible, the one true God.

The final threshold is the move to enter the kingdom.³¹ This is the final step for the pre-evangelist and the postmodern. It is time to move to evangelism, time to share the gospel. The postmodern has been prepared and wants to hear. God has been revealed and the questions have all been answered. According to Everts and Schaupp, the time has come for the postmodern to “make a decision.”³² Unfortunately, in the case of many postmoderns this step is viewed as just that, a decision. They have seen all the facts, now it is time to decide whether or not they will leave behind their past way of life and decide to live a new life.

When a postmodern is confronted with the call to “come alive...to stand,”³³ this threshold poses a threat to their conversion. Postmoderns will face the temptation to see, feel and experience their conversion as something they were able to do. The temptation is to view this as the culmination of their discovery of truth. The pre-evangelist ministering to them must be careful during this threshold. This step must not become another logical step in the postmodern path to truth. If the postmodern continues with a mind-set of finding a personal truth to suit their thinking, their experience and their choice, than eventually Christianity will fail them. Likewise, if this step is viewed synergistically, than the trust they have in God will fail. Consequently, the questions they ask will have more of the same worldly answers, the openness they have will open them up to syncretism and their seeking will be in vain. At that point, they will not enter

30 Everts, 88.

31 Everts, 103.

32 Everts, 106.

33 Everts, 105.

the kingdom.

Understanding this final threshold is key to understanding the fundamental problem with the postmodern. This is where the postmodern wants to end up because it is where they started. According to their sinful nature, they want to make the decision to enter the kingdom.³⁴ When the pre-evangelist keeps this in mind, he will do all he can to move out of pre-evangelism methods and into pure evangelism.³⁵ The pre-evangelist becomes the evangelist and shares the gospel in the clearest possible way.

The final threshold is not the time when the decision will be the easiest for the postmodern to make. All of the work to understand the postmodern mind is not a means to make the decision easier. Rather, the evangelist hopes that by understanding the postmodern, he can pave the way for a moment when he can share the gospel in the clearest way possible and the Holy Spirit can do his work in his time through the word to convert. If the words of the evangelist's message are not clear, left up to some interpretation, bend, add or subtract from the Word of God, then the Word of God was not preached in all its truth and purity. Without all its truth and purity, tainted by man, the words are empty and useless.³⁶

Millennials

Millennials are the emerging majority group for pastors as they go out to pre-evangelize the lost. Tolerance is a cornerstone in the mind of a millennial. To a millennial personal experience shapes what they believe. Absolute truths are a thing of the past and relativism reigns. Unfortunately this has an adverse effect on religion because “People today are more concerned about being judgmental about sin than they are about the sin itself.”³⁷ Millennials have backed themselves into a corner with their aversion to absolutes. If everyone has the right to determine what they believe is right and wrong, then there can be no judgment. The result of this is the fear that there will be intolerance of an individual's perception of the world. This judgment is the opposite of their tolerance mind-set. Any pastor hoping to do pre-evangelism among millennials must be careful not to come across as judgmental or intolerant. Patience and listening skills will go far with this generation who need validation and want to express their

34 Dog Notes Order of Salvation p. 27

35 Dyck, 102.

36 Cf. 1 Corinthians 13:1.

37 McAllister, 91.

perception of society. At the same time, the absolute truth of Scripture means it is free from judgment. Indeed faith in the one true God is the only place where anyone can be at peace from judgment. On God's side, there is no condemnation.³⁸

Although they need to hear about the one true faith, millennials do not want to hear a list of facts proclaiming the truth,³⁹ they want to share in the experience before they can trust someone to tell them the truth. Millennials understand through experience, so the open door to their hearts is to show them love. Showing them love gains their trust because they experience the kind of message the Bible holds for them.

My friend began sharing the truth from the Scriptures, and she was met with instant, violent defensiveness. She knew she was right, but she decided to change her approach. She began sharing how Christ had changed her life, how real He is to her, and how He is her best friend who is with her always. Suddenly the other kids' eyes lit up. Their whole countenances changed. They desperately wanted what my friend has! And they followed her around for the rest of the conference asking a zillion questions about how to have that kind of relationship with Christ. She shared the same truth with them then, but they were much more willing to receive it.⁴⁰

The millennials are ready to hear the gospel, they just need to hear the message on their terms. God's Word does not have to change in order to appeal to this generation. Rather, the methods we use to share the word can make all the difference in the world. Understanding the millennials means meeting with them on their terms. Meeting with them on their terms may be uncomfortable, but if it gains a hearing for the gospel, it's worth it.

Diversity typifies the millennial generation. Buying into the idea that everyone deserves to have their own experiences and create their own beliefs exemplifies diversity. This idea also strikes a nerve with the millennials when trying to lay down common themes that appear in a majority of this group.⁴¹ Diversity for the millennials is more than race, gender or ethnicity though. For the millennials their brand of diversity may best be described as the diverse ways in which they hope to contribute something to this world.

Millennials overwhelmingly believe they can do something great to contribute to society.⁴² Their common goal may seem naïve, but their motivation behind this goal is intriguing. For many millennials it appears that their hope for contributing to this world is less naïve and

38 Cf. Romans 8:1.

39 McAllister, 101.

40 McAllister, 99.

41 Rainer, 2.

42 Rainer, 16.

more selfless. “If a Millennial does achieve wealth, fame, or power, it is a means to a greater good than an end in and of itself.”⁴³ Keeping this desire to contribute to the greater good in mind, pastors may be able to share the greater good Jesus accomplished through his suffering and death on the cross. Though the millennials lofty goal seems impractical it recognizes that this world is in need of a change and that in its current state there is room for improvement. Transition from civil righteousness to the true righteousness won by Christ and the millennials will see the balm to the pain in this world is Christ.

In addition to experiences, relationships play an important role in the lives of the millennials. Though bombarded with technology, millennials still feel the need for face to face human contact. The internet and touch screens allow almost anyone anywhere to instantly connect with someone, but that connection does not seem to be the most fulfilling kind for millennials. “I’m on Facebook a lot, but I prefer to be with people. I love it when I meet a Facebook friend for the first time in person. It’s like we have this instant connection.”⁴⁴ The internet, apps and phones may be the fastest way to connect to someone, but for millennials they function more as a means to an end. The chats and texts are a great way to meet, arrange and organize meetings, but the whole purpose is to make the face to face meeting happen. Millennials are not looking for a relationship with a machine, but are willing to use any touchscreen at their fingertips to find someone to connect to face to face. Understanding the importance of relationships to millennials can be a challenge and an opportunity for pastors. Using the technology to meet and arrange meetings may be an ever changing process, but the good news is the face to face is the important part. That means the opportunity for pastors is making a connection. During a face to face meeting a pastor can show love for an individual so that a relationship with a real person might open the door for more meetings and at some point evangelism.⁴⁵

Education has never been more accessible and the millennials are taking full advantage. “Most Millennials are smart. They can read the realities of the marketplace. They know the trends in vocational opportunities. This pragmatic side increases the desire to learn, to get ahead, to get more education.”⁴⁶ A generation eager to learn is exciting. With no shortage of materials available on the Bible this generation ought to have some acquaintance with God, but most are

43 Rainer, 17.

44 Rainer, 19.

45 Scott Dawson, *The Complete Evangelism Guidebook: Expert Advice on Reaching Others for Christ. 2nd ed.*, (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2008), 102.

46 Rainer, 21.

not eager to grow their spiritual knowledge. “The shocking reality for us is that only 13 percent of the Millennials considered any type of spirituality to be important in their lives.”⁴⁷ If millennials are not interested in the Bible, then leaving the job of educating themselves in the Scriptures cannot be left up to them. Providing engaging educational opportunities for the millennials to grow in their knowledge of the Bible will be a major opportunity for pastors to connect with this generation than others in the past. This generation knows how to study and as pastors we have a book unsurpassed in wealth of wisdom, understanding and love.

Part Three: How Does Pre-Evangelism Relate To The Ministerial Cause Of Salvation?

Pastors are not only called to shepherd the flock, but to seek out the lost. They are called to share the word with the lost. Left alone, the lost are spiritually dead and without any hope of eternal life. They need someone to bring the word to them. Pastors are formally called to do this work. Through pastors the lost are brought into contact with the Word of God. For this reason, pastors play an important role in salvation. It is through the words a pastor uses that unbelievers hear of the saving message about Christ Jesus. Pastors have the privilege to share the word with someone who has never heard it. They are responsible for being faithful to their work of preaching the gospel.

At the same time, pastors receive no credit when an unbeliever is brought to faith by the work of the Holy Spirit. After the word is shared, the pastor has no control or influence whether the unbeliever comes to faith. When the Bible describes, “conversion and sustenance of faith, man's role is very small...Man simply imparts the Word, and the Spirit does all the work.”⁴⁸ The Holy Spirit does the work of breathing life into the dead heart of the unbeliever. Therefore all the credit for bringing the lost to life is given to the Spirit. However, the pastor is still left with a part to play.

Pastors are part of the cause of salvation. They are the ministerial cause of salvation or “God's agents, playing a vital role in his saving work, by utilizing the Word, i.e. the instrumental cause.”⁴⁹ Ministers or pastors use the Word of God as a tool. They take its message and share it. When pastors do this, they work with the word. They do not change the meaning, but they can change the way they present the word. The words, illustrations or emotions a pastor uses to

⁴⁷ Rainer, 22.

⁴⁸ Hein, 22.

⁴⁹ Hein, 3.

explain the gospel differ from person to person.

Pre-evangelism plays a vital role in the ministerial cause of salvation. “In a loose sense, anything that causes a sinner to stop and think may be termed a call. This is part of what may often be called 'pre-evangelism.’”⁵⁰ The ultimate goal of a pastor is to share the gospel so that the Holy Spirit can do the work of calling someone to faith or converting them. When a pastor begins his work among the lost, he first begins by connecting with the lost. By speaking with and listening to an unbeliever, a pastor can use their life experiences to ask them more questions or point out the unfulfilled parts of their life. If a pastor can peak the interest of the unbeliever, then he can pave the way for more discussion. When an unbeliever is drawn into a conversation with a pastor the pastor needs to see this as an opportunity for paving the way for sharing the gospel. Pre-evangelism sparks the interest of the lost so that they are willing to listen to the words the pastor speaks. When the words the pastor speaks are the saving words of the gospel, pastors do all they can to make the message clear.

Pre-evangelism has everything to do with the lost. It has everything to do with those who do not know the gospel. Its purpose is to give them every opportunity to hear the gospel. Pre-evangelism sparks an interest in those who have no interest in listening to believers. It seeks to bring the Word of God to the deaf and blind. The lost are deaf and blind spiritually to the Word of God, but not to the audible words of a pastor. When pastors understand that the lost are limited spiritually, not psychologically, they see opportunities all around them.

Opportunities to pre-evangelize are all around pastors who understand the ministerial cause of salvation. Judgment Day is fast approaching and for the unbelievers that means judgment.⁵¹ God's judgment on the Last Day for those who do not believe is eternity in hell. Pastors are compelled to preach the gospel to the lost so that they might be saved from eternal damnation and come to faith in their Savior. Pastors are called to preach, but they are not called to make believers. They cannot make someone come to faith, but they can spark the interest of those who are content to remain in their unbelief:

The herald did not concern himself with whether or not the people believed the message. The king knows of an impending invasion, and so he sends his herald to each town to warn the people that they might take up arms. If the people do not believe the herald, their destruction is their own fault, not his. The only way the herald would be to blame is

⁵⁰ WLS, 6-7.

⁵¹ Cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:2.

if he had not delivered the warning of the King. If anyone hears the trumpet but does not take warning and the sword comes and takes his life, his blood will be on his own head. Since he heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning, his blood will be on his own head. If he had taken warning, he would have saved himself. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes the life of one of them, that man will be taken away because of his sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for his blood.⁵²

This hypothetical situation of a herald sent out to warn towns facing the threat of invasion illustrates the role of a pre-evangelist and an unbeliever. A herald will do all he can to warn the people of the impending danger. His message will be a clear trumpet blast warning of the impending danger. If someone asks what his trumpet call means he will explain. If the herald sees someone on the road he will tell him of the coming threat of invasion. The herald must do his work to get the message out because if someone did not hear the message and dies, the herald is to blame. On the other hand, if the herald does all he can to warn the people and though they understand the impending danger, do not flee and are killed, the herald is not responsible for their fate.

In the same way that a herald is sent to deliver a message to the people, a pastor is sent to preach the gospel to the unbeliever. Pastors are sent out to spread the gospel. They want to share this message in the clearest possible way. On the one hand, they want to share the message in the clearest possible way so that some may hear and believe. On the other hand, they want to share the message in the clearest possible way so that they are not held responsible for the fate of an unbeliever because their presentation of the message was poorly communicated, confusing or disingenuous.

Pre-evangelism work helps the heralding pastor deliver the clearest possible message. When a pastor shares the gospel with someone, he is like the herald telling someone an invasion is imminent. When a pastor does pre-evangelism, he is like the herald making sure the townspeople understand his language, his trumpet blast indicates an invasion and his warning needs to be taken seriously. Pre-evangelism seeks to do all of these things. It may not be sharing the gospel directly with someone, but it is the preparatory work to make sure the people will understand the presentation of the gospel. Ultimately, the people with whom the pre-evangelist works may reject his message once he tries to share the gospel. That however is not his concern. His concern is that they understand what it means for them if they believe versus if

⁵² Hein, 11.

they remain in their unbelief. Since the consequences of unbelief are eternal death,⁵³ the pre-evangelism needs to be done in the best possible way.

Part Four: What Needs To Change About Pre-Evangelism?

Pastoral pre-evangelism efforts in the WELS need to change. According to the WELS Statistical Reports from the last fifteen years, there is a consistent lack of adult confirmands and adult baptisms.⁵⁴ The numbers indicate that over the last fifteen years close to fifty five percent of congregations have had one or less adult confirmands and almost ninety percent have had one or less adult baptisms. These two statistics are important for understanding the need to improve and be intentional about pre-evangelism efforts. These statistics reveal that the majority of WELS churches experience almost no growth in terms of bringing an unbelieving adult into the faith.

The results of these statistics partially reflect outreach efforts. If these numbers reveal the fruits of the gospel working on unbelieving hearts to bring them to faith, then they are in part a reflection of the lack of unbelievers brought to faith. Surely these statistics do not only measure pre-evangelism efforts. They are not meant to show that some pastors are very intentional about reaching out to the lost, while others put no effort at all into outreach. These statistics are simply one piece of the puzzle that help reveal that there are areas where the church could grow its efforts to reach the lost. With an increase in intentional pre-evangelism, the opportunity for the lost to hear the message can grow. If more people hear the message, then more may be brought to faith as adults. In that way, an increased effort in pre-evangelism could impact the adult baptism and confirmation statistics. However, whether the statistics are high or low, a pastor convinced of the one true faith will be motivated to mission work because he knows what is at stake. There is only one narrow road to heaven. There is only one message to proclaim. The gospel must be proclaimed, not so that the WELS can grow or so that a pastor can be remembered as a great evangelist. Rather, Jesus reminds all evangelists that, “in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent” (Luke 15:7). Love and the hope of rejoicing motivates pastors to reach out to the lost.

⁵³ Cf. Romans 6:23.

⁵⁴ Appendix I.

Adults who do not believe are the ones behind the statistics for adult confirmands and adult baptisms. This group is made up of adults who have heard the gospel message but have not believed or have not heard the gospel at all. In either case, both of these groups represent people who need to hear the gospel message. Pastors cannot make an unbeliever believe or make the gospel more powerful. On the other hand, they can work to gain a hearing among the unbelievers and present the gospel in the best possible way, without errors, with appropriate zeal and with clear language.

The efforts of pastors to preach the gospel to the lost must not be tolerated as one of the factors contributing to poor adult confirmand and baptism statistics for WELS churches. There may be many uncontrollable factors that contribute to the low statistics for churches, but pastors can control how faithful they are in their effort to reach out to the lost. Faithfulness to the lost includes pre-evangelism preparation. Pastors do not need to be afraid that they are somehow detracting from the power of the Word of God when they try to gain a hearing for the gospel. Pre-evangelism can be done with a clear conscience when pastors are upfront about their faith and desire to share their faith. They can also go a long time in a conversation or have a full conversation with an unbeliever without reaching the point of sharing the gospel message. Instead, some conversations are merely attempts to make the unbeliever think or to realize there may be something missing in their life.

There are many adults who do not believe and have something missing in their lives. Jesus reminded the disciples that there were many who were lost and had not heard the message of the gospel and didn't even know they needed it. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few."⁵⁵ This truth is timeless. Pastors for all time will have a large harvest field ready for seed.

When pastors share the Word of God, the seed is sown and the Spirit is able to make it grow. Pastors can do a lot of prep work on the harvest field, but ultimately they cannot see into the hearts of people. They do not know if the seed they sow is falling on hard ground, rocky ground, a thorny patch or the good earth.⁵⁶ They do not know who God has elected to save and who will reject the message. Yet, pastors can spend time talking with someone to find out what kind of ground they are and what might be their struggle. Taking the time to do this, a pastor may be able to break up the hard ground, remove the rocks and take out some weeds so that the

⁵⁵ Matthew 9:37.

⁵⁶ Cf. Matthew 13:1-23.

seeds of God's Word fall on soil that is able to be nourished and grow. However, this does not mean that pastors receive credit for or play a part in the actual creation of faith “neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”⁵⁷ Again this is the distinction between pre-evangelism, evangelism and conversion.

The desire to do intentional pre-evangelism as a way to create more opportunities to share the Word of God which has the power to bring someone to faith come from a heart of love. Reaching out to someone for the first time may pose many obstacles for a pastor. A person may have a low view of pastors, a negative view of Christianity or be angry with God. Yet pastors are called to the same work as their Lord “to seek and to save the lost.”⁵⁸ Their motivation flows from a pastoral heart filled with love. In 1 Thessalonians 2:8, the apostle Paul revealed his pastoral heart when he wrote, “because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.” Indeed, this heart of love leads pastors to want to do all they can to gain a hearing for the gospel.

Part Five: What Are Some Methods Of Pre-Evangelism To Millennials And Postmoderns?

Exploring methods of pre-evangelism is a practical way for pastors to reach out to millennials and postmoderns. Although there is no universal method of pre-evangelism and no perfect method that results in one hundred percent conversion, pastors can improve their pre-evangelism efforts by exploring their options. There are always new ideas for exciting interest in the content of the Bible. There are always new ideas because the context in which a pastor shares the gospel message will always be different. Technology, terminology, temperament and a host of other changes are always occurring in society. Pastors have to be ready to change their style of gaining a hearing and piquing the interest of unbelievers. The following methods serve as a portion of strategies up for exploration and adaptation by pastors.

Servant Evangelism

In Scott Dawson's book *The Complete Evangelism Guidebook: Expert Advice on Reaching Others for Christ*, he bases his wide range of methods for evangelism on a set of

⁵⁷ 1 Corinthians 3:7.

⁵⁸ Cf. Luke 19:10.

principles. He identifies his method of evangelism by the term “servant evangelism.” In his book he proposes that:

- ! Anyone can be kind
- ! The average Christian is able to do a highly effective evangelism – anyone can sow a seed (see Matthew 13).
- ! Effective evangelism is a process and does not produce an immediate flip-flop from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow” (1 Cor. 3:6).
- ! Evangelism happens in an atmosphere of acceptance of new people who are coming in – loving them just as they are, just where they are. The story of the prodigal son is a model of this acceptance (Luke 15:11-32).
- ! We can begin effective in evangelism now, right where we are. It doesn't take any further training. We've all received the training we need to be effective evangelists if we have spent six months in the church and in reading our Bibles. It's very simple! Just do it – as Matthew 28:19 directs.⁵⁹

Dawson's principles have a vein of pre-evangelism running through them. His list centers on creating a welcome and inviting atmosphere for all people. This kind of environment appeals to people. It opens doors to people. At the same time, many of his suggestions do not involve a direct presentation of the gospel. Instead, they are servant minded words and actions that convey sincerity and genuine interest in the wellbeing of others. These characteristics attract people and may lead to opportunities to share the gospel.

Pastors who emulate his principle of acceptance and loving people just as they are may see an increase in the amount of conversations they have with unbelievers. Although these principles need to be qualified in that acceptance and loving people just as they are does not mean the acceptance of sin or a sinful life style, they are still beneficial as pre-evangelism tools. Pastors who can show people, even blatantly sinful people, that they care about them and love them prove that they can be trusted. Pastors who are patient and willing to empathize with the lost reveal their caring heart and long term commitment, opposed to a shallow charmer looking to win another soul to sit in his church.⁶⁰

Pastors who generate trust will gain a hearing among the millennials and postmoderns. Both of these groups are hesitant to trust people, especially those who seem judgmental and unloving. Yet Dawson maintains that “people are yearning to be convinced that Jesus is real and

⁵⁹ Dawson, 43-44.

⁶⁰ Everts, 71.

that what he stands for is good and right. But these days none of them are going to be argued into the kingdom. They are going to be escorted or nudged into God's kingdom by fellow travelers were willing to make changes to become just like them.”⁶¹ Pastors do not need to sin in order to gain the trust of unbelievers. Rather, they need to show them that they are not judgmental or unloving toward someone who is from a different socioeconomic class, ethnicity, ages, etc. and that they are willing to preach the gospel to them.

Pre-evangelism means doing something in order to get someone to a place where they can hear the gospel. This is more than offering church on Sunday mornings. This is something that might take pastors out of their comfort zone. It means asking the questions:

What are you willing to do so that people you know will go to heaven? Invite them to church? Share your story? Take them a meal? Pray for them every day until they are saved? Your mission field is all around you. Don't miss the opportunities God is giving you. Is anyone going to be in heaven because of you? Will anyone in heaven be able to say to you, “I want to thank you, I'm here because you cared enough to share the good news with me?” Imagine the joy of greeting people in heaven whom you helped get there? The eternal salvation of a single soul is more important than anything else you'll ever achieve in life. Only people are going to last forever.⁶²

Dawson's list of questions are a good exercise for any pastor wondering if he is doing all he can to pre-evangelize in his community. These questions can be implemented any day of the week and in any situation. Questions can open up the door for a spiritual conversation with almost anyone.⁶³ Harnessing their power might spark a conversation with someone who a pastor never thought would want to talk with him at all. That person might be an unbeliever and their conversation might spark the interest of the unbeliever to come to church or be willing to talk with the pastor again sometime. Either way the pastor made a step in the way of pre-evangelism to try and gain a hearing among the lost. Even if all goes well and the pastor is able to share the gospel sometime with this person and they do not come to faith, the pastor tried and was faithful to his work of preaching the gospel. The work to create faith is in the Spirit and in the Spirit's time. In any case, trying to gain a hearing is better than not trying.

Dawson gives some guidance to those who are not sure how to guide a pre-evangelism conversation. Having a simple format to work from when trying to intentionally guide a conversation toward a gospel presentation is a great tool. These four points serve as a simple

61 Dawson, 45.

62 Dawson, 65.

63 Kevin Harney, *Organic Outreach for Ordinary People: Sharing the Good News Naturally*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 2009), 183.

guide to a pre-evangelism conversation designed to generate interest in the gospel:

1. What my life was like before I met Jesus
2. How I realized I needed Jesus
3. How I committed by life to Jesus
4. The difference Jesus has made in my life⁶⁴

First, number three has the intention of teaching a decision theology, so it needs to be changed to a “how Jesus worked faith in my heart.” After fixing number three, the list can be taken and molded by a pastor into a general pattern for conversations with the lost. These questions allow for the universal need of all people for a savior to come up and for Jesus as the answer for all people to come up. These may be enough to gain some interest in talking more about the Bible and the gospel.

Friendship Outreach

Carl Simmons suggests a variety of pre-evangelism methods in his book *Outreach Ministry in the 21st Century: The Encyclopedia of Practical Ideas*. In particular, Simmons focuses one chapter on friendship evangelism. Here he provides many suggestions for scenarios in which a believer might be better able to start a conversation about faith. These situations are natural and serve as ice-breakers that alleviate the pressure and awkwardness of an evangelism meeting in an office or at a random doorstep. The following ideas offer a pastor several ways to mingle with friends who are unbelievers.

First Simmons suggests an idea called “seeds of faith.”⁶⁵ This idea mixes friends and gardening. Simmons suggests working together with an unbelieving friend on a garden. The time spent together working on the garden may produce opportunities to share experiences, grow in trust and provide the chance to generate interest in the gospel. The garden itself and the seeds can be used to share some of Jesus' parables about spreading the seeds, the harvest and the vine and the branches. This idea is non-confrontational and allows for months of conversations, which means months of opportunities to work to gain a hearing for the gospel.

Second, he suggests mixing friends and food. Hosting a one-time meal event or developing a tradition of serving a meal at a certain time of year provides an opportunity for

⁶⁴ Dawson, 62.

⁶⁵ Carl Simmons, *Outreach Ministry in the 21st Century: The Encyclopedia of Practical Ideas*. (Loveland, CO: Group Pub., 2007), 93.

people to come together. Make sure to schedule the event in advance so that people have time to plan and get the chance to develop some excitement for the get-together. Only invite a small group of unbelieving friends or family to come to the event. Then over the meal let the conversations take their natural course. No need to force a gospel presentation on the group. Allow the comfort level of the group to rise and “as needs are brought up, make a point of following up in prayer and by checking in with your friend or neighbor regularly to see how things are going.”⁶⁶ These follow up conversations continue this pre-evangelism idea and hopefully lead to a sharing of the gospel.

Third, he offers the idea of doing a community car wash on your street.⁶⁷ This will bring in neighbors and strangers from around the community. The thing to remember with this idea is that the window of opportunity is very small. However, expanding the idea may gain more time for interacting with people helping with the event and with those benefiting from it. The event could grow into a street wide event with washes at one house, fluid checks at another and even include games for the kids at one house and food at another. Regardless of the size, this opportunity allows the pastor to get his name out into the community and show he cares for the community. Any activity that a pastor can host or attend to show the community who he is and the way he lives his life is an opportunity to connect with people in hopes of connecting people with Jesus.⁶⁸ Remember, the people helping with the event are just as important for pre-evangelism as those not directly involved.

Forth, create a list of twenty open ended questions that can be used as conversation starters. The questions are best written so that they can have a spiritual aspect. Some suggestions for questions are:

- ! What do you think about [a tragic event in the news]? Do you think there is an ultimate meaning behind events like that?
- ! What was the best day in your life? What made that day so meaningful?
- ! Do you think people can really change? What about criminals or terrorists? What do you think are the underlying reasons for crime and violence?⁶⁹

Questions like these provide unbelievers the chance to show aspects of their world view, their values and their struggles within this world. Pastors can dig deeper with the responses and

66 Simmons, 94.

67 Ibid.

68 Harney, 151.

69 Simmons, 95-96.

finally offer answers based on the Word of God. The response of the unbeliever to a pastor's Christian view may serve to pique the interest of the unbeliever and lead to deeper conversations about the Bible and what God has done for them.

Fifth, host a backyard BBQ.⁷⁰ For this event it is important to mix believers and unbelievers together. Let your fellow believers know that you hope this event will open up some doors to share the gospel. Make the event fun with outdoor games and make sure to introduce people to one another to foster conversations. This event could be hosted at the pastor's house or at a member's house, but not at the church. The point is not to make it feel like a pre-evangelism event, rather a fun night together with friends who happen to love Jesus and live to share his message and his love with others. This event is low pressure for everyone involved and a great way to create amiable relationships that can lead to conversations about faith.

Sixth, host a movie night with a film that naturally lends itself to conversations on spiritual subjects.⁷¹ Choosing a movie that has spiritual subjects and being up front about the nature of the film is a good way for people to express their thoughts on spirituality. This may be a less confrontational way for people to share their thoughts and provide you an opportunity to share your faith. Serving ice cream or some other snacks will also help keep the mood light after the movie. Make sure all who are invited know that you will still be friends with them even if they do not share your faith, but also that you will be praying for them and for more opportunities to share your faith with them.

Seventh, take someone out to lunch. This option again combines food and friend, but in a more intimate setting. The one on one conversation affords both people to share an air of confidentiality and trust. Make lunch a monthly activity with this person and eventually begin to bring Jesus up in conversation. “After some small talk on the usual issues, bring up what you really want to say. Share what Jesus has done in your life and how he can do the same for your friend and whatever he or she is going through right now.”⁷² This transition from the secular to the sacred conversation can come off as a natural thing to share with someone you have become closer with. Share the gospel out of love with gentleness and by being non-confrontational about sin. Point to yourself as the “worst of sinners,” and allow them to identify indirectly with their own sins. Have a pocket Bible or some verses ready if your pre-evangelism leads to a full evangelism conversation. Be ready to make the most of your chance to tell someone you care

⁷⁰ Ibid, 96.

⁷¹ Simmons, 96.

⁷² Ibid, 97.

about and want to spend time with about the good news.⁷³

Eighth, host a “seekers study.”⁷⁴ Millennials and postmoderns alike are among the most educated people around so they know how to ask questions and dig for the answers.⁷⁵ Make the subject of this study group a study of some of the tough questions about the Bible. This activity is great to host at church where members can invite non-member friends allowing both parties to grown and learn about the Bible. Then, when difficult questions come up, the believer has the knowledge and understanding to present the facts in an open way rather than with condemnation. Sharing the truth in this way will show people they can ask the difficult questions, get answers and avoid judgment.

Ninth, invite people to church to watch an appropriate reality-TV show.⁷⁶ Millennials and postmoderns have grown up in a generation where many people are addicted to watching reality-TV shows. Hosting a reality-TV night can be a great way to connect with member’s unbelieving friends and get them into church in a non-confrontational way.⁷⁷ Be upfront that the purpose is to watch the show. There will not be a formal devotion, only watching the show, snacks and small talk. This is a great pre-evangelism tool to give people a sense of belonging and community amongst believers. The event itself may not be a preaching of the gospel, but the conversations or relationships that begin here could lead to talking about Jesus.

Tenth, take advantage of families and try some “parent 'bridge events.’”⁷⁸ Events organized for children to play together is an outlet for parents. This is a great way to get the adults together to talk while keeping their children safe and occupied. Parents can share stories and grow their relationships by fostering meaningful conversation. An Easter egg hunt at the church is one example of a 'bridge event.' The event brings people to the church grounds and introduces them to the pastor and members. This event does not need to have a devotion attached to it, but if it does, than it needs to be made clear from the beginning. If some have a problem with the devotion, give them the option to skip the devotion. In this way, even if the unbeliever does not hear the Word of God, they at least saw that you were patient and understanding. These qualities may keep them open-minded and open the door for more pre-evangelism and evangelism in the future.

73 Dawson, 65.

74 Simmons, 97..

75 Harney, 152-3.

76 Simmons, 98.

77 Harney, 154.

78 Simmons, 99.

Simmons's ten ideas for pre-evangelism offer pastors plenty of methods to test on millennials and postmoderns. These ten can be modified to fit many different pastor's personalities and those of unbelieving millennials and postmoderns. More than that though, these activities invite believers and unbelievers, pastors and people, to learn about one another as individuals with common interests. In this way, pastors and believers can show unbelievers the love they have for them and the desire they have to share what they hold most dear to them because they believe it will be the greatest message of peace and comfort in the world.

The One-Degree Rule

Kevin Harney employs many of the same suggestions for outreach as Simmons in his book *Organic Outreach for Ordinary People: Sharing the Good News Naturally*. Harney, along with Simmons, gives suggestions for engaging believers and unbelievers in social events, meals and study groups. Again these opportunities allow Christians to shine a light into the lives of the unbeliever. Harney gives more detailed encouragement to the pre-evangelist hoping to ignite some interest in the lost. He reminds believers to let their light shine so that:

When people look at us, they should see a confident trust in the Savior, a boldness rooted in our faith in him. This confidence is not an arrogant posture that says we know it all and have everything in life figured out. Rather, it is a humble certainty that God is on the throne, that we are walking in his light and that we don't have to live like those who stumble in the darkness. As unbelievers see this attitude in our lives, they will be drawn to the light of God that shines through us – Jesus Christ.⁷⁹

We could host all the events in the world, but if we are not careful to give off a humble and attractive glow of faith rather than a raging fire of judgment, the lost will not be drawn to us. Harney points out the wonderful warmth we can reflect as pre-evangelists. We can reflect the love our Savior has for us. We can seek to gain a hearing for the gospel among the lost. We can show them they have everything to gain by listening to the message that we hold so dear.

Compartmentalization is a trap for pastors. When pastors fall into the trap of keeping their church work out of the other things in their lives, they miss out on opportunities for pre-evangelism. “Too many Christians compartmentalize their lives and keep their 'church friends'

⁷⁹ Harney, 82.

away from their 'other friends.'"⁸⁰ Pastors can fall into the trap of keeping their work of pre-evangelism on the clock, but the opportunities for pre-evangelism cannot be put on hold. Whenever a chance for pre-evangelism presents itself pastors must be ready.

Pastors can maintain an intentional pre-evangelism outlook with the “Thirty-Seconds Rule.”⁸¹ The Thirty-Seconds Rule is a commitment pastors can make to stop at designated times throughout the day to reset their hearts and eyes toward the people around them. There are opportunities occurring all around pastors all day long, but they can fly by if pastors do not take the time to stop and see them. When pastors slow down to look at the people around them, pre-evangelism happens. When they slow down to connect with their community, their opportunity to evangelize goes up.

Another of Harney's rules is the One-Degree Rule.⁸² He uses a scale from one to ten and asks evangelists to honestly rank themselves from one to ten, one being ice cold and ten being sizzling hot. Keeping this scale in mind is a graphic reminder for pastors who want to remain consistently pre-evangelism minded wherever they are. The scale functions as a visual encouragement to be sizzling hot. Pastors have the greatest message to share, amongst many who have not heard and the Spirit who promises to work. The scale helps pastors be intentional about their pre-evangelism. Being held accountable throughout the day by keeping the scale in mind keeps a pastor from feeling guilty later that he was at an ice cold “one” on the scale for evangelism all day. A little reminder from the scale could be the boost a pastor needs to get himself back in the mind-set to spark interest in the Word of God and be bold to share the truth with someone who may have never heard it.⁸³

Harney encourages both planned and unplanned pre-evangelism. Like Simmons, he gives many examples of planned activities to provide pre-evangelism opportunities, but he also drives home the point to be ready for the unplanned openings. Some of these he calls truck-sized openings.⁸⁴ These are the moments when someone asks an open question that you can give a faith related answer to. When someone asks about the past weekend, a struggle or pain in your life, a recent joy or celebration or when viewing the wonder and beauty of creation, all of these can be presented with an honest answer that talks about God. The past weekend at church, the sad recent departure of a loved one to their heavenly home, the miracle of a new born baby or the

80 Harney, 152.

81 Harney, 155.

82 Harney, 62.

83 McAllister, 98.

84 Harney, 192-3.

majesty of a mountain range all give opportunity to talk about God. They all have the potential to spark the interest of unbelievers who wonder what they might be missing in church, when contemplating life after death, the intricacies of childbirth and the magnitude of the created universe. All of these topics can be brought up by the savvy pre-evangelist in order to get the unbeliever thinking and wanting to hear more about God.⁸⁵

Reaching The Samaritans

Near the end of his book *Radical Outreach: The Recovery of Apostolic Ministry and Evangelism*, George Hunter points to the outreach Jesus did to the Woman of Samaria as an example for those who want to reach out to this current generation. He points to four factors that match up with the same characteristics as the millennials and postmoderns:

First, she had ancestors who had known the God of Abraham; certain ancestors, such as Jacob, had been people of great faith. However, second, she was not substantially influenced by the Abrahamic faith. She had acquired some of the faith's language, such as the words "prophet" and "messiah"; but its deeper meaning had escaped her. Third, she was struggling in her personal life. Her life was not turning out according to any plan...in ancient Samaritan culture, a woman whose man would not marry her had no social standing, we know that she was marginalized and branded a "loser"; undoubtedly, she had a low sense of self-worth. However, fourth, she was a seeker, asking religious questions, though not always in the language of the Jewish religious tradition.⁸⁶

In the same way, millennials and postmoderns come on the heels of more biblically literate parents though they live in an increasingly less Christian society which is leading many to struggle more and more in their personal lives. Many are searching for an escape from this life of struggle while trying to find a set of principles they can live by that will make them happy. In the end, they need what the Samaritan woman needed, Jesus. Pastors can reach out to the millennial and postmodern who can relate to this woman. Hunter offers five approaches pastors can use to gain a hearing among modern Samaritans.

First, Hunter suggests beginning where the person is. The Samaritan woman was not ready to jump into a deep spiritual conversation with Jesus about the promised Messiah. Knowing this, Jesus "began where the Samaritan woman was – her ancestry, her domestic

⁸⁵ George G. Hunter, *Outreach: The Recovery of Apostolic Ministry and Evangelism*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 193.

⁸⁶ Hunter, 184.

history, her struggles, questions and issues.”⁸⁷ When pastors go out to do their pre-evangelism, it is critical that they begin their conversations with people on their level. It is of no advantage to the pastor or unbeliever to talk past one another. Rather, the pastor must be willing to learn where to begin with an individual. The key to gaining an understanding of the individual is to engage them in conversation. Pastors can keep the conversation going by showing they are open to discussion and questions on the individual's level with responses that present the truths of the Bible with compassion not condemnation.⁸⁸

Hunter's second point centers on the need for a dialogue. The millennial and postmodern want to be taken as individuals and they are individuals just like the Samaritan woman. Jesus engaged her in conversation and was not afraid to ask her the real issues she struggled with. Pastors must be ready to talk with people about their real struggles. Learning and growing in the skill of carrying on conversation is vital for effective pre-evangelism. Pastors will not be able to gain a hearing unless they say something that can be heard, heard in the audible sense and heard in the sense of recognition of vocabulary.

Jesus spoke her language and pre-evangelists need to be prepared to do the same according to Hunter. Jesus' wisdom shines through with his use of words and pictures people can understand. He and the woman were at a well, so he used a metaphor of “living water” to describe his offer of eternal life. Pastors today need to be ready to do the same when discussing the Word of God. Their conversations need to be devoid of the “esoteric academic language of theologians and the jargon of the ecclesiastical traditions.”⁸⁹ Millennials and postmoderns are turned off by church language. They want something more real. Pre-evangelism conversations can generate interest, while not throwing around terminology that only a theologian can understand. Rather, a wise pre-evangelist can take the content of the Scriptures and put them into the context of the individual with whom they are speaking. Being respectful of individuals rather than degrading them will keep the conversation going and hopefully open up a chance to share the gospel.

Respect is key with those who feel uneasy in the presence of a Christian, especially of a pastor. Jesus as a Jew and the marginalized Samaritan woman were not supposed to talk with one another according to the rules of society, but he did talk to her and with respect. She did not expect Jesus to treat her with respect. That made all the difference when he did. She saw a man

⁸⁷ Hunter, 188.

⁸⁸ Simmons, 98.

⁸⁹ Hunter, 189.

willing to treat her with love. His love had a redemptive quality about it. His willingness to treat her not as she deserved allowed her to experience what her life would be like if she was no longer carrying around the burden of her sins. Pastors can show that same redemptive quality by being respectful when having pre-evangelism conversations. Judgment and lack of respect will turn unbelievers away from listening to a pastor long enough to tell them about Jesus. On the other hand, a pastor who shows love and respect will be able to keep the unbeliever's attention. He can keep it long enough to show the lost he understands them and their struggles.

Finally, Hunter ends with the emphasis on understanding. “Jesus listened, responded and related to the Samaritan woman.”⁹⁰ When Jesus spoke with the woman, he listened so that he could respond to her in a meaningful way. His responses showed he understood what she was going through and what she needed to hear. She needed to hear the hope of a Savior, not just for the Jews or the chosen people, but for her. Pastors who take the time to understand where a millennial or postmodern is at before they jump into a formal law and gospel presentation show they want to understand where they are as an individual, not just get them evangelized so they can move as quickly as possible to the next degenerate soul to be converted.⁹¹ Pastors show someone they understand them when that person can walk away saying what the Samaritan woman said, “come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!...Jesus had not actually told her everything she had ever done; there hadn't been enough time!”⁹² Jesus made her feel like he really understood her. Pastors can do the same when they take the time to listen to a millennial or postmodern who may be sceptical of them and does not expect them to treat them with respect. Then showing they understand them leaves them wondering how someone could share a message with them that makes them want to hear more.

Five Thresholds

Don Everts and Doug Schaupp offer five thresholds that a postmodern needs to cross through before they are ready to come to faith in their book *I Once Was Lost: What Postmodern Skeptics Taught Us about Their Path to Jesus*. These five thresholds cannot be treated as a means of grace in that they will absolutely bring a postmodern to faith, but they are very useful for pre-evangelism work. Everts and Schaupp devote their entire book to these five thresholds,

⁹⁰ Hunter, 189.

⁹¹ Dyck, 39.

⁹² Hunter, 189.

confident that with an understanding of these major themes a pre-evangelist might gain the best possible hearing for the gospel. They begin with the steps they believe are necessary to gain the truth of the distrusting postmodern.

There are five habits that establish trust among the postmoderns.⁹³ One, pre-evangelists must pray when faced with someone who isn't ready to trust a single word they say. The first reaction of many when faced with someone who does not want to listen to them can be defensive. When defences go up, the pre-evangelist turns from seeking to win a hearing for the gospel to winning an argument. Prayer asks God for the strength to be patient and not get defensive. Rather, pre-evangelists ask God to give them compassion and patience when dealing with the lost.

Two, pre-evangelists must remain open and curious when talking with postmoderns. The temptation toward feeling offended is going to come up when dealing with someone who distrusts you and has a different understanding of the world. Instead of being offended, pre-evangelists can try to learn from every encounter with a postmodern to see where they are coming from. Learning from them provides better insights as to what their struggles are and who they can best be reached with the gospel. This means asking questions and really listening to the postmodern response. When questions are asked and the conversation develops, pre-evangelists need to be genuine. If a person is being fake, then the other person will know it. Learning from the postmodern means showing you are willing to give them your heart.

Three, bond with the postmodern. They think and live differently, but the pre-evangelist needs to be willing to walk on the same side of the street as they do. Unbelievers are going to be different than the people sitting in the pews, but that does not have to scare pastors from bonding with them. Pastors do not have to fall into sin in order to bond with a postmodern. "The best conversations with non-Christians rarely occur inside a church building or at an event designed for seekers."⁹⁴ The point is that pre-evangelism is going to be an intentional effort on behalf of the pastor. He will have to go out into the community and make an effort to meet postmoderns. Most likely they will not come flooding into church asking him questions about faith. Therefore, when pastors are out in the community, they must not avoid the unbelievers around them, but find ways to bond with them. Pastors can even go so far as to talk about their own struggles with faith in order to bond with the lost.⁹⁵ Being vulnerable and relatable makes the pastor more

93 Everts, 36.

94 Everts, 42.

95 McAllister, 130-131.

human, more of an individual and more able to share Jesus' love for the lost. After forming a genuine bond with someone, the door for evangelism may open.

Four, look for ways to affirm something about the postmodern. When affirming the postmodern, the goal is to look for a good quality that can lead into a discussion about Christ. Paul did this when he called the Athenians very religious. He affirmed that they were trying to find and worship God. From this point Paul was able to show them the answer to who God is. He was able to tell them about the one true God. Paul had to be careful when he affirmed the Athenians as do modern pre-evangelists when affirming postmoderns. Paul was not affirming that through careful searching, the Athenians would discover Christ. In the same way today, pre-evangelists who seek to affirm, may know a Buddhist neighbor who is a good parent or an atheist who likes to give back to the community. A pastor can affirm these as good qualities, but must be careful not to give the impression of relativism. Godly living can only flow from the roots of faith.⁹⁶ Though a pastor can affirm someone living a good life to get to a conversation about Christ, he must never give the impression that good works contribute toward salvation. There is only one God and one way to salvation. God is not whoever a person creates him to be or whatever morality they live by in their lives. With this in mind, affirmation can still be a good pre-evangelism tool and launching point for the gospel. It can build relationships and trust with postmoderns initiating interest and further discussion of Christianity and eventually the gospel.

Five, welcome those postmoderns who are not Christian. Pre-evangelists must give a welcoming impression to the lost or they will maintain their distrust of Christians. Welcome those who do not know anything about Christianity. Encourage curiosity and questions about the one true faith and doors will fly open for opportunities to share the gospel. Welcoming questions really gets at the heart of pre-evangelism, the desire to create and foster in the heart of unbelievers the desire to learn more about Christianity. Pastors must be excited for unbelievers to come asking questions about their faith. This is an open invitation to share the gospel. It is the culmination of gaining a hearing. It is someone who wants to hear more. They do not want to hear more because they know what is in store for them, but out of pure curiosity. They are dead spiritually, but naturally curious about things around them in this world. Welcome that curiosity about the world, but give them something beyond the world from heaven.

Threshold two is made up of three habits that will provoke the curiosity of the

⁹⁶ Dawson, 27.

postmodern. One, pre-evangelists can encourage questions. “It seems Jesus used questions not to elicit information from people but rather to stir within them some thought or emotion. Jesus is asked 183 questions in the Gospels. He answers just 3 of them – and he asks 307 questions back!”⁹⁷ Pastors who can encourage unbelievers to ask good questions can effectively create in them the interest and desire to learn more about what Christianity might mean for them. This is not a way that pastors can latch on to some synergistic methodology eliciting some spiritual knowledge inside of an unbeliever, rather a pastor can simply get the lost postmodern to consider and question something in their life or a deep seeded belief of theirs. When pastors can get postmoderns to stump themselves with a question, they create curiosity in the postmodern. Pre-evangelism minded pastors can use this curiosity as a chance to gain a hearing for the gospel among those who many have had no curious desire to listen to them before.

Two, pastors can create curiosity through parables. Jesus used many parables to stick inside the minds of the lost, causing them to beg him for further explanation and ask more questions. Pastors who can master the art of telling stories and creating illustrations that divulge a heavenly message may pique the curiosity of the postmodern mind. These parables are powerful tools because they reveal a spiritual truth while creating curiosity. In the explanation a pastor can weave in the gospel truths while explaining the true meaning behind the parable.

Three, pastors can be curious as a way to encourage the curiosity of others. Pastors who do curious things make others ask questions of them. A pastor who spends time with the destitute or those afflicted by addictions may beg others to ask him why he wastes his time with those kinds of people. This opens the door to talk about the unconditional love of God. Other curious or countercultural activities carried out intentionally by pre-evangelist minded pastors create curiosity and open the door for conversations with the lost.

Threshold three asks the pastor to be bold enough to challenge postmoderns to be open to change. This is not easy for postmoderns. They might be able to overcome their distrust and become curious, but being willing to change their whole outlook on life is a completely different story. Pre-evangelists need to be ready to challenge postmoderns to do this. If a pastor and a postmodern have a lot of conversations about what one another believes, but the pastor never challenges the postmodern to believe this message of Jesus is real for him, than the two are talking past one another. At some point, the pastor must call the postmodern out of his

97 Everts, 54.

complacency. He must challenge the postmodern with a conversation where he makes him challenge what he believes and consider that it may not be the truth. At this threshold, the pastor pushes past curiosity and onto shaking the core of the postmodern with the challenge that he cannot only question what he has believed, but that he must change it because there is only one true path, one narrow way. The openness to change can create the opportunity for pastors to show postmoderns that Christianity is the truth they need in their lives.

The fourth threshold prompts pastors to bring unbelievers to the point of being seekers.⁹⁸ Pre-evangelists want to bring postmoderns to Jesus, not only to a more spiritual lifestyle or belief in God. Pastors want the postmodern to realize the God they are talking about is unique. Faith in Jesus will be more than “fire insurance”⁹⁹ just in case the whole God thing turns out to be true. Becoming a Christian is a life changing event. Postmoderns who become seekers show they are moving past curious and open to change by spending more time with Christians.¹⁰⁰ Seekers are not true believers yet, they are simply willing to spend more time among Christians because they want to learn more about Christianity and what it is.

When pre-evangelism pastors have a postmodern seeker in their midst, it provides them an opportunity to show the joys of being a Christian. Seekers in and around church provide the pastor the chance to show the impact of Jesus on a person's daily life. Pastors can show the peace Jesus gives to those who suffer and the joy it gives to those who find their contentment in his promises. Allowing the seekers to listen to the prayers of Christians will also show them what Jesus does for his followers. Prayers filled with praise and petitions for strength give the seekers a glimpse into the blessings Jesus gives to believers. When questions arise among seekers during their time with a pastor, he must take the time to give them solid, satisfying answers. Show them the answers in the Word of God. Share personal struggles with similar truths and how the Word of God helped even a pastor grow in his faith and knowledge of the truth. In this way, pastors can model the seeking Christians do even after they have been brought to faith by the power of the Holy Spirit.

At the expense of making the seeker threshold an allusion to decision theology, Everts and Schaupp quickly admit that the seeker threshold ought not to last long before the pre-evangelist pastor moves on to evangelism. The final threshold is entering the kingdom. This event is the conversion of the unbeliever. This can only happen by the power of the Holy Spirit.

98 Everts, 86.

99 Everts, 87.

100 Simmons, 97.

The Holy Spirit does this by working through the power of his word. So, the pastor's only role in this final threshold is to have a purposeful conversation with the seeker in which he shares the whole message of the gospel. This final threshold moves out of the realm of pre-evangelism and on to evangelism. All of the pre-evangelism work to gain the trust, curiosity, openness and willingness to sit and listen finally culminates in a careful presentation of the gospel message. This is most likely not the first exposure to the gospel, but this time the message is personal and allows for extended discussions on any parts that are still confusing. At the end of the meeting, the hope would be that the Holy Spirit does his work and if not then, that later on the door is still open for more sharing of the gospel and prayers that the Spirit will work in due time.

Conclusion

κηρύξατε το ευαγγέλιον. This phrase appears above the chapel doors at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. The pastors who pass under these words realize they are being called to preach the gospel message to the world. They are sent to believers and unbelievers. For believers, pastors go to strengthen and build up their faith. For unbelievers, pastors are sent to introduce them to the Word of God. Pastors who set out to do the work of seeking the lost begin with pre-evangelism. They go out with a heart of love and a mind full of methods and approaches to best gain the trust of the lost. The major groups pastors will encounter at this point in time are millennials and postmoderns. Pastors who understand how to connect and communicate with these two groups will have a better chance of gaining a hearing for the gospel. This work does not guarantee that the gospel will work faith in the hearts of everyone they reach out to, but they will be sure they did all they could to preach the word clearly so that the Holy Spirit could do his work of creating faith in the hearts of the lost.

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Appendix I

2014 WELS statistical report

527 of 1,262* congregations or 41.8% had zero adult confirmations and 692 of 1,262* congregations or 54.8% had one or less adult confirmations.

902 of 1,262* congregations or 71.5% had zero adult baptisms 1121 of 1,262* congregations or 88.8% had one or less adult baptisms.

*1,269 is total congregations, but report had data for 1,262

2010 WELS statistical report

521 of 1,287 congregations or 40.5% had zero adult confirmations and 700 of 1,287 congregations or 54.4% had one or less adult confirmations.

910 of 1,287 congregations or 70.9% had zero adult baptisms 1131 of 1,287 congregations or 87.9% had one or less adult baptisms.

2005 WELS statistical report

467 of 1,279 congregations or 36.5% had zero adult confirmations and 659 of 1,279 congregations or 51.5% had one or less adult confirmations.

897 of 1,279 congregations or 69.2% had zero adult baptisms 1,096 of 1,279 congregations or 84.5% had one or less adult baptisms.

2000 WELS statistical report

447 of 1,295 congregations or 34.5% had zero adult confirmations and 621 of 1,295 congregations or 48.0% had one or less adult confirmations.

919 of 1,295 congregations or 71.0% had zero adult baptisms 1142 of 1,295 congregations or 88.2% had one or less adult baptisms.