

WHEN TO TELL THEM ABOUT JESUS: EXPLORING HOW SCRIPTURE,  
COMMUNICATION THEORIES, AND MODERN DAY METHODS INFORM THE  
CHRISTIAN EVANGELIST

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## ABSTRACT

Christians know what they are supposed to do: Witness to unbelievers. Christians know whom they are supposed to speak about: Jesus. The Great Commission makes their mission and message clear. What is not so clear to Christians, is when to do this witnessing. Should they walk up to every unbeliever they encounter and immediately begin talking about Jesus? If not, when should they start a spiritual conversation? How can Christians transition from the everyday conversations they have with unbelievers to the law and gospel they desperately need to hear? Unless these questions are answered, Christians are left with an assignment, the Great Commission, and an end goal, telling people about Jesus, but no practical way of accomplishing either. This thesis seeks to bridge that gap in personal evangelism by examining Scripture's teachings about personal evangelism, two relevant communication theories (Social Penetration and Uncertainty Reduction), insights from evangelism literature, and interviews with several experienced WELS evangelists. This paper advocates timing personal evangelism according to the needs of each individual prospect and proposes the acronym CHRIST as a method for determining when to share the gospel with a person.

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## Introduction

Evangelism has been given a large amount of attention in Christian circles, and for good reason. Sharing the gospel with the world is the mission Jesus gave the church:

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Mt 28:18-20).

Christians are to go and make disciples of all nations, not because they want to impose their worldview on everyone else, but because believing in Jesus is the only way to avoid eternal punishment in hell. Acts 4:12 echoes that sentiment: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” Trusting in Jesus Christ as one’s Savior and substitute is the only path to heaven and eternal life. The people of the world can wax eloquent about all religions being equal and claim that a loving God would never send people to hell, but such arguments directly contradict clear passages in Scripture. God’s opinion is the only one that matters on Judgment Day, and he has revealed in the Bible where he stands on the issue of eternal life. “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” (Mk 16:16). There is no middle ground when it comes to one’s spiritual condition. Jesus’ words to the Apostle Paul in Acts 26:17-18 make that evident:

“I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

A person is either in the darkness of Satan’s power, or in the light of God’s forgiveness through faith in Jesus. There are no other options for a person’s spiritual alignment and no second chances to switch sides once death ends one’s time of grace. Death can come at any time, as can the Last Day and the return of Jesus to judge the living and the dead (Mt 24:36-51, Mt 25:1-13). Every person will spend eternity in either heaven or hell and the deciding factor which

determines their destination is whether that person trusts in Jesus as their Savior or not. Romans 10:13-14 accentuates this truth and emphasizes the importance of evangelism:

For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”

Christians have the good news about Jesus, they know he is the only way to heaven, and they must be the ones to share that gospel message with the millions of people who have not heard it and do not believe in Jesus as their Savior. Only by hearing the gospel can sinners be brought to faith. The emphasis on evangelism in Christian circles is well-placed indeed.

The mission of the Christian church is clear: tell the world about Jesus. The means the church has been given to accomplish this goal is equally clear: use the Word of God. “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word about Christ.” (Ro 10:17). The Word of God, the Bible, is the means by which the Holy Spirit creates and strengthens faith in the hearts of human beings. The Word is a double-edged sword (Heb 4:12), a flaming hammer (Jer 23:29), and the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (Ro 1:16). The Word is the tool which every Christian has been given to share Jesus with the world. The Word is not just *a means* by which people are brought to faith, it is *the only means* (Lk 16:27-31). The gospel of the Bible is not just a nice message about Jesus, it actually contains the power necessary to cause a person to believe that message is real and applies to them. The only evangelism which will be effective is evangelism which speaks the message of God’s Word, the gospel about Jesus Christ.

The Christians of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) do not question whether Jesus’ Great Commission of Matthew 28 applies to them. Neither do they question whether God’s Word contains the power to change hearts and create faith. Members of WELS know their mission and the means they need to use to complete it. However, the methods for implementing the means of the Word and completing the mission of evangelizing are not always so clear. Powerful sermons which lead to thousands of converts and worldwide mission plans which carry the gospel to the four corners of the earth sound appealing and have their place, but very few Christians are given the gifts and opportunities required for those kinds of evangelism. The most common and effective way to share the gospel of the Bible is through personal

evangelism: a one-on-one conversation about Jesus between a believer and an unbeliever. This is a method of evangelism which every Christian is capable of using.

At the outset it is clear that personal evangelism is more limited than evangelism in general. It is one kind of evangelism. It is directed towards a certain individual or individuals as opposed to varieties such as media, street, or mass campaigns directed toward many. It is personal as opposed to impersonal and specific as opposed to general. It is face-to-face encounter with an individual in contrast to preaching to many from afar. It is without intervening barriers such as podiums, television screens, platforms, or distance. Here the witness is most vulnerable and, consequently, most effective.<sup>1</sup>

Personal evangelism sounds so simple and many different methods have been suggested to Christians for how they should carry it out. Yet when all the various approaches and suggestions are considered, the aspiring evangelist is left with two questions: When should he tell someone about Jesus? How should he go about doing it? This paper has attempted to bring together information from the Bible, communication science, evangelism literature, and experienced WELS evangelists to answer those two questions. The conclusion reached by this author is that Christians need to embrace the biblical approach to personal evangelism which intentionally focuses on the needs of each lost individual and urgently engages them with the gospel.

## Part I: Biblical Principles

### *Pre-evangelism*

Before the aspiring evangelist engages an unbeliever in a spiritual conversation, he would be wise to study the biblical principles of personal evangelism. The motivation for doing personal evangelism and the means to accomplish it have already been discussed, but the Bible lays out several other clear principles for Christians to follow regarding personal evangelism which every evangelist must keep in view. The first of these principles is that personal evangelism really begins before the gospel message is spoken.

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<sup>1</sup> Schweer, William, *Personal Evangelism for Today* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1984), 12

In the ministry of soul-winning, the approach does not necessarily begin at the time we open a conversation about spiritual matters. We are making approaches, which may be favorable or unfavorable, long before that.<sup>2</sup>

This concept is called pre-evangelism and involves Christians living godly lives that honor God and attract the attention of unbelievers. Hebrews 12:14 shows that pre-evangelism is a biblical concept. “Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.” The way a Christian lives his life speaks volumes as to what he believes. A Christian who preaches love with his mouth, but shows arrogance, hatred, bitterness, or selfishness with his life will not be able to communicate the gospel message effectively. Actions speak louder than words; they can either earn a hearing for the gospel or they can build a barrier that makes sharing the gospel more difficult. This is why Paul urges the Thessalonians:

Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody. (1 Th 4:11-12).

Paul gives a similar charge to Titus regarding the slaves in his congregations:

Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive. (Tit 2:9-10).

When Christians live in a way that shows love to the people with whom they interact, unbelievers likely will wonder why they are living that way. Even if the unbelievers do not approach the Christians and ask them to explain what makes them different, they will be far more inclined to listen to the Christians when the Christians approach them.

The transformed Christian life prepares for and supports spoken witness. Nothing does more to open someone to information about Jesus... than knowing someone who is being changed for the better under His influence.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Gornitzka, Odd, *Living Witnesses: Studies in Personal Evangelism* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965), 14

<sup>3</sup> Rudnick, Milton, *How to Share Christ Confidently* (Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001), 18

Living a God-pleasing life is important for gaining opportunities to engage in personal evangelism, but Christians can go even further with pre-evangelism efforts. The Apostle Paul makes this clear in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

Paul did not just evangelize with his mouth, he evangelized with his life. He lived in a way that honored God and appealed to his fellow man. Paul did everything he could to break down barriers between himself and the people with whom he wanted to share the gospel. This did not mean he approved of sin or participated in it, such a practice would have been hypocritical and counterproductive. Rather, Paul found ways to relate to his target audience that were within the realm of Christian freedom. Modern day Christians who wish to carry out personal evangelism can and should seek to follow the same pre-evangelism approach. It will seriously hinder their efforts to share the gospel with unbelievers if the unbelievers have no desire to be around them.

Pre-evangelism is important and valuable, but Christians must keep two cautions in mind. First of all, pre-evangelism is only the initial step in personal evangelism.

However, as important as preliminaries are—confidence, motivation, and Christlike living—complete Christian witness has not taken place until they are joined to the Gospel message. Eventually, the witness must either say something personally or somehow connect another to the Gospel. It is through that message, that Word about who Jesus is, what He has done, and what He means to us, that hearts are opened, minds are changed, and eternal hope is born.<sup>4</sup>

If a Christian only lives a God-pleasing life and shows love to everyone, he has not yet evangelized because he has not actually spoken the gospel. The point of pre-evangelism is to gain an opportunity for the gospel to be spoken; that is how the Holy Spirit will create faith. If

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<sup>4</sup> Rudnick, Milton, 25

the gospel is never proclaimed, pre-evangelism is pointless. The second caution for Christians is that pre-evangelism should never be a staged or forced act.

What about our lives? Aren't we supposed to draw people to Jesus by our living? Yes. We are the salt of the earth, the city on a hill, the light on a stand. But this is not an artificial, distinct activity, a show we put on. It happens organically, without our even thinking about it, when we live by faith. It looks not attractive but goofy to the world—perhaps goofy enough that they will ask about the hope that drives such a life (1 Peter 3:15 yet again), and we can move in witness from puzzling, loving deeds to saving words.<sup>5</sup>

Pre-evangelism is a natural fruit of faith produced by the eternal thankfulness of the Christian heart. Christians should always be mindful of the impression they are giving to unbelievers, but should never “fake” godliness in the hopes of attracting attention. Holiness is not something Christians need to summon up from within themselves, the Holy Spirit will bring it forth because Christians, like fruit trees, cannot help, but bear noticeable fruit.

### *Unashamed Evangelism*

Another Biblical principle of personal evangelism is that it should be unashamed. The sinful world is not going to want to hear the gospel message because it seems like “foolishness” to them (1 Co 1:18). The sinful heart is hostile toward God, his Word, and his messengers (Ro 8:7). Yet Christians need to speak the gospel boldly, without fear or trepidation (2 Tm 1:7), because they are not trying to win the approval of people (Ga 1:10). Paul says it best in Romans 1:16: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.” Christians can participate in personal evangelism without hesitation because God’s Word has the power to accomplish the impossible task of breaking through stony hearts of unbelief with the grace of Christ. Jesus assured his disciples in Luke 12:4-12.

“I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. Are

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<sup>5</sup> Sias, John, *5 Things You Can Do to Witness Christ* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 63-64

not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

"I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. But whoever disowns me before others will be disowned before the angels of God. And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

"When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say."

Christians should not be afraid because God promises to protect them. They should not be ashamed because Jesus promises to acknowledge those who acknowledge him before his Heavenly Father. They should not worry about whether they will be able to find the right words to say because the Holy Spirit will provide them. Christians have nothing to be ashamed about in personal evangelism because the message they are speaking is not their own, it is God's message.

### *Sensitive Evangelism*

Just because Christians are able to witness unashamedly, does not mean they should witness thoughtlessly, without any regard to the feelings of others. The manner of speech Christians use in their personal evangelism matters a great deal.

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. (1 Pt 3:15-16).

The gospel about Jesus is the most important message for everyone to hear, but that message must be delivered with gentleness or respect or it will do more harm than good. If Christians attempt to do personal evangelism by running rough-shod over people's opinions and values or speaking in condescending, harsh ways, they are being poor messengers of their King. The way a message is conveyed often makes more of an impression on the hearer than the message itself. The gospel message is the greatest message of love ever told, but if it is not delivered in a loving

way, it will not be received as a message of love. Christians must be wise in their opportunities and be careful to always season their conversations with grace (Co 4:5-6).

Those who try to deny that there is One who deserves to exercise the authority of the Author of life deceive themselves. Believers dare not mock that self-deception as they begin their witness. Just because the fool says in his heart, “There is no God!” (Ps. 14:1; 53:1), that does not mean that foolishness is easily dislodged or that it need not be taken seriously. We approach the unbeliever “with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15). The Christian witness will help the other person analyze the true significance of what it means to have someone to put his or her trust in.<sup>6</sup>

Christians should not treat unbelievers like fools, nor should they make it a practice to try and argue them into heaven.

Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. (2 Tm 2:22-26).

It is all too easy for a Christian to win the argument, but lose the soul in the process. Arguing puts up barriers because it makes people defensive; this is the last thing a Christian evangelist wants to accomplish when sharing the gospel. Personal evangelism must be carried out with gentleness, respect, and love. A Christian who is sensitive to the worldview of his listener will be received far more favorably than one who is not and his message will be far more impactful.

It is easy to talk about the love of God, but what convinces people of its reality is not your words alone, but also your way. If you demonstrate by the way you live and relate to others that the love of God has become a reality in your own experience, *then* you have something that is hard for people to walk away from.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Kolb, Robert, *Speaking the Gospel Today* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1995), 19

<sup>7</sup> McPhee, Arthur, *Friendship Evangelism: The Caring Way to Share Your Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 75

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the greatest message of love ever composed and is meant to be shown, not just spoken.

### *Results of Evangelism*

The Christian evangelist must keep one other biblical principle in mind when conducting personal evangelism. He must remember that God alone delivers the results. Christians are the messengers; they sow the seeds of the gospel on the hearts of unbelievers, but it is not the responsibility of Christians to make those seeds grow, nor is it their fault when they fail to grow. Jesus explained this truth to his disciples with the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 (also in Mk 4:1-20 and Lk 8:1-15).

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things in parables, saying:

“A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

Christians are told to cast the seeds of the gospel and not to worry about whether every one of those seeds takes root and produces a harvest. God will determine which seeds grow and will make sure the harvest they produce will be bountiful.

The crucial thing to remember in evangelism is the distinction between our responsibility and God's. Our task is to present faithfully the gospel message by our lives and our lips. Any definition of our task that includes results is confusing our responsibility with God's prerogative, which is regeneration... We sow and water; God gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:5-9). We may reap—but only when God has brought the grain to maturity.<sup>8</sup>

God creates, grows, and sustains faith with his Word, Christians need only to speak it. The Lord will add to their number (Ac 2:42-47) and bring more sheep into the pen (Jn 10:14-16).

Christians can be certain the gospel will yield results because of God's promises regarding election. Ephesians 1:3-14 makes it clear that God determined that some people, before the creation of the universe, would hear the gospel message during their lifetimes and be brought to saving faith. God elected these individuals to be saved, not because of any good thing that was in them or would be in them, but simply because of his grace and through the merits of Christ Jesus (Eph 2:8-9). Even though God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tm 2:4), only those whom God elected will be saved (Mt 22:14). The fact that many will not come to faith and be saved is not God's fault, but is the fault of each individual who rejects Jesus as their Savior (Lk 13:34-35, Ro 10:16-21). What this means for the evangelist is that not everyone to whom they speak the gospel will come to faith and be saved, but some will! God makes that clear through the Apostle Paul's words in Romans 11:1-5.

I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel: "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.

There is always, in every age, a remnant of believers and people who will become believers. Christians cannot see into hearts and know who makes up this remnant; that privilege rests with God alone (1 Kg 8:39). The Christian evangelist must share the gospel with every person expecting that they are one of God's elect because they very well might be. If they are one of the elect, God's Word will accomplish his purpose and bring that person to faith before that person

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<sup>8</sup> Metzger, Will, *Tell the Truth: The Whole Gospel to the Whole Person by Whole People: A Training Manual on the Message and Methods of God-centered Witnessing* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 25

dies. The Holy Spirit working through the gospel does not always bring about immediate results or visible ones, but he always brings results (Isa 55:10-11). Christians, therefore, keep sowing the seeds of the Word trusting that God will gather those he has chosen.

## Part II: Biblical Examples of Personal Evangelism

The Bible does not just provide general principles for personal evangelism, it also gives specific examples of Jesus and believers carrying it out. These examples are where aspiring evangelists should turn their attention next as they consider when and how to do personal evangelism. Of the many biblical accounts of evangelism, only a few fit under the category of *personal* evangelism. The powerful sermons of Jesus, Peter, and Paul are inspiring examples of evangelism and offer many insights. Most Christians, however, will not find themselves in a position to evangelize hundreds or thousands of people at once, but they will all have opportunities to share their faith one-on-one with individuals. Therefore, biblical examples of personal evangelism are the only ones considered in this paper.

Careful studying of these biblical examples provides the aspiring evangelist many useful takeaways, but a few disclaimers should be kept in mind. Every personal evangelism situation is different and unique; there is no “one size fits all” method or “silver bullet” approach which can be found in the Bible and applied universally to guarantee converts. The biblical examples provide some general principles for personal evangelism, but the modern-day evangelist must apply those principles to every specific situation with wisdom and discretion. It is also important for Christians to remember the obvious: Jesus had certain advantages in witnessing which the average Christian evangelist does not possess and cannot obtain (e.g. perfection, being able to see into hearts, omniscience, reputation as a miracle worker and prophet, etc.). This fact should not discourage Christians from evangelizing, but should prevent them from holding unrealistic expectations for their witnessing attempts. Jesus was and is God; no other evangelist is able to do personal evangelism as well as Jesus did. However, every Christian can still learn from Jesus’ example as the perfect evangelist and grow in their own evangelizing ability.

One general observation must be pointed out regarding biblical examples of personal evangelism before specific examples are examined because it relates directly to the question of when to engage in personal evangelism with someone. In almost all of the biblical examples of

personal evangelism, the believers spoke about spiritual things right away. This does not necessarily mean modern-day Christians should forget about building relationships with people or about easing into conversations with less-controversial topics before evangelizing. Both those approaches are important and have their place. No one should argue, however, that a Christian must never bring up spiritual topics in conversation with someone unless he has first cultivated a relationship with the person over an extended period of time. That simply was not the approach most biblical evangelists followed. (See Appendix A for an exhaustive list categorizing all the biblical accounts of personal evangelism.) This subject will be examined more thoroughly in Part III: Conclusions of Communication Science.

### *The Rich Young Man*

In Mark 10:17-31 (also Mt 19:16-30 and Lk 18:18-30), Jesus is confronted by a rich young man who asked Jesus what he had to do in order to gain eternal life.

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”

“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”

Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

At first glance, this attempt by Jesus at personal evangelism appears to be a failure. The man went away sad! No conversion experience was recorded; no contact information was exchanged; no further spiritual discussion ensued. Other than Jesus’ remark about “come, follow me”, no gospel is even spoken to this rich young man. One must give Jesus the benefit of the doubt, however, and assume that Jesus chose the best possible evangelism approach for the situation. Jesus knew what this man needed; he needed the law. The rich young man thought he could earn eternal life on his own and that his godly living warranted him a spot in heaven. Yet Jesus sliced through the man’s façade of righteousness and showed him that his heart was not as pure as it

appeared. It was not God who was sitting on the throne of this man's heart, but money. Jesus saw this when he looked at the man, and he loved him too much to abandon him to the false hope of earthly wealth. Jesus knew that only the harsh totality of God's law could reveal the deadly flaw in the rich young man's spiritual confidence so he did not hold back. It is unknown whether this rich young man ever repented of his greed and put his faith in Jesus, but Jesus certainly gave him the best chance he could to make that result possible.

Christians do not need to be afraid of speaking God's law. Sinners need to be shown that their attempts at holiness have fallen far short of the perfection God requires. They need to see that they cannot make it to heaven on their own and that earthly treasures are meaningless at life's end. God's law brings discomfort, but sets the stage for the beautiful comfort of the gospel. Christians can also learn from this biblical account that they must view unbelievers with eyes of love as Jesus did and that a witnessing attempt has not necessarily failed just because the person does not convert on the spot or ask for a return visit. Sometimes it takes longer than one conversation for the Word of God to convict or convince a heart.

### *Zacchaeus*

Another account of Jesus doing personal evangelism is found in Luke 19:1-10, the story of Zacchaeus.

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

What is striking about this account is that the words Jesus spoke to Zacchaeus prior to his conversion are not recorded, but that does not mean this account offers no insights to the aspiring Christian evangelist. Jesus could have kept walking past Zacchaeus' tree, but instead he took the time to speak to Zacchaeus, even going so far as to spend the rest of the day with him!

What Jesus demonstrated with Zacchaeus is a better way. His approach still stands as a prototype for faithful and fruitful witnessing in today's society. He took time to be with Zacchaeus. He went into Zacchaeus's comfort zone. Instead of saying, "come with me, there is a special event at my church" (which is really an initiation to go where Christians are most comfortable), Jesus reversed the norm and surrendered himself to the circumstances where Zacchaeus was most at ease. And while he was with Zacchaeus, Jesus was neither intimidated nor captured. Instead, he engaged Zacchaeus in discussions... that transformed his whole view of life.<sup>9</sup>

It would not be wise for Christians to go around inviting themselves over to the houses of unbelievers. All Christians would do well, however, to open their eyes and see the evangelism opportunities around them. They cannot see into hearts like Jesus could, but it is still possible for them to notice people in need of the life-changing gospel message. Christians are just as capable as Jesus was to take time out of their day to talk with unbelievers. If a Christian does not intentionalize personal evangelism, it will be all too easy for the urgent busyness of life to crowd out the important mission of sharing the gospel with lost souls.

We need to be alert to signs of spiritual interest while engaging in the normal pursuit of our vocation. It may appear at any time, and amid the most unsuspecting circumstances, even from the tree tops.<sup>10</sup>

### *The Samaritan Woman, Nicodemus, and Pontius Pilate*

The story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman is the most famous example of Jesus conducting personal evangelism and is recorded in John 4:4-26.

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<sup>9</sup> Posterski, Donald, *Reinventing Evangelism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 29

<sup>10</sup> Coleman, Robert, *They Meet the Master: A Study Manual on the Personal Evangelism of Jesus* (Wilmore: Asbury Theological Seminary, 1973), 51

Now [Jesus] had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

"I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

"Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."

Jesus' intentional approach to personal evangelism is seen again by the fact that he chose to go through Samaria, even though most Jews went around the country. His loving heart is also clear in his willingness to violate social customs by addressing the Samaritan woman. The question he first asks her is simple enough: "Will you give me a drink?" Yet Jesus almost immediately turns the conversation into a spiritual one by changing the focus from the water to his identity. His remark about giving her living water is shocking enough to draw out another question from her. Once Jesus clarifies that the water he is offering is different from the water in Jacob's well and vastly superior, he has the Samaritan woman completely hooked.

Before He mentioned the question of salvation, He endeavored to meet a need which she recognized was hers, and from that point, whetting her curiosity, He led her step by step to her greatest need of all—the need to know Him as Savior and Lord.<sup>11</sup>

This practice of saying something shocking or puzzling to catch the interest of the person with whom he was talking is one which Jesus used all the time in his personal evangelizing attempts. It takes the form of “living water” with the Samaritan woman, “being born again” with Nicodemus (Jn 3:1-21), and “having a kingdom not of this world” with Pontius Pilate (Jn 18:33-19:16). In the case of Nicodemus, Jesus opens with the question seemingly out of the blue, but the shocking statements he made to Pilate and to the Samaritan woman were directly connected to things they asked about. In all three of these accounts, Jesus addresses the most pressing need of his hearers, but in a way that peaks their curiosity and engages them in the conversation instead of lecturing them into a stupor. Scripture is silent on the fate of Pilate, but both Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman are brought to faith by the testimony of Jesus. The gospel message Jesus spoke to these individuals is no different from the gospel Christians have today and the method of introducing the gospel with thought-provoking questions which address the needs of unbelievers is far from impossible for Christians to imitate.

Once Jesus drew the Samaritan woman in with his pregnant questions, he showed the same boldness he used with the rich young man and introduced the law into the conversation. Jesus does not hesitate to point out the sexual immorality of the Samaritan woman, nor does he allow the woman to distract away from the uncomfortableness of the topic. Jesus does not speak the law in a belligerent or condescending way, but he does speak it firmly without hesitation. He does the same thing with Nicodemus when he says “You people do not accept our testimony” (Jn 3:11) and also with Pilate when he says “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above” (Jn 19:11). Jesus was not afraid to make the conversation uncomfortable because he knew that was what awoke people to their desperate need for the comfort of the gospel. Christians should remember this truth in their own personal evangelism attempts.

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<sup>11</sup> Hitt, Russell, *Share Your Faith: Perspectives on Witnessing* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), 13

### *Other Biblical Accounts of Personal Evangelism*

Many more insights can be gleaned from the other Biblical accounts of personal evangelism that cannot be addressed at length in this paper. John the Baptist and the Apostle Paul both followed Jesus' example of invoking shocking questions and uncomfortable conversations in their interactions with King Herod (Mt 14:1-12, Mk 6:14-29), Governor Felix (Ac 24:24-26), and King Agrippa (Ac 26:1-29). The shepherds who saw baby Jesus are a prime example of evangelizing with joy and urgency (Lk 2:17-18). The Samaritan woman and the healed demoniac show the impact personal evangelism can have either immediately (Jn 4:28-30, 39-42) or over an extended period of time (Mk 5:18-20, Mk 7:31-33). The Apostle Paul's success in the city of Philippi with Lydia and the jailor demonstrate that opportunities for personal evangelism can come from intentional or unexpected efforts (Ac 16:13-15, 29-34). The Christian evangelists will want to study all of these biblical examples to discover how they can better proclaim the gospel about Jesus to the unbelievers in their lives.

### Part III: Conclusions of Communication Science

Examining the biblical principles and examples of personal evangelism has laid a necessary foundation for how a Christian should go about conducting personal evangelism. Thus far though, little has been said about when a Christian should engage in personal evangelism. The question has no easy answer, but communication science provides some guidance in regard to appropriate timeframes and approaches for sharing the gospel with unbelievers. Two theories in particular will be examined: Uncertainty Reduction Theory and Social Penetration Theory, as well as general suggestions from communication guidebooks.

#### *Relationships form over time following a progression*

Generally, close relationships form over time, not immediately. People do not usually become good friends instantly and "love at first sight" is the exception, not the norm. This reality has direct implications on personal evangelism.

Specifically, it is hypothesized that interpersonal exchange gradually progresses from superficial, nonintimate areas to more intimate, deeper layers of the selves of the social actors. That is, people are generally believed to let others know them gradually, first revealing less intimate information and only later making more personal aspects of their lives accessible.<sup>12</sup>

The spiritual conversations personal evangelists desire to have with people fall under the “more intimate layer” of the individuals’ selves. Religion is something most people prefer to discuss only with family members and friends and not strangers or acquaintances. It makes sense then why so many Christians are reluctant to bring up Jesus when they are interacting with unbelievers; they recognize that doing so often violates the normal way people like to communicate. This communication concept also explains why “friendship evangelism” has been trumpeted as the perfect form of personal evangelism. Friendship evangelism operates under the assumption that there are fewer barriers in the way of the gospel when people hear it from a trusted friend, rather than from a stranger and is directly in line with the research of communication science.

Thus, as people continue to interact and maintain a relationship, they gradually move toward deeper areas of their mutual personalities through the use of words, bodily behavior, and environmental behaviors.<sup>13</sup>

Relationships tend to form following a gradual process as two individuals become more comfortable with each other and willing to share more personal information. Social scientist Charles Berger posits that this is because the individuals need time to reduce uncertainty in their relationship before they become more intimate.

Most persons prefer an amiable, relaxed, and conflict-free interaction tone than one which is unfriendly, saturated with tension, and conflict-ridden. In order to achieve these kinds of interactions, it is imperative that uncertainty be reduced.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Altman, Irwin and Taylor, Dalmás, *Social Penetration: Development of Interpersonal Relationships* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc, 1973), 6-7

<sup>13</sup> Altman, Irwin and Taylor, Dalmás, 27

<sup>14</sup> Berger, Charles and Bradac, James, *Language and Social Knowledge: Uncertainty in Interpersonal Relations* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd, 1982) 7

People do not like to be stressed or uncomfortable in their social interactions and seek to reduce the uncertainty that causes such feelings. Few situations foster more uncertainty than a meeting between two strangers.

Upon meeting a person for the first time, we not only are faced with problems of retrodiction and prediction, we are also faced with problems of explaining why the person behaves and believes the way he or she does. Uncertainty, then, can stem from the large number of alternative things that stranger can believe or potentially say.<sup>15</sup>

All of these uncertainties are in play during a personal evangelism encounter between strangers and can make both the evangelist and the prospect uncomfortable. Christian evangelists should be aware of them, but do not necessarily have to avoid sharing the gospel with strangers or acquaintances. Mutually disclosing information, asking questions, and small talk are three communication strategies which can be employed to lower uncertainty and create opportunities for the gospel to be spoken.

[Jourard] found that persons who reported more willingness to disclose personal information about themselves to others also reported that they received more personal disclosures from others. By contrast, persons who were unwilling to disclose personal information about themselves reported that others were unwilling to disclose personal information to them.<sup>16</sup>

A person is going to be more inclined to share personal information about himself with someone who has already shared personal information with them. The Christian evangelist who wants to delve into the heart of another person must be willing to open his own heart to the prospect. This does not mean the Christian should bombard the person to whom he is witnessing with sad personal stories or childhood memories. Mutual disclosure must be appropriate for the conversation and should have an intent in mind.

Thus, if you wish to find out whether the person with whom you are conversing is afraid of snakes, you might disclose to him or her that you are afraid of snakes and discuss a vivid instance in which you showed such fear. There is the chance that the person will reciprocate at the same level of intimacy but not in the same content category as your disclosure. Thus, the person might respond to your revelation by talking about his or her

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<sup>15</sup> Berger, Charles and Bradac, James, 7

<sup>16</sup> Berger, Charles and Bradac, James, 26

fear of rabbits or high places. Of course, once the target person begins such a disclosure process, it may be possible for you to interject a question about the specific item of information in which you are interested. For example, after the person describes his or her fear of high places, you might ask something like, “How do you feel about snakes?”<sup>17</sup>

The Christian evangelist wants to talk about spiritual things and therefore should limit his disclosures to that realm or to disclosures which will transition into it. This might take the shape of a personal testimony about how Jesus has impacted one’s life or could be a sharing of a particular struggle or sin which the evangelist has in common with the prospect. The intent of such mutual disclosure is to find common ground and build trust. In other words, mutual disclosure, done correctly, lowers uncertainty and helps move the relationship to a deeper layer of intimacy where spiritual topics are more naturally discussed.

Asking questions is another natural way for uncertainty to be reduced in social interactions and goes hand-in-hand with mutual disclosure.

A better conversation model is to begin with common interests and seek to move deeper into values, attitudes and beliefs. We move gradually, yet directly, and with a purpose in mind. Our goal is to touch the conscience. One of the best ways to do this is by developing the art of questioning.<sup>18</sup>

When Christians encounter prospects, it is dangerous for them to assume people hold a certain belief or attitude. Every person is unique and just because someone belongs to a certain group or category of people (atheist, liberal, Catholic, etc.) does not mean that person necessarily holds to all the same stances to which his group holds. If the Christian evangelist wants to know what the person to whom they are talking believes, he should ask the person. The prospect’s answers to the questions will provide the evangelist with useful information about where the prospect is at spiritually, and will help the prospect reduce uncertainty, especially if the evangelist remembers to mutually disclose during the questioning process. A few cautions need to be kept in mind though.

While the questions that are asked and answered during an initial interaction between strangers may serve to reduce uncertainty and reveal common ground between

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<sup>17</sup> Berger, Charles and Bradac, James, 27

<sup>18</sup> Metzger, Will, 124

interactants, there is most probably a limit to the number of questions which can be asked during such encounters.<sup>19</sup>

Christian evangelists need to make sure they do not slip into the role of interviewers after a football game, firing off question after question while the interviewee frantically tries to keep up with the barrage. It is important for the evangelist to limit the number and scope of his questions so that the prospect is not overwhelmed and so the conversation does not stray too far afield from the desired spiritual discussion.

The second caution for Christian evangelists to keep in mind relates to the use of surveys.

Often Christians give the impression that they are studying something, and the survey's answers will be tabulated, when in fact, the survey is a tool designed to engage people in conversation. It seems much more honest to forget the survey itself and simply approach people on a personal level.<sup>20</sup>

Surveys can be a useful tool for Christians who are trying to engage the people of their community in conversation, especially if the Christians are not used to talking with strangers. In many ways, a survey is less threatening than conversing with a stranger directly both for the Christian and the prospect because surveys are more impersonal. Some surveys, however, actually impede the progression of intimacy in relationships because they give the impression that the person being interviewed is just another statistic. Christian evangelists should be wary of such surveys and should always strive to make every conversation personal and genuine, even if they use a survey.

Mutual disclosure and questions are two techniques Christians should become proficient in for personal evangelism. Small talk can also be helpful for reducing uncertainty in a relationship. Obviously, the Christian evangelist cannot share the gospel just by talking about sports or the weather, but he can reduce uncertainty and find common ground by talking about such things.

Small talk has a bad rap as the lowly stepchild of real conversation, yet it serves an extremely important function. Without it, you rarely get to the real conversation. Small talk is the icebreaker that clears the way for more intimate conversation, laying the

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<sup>19</sup> Berger, Charles and Bradac, James, 26

<sup>20</sup> Metzger, Will, 131

foundation for a stronger relationship. People who excel at small talk are experts at making others feel included, valued, and comfortable.<sup>21</sup>

The purpose of small talk is to get the ball rolling in the conversation so that uncertainty can begin to be reduced and so the people involved can feel more at ease with each other. “How do you put people at ease? By convincing them they are OK and that the two of you are similar. When you do that, you break down walls of fear, suspicion, and mistrust.”<sup>22</sup> The wise Christian evangelist will recognize the benefits of small talk, but must always consider the varying degrees of its usefulness in each personal evangelizing opportunity. If a Christian shows up at a stranger’s door and begins asking the person about the weather, he will probably be seen as odd and likely will not make much progress towards having a spiritual conversation. If a Christian engages a prospect at a church potluck in conversation about the local team’s most recent game, he may be able to foster a relationship with that prospect which later leads to a more serious conversation about Jesus. Christian evangelists must always be adapting their methods to fit their current situation.

*Every communicator has a goal*

Another important communication principle for Christians to keep in mind is that every communicator has a goal. Nobody talks just for the sake of talking or interacts with people for no reason. The Christian evangelist seeks to converse with a prospect because he has the goal of telling that person about Jesus, but the prospect also has a goal for why he is talking with the Christian evangelist.

Although people sometimes seek to interact with others simply for the sake of talking with someone, which is itself a goal, communication is employed much more frequently as a means for the achievement of various instrumental goals.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Fine, Deborah, *The Fine Art of Small Talk* (New York: Hyperion, 2005), 4

<sup>22</sup> Lowndes, Leil, *How to Talk to Anyone: 92 Little Tricks for Big Success in Relationships*. (New York City: McGraw-Hill Companies, 2003), 52

<sup>23</sup> Berger, Charles, *Planning Strategic Interaction: Attaining Goals Through Communicative Action* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1997) 13

Christian evangelists who are able to discern the goals of the people with whom they are talking gain a valuable insight into how they can apply the Word of God to them in meaningful ways.

Why talk about what we want? That is childish. Absurd. Of course, you are interested in what you want. You are eternally interested in it. But no one else is. The rest of us are just like you: we are interested in what we want. So the only way on earth to influence other people is to talk about what they want and show them how to get it.<sup>24</sup>

Everybody in the world wants something, but seldom do they all want the same thing. The Christian evangelist wants to tell prospects about Jesus, but those prospects may not want to be told about Jesus. Instead, the prospects may want to have more money, or a safer neighborhood, or a more satisfying life. This does not mean Christians should give up on their goal of sharing the gospel, it just means they need to show how the gospel meets the goals of the people with whom they are sharing it. Christians must beware of preaching “health and wellness gospel”, promises that claim knowing Jesus will guarantee a great life in this world, but can still apply the gospel specifically to each prospect’s goal. Faith in Jesus will not lead to more money, but it can lead to greater contentment with one’s current finances. Faith in Jesus will not remove all crime from the neighborhood, but it will provide eternal confidence that enables one to sleep better at night. Faith in Jesus will not remove all stresses and problems from one’s life, but it certainly can give greater satisfaction. The Christian evangelist knows these truths; his challenge is to help the unbelievers he encounters discover them.

Goal-oriented communication can be further broken down into a perception of costs versus rewards. When two people converse with each other, both people are constantly evaluating the current and potential costs and rewards of that relationship. If a person feels that a relationship is not benefitting him enough, he likely will decide to discontinue the relationship or put very little effort into it. If a person believes a relationship to be beneficial for him, he will likely strive to maintain it or even develop it further.

Altman and Taylor (1973) assert that perceptions of relative rewards and costs by relational partners affect the growth and decline of relationships. When relational rewards exceed costs, relationships tend to escalate; when costs exceed rewards, relationships tend to decline.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Carnegie, Dale, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (New York: Pocket Books, 1998), 30-31

<sup>25</sup> Berger, Charles and Bradac, James, 4

The constant considering of costs versus rewards is at the very core of both the Uncertainty Reduction Theory and the Social Penetration Theory. It is the reason provided for why some relationships develop while others never begin.

If people “like” one another or feel that something is gained from a relationship, a different history will obviously ensure compared with cases in which the exchange process is unsatisfactory.<sup>26</sup>

It is also the reason provided for why people do not remain at the same level of intimacy forever.

Were development based solely on immediate rewards and costs, it might be expected that interaction would only continue at the same level of intimacy of exchange—where reward outcomes are known and relatively certain. However, forecasts involve estimations of potential outcomes in areas of more intimate exchange, a fact which results in the relationship moving forward to new and potentially more satisfying interactions.<sup>27</sup>

Costs and rewards also are a reason for why strong relationships do not disintegrate after one bad conversation and the main reason why people consider some relationships, such as their relationship with their spouse or best friend, more valuable than their relationships with other people like acquaintances or strangers.

As a relationship develops, the outcomes of evaluation and forecast processes are fed into this central memory and contribute to a cumulative outcome history of the dyad. This construct provides a place where discrete reward/cost outcomes can be integrated and compared with other outcomes in the same relationship, thus placing a specific interaction in the context of prior experiences. The person is able to address the questions “How does this experience compare with all the others we have had?” and “How does this experience affect the overall worth or value of the relationship?” Furthermore, the central memory is a yardstick against which the relationship is compared with other relationships. As a repository of outcomes for all prior and current social relationships, it permits comparison of any social relationship with any other and relates to the question “What is the worth or value of this relationship compared to others?”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Altman, Irwin and Taylor, Dalmás, 4

<sup>27</sup> Altman, Irwin and Taylor, Dalmás, 39

<sup>28</sup> Altman, Irwin and Taylor, Dalmás, 37-38

The fact that people think in terms of costs versus rewards also accounts for why relationships usually form via a gradual process.

First, social penetration is ordinarily gradual because reward/cost projected outcomes are more certain for adjacent interaction areas than for distant ones. For example, one is usually better able to predict political attitudes of another person (rather than his basic emotional states) from superficial conversation at a cocktail party).<sup>29</sup>

If a person perceives a relationship to be especially rewarding, he is more likely to forgo the gradual process of developing intimacy in order to obtain the rewards more quickly.

As a relatively self-evident proposition, it may be said that the greater the ratio of rewards to costs, the more rapid the penetration process. Stated in another way, the growth of a relationship will be a direct function of the extent to which “good” or satisfying aspects of the experience outweigh “bad” or unfavorable ones.<sup>30</sup>

Closely connected with this function of costs versus rewards is the proposition that a person’s desire to reduce uncertainty in a relationship is a direct result of whether they perceive the relationship as being worth the investment or not.

Within the context of uncertainty reduction, we postulate that when persons become concerned with the reward and costs that another person can mediate for them, they will become more concerned about reducing their uncertainties about the other person. By contrast, if the other person does not have the power to reward or punish us in significant ways, then our concerns for reducing our uncertainties about the other person are reduced.<sup>31</sup>

It is extremely important for Christians to be aware of this cost versus rewards mentality when they engage in personal evangelism. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a valuable, applicable message to everyone, but prospects must be helped to see why it is valuable and applicable for them. In order for the relationship between the evangelist and the prospect to continue, the prospect must discover that the gospel has direct relevance to their personal goals or must believe his relationship with the evangelist offers greater rewards than costs. Therefore, the wise

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<sup>29</sup> Altman, Irwin and Taylor, Dalmás, 40

<sup>30</sup> Altman, Irwin and Taylor, Dalmás, 42

<sup>31</sup> Berger, Charles and Bradac, James, 17

Christian evangelist will not focus on what he needs to say, but rather will focus on what the prospect needs to hear. Such a focus will lead the evangelist to attempt to learn about the prospect and apply the gospel specifically to the prospect's situation.

*Imposing on people can have negative impacts*

Thus far, an examination of communication science has made it clear that relationships develop over time through a gradual process and has shown that a goal focused mentality of costs versus rewards determines the length of the process and the depth relationships reach. What happens, though, when a person violates the gradual process of relationship formation without the other's permission? Communication scientists are agreed that such an imposing generally has negative impacts on the relationship.

Two important aspects of privacy are desired privacy and achieved privacy. Desired privacy is a subjective statement of an ideal level of interaction with others—how much or how little contact is desired at some moment in time. Achieved privacy is the actual degree of contact that results from interaction with others. If the desired privacy is equal to the achieved privacy, an optimum state of privacy exists. If achieved privacy is lower or higher than desired privacy—too much or too little contact—a state of imbalance exists... Privacy is an input and output process; people and groups attempt to regulate contacts coming from others and outputs they make to others. It is important to understand how people and groups regulate privacy with regard to what comes in from others and what goes out from the person or the group to others.<sup>32</sup>

People try to be respectful of others' privacy and expect them to return the favor. Privacy is important to human interactions and violating privacy is a serious offense because privacy affects one's self-image.

Thus the ability or failure to regulate self/other boundaries is an important contributor to self-definition because it is a source of self-knowledge based directly on overt ongoing interaction. That is, if I see that I cannot control interaction with others in ways that I desire, then I am provided with important negative information about my competence to deal with the world. If I fail to implement my desired contact repeatedly and in many situations, then I gradually will develop a self-definition quite different and probably

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<sup>32</sup> Altman, Irwin, *The Environment and Social Behaviour: Privacy, Personal Space, Territory, Crowding* (Monterey: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1975), 10-11

more negative) than if I were reasonably successful in regulating interaction with others.<sup>33</sup>

Since privacy is connected with self-image, people generally move cautiously from low-risk levels of disclosure, such as small talk, to levels where high-risk disclosures are required, such as one's spiritual leanings.

To put it another way, a hasty excursion into very intimate areas may involve a greater gamble than interaction in adjacent and similar areas. While one can gain a great deal from intimate encounters, the psychological costs could also be enormous. Thus, because of uncertainty of outcomes, it is expected that most people adopt a conservative approach, moving into areas of exchange where outcomes are better known.<sup>34</sup>

When an individual fails to respect a person's privacy, that person's expectations are violated and the offender's credibility is reduced. In other words, the perceived cost of the relationship increases and the likelihood of continued interactions and greater intimacy decreases.

People often make mistakes about when to conceal or reveal private information. Boundary turbulence results because the rules for appropriate timing are not followed. The irresponsible person does not intentionally aim for turbulence; however, by not taking into account certain expectations about the way people keep information or tell it to others outside the boundary, the discloser causes problems.<sup>35</sup>

Disclosing information that is viewed by others as private, such as one's spiritual beliefs, or forcing another to disclose such information causes problems because one person is assuming a higher level of intimacy than the other person is willing to grant.

Accordingly, people feel the right is theirs to determine what others know about them. Individuals feel violated when others (like credit card companies) find out something about them without their permission. It does not fit their calculus. People are not in control of something important that belongs to them—their information.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Altman, Irwin, 46-47

<sup>34</sup> Altman, Irwin and Taylor, Dalmás, 41

<sup>35</sup> Petronio, Sandra and Irwin Altman, *Boundaries of Privacy: Dialects of Disclosure* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 186

<sup>36</sup> Petronio, Sandra and Irwin Altman, 9

The importance of maintaining privacy in relationships has direct implications for Christians engaging in personal evangelism. In order to share the gospel effectively with a prospect, the Christian evangelist must venture into an intimate part of the prospect's self-image and discuss spiritual things which are viewed by most people to be private. Christians should not shy away from such a venture, but should proceed with caution.

Not every time and place is an opportune time and place to approach men on spiritual matters. There is such a thing as "sanctified common sense" to be exercised in this matter. There is a zeal which is not rooted in knowledge, and such zeal may do more harm than good. It may even make religion appear ridiculous. Common sense coupled with tact is invaluable in our approach. "Only that we do not," as Stanley Jones of India warns, "become so concerned about tact that we never make a contact."<sup>37</sup>

Christians aspiring to engage in personal evangelism might be especially susceptible to privacy violations because they believe the gospel message to be more important than the prospect's feelings. Such a belief is not in line with biblical principles or communication research.

A third common false concept about witnessing is that in doing so we may violate the normal rules of behavior that govern interpersonal relationships. This is what we do, for example, when we impose ourselves and our "witness" upon people against their will... Were it to be a matter of force, God could have converted the whole world long ago. But God does not compel men to listen to Him. Therefore, who do we think we are that we should force them to listen to us?<sup>38</sup>

The gospel message is important for people to hear, but Christians need to remember that the gospel message does not work magically or create faith just because the sound waves from the words resonate in the eardrums of the listener. The Holy Spirit works through the gospel to create faith and convert people by convincing their human faculties that the message is true and worth believing.

Knowing the Biblical text is not enough for effective Christian witness. The task of bridge-building demands a knowledge of our immediate neighbors, and believers must use the tools of modern academic disciplines, which are also products of God's creative hand, to gain an understanding of the world around us. Whatever ideologies may influence modern practitioners of psychology, sociology, or anthropology, for instance,

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<sup>37</sup> Gornitzka, Odd, 16

<sup>38</sup> Hitt, Russell, 51

these disciplines still offer us the means to grasp certain categories in which our contemporaries think, as well as some accurate glimpses of the ways in which human creatures function.<sup>39</sup>

Social and cultural communication norms should be observed whenever possible lest rudeness or social incompetence erect barriers of offense between the gospel and the hearers.

*People follow learned communication scripts*

Privacy expectations are part of a larger concept apparent in human interactions called communication scripts. The concept proposes that people learn throughout their lives specific and appropriate ways to act in certain situations. These specific and appropriate ways are called scripts and once a script has been learned for a certain situation, the person may carry out human interaction during the situation with very little effort or interest.

According to Abelson (1976) and Schank and Abelson (1977), by adulthood we have acquired thousands of scripts for the understanding of various routine action sequences: Once this large file of scripts is developed, the problem for the human understander facing a particular situation is: (1) to determine whether he or she has a script to fit the particular situation being faced, and (2) if there is a script, what role he or she will play in it. Once these issues are resolved in an affirmative way, the person can enact the sequence of behaviour involved in the routine without paying much attention to what he or she is doing.<sup>40</sup>

While this phenomenon may seem like a disadvantage to the Christian evangelist because it means prospects can easily remain disengaged from personal evangelism attempts, a shrewd evangelist can turn communication scripts into an advantage. When a social interaction deviates from a person's learned scripts, the person naturally becomes more interested and engaged in the conversation because he can no longer run on "auto-pilot". "On the other hand, unexpected and surprising behaviours engage the 'naïve scientist's' explanatory apparatus; they produce a state of high vigilance or mindfulness."<sup>41</sup> This does not mean that the Christian evangelist should cause a script deviation by speaking something random or inappropriate. It is possible, however,

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<sup>39</sup> Kolb, Robert, 14

<sup>40</sup> Berger, Charles and Bradac, James, 41-42

<sup>41</sup> Berger, Charles and Bradac, James, 113

for the evangelist to attract the attention of his prospect with a shocking or interesting truth related to the gospel. As explained in Part II, that is exactly what Jesus often did in his personal evangelism encounters. Such shocking statements can take many forms which will be determined by the circumstances of each personal evangelism opportunity, but the general principle is valuable for the aspiring evangelist to keep in mind. In order to have an impactful conversation about the gospel, both the evangelist and the prospect must be invested in the interaction. It is the evangelist's job to make sure that happens.

*People are yearning to be appreciated*

One more point must be mentioned in connection with communication science and has direct relevance to personal evangelism. All people are yearning to be appreciated. That appreciation is one of the primary goals people have in mind when they enter conversations. Christian evangelists who make prospects feel appreciated will have a much greater chance of developing meaningful relationships with them and will be more likely to earn a hearing for the gospel.

William James said: "The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated." He didn't speak, mind you, of the "wish" or the "desire" or the "longing" to be appreciated. He said the "craving" to be appreciated. Here is a gnawing and unfaltering human hunger, and the rare individual who honestly satisfies this heart hunger will hold people in the palm of his or her hand and "even the undertaker will be sorry when he dies."<sup>42</sup>

People crave acceptance, appreciation, and love. This should come as no surprise to Christians who know that God created human beings as social creatures meant to be in a loving relationship with their Creator. When Adam and Eve introduced sin into the world, the balance of that perfect, loving relationship was destroyed and people began to crave the fulfilling love they once possessed. This craving can only truly be satisfied through faith in Jesus because that alone restores the loving relationship between God and man. However, Christians can partially satisfy people's yearning for appreciation by showing a genuine interest in them during personal evangelism. This is yet another way for Christians to win a hearing for the gospel.

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<sup>42</sup> Carnegie, Dale, 18

Showing genuine interest is flattering and essential to conversing. If you are interested in how I lost sixty-five pounds or how I started my business or anything else about me, I feel special. I also think positively about you and want to continue talking with you. The more interest you show in me, the more interesting you become to me.<sup>43</sup>

Christians do not want to flatter or manipulate, but they do very much want to form relationships with people and share with them the life-changing gospel message. A simple way to accomplish that goal is to show interest in the people with whom they are talking. “When people see that you are interested in them, they are quite likely to become interested in Him.”<sup>44</sup>

#### Part IV: Insights from Evangelism Literature

After examining what the Bible has to say about personal evangelism and drawing conclusions from communication science regarding the formation of human relationships, the Christian evangelist is well-informed for approaching the lost with the gospel. Evangelism literature suggests some additional principles which have bearing on when and how to do personal evangelism. Familiarizing oneself with these principles will allow the Christian evangelist to formulate an even more complete approach for sharing the gospel with individuals.

#### *Evangelize out of love, not guilt*

The great importance of evangelism causes some Christians to enter into personal evangelism motivated by guilt instead of love. While the Holy Spirit certainly can work through the gospel to bring about good from guilt-motivated efforts, negative results are far more probable for both the evangelists and the prospects.

The kind of witnessing I hated was sharing the gospel more out of a sense of guilt and compulsion rather than out of a sense of freedom and liberty. It's that little voice inside

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<sup>43</sup> Fine, Deborah, 41

<sup>44</sup> Hitt, Russell, 17

your head that keeps on saying, “you’ve got to do it!” And when you do, you’re so uptight you feel you’d burst if somebody stuck a pin in you.<sup>45</sup>

Introducing the good news about Jesus to unbelievers is an extremely important task, but Jesus never intended guilt to be the driving force behind personal evangelism. Jesus lived, died, and rose so that Christians could live under freedom and grace, not obligation and fear (Ga 5:1). Christians who engage in personal evangelism out of guilt will likely not enjoy sharing the gospel and will burden their consciences when they do not share it. Guilt also makes it harder for a Christian evangelist to keep his focus on the prospect’s needs, because the Christian is only thinking about how uncomfortable he is and about how badly he wants the conversation to end.

The issues that make us avoid speaking in public are the same issues we face in evangelism: being the focus of attention, wondering how we’re being perceived, saying the wrong thing and being embarrassed, and risking rejection for what we say. Notice the common characteristics of those items: the focus is on *me*. The best way to handle legitimate fear in speaking is to turn the focus outward—on the listeners and their needs.<sup>46</sup>

The secret to evangelizing without guilt is to replace guilt with a sincere love for the lost. In other words, the Christian evangelist needs to be motivated by the gospel, not the law. His attitude will reflect the sentiment of Peter and John in Acts 4:20, “As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” Focusing on Jesus and the needs of those who do not know him, will enable the Christian evangelist to overcome his guilt and share the gospel out of love.

Out of concern for others, grounded in God’s incomparable love for you and for them, tell them what they need to know, even though the net of fear is trying to restrain you. Let concern for their spiritual and eternal welfare push right through your fear.<sup>47</sup>

Christians who wish to fill their hearts with this empowering love for the lost cannot do so apart from the Word of God. Overcoming guilt is not an act of the human will, it is an act wrought by the Holy Spirit working through the words of Scripture. The Christian evangelist

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<sup>45</sup> Innes, Dick, *I Hate Witnessing: A Handbook for Effective Christian Communication* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1985) 7

<sup>46</sup> Bechtel, Mike, *Evangelism for the Rest of Us* (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2006), 77

<sup>47</sup> Rudnick, Milton, 8

must trust the same power which changes the heart of the unbelieving prospect to change his own heart too and fill him with a Christ-like love. Christians who are studying the Bible every day will not need to guilt themselves into doing personal evangelism, the Holy Spirit will fill their hearts with the same fire he kindled in Jeremiah the prophet. “But if I say, ‘I will not mention his word or speak anymore in his name,’ his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.” (Jer 20:9). God’s love for the lost is not a flicker, but an inferno which cannot help but ignite the hearts of Christians with a similar love through the Word of God.

### *Evangelize urgently*

The natural reaction of the evangelist whose heart bleeds for the lost is to share the gospel urgently. Judgement Day could come at any moment and bring an end to the time people have to come to faith in Jesus (Mt 24:36-44). Jesus understood this and exhorted his disciples to evangelize urgently in John 9:4, “As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.” Once Judgment Day begins, evangelism will cease and every human being will be ushered into either heaven or hell (Mt 25:46). There will be no second chance for unbelievers to believe the gospel message of Jesus and be saved. The reality of this biblical truth heightens the importance of sharing the gospel message with people now, in this life, because that is the only chance they have to hear about their Savior Jesus and be brought to faith. If Judgment Day does not end their time of grace, death will, often after the relatively short span of 70 or 80 years (Ps 90:10). When death claims a person, his soul immediately goes to heaven or hell depending on whether the person trusted in Jesus as his Savior or not. Hebrews 9:27 says, “People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment”. Christians have the solemn responsibility and the joyful privilege of sharing the saving message of the gospel with people before their time of grace ends.

This paper has shown multiple times, however, that the urgency of evangelism does not mean Christians have the right to recklessly or thoughtlessly bombard people with the gospel.

To fail to understand and to genuinely manifest urgency is to rob ourselves of an essential part of its meaning and to minimize the effectiveness of the evangelism we do. Like a plant that can only grow and produce in a tropical climate, evangelism’s best health and

productivity is experienced only in an atmosphere of responsible urgency. This does not mean, of course, that we do not recognize that people need time to understand and that the Holy Spirit often takes time to do his work. Evangelism remains urgent, although it proceeds with a sensitive respect for persons and the utmost caution against running ahead of God or manipulating people.<sup>48</sup>

The Christian evangelist who wishes to pursue personal evangelism with sensitivity, need not feel constrained to sacrifice urgency and stand idly by waiting for the perfect opportunities to share the gospel. Christians can go about sharing the gospel with people urgently and sensitively if they actively seek to cultivate relationships and intentionally look for witnessing opportunities in their conversations. “We build bridges to people in our personal mission fields by establishing relationships with them. In these relationships, we look for openings. Then we communicate the gospel.”<sup>49</sup> Evangelizing urgently means urgently interacting with people and getting to know them in order to share the gospel.

The Christian evangelist must avoid, however, cultivating relationships with unbelievers just to share the gospel with them. Such an approach fails to treat unbelievers as genuine human beings and views them only as a means to an end.

A frequent criticism leveled at any emphasis that encourages personal evangelism is that it reduces relationships to projects. The accusation can be valid. If people seek out friendships for the express purpose of witnessing to a prospective convert, the person becomes a task. Reducing relationships to evangelistic ventures is demeaning and an insult to the inherent value of people.<sup>50</sup>

The Christian evangelist who builds a relationship with a prospect must do so out of love for the whole prospect, recognizing him as a human being with many needs.

We build relationships because we genuinely care about people, not just as a method to get them saved. Genuine care involves more than just their salvation. If we truly care about people, that care involves more than just their salvation. It involves every part of their lives, of which their spiritual health is one important part.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Schweer, William, 23

<sup>49</sup> Valleskey, David, *We Believe, Therefore We Speak* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1995), 181

<sup>50</sup> Posterski, Donald, 126

<sup>51</sup> Bechtle, Mike, 75

A good way for the evangelist to check whether he is pursuing personal evangelism with genuine care is to ask himself whether he is willing to be friends with a prospect even if the prospect has no interest in becoming a Christian or talking about religion. Christians urgently want unbelievers to come to faith in Jesus, but they are not salesmen trying to manipulate people into heaven with charisma and fake friendships. Genuine love and concern will accomplish far more good, even if it does not lead to witnessing opportunities. “Effective evangelism needs to be built upon love for two essential reasons. First, love meets a perceived need in men and women everywhere. Secondly, the God we proclaim is love in His very nature (1 John 4:16).”<sup>52</sup>

*Give people something they want*

Much has been said in this paper already about intentionally focusing personal evangelism on the needs of the unbelievers. Such an approach is biblical and matches the conclusions of communication science. It should come as no surprise, then, that evangelism literature also advocates tailoring personal evangelism to meet the needs and desires of prospects.

Remember, your entering into a conversation is only the beginning. Spiritual language comes only into full bloom when a meeting-point has been reached, caused by your discerning a spiritual need in your contact. Around such a need, then, must a relationship be based, designed to enlarge the area of need on the one hand, and the means to overcome it on the other.<sup>53</sup>

Most prospects know about Jesus and are aware of the churches in their neighborhood; yet they have decided, for various reasons, not to invest themselves in Christianity. They do not see how the gospel meets their needs and desires and therefore have not made it a priority. The goal of the Christian evangelist must be to show the relevance of the gospel to the life of every individual prospect.

The task of the evangelist is to make the gospel his or her gospel so that others will embrace it as their gospel. To be faithful to the message so that the message is relevant to

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<sup>52</sup> McPhee, Arthur, 55

<sup>53</sup> Schnell, William, *Christians Awake! (Romans 13:11, 12): Restoring the Art of Witnessing, Evangelizing, and Soul Winning* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1963), 32

the situation: that is the evangelistic challenge. Jesus Christ is the good news, but why and how is he good news for today?<sup>54</sup>

Relating the gospel to the needs of the prospect captures interest and frees the evangelist from the burden of manufacturing a road into the conversation for the gospel.

Christian witness does not begin by laying out a broad philosophical basis upon which the discussion of Biblical viewpoints and values may be discussed. Christian conversation really begins most often where the person with whom the believer is talking wants it to begin, usually where he or she is hurting or questioning or feels ill at ease.<sup>55</sup>

The Bible does not relate the good news about Jesus' saving work as a dry, generic message; it applies the implications of that gospel to a variety of situations in specific and colorful ways. Christians can do the same thing in personal evangelism by identifying the needs of their listeners.

There are various ways to express that Christ is the solution. It is most helpful and meaningful to use terms that speak to the needs and situation of the hearer. For example, those who reveal recognition and regret over wrongdoing are ready to hear that Christ paid for our guilt with His own blood and death. Those who are in pain need to know that Christ knows what we are going through and will support us in our suffering. Christ has suffered for us, so that we can look forward to a life in which there will be none. Those who are lonely need to know that Christ empathizes with them, has experienced and overcome the worst kind of loneliness—separation from God, and will fill the void with His own presence. Those addicted to any evil substance or behavior need assurance of Christ's liberating victory over forces that hold us in bondage. People worried about death can find hope in knowing that by His death and resurrection Christ has made a way for us through death to a life that never ends. The Bible is rich with vivid language that conveys the Good News to the heart.<sup>56</sup>

Christian evangelists need to identify where each prospect is at spiritually and then apply the gospel accordingly. Initially, it can be helpful to discern whether a prospect is operating from a position of spiritual security or spiritual brokenness.

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<sup>54</sup> Armstrong, Richard, *The Pastor as Evangelist* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 47

<sup>55</sup> Kolb, Robert, 17

<sup>56</sup> Rudnick, Milton, 30

Human creatures formulate their questions about life from one or the other of two stances: from a stance of security, based on a sufficiently firm trust in someone or something to enable them to get along without recourse to trust in their Creator; or from a stance of brokenness, perhaps even despair, in which the old bases for decision-making have been so challenged and shaken that they are no longer viable. In this case life must find a new basis, or cease.<sup>57</sup>

In other words, the Christian evangelist must determine whether he needs to break down a self-confident heart with God's law or sooth a broken spirit with God's gospel.

Thus, it is vital for the Christian witness to determine whether the hearer wants to know about life's meaning because he is interested in defying death out of his own resources and on his own terms, or whether he is terrified by the prospect of death itself. Effective Christian witness cannot proceed until it is known whether Mary wants to earn a place in the heavenly choir by singing in the local church choir every Sunday, or whether she fears her failure to worship in the past has closed the doors of the church and heaven to her forever. It is absolutely necessary to know whether John wants to calculate the timing of judgment so that he can yet schedule the delights of defying God, or whether he yearns for the day of liberation. It is crucial to know whether Beth is looking for a license for an abortion which would be convenient for her, or whether she is seeking forgiveness for an abortion which has brought her guilt and self-hatred.<sup>58</sup>

Focusing on the specific needs of prospects will not only present the gospel in an applicable way, but will also tend to steer the evangelist away from "canned" witnessing approaches and communicate the genuine love which is so important for credibility in personal evangelism. While it can be helpful to have a general conversational framework in mind for personal evangelism, Christians need to be careful to treat every person as a unique individual who needs the law and gospel applied to his specific life situation. Such was the approach of Jesus, the perfect evangelist.

Jesus never took anything for granted. He put each individual to the test, not because he was suspicious or liked to sit in judgment, but out of love, because he had come to seek and to save those who are lost. He was the Great Physician who because of his deep concern for the patients made careful diagnoses in order to be able to apply the right remedy.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Kolb, Robert, 10

<sup>58</sup> Kolb, Robert, 10-11

<sup>59</sup> Gornitzka, Odd, 22-23

The gospel is the most potent and effective medicine in the world, but even the best medicine can fail if improperly applied or if the patients do not know they are sick. One of the most important jobs for Christian evangelists, therefore, is to identify the needs of prospects and show how the gospel meets those needs. “We must learn to be at home in the deep places of human souls. Otherwise we shall be merely exchanging ideas, which have little healing in them.”<sup>60</sup>

### *Listen*

The best way for aspiring evangelists to identify the needs of prospects is by listening. “By careful listening you can discover such important information as a person’s interests, his goals, his most important concerns, his most pressing needs, etc.”<sup>61</sup> This may seem like a strange concept for Christians seeking to participate in personal evangelism because the focus of evangelism generally is on speaking. However, if the evangelist remembers the importance of loving the whole person and discerning the needs of each individual, he will seek to listen in his personal evangelism attempts.

Careful listening accomplishes three things: First, it puts my focus on the other person instead of on me. Second, it builds trust with the other person, since he or she knows I’m not just pushing the gospel but am genuinely interested in his or her situation. Third, it helps me learn where God is working in that person’s life, so I can join him in moving that person to the next level.<sup>62</sup>

Focusing on the prospect, building trust, and learning where the prospect is at spiritually are three of the Christian evangelist’s biggest goals in personal evangelism and all of them are accomplished by attentive listening. The evangelist who applies himself to listening also avoids giving the impression that he is preaching at the prospect or lecturing him.

You have to be careful that your conversation does not turn into a monologue. If what you’ve been able to share of your faith at that point turns into a sermon, its effect will most likely be zero. But if you’re able to continue sharing it in an unthreatening way, if you share in such a way that he feels free to dialogue with you about it, then you have

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<sup>60</sup> Shoemaker, Samuel M. (Samuel Moor), "Personal evangelism." *Anglican Theological Review* 29, no. 3 (July 1947): 137-144

<sup>61</sup> McPhee, Arthur, 107

<sup>62</sup> Bechtle, Mike, 104

used your opportunity aright. Be sure, however, that you give him the freedom to change the course of the conversation if he chooses.<sup>63</sup>

Listening also gives the evangelist information and opportunities to relate to the prospect and strengthen the relationship through mutual disclosure. In general, people feel more comfortable conversing with people who are like them. This does not mean Christians should seek to experience every sinful vice or pretend to be someone they are not. Every life is different and each human being has certain experiences which are unique only to him. However, Christians should always be able to establish at least some common ground with unbelievers because Christians are sinners too who must rely on Jesus for salvation just as much as the people to whom they are witnessing. The Christian evangelist should never give the impression that his own life is devoid of sins and problems or that he is somehow better than the prospect. “To be effective communicators of Christ’s message we need to be ordinary human beings who are realistic about ourselves and about life, and above all, honest and authentic persons.”<sup>64</sup> Christians need not air all of their sins in a personal evangelism encounter, but neither should they put on a façade of perfection.

But this must be balanced by the constant consciousness that we are not perfection standing on one side of a line, and speaking to imperfection on the other: we are ordinary men, with problems, some of them still on the way to being solved, who stand ever under the same judgment of God as confronts all human beings.<sup>65</sup>

Finding common ground on which to relate is essential to personal evangelism and is best accomplished by listening. The aspiring evangelist who wants to share the gospel with his mouth will do so far more effectively if he uses his ears first.

#### Part V: Insights from WELS Evangelists

Information acquired from careful study of the Bible, research into communication science, and evangelism literature is valuable for the aspiring Christian evangelist and has

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<sup>63</sup> McPhee, Arthur, 96-97

<sup>64</sup> Innes, Dick, 62

<sup>65</sup> Shoemaker, Samuel M. (Samuel Moor), 137-144

provided many helpful principles for personal evangelism. Experience is another valuable source for information regarding when and how to approach unbelievers with the gospel, and interviews filled out by experienced WELS evangelists offer practical insights into personal evangelism which cannot be found elsewhere. These insights largely support the conclusions already made by this paper, but specifically target elements of personal evangelism which are especially relevant for aspiring evangelists. Information from these interviews is summarized and quoted here, but the complete interviews are provided in Appendices B-F.

### *Relevant Bible passages for personal evangelism*

God's Word gives the mission of evangelism to Christians, but also the motivation. The five WELS pastors interviewed for this paper made that very clear when they commented on which Bible passages were important to them in regard to personal evangelism. Pastor Valleskey wrote:

I'm assuming with this question you are asking "Why evangelism?" In my ministry, I don't think that it was any particular passage or biblical account that moved me to "do the work of an evangelist," but rather the whole law/gospel message of the Scriptures.

In other words, the entire message of the Bible serves as motivation for Christians to evangelize because of universal truths it contains such as the truths about all people being sinful and all people needing a Savior.

Pastor Schulz and Pastor Schroeder both listed 2 Corinthians 5:21 as being especially relevant to personal evangelism: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." This Bible passage outlines the vicarious atonement very clearly and is useful for showing people that Jesus is their substitute. However, this should not be the only passage Christians attempt to use in their personal evangelism attempts. Pastor Leyrer and Pastor Scharf both mentioned the example of Paul "being all things to all people" (1 Co 9:22) and noted how Paul changed his evangelism approach to fit each situation. Both stated the importance of Christians approaching personal evangelism with the same adaptability and Pastor Schulz went so far as to list different types of passages which he has used with different types of people (Atheists, Muslims, Catholics, Reformed, etc.). Pastor

Schulz also advised Christians to familiarize themselves with biblical stories because stories resonate with people better than recitations of Bible verses.

### *Timeframe for personal evangelism*

All five of the WELS pastors interviewed agreed that the timeframe for when to share the gospel with people varies from relationship to relationship. They identified two main categories of prospects: people with whom the evangelist will be interacting regularly and people with whom the evangelist will likely only interact once. Regarding the former category, Pastor Valleskey wrote: “To a certain degree, it is helpful to ‘earn the right’ to talk about spiritual things. People will be more likely to listen to what you have to say if you have established a relationship with them.” Pastor Schroeder agrees and commented:

We treat prospects differently depending on our relationship with them. When we can expect a long term commitment from them, such as enrolling in our preschool, we take the opportunity to build a relationship with them before trying a L/G presentation. We have found that in our culture today, we have more opportunities to share the gospel if we earn the right to be heard. That transfers into the area of personal evangelism. Someone who trusts you is more likely to give you evangelism opportunities than a stranger.

While it can be advantageous to build relationships with people prior to sharing the gospel with them, all five pastors acknowledged that such an approach is not always possible. Pastor Schulz wrote:

Sometimes the opportunity comes instantly – with someone you don’t even know. If the situation is right, go for it. Give the answer they need. Introduce them to the loving God they have. Don’t wait. Times this would be important is if you are pretty sure you won’t run into them again. (Airplanes, elevators, etc.)

If a Christian is not sure into which of the two categories the prospect with whom he is talking falls, he should engage in personal evangelism right away. Pastor Scharf noted: “But my basic rule is err on the side of saying something. All too often we pass up opportunities with the excuse that maybe a better one will come up later.” Pastor Leyrer summarizes well the best approach for a Christian evangelist to take in regard to the timeframe of personal evangelism.

“The key is to have many ‘styles’ of evangelism in your quiver so that you can shoot the arrow the relationship calls for.”

*Effects of cultural communication norms on personal evangelism*

All five pastors also agreed that Christians should not disregard cultural communication norms in their personal evangelism. Pastor Schulz commented:

Observing cultural communication norms is important! We have to be talking in a “language” they understand so we know our message is getting across. So it helps to be up to date with the way people speak and communicate in a way they can truly understand.

Christians need to pay attention not just to the content of their message, but also to the way they are delivering that message. Pastor Scharf wrote: “One of my rules for vicars is ‘don’t be weird’. You don’t have to disregard cultural communication norms to share Jesus.” Pastor Schroeder warned about what could happen if Christians ignored the normal rules for communication: “Failure to recognize those norms will inevitably erect obstacles to hearing and understanding the Gospel.” It is valuable for aspiring evangelists to learn everything they can about cultural communication norms in order that they can share the gospel more effectively with the people who follow those norms.

*Relation between the certainty of election and the urgency of personal evangelism*

The certainty of all God’s elect being brought to faith did not lead any of the five interviewed pastors to downplay the urgency of personal evangelism. The certainty of election and the urgency of evangelism are not opposing doctrines which contradict each other, rather both doctrines must be held in tension and believed. Pastor Valleskey explained:

It's not up to me. God's work will get done (Matthew 24:14) with or without me. As you said, God will gather in his elect before Jesus returns, whether it's tomorrow or 100 years from now. It's not proper to motivate people for evangelism by telling them something like, “Jesus is coming back soon. If you don't tell people about Jesus and do it soon, millions will go to hell.”

But on the other hand, the Scriptures do tell us that Jesus could come back at any time and that God given his Church the commission to preach the Gospel to all creation during the interim between the first and second coming of Jesus (see Jesus' Parable of the Minas in Luke 19:11-27).

Pastor Schulz takes a similar harmonized view between these two doctrines and advised:

God is going to do his thing – in his own timing. But the way God does his thing – and He tells us this in the Word – is through US URGENTLY TELLING others about the Gospel. So God urgently uses us to do this work

Pastor Leyrer believes it to be impossible for a Christian to have no desire to share the gospel urgently.

I cannot envisage a Christian evangelist who does not attach urgency to the gospel. By its very nature, the gospel is an urgent message. It won't bother me on Judgment Day as I see people I knew being judged without Christ's righteousness around them. Maybe it should bother me now.

The certainty of God bringing all his elect to faith in no way compromises the urgent mission of all Christians to share the gospel with unbelievers.

*Relation between the efficacy of the Word and careful personal evangelism*

All five pastors espoused the efficacy of God's Word, but also cautioned against using that as an excuse to engage in personal evangelism carelessly. Pastor Valleskey commented:

The one doesn't necessarily follow the other logically. Yes, God's Word is powerful and effective. But it's not without reason that when Jesus sent out the Twelve on their own for the first time, he told them to be as "wise as serpents" (Matthew 10:16), which, to use another picture, would be the opposite of a bull in a china shop approach.

Christians are to make use of the common sense and reason which God has given them to assist in personal evangelism, not because God's Word need help, but in order to gain a hearing for the gospel. Pastor Leyrer explained:

True, we shouldn't be paralyzed by the fear of "messing things up." But it is also true that my poorly prepared testimony may make it that I do not even gain a HEARING for the gospel. No I can't add to the gospel's power just like I can't make a flower grow. I can run over a flower with my car, though, from uncaredful driving.

Pastor Schulz similarly advised Christians not to put up barriers in their personal evangelism through carelessness.

God is always the One who converts... his Word is the only thing that has power to do it... it isn't us... but if we don't use the wisdom and skills He gives us to do it... we can become barriers in the way of his message that needs to be communicated! We can be barriers to people seeing our God of love in Jesus. So let's do it and let's do it as well as we know how.

Pastor Schroeder summarized well the appropriate approach of Christians toward the efficacy of the Word in personal evangelism.

There is a tension in our ministry between these two truths. Nowhere does he tell us that the efficacy of the Word excuses a lack of working or planting or going. Nowhere does Jesus tell us that our working and going and planting are what saves. Efficacy cannot be an excuse for laziness; effort or results cannot be an excuse for pride.

#### *Appropriate methods for personal evangelism*

This paper has already made it clear that there is no one method for personal evangelism which works for every situation. The five pastors interviewed confirmed this truth and mentioned several different methods which they found helpful in their ministries. Pastor Valleskey, Pastor Leyrer, and Pastor Schulz all commented on the importance of having one general framework, such as God's Great Exchange, memorized for sharing law and gospel so that the evangelist can be confident in his witnessing opportunities. They stressed the importance of keeping such a framework flexible, however, so that the evangelist can adapt it appropriately to each situation.

Pastor Schulz mentioned that another approach to personal evangelism is for the evangelist to tell his story to the prospect.

Tell others how God has changed your life. If you can, tell them how you came to faith. Show them the difference between a life without God and one with God. Today, in a

culture that doesn't think much of the inerrant Word of God... what makes an impact initially on people is seeing a changed life. They want a changed life too. Then, you can give them the Word that will change their life through Jesus.

This method fits very well with concepts examined earlier in this paper such as the importance of mutual disclosures and showing prospects the relevancy of the gospel to them.

Pastor Scharf supports a method of listening to the prospect's story and then asking a transitional question such as: "How have the things you told me about affected your relationship with God?" Pastor Schroeder suggests using invitational outreach which is a method where a church creates high quality events to which its members can invite prospects. Ultimately, every Christian evangelist must discover the method which works best for him and be willing to adapt it according to each specific personal evangelism attempt.

#### *Advice for Christians who want to do personal evangelism*

The advice these five pastors had for aspiring Christian evangelists is summarized best by Pastor Scharf's four-word answer: "Love Jesus. Love people." Christians' love will show itself in personal evangelism in two main ways: preparing for personal evangelism and actually doing personal evangelism. In regard to preparing for personal evangelism Pastor Leyrer reiterated the importance of learning a basic law and gospel outline to use in witnessing attempts. He also advised every Christian to write down a few paragraphs articulating his personal story about how Jesus has changed his life so that the Christian is ready to share that story with prospects. Pastor Schulz also commented on the importance of preparation and listed what he viewed as the two most important things for an aspiring evangelist to do.

#### **NUMBER ONE MOST IMPORTANT THING:**

Be in the Word. Every day. The more you are filled with His Word... the more his Word will be coming out of you. You won't be able to help it. (the same way if you read lots of books of a certain author... or spend a lot of time following a certain team, or certain hobby or whatever... people won't be able to stop you talking about it.)

#### **NUMBER TWO:**

Physically list down names of people who need to know Jesus. Pray for them. If you are consciously thinking about them and praying for them, you will be more likely to reach out to them when given the opportunity. And it can't help asking God to open their hearts

and change them as well. It is his power through the Gospel that is going to change them anyway. And we know it is his will!

Preparing for personal evangelism will do no good, however, unless Christians actually get out and do it. Pastor Schroeder wrote:

Just do it. A bunch. Ready, fire. Aim, fire. Just keep pulling the trigger. Many churches or people think they need to train and plan and plan and train and they never get around to doing it. They just: ready, aim, ready, aim, aim...

Pastor Valleskey gave similar advice and added that personal evangelism is best learned by participating in it.

A two-word answer: DO IT. There is no substitute for experience. Reading about evangelism is helpful. Studying what the Scriptures have to say about evangelism is helpful. But what makes an evangelist is doing the work of an evangelist.

### Conclusion

The Bible, communication science, and modern day methods suggest many insights to aspiring Christian evangelists. This paper has attempted to give an overview of the ones most relevant to personal evangelism, but the amount of information given may be too much for aspiring evangelists to remember. Therefore, the author has summarized the research of this paper into an acronym for Christians to keep in mind when they are engaging in personal evangelism. Aspiring evangelists just need to remember CHRIST.

C – Care about the prospect.

H – Hear the prospect out.

R – Relate to the prospect.

I – Identify the prospect's needs and desires.

S – Share law and gospel appropriately with the prospect.

T – Take time to hear feedback from the prospect and follow up with the prospect.

The first thing a Christian evangelist needs to do is *care* about the lost, not just about their spiritual well-being, but about everything going on in their lives. This care results naturally from a Christ-like love which comes only from consistent study of the Bible. An aspiring evangelist must care enough about people to be in God's Word personally, every day so that he can be prepared to share that Word with others who need it. Caring for the lost also means the evangelist is actively looking for openings to talk about Jesus with unbelievers, even though spiritual conversations are not always natural or easy.

Once a Christian cares enough to make contact with an unbeliever, he next needs to *hear* the unbeliever out. Active listening allows the evangelist to build trust and learn about the whole person. Listening shows that the evangelist is not just a salesman offering a canned gospel presentation to another number and makes the next two steps of personal evangelism possible.

While the Christian evangelist hears the prospect out, he is able to learn ways in which he can *relate* to the prospect. Relationships form over common interests or similarities, so it is crucial for Christians to be open about their own imperfections and struggles. Such disclosures lower uncertainty, raise credibility, and help to show how the gospel has made a difference in the life of the evangelist.

Hearing out the prospect also allows the Christian evangelist to *identify* the prospect's needs and desires. Every person is looking for certain things to make their life better, but often they do not realize that the gospel is what they need most of all. If Christians identify what prospects want, they will be able to present the gospel in specific ways which are more appealing and attractive to the prospects.

The most important thing Christians need to do in personal evangelism is to actually *share* law and gospel with unbelievers. God's Word is the tool with which the Holy Spirit works to create faith and Christians can trust that it will be effective. This trust, however, should never lead the evangelist to speak the Word carelessly or to completely neglect cultural and social communication norms in regard to conversation and relationships. Rather, the evangelist must seek to communicate in a way that does not erect barriers between unbelievers and the Word. He must also strive to apply the law and gospel specifically to each prospect's needs and desires so the prospects can see why they need Jesus.

Once a Christian has shared the gospel with an unbeliever, it is crucial for him to *take time* to hear immediate feedback from the unbeliever and to follow up later with him. Listening

to feedback allows the evangelist to clarify any confusions or answer any questions the prospect may have. Following up with the prospect, whenever possible, allows the evangelist to continue strengthening the relationship and presents more opportunities for sharing the gospel.

Evangelism is the mission Christ gave to all believers, and it is important. Not every Christian can travel overseas as a foreign missionary, but every Christian can be an evangelist to the people with whom they interact on a daily basis. Talking about Jesus one-on-one with another person is not always easy, but it is the best way to connect people to the Savior they so desperately need. Christians need to embrace the biblical approach to personal evangelism which intentionally focuses on the needs of each lost individual and urgently engages them with the gospel.

Christians can share the gospel urgently without ignoring cultural and social norms for communication and relationship building if they remain focused on the people with whom they are sharing the gospel. When should the Christian evangelist tell someone about Jesus? How should he go about doing it? Both questions have the same answer: whenever and however someone *needs* to hear about Jesus. The timeframe and method of each personal evangelism attempt will vary from prospect to prospect, but Christian evangelists who remember CHRIST will be able to determine the best way to share the gospel with each individual. If they cannot remember CHRIST however, they need only to remember Christ. Christian evangelists who are focused on the life, death, and resurrection of their Savior Jesus will not be able to refrain from sharing that gospel with the people in their lives, and those who trust in their Savior's Word, will not be disappointed.

## APPENDIX A

### CATERGORIZED LIST OF BIBLICAL PERSONAL EVANGELISM ACCOUNTS

#### Relationship prior to evangelizing

Genesis 40	Joseph with the cupbearer and baker?
Nehemiah 2	Nehemiah and King Artaxerxes?
Daniel 3	Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and King Nebuchadnezzar
John 1:35-36	John the Baptist to Andrew and John
John 1:40-42	Andrew to Peter
John 1:44-46	Philip to Nathanael

#### Simultaneous relationship building and evangelizing

Genesis 39	Joseph in Potiphar's house and prison
2 Kings 5	Naaman's Israelite slave girl?
Luke 7:36-50	Jesus at Simon the Pharisee's house
Luke 14:1-24	Jesus at a Pharisee's house
Luke 19:1-10	Jesus and Zacchaeus
Luke 24:13-35	The road to Emmaus?

#### No clear relationship before evangelizing

Genesis 41	Joseph before Pharaoh
1 Kings 10	Solomon and the Queen of Sheba
Daniel 1	Daniel and the chief official in charge of food
Daniel 2	Daniel and King Nebuchadnezzar

Daniel 5	Daniel and King Belshazzar
Matthew 14:1-12	John the Baptist and King Herod (Also Mark 6:14-29)
Matthew 19:16-30	Jesus and the rich young man (Also Mark 10:17-31, Luke 18:18-30)
Mark 5:18-20	The healed demoniac in the Decapolis
Luke 2:17-18	The shepherds after seeing baby Jesus
Luke 2:38	Anna at the temple
John 3:1-21	Jesus and Nicodemus
John 4:1-26	Jesus and the Samaritan woman
John 4:28-30, 39-42	Samaritan woman to her town
John 18:36-37	Jesus and Pontius Pilate
Acts 8:26-40	Philip and the Ethiopian
Acts 10:23-48	Peter and Cornelius
Acts 13:6-12	Paul, Barnabas and Sergius Paulus
Acts 16:13-15	Paul and Lydia
Acts 16:27-34	Paul and the jailor of Philippi
Acts 24:24-26	Paul and Governor Felix
Acts 26:1-29	Paul and King Agrippa

APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENT DAVID VALLESKEY

Person being interviewed: President David Valleskey

Date of interview: November 19, 2016

**Which Bible verses or accounts do you believe are most important to keep in mind with personal evangelism? Why?**

*I'm assuming that with this question you are asking "Why evangelism?" In my ministry, I don't think that it was any particular passage or biblical account that moved me to "do the work of an evangelist," but rather the whole law/gospel message of the Scriptures, such as:*

1. *The fact that all have sinned (Romans 3:23)*
2. *The fact that sin, even one sin, results in death (Romans 6:23a, James 2:10)*
3. *The fact that through Christ's redemptive work all have been justified (Romans 3:24, objective, universal justification)*
4. *The fact that people receive the benefits of justification by faith (Romans 3:28, subjective, personal justification).*
5. *The fact that apart from faith in Christ people are lost forever (Mark 16:16)*
6. *The fact that faith comes from hearing the message (Romans 10:14, 17)*
7. *The fact that Christ has entrusted to his Church the proclamation of the Gospel (Mark 16:15; Luke 19:11-27, work with the "Mina" of the Gospel until the King returns).*
8. *The fact that an inevitable fruit of faith is a desire to share the Gospel with others (Luke 2:17, the shepherds; Acts 4:20, Peter and John)*
9. *The fact of the lateness of the hour (John 9:4)*

**How quickly do you think Christians should tell people about Jesus? Should the timeframe change depending on the depth of the relationship? (stranger vs friend, first meeting with a prospect vs third time, etc.)**

*Yes, the time frame will probably change depending on the circumstances. To a certain degree, it is helpful to "earn the right" to talk about spiritual things. People will be more likely to listen to what you have to say if you have established a relationship with them. That's the whole idea of "friendship evangelism," which in reality is pre-evangelism. You might look to the section entitled "Establish Relationships" in my evangelism textbook,*

*We Believe—Therefore We Speak* (pp. 171-176, particularly *Let Your Light Shine*, pp. 173-175).

*On the other hand, there can be times when it will be only natural for you to speak about spiritual matters, even if you haven't first established much of a relationship. I'm thinking, for example, of someone who has visited a church service. That person has already indicated an interest in things spiritual. If you then visit him his home, it would only be natural to get into spiritual matters quite quickly. In fact, if a pastor pays a visit to the home of a church visitor and talks only about non-spiritual things, the person visited might wonder why the pastor came.*

*And, of course, you want to be ready at any time to “give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15).*

**What do you see as the relationship between observing cultural communication norms and a Christian’s personal evangelism approach?**

*I'm not sure what you mean by “cultural communication norms”; so I don't know how to answer this question. If by it you mean that your personal evangelism approach will vary from person to person and from culture to culture, I would give a guarded “yes” answer to that question. I have never served in the so-called Bible belt of our country; but I have talked with pastors who have. They find it much easier to strike up a conversation about spiritual matters with people than do pastors on the West Coast, where your father is serving and I served. It might well take a little longer to get to the point where one can share law/gospel with a West Coast dweller than a Bible belt resident. One has to adjust his approach according to the culture in which he lives.*

*Having said that, I should add that I need to remember that*

- 1) all people, Bible belt or non-Bible belt, are included among the people for whom Jesus lived and died; and that therefore*
- 2) all people need the Gospel; and that*
- 3) it takes just as much of a miracle to convert a Bible belt resident as a non-Bible belt resident; and that*
- 4) the Gospel is powerful, no matter what the culture; and that therefore*
- 5) I will not conclude that a West Coaster is unconvertable. It may take a little more work, a little more time; but I can still trust the power of the Gospel.*

**Respond to the following statement: Since God has promised to bring all his elect to faith before Judgment Day, Christians don’t have to evangelize with any urgency.**

*In one respect, but one respect only, I can agree with that statement. It's not up to me. God's work will get done (Matthew 24:14) with or without me. As you said, God will gather in his elect before Jesus returns, whether it's tomorrow or 100 years from now. It's not proper to motivate people for evangelism by telling them something like, “Jesus is coming back soon. If you don't tell people about Jesus and do it soon, millions will go to hell.”*

*But on the other hand, the Scriptures do tell us that Jesus could come back at any time and that God given his Church the commission to preach the Gospel to all creation during the interim between the first and second coming of Jesus (see Jesus' Parable of the Minas in Luke 19:11-27).*

*I'm attaching a sermon that I preached for a World Missions seminar a number of years ago. The text is Matthew 24:14. Under the them, "God's Work Will Get Done," I talk about the tension between God's promise that the elect will be gathered in and the commission of Christ to preach the Gospel to all creation.*

**Respond to the following statement: Since God's Word is powerful and effective, Christians never need to proceed slowly or cautiously in their personal evangelizing.**

*The one doesn't necessarily follow the other logically. Yes, God's Word is powerful and effective. But it's not without reason that when Jesus sent out the Twelve on their own for the first time, he told them to be as "wise as serpents" (Matthew 10:16), which, to use another picture, would be the opposite of a bull in a china shop approach.*

*It's a different story, of course, if my slow, cautious approach to personal evangelism stems from doubt in the power and efficacy of the Word. I like this quote from a sermon preached by Charles Spurgeon back in 1886 in which he compares the Gospel to a lion:*

*A great many learned men are defending the gospel; no doubt it is a very proper and right thing to do, yet I always notice that, when there are most books of that kind, it is because the gospel itself is not being preached. Suppose a number of persons were to take it into their heads that they had to defend a lion, a full-grown king of beasts! There he is in the cage, and here come all the soldiers of the army to fight for him. Well, I should suggest to them, if they would not object, and feel that it was humbling to them, that they should kindly stand back, and open the door, and let the lion out! I believe that would be the best way of defending him, for he would take care of himself; and the best "apology" for the gospel is to let the gospel out.... Preach Jesus Christ and him crucified. Let the Lion out, and see who will dare to approach him. The Lion of the tribe of Judah will soon drive away all his adversaries.*

**In your ministry, what is/were the main methods you use/used for doing personal evangelism? What methods do/did you encourage other people to use?**

*As you may know from the evangelism training that you received from Prof. Leyrer (to whom I taught evangelism), I am of the opinion that it is helpful for a pastor to learn well one basic evangelism, law/gospel, approach, such as, but not confined to, God's Great Exchange. If you learn a basic outline well and use it frequently, it becomes second nature to you and, in addition, you will have no trouble adjusting it as circumstances dictate. When I first started out in my ministry, I had no idea what I was going to say when I made what I hoped would be an evangelism call in people's homes. And often, since I didn't know what I was going to say, I ended up saying very little of real*

*substance. My confidence in evangelism began when I started using one basic approach, beginning with what was called Talk About the Savior. Little by little that outline evolved into God's Great Exchange. I owe much of that outline to Pastor Robert Hochmuth, my neighbor in California's Silicon Valley. He was the A-C District Mission Board chairman and my mentor. Once I started using this basic outline, I grew in confidence because I knew what I was going to say if God gave me the opportunity.*

*In addition, the fact that I was using one basic evangelism outline in my calls, helped me to train members in calling on the unchurched. They would learn the same basic outline, would accompany me on calls and listen as I shared the Gospel using that outline, and in time were able to do it on their own.*

**What advice would you offer a Christian who wanted to get better at sharing his faith with others?**

*A two-word answer: DO IT.*

*There is no substitute for experience. Reading about evangelism is helpful. Studying what the Scriptures have to say about evangelism is helpful. But what makes an evangelist is doing the work of an evangelist. During the 20 years I served at Apostles, San Jose, CA, we allotted virtually no funds in our budget for outreach. We did our outreach work through legwork, person-to-person sharing of the Gospel. And God blessed that work.*

*I should also add that there is hardly any greater joy that one can experience in the ministry than becoming a "spiritual father" to people. When I left Apostles for the Seminary in 1984 after starting that congregation and serving there for 20 years, I went through all my files, tossing things that I felt I would no longer need. One file that I couldn't bring myself to throw away was what I have called my "love letters" file. In that file were cards, notes, and letters from members over the years, expressing their appreciation for my ministry. The vast majority of those "love letters" were from people who had been brought to faith in their Savior as a result of my ministry. Note I say "as a result of," not "because of my ministry." God the Holy Spirit did the work; but he used me as his conduit to bring the Gospel to these people, through which he called them out of darkness into God's marvelous light. And that's why they thanked the Lord for me and my ministry.*

*P.S. When I retired from the Seminary in 2004 and did another housecleaning of files, I still couldn't throw that file away. It still sits in my file cabinet, a silent testimony to the joy of being used by God to bring a sinner to repentance and faith. God is continuing to use me in my retirement. In two weeks, Sunday, December 4, I am going to be baptizing a young Chinese woman I've been instructing. She knew literally nothing about Jesus her Savior. In two weeks she is going to publicly confess faith in Jesus and be brought into the family of God through baptism. What a joy to be used by the Lord in this way!*

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW WITH PASTOR DANIEL LEYRER

Person being interviewed: Pastor Daniel P. Leyrer

Date of interview: 12/02/2016

#### **Which Bible verses or accounts do you believe are most important to keep in mind with personal evangelism? Why?**

*The three evangelistic messages of Paul in Acts (synagog in Pisidian Antioch; Lystra; Areopagus) because they give great examples of how Paul preached Christ crucified and risen in different ways to different people.*

*Jesus at the Sychar well with the Samaritan woman because it reminds me to transfer from secular to sacred in my evangelizing, and gives me a way to do it.*

*Paul's lecturing every day for two years straight in Ephesus (Acts 19) and then all the people of the province hearing the Word from those who first heard it from Paul, because it reminds me that evangelism can permeate an organization through faithful preaching and equipping and that I'm not in this alone.*

*1 Cor 9 "all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some" has always been inspirational to me in my personal evangelism efforts, since I was a boy, because it tells me to make real changes in my life, to accept those changes as difficult as they may be, because evangelizing people is THAT important.*

*There are many other accounts but I don't want to go on too long.*

#### **How quickly do you think Christians should tell people about Jesus? Should the timeframe change depending on the depth of the relationship? (stranger vs friend, first meeting with a prospect vs third time, etc.)**

*It definitely depends on the level of relationship. Friendship allows for "time release" evangelizing as I make my testimony in a way that fits the occasion, knowing that I'm going to see that person over and over again. However, there has to be a place for that "take my shot now" kind of evangelism which moves quickly from pre-evangelism to evangelism because we don't know how long we will have with that person. The key is to have many "styles" of evangelism in your quiver so that you can shoot the arrow the relationship calls for.*

#### **What do you see as the relationship between observing cultural communication norms and a Christian's personal evangelism approach?**

*I'm all for Christian's familiarizing themselves with cultural communication norms in order to not put a stumbling block in the way. Nevertheless, the love and compassion*

*shown by an evangelist just by being in another culture, out of his comfort zone, goes a long way even if his communication is not entirely culturally adept.*

**Respond to the following statement: Since God has promised to bring all his elect to faith before Judgment Day, Christians don't have to evangelize with any urgency.**

*I cannot envisage a Christian evangelist who does not attach urgency to the gospel. By its very nature, the gospel is an urgent message. It won't bother me on Judgment Day as I see people I knew being judged without Christ's righteousness around them. Maybe it should bother me now.*

**Respond to the following statement: Since God's Word is powerful and effective, Christians never need to proceed slowly or cautiously in their personal evangelizing.**

*True, we shouldn't be paralyzed by the fear of "messing things up." But it is also true that my poorly prepared testimony may make it that I do not even gain a HEARING for the gospel. No I can't add to the gospel's power just like I can't make a flower grow. I can run over a flower with my car, though, from uncareful driving.*

**In your ministry, what is/were the main methods you use/used for doing personal evangelism? What methods do/did you encourage other people to use?**

*The main method I use is a direct "confrontational" style that is informed by the God's Great Exchange outline. I feel this fits my personality and it fits my life as pastor, where the prospects that I meet are almost expecting me to share a message with them.*

*I encourage others to use their friendships as springboards to speak of the hope they have in Jesus in the day to day matters of life. Telling their story of how being connected to Christ through our church has made a difference in their lives. I also try to give them simple training in making transitions from secular to sacred and in communicating law and gospel clearly in just a few minutes.*

**What advice would you offer a Christian who wanted to get better at sharing his faith with others?**

*Two things. First learn a basic law/gospel outline like God's Great Exchange. Not as a straightjacket, but as a basic outline that will always give them a map in their head of the way to communicate sin and grace to a friend. Second, articulate your own story. Write down in a couple paragraphs what your testimonial would be, your testimony to your own need for Jesus and then what Jesus has done for you. Use that testimonial when opportunities present themselves to "give the reason for the hope that you have."*

APPENDIX D  
INTERVIEW WITH PASTOR JOEL SCHULZ

Person being interviewed: Pastor Joel Schulz

Date of interview: November 21, 2016

**Which Bible verses or accounts do you believe are most important to keep in mind with personal evangelism? Why?**

*Bible Verses:*

*2 Corinthians 5:21 has always been helpful – the Great Exchange.*

*I don't usually use the whole presentation as we were taught in Sem – verbatim – but having that kind of “outline” in my head is always helpful.*

*Passages about the divinity of Jesus are helpful – especially when you are talking to Muslims, Hindus, JWs, Mormons, Atheists, etc.*

*Gospel passages like Ephesians 2:8-9 are helpful when talking with Catholics and other work righteous people.*

*Passages about conversion are helpful when talking to people with Reformed understanding.*

*More helpful than just passages are Bible stories... just knowing some Bible stories that you can tell people to help them get past where they are stuck in their “coming to faith” process...*

- *Jesus raising Lazarus*
- *Jesus and the sinful woman anointing Him*
- *Jesus and Mary and Martha*
- *Joseph and Potiphar's Wife*
- *Jesus stilling the storm*
- *Etc.... there are so many!*

*People love stories... and telling stories about God is often more helpful than just a few passages... especially when most people we talk to don't believe in the inerrancy of Scripture... yet.*

*Doctrines:*

- *I think the doctrine of Objective Justification is huge to me. This reminds me I am not a salesman. I am a messenger. If they listen to me, all credit goes to God. If they don't, it is their fault. But I am just sharing a message they can already rejoice in, because their sins were on that cross when Jesus died.*
- *The Natural Knowledge of God is helpful as well. Show people God where they can see Him... then introduce them to the true God.*

**How quickly do you think Christians should tell people about Jesus? Should the timeframe change depending on the depth of the relationship? (stranger vs friend, first meeting with a prospect vs third time, etc.)**

*This is going to vary each time – depending on the situation.*

*Sometimes the opportunity comes instantly – with someone you don't even know. If the situation is right, go for it. Give the answer they need. Introduce them to the loving God they have. Don't wait. Times this would be important is if you are pretty sure you won't run into them again. (Airplanes, elevators, etc)*

*Other times, it will be helpful to build the relationship... and let them get to know you and trust your concern for them... and then share the message they need so badly. Times this would work is when you KNOW you will have future opportunities to share with them.*

**What do you see as the relationship between observing cultural communication norms and a Christian's personal evangelism approach?**

*Observing cultural communication norms is important! We have to be talking in a "language" they understand so we know our message is getting across. So it helps to be up to date with the way people speak and communicate in a way they can truly understand.*

**Respond to the following statement: Since God has promised to bring all his elect to faith before Judgment Day, Christians don't have to evangelize with any urgency.**

*God is going to do his thing – in his own timing. But the way God does his thing – and He tells us this in the Word – is through US URGENTLY TELLING others about the Gospel. So God urgently uses us to do this work. I think this has often been used as an excuse because of laziness or fear or apathy to not be sharing the good news God has given us to share. So yes, we must be about God's Work – sharing the Gospel – urgently! Because the day is almost over and night is coming... let's work while it is day!*

**Respond to the following statement: Since God's Word is powerful and effective, Christians never need to proceed slowly or cautiously in their personal evangelizing.**

*God has given us brains and wisdom and sense to be witnesses for Him. When you study Paul and Peter and the other disciples, they used all kinds of methods and personal efforts and a lot of energy to get the Gospel out into the world. It even talks about times they did it more "effectively" than others. God is always the One who converts... his Word is the only thing that has power to do it... it isn't us... but if we don't use the wisdom and skills He gives us to do it... we can become barriers in the way of his message that needs to be communicated! We can be barriers to people seeing our God of love in Jesus. So let's do it and let's do it as well as we know how. Confidently because*

*God is the one doing the work and the One who is with us. And humbly... because only his power can do what we are offering people.*

**In your ministry, what is/were the main methods you use/used for doing personal evangelism? What methods do/did you encourage other people to use?**

*I already mentioned a few... having the Great Exchange outline as a general framework...*

*But I think the best thing for me, and for others, is to be able to tell “your story.”  
Tell others how God has changed your life.  
If you can, tell them how you came to faith.  
Show them the difference between a life without God and one with God.  
Today, in a culture that doesn’t think much of the inerrant Word of God... what makes an impact initially on people is seeing a changed life. They want a changed life too. Then, you can give them the Word that will change their life through Jesus.*

**What advice would you offer a Christian who wanted to get better at sharing his faith with others?**

**NUMBER ONE MOST IMPORTANT THING:**

*Be in the Word. Every day.  
The more you are filled with His Word... the more his Word will be coming out of you.  
You won’t be able to help it.  
(the same way if you read lots of books of a certain author... or spend a lot of time following a certain team, or certain hobby or whatever... people won’t be able to stop you talking about it.)*

**NUMBER TWO:**

*Physically list down names of people who need to know Jesus.  
Pray for them.  
If you are consciously thinking about them and praying for them, you will be more likely to reach out to them when given the opportunity.  
And it can’t help asking God to open their hearts and change them as well.  
It is his power through the Gospel that is going to change them anyway.  
And we know it is his will!*

*Blessings on your project, Craig!  
In Jesus,  
Joel*

## APPENDIX E

### INTERVIEW WITH PASTOR JONATHAN SCHARF

Person being interviewed: Pastor Jonathan Scharf

Date of interview: Thanksgiving Day, 2016

#### **Which Bible verses or accounts do you believe are most important to keep in mind with personal evangelism? Why?**

*I think Paul is a great example in how he uses different approaches in different situations. When it comes to personal evangelism, his discussion of becoming all things to all people is important and keeping the focus on seeing each person as one for whom Christ died.*

#### **How quickly do you think Christians should tell people about Jesus? Should the timeframe change depending on the depth of the relationship? (stranger vs friend, first meeting with a prospect vs third time, etc.)**

*There are a ton of variables on this one. If it's the last time I'll probably see the person - I say go for it – even if it is awkward. If there is potential for extended future relationship, sometimes let the light shine a bit first and they may ask, or you will be there when something happens and you can use that opportunity. But my basic rule is err on the side of saying something. All too often we pass up opportunities with the excuse that maybe a better one will come up later.*

#### **What do you see as the relationship between observing cultural communication norms and a Christian's personal evangelism approach?**

*Absolutely. One of my rules for vicars is “don't be weird”. You don't have to disregard cultural communication norms to share Jesus.*

#### **Respond to the following statement: Since God has promised to bring all his elect to faith before Judgment Day, Christians don't have to evangelize with any urgency.**

*That ignores everything else God's Word says about our responsibility to “preach the Word” and “always be prepared” and all of Scripture's discussion about fruit. If we realize what we have we will want to share it.*

#### **Respond to the following statement: Since God's Word is powerful and effective, Christians never need to proceed slowly or cautiously in their personal evangelizing.**

*We are to be good stewards of all the gifts God has given us, including our opportunities and relationships.*

**In your ministry, what is/were the main methods you use/used for doing personal evangelism? What methods do/did you encourage other people to use?**

*In personal situations: I ask people how what they tell me has affected their relationship with God.*

*In corporate situations: I knock on doors and talk to people, so I can ask them that.*

**What advice would you offer a Christian who wanted to get better at sharing his faith with others?**

*Love Jesus. Love people.*

## APPENDIX F

### INTERVIEW WITH PASTOR JONATHAN SCHROEDER

Person being interviewed: Pastor Jonathan Schroeder

Date of interview: 12-2-17

**Which Bible verses or accounts do you believe are most important to keep in mind with personal evangelism? Why?**

*2 Cor 5:21. It shows how God solved mankind's twin problems of sin and the lack of holiness.*

**How quickly do you think Christians should tell people about Jesus? Should the timeframe change depending on the depth of the relationship? (stranger vs friend, first meeting with a prospect vs third time, etc.)**

*We treat prospects differently depending on our relationship with them. When we can expect a long term commitment from them, such as enrolling in our preschool, we take the opportunity to build a relationship with them before trying a L/G presentation. We have found that in our culture today, we have more opportunities to share the gospel if we earn the right to be heard. That transfers into the area of personal evangelism. Someone who trusts you is more likely to give you evangelism opportunities than a stranger. See our Harvest Strategy: Attached.*

**What do you see as the relationship between observing cultural communication norms and a Christian's personal evangelism approach?**

*Failure to recognize those norms will inevitably erect obstacles to hearing and understanding the Gospel.*

**Respond to the following statement: Since God has promised to bring all his elect to faith before Judgment Day, Christians don't have to evangelize with any urgency.**

*Hogwash. See the quote from my symposium essay, "Worship and Outreach: A Lutheran paradigm"*

***Balancing the inherent efficacy of the Word and stewardship of the means of grace***

*Consider these two truths:*

- *God's Word works: it is efficacious of itself because it is the tool the Holy Spirit uses to call people to faith. Nothing we do makes the Word work better.*
- *God commands us to be faithful stewards of the means of grace. We seek to use them in the best possible way.*

*These are both true statements. We believe that the Word of God is efficacious. That means our job is to preach the gospel, and leave the converting to the Holy Spirit. It*

is always efficacious because it is the gospel: it is living and active; it is the power of God; it never returns to him empty. This call has the power to open the heart of man and reclaim it for God. It is able to make us wise for salvation.<sup>66</sup>

Yet at the same time, our Lord calls us to be faithful stewards of the means of grace and use them in the best way we can. He tells us to preach the Word and to be prepared in season and out of season, to do your best, to be a workman approved, to correctly handle the Word, to entrust to reliable men who are apt to teach.<sup>67</sup> He tells his messengers to plant and water, and to go and teach.<sup>68</sup> He wants us to be faithful to God's Word and faithful with God's Word.<sup>69</sup>

There is a tension in our ministry between these two truths. Nowhere does he tell us that the efficacy of the Word excuses a lack of working or planting or going. Nowhere does Jesus tell us that our working and going and planting are what saves. Efficacy cannot be an excuse for laziness; effort or results cannot be an excuse for pride.

God has a plan to save mankind: God has a part, the Word has a part, and you have a part. The dogmatists like Johann Andreas Quenstedt help us here with their distinctions between the causes of salvation.<sup>70</sup> The efficient cause of salvation is the Holy Trinity;<sup>71</sup> the instrumental cause of salvation is the Word;<sup>72</sup> the ministerial cause<sup>73</sup> of salvation is the messenger.<sup>74</sup>

We are correct when we say that the Word is efficacious by itself and the Spirit works when and where he wills. We have no effect on the efficient and instrumental causes of salvation. However, Scripture does say, "And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"<sup>75</sup> The only cause of salvation you and I have any control over is the ministerial cause.<sup>76</sup> It is that cause which the Lord addresses when he tells us to be good stewards of the means of grace (the instrumental cause) that the Trinity (the efficient cause) might achieve its goal: the glory of God and the salvation of man.

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<sup>66</sup> Heb 4:12; Rm 1:16; Is 55:11; Rm 10:17; 2 Ti 3:15

<sup>67</sup> 2 Tim 4:2; 2:15; 2:2; 2:24

<sup>68</sup> 1 Cor 3:6; Mt 28:19

<sup>69</sup> 1 Cor 4:2

<sup>70</sup> Johann Andreas Quenstedt, *Theologia dictactico-polemica*, IV, XV: *De ecclesia*, XIII-XV.

<sup>71</sup> *Causa efficiens principalis est total SS. Trinitas.* Θεσις XIII. See also Θεσις XIV the impulsive cause that moves God is outwardly the extreme misery of the people and the merit of Christ. Inwardly it is his goodness, compassion and grace.

<sup>72</sup> *Causa instrumentalis sunt Verbum et Sacramenta.* Θεσις XVI.

<sup>73</sup> *Causa ministerialis, qua Deus in collectione et conservatione Ecclesiae utitur, sunt ministri verbi.*

<sup>74</sup> They are the servants who bid the bidden come, Lk 14:17; that I might save some, 1 Cor 3:22; given by Christ for the Church, Eph 4:11-12; workers together in God's work of building, 1 Cor 3:9; ambassadors for Christ, 2 Cor 5:20; for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel, 1 Cor 4:15. They are a *causa ministerialis* not by reason of the ministers' person, but by reason of their ministry—namely that they preach the Word and administer the Sacraments. See Baier, III, 9: *et suo modo etiam ipsi ministri ecclesiae*. Baier then quotes Gerhard "...non ratione personae, sed ratione sui ministerii, quatenus scl. verbum praedicant et sacramenta administrant. Sic evangelium est potentia Dei ad salute Rom 1, 16, et Timotheus, praedicans evangelium, salvat se ipsum et eos, qui ipsum audiunt 1 Tim 4, 16." *Baieri Compendium Theologicae Positivae*, III 185.

<sup>75</sup> Rom 10:14

<sup>76</sup> This in no way equates the public ministry with the means of grace. The Word of God is a means of grace also when merely read (Pieper, III, 449 and FC SD, XI, 29). God is the efficient cause, the Word and Sacrament are the instrumental cause, and the minister is merely the mouthpiece, the herald, of the saving message. As God said to Jeremiah, "You will be my mouth."

*A Lutheran paradigm of worship and outreach seeks to uphold both of those biblical truths: God's Word is the efficacious tool God would use to save man, and God commands us to do our very best in sharing that Word with others.*

*A Lutheran paradigm also uses these two truths to inform each other. God says his Word works; then he turns right around and tells you to work like crazy: Plant! Water! Divide! Preach! Go! The efficacy of the Word doesn't remove the urgency of Jesus' words—rather, it informs our activity in ministry. After planting and watering and preaching and growing, the efficacy of the Word offers the great comfort of telling the ministerial cause that it is the instrumental cause that is efficacious and the efficient cause who has promised to work when he wills. The efficacy of the Word gives us the comfort of knowing that God is working; it never comforts us to be lax in our gospel-preaching work. We use First Article gifts to communicate Second Article truths with Third Article confidence.<sup>77</sup>*

*The Word works; the minister works. God promises the former and commands the latter. Our goal is to strive to communicate the efficacious Word in the best ways we can.*

**Respond to the following statement: Since God's Word is powerful and effective, Christians never need to proceed slowly or cautiously in their personal evangelizing.**

*See the above quote. We need to be willing to say both truths. That the word is efficacious but we are called to be the best stewards of the means of grace that we can be.*

**In your ministry, what is/were the main methods you use/used for doing personal evangelism? What methods do/did you encourage other people to use?**

*Invitational outreach. Invite them to Sunday morning worship. Create a bunch of high quality invitational events that your people will use in their personal evangelism invitations.*

**What advice would you offer a Christian who wanted to get better at sharing his faith with others?**

*Just do it. A bunch. Ready, fire. Aim, fire. Just keep pulling the trigger. Many churches or people think they need to train and plan and plan and train and they never get around to doing it. They just: ready, aim, ready, aim, aim...*

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<sup>77</sup> This excellent thought comes from Prof. Richard Gurgel and is most recently published in *Preach the Word*, September, 2010.

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