

“Evangelism, for certain, is an exercise of the mind. You have to know the gospel to share the gospel. But, even more, evangelism is an exercise of the heart. Few people know the world of evangelism like Tim Beougher. Few people have the heart of evangelism like Tim Beougher. Such are the reasons *Invitation to Evangelism: Sharing the Gospel with Compassion and Conviction* will become one of my most recommended books on the incredible topic of evangelism.”

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Founder and CEO of Church Answers  
Author of *The Post Quarantine Church*

“In *Invitation to Evangelism*, Tim Beougher grants readers a solid biblical foundation for evangelism while at the same time equipping them to put their convictions regarding the gospel and making disciples into practice. He writes from the experience of an academician who is a serious student of evangelism and a pastor who lives out the Great Commission in his ministry. This book offers a well-rounded introduction to evangelism for students, pastors, and church members. I will be using it as my primary textbook in my evangelism classes at Anderson University. It’s that good!”

—Tim McKnight  
Associate Professor of Youth Ministry and Missions  
Director of the Global Center for Youth Ministry  
College of Christian Studies, Anderson University

“Tim Beougher has taught more students in courses related to the theology and practice of evangelism than any other professor in the 160-year-plus history of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Now with the publication of his latest book *Invitation to Evangelism*, anyone anywhere can benefit from the same biblically faithful, personally focused approach to sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with those who have yet to believe. I cannot recommend this work highly enough.”

—Adam W. Greenway  
President, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

“*Invitation to Evangelism* is a comprehensive guide. It covers evangelism from every possible angle—biblical, historical, practical, and pastoral. Beougher’s solid academic approach combines with his genuine pastoral concern to produce a practitioner’s handbook. Readers will be encouraged to believe the gospel and share it!”

—Jimmy Scroggins  
Lead Pastor, Family Church, West Palm Beach, Florida  
Author of *3 Circles*

“I cannot recommend highly enough Dr. Tim Beougher’s *Invitation to Evangelism*. As I read this thorough treatise on the wonderful subject of evangelism, I

thought about two words: anointing and favor. God has given us an anointed and helpful resource from the gifted mind and pen of Dr. Beougher. But that is not all. This book has the favor of God upon it, and I predict it will become the standard textbook for classes in evangelism at both the college and seminary levels. I recommend it to every pastor and student of the Word of God. You will be blessed, motivated, and challenged. I absolutely loved reading it!”

—Danny Forshee  
Lead Pastor, Great Hills Baptist Church, Austin, Texas

“This is a time the church has thankfully become alert to the different aspects of the mission of God. A side effect of this could be not giving sufficient attention to the evangelistic mandate. Behind this mandate are hard countercultural realities which, if not constantly kept before the church, she can (to her peril) begin to ignore. In an eminently readable style, this book does a great service by alerting the church to what lies behind the call to evangelism and how we can be faithful to it today.”

—Ajith Fernando  
Teaching Director, Youth for Christ, Sri Lanka  
Author of *Discipling in a Multicultural World*

“*Invitation to Evangelism: Sharing the Gospel with Compassion and Conviction* is filled with practical insight, personal testimony, and profound theology—an ideal introduction to a life-and-death topic.”

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“My wife and I are blessed with a fascinating circle of not-yet-Christian friends, some profoundly secular, some from traditional religions, and some from a post-modern ‘spirituality’ that is ambiguous at best. Yet, most of these dear ones are open to spiritual conversations. So, we often grapple with, ‘How can we make the gospel *clear*, and how might we, by the power of the Spirit, offer a loving, compelling *call* to follow Christ as Lord?’ Tim Beougher’s *Invitation to Evangelism* offers us biblically grounded, practical, and varied answers to both of these questions—plus so much more!”

—George Guthrie  
Professor of New Testament  
Regent College

“My understanding of evangelism was deepened more than two decades ago when I sat under the teaching of Tim Beougher as one of his Ph.D. students. His biblical exposition, clarity of thought, and personal example helped shape

and strengthen my personal convictions. In *Invitation to Evangelism: Sharing the Gospel with Compassion and Conviction*, those lessons are now available to everyone, with no matriculation requirements. This book is a gift to the church and, prayerfully, will result in the gift of the gospel being offered to the lost.”

—Paul Chitwood

President, International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention

“The litmus test for any book on evangelism is that it encourages the believer to go out and share with compassion, zeal, and urgency the good news of the gospel. Tim Beougher’s *Invitation to Evangelism*, comprehensively meets that test. Tim’s book is theologically rich, equips the believer to share the gospel, and fosters a deep compassion for the lost. It is comprehensive but easy to read, and full of personal and practical illustrations that both inspire and challenge the believer towards active evangelism. This book will be a huge blessing to the church and will stir believers to take seriously the Great Commission given to us by the Lord Jesus Christ. I will be encouraging my network of churches to read this book.”

—Andy Constable

Co-pastor, Niddrie Community Church,  
Edinburgh, Scotland  
Director, 20 Schemes

“When Jesus commissioned his followers to proclaim the gospel, beginning in Jerusalem and then to all nations, he was sending them first to the very people who had crucified him. The Roman soldiers who had spat upon Jesus, scourged and mocked him, driven nails through his hands and feet, were to hear of God’s love and Jesus’s atoning death. The scornful, self-righteous Scribes and Pharisees were to be presented with their need to repent and believe. Religious people who had bayed for Jesus to be crucified were to be told of forgiveness and the promise of eternal life. The ordinary people who had called out ‘Hosannah’ to the King of Kings were to understand that the risen, living Jesus could be their Lord and Savior. And sinners—every creature—in all nations should each know the most wonderful yet urgent message that Jesus saves. Tim Beougher has gifted to the church a ‘more-than-a-manual’, but a practical, down-to-earth primer on evangelism that will equip Christians in ensuring that every person, in every nation, in each succeeding generation hears the news that Christ can save. *Invitation to Evangelism* will stir and encourage any Christian in making Jesus known to all.”

—Roger Carswell, Evangelist  
Author of *Evangelistic Living*

“The textbook that you need is from the learned man who practices what he teaches. Dr. Beougher offers the reader years of wisdom, understanding of

evangelistic principles, and the practical application that you will need when leaving the textbook. He is one of God's gifts to us in this generation."

—David Evans

Senior Pastor, Springfield Baptist Church, Springfield, Tennessee

"Some may say, 'We do not need another book on evangelism.' I would say we do not need just another book on evangelism, but we do need this one. Dr. Tim Beougher's *Invitation to Evangelism* is comprehensive, convictional, and consistently biblical. The reader is receiving in one volume the content of seminary level evangelistic training and yet written in a winsome way that will not feel overly academic. I encourage you to read and implement its clear and compelling directives. The chapter on witnessing to children is worth the price of the book all by itself. My prayer is that God will use this book, and its author, to the end that lost people will be saved and saved people will become more evangelistic."

—Todd Gray

Executive Director-Treasurer  
The Kentucky Baptist Convention

"Tim Beougher is 'Professor Evangelist'—and not just the Billy Graham Professor of Evangelism at Southern Seminary. Since he began teaching at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary twenty-five years ago, Dr. Beougher has faithfully instructed countless students in the stewardship of evangelism. This book is the outpouring of Dr. Beougher's sustained dedication and conviction. *All* Christians will greatly benefit from this vital book—a book full of gospel wisdom and practical help to overcome barriers to evangelism. I am proud to have Dr. Beougher on the faculty and I am proud to know him as friend and colleague. This timely volume will encourage Christians everywhere to engage in the task of evangelism with clarity and boldness."

—R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"As one of the leading, most respected, and well-loved professors of evangelism, it is no surprise that Dr. Tim Beougher has produced a thorough and needed reference manual for every pastor's toolbox. *Invitation to Evangelism* is excellent and a must read for pastors, church leaders and students."

—Jaye Martin

Jaye Martin Ministries

"I have known Tim Beougher over the years in many capacities: as my professor, as one of my doctoral supervisors, and then as a colleague in the Billy Graham School at Southern Seminary. Dr. Beougher is the quintessential example of a scholar-practitioner in evangelism. He set the standard for teaching young

theologues the practical art and the passion for evangelism. Personally, he not only teaches how to evangelize; he puts his words to action. This book is a necessary addition to anyone's library who desires to learn, teach, and inspire others to be consistent and obedient in leading people to Christ."

—Bill Henard

Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, Athens, Tennessee

"I have found in this work what I've been seeking a number of years: a theologically strong and practically relevant toolbox for doing evangelism. Too many books on evangelism assume a knowledge of the biblical basis for evangelism, but this one starts there. Some neglect the personal walk of the one evangelizing, but not so with this book. Several offer only one or two ways for doing evangelism, but this book provides multiple strategies for proclaiming the gospel to nonbelievers. Others give little attention to the process of preserving evangelistic results, but this work ends there. Because I know Tim Beougher—a man whose heart beats with evangelism—and because I see this book as incredibly valuable, I will encourage its use in the classroom and in the local church. And, I will return to it often as a primary resource for my own evangelistic efforts."

—Chuck Lawless

Professor of Evangelism and Missions; Dean of Doctoral Studies  
Vice President for Spiritual Formation and Ministry Centers  
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

"For over three decades, Tim Beougher has taught and modeled for thousands of students how to faithfully share the gospel of Jesus Christ. On this urgent topic, Beougher's character, wisdom, and experience are unrivaled. In this book, he provides students, pastors, and Christians with a biblically based practical guide on how to effectively communicate the good news of the gospel. This is a book that will bear fruit now and for eternity!"

—Paul Akin

Dean, Billy Graham School, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"Dr. Beougher has been a student, practitioner, and professor of evangelism for many years. This book is the compilation of that knowledge and experience. It's not only a resource for students in Bible college or seminary, but also helps pastors and churches get involved in sharing the gospel in their everyday contexts. Readers will grow in their own affections to engage the lost in evangelism."

—Erik Reed,

Pastor, The Journey Church, Lebanon, Tennessee  
Founder, Knowing Jesus Ministries.

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# INVITATION TO EVANGELISM

*Sharing the Gospel with  
Compassion and Conviction*

TIMOTHY K. BEOUGHER



*Invitation to Evangelism: Sharing the Gospel with Compassion and Conviction*

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# CONTENTS

Foreword: <i>Robert E. Coleman</i> .....	xiii
Acknowledgements.....	xv
Preface .....	xix

## **Part 1: Preparing for Evangelism**

1 What Is Evangelism? .....	3
2 The Biblical Basis for Evangelism (Part 1).....	17
3 The Biblical Basis for Evangelism (Part 2).....	31
4 Theology of Evangelism .....	41
5 History of Evangelism.....	59
6 Evangelism and Postmodernity .....	89
7 What Is the Gospel?.....	101
8 Motivations for Evangelism.....	113
9 Overcoming Barriers to Witnessing .....	125
10 Devotional Life and Evangelism.....	141
11 Prayer and Evangelism.....	149
12 Concentric Circles of Concern.....	159

## **Part 2: Practicing Evangelism**

13 Evangelism as a Way of Life .....	169
14 Bridges to the Gospel .....	183
15 Gospel Booklets.....	197
16 Personal Testimony .....	207
17 Evangelistic Bible Studies .....	215
18 Gospel Appointments .....	225
19 Servant Evangelism .....	231
20 Evangelism and the Internet/Social Media .....	241

21 Calling for a Response..... 249  
22 Evangelism and Apologetics .....259  
23 Witnessing to Children.....273  
24 Witnessing to Family Members..... 283  
25 Witnessing to Cult Members or Adherents of Other Religions....295  
26 Evangelistic Preaching ..... 303  
27 Local Church Evangelism.....313

**Part 3: Preserving Evangelism**

28 The Process of Making Disciples .....323  
29 Assurance of Salvation ..... 349  
  
Afterword.....359  
Bibliography..... 363  
Index..... 399

## CHAPTER 1

# WHAT IS EVANGELISM?



EVANGELISM PRESENTS AN OFFENSIVE PICTURE to people both inside and outside the church. When some hear the word *evangelism*, they equate it with hardline psychological pressure, yelling through a bullhorn, or proselytizing people against their will. Yet those negative connotations express poor stereotypes of an activity that by its very nature means the communication of “good news.” And indeed, if you have good news, life-saving news—even eternal life-saving news—how can you not desire to share that message with others?

In this opening chapter we first will examine biblical terminology employed for the practice of evangelism and then observe various definitions of evangelism. I trust this overview will remind believers not only of the great responsibility of evangelism, but also of the unbelievable privilege that is ours of testifying to the good news of what God has done for us in Christ.

### BIBLICAL TERMINOLOGY

Our word *evangelism* is taken from the Greek word *euangelion*, translated “the gospel.” Within the word *evangelism* we see the word *evangel*, meaning “good news.” The evangel which lies at the heart of the Christian faith is the good news about who God is and how he has provided reconciliation for sinful humanity.

So evangelism is to announce the *euangelion*, the good news. The noun form appears over seventy times in the New Testament, while the verb form *euangelizō* appears over thirty times. We find both the noun and the verb forms in Romans 1:15, “So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.”

The term *kerygma*, meaning “to proclaim,” highlights the proclamation of the gospel. The verb form appears more than sixty times in the New Testament, and while not always referencing the proclamation of the gospel, it is often used in that context—for example, in 1 Corinthians 1:21: “God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached [*kerygma*] to save those who believe.” In Romans 10:14–15, the terms *kērussō* and *euangelizomai* are used synonymously.

Another biblical term that relates to evangelism is *martyreō*, meaning “bearing witness.” A witness is someone who brings firsthand testimony of what he or she has seen or heard or experienced. This term is used in Jesus’s declaration to the disciples found in Acts 1:8, “You shall be my witnesses.”<sup>1</sup>

## DEFINING EVANGELISM

Humpty Dumpty’s assertion in the fictional work *Through the Looking Glass* highlights the problem we face when it comes to definitions: “When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”<sup>2</sup> You could place one hundred people in a room, ask them to define evangelism, and probably come up with two hundred different definitions.<sup>3</sup>

Sometimes the best way to define a term is first to define what it is not. Many things that fly under the banner of evangelism do not constitute true evangelism when viewed from a biblical perspective. While numerous examples could be listed of what evangelism is not, I have found that two particular misconceptions about evangelism often confuse people.

- 
1. Tom Johnston, a dear friend and professor of evangelism at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, has done extensive work on these biblical terms and how they are translated in various historical translations of the Scriptures. For an in-depth discussion, see Thomas P. Johnston, *Evangelizology, Vol. 1: Motivation and Definition* (Liberty, MO: Evangelism Unlimited, 2011), 209.
  2. Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1917), 99.
  3. David B. Barrett, *Evangelize: A Historical Survey of the Concept* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 1987) lists seventy-five different definitions.

## EVANGELISM: WHAT IT IS NOT

First, evangelism is not “mere presence.” We hear that perspective expressed often today. Some people declare, “I’m just going to witness with my life. I’m going to let my life do the talking.” Some even misquote St. Francis of Assisi (1181/1182–1226), claiming he opined, “Preach the gospel at all times; use words if necessary.” Scholars of St. Francis assert he never said those words, but I maintain even if he had said them, they still would be wrong! This is like saying, “Feed the hungry at all times; use food if necessary.”

Your life is not the gospel. The good news of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ must be shared verbally. Evangelism is more than mere presence. If you live a committed Christian life in front of people but never share the reason for the hope within you, they are going to assume one of two things about you.

First, they might assume you are a good person. And by human standards you might fall into the overall category of “good” instead of “bad.” But your life is not the gospel. Do good works save? No—they emphatically do not. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ, not because of our works.

Second, others might assume you are a religious person. After all, they see you going to church each Sunday, and sometimes other times as well. Does religion save? No—religion does not save; only a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ saves.

I heard Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ (now Cru), tell of a Christian businessman who worked for years in the same office and had never opened his mouth to testify about Christ. He sought to live a life of integrity and model compassion among his fellow workers. Finally, after several years, a man came to his office and asked if he had a few minutes to answer a personal question. This Christian businessman said “sure,” confident he was about to be asked the reason for the hope within him. The coworker began by noting he had witnessed a difference between this man and the other workers in the office, filling the Christian man’s heart with excitement for the inevitable question about Christianity. But instead, the coworker asked him, “Are you a Buddhist?” Bright noted the Christian businessman had convinced this coworker he was different, but apart from any verbal sharing of the gospel, the coworker mistakenly assumed he was a follower of a different religion.

LeRoy Eims shares a similar story:

A Christian businessman in Seattle confessed how he had unknowingly discouraged a business associate from coming to Christ for years. One day the friend told the Christian businessman he had met the Lord the night before at a Billy Graham meeting. The longtime Christian was elated and said so, but the new Christian replied, “Friend, you’re the reason I have resisted becoming a Christian all these years. I figured if a person could live a good life as you do and not be a Christian, there was no need to become one!”<sup>4</sup>

As Eims points out, this Christian businessman had sought to live an exemplary life, but he had not communicated his source of strength for doing so.

How will people know where our hope is found if we do not tell them? We may think that our life is bearing testimony, but without an accompanying verbal witness, the gospel has not been communicated. Evangelism is not “mere presence.” We might recast the mistakenly attributed quote of St. Francis of Assisi in this way: “Share the gospel at all times, and use words, because they are necessary.”

A second thing that evangelism is not is “spiritual mugging.” Some people seem to think that unless you are browbeating someone with the truth, you are not truly witnessing. One of my college friends was accosted by well-meaning but overly zealous “witnesses” in the laundry room of his dormitory. As he was folding his clothes, four fellow students backed him into a corner and told him he needed to pray the sinner’s prayer. He told them he wasn’t interested, but they weren’t taking “no” for an answer. They kept insisting that he “pray the prayer,” and he realized they were not going to leave until he did, so he went through the motions. These four men left rejoicing over their new convert, but he was as lost after the encounter as he was before.

Evangelism is not spiritual mugging. Jesus was willing to let people walk away (see the account of the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16–30). Only God can change hearts. You cannot browbeat someone into the kingdom of God. You can browbeat them into praying a prayer or doing

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4. Leroy Eims, *One-to-One Evangelism: Winning Ways in Personal Witnessing* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1990), 39.

some other type of religious activity, but you cannot “mug” them into genuine conversion. We must avoid the ditches of “mere presence” and “spiritual mugging” in our evangelism. If those two approaches show us what evangelism is not, then what is evangelism? The following section will seek to clarify what evangelism is through the use of various definitions.

## WHAT EVANGELISM IS: VARIOUS DEFINITIONS

### *1918 Anglican Definition*

A special committee was appointed in 1918 by the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, to bring clarity to the task of evangelism. The appointed group of Anglican bishops produced this definition: “To evangelise is so to present Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, that men shall come to put their trust in God through him, to accept him as their Saviour, and serve him as their King in the fellowship of his church.”<sup>5</sup> This definition has numerous strengths. It reminds us that evangelism is good news about Jesus Christ. It reinforces the reality that evangelism depends completely on its effectiveness from the power of the Holy Spirit. It highlights that while people come to faith individually, faithful evangelism leads to incorporation into the church. It points out that true evangelism calls for a response to the message. The gospel is a message that demands a response, a “yes” or “no” to Christ’s offer of forgiveness. The definition also reminds us that evangelism should result in discipleship. A disciple is a learner or follower of Christ. Response to the gospel involves a change from going my own way to following Christ’s way.

Yet in spite of these strengths, J. I. Packer, himself an Anglican, offers a critique of the definition, particularly of the phrase “*that* men shall come to put their trust in God through Him.” Packer believes that phrase defines evangelism in terms of its results and comments, “This is to define evangelism in terms of an effect achieved in the lives of others; which amounts to saying that the essence of evangelizing is producing converts.”<sup>6</sup> Regarding this same clause in the definition, John R. W. Stott asserts, “Evangelism must not be defined in terms of its results. . . . To ‘evangelize’ in the biblical

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5. Bryan Green, *Practice of Evangelism* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951), 6.

6. J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1961), 40.



usage does not mean to win converts (as it usually does when we use the word) but simply to share the good news, irrespective of the results.”<sup>7</sup> This point rings true. Evangelism must be defined in terms of the message proclaimed, not the results achieved.

### *D. T. Niles*

D. T. Niles, a theologian from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), offered this memorable definition: “Evangelism is witness. It is one beggar telling another beggar where to get food.”<sup>8</sup> Reminiscent of the four starving men in 2 Kings 7:1–9 who stumbled upon an abundance of food, this definition reminds us that we have come to faith due to God’s mercy and grace. The difference between the two classes of beggars in Niles’s definition is that one has discovered the bread of life, and the other needs to know that truth.

This definition reminds us of the importance of humility in our witness. If our salvation were something we could earn by our own efforts or good works, then we would have grounds for boasting. But the Scriptures constantly remind us that salvation is a gift from God that is completely undeserved on our part (Eph. 2:8–9). The ground is indeed level at the foot of the cross. This humility is crucial in our witness because a major reason unbelievers are turned off by Christianity is they perceive Christians as somehow claiming they are better than everyone else. If we understand grace, we will be humble. Christians should be the most humble people in the world. We can share the gospel with deep conviction but also with genuine humility. We truly are “one beggar telling other beggars where to find food.”

### *Bill Bright (Campus Crusade for Christ)*

Bill Bright shared his perspective on evangelism with this statement: “Success in witnessing is simply taking the initiative to share Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and leaving the results to God.”<sup>9</sup> This definition reminds us that real “success” in evangelism is based on our sharing the good news, not on the person’s response. It also highlights the necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit in the gospel conversation.

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7. John Stott, “The Biblical Basis of Evangelism,” in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), 69.

8. D. T. Niles, *That They May Have Life* (New York: Harper, 1951), 96.

9. Bill Bright, *Witnessing without Fear: How to Share Your Faith with Confidence* (San Bernardino, CA: Here’s Life, 1987), 69.



### *1974 Lausanne Covenant*

In 1974, Christian leaders from all over the world met at the International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland. One of the results of that meeting was a fresh definition of evangelism: “To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe.”<sup>10</sup> I have read scores of books on evangelism since 1975, and my unscientific survey concludes this definition is the most-quoted definition on evangelism in recent decades.

This definition reminds us that evangelism involves communicating the good news of the gospel, which is set forth in 1 Corinthians 15, and includes an emphasis on the resurrection. Many “gospel presentations” used today focus on the cross (and rightly so!) but neglect any reference to the resurrection. The definition also highlights key benefits of salvation (forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit) as well as the necessary response of repentance and faith. Obviously, the longer the definition, the more that can be included.

## MY DEFINITION

As I have practiced evangelism for more than four decades and taught evangelism for more than three decades, I have settled on this definition of evangelism: it is *the compassionate sharing of the good news of Jesus Christ with lost people, in the power of the Holy Spirit, for the purpose of bringing them to Christ as Savior and Lord, that they in turn might share him with others*. In order to unpack that definition, I would like to break it down into key phrases, each with an important emphasis.

### *The Spirit of Evangelism: Compassion*

Douglas Stewart has argued the single greatest reason we fail to witness is that we do not possess the compassion of Christ.<sup>11</sup> I begin my definition of evangelism with compassion because of the example of Christ. Matthew 9:36 reminds us that when Jesus saw the multitudes, he “felt

10. “The Nature of Evangelism,” Lausanne Covenant 4, in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, 4.

11. Douglas Stewart, “Evangelism,” *Expository Times* 67, no. 10 (July 1956): 312.

compassion for them.” How do we respond when we encounter sinful multitudes? What is our response when we are confronted with sinful humanity? I fear too often our response is not of one of compassion but one of coldness, callousness, criticism, or condemnation.

When our daughter Karisa turned seventeen years old, I took her to get her ears double-pierced. Since she was not yet eighteen, a parent had to go and sign a permission form before the procedure. My daughter wanted to go to a store on Bardstown Road in Louisville, a section of town where tattoos and piercings are common. As we were waiting in line, a woman joined the line behind us. She not only had her ears pierced multiple times, but she also had her nose, eyebrows, lips, and tongue pierced multiple times. My first reaction was one of amazement, then analysis, and finally criticism: *Why would she do that to her body?* I was not feeling compassion for this woman but instead criticism and condemnation.

The silence of my thoughts was broken by my daughter’s voice as she asked this woman if she knew God. “No,” the woman replied. “I don’t know God. What would God want with someone like me?” As we waited in this very long line, my daughter Karisa shared with this woman about how God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that *whoever* believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

I experienced a conflict of emotions in my heart. I felt incredible fatherly pride in my daughter. Karisa was not old enough to get her ears pierced by herself, but she had compassion for this woman and was seeking to point her to the Savior. But I also had the contrasting emotion of incredible disappointment in myself. How could my heart so quickly fill with criticism instead of compassion? When Jesus saw the multitudes, he had compassion on them. They were wandering aimlessly like sheep without a shepherd. Why is it that so many of us who claim to follow the Compassionate One are sometimes lacking in compassion?

Christians can develop a cold heart toward the unsaved, which can lead to a calloused, hard heart. From time to time we may need to get on our faces before God and cry out for a heart of compassion for the lost. It was said of D. L. Moody that he never spoke about lost souls without tears in his eyes. John Henry Jowett emphasizes the importance of compassion by saying, “The gospel of a broken heart demands the ministry of bleeding hearts. As soon as we cease to bleed, we cease to bless. . . . Tearless hearts

can never be the heralds of the Passion.”<sup>12</sup> Compassion undergirds the spirit of evangelism.

### *The Method of Evangelism: Sharing*

I utilize the word *sharing* very deliberately. Sharing involves both our verbal and nonverbal communication; it involves both talking and listening, and it is both an act and a process. In Acts 8:35, as Philip dialogued with the Ethiopian eunuch, the Scriptures record, “Philip shared Jesus with him.” Sharing involves communication—both talking and listening. Much of our evangelism training focuses on us learning how to talk, and rightly so. As we have already argued, “mere presence” without verbal communication is not evangelism. But good evangelism is a dialogue, not a monologue. And we do not receive much training in how to listen. My wife Sharon is one of the best personal witnesses I know, and it is in no small part due to her listening skills. We must listen with alertness and sensitivity in order to understand what the other person believes and where he or she is coming from. Listening is hard for us because in a dialogue, when the other person is talking, our mind usually begins formulating what we will say next. Several verses in Proverbs 18 remind us of the importance of active listening: “A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own mind” (v. 2); “He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him” (v. 13); and “The mind of the prudent acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge” (v. 15).

If you will learn to ask good questions and then listen, most people will open up and talk about their life and their beliefs. They will often self-diagnose themselves in terms of what they are trusting in and where their hope is found. In later chapters we will discuss how to communicate the gospel message and focus on helpful ways to begin spiritual conversations, but underlying it all we have to learn to listen to what the person is saying in response. Evangelism involves both talking and listening.

### *The Content of Evangelism: The Good News of Jesus Christ*

In announcing the birth of Christ in Luke 2:10, the angels testified of “good news of great joy!” The content of evangelism is good news! Sometimes our attitude seems to convey that what we are sharing is somehow

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12. John Henry Jowett, *The Passion for Souls* (New York: Revell, 1905), 30, 34.

less than good news to this person. We drag our heels and often seem reluctant to open our mouths. Why do we act like that at times? The gospel is the greatest news this world has ever known! It is the greatest news any person could ever hear! We will unpack the gospel message more fully in a later chapter, but for now remember that it is *good news!* The content of evangelism is the good news of Jesus Christ: who he is and what he has done for sinners.

### *The Recipients of Evangelism: Lost People*

In Luke 19:10, Jesus reminded us that his mission was to “seek and to save that which was lost.” Part of making his mission our mission involves understanding that people are lost. When you are lost you do not know the way. My current hometown of Louisville, Kentucky, has been described as the location where “the Bible belt buckles,” but in my more than two decades of living here, the vast majority of people I witness to do not know the gospel message. We mistakenly assume that in a place like Louisville people must have heard the gospel at least a hundred times and just continue to refuse to bow their knees before Christ. And yes, there are people in Louisville who have heard and understood the gospel and yet reject it. And yet most people I talk with are not only lost in sin—they are lost in sin with no clue as to the road map pointing them to the narrow road that leads them out of their predicament.

That means that not all evangelism can be done inside the church building. Most lost persons will never come to church—because they are lost! Some churches have subtly reversed the Great Commission; instead of “go and tell,” it has become “come and hear.” I am not against doing evangelism inside the church building. Every time I preach, I seek to communicate the gospel message, as I never assume that everyone who attends that day already knows Christ personally. But we cannot rely on a “come and hear” strategy when so many people will never come and hear. The only way they will know the gospel is if we “go and tell.” People are lost, and that means we must go to them with the gospel and initiate those spiritual conversations. The recipients of evangelism are lost people.

### *The Power for Evangelism: The Holy Spirit*

In Acts 1:8, Jesus encouraged a rather discouraged band of disciples with the words, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has

come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” Often when I hear someone reference Acts 1:8 they focus on the strategy for evangelism contained within that verse. This strategy reflects concentric circles, beginning where you are (your Jerusalem) and continuing outwardly to “the uttermost parts of the earth.” Certainly that strategy is found there, and we see it enacted throughout the remainder of the book of Acts. But too often we focus on the strategy and forget the power. Jesus didn’t tell the disciples, “Here is your strategy, now do the best you can in your own strength.” No, the strategy is impotent without the power! Jesus told them to tarry until they received the empowerment of the Holy Spirit because their ministry (and ours as well) would be worthless without the power.

I have adopted 2 Corinthians 4:7 as my life verse (my translation): “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power might be from God and not from we ourselves.” Periodically I’ll have someone say to me, “I just don’t feel adequate to do evangelism.” Do you know how I reply? I grab their shoulders and exclaim, “That’s great! That’s wonderful! You are exactly where God wants you to be! God doesn’t work through people who feel they are adequate, but through those who acknowledge their weakness and need for God’s empowering strength.” If you feel inadequate to do evangelism, then you are a perfect candidate for God’s power.

Reflect on what the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2. He reminisced about his first visit there and recalled that he was with them “in weakness and fear and much trembling.” Think about who wrote those words! Not a brand-new believer or a backslidden Christian, but the apostle Paul! Paul affirms that when he was in Corinth, he was shaking in his sandals with fear, but he goes on to testify that his ministry among them was a demonstration of the Spirit in power. Even the great apostle Paul had to learn the lesson that he could not do ministry in his own strength but only in the Spirit’s empowering.

We see a similar lesson learned by the apostle Peter. In Matthew 26 when Jesus told the disciples they would fall away due to persecution, Peter protested Jesus’s words: “Peter said to Him, ‘Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You’” (v. 35). But if we fast-forward to Jesus’s trial, we see Peter identified by a servant girl as one of Jesus’s followers. How does Peter

respond to this accusation? He told her, “I do not even know the man.” Luke tells us at that moment Jesus turned around and looked right into Peter’s eyes. What was Peter’s response? He went out and “wept bitterly.” Those tears were bitter because he had denied his Lord and Master, even after vowing he would do no such thing.

But now let’s fast-forward to Acts chapter 4. Peter is not being questioned by a servant girl; now he’s standing before the top civic and religious authorities of the land. They ordered him to stop talking about Jesus, and how does Peter reply? “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard” (vv. 19–20). The authorities threatened Peter and John and then let them go. After being dismissed by the authorities, Peter and John called a prayer meeting. Every time I read this account at the end of Acts 4, I feel convicted. If I had called that prayer meeting, I suspect the main request would have been different. I would have been praying for safety. I would have been asking God to build a hedge of protection around me and the other believers in Jerusalem. Yet at that prayer meeting, they were not praying for safety; they were praying for boldness. While it is not wrong for a believer to pray for safety (as in the Psalms), what strikes me is that their own personal safety wasn’t what was uppermost in their minds (and in their prayers). Instead of praying for safety, they prayed for boldness.

That raises a key question. *Why* did they pray for boldness? The answer is simple yet profound. They prayed for boldness because they *needed* boldness! We don’t normally pray for things we already have. We may thank God for them, but we don’t ask him for them if we already have them. Why did they pray for boldness? Because they lacked it—they were scared. They didn’t want to allow their fears to keep them from sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, so they prayed for boldness.

How did God choose to answer that prayer? Well, this prayer meeting witnessed phenomenal results! When they prayed, the place they were in was shaken. Wouldn’t it be great if in every prayer meeting when you prayed, God would shake the building you were in as a testimony that your prayers had been heard and would be answered? I currently serve as pastor of West Broadway Baptist Church. The church building is located on the east side of Louisville, right across the road from railroad tracks. Occasionally a train rumbles by and shakes the building as we are praying



during our Wednesday night prayer meetings. But in Acts 4, there was no locomotive; the place was shaken by the power of God.

God answered their prayers for boldness, and they continued to share the good news of Christ. In Acts 5 the authorities dragged Peter and John back in and said, “We gave you strict orders not to talk about Jesus and you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching” (v. 28, my translation). Reflect on that assertion for a moment: “you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching.” That wasn’t a report in a denominational newsletter (“we have reached our city for Christ!”) but the testimony of their enemies! The authorities were basically saying, “We told you guys to shut up, but you obviously didn’t because everywhere we turn, we find new followers of Christ.” So this time they didn’t just threaten them with words, they beat them with rods.

How did Peter and John respond to this persecution? It says they “left the presence of the council rejoicing that they have been considered worthy to suffer for Christ’s name” (v. 41). Where in the world would they have gotten the idea that the way that you respond to persecution is by rejoicing? It appears in that moment they reflected back to some three years earlier when they heard Jesus utter what we know as the Beatitudes: “Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of falsehood against you on account of me; in that day rejoice and be glad because your reward in heaven is great” (Matt. 5:11–12, my translation). So as Peter and John were limping down the street, they were rejoicing; they were celebrating.

So here is an important question for us to answer. What made the difference between Peter cowering in fear before a servant girl and Peter boldly standing up to the top authorities in the land? What made the difference between Peter’s response in Matthew 26 and his response in Acts 4 and 5? The answer is simple: Acts 2! The coming of the Holy Spirit and his empowering ministry at Pentecost. The Peter who boasted he was willing to die for Jesus was Peter boasting in his own strength that “I’ve got this.” Well, he didn’t have it. The Peter in Acts chapter 4 and 5 and beyond is a Peter who is filled with the Holy Spirit. The power for evangelism is the Holy Spirit. We must be filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit as we witness.

### *The Purpose of Evangelism: Bringing Them to Christ as Savior and Lord (Acts 16:31)*

When we share the gospel with others, what is the goal? That we bring them to a church? That they join a denomination? That they adopt a new

philosophy of life? While all those things have their place, we are bringing them to a person—to the Lord Jesus Christ. I am convinced that many people reject Christianity not because they have truly understood Christ's person and work but because of the visible failure of Christians or because they misunderstand the gospel message.

The object of saving faith is the whole and undivided person of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We must not divide Christ up into bits and ask people to respond to only one of the bits. He must be received as both Savior and Lord. The purpose of evangelism is bringing lost persons to Christ as Savior and Lord.

*Perpetuation of Evangelism: They Win Others (2 Tim. 2:2)*

We have already noted that evangelism should not be measured in terms of results, but when someone does come to faith in Christ, we want to see that person become a fruit-bearing disciple in a local church. The perpetuation of evangelism is that the new believer will begin to reach out in love to share the good news of salvation with others. We see this process of spiritual multiplication in 2 Timothy 2:2: “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” This verse highlights four generations: Paul, Timothy, faithful men, and then “others.” New believers have great potential in evangelism. Some of them have large numbers of unsaved friends or family members. Helping the new believer learn to share his/her faith from the beginning is a wise stewardship of opportunity.