

Prayer, care, share

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In 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 we find these words of the Apostle Paul:

“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

As followers of Christ we each are called to be ambassadors of Christ. In these next few pages we will look at a biblical, simple way, to think about evangelism in a way that it becomes a natural part of our lives. Here at our church we use the basic ideas of “Prayer, Care, and Share” to help organize our thoughts and our efforts of evangelism as both individuals and as a church body.

Prayer

When talking about sharing our faith, “Prayer” is asking the Holy Spirit to go before us as He prepares our hearts and the heart of the unbeliever. That our lives would be holy. That our hearts would long for the salvation of the people around us. That we would be sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s leading. That the unbeliever’s heart would be open to the truth of the gospel.

Who is one person that you wish with all your heart would become a follower of Jesus Christ? Are you praying for them? It may be your spouse, your boss, your neighbor or even your enemy. But are you praying for them?

When we look back through the life of Jesus Christ, the early church and even church history, the pattern is that God puts a burden in people’s hearts to pray. They obey in prayer. Then God works.

Drawing people to the love of Jesus Christ is a work of God the Father, from beginning to end, but at the same time we have been invited to take part in the process.

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

In Acts 1:8 you can see the balance when Jesus instructs his disciples with these words:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

We, the children of God, are to take our place as the bearers of light in the dark world around us (Matthew 5:14-16). We are to usher in the kingdom of God one moment, one conversation, one person at a time. We have been invited to be ambassadors of Christ and carry the Good News of our King to a lost, needy and unbelieving world. If we are to be Christ’s ambassadors, where do we start? Prayer.

Prayer is necessary because man is fallen and cannot receive the knowledge of the truth without divine revelation. In Matthew 16, Jesus had asked the disciples who they thought Jesus was. Peter had responded, ***“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*** Jesus then answered him, ***“Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.”***

Logic is not enough to understand and believe in Jesus Christ. It must be a revelation from God. Jesus tells us in John 6:44 that ***“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”*** In conversion ***“it is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no hope at all”*** (John 6:63).

Prayer is necessary because our own strategies, knowledge and winsome personality are not enough, i.e., without Christ we can do nothing. God alone can open one’s heart to the gospel. We see this truth at work in Acts 16:14, ***“One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.”***

We are to pray, for others with a God-honoring love, and share the truths of the gospel, but it is the Holy Spirit who draws one to Himself. The apostle Paul described this essential truth with these words in 1 Corinthians 3:7, ***“So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”***

Through prayer we depend on God's Holy Spirit in Evangelism, God brings the victory and He alone is glorified.

The Bible tells us how to pray in regards to evangelism:

Pray . . . that the Lord would send workers into the harvest field (Luke 10:2). That God would open a door for our message (Col 4:3). That we would proclaim it clearly (Col. 4:4). That we would be wise in

the way we act toward outsiders (Col. 4:5). That we would make the most of every opportunity (Col 4:5). That our conversation would be filled with grace so that we may know how to answer everyone (Col. 4:6) That words may be given us so that we will fearlessly make known the mystery of the Gospel (Eph. 6:19). That we may declare it fearlessly (Eph. 6:20). That the Holy Spirit would convict them in regard to sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:18). That we would not be ashamed to testify about our Lord (2 Tim. 1:7). That God would draw the unbeliever to Himself (John 6:44).

Prayer is where evangelism should always begin, but we must also be ready and willing to care for those who need to be saved.

Care

“Care” can be described as “building relationships that clearly display a love for God and a love for the unbeliever.” Our desire is that we would be a living example of Christ’s love for them, and because of this they would be open to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As it has been said before, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

When you hear the testimonies of other Christians and how they became open to belief in Jesus Christ, they often start like this: “I had a neighbor . . . there was a coworker . . . I met a classmate . . . I had a family member.” They then tell of a relationship that God used to draw them to Himself. Not that a relationship has the power to bring someone to Christ, for that can only be done by the Holy Spirit, but somehow, God worked in the lives of these believers in such a way that it turned the attention of the unbeliever towards Christ.

We find this truth in Matthew 5:16, ***“Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”*** First, God transforms our lives so that we selflessly begin to care for others. He then uses our love for others as a tool to turn an unbeliever’s attention towards Himself.

It is an expression of 1 John 4:19, ***“We love each other because he first loved us.”***

Our care or love for others is not rooted in the idea that we must initiate good actions or that we are even good enough to produce loving acts. It is based on the idea that Christ now lives in us. We are merely displaying the love that Christ has now birthed in our hearts. It is the natural overflow of an unconditional love that God has for us.

Through Christ, our lives are transformed so that we love our enemies, forgive those who have wronged us, give to those in need, speak blessings instead of curses, bear each other’s burdens, and even lay down our lives for one another. As a supernatural love for others takes root in our lives, a watching world will see that we are different. It will provoke questions causing unbelievers to ask the reason for the way that we live and the hope that we have. Jesus will be proclaimed and He will draw people to Himself.

John 13:34b-35 says, *“As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

This is especially true in a multi-cultural church like ours. The world struggles to make peace between different ethnic groups, but as we grow in our love for each other the world will take note that we have been with Jesus.

The only reason that we are moved to die to self and bear each other's burden is because Christ lives in us. Our good deeds do not have the power to lead someone to Christ. Only the Holy Spirit can convict of sin, reveal the good news of Jesus, and grant faith to a sinful heart. Our caring is just a tool in the hand of our Savior.

The Apostle Paul was used by God in a similar way in Acts 16:

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ²⁶ and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. ²⁷ When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul cried with a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” ²⁹ And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

By Roman law the jailer would likely have lost his life if the prisoners had escaped. Paul, knowing this remained in prison, even though he had been wrongly jailed and had an opportunity to escape. It was the Holy Spirit moving through the selfless actions of Paul and Silas that brought about openness to the gospel in the life of the jailer.

Please understand what we are talking about today. “Care” is more than being friendly, diplomatic and helping others when it is convenient. It is a denying of self, bearing each other’s burdens and putting others before ourselves. It is Jesus’ greatest commandment:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”
(Matthew 22:37-40)

If we are in Christ we should pray that God would stir in our hearts a love like Christ had. A love that permeates every part of our lives. A selflessness that puts others before ourselves. From the simplest of things like giving up your seat on the metro, giving up your place in line at the restaurant, or giving up your place in the football game so someone else can play. Giving away your money, reaching out to the lonely, or giving of your time to help someone in need. Walking with a person in the midst of tragedy, adopting a child in need, or changing careers so that your life lines up with God’s priorities. It’s putting your spouse’s needs before yours. It is reserving quality time with your children. It is living more simply so you can have money to

help others. It is the willingness to help another person, even though you know that it will make your life more complicated. It is loving others more than yourself for their salvation and God's glory. This love drives us back to Matthew 5:16, ***"Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."***

Does your life make it easier or more difficult for those around you to believe in Jesus Christ?

Share

Our evangelism starts with Prayer, continues with Care, and finally arrives at Share. "Share" can be described as "Being sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading as we clearly explain the complete Gospel of Jesus Christ to an unbeliever who is open to receive it."

That is the goal. That God would work through us in such a way that an unbeliever is now, finally, ready to hear and receive the grace found in Jesus Christ. To make this more practical, take a moment and think of a friend, coworker or family member who is not a follower of Jesus. Jesus came to reconcile them to God, so that they would not die in their sins and spend an eternity in hell, separated from God forever...

Jesus was not crucified so that they could have the life they always dreamed of. It was not so their life would be pain free. It was not to secure their financial success or to improve their physical health. It was not so they would be nicer people or have better manners. It was not so they could be happy and blessed. It was not so they could be successful or even respected. It was not so they could feel less guilty or be more religious. It was not so they could have good self-esteem or see themselves as significant. Jesus was crucified because their sin and rebellion has separated them from a holy God, and justice demands death and separation. We each have been found guilty, and the judgment of death and eternal condemnation have been passed upon us all. If they die in their sin, they will be shut out from the presence of the Lord and spend forever in hell, a place of everlasting destruction and suffering (Matthew 10:28; Matthew 13:42; Matthew 18:8; Philippians 1:28; Matthew 7:13; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9).

Jesus Christ came to reconcile mankind to God. Luke 19:10 tells us, ***"the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost."*** He, the Son of God, became a man and lived a sinless life so that he could die in our place and pay the price for our sin. So that all who receive him, who believe in his name, will become children of God (John 1:12) and spend eternity in heaven.

Jesus came to save them from their sins, but the results of their being saved will be breathtaking, because through the blood of Jesus Christ and the gift of grace that they will receive . . . their sins will be forgiven. Unconditional love will be experienced. Hearts will be healed. Needs will be met. Temptation will be defeated. Freedom will be found. Forgiving others will now be possible. Relationships will be reconciled. Priorities will be changed. Conscience will be cleared. Peace will be granted. Purpose will be discovered. Selflessness will become the norm...

Being made right with God through Jesus Christ is the key . . . but to be made right with God one must first repent and believe in Jesus Christ. Not just an acknowledgement that Jesus exists, because the book of James tells us that even the demons believe, yet they have been eternally condemned. Those who repent and believe are eternally saved and will have new affections and desires for God. It is a repentance, a turning away from the world and towards Christ. It is finally coming to a point in their lives that they put their complete trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

If we are going to impact the world for the kingdom of God, it must be focused on the preaching of the gospel. Only the gospel possesses the power to transform lives. When we watch the news we are overcome by the evil all around us, but the biggest problem is the evil within us. We desperately need a Savior. Salvation is not found in starting another NGO, or in a government, or in the U.N. or in more education. Salvation is found in Jesus Christ . . . and his method of bringing the good news to our hurting world is through us . . . the church. Only we are called to be the light of the world. Our world, our country, our city desperately need us to take up this challenge and preach the gospel.

Romans 10:13-14 says this, ***“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?”***

We must share the hope found in Jesus Christ. Salvation is prompted by God drawing people to Himself, but there is a role that we can play.

To “share” is to set before them the simple facts of the Gospel. That all mankind has been separated from a holy, righteous and loving God because of our sin. That the wages of sin is death, and because of our sin we deserve condemnation and eternal separation from God in a place of endless torment, called hell.

God, seeing our desperate need, sent His Son down from heaven to earth to become a man in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus lived a sinless life, and willingly laid down His life for our sake and was crucified on a Roman cross. In this act He paid for our sins so that we could be reconciled to God. Three days later he was raised from the dead, conquering sin and death. All who will repent and believe in Jesus Christ will be saved and reconciled to a right relation with God.

There are many who need Christ. “How can we know who to reach out to?” First take some time to think through your relational circles and take note of those who are not believers in Christ. God has given us spiritual markers that help us know better who to invest in. The first is to give special consideration to those who show interest in the things of God. Romans 3:10-12 tells us that ***“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”*** Because of this, if we see someone who is interested in the things of God, it is very likely that God is working in their lives. The human heart will have no interest in God unless God begins to draw them to Himself (John 6:44). Once we see God working in someone’s life, we need to join God in that work. That’s what Jesus did. In John 5:19 Jesus said, ***“I only do what I see the Father doing.”*** If we see God moving in someone’s life, that is our invitation to join God and help this person find Jesus Christ.

A second spiritual marker that will help us discern who to reach out to is that of our own spiritual burden. This may be a certain unbeliever who is often on your mind or in your Ps. Someone for whom God has given you a compassionate and even a broken heart. Someone who you feel a growing responsibility for in regards to their salvation. At times the people that we are burdened for are family members, coworkers or certain friends. With that in mind let the guiding of the Spirit help you focus your energy and your prayers as you seek to be used of God to share your faith in a meaningful way with them. It could be at this point this person is very closed to spiritual things. It doesn't mean you don't continue sharing the love of Christ with them. If God has given you a burden for them, but they don't seem interested, invest in them anyway. At times God guides us to specific individuals through their spiritual openness; at other times through a burden for them that God has put on our hearts. At other times God uses both of these spiritual markers to guide us.

May we each pray that our hearts would be burdened for the lost around us. May we faithfully pray for them. May we be selfless in our care for them. May we have faith, discernment, and courage to clearly share the gospel with them. May God use us as a tool in His hand as He brings many to salvation in Jesus Christ.

Discussion questions:

1. If you are already a follower of Jesus Christ, what did God use in your life to bring you to salvation? (people, situations, scriptures, events, etc.)
2. When we consider the scriptures, why is "Prayer" so important in leading others to Christ?
3. When you look back at the list of biblical, evangelistic prayers on pages 2-3, which of these would you be most likely to pray as you seek to share Christ with someone?
4. "Care" can be described as "building relationships that clearly display a love for God and a love for the unbeliever". Why do you think this is so important in the process of leading someone to Christ?
5. What might be an act of love that would begin to communicate love to an unbeliever?
6. Romans 10:13-14 tells of the importance of one hearing the good news of Jesus Christ before they can believe in Him. What do you think are the largest obstacles to speaking the gospel clearly to those who need to hear it?
7. What do you think are the largest obstacles that keep an unbeliever from truly hearing the gospel when it is shared with them?
8. Summarize the connection of Prayer, Care and Share as one seeks to share Christ with an unbeliever.
9. What from this sermon do you think God wants you to remember?
10. How do you think God wants you to put it into action?