

Courageous Evangelism© by Stephen Misarski

Chapter One: What is Evangelism?

Introduction

When you hear the term “evangelist”, what images come to mind?

When someone talks about “evangelism”, what activities pop into your head?

Some people may picture Billy Graham filling Boston Garden and preaching before thousands of people.

Others may recall turning the channel to catch a televangelist with big hair and a fancy suit asking for money.

Still, others may be reminded of a person standing on the street corner with a bullhorn warning of the “coming wrath.”

These are the kinds of images that cause believers to shy away from practicing evangelism.

While fundraising for my short-term missions trip to Egypt, I met with the deacons of my liberal Congregational home church. One of the more direct questions that I was asked was, “Are you going to evangelize Muslims while you are there?” Put in those terms, my mission sounded rather offensive, even to some conservative Christians. Was there another way to express our mission in a predominantly non-Christian nation?

But during this book, we will not avoid using the word *evangelism*.

The Origin of the Words

The root of this word is *evangel* or good news or Gospel. The New Testament Greek word *eu-aggelo* is a compound word. Our English words *eu-phemism* and *eu-phoria* maintain the Greek form of the prefix eu- meaning good. The second part is used in our English word *angel*, meaning the heavenly beings that proclaim a message from God. The Christmas story illustrates this: “But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you **good news** that will cause great joy for all the people’” (Lk 2:10).

Angels may have been the first to “evangelize” or proclaim the Good News but Jesus insisted that the responsibility lies with his disciples and not the heavenly hosts. The Gospel maintains an incarnational quality in that only those who have been transformed by the Gospel are allowed to proclaim the Gospel.

The verb is just as common as the noun for good news; meaning to preach or proclaim the Gospel. One can evangelize (Acts 8:40) or “evangelize” (preach) Jesus (Acts 5:42) or “evangelize” (preach) the Word (Acts 8:4) or “evangelize” (preach) the things pertaining to the

Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus (Acts 8:12). On one rare occasion, Paul uses the noun and verb together that could be translated literally “to evangelize the evangel” (Gal 1:11)

So *evangelism* is the process of preaching, proclaiming, telling, or sharing the Good News.

The other word we will use is *witness*. Today, we recognize the word most naturally in the context of the courtroom. One of its uses in the New Testament is just that. In reference to Jewish Law, “a witness of two or three establishes a thing” (Dt 19:15, Mt 18:16). One can simply be a witness or be a witness of certain historical things (Lk 24:48) or be a witness for a person (Acts 1:8).

The Greek word is found in English for a particular kind of witness: *martyr*. This witness suffers a violent death for their words and actions as in the example of Stephen (Acts 22:20). As scary as that sounds, this Greek word is also used of those who speak out and live to tell about it.

The verb form *martyreo* is also used, meaning: to be a witness or bear witness. A good definition of witnessing is **to attest to something they have seen or heard or experienced or known by way of divine revelation**.

This Greek root is found as the noun *martyria*, meaning: the statement made by a witness when she witnesses to something or for someone i.e. her testimony.

One other term will be used which is attested to once in the New Testament: *sharing your faith*. “And I pray that the **sharing of your faith** may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ” (Philemon 1:6).

Throughout this book, the word **evangelism** will be used as synonymous with **witnessing**, **sharing one’s faith**, and **evangelizing**. We will steer away from more pejorative terms like **proselytizing**, **winning souls**, **getting someone saved**, and **getting someone converted**. They may have been legitimate terms in other times but presently have negative connotations and imply fuzzy theology.*

*Footnote: Two adjectival forms are related but are often confused and misused: “evangelical” and “evangelistic”. The former is an adjective describing the theological trait of a person or church that focuses on the Gospel or the “evangel.” “Evangelicals take the Bible seriously and believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.” <https://www.nae.org/what-is-an-evangelical/2022>. However, while two evangelical churches may hold very similar *evangelical* beliefs, one may be more *evangelistic* than the other. “Evangelistic” describes an evangelical Christian or church that is focused on preaching the Gospel to the lost and determined to maintain a culture of witness among their members. The hard truth is that there are *evangelical* churches that are **not** very *evangelistic*.

What Evangelism is NOT.

There are many activities that churches and Christians engage in which they may call evangelism or unbelievers may experience from believers that are not evangelism. Some are clearly

misguided and others are incomplete. For accuracy's sake, let's eliminate these activities and concepts from our definition of evangelism.*

Evangelism is NOT...

an imposition of our ideas. This negative idea implies that the Gospel is a collection of personal ideas or opinions that we are forcing onto another human being.

merely giving your personal testimony. As powerful as our individual God story is, one may give their personal testimony in a way that focuses on the effects of the Gospel and neglects to explicitly tell what God has done and how to respond. We will teach how to give a Gospel-laden personal testimony.

merely social action. Concrete expressions of compassion like feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the prisoner, nursing the sick, and hosting a stranger are definitely part of the Gospel (Mat 25:35-36, 42-43). But these acts can be done out of obligation or profit and therefore alone do not embody the Gospel. They are the fruit of the truly redeemed. They can be ways to open the hearts of the needy to the Gospel but they alone are not the Gospel.

persuading people to make a decision for Christ. This is an essential piece of evangelism but can be incomplete if the actual message is not sufficiently explained and people are responding to a partial Gospel. The apocalyptic film series known as the Mark IV Films of the 1970s used fear to persuade the unchurched to avoid experiencing the horrors of the Tribulation. They presented a truncated Gospel and many people made decisions for Christ based on raw emotion. This is an incomplete, even unhealthy Gospel message.

merely inviting someone to a meeting. We will further discuss the power of invitation but again, getting a person to attend a worship service or a Gospel presentation is a good thing but incomplete if the person is not encouraged to respond to the message heard.

exposing the contemporary dilemma. Leading people to the realization of their unregenerate state and the helplessness of human effort to deliver them from this grim state is certainly a great setup for the "good news." But an explanation of the bad news alone will lead to despair and hopelessness if it does not also point them to the way of escape which is the Good News.

loving service. Another style of evangelism, that we will discuss, is service motivated by a love for people. Many liberal churches are very good at this kind of outreach to their community but again, it is incomplete without a full explanation of the motivation and the Gospel message.

wearing a message. Crosses, tattoos, bumper stickers, t-shirts, and salvation bead bracelets are a few of the ways Christians get their message across. They are worn to provoke a response from those who notice them. Many recall the man in the rainbow wig with the John 3:16 sign who always stood behind the endzone of NFL games. People were either annoyed or they found someone who could explain the verse. Still, without the symbol or message leading to a conversation, an unbeliever remains uninformed about the full message of good news.

*Footnote: This list is not original and is derived from quotes from three authors.

...an imposition of our ideas...merely personal testimony...merely social action...may not involve apologetics...not the same as the results of evangelism... (Mark Dever, *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism*, 82.)

...persuading people to make a decision; it is not proving that God exists, or making out a good case for the truth of Christianity; it is not inviting someone to a meeting; it is not exposing the contemporary dilemma, or arousing interest in Christianity; it is not wearing a badge saying, "Jesus saves!"...(Saving Grace, John Cheever, 113)

...loving service e.g. tutoring inner city kids, helping the homeless, serving in a soup kitchen, standing up for rights. Social action is the results of the Gospel being lived out. (Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth*, 51.)

What Evangelism Is

Positively, here are some noteworthy and accurate definitions of evangelism.*

*Note: These definitions originate from resources discussed in the Literature Review of my dissertation as well as quotes from the Focus Group conducted among members of the LifeLight Congregation, Southboro, MA.

Evangelism is...

"...the positive act of telling the good news about Jesus Christ and the way of salvation through him. (Dever)

"... 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." -The 1918 Anglican Definition:

<http://beamezion.org/resources/evangelism/TheMeaningofEvangelism.pdf> 9/28/16

"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 Holy Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Savior and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the Gospel invitation, we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus still calls all who would follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify with his new community. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his church, and responsible service in the world."

-1974 Lausanne Covenant Definition

<http://beamezion.org/resources/evangelism/TheMeaningofEvangelism.pdf> 9/28/16

"...going out in love, as Christ's agent in the world, to teach sinners the truth of the Gospel with a view to converting and saving them. (Packer 53)

“To evangelize is to declare on the authority of God what he has done to save sinners, to warn men of their lost condition, to direct them to repent, and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. (Cheeseman *Saving Grace* 113)

“...making friends for God.” (Leighton Ford, speaking in June 2014, Charlotte)

“...the process of intentionally and verbally sharing the Good News about the life, death, resurrection and loving leadership of Jesus with those who do not have a relationship with God.”(Metzger)

“...the way of living beautifully and opening one’s web of relationships to include the unbeliever. A person is exposed to the music and the words of the Gospel.” (Aldrich 27)

“...an invitation to enter into a mutual journey for truth.” (Dorsett 17)

“...not about saying everything.... saying enough.” (Tice 72)

“...telling the story of God’s ultimate victory over the darkness in our world and in our own soul. Evangelism is inviting people to take their part in that Big Story.” (Richardson p25)

“...communicating God’s rule to set all things right in the person of Jesus.” (Richardson 124?)

“...one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.” (NT Niles)

“...a *concerted*, self-conscious *effort* to *confront* the unbeliever with the truth about and the claims of Christ with a view to *challenging* and *leading* that unbeliever into repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and thus into the fellowship of his church that the discipleship process may carry on.” (Drummond 34)

“...to bring the Unchurched Harry into a personal encounter with God; not just to merely pass on information about God.” (Strobel 59)

“...about throwing out the seed and letting the Holy Spirit do the rest (Lifelight/Focus Group)

Here are some other quotes that may also inspire you:

“We are the hands and feet of evangelism, but God, the Holy Spirit is responsible after we are the hands and feet. (Lifelight/Focus Group)

“Witnessing is our Words and our Ways; our Lives and our Lips; our Conduct and our Conversation. To witness is to testify that Christ is who he said he is.” (Metzger 52-53)

“I cannot by being good, tell men of Jesus' atoning death and resurrection, nor of my faith in his divinity. The emphasis is too much on me and too little on him. Our lives must be made as consistent as we can make them with our faith, but our faith, if we are Christians, is vastly greater than our lives. That is why the “word” of witness is so important.” -Sam Shoemaker (Ford Persuader 72)

“The Gospel is not only an invitation; but also a command to obey. Receive new life. Escape hell-judgment. Evangelism without the message of judgment is not evangelism.” (Ajith 196)

“We don’t fail in our evangelism if we faithfully tell the gospel to someone who is not converted; we fail only if we don’t faithfully tell the gospel at all.” (Dever 82)

“There are only three types of people; those who have found God and serve him; those who have not found God and seek him, and those who live not seeking, or finding him. The first are rational and happy; the second unhappy and rational, and the third foolish and unhappy.”
- Blaise Pascal

<https://apologetics315.com/2008/12/sunday-quote-blaise-pascal-on-three-types-of-people/>
1/26/22

As a part of my doctoral thesis project, I developed my own comprehensive definition of evangelism:

Evangelism is when the Lord of the Harvest, who desires to have fellowship with his God-imaged creatures sends Spirit-equipped disciples to a humanity lost in their sins and separated from a Holy God, in order to proclaim through their words, actions and lives the Good News of Jesus, atoning for their sin and offering his resurrection life, so that the elect, convicted of their sin, may respond in repentance and in faith to the offer of saving grace, receive eternal life and begin to follow the Lord Jesus as his disciple.

The Lord of the Harvest (Lk 10:2), is the initiator of evangelism. The harvest belongs to the Lord. The Lord exhorts saints to pray for more workers to go into the world with the Gospel not because we see lost souls, but because “he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Mt 9:36) and he concluded that “the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few” (Mt 9:37). The Lord’s desire is not for anyone to be lost but all to come to repentance (II Pet 3:9). He is the origin of compassion for the lost (Lk 19:10) that infuses his saints to go out.

Creator God **desires to have fellowship with the creatures that bear his image**. God uniquely created human beings in his image. The three persons of the Trinity are in relationship with each other when he says “Let us..” (Gen 1:26). Moses portrays the Creator God coming into the Garden at the cool of the day to walk with his image-bearing ones (Gen 3:8). Paul expresses the heart of the Lord as one “who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. (I Tim 2:4).

The Lord Jesus **sends Spirit-equipped disciples**. God does not send angels (I Pet 1:12) but instead, other former lost, now regenerated believers to bear witness to eternal life in God through Jesus (I Jn 1:2). Their transformed character, outlook, attitude and purposes along with their words point people to the hope that they have in Christ (I Pet 3:15-16).

Disciples are sent **to a humanity** that is **lost in their sins and separated from a Holy God**. Because of the rebellion and disobedience of the first humans, and every descendent after them (Rom 5:12), fellowship has been broken (Rom 5:10) and every human being is separated from a Holy God (Isa 59:2).

The purpose for which they are sent is **to proclaim through their words, actions and lives the Good News of Jesus**. A lifestyle approach means that through the normal courses of life, Spirit-filled Christ-followers move among lost seekers, demonstrating the reality of new life in Christ by acts of love and service and through words of witness. INCARNATION!

They tell of **Jesus, atoning for their sin and offering his resurrection life**. Out of his love for his sinful creatures (Rom 5:8), God provides a way to restore that relationship through the sacrificial death of the Son in place of the sinner (Rom 3:25).

They proclaim the Good News **so that the elect** might respond. Although God has elected individuals for salvation, all people are potentially elect (Rom 8:29-30).

They are, first, **convicted of their sin**. The Holy Spirit draws people to the Father through the Son by convicting them of sin (John 16:8) and by awakening an ability to trust in the free gift of salvation (Jn 6:65).

The next step is to **respond in repentance and in faith to the offer of saving grace and receive eternal life**. The lost must respond freely to the conviction of sin by repenting or turning from their selfish and rebellious ways (Acts 17:30). God then provides the ability for faith-disabled humans to rely on the free gift of Christ's death (Jn 6:37); that is, to place their trust in God's Solution for their separation from God (Rom 6:23).

Evangelism is not complete until they **begin to follow the Lord Jesus as his disciple**. The full circle of evangelism is the making of disciples. Matthew 28:19-20 describes that process as beginning the journey with baptism and continuing and growing in obedience to the commands in Jesus' teachings. Those who respond to the Good News have not closed the loop until they in turn are sent out as Spirit-equipped disciples to other lost people. The end goal of evangelism is more disciples who start the process of evangelism again.

Questions:

1. Which one of these definitions or quotes is the most helpful for your understanding of evangelism?
2. How does that definition help you to be a more effective witness?
3. Attempt to develop your own definition of evangelism.