

Preparing Ourselves

1 Peter 3:13-16

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September 8-9, 2018

Sermon Bumper: [Evangelism Inspiration](#)

I was stunned and saddened by the results of a Barna study released this past March.

- When asked if churchgoers had “heard of the Great Commission,” 51% said they did not recognize this term.
- 25% said they have heard of the “Great Commission” but don’t know what it means.
- That means 76% of those who go to church have no clue what the Great Commission is all about.
- Sadly, only 17% have heard of the Great Commission and know what it means.

To be clear, the Great Commission is found in [Matthew 28:18-20](#) and comes as a command directly from Christ: ***“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘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.’”***

Maybe we should start calling the Great Commission the Great Ommission.

We’re kicking of a new series today called “Intentional.” I got the idea from Pastor Tim’s sermon a couple weeks ago when he made the point we must be intentional in our growing. We’re going to pick up on this and say we must also be intentional in our going. Actually, we must be intentional in our gathering and giving as well. Here’s a good working definition: *“Intentional is an action performed with awareness; done deliberately, consciously, on purpose.”*

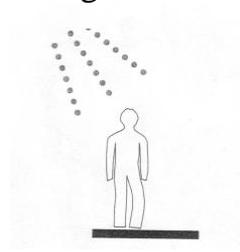
We could say it like this: *Instead of being apathetic, let’s be intentionally evangelistic.*

I was greatly helped in my understanding of the importance of raising our evangelistic temperature from a book called, “*Building a Contagious Church*” by Mark Mittelberg. I’ve incorporated a few of his thoughts into the first part of this message.

1. God Loves Everyone

The starting point is to recognize at least five truths. Here’s the first: *God loves everyone*. John 3:16 tells us that “***God so loved the world...***” We need to do whatever we can to gain God’s heart toward those who don’t know Him yet.

Write this down – *You will never look into the eyes of someone God does not love*. Let’s illustrate with this simple drawing.



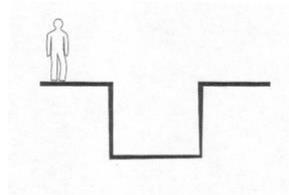
Can you honestly say you love everyone?

2. People are Spiritually Lost

While people have tremendous value to God, the Bible declares a second truth: *People are spiritually lost*. Romans 3:10-12 spells out this reality: “***As it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.’***”

The Bible is clear: *No matter how “good” people appear, if they don’t know Christ, because they are sinners, they are headed for eternal torment in a place called Hell.*

This can be shown by adding a chasm to our drawing which illustrates Isaiah 59:2: “***But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.***”



Do you really believe that people without Christ are lost?

3. People Need Christ

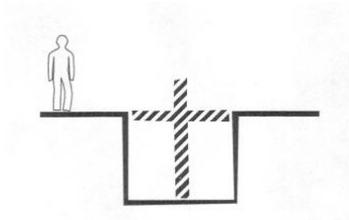
The good news is that everyone is loved by God. The bad news is that people are spiritually lost. The great news is that Jesus died as full payment to provide salvation.

Our post-Christian culture bristles at the teaching that Jesus is the only way to a relationship with the Almighty. On top of that, an insidious form of religious pluralism is creeping into many churches, which teaches that there are multiple paths to God.

Jesus was not ambiguous when He said in John 14:6, ***“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*** Acts 4:12 adds, ***“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”***

While this message is not politically correct, it’s biblically correct and it’s the best news we can give to people who are spiritually lost and on the road to hell.

Let’s expand our drawing to show that the cross is the bridge that leads lost people God.

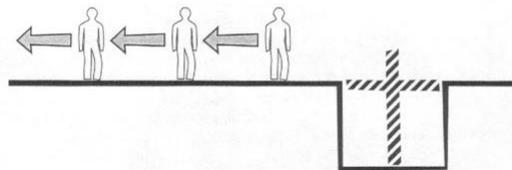


4. People Have Moved

While this picture may have described people in our culture a few decades ago, something has changed. The vast majority of people in our society used to live close to the chasm and had at least some understanding they were sinners who needed the forgiveness of God.

Here's the fourth truth. For the most part, people in our culture have *moved*. They have disengaged from biblical moorings and can no longer look over the edge and see the depth of their sins. In fact, for many, they don't even recognize there is a rift between them and God. Our culture today reflects Isaiah 5:20: ***“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness.”***

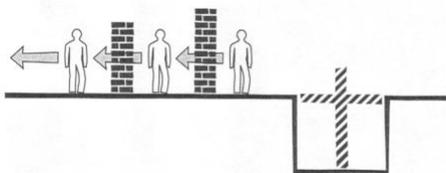
Here's how we can illustrate it:



Whatever term we use: *secular, postmodern, post-Christian* or the *nones*, the fact is that people don't think the way they used to think or believe the things they used to believe. Many have moved away from Christian beliefs, values and morals. When we say, *“God loves you,”* many will respond by saying, *“Oh yeah? Which God?”* They may even wonder what they've done that is so bad they need forgiveness for.

5. People Need Answers

That leads to our fifth truth: *People Need Answers* because they have put up roadblocks and walls between them and the Lord. Here's what it looks like:



If we want to help move others toward Christ, we need to intentionally address their issues and show that the Christian life is the best way to live and the only way to die. We must both declare *and* demonstrate the gospel. Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 10:5: ***“We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.”***

Christianity has always advanced when under attack. It's becoming increasingly difficult to stand for Christ today but it was far worse during the Roman Empire when persecution and problems were pulverizing believers. Many lost their lives and those who lived lost their livelihoods. Brothers and sisters, we have a choice

to make – we can become alarmed, angry, argumentative and abrasive...or we can live attractive and appealing lives.

Please turn to 1 Peter 3:13-16: ***“Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.”***

Instead of being apathetic, let’s be intentionally evangelistic. I see three ways we’re called to prepare ourselves.

- We need to *exhibit* (3:13-15a)
- We need to *explain* (3:15b)
- We need to *express* (3:15c-16)

1 – Exhibit (3:13-15a)

The phrase ***“zealous for what is good”*** means to burn with a desire to do what is good. In verse 14 we read that we still might suffer, but even if we do, we will be blessed. Jesus put it this way in Matthew 5:10: ***“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”***

The last part of verse 14 contains a quote from Isaiah 8: ***“Have no fear of them, nor be troubled.”*** The word ***“fear”*** is the word *phobos*, which means *“to be so terrified that you want to flee.”* Peter would know all about that, wouldn’t he? Have you ever felt that way? I have. It’s especially scary when it comes to witnessing, isn’t it? Some of us would rather bolt than be bold.

These Christians were in danger of being killed or thrown in jail while I worry about someone ridiculing or rejecting me. The first step is to *exhibit* authenticity. Verse 15 begins with a contrast to verse 14: ***“But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy.”*** The word ***“but”*** shows that we don’t have to be filled with fear. The word ***“heart”*** is from the Greek, *“kardia”* and refers to the control center of our lives.

“Holy” means to *“be set apart.”* Peter is arguing that Jesus must be Lord of our lives. The word ***“Lord”*** is a title of honor that demands respect and reverence. It’s

the New Testament equivalent of the title “Jehovah.” To declare that Jesus is my Lord is to say that *He has sovereign power and authority over me and I submit to Him with reverent obedience, because I am His possession.* When Jesus is set apart as Lord, He will deliver us from fear. When He is at the center, we will fear displeasing Him more than fearing what people might say about us.

J.D. Greear writes: *“Being able to articulate the gospel with accuracy is one thing; having its truth captivate your soul is quite another.”*

Here are some questions to consider. Is Jesus Lord of your life right now? Have you ever made a decision of your will to live under His leadership in *every* area of your life? Is Jesus in *complete control*, or are you deliberately keeping things from Him? Is Jesus prominent in your life or is He preeminent?

One of the reasons some don’t engage in evangelism is because they’re not 100% committed to Christ. Christ won’t be on your lips if He’s not Lord of your life! It’s hard to witness when we’re gutted by guilt or feel far away from God. To say it another way, if we’re not in communion with Christ, we won’t want to communicate Christ to others.

Sadly, according to another Barna survey, almost half of born-again believers questioned in a nationwide poll admitted they are *“searching for meaning and purpose.”* This is the same percentage as the response of non-Christians! If Christ followers are floundering in life, than what do we have to give to lost people? If people don’t see us living with love, joy, peace and purpose then do they really want what we have?

The first thing we’re called to do is to *exhibit* an authentic Christian life by setting apart Christ as Lord in our hearts. Evangelism is primarily who we are, not what we do; we *are* witnesses. I’ve always liked Joe Aldrich’s definition, *“Evangelism is what spills over when we bump into someone.”* When we’re living under the leadership of Christ, we will have something appealing when it spills over to them.

Instead of being apathetic, let’s be intentionally evangelistic.

2 – Explain (15b)

Exhibit what you say you have and secondly, be prepared to intentionally *explain* what you have. We see this in the middle part of verse 15: *“...always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope*

that is in you.” We’re called to visualize Christianity by exhibiting it. We’re also urged to verbalize our faith by explaining it.

When we are living under the lordship of Christ, our lives will be characterized by hope that springs from the resurrection. Non-Christians will see what we have and be curious about it and some will ask us about our faith. When they do, we need to be ready. Unfortunately, according to another Barna survey, 9 out of 10 Christians who attempt to explain their faith come away from those experiences feeling like they’ve failed. For most of us, we tend to avoid those things that make us feel like failures.

Let’s drill down a bit. Some of us don’t share our faith simply because it makes us feel awkward. Here’s what I’ve learned. It’s almost always uncomfortable to have an intentional conversation about Christ. If you wait until it’s not awkward, you’ll never do it. When I posted the name of this series on Facebook Friday, Greg Moroni shared something on my wall that is spot on: *“It generally takes a little TENSION to become inTENSIONal! And a lot of luv!”*

Our primary mission is to make disciples. This begins in our own homes and then moves to our neighborhoods and then to our workplaces, our campuses, the community and to all the nations. When you go to Aldi your priority is to talk to people, not to purchase potato chips. If you pick up some meat that’s great, but while you’re there look for someone to meet.

I’ve been challenged to look for opportunities to be intentional this week. On Tuesday night I went to HyVee in Rock Island to mail something to our daughter Megan and to send some John Deere hats to my dad as a follow-up to our factory tour at Deere. I was trying to hurry because the woman behind me was becoming impatient. It took some time because I had to buy two boxes and then tape them up and write out addresses. While I was doing all this she asked me if I worked at Deere. I told her “no” because I’m not smart enough...I’m just a pastor. As soon as I said that, she held up her arm and showed me that the hair on her arm was standing up. She told me that she knew I was going to say that before I said it (and now the hair was standing up on my neck). I then asked her if she went to church and she said she took care of that when she was a kid. I gave her a gospel booklet and invited her to Edgewood.

After I grabbed a quick dinner, I went to the board meeting for the Quad Cities Missing Person Network, where I serve as the chaplain. I shared how I experienced loss when my friend Tim drowned in the Rock River when I was 18

and then intentionally shared my testimony of how I came to know Christ. I've been able to follow up with two people already.

On Friday by God's grace I was able to turn a conversation about laptops into an invite to church. When I was working on this sermon at a McDonald's someone asked if I liked my MacBook. I told them I did and then brought it over to them to show them how fast it is and how great the screen is. I demonstrated what it could do by clicking around on our website. In the process I invited them to church and they said they would come!

I tell you all that to say this. Because I've been trying to be intentional all week, God opened up opportunities to speak for Him. When I'm not intentional with my time, I miss opportunities all the time.

The word ***“always”*** means we are to be ready at all times, to be on a state of alert. The tone is an urgent imperative to have an *attitude of intentional anticipation*. If we are walking with Christ, people *will* notice, and they *will* ask. To be ***“prepared”*** comes from the word that we translate as *“fitness.”* It carries with it the idea of *“being in readiness”* like a Marine on a mission. It was also used of a bride getting prepared for a wedding.

We're challenged to ***“make a defense.”*** This is the Greek word, *“apologia,”* from which we get the word “apology.” That doesn't mean we should apologize for our faith by saying, “I'm sorry for what I believe,” (which some of us do) but instead it means a “verbal defense.” It was used in a courtroom to give evidence or testimony about a situation.

Did you notice what causes people to ask about our faith? It's the fact that we have ***“hope.”*** This literally reads, *“The in-you hope...”* Colossians 1:27 defines the source of our hope: ***“...Which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”*** Biblically defined, hope is a desire for some future good with the expectation of obtaining it. When you think about it, this world offers no hope. When a pre-Christian sees someone living with hope, they want to know how to get it for themselves because Ephesians 2:12 says that unbelievers are ***“without hope and without God in this world.”***

Notice that it says, ***“to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.”*** The word ***“ask”*** means to *“crave or desire”* and is in the present tense which means we need to be ready “every time someone asks.” People are craving answers. They know they don't have hope – and they want it.

While my son-in-law Brad and I watched the opening minutes of the Eagles-Falcons game on Thursday night, a Pepsi commercial came on featuring football fans and players with some really catchy music. As the commercial crescendoed it ended with this tagline: *We live for this*. Really? This is what life is all about? We both shook our heads, lamenting how sad that the purpose of life has been reduced to carbonated sugar water and football...Everyone knows the real game is Sunday night when the Packers beat the Bears!

While there are no hopeless situations, there are tons of people who have grown hopeless about them. Remember the context here is how Christians are living in the midst of a cultural crisis. Are you ready to give them the answer? By the way, if people don't ask you questions it may be because they don't see the Lord in your life.

Instead of being apathetic, let's be intentionally evangelistic.

3 – Express (15c-16)

When we *exhibit* the lordship of Christ in our lives, people will be curious and will want some answers. When they ask, we need to be ready to intentionally *explain* our faith. The end of verse 15 tells us we are to *express* what we believe with **“gentleness and respect.”**

Let's remember that our role is not to win arguments or debates, but to make disciples. We're called to be witnesses, not prosecuting attorneys. While we should be ready to defend what we believe, we must avoid being argumentative and abrasive.

- **Be gentle.** This is translated as “meekness” in some versions. It's an inner attitude that affects the way we interact with others and literally means, “strength under control.” It denotes a humble and gracious attitude which expresses itself in a *“patient submissiveness to offense...and free from the desire for revenge.”* 2 Corinthians 10:1 tells us how Paul treated others: **“By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you...”** And in Matthew 11:29, Jesus says this about Himself, **“I am gentle and humble in heart...”** Are you gentle with those who sin differently than you do?
- **Be respectful.** Interestingly, this is the same word that is translated **“fear”** in verse 14. We're to have a sense of holy awe at the opportunity to speak

words of life to people who are lost in their sins. It's a holy moment when eternity hangs in the balance. As such, we should approach our time with *reverence* toward God and *respect* toward others.

I like how Mack Stiles puts it: *“Evangelism isn't just data transfer; we must listen to people, hear their objections, and model gentleness because we know that souls are at stake.”*

Most of our witnessing is likely to happen in the passing moments of conversation. As we mix it up with people, we *will* have opportunities. The issue is not to become more aggressive but to become more sensitive to the needs of the people around us, and more aware of the subtle promptings of the Holy Spirit. To be respectful means to be more gentle to people and their pain. As someone has said, *“We must be winsome if we would win some.”*

U.S. Army Chaplain Captain Jose Rondon serves at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri. According to BP News, he has experienced the exhilaration of seeing more than 1,400 professions of faith, since March. When asked about it, he responded, *“There's nothing more exhilarating in life than seeing people come to Christ.”* He summarized his part in what God is doing with one word: *intentionality*. Rondon has learned how to be intentional with his words and with his treatment of his fellow soldiers: *“God always opens great doors...when we listen to people without interrupting. We show them how much we care by being there for them whenever they need it most.”*

When our attitude is gracious and gentle, verse 16 tells us those who oppose Christianity will be disarmed: ***“...those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.”*** That won't happen if we're argumentative or condescending.

On a practical level, that means intentionally slowing down, intentionally listening to people, intentionally introducing ourselves, intentionally not judging them, intentionally looking at them while they're talking, being intentionally attentive to details and needs, intentionally remembering names and intentionally following up. It also means we don't try to cram everything into one conversation.

As we *exhibit* Christ to people by making sure He is Lord of our lives, as we *explain* the reason for the hope that we have, and as we *express* ourselves with gentleness and respect, God will use us to clear the way for people to see the central message of the Cross of Jesus Christ.

Action Steps

I came across a simple prayer I've started to pray: *"Break into my day, Lord, and help me to break into somebody else's."* Would you pray this with me?

We need to be constantly and intentionally alert to people around us. That's what living on mission is all about.

Let's consider some action steps. We'll take our main points in reverse order:

1. Express. Ask God to turn your fear of witnessing into an inner attitude of grace and gentleness toward people.

- **Trust God to order your steps.** Here's something that I'm trying to work on. I'm reminding myself everyone I meet is either on the narrow way to heaven or on the wide highway to hell.
- **Meet someone new every day.** When you see someone you don't know, walk across the street or office or campus or church and introduce yourself. We can practice that here today. Take the first two minutes after the service ends to introduce yourself to someone you don't know.

Let's be intentional but also organic, strategic but also sincere.

2. Explain. Albert Mohler says that *"at the end of the day, the biggest obstacle to evangelism is Christians who don't share the gospel."* D.L. Moody was once criticized for his methods of reaching people with the gospel. His reply was, *"I agree with you; I don't like the way I do it either. Tell me how do you do it?"* The woman who had criticized him dropped her head and said, *"I don't do it."* To which Moody responded, *"Well, I like my way of doing it better than your way of not doing it."*

- **Practice telling your story.** For an outline, think about what your life was like "before" you became a Christian. Then describe "how" you became a Christian. Finally, write down how your life has changed "after" your conversion.
- **Connect your family members to Christ.** Begin by living out your faith in front of your family. Your first priority is to evangelize and disciple them.

- **Be redemptive on social media.** Post verses on Facebook. Pass along Christ-centered websites. Avoid arguing.
- **See yourself as a link in the chain of someone becoming a Christian.** Your job might be to sow the seed and someone else may get to rejoice in the harvest.
- **Use tools to share Christ.** We have additional copies of *Anchor for the Soul* in Spanish and English and *Soul Satisfaction* on the shelf outside the doors.
- **Leverage current events, movies and news stories as redemptive tools.**
- **Expect to feel awkward, for things to get messy, and for tension to rise.** And then do it anyway.
- **Discover your preferred evangelism style.** For the next three weeks, we'll be looking at six different approaches – the confrontational style modeled by Peter, the intellectual exhibited by Paul, the testimonial of the blind man, the relational as seen in Matthew's dinner party, the invitational as modeled by the Samaritan woman, and the serving model demonstrated by Dorcas.

3. Exhibit. The key to getting ready is not so much reading books to get answers to common questions, though that is helpful. The main thing is to settle the question of hopelessness in your own heart. To say it another way, the best preparation is to make sure your own heart is holy and filled with hope.

Some of you are born again but you've not yet been baptized. The Bible says that's your next step. We set aside the last weekend of every month for baptisms.

There is a close connection between reverencing Christ as Lord in my heart and always being ready to make a case for my hope. We must "be" good news before we can share good news. People will ask questions if you're living a Christ-centered life. If they don't see Christ in you, they'll question your Christianity. And when you're filled with hope you'll share it with others.

If you have never submitted yourself to the Lordship of Christ, I want to give you an opportunity to do so right now. Turn everything over to Him. Live only to please Him. Be satisfied with nothing less than God's purposes and the pleasure of serving Him. I came across a post that says it well: "*You cannot seek Him with all your heart in your spare time.*"

The phrase, "***honor Christ the Lord as holy***" is in the aorist imperative, which can be translated, "*Do it now!*" It's the only command in verse 15.

The Celebrate Recovery Band is going to come back up and lead us in the song, “Come to the Cross.” If you need to come to Christ, would you do so right now?

If you’re already a Christ-follower, think of one person you know who needs Christ and determine to no longer be apathetic but intentional in your evangelism. Will you intentionally engage with him or her this week? That way if Barna contacts you about the Great Commission, you’ll not only be able to tell him what it is, you’ll be living in obedience to it!

Closing Song: “Come to the Cross”