

# Foundations Lesson #7

## Sharing the Gospel Message, Part 1

Peter, in his first letter, tells his readers that they should always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks them to give the reason for the hope that they have (I Peter 3:15). He then adds that this must be done with gentleness and respect. Jesus commanded his followers: “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15-16, see also Matthew 28:18-20). These passages of Scripture should help us understand the importance of sharing the gospel message.

You and I have been called to share the gospel message. We can't afford to keep the wonderful news of the Kingdom of God to ourselves. It's supposed to be spread “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Everyone needs to hear the good news. Everyone. I want to tell you plainly that you have a message. What God has done for you in saving you – delivering you from sin, bondage, and eternal separation from him – he wants to do for the people you meet as well.

The word gospel simply means good news. Salvation by grace through faith being available to all is good news. Jesus Christ having shed his blood for the sin of the world is good news. Being able to have a right relationship with God is good news. What you and I've been given, we're also called to give away so that others might benefit. Jesus said, “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8). As the four lepers from II Kings chapter 7 said, “We're not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves.”

In sharing the gospel message, we also need to understand the importance of what's at stake. As C. S. Lewis has said,

**QUOTE** You have never met a mere mortal. Everyone you have ever come in contact with, you have argued with, or traded with, every one of them is either an immortal horror, or an everlasting splendor. But you have never met a mere mortal.

What anyone does with the gospel message is the single most important decision in all of life. Nothing else comes close to having the impact of that choice. We'll cover this subject in greater detail in Lesson #15 on Eternal Judgment, but accepting or rejecting God's message will determine a person's standing – either that of being incredibly glorious or incredibly hideous – for ever, and ever, and ever, and ever. What could be more important than that?

On our outline, Roman Numeral number one says, “In sharing the gospel message, God has made us...” and then five terms are listed that show us a portion of our identity as God sees us. The first one is ambassadors.

**2Co. 5:18-20** All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

An ambassador is simply someone who represents the interests of his native land on foreign soil. So the Canadian ambassador to Argentina, for example, is a citizen of Canada, but he lives in Argentina, on foreign soil, and there he represents the interests of his homeland, Canada. Similarly, we believers are strangers and foreigners in this world. Our citizenship is in heaven. That's our homeland. In the passage we've just read, God has defined us as ambassadors, meaning that we're to live in such a way as to represent the interests of the Kingdom of heaven, our native land, on the foreign soil of this earth. **That** is an important part of our identity. The passage informs us that God has a message, the message of reconciliation, and that he's entrusted that message to us, his

ambassadors.

Then also, we're salt and light.

**Mt. 5:13-16** [Jesus speaking] "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Salt creates thirst. We're called to live our lives in such a way that the people of this world will become thirsty for the life of God residing in us. Light reveals. We're called to reveal, by what we do and say, the beauty, the wisdom, the love, the goodness of God. It's all a part of who God has made us to be. Please notice that Jesus didn't say that we should **act like** salt and light; he says that we **are** salt and light. It's part of our identity. Then also, we're acknowledgers of Christ.

**Mt. 10:32-33** [Jesus speaking] "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.

Here Jesus points out that his followers have been mandated to acknowledge him before men. He then goes on to point out the severe consequences for doing the opposite. Many years ago at a midweek Bible study, we were discussing what to do if someone were to hold a gun to our head and say, "Deny Christ or die!" One young man told us that he would deny Christ and then repent later. I have to admit that I appreciated his honesty, but that's the wrong strategy to use for many reasons. What if the person holding the gun pulled the trigger anyway? What if the person who denies Christ has a change of heart and doesn't want to repent later? But most of all it's a horrible testimony to the one holding the gun. The believer being threatened would be proclaiming, by his actions, that it's far more important to hold on to his life than to acknowledge Jesus. Nothing could be further from the truth. Countless martyrs who've died for their faith would be able to tell us today that having lived as acknowledgers of Christ was more than worth it. As Jesus himself has said,

**Lk. 12:4-5** "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.

So if you or I ever find ourselves in the position where we're told to deny Christ or die, I trust that God will give us the grace to smile and say something like, "Friend, if you pull that trigger, I'm going to spend eternity with my God and Savior, and if you don't, I'm going to let you know that Jesus Christ is Lord." I think that's what an acknowledger would do.

Next on our outline, God has made us to be testifiers.

**Rev. 12:11** They overcame him [the devil] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

I want you to understand something. There's **power** in the word of your testimony. I believe your words and my words have far more impact than what we realize. We know from Scripture that God's words are incredibly powerful. They carry immense authority, and they always accomplish the purpose for which they're sent. When God spoke and said, "Let there be light," there was light. That's enormous power. Since we humans have been created in the image and likeness of God, our words are powerful, too. Granted, they're not nearly as powerful as God's words, but their effect is

still far greater than what most of us realize. Of course, the more Christlike you or I become, the more impact our words will have. The verse we just read from the book of Revelation informs us that when these believers spoke, the word of their testimony was part of what caused them to overcome the devil. That's powerful language. So let's not underestimate the identity we've been given by God as testifiers.

Our outline continues by letting us know that God has made us to be witnesses.

**Ac. 1:8** [Jesus speaking] 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."

A witness is someone who testifies to what they've seen or heard. In a court of law, when witnesses take the stand it's not their place to dispute or argue with anyone. They're simply called upon to give the first-hand account of what they've experienced. When we share the gospel message with others, one of the challenges we face is to avoid entering into religious debates **with** others instead of presenting the plan of salvation **to** them. Most religious debates I've ever witnessed have had a way of quickly degrading into occasions for anger, disrespectful or insulting language, or attempts to overpower people into believing. All such sinful ways of treating people will do a lot more harm than good. It's never about proving how right we are, it's about our representing God to a world that desperately needs him, whether they realize it or not. Having a godly attitude towards the **people** we're conversing with is every bit as important as our sharing the truth God would like them to believe. Let's remember, everything in life is about God first, others second, and self last. It's not hard for unbelievers to notice when we're being insensitive, selfish, or disrespectful. Our Savior and our example, Jesus Christ, always treated people with great dignity and care. When we act in selfish or insensitive ways, the unbelievers we're conversing with will be so negatively impacted by the experience they had with us that they won't want anything to do with our message, and we certainly can't blame them for feeling that way.

There's one more identity I want to mention from Scripture. I didn't include it on the outline because it was spoken to specific people in a context that related to their trade.

**Mt. 4:18-20** As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him.

Here Jesus calls Peter and Andrew to follow him, using terminology that they were very familiar with. He invites them to become **fishers of men**. Although the context of Jesus' statement being made to fishermen can't be ignored, I believe there's some validity in applying Jesus' term "fishers of men" to all believers. No one ever caught a fish unless they were trying to catch a fish. They had to be intentional in order to get results. In the same way, we believers need to be intentional in order to see lost people receive Christ. If we're not trying to do that, it won't happen. Fish don't just jump into the boat. Good fishermen know where the fish are, and they know what bait to use. In the same way, we should be especially attentive to people who're spiritually hungry so that we can tailor-make the message to meet their needs and address their concerns.

Before going on to the next section of our outline, I want to encourage you to know the message of God as well as you possibly can. Granted, knowing what God has revealed in the Scripture is a life-long process. No matter how well any of us know God's message, we always can and need to know it better. But even if you're relatively young in the faith, you can get to know the message of God's salvation well enough to explain it to others. I'd encourage you to review Lesson #3 on Salvation as often as you need to in order to get more comfortable in talking about it. If you have questions, find a mature believer to help you. When you actually find yourself in a conversation with an unbeliever about God, be sure to listen attentively to what that person has to say. Even if they're

brashly propagating the crazy doctrine of some off-the-wall cult, **they** are still precious and valuable because they've been created in the image and likeness of the great and eternal God. Our listening to them carefully does not mean that we agree with them, it means that we're honoring them by giving their words our undivided attention. They'll be much more likely to take our words seriously if we've taken their words seriously.

Memorizing a few key Scripture verses is also a great idea. If we hide the message of God in our heart (Psalm 119:11), then we'll be able to recall it when the need arises. Above all, remember that God is with you. The Holy Spirit dwells in the heart of every believer. The Holy Spirit knows exactly what the person you're talking to needs to hear, and he, the Spirit of the Almighty God, will empower you and help you say what's best. So be confident in God's ability to help you and guide you. Amen.

## Foundations Lesson #7

### Sharing the Gospel Message, Part 2

Roman Numeral number two on our outline gives us some reasons we're to share the gospel message.

**1Ti. 2:3-4** This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

**2Pt. 3:9** The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

In the two verses we've just read, I like to emphasize the words "wants" and "wanting". Those words make it crystal clear that God desires all to be saved. God **wants** all men to be saved; he doesn't **want** anyone to perish. It's vitally important for us to understand the heart of God and then to allow him to change our hearts to become more and more like his. God has a deep longing, a great yearning, to include, to draw people to himself, to make sure – as much as possible – that no one gets left out. There's a poem I learned years ago that reflects God's desire to include. It goes like this:

**POEM** They drew a circle that shut me out.  
Heretic. Rebel. Thing to flout.  
But love and I had the wit to win.  
We drew a circle that took them in!

Over and over again in the Scripture God invites us to **come** to him.

**Jas. 4:8a** Come near to God and he will come near to you.

**Rev. 22:17** The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

**Is. 55:1** "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

Just after the man and the woman in the Garden of Eden had fallen into sin, Scripture tells us that the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" Let's remember that when **The Almighty** asks a question, it's not because he's looking for information. He knows all things. He knew exactly where the man was hiding. I suppose he may have taken the approach he did because he wanted to give the man opportunity to come forward on his own. But **God took the initiative**. I imagine his heart ached deeply over the busted relationship between himself and the humans he'd created. As a wise woman from Tekoa once said,

**2Sa. 14:14** Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die. But God does not take away life; instead, he devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him.

Did you catch that? God longs for unity and relational harmony so deeply that he devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him. For us that's both a great blessing and a great challenge. It's an incredible blessing to know that the very Creator and Sustainer of all things will tenderly and faithfully do anything within reason to draw us back to himself whenever we stray. But it's also a great challenge because what God has done for us, he expects us to do for others. He's called us to be like him. The deep longing he has to include people, to have rich and healthy relationships with them, we need to have in our hearts as well. With every glimpse I get of God's vast and tender compassionate care, I realize afresh and anew how far I still have to go. Fortunately, I can trust God's great transforming power to do the work of getting me there, and so can you.

We also understand from God's word that if we share the gospel message with an unbeliever, and that unbeliever then accepts the message and turns to God, heaven rejoices.

**Lk. 15:7** [Jesus speaking] I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

I don't know if angels celebrate with cake and balloons or not, but we do know that all of heaven gets gloriously happy when just one human receives God's salvation. Since our main priority in life is to live in such a way that God is pleased, that's powerful encouragement for us to share the gospel message. We shouldn't try to **force** or **overpower** anyone to receive Christ into their lives. Our job is to care about them, tell them what they need to know, encourage them, pray for them, and then let them make their choice. If they choose well, we rejoice with them and with all of heaven. If they choose badly, we grieve. But we have to respect the fact that it's their decision, not ours. As powerful as God is, he's also incredibly gentle. That's why the Bible tells us that one of the evidences, or fruit, of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is gentleness (see Galatians 5:22-23).

As we noted earlier, God says that we should always be prepared to tell people why we have the hope that we do.

**1Pt. 3:15b** Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

Peter here uses the word **always**. Always be prepared. Paul, in writing to Timothy, says to be prepared **in season and out of season** (see II Timothy 4:2). I believe "in season" refers to those times when we're expecting what's coming and so we have the opportunity to get ready, but "out of season" refers to those times when we have zero advance warning. When that happens, it's especially important for us to trust God and therefore not get stressed or frazzled. God is **never** caught off guard. His Spirit lives inside each one of us believers. So, we just need to retain our peace and believe that the Holy Spirit will give us all the words the other person needs to hear.

Then, Scripture also declares that we can "snatch people from the fire."

**Jde. 23a**

snatch others from the fire and save them;

We know that God is a great rescuer, but here he invites us to have a part in his great rescue operation. Jude doesn't define the nature of the fire we can snatch people from to save them. Maybe he's referring to the fire of eternal damnation, or maybe it's the fire of earthly pain and sorrow that results from sin. Scripture doesn't tell us. But either way, it's clear that the people he refers to need to be saved, and that we've been given, by God, all that's necessary to do the job. Then also, Scripture tells us to share the gospel message because it's wise to do so.

**Pr. 11:30**

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.

Wisdom is a remarkable quality. Those who walk in wisdom have a whole slew of benefits that others don't have. The proverb we just read tells us that those who engage in the work of endeavoring to win souls are actually walking in wisdom. Another benefit to sharing the gospel message is mentioned in the book of Philemon, verse 6. It says,

**Pm. 6**

I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.

Here Paul the apostle is writing to Philemon, exhorting him to be active in sharing his faith. Paul goes on to point out that the unbelievers who hear his message aren't the only ones who benefit. I find it remarkable that in Christ, some things are not fully received until they're given away. I know that sounds like a paradox, but Jesus told us to give and it would be given unto us, that with the measure we use, it will be measured to us. That principle certainly applies here. The benefit received by the one sharing the gospel message is revealed to be "a **full** understanding of every good thing we have in Christ." So if you feel that you have a lot to learn about what it means to be in Christ, sharing your faith is one activity you can engage in to grow in that area of your life.

Next on our outline, we read that God has ordained that people give the world the good news.

**Ro. 10:14-15**

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? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

Ten times in the book of Genesis chapter one it's noted that God created plants and animals **according to their kinds**. The strong inference is also that each of these plants and animals **reproduce** according to their kinds. So when hyenas reproduce, they don't have baby mosquitoes or frogs, they have baby hyenas. Similarly, when an apple seed is planted, the resulting tree isn't a pear tree or an oak tree, but an apple tree. Since God has designed his physical creation in such a way that living things reproduce according to their own kinds, it shouldn't surprise us that his spiritual creation has been designed to function similarly. Believing humans, full of the Spirit of God, have the capacity, by sharing the gospel message, to reproduce, seeing others born into the Kingdom of God. Granted, on very rare occasion God has been known to use other means, but almost always God's preferred method is that a child of his shares the gospel message, resulting in spiritual reproduction.

Then also, we share the gospel message because we never know when we might be next to someone who's close to death.

**Ac. 12:6**

The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance.

**verses 18-19**

In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he

cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.

Peter had been imprisoned by Herod. Roman law stated that a soldier who was charged with the duty of guarding a prisoner had to pay with his own life if that prisoner escaped. The night before Peter was to be brought to trial, an angel of the Lord came and miraculously freed him from the prison. When Peter couldn't be found the next day, the guards were executed. The point here is that Peter had been in a jail cell with no idea that the guards to his right and to his left had less than 24 hours to live. They had no idea, either. So it's a good idea to share the gospel message at every opportunity we've been given, because we don't know what a day may bring forth (Proverbs 27:1).

Many years ago our pastor told us the story of how one morning, when he was in grade school, the Lord spoke to him and said, "I want you to tell Manfred about me today." Two or three times during the school day, the Lord reminded him to share the gospel message with Manfred, who was a classmate of his. Our pastor told us that at the end of the school day, he put God off saying, "I'll do it tomorrow." Later that day, Manfred was out on a fishing boat with his grandfather and drowned. We never know when we might be next to someone who has less than 24 hours to live.

The last reason given on our outline that we're to share the gospel message is that no one having known hell would want anyone else to go there.

**Lk. 16:22-28** [Jesus speaking] "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

"He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

The rich man knew what it was to be in such torment that he longed for the treasured relief provided by even a single drop of water. In that state of intense agony, he begged Abraham to send Lazarus to his brothers, so that they might escape the destiny that had befallen him. No one having known hell would want anyone else to go there.

The reasons given to share the gospel message under Roman Numeral number two on our outline are not exhaustive. I trust you'll discover others as you continue to walk with God. Hopefully, the reasons provided here will give all of us enough motivation and understanding to help us please God in this important aspect of the Christian life. Amen.

## **Foundations Lesson #7**

### **Sharing the Gospel Message, Part 3**

Roman Numeral number three on our outline gives us some of the ingredients that are necessary in sharing the gospel message. The first of these is compassion.

**Ps. 86:15** But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

God is deeply compassionate. Since we're called to become more and more like him, knowing the heart of God helps us know what we need to be conformed to. If we have an attitude that says, "the unsaved have made their bed – now they can lie in it" we're in great need of being transformed by the Holy Spirit. The example of our Lord Jesus Christ also shows us the compassion of God.

**Mk. 6:31-34**

Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

I've often been challenged by this passage of Scripture. Jesus and his followers had been so busy that they were **tired** and they were **hungry**. So Jesus made plans to get away with his disciples to a remote place in order to get some much needed rest. But when they arrived, a large crowd was already there to meet them. If I'd been in Jesus' shoes, I probably would've been ticked off that my plans had been wrecked and that we now wouldn't be able to get the R&R we desperately needed. Jesus didn't feel that way at all. He had compassion on the people. He saw their need. He ministered to them without even a tinge of complaining or frustration. Such pure-hearted compassion is also what we're called to have.

**Col. 3:12**

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

This should challenge us to look past people's faults and see their need. A Christian college student noticed that every time she ran into her downstairs neighbor, she was on her way to another party, so they would just exchange quick, friendly greetings. One day the neighbor said to her, "I like you. You're all right. Let's get together next week and smoke a joint, OK?" Now some believers would have taken that opportunity to tell the gal that smoking marijuana is sin, but correcting someone who isn't looking for correction never builds relationships, which are extremely important in trying to lead others to Christ. I thought that the response of the Christian college student was brilliant. She said, "Thanks! I really like you too, and I'd love to spend some time with you. I can't stand pot, but I'd sure love to do something else."

Let's remember, it's not our job to set the world straight, it's our job to help people find God. The people of this world tend to be on a treadmill searching for satisfaction and meaning in life. They're thirsty but drinking from all the wrong wells. In all their striving – sometimes at the expense of others – they have yet to realize that their pursuit is endless. It's like running a marathon without a finish line. Sure, they may experience some temporary fulfillments along the way, but ultimately, the only way for their searching souls to be satisfied is for them to come into a vibrant relationship with the Lord.

A factory worker who was making minimum wage said to her co-worker, "If I only had a thousand dollars, I'd be perfectly happy." Her boss, who overheard her say that, was fascinated by the thought of seeing what a perfectly happy employee would look like. So he went to her and said, "I heard what you said. Here's a thousand dollars." As he was walking away, he heard her moan, "Why didn't I say five thousand dollars would make me perfectly happy?"

Now if, after hearing the story of this woman, you feel on the inside like telling her, "You're being ridiculous. You said the money would make you perfectly happy. Can't you see that you were wrong?" then you need a drastic change of attitude. Jesus was **full** of compassion. You and I need to have the same attitude, the same heart, that he had. If you're like me, you have lots of room for improvement! By the way, if you find yourself in need of compassion, don't fret. Simply ask God to



change your heart. He's faithful. He'll change you. He's in the life-transformation business! Again, compassion will help us look past people's faults and see their needs.

The next ingredient that's necessary in sharing the gospel message is prayer. Of course, talking to God and communing with him is a very necessary part of our daily lives, but when it comes to lost people needing God's salvation, prayer is indispensable. Moses is a great example from Scripture of someone who cried out to God on behalf of those who were about to be destroyed.

**Ex. 32:9-14** "I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."

But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. "O LORD," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'" Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

**verses 31-32** So Moses went back to the LORD and said, "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin – but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written."

Here we see in Moses the heart of a great intercessor. When God was about to destroy the nation Moses was leading, Moses was only concerned about the people of that nation, not at all about himself. He was even willing for God to blot his name out of the book of life! That's how deep his burden was for the people he was leading. To say that this is an example of intense dedication would be an understatement!

The apostle Paul had a similar heart.

**Ro. 9:2-4a** I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel.

**Ro. 10:1** Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.

When it comes to seeing the lost brought into the Kingdom of God, there's no substitute for prayer. Prayer releases the hand of God to work in the unsaved person's life. When we pray, we're not only communing with the King of all kings and the Lord of all lords, but we're also acknowledging that only **he** can save a soul; only **he** can bring conviction to a heart; and only **he** can draw an unbeliever to himself. Charles H. Spurgeon once said,

**QUOTE** Pray as though everything depends on God, and then work as though everything depends on you.

Without the activity of the Spirit of God in a person's life, that person can't come into the Kingdom of God. However, without our sharing the gospel with them, they won't have the information and demonstration they need in order to make the right decision. Both factors are necessary. In John 6:44, Jesus put it this way:

**Jn. 6:44a** "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him,

Our prayers will intensify the drawing power of the Spirit of God in the lives of the unbelievers we're sharing the gospel message with. Amen.

## Foundations Lesson #7

### Sharing the Gospel Message, Part 4

Turning over to the second page of our outline, we see that **personal contact** is another necessary ingredient in sharing the gospel message. Before we get into the matter of what to do and what not to do when engaging in personal contact, I'd like to bring up something even more basic. I don't think anyone would argue that in much of the church today, efforts to see unbelievers born into the Kingdom of God aren't bearing a whole lot of fruit. Part of the reason for this has to do with our hurrying off to do the work without first spending time seeking the Lord. God wants us to be a part of what **he's** doing, not the other way around. He's not looking for people who make their plans, ask him to bless their plans, and then rush off to carry out their plans; he's looking for people who'll carry out **his** plans. Carrying out his plans first of all entails finding out what those plans are.

I always get concerned when I hear Christians talk about what they're doing **for God**. Some believers reason that since, before salvation, they were, say, in the entertainment business for the devil, they now want to be in the entertainment business **for God**. Whereas there may be a noble motive to that idea, it falls far short of living under the **lordship** of Christ. What if **The Almighty** actually wanted them now to be a painter or an accountant? When we received Christ as our Lord, it's not as if we made a list entitled, What I Will Do For God, signed our commitment to it, and then handed it to the Lord. That's not what God's looking for from us. What he wants is for us to leave the list blank, sign our commitment to it, and then have **him** fill it in. Finding out what he's put on that list requires prayer. As Jesus has said, "**Ask** and it will be given to you." So the first step for you to engage in successful evangelism is for you to find out from God what his plans are for you in that area.

Having said that, I'd like to read from our outline on the **how to's** of personal contact. It says,

#### **QUOTE**

The Bible contains many stories of people who led others into a living, personal relationship with the Lord. Andrew was so thrilled at finding Jesus that he found his brother Peter and introduced him to Jesus (John 1:40-42). Paul and Silas spoke to a jailer at midnight, preventing him from committing suicide, and leading him and his family to the Lord (Acts 16:27-33). Jesus spoke to a puzzled Rabbi at night (John 3:1-15), a woman outcast at noon (John 4:7-26), and many others. Wherever we find ourselves, God may be wanting us to share the gospel message. Here are some practical considerations on how this can be done best.

The first entry on our outline exhorts us to make the most of every opportunity.

#### **Eph. 5:15-16**

Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

Jesus never wasted an opportunity. When I was a new believer, I was amazed to read how Jesus handled interruptions. One of the more intriguing examples of this took place on an occasion when four men dug through the roof and then lowered a paralyzed man down on a mat to where Jesus was preaching (see Mark 2:1-12). I find it significant that the Scripture records nothing about Jesus' message that day, it only records how he handled the interruption to his message. Of course, we have to be careful to discern when an interruption is of the Lord and when it's just a distraction,

but we also have to be flexible enough to put our well-prepared plans on hold when it's appropriate.

A woman was teaching a Sunday school class of third graders. She noticed how one of the boys kept taking a shiny new whistle out of his pocket. Finally, the lad couldn't help himself and he blew the whistle. Everyone looked at him. He was embarrassed. But the teacher asked him to do it again, this time a nice, long blast on the whistle. A little surprised, the boy complied. When he finished, she told her class that one day the trumpet of the Lord will sound and Jesus will return. Just like the blast from the whistle was unexpected, no one will know the day or the hour of Jesus' return. Then she told her class that they all needed to be ready, and many of the children responded with deep repentance under the conviction of the Lord.

Next on our outline, we need to relate deeply to people's circumstances.

**1Co. 9:19-23** Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

Here Paul, the author of the book of First Corinthians, writes how he went out of his way to identify with his hearers so that he could better share the gospel message with them. Jesus also set the example in relating deeply to us. I invite you to picture him enjoying the glories of heaven, being worshipped by the angels, overseeing creation with his Father. Then in the next instant, he was a fertilized egg cell in the womb of a teenager. Picture yourself having to make that transition. That would be the ultimate in culture shock. But that's what he did, gladly, so that he could fully relate to you and to me.

Another important aspect of sharing the gospel message is our being sensitive to the needs of the people we're talking to.

**Mk. 2:16-17** When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Jesus here spent time with people based on ***their need***, not based on who he would have enjoyed hanging out with. God is deeply concerned with each human on the planet, and their spiritual needs – as well as physical needs, emotional needs, and other needs – are deeply important to him. The gospel message will have a much greater impact in the lives of our hearers if it's accompanied by a compassionate demonstration of caring for their needs. Some would argue that it's not natural for them to find ways of meeting other people's needs. Actually, the ability to get past ourselves and serve someone else isn't natural for anyone. That means we have to learn; we have to change; we have to work at it. If we do our part, God will always be faithful to do his.

The Scripture also exhorts us to be good listeners.

**Jas. 1:19** My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,

A friend of mine used to say, "God has given us ***two*** ears but only ***one*** mouth. That should tell us something." Perhaps learning to listen twice as much as we talk would be beneficial for many of us. I recall watching a video clip of a very gifted evangelist sharing the gospel message with a young man. I have to admit that I cringed as I watched the evangelist interrupt the young man he was interviewing

**three times** in the space of about 15 seconds. Fortunately, the young man didn't just walk away. I understand the temptation for us to feel so passionate about the message we're trying to share that we, consciously or unconsciously, feel like it doesn't matter all that much how we're treating the people we're trying to convince. But that's a huge mistake because it's not God's priority. We need to be every bit as passionate about engaging people with the love and respect of the Lord as we are about sharing the message of the Lord with them.

It's also important for us to be consistent between what we say and how we live. We can't expect the people around us to listen to us talking about God if we're living like the devil. The Apostle Paul, writing to the church in Corinth, said this:

**1Co. 10:33 – 11:1** even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

Paul wasn't perfect. None of us are. But he was so deeply committed to pleasing God that he could, in clear conscience, tell his readers that they would do well to follow his example. I personally believe that Christians who aren't surrendered to God have done more damage to the church than all the cults and man-made religions combined. Our lives must be lived under the lordship of Christ if our message is to have the impact it needs to have.

Then, as we've already mentioned, we're told to be gentle and respectful in sharing the gospel message.

**1Pt. 3:15** But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

Continuing on our outline, a few points are given on how **not** to share the gospel message. It's natural for Christians to be repulsed by sin. Of course, we need to be every bit as disgusted with the sin in our own lives as we are with the sin in the world. Nonetheless, in our adverse reactions to sin, we need to be very careful not to project those adverse reactions onto the **people** we're sharing the gospel message with, who may be engaging in that sin. As the old saying goes, love the sinner, hate the sin. I invite you to study how Jesus handled the sinners he came in contact with. I believe you'll find rich examples of mercy and graciousness. Granted, he was very strong and direct with the religious leaders, but they were claiming to represent God and they had the wherewithal to know better. Condemning people for their sin doesn't put them in a frame of mind or heart to want God. As James 2:13 says,

**Jas. 2:13** because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

Two believers, a woman in her late 20s and a young man who was a college student, were paired up to walk up and down a beach to start conversations about God. They came across a group of three people, a man and two women, and they were able to have a vibrant conversation with them about spiritual matters. The woman even exchanged phone numbers with two of them before they went their separate ways. After the conversation was over, the college student told the woman he'd been paired up with how disappointed he was that only two of the essential four truths had been shared and that they were even presented in the wrong order. So the woman asked him to recall the names of the three people they'd just talked to. He didn't know a single name. Perhaps that's a particularly blatant case of insensitivity, but that's what happens when we're so focused on what we want to say that we fail to care about the people we're talking to.

We also need to remember that our message is **not** that we have it all together. Our message **is** that we know the One who does. I'm grateful for the encouragement believers gain after walking with

the Lord for a while. They see that their life is now different. They enjoy the benefits of knowing better how to navigate the complexities of their existence. That's wonderful. But all of us have to remember that every change that's taken place in our lives since salvation has been **by the grace of God**. If we fall into the trap of thinking that **we** did it, then we'll think of ourselves more highly than we ought, and as a natural result of that pride, we'll consider others inferior. Then, looking down at others, we'll end up offending them instead of helping them. So let's always be careful – in our thoughts and in our attitudes – to give credit where credit is due.

The Apostle Paul has written to the church in Thessalonica,

**1Th. 2:8b** ...we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well,

God has called us to be authentic, servant-hearted people, sharing not only the gospel of God but also ourselves. As we embrace that call, we won't fall into the trap of treating unsaved people as evangelistic projects rather than people, or of saying evangelism is something we do, and I quote, "on Thursday nights at 7." Instead, it'll become a natural part of who we are, an outflow of our love for God. If we believers really got to know the spiritually lost people around us, we would talk about faith much more naturally. Sharing the gospel message would become more of a conversation and less of a high-pressure sales pitch. Amen.

## Foundations Lesson #7

### Sharing the Gospel Message, Part 5

Going on to Roman Numeral number four on our outline, I want to cover some great truths about sharing the gospel message. The need is great.

**Jn. 4:35b** [Jesus speaking] I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.

As Jesus was making this statement, the people of the town of Sychar were coming to meet him. The harvest he was talking about was spiritual, not physical. We can't be deceived by our present existence into thinking that all is well. Just because our physical eyes don't give us the information that many, many, are headed for the most hideous, painful, and hopeless eternity imaginable, doesn't mean that it isn't true. Heaven is real. Hell is real. The word of God says so. Multiplied millions are in dire need of being rescued. God stands ready to rescue them, but we have to do our part in letting them know about God's salvation. Our need to share the gospel message is extremely urgent and extremely important.

**Jn. 3:36** Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

There's no time to waste. Scripture tells us that the time to act is now.

**2Co. 6:2** For he says, "in the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

We've read how Jesus said to his followers, "I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields!

They are ripe for harvest.” So where are these fields of labor we're supposed to penetrate with the gospel message? The field of our activity is the world!

**Mt. 13:36-43**

Then he [Jesus] left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”

He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

“As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

I advise and exhort you to ask God to give you his heart and his urgency for the lost. Reaching out to them with God's message of hope may very well mean that you'll be rejected, mistreated, or misunderstood. Reach out anyway. Never forget what you were before God rescued you.

Also, please don't think your efforts in sharing the gospel message have been ineffective unless the person you're talking to actually receives Christ. Jesus said that both the work of sowing (that is, sharing truth that helps people get closer to receiving Christ) and the work of reaping (that is, leading them to receive Christ as Lord and Savior) are vitally important (see John 4:36-38).

One of the great challenges we face in sharing the gospel message is that many unbelievers have developed a vague belief system that maintains that everything will be OK with them because they are a “good person”. If we just let them know that God loves them and has a great plan for their lives, they may understand salvation to be a mere life-enhancement exercise. The danger is that they won't comprehend their great **need** to be rescued from sin. No one is interested in taking medicine if they don't believe they have a disease. For such individuals, it's important to help them come to the conclusion – without our being condemning or judgmental – that they have sinned, that they are in great need of being rescued, and that they do indeed stand guilty before a holy God. The law of God is invaluable to help unbelievers come to that conclusion. Once they see their need, they'll be eager to hear about God's grace and the solution he's offered in Jesus Christ.

Before ending this lesson, I want to encourage you to read the vision given to William Booth. You can find it in the **Additional Resources** section of this web page.

I'd like to close with the poem on the bottom of our outline.

**POEM**

To fallen men, a dying race,  
Make known the gift of gospel grace.  
The world that now in darkness lies,  
O church of Christ, **evangelize!**

Amen. God bless you all.