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IMPLEMENTING AN INCARNATIONAL EVANGELISM
STRATEGY AT BETHANY BAPTIST CHURCH,
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

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IMPLEMENTING AN INCARNATIONAL EVANGELISM
STRATEGY AT BETHANY BAPTIST CHURCH,
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PREFACE

My sincere gratitude belongs to those who have sacrificed in order that I might be able to complete this project. I thank my faculty supervisor, Dr. Timothy Beougher, for his guidance and encouragement throughout the length of the project. I honor the memory of my father and mother, Robert and Brenda Vickery, for training me up in the gospel of God's grace. I thank my parents-in-law, Glenn and Janice Smith, for training up my wife in the gospel and for supporting my efforts in this project with their prayers and finances. I thank my Bethany Baptist Church family for their patience with me, their love for me, and their endurance in the gospel of our Lord. I thank our children, Olivia, Logan, and Clara, for being patient with Daddy when he was busy working. And finally, I thank my wife, Shannon, for her constant help, proofreading, support, wisdom, and encouragement.

May the Lord use this work for the building up of his church and the advance of his blessed, eternal kingdom.

Kenneth Wayne Vickery

Louisville, Kentucky

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Before ascending to heaven, Jesus gave his disciples a commission that defines the mission of his church until the time of his return. That commission is to make disciples of all nations. While this mission of the church involves more than evangelism, evangelism is its starting point. The church must see the lost coming to faith in Christ before we can teach them what Christ commanded, and the lost will come to faith in Christ only as the church is faithful in its witness with clear communication of the gospel. The purpose of this project was to equip the church for that faithful, clear gospel witness.

Context

In 2017, Bethany Baptist Church (BBC) celebrated eighty-five years of ministry in the Highlands area of Louisville. The church's peak membership of more than 1,100 people occurred in the 1970's, during the ministry of the senior pastor with the longest tenure at Bethany—a tenure of twenty-four years. From 1986 to 2010, the church saw five senior pastors come and go, with an average pastoral tenure of less than four years. At the time of my call to serve as senior pastor in 2011, much work had recently been done to ensure that membership rolls were up to date and accurate. The church's membership stood at approximately 230 people, with an average attendance of 105 people in Sunday morning worship services.

In the few years leading up to this project, I had rejoiced to see several areas of growth in the ministry of BBC. The church was more engaged in North American and international missions than ever before in its history. The generous and sacrificial giving of church members had resulted in an increase in budget and designated offerings even

when membership and attendance had declined. The greatest challenge before us was the ongoing decline in membership, resulting from a small number of professions of faith in Christ through baptism. That challenge was the need I intended to address in the planning and implementation of this ministry project.

Strengths and Weaknesses at BBC

Early in my ministry at BBC, I labored to lead the church to be faithful in sending and going to the nations with the gospel. In 2011, we held our first annual International Missions Festival. Each year, we invited missionaries to spend a weekend with our church, informing us of what God is accomplishing through their ministries and encouraging us to be involved. We began to solidify partnerships with missionaries, and our weekly prayer gathering became focused primarily on petitioning God with specific requests provided by those missionaries. It did not take long for those prayer partnerships to blossom into additional involvement.

In 2013, BBC sent the first team of church members to work among the Songhai people of Niger, Africa. Although many current members have been at BBC for decades, no one could recall the church sending an international mission team before. Since 2013, we have sent additional members to work among that people group, developing a deeper partnership with the missionary posted to Niger. We have also begun a partnership with a church planter in Montreal, Quebec, and are sending teams to work alongside that missionary on an annual basis.

We have seen an increase in giving to send missionaries. Our offerings for international missions have increased every year since 2011, and most of those increases have been in double-digit percentages. BBC's 2015 offering for international missions was a fourfold increase over that same offering in 2011. Additionally, the church voted unanimously a 1 percent increase in Cooperative Program giving to Southern Baptist Convention causes from the church budget in each of the last seven fiscal years. I am thankful to God to see our growth in direct and cooperative missions involvement.

In contrast, one of our current weaknesses was a lack of effectiveness in reaching our own local community with the gospel. A handful of our members were active in local gospel ministries and were laboring to witness for Christ in their spheres of influence. I believed the majority of our membership, however, was languishing in a state of apathy when it came to evangelistic outreach. For some, there was no sense of urgency in reaching people for Christ in our community, while for others there was a desire to do so mixed with a feeling of being ill-equipped for the task. Many of our members are above sixty years of age, and they may fear they have no way of finding common ground with the younger generation in order to build relationships. Some have grown accustomed to relying on attractional events as the sole means of outreach, expecting the lost to come to the church rather than the church reaching the lost. Attractional methods that may have been effective a few decades ago will not be as effective in our current culture. As the culture has shifted, we must adapt our methods in order to reach people with the gospel.

A related weakness was the practice of leadership development within our church. There was a need to increase the developing of leaders who would then devote time and energy to intentionally lead others in the process of making disciples. Some who held leadership positions within the church were serving at less than full capacity, and apathy in leadership will only deepen apathy in the greater body. If leaders are to serve the church effectively for the expansion of Christ's kingdom, a full commitment is necessary. There was a need to strengthen leaders to recapture the joy of their calling to invest themselves in the lives of others.

Because of the weakness in leadership development, we also had a weakness in strong mentoring relationships within our church. BBC is a welcoming, friendly congregation, and many people who visit our worship services comment positively on that hospitality. That initial welcoming spirit, however, did not progress toward building deeper relationships where discipleship could take place. The hospitality remained on a

surface level, and it required a deeper hospitality and investment in people's lives to be effective in making disciples equipped to make more disciples.

These weaknesses—the lack of an effective strategy for evangelism, leadership development, and mentoring relationships—were the three most glaring weaknesses in our ministry at BBC. An effective equipping strategy for evangelism was the most pressing weakness and would be the primary focus of this ministry project, but the plan to strengthen that area would involve attention to the other two weaknesses as well.

Rationale

My desire for BBC was to see our members passionately engaged in a strategy for evangelistic outreach in our local context. For four years, our membership and worship service attendance had continued to decline. In 2011, the average number of attendees in Sunday morning worship services was 105 people. In 2015, that average had fallen to 89 people. We had baptized a total of ten people over five years. I was deeply concerned over these statistics, for they indicated that we were not effectively reaching our immediate community for Christ.

One of the primary reasons for this weakness was a lack of clear vision for BBC's strategy of local outreach. I recognized that we must keep moving forward in our vision to reach unreached peoples in far off places. I knew that we must not lose ground but continue gaining ground in our involvement in North American and international church planting. But I also knew that we must have an equally clear strategy for reaching our own city for Christ, and our people must embrace that strategy and be equipped to engage in it. Indeed, our experiences in missions farther away could be of great help to us in local evangelism.

Since another weakness at BBC was a lack of developing leaders, I selected a group of people who were recognized as church leaders to embark on the journey of this project. Due to the size of our congregation, I originally planned for this group to consist of six to twelve church leaders who would commit to embrace the project and see it

through to completion. As the project unfolded, however, I revised the plan to include a larger group of church members who expressed a desire to participate in the training. The project itself focused on an evangelism strategy, but the process equipped leaders to take the strategy and expand it throughout the church. I began with an assessment of the participants' understanding of evangelism and their current practice of it in their spheres of influence. This assessment tool served to clarify how often these leaders were sharing their faith and the methods with which they were doing so.

I then developed a curriculum that drew from the evangelistic methods of four primary sources: Jesus in his earthly ministry, Paul in his missionary labors, the historical corporate witness of the church, and cross-cultural missionaries in a modern context. This curriculum presented evangelism as the incarnational witness of those sent by God into the world, with the ultimate example being his Incarnate Son. Each of these sources showed the necessity of our sacrificial investment in the lives of the lost for the glory of God.

One of the concerns I had heard voiced in our congregation was that our community is hardened and inoculated to the gospel. My suspicion, however, was that many in our community may only be hardened and inoculated to an outdated method of communicating the gospel. The responsibility is ours to adapt our methods in order to clearly communicate the gospel in our context, and the Holy Spirit will empower us to do so. This adaptation will require sacrifice from us, but this comes as no surprise when we follow Him who made the supreme sacrifice for our salvation. As we studied Christ's methods, we considered foremost how he obediently identified with the sinful creatures he came to save. In his ministry, Christ probed people's beliefs and understandings in order to expose the weaknesses of their worldviews. He served them and ministered to their needs. And he courageously spoke the truth of himself to them.

In Paul's ministry, we considered his imitation of Christ's ministry. As the love of the Father sent his Son into the world, the love of Christ compelled Paul as his

ambassador. That same love compels Christ's ambassadors today. Paul adapted his methods in accord with the knowledge bank of truth possessed by his hearers. He did not simply unload a quick, memorized speech of the reality of universal sin and the one and only Savior from it, but he began where his hearers were in their beliefs and guided them toward the truth. Paul personally identified with people so that by all possible means he might save some with the gospel of Christ.

In the historical witness of the church, we examined this incarnational witness in a people who suffered for the sake of the gospel's proclamation and bore evidence of the power of the gospel by their love and unity. In historical examples and from our own experiences with cross-cultural missionaries in both Montreal and Niger, we considered the emulation of Christ and Paul. Missionaries sacrifice and strive to learn about the people they seek to reach. They intentionally labor within cultural expectations in order to identify with the people. They minister to the communities of their mission field in order to meet needs and show love. The primary intent of the curriculum was to show that we must follow these same incarnational methods in our own culture within the city of Louisville, Kentucky.

First, there is the reality that so many people from vastly different cultures now reside in our community—people from cultures around the globe. If we are going to reach them, we must do the sacrificial work of identifying with them, understanding their worldview, ministering to their needs, and guiding them to Christ. Second, we must do the same even with those of our own native culture. As we seek to reach people of our own culture, we must think like missionaries in a cross-cultural context and adapt our methods accordingly. We may not be required to learn a new language, but the beliefs and worldviews we will encounter in our own community will be just as foreign to us as are those we encounter in the deserts of northern Africa or the metros of eastern Canada. To reach our fellow Louisvillians, we must be incarnational evangelists, investing the time and energy to serve our neighbors and clearly communicate the gospel to them.

After completing the curriculum, I used it to equip the church leaders in the evangelism strategy. The primary aim in teaching the curriculum was to facilitate the faithful practice of incarnational evangelism among the leaders of BBC. The final session of the curriculum, however, demonstrated the practice of equipping others in the strategy as well. Jesus equipped his apostles; Paul equipped the churches he planted and their leaders; and cross-cultural missionaries equip new believers to make disciples. The strategy begins with the leaders, but it must not end there. The leaders must lead by setting an example before others and by mentoring others to be incarnational evangelists. I designed the curriculum to be a concise, five-session plan that could easily be used by the leaders to equip others in the church. This strategy was designed to help church leaders encourage one another to truly lead and to expand the practice of evangelism throughout the entire congregation.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to design and implement an incarnational evangelism strategy among the members of Bethany Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky.

Goals

The following three goals were necessary to determine the progress and completion of this ministry project. These goals reflect a method of equipping leaders within the church to lead fellow church members into a lifestyle of incarnational evangelism.

1. The first goal was to assess the current understanding and practice of evangelism among a pastor-selected group of leaders at BBC.
2. The second goal was to develop a five-session curriculum that would equip church members for incarnational evangelism.
3. The third goal was to utilize the curriculum to equip the group of leaders for incarnational evangelism.

Included within each of these goals was the research methodology necessary to indicate the means of measurement, the benchmark of success, and the instrumentation used. This methodology served to equip the leaders of the church for faithful evangelism. In addition, it provided leaders a tool to use in mentoring other church members in the practice of evangelism.

Research Methodology

The first goal of this ministry project was to assess the current understanding and practice of evangelism among a pastor-selected group of leaders at BBC. This goal was measured by administering an Evangelism Practices Inventory (EPI) to a group of leaders in the church.¹ The goal was considered successfully met when the leaders completed the EPI and the inventory had been analyzed yielding a clearer picture of their current practice of evangelism.²

The second goal of this ministry project was to develop a five-session curriculum that would equip church members for incarnational evangelism. The curriculum analyzed methods of evangelism practiced by Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul, and modern cross-cultural missionaries, along with the historical corporate witness of the church, to show the necessary components of an effective incarnational witness. This goal was measured by an expert panel who utilized a rubric to evaluate biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.³ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the sufficient level.

¹See appendix 1.

²All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

³See appendix 2. The expert panel included four local pastors of varied age and experience. One of the pastors also serves as a seminary professor who teaches regularly on the subject of personal evangelism.

The third goal of this ministry project was to utilize the curriculum to equip the group of leaders for incarnational evangelism. This goal was measured by administering the EPI again to the leaders who completed it prior to being equipped with the curriculum. The goal was considered successfully met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-study EPI results.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms were used in the ministry project:

Evangelism. Evangelism is clearly and compassionately communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, with an aim to persuade unbelievers to repent of sin and put their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. This project is in agreement with J. I. Packer when he writes that evangelism “is an act of communication with a view to conversion.”⁴ Evangelism necessarily entails the communication of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost with an aim to persuade; without the communication of that gospel, evangelism has not taken place.

Incarnational evangelism. Incarnational evangelism can be briefly defined as sacrificial service to and intentional identification with unbelievers for the purpose of a clear, compassionate communication of the gospel.⁵ Though not a one-to-one

⁴J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1961), 85. In defining evangelism, Alvin Reid argues that “understanding the basics of evangelism begins with, and never moves past, the Word of God.” Alvin L. Reid, *Introduction to Evangelism* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 1998), 9. Reid then presents biblical terms for what it means to evangelize. Those terms include “communicate good news, proclaim as a herald, bear witness, and make disciples.” Reid states, “The main part of the word *evangelism* is the English term *angel*, a messenger. So to evangelize is to tell a good message.”

⁵To expand that definition, incarnational evangelism involves the investment of time and energy to engage unbelievers and seek to discern their beliefs and views of life in order to speak the gospel to them in a way they can understand. It involves acts of service for others as visible signs of the gospel proclaimed. It involves intentional love through actions accompanying intentional love through the communicated word of the gospel. Incarnational evangelism, therefore, is a nuanced definition of what evangelism should involve: paying the cost of intentionally loving the lost with the gospel of Christ. David Wheeler states, “For a Christian to live an incarnational lifestyle is to be like Jesus in identifying with lost people and humbly serving them.” Dave Earley and David Wheeler, *Evangelism Is...: How to Share Jesus with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville: B&H Academic Publishing, 2010), 214.

comparison, incarnational evangelism is founded upon the incarnation of the Son of God and looks to the methods of the Evangelist Extraordinaire, Jesus Christ, as the supreme model. Will McRaney writes, “We are not dump trucks containing the gospel. We do not just back up to people and dump our load. We are to communicate as effectively as possible, checking for understanding and commitment along the way.”⁶

The gospel. The gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God in human flesh, died on the cross for the sin of mankind, was buried, and rose from the dead to secure salvation for all who will repent of sin and trust in him (John 3:16-17, 1 Cor 15:3-11). It is the message of the gospel that the Holy Spirit empowers to save the lost (Rom 1:16), therefore a grasp of the fundamental news of the gospel is essential for the practice of evangelism. Will McRaney rightly argues, “Without a clear understanding of the message, it will be almost impossible for us to encode a message that the lost person can receive.”⁷

Three limitations applied to this project. First, the accuracy of the EPI was dependent upon the willingness of the participants to be honest about their practice of evangelism both before and after the equipping process. To mitigate this limitation, the EPI was completed using a Personal Identification Number (PIN) chosen by the participant to be used throughout the length of the project. Utilizing a PIN ensured anonymity in the EPI survey process. Second, the effectiveness of the equipping process was limited to the commitment of each participant to attend all equipping sessions. Unless every participant attended all five sessions, it would be difficult to measure the benefit of instruction with the curriculum. To mitigate this limitation, only those church leaders who would commit to full attendance were included as participants, and the

⁶Will McRaney Jr., *The Art of Personal Evangelism: Sharing Jesus in a Changing Culture* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2003), 100.

⁷Ibid., 64. McRaney continues, “Becoming increasingly prepared with the essentials, we will be more prepared to answer about the hope that is within us and defend the faith when people ask questions and challenge the message.”

equipping sessions were scheduled at a time convenient for all participants. Third, the project was limited to short-term results concerning the practice of evangelism among the participating church leaders. Although the curriculum was written to facilitate those leaders mentoring others within the church for evangelism, that desired outcome is a long-term effect that is beyond the scope of this project's measurements.

One delimitation was placed on the project. The project was confined to a timeframe of twenty-two weeks. This length of time was adequate to prepare and teach the five-week equipping sessions, allow for six weeks of post-equipping activity in the participant's lives, and conduct a post-equipping EPI to measure any resulting change in evangelistic practice.

Conclusion

Every Christian has the responsibility and privilege to be a faithful witness to the identity of Jesus Christ as the one Savior and Lord. That witness necessarily involves clear, compassionate communication of the gospel to those who have not put their faith in Christ, and it calls for sacrifice on the part of the gospel messengers. The following chapters present a means to equip church members for that clear, compassionate, sacrificial communication of the gospel. Chapter 2 will provide the biblical and theological foundations for equipping the church for incarnational evangelism.

CHAPTER 2
THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR
INCARNATIONAL EVANGELISM

Introduction

The thesis of this chapter is that as in his incarnation Christ was sent into the world to save the lost, Christians are sent by Christ into the world to be incarnational proclaimers of his saving message. Three New Testament passages will be considered: the account of Christ's commission to his disciples in John's Gospel, Paul's description of believers' ministry of reconciliation in his second letter to the Corinthian church, and Paul's surrender of rights and freedoms in order to serve others with the gospel in his first letter to the Corinthians.

**The Link between Christ's Incarnation and his
Commission to his Disciples (John 20:19-23)**

John 20:19-23 provides the account of one of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to his disciples and his commissioning of them. Among the passages in the Gospels and the book of Acts that report the Great Commission, John records that Jesus signaled an inseparable link between his mission in the incarnation and his disciples' mandate in the Great Commission.¹ Other Great Commission passages provide specific aspects of the Great Commission, including the work to be accomplished (proclaim the gospel, make disciples by baptizing them and teaching them Jesus' commands, being witnesses for Jesus) and the scope of that work (the whole creation, all nations, to the end of the earth). It is John, however, who records that Jesus said to his disciples, "As the

¹The passages that are commonly understood to report Christ's Great Commission to his disciples are Matt 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16, Luke 24:44-49, John 20:19-23, and Acts 1:8.

Father has sent me, even so I am sending you,” signaling the link between his mission and that of his followers.² To understand the nature of that link is important for the church to faithfully fulfill the Great Commission Jesus gave.

The Position of Peace and Joy

The link between Christ’s mission and the commission of his disciples into the world begins with an understanding of the position of those he sends. The position of Christ’s commissioned is one involving a fear-conquering joy in the knowledge of the One who has completed the work of purchasing for them peace with God. Fearing the Jews who had plotted to crucify Jesus, the disciples had sequestered themselves behind locked doors, but the risen Christ appeared there among them. John reports that Jesus said, “Peace be with you,” words that he spoke again immediately prior to the commissioning and again in another appearance to his disciples eight days later (John 20:26). John reports further that upon seeing the evidence of his passion in his hands and side, the disciples were overjoyed to see the Lord.

The peace greeting was common among Jewish people. D. A. Carson asserts though that the repetition of it would have sparked among the disciples a recollection of Jesus’ pre-crucifixion promise to bring them the “unqualified well-being” the greeting expressed; their joy came from being face-to-face with the reality that “the risen Lord is none other than the crucified sacrifice.”³ George Beasley-Murray comments, “His ‘Shalom!’ on Easter evening is the complement of ‘It is finished’ on the cross, for the peace of reconciliation and life from God is now imparted.”⁴ Gerald Borchert provides this happy conclusion:

²All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (2007) unless otherwise noted.

³D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 647.

⁴George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 379.

These verses are an assertion that the disciples' mourning for Jesus and 'fear of the Jews' gave way to the surprising revelation that the very Jesus who had been crucified was indeed alive and standing in their presence. And just as he promised before his crucifixion, their weeping and mourning turned to an effervescent experience of joy.⁵

The disciples' joy was a product of their seeing and hearing proof that Jesus had accomplished his mission. All that he had promised concerning his death and resurrection, he had fulfilled.

That Jesus was sent into the world by the Father is one of the major emphases of John's Gospel, and the link between Jesus' mission and the commissioning of his disciples begins with the announcement that Jesus had accomplished what the Father sent him to do. On his cross, Christ has brought peace between Holy God and sinful man, and those Christ sends are those who have experienced the joy of entering that peace. The way for the guilty to be reconciled with the Holy has been accomplished. Hearing with faith "Peace be with you" from the Lord Jesus Christ is the assurance of one's right standing before God through his perfect, sufficient sacrifice. The peace he gives brings the assurance of God's steadfast love and constant care in their commission. Fear of man will not hold sway over those who exist in this position of peace and joy.

The Sent Becomes the Sender

Having pronounced peace upon his disciples, Jesus then commissioned them. They had seen the evidence of his mission accomplished in his hands and side, and he now told them, "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." Leon Morris writes, "It is only because he has thus accomplished his mission, and indeed precisely because he has accomplished it, that they are sent into the world."⁶ This commission hearkens back to Jesus' prayer for his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion; there he

⁵Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12-21*, The New American Commentary, vol. 25B (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2002), 306.

⁶Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, rev. ed. The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 747.

identified the locale and scope of their mission when he said that he had sent them into the world (John 17:18). Andreas Köstenberger states, “In a momentous development, the Sent One (e.g., 9:7) has now become the Sender of his disciples, and his sending of them is predicated on the way in which the Father has sent Jesus.”⁷ The link between the Father sending the Son into the world and the Son sending his disciples into the world is established. Carson notes that the verbs used in the commission passage—as the Father has ἀπέσταλκέν (sent) me, even so I am πέμπο (sending) you—are a typical style variance incorporated by John, and “nothing should be made of the change, as if the clue to the verse lay in two kinds of ‘sending.’”⁸ Indeed, Jesus stresses the similarity of his mission and the disciples’ commission with the expression “just as” (καθώς). Morris contends that the use of καθώς heightens the improbability of any change in meaning between the “sending” verb forms used in the verse—“It is the resemblance that occupies attention.”⁹ Craig Keener summarizes:

Whereas the sending of the Son is the heart of the Fourth Gospel’s plot, its conclusion is open-ended, spilling into the story of the disciples. Thus the church’s mission is, for John’s theology, to carry on Jesus’ mission (14:12; 17:18). Because Jesus was sending ‘just as’ (καθώς) the Father sent him (20:21), the disciples would carry on Jesus’ mission, including not only signs pointing to Jesus (14:12) but also witness (15:27) through which the Spirit would continue Jesus’ presence and work (16:7-11).¹⁰

The disciples’ mission in the world—and by extension the church’s mission in the world—is inseparably linked to Jesus’ own.

The foundational work of Christ’s mission, then, has been completed at the cross, yet his mission continues through the work of his disciples whom he has sent into

⁷Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters: The Word, the Christ, the Son of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 259.

⁸Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 648.

⁹Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, 746.

¹⁰Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 2:1204.

the world. Carson argues that the disciples' commission is not a replacement of Jesus now that he has ascended to the Father, nor do they "take over Jesus' mission," rather "his mission continues and is effective in their ministry (14:12-14)."¹¹ The link between the Father sending the Son and the Son sending his disciples indicates that Jesus' "disciples are drawn into the unity and mission of Father and Son."¹² The astounding revelation in the Great Commission is that God has chosen to involve redeemed human beings in his mission of salvation in the world. But that mission has never, will never, and could never depend upon the strength and wisdom of man; the mission will continue to be fulfilled by the power of Jesus' continued presence with his sent disciples, in the third Person of the Godhead.

Having spoken his commission, Jesus "breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit,'" thus assuring his disciples of the coming, promised Holy Spirit who would empower them for the task before them (v. 22).¹³ The Holy Spirit brings new life (John 3:5), and he would be the power behind Great Commission fulfillment (Acts 1:8). Köstenberger shows the connection between God's life-giving breath on Adam at creation (Gen 2:7) and Jesus' assurance of the coming Spirit for his disciples. Köstenberger writes, "Here, at the occasion of the commissioning of his disciples, Jesus constitutes them as the new messianic community in anticipation of the outpouring of the Spirit subsequent to his ascension."¹⁴ Borchert also makes this connection to the breath of God at creation and states that Jesus "breathed into his

¹¹Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 649.

¹²Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 573.

¹³I interpret this verse to be a sign and promise of the Spirit to come on the Day of Pentecost rather than John's record of the Pentecost event (see Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 649-55, and Köstenberger, *John*, 574-75). For an interpretation that sees John telescoping the coming of the Spirit, without concern for precise chronology, see Beasley-Murray, *John*, 380-82, and Borchert, *John 12-21*, 307-9. The differing interpretations do not affect the argument of this paper, as the primary point made here is that the Holy Spirit would provide the power for the disciples to fulfill their commission.

¹⁴Köstenberger, *John*, 575.

followers the new breath and let the Spirit loose among his followers so that they might be empowered to do his will.”¹⁵ The Great Commission is the ongoing mission of God to bring salvation to humanity. In the incarnation of the Son of God, the Father sent Jesus into the world to accomplish that salvation, and in the Great Commission, Jesus sent his disciples into the world, quickened and empowered by his Spirit, to extend that salvation to the end of the earth.

Whereas the Holy Spirit is the power behind the Great Commission, the good news of salvation accomplished by Jesus is the content of the Great Commission. The essence of the commission—the essence of Jesus sending his disciples into the world—is to proclaim the gospel. Jesus revealed this essence when he said to his disciples, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld (v. 23). In the context of the commissioning, this extending or withholding forgiveness of sins is dependent upon the gospel message proclaimed by the disciples as they evangelize the world.

God alone has the authority to forgive sins, and he does so only through a person’s faith in Jesus Christ, whom he sent into the world to die and rise again for our salvation. As the risen Christ sends his disciples into the world, empowered by his Spirit, to spread that message, those who respond to the gospel with repentance and faith stand forgiven, and those who reject the gospel stand unforgiven. Thus, Jesus continues his mission of salvation through his Spirit-powered disciples’ commission. Beasley-Murray maintains that, in the context of the risen Lord’s commission and giving of the Spirit, there is a “double context of the continuance of the mission of Jesus through his disciples in the world, and the continuance of that mission through the Holy Spirit to the world in and with the disciples.”¹⁶ He writes,

¹⁵Borchert, *John 12-21*, 309.

¹⁶Beasley-Murray, *John*, 383.

With the double context, there is a double aspect of the mission: that of declaring salvation and judgment. The Gospel makes it plain that Jesus was sent primarily to reveal God and to redeem mankind: “God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (3:17). But the rejection of the revelation and of the Revealer inevitably entails a negative judgment upon the rejectors.¹⁷

Keener argues that with the indwelling Spirit’s presence and power, the disciples would be enabled to continue Christ’s work, and as they did so, “the disciples announce both righteousness and judgment based on people’s response to Christ.”¹⁸ The essence of the disciples’ commissioning entails the relay of the gospel, which exposes the great divide between those who stand forgiven by God and those who persist under his condemnation (John 3:18).

In summary, the risen Jesus appeared to his disciples, as evidence of his accomplished work that has produced peace between God and man. He then sent them into the world, as the Father had sent him into the world. The risen Christ would continue his saving work through his disciples. Jesus gave assurance of the promised Spirit’s presence and power to fulfill the commission he gave them, to proclaim the gospel through which mankind obtains forgiveness of sin. Since the sending of the disciples is predicated on the Father sending the Son, there are implications about how Jesus’ disciples will serve to fulfill the Great Commission.

Implications from the Link between the Incarnation and the Great Commission

D. A. Carson contends that in the context of John’s writings, the primary implication of the link between the incarnation of Christ and the Great Commission of Christ’s disciples is that of obedience. The emphasis of John’s Gospel on the sending of the Son by the Father is centered upon the Son’s obedience, and the lives of those who follow Jesus are to be marked by obedience as well (John 15:9-10). To quote Carson at

¹⁷Beasley-Murray, *John*, 383.

¹⁸Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1206.

length,

Jesus was sent by his Father into the world (3:17) by means of the incarnation (1:14) with the end of saving the world (1:29); now that Jesus' disciples no longer belong to the world (15:19), they must also be sent back into the world (20:21) in order to bear witness, along with the Paraclete (15:26-27) – though obviously there is no mention of incarnation along the lines of 1:14, and any parallel must be entirely derivative. In so far as Jesus was entirely obedient to and dependent upon his Father, who sealed and sanctified him and poured out the Spirit upon him without limit (1:32; 3:34; 4:34; 5:19; 6:27; 10:36; 17:4), so far also does he constitute the definitive model for his disciples: they have become children of God (1:12-13; 3:3, 5; 20:17), the Spirit has been promised to them (chs. 14 – 16) and will soon be imparted to them, they have been sanctified by Christ and will be sanctified by God's Word (17:17) as they grow in unqualified obedience to and dependence upon their Lord.¹⁹

The church's evangelistic work in the Great Commission then has a paradigm of obedience to imitate, and that paradigm is the obedience of Jesus in his incarnation.

The model that Jesus provided in his incarnation was a model of obedience, and his obedience involved the servanthood of his incarnation and the agony of his cross. His obedience involved his identifying with, serving, and giving his life for those he came to save (Phil 2:7-8). His obedience involved the endurance of suffering for the joy of saving for the world (Heb 12:2). His obedience involved his coming "not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45). Jesus vividly displayed this truth to his disciples as he washed their feet on the night before his crucifixion, saying, "For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you" (John 13:15).

Since they have been sent by Jesus as the Father has sent the Son, the implications for disciples is that Great Commission obedience will involve the foregoing of self-interests for the interests of others (Phil 2:4). Gregory the Great wrote,

The Father sent his Son, appointing him to become a human person for the redemption of the human race. He willed him to come into the world to suffer—and yet he loved his Son whom he sent to suffer. The Lord is sending his chosen apostles into the world, not to the world's joys but to suffer as he himself was sent. Therefore as the Son is loved by the Father and yet is sent to suffer, so also the

¹⁹Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 648-49.

disciples are loved by the Lord, who nevertheless sends them into the world to suffer.²⁰

To reach the world with his saving gospel will require the obedience of service toward others and the sacrifice of the disciples' lives so that others might receive salvation. Christ has saved and set an example for his disciples, and his call involves denying one's self, taking up one's cross and following him (Matt 16:24). Fulfilling the Great Commission will involve suffering and sacrifice in the lives of those Jesus has sent into the world, as the Father has sent Jesus into the world.

Christ's Ambassadors of Reconciliation, Compelled by His Love (2 Cor 5:11-21)

Second Corinthians 5:11-21 contains a defense of Paul's apostolic ministry to the church at Corinth. In that defense, Paul articulates the nature of believers in Christ as a people who have been radically changed by the gospel and then sent into the world as ambassadors for their Savior, entrusted with his message of reconciliation. Colin Kruse divides the passage in this way: Paul "responds to criticisms of the way he conducts his ministry (5:11-15), and then spells out the theological basis upon which reconciliation with God rests (5:16-21)."²¹ The passage provides further insight into the nature of the Great Commission and the church's faithful obedience in fulfilling it.

The Fear of the Lord

A healthy fear of God motivated Paul in his evangelistic ministry (v. 11). Kruse notes that Paul's persuading others out of fear of the Lord could be interpreted in two ways. The first interpretation is that Paul is motivated to *diligence* in persuading others to the obedience of faith in the gospel, since he knows that all of his life and

²⁰Joel C. Elowski, *John 11-21*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament, vol. 4B (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2007), 360.

²¹Colin G. Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2015), 162.

ministry will ultimately be judged by the Lord. Paul thus, “sought to remove intellectual barriers, to overcome prejudice and ignorance and to convince by argument, testimony and the straightforward proclamation of the gospel.”²²

The second interpretation has to do with *maintaining pure methods* in the ministry of evangelism, refraining from any form of manipulation or trickery and relying on the clear communication of truth.²³ This second interpretation is likely the better one. Paul acknowledges that God knows not only his methods but the heart-motivations behind them, and Paul carries out his ministry with integrity because of that awareness. Paul’s aim is certainly to persuade others but only with the purely-spoken gospel. He would make the effort to connect with his hearers, identify their false beliefs, and present a persuasive argument with the effectively-communicated truth of Christ crucified and risen again. Mark Seifrid concludes, “The fear of the Lord includes the recognition that he must be manifest before Christ in order to be judged for what he does and says. The Corinthians have no reasons to hold persuasion such as this in suspicion.”²⁴ Christians are to labor in the Great Commission with integrity and no hint of manipulation. Such integrity shaped Paul’s ministry. Thus, Paul does not commend himself to the Corinthians but points them to the only valid reason to boast in his ministry—not in Paul himself but in God’s power at work in and through him (vv. 12-13). Paul’s goal was the clear communication of the gospel for the salvation of others—his gospel ministry was “for God and God’s purposes with the Corinthians.”²⁵ Ralph Martin maintains, “He has done nothing to push himself forward except to be a minister of the gospel; rather, he is

²²Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 163.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴Mark A. Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014), 240.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 242.

intent on seeking to please God and to serve his fellows.”²⁶

The Love of Christ

Paul writes, “For the love of Christ controls us . . .” (v. 14). David Garland argues the “for” (γάρ) provides the reason for what the Apostle has written in 5:11-13. Paul is driven to fulfill his ministry in fear of the Lord because of the love of the Lord that controls him. Garland asks and answers, “What drives Paul to dedicate himself to God and to others? Paul expands on his motives with a doctrinal exposition of what Christ’s death means for his own life and ministry.”²⁷ The word, συνέχει, translated “controlled” in the ESV, can also be translated as constrained or compelled. Kruse asserts that the meaning of the word is “pressure applied not so much to control as to cause action. It is motivational rather than directional force.”²⁸ The love of Jesus is what compelled Paul, motivating him to faithfully minister the gospel to others with utmost integrity.

The love of Christ of which Paul speaks can be interpreted as the objective genitive (Paul’s love for Christ) or the subjective genitive (Christ’s love for sinners, displayed at the cross). While Paul’s love for Christ was surely a motivating factor, the ensuing verses indicate that it was Christ’s redeeming love that was the compelling force in Paul’s evangelistic ministry. Murray Harris states, “No one doubts that believers’ love for Christ motivates their actions, but here Paul is concentrating on an earlier stage of motivation, namely the love shown by Christ in dying for humankind.”²⁹ It was the love

²⁶Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 40, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 285.

²⁷David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, The New American Commentary, vol. 29 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 277.

²⁸Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 165.

²⁹Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 419.

of Jesus, demonstrated in his sin-bearing death on the cross, that motivated Paul to obedient Great Commission fulfillment. Christ's love compelled him to tell the world of that love. Paul then shows that this motivating love extends to all believers: Christ "died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (v. 15).

The compelling love of Jesus results in the believer laying down his life in gospel service to the world for Jesus' sake. Mark Seifrid claims that Paul does not imply that obedience is as an offering of love in response to Christ's love, but it is Christ's love at work in the believer. He writes,

A life in service to Christ is nothing other than the ongoing reception of Christ's gift of himself. It does not constitute a 'return gift,' which would be nothing other than a fresh self-assertion, an isolation of one's self and life from Christ. Knowingly or unknowingly, we would thereby seek to pay off our debt and to bring Christ under obligation to us. Gifts are given to be received, not to be repaid. They thereby establish and define relationships. In the presence of Christ, we may happily remain beggars.³⁰

Christ's love is the drive of the Great Commission, the controlling force of the church's obedience in that commission.

As a result of Christ's compelling love, the believer looks upon no other human being from the viewpoint of outward appearances (v. 16). Paul confessed that he had once looked at Jesus himself in a mere fleshly way, but not after his conversion on the Damascus Road (Acts 9). Harris alludes to the fact that two radical changes had taken place in Paul upon his conversion. Paul "now recognized and proclaimed Jesus as Messiah and Lord," and he "now viewed Gentile believers as Abraham's offspring . . . while Jewish unbelievers were in need of salvation in Christ. And these two changes were not unrelated. A new attitude toward Jesus Christ prompts a new outlook on those for whom Christ died."³¹ Paul no longer judged people by worldly, human standards; he

³⁰Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 246.

³¹Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 429-30.

saw people through a spiritual lens, and his objective was to meet the spiritual needs of the people he encountered. The love of Christ brings eternity into sharp focus for the believer so that each human being is rightly seen as a soul destined either for eternal bliss or eternal damnation. Eternal bliss will be entered only by those who have heard the gospel and been persuaded to respond with the obedience of faith. Garland states, “Understanding the full meaning of the cross and resurrection and fully experiencing the Spirit brings an enlightenment that causes Christians to see things and other persons in new ways.”³²

New Creations and Christ’s Ambassadors

Paul’s argument climaxes in the doctrine of what God has accomplished through Christ and what God continues to accomplish through those who are in Christ. Reminiscent of the commissioning in John’s Gospel, God has brought new life and peace—reconciliation between God and man. He has also sent out the reconciled into the world, entrusted them with his message of reconciliation. The message is God’s, as is the power working through its proclamation to bring salvation to the lost.

Anyone who has been united with Christ by faith is a new creature, which implies a radical transformation (v. 17). Garland notes that the noun and verb must be provided in translation, as Paul’s statement is literally, “If anyone is in Christ, *καινη κτίσις*, *a new creation*.”³³ Since elsewhere in his writings, Paul never uses the term “creation” to refer to individuals, Garland asserts that Paul “conceives that Christ’s death and resurrection marks a radical eschatological break between the old age and the new.”³⁴ Seifrid also remarks, “The abruptness of Paul’s wording marks the unqualified and

³²Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 284.

³³Ibid., 286.

³⁴Ibid.

undiminished entrance of the eschaton into the present world.”³⁵

Jesus is making all things new, and those who are united with him by faith are already glad participants in the new creation. Although they live now in the realm of the old world, the believers’ hope is focused upon the full consummation of that new world they have already tasted. Christians are citizens of the kingdom of heaven sent into the world to be preserving salt and radiant light (Matt 5:13-16). Thus, Garland argues also for the individual subjective experience of the new creation, and he suggests that Paul implies the individual when he writes, “if anyone.” Since the old has passed away and the new has come, “the individual’s whole being, value system, and behavior are also changed through conversion.”³⁶ This new creation or creature God has made through reconciliation to himself in Christ produces a radical change at a person’s core, which necessarily changes one’s outlook, values, and conduct. God gives peace; God gives new life. Chrysostom wrote, “We ought to live for Christ not just because we belong to him, not just because he died for us and not just because he rose again on our behalf. We ought to live for him because we have been made into something different. We now have a new life.”³⁷

All of this is accomplished through the suffering death of Christ on the cross, where God “for our sake made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God” (v. 21). George Guthrie attests,

Christ the sinless One, through identification with us, took sin on himself and died, serving as our sin sacrifice. We the unrighteous, through relationship with Christ, take on God’s righteousness, are reconciled to God, and transformed as newly created, new-covenant people in the world. In other words, because of our identification with Christ, we as the new-covenant people of God are in right standing before God and are an expression of God’s righteousness before the

³⁵Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 252.

³⁶Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 287.

³⁷Gerald Bray, *1-2 Corinthians*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999), 249.

world.³⁸

Again, one should remember Jesus' evidence of his passion and the words that formed the bookmarks to the commissioning in John's Gospel: "Peace be with you. Receive the Holy Spirit." Those who have peace and new life in Christ are sent into the world.

The participants in the new creation are thus sent out with a ministry given to them by God—the ministry of reconciliation (v. 18). Seifrid insists that the position and ministry of the apostle are inseparable; "Paul acts out of that which he has received" and "accomplishes in the world only that which has been accomplished for the world by God in Christ."³⁹ The commission is a divinely-planned component of God's work in reconciling the world to himself. The reconciliation has been accomplished at Christ's cross but remains to be applied through the communication and reception of God's entrusted message, the gospel (v. 19). The ministry of reconciliation is therefore centered upon the clear communication of that gospel.

Harris draws four points from Paul's understanding of his ministry of reconciliation. First, the Father is the initiator and the goal of reconciliation. Second, Christ the Son was the agent who accomplished reconciliation. Third, mankind and the entire creation are the objects and beneficiaries of God's work of reconciliation. Fourth, reconciliation is an achieved reality on God's side, but it must be received on man's side. The gospel must be proclaimed and embraced for reconciliation to be applied in the lives of human beings. Harris concludes, "Since these latter two stages—proclamation and receipt—must take place before the two alienated parties, God and human beings, begin to enjoy friendly relations, there is a sense in which reconciliation is an incomplete, ongoing process."⁴⁰ God brings reconciliation through the ministry he has given his new

³⁸George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 315.

³⁹Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 257.

⁴⁰Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 436-38.

creatures. Garland makes a similar argument:

This unit contains three key assertions. (1) God is the driving force behind the redemption of mankind. Reconciliation comes solely at God's initiative. (2) God acted through Christ's death, and Christ alone is the means of reconciliation. (3) God continues to act through those who have been reconciled. They have the privilege and responsibility to share in this great divine enterprise and are to call others to be reconciled to God.⁴¹

God's work of reconciliation is continued through the spoken gospel received. Earlier in this letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote of God's power at work and on display in his gospel, a treasure in jars of clay (2 Cor 4:7). When the good news of Christ's reconciling death is proclaimed, God is present and working with divine power to extend his salvation to the end of the earth (Rom 1:16).

Having been entrusted with the message and given the ministry of reconciliation, believers are sent into the kingdoms of this world as ambassadors (πρεσβεύομεν) for Christ, on his behalf (v. 20). The word πρεσβεύω originally carried the meaning of someone who was older and who had obtained the wisdom and experience that old age brings. In the political realm, it was this type of person who was commissioned to represent a nation and carry its message to foreign entities.⁴² Murray Harris notes, "To be an ambassador in the ancient world (Greek, Roman, or Jewish), as in modern times, involved three things: (1) a commissioning for a special assignment; (2) representing the sender; and (3) exercising the authority of the sender."⁴³

Paul's conviction of his ministry entailed these characteristics. He was commissioned by Christ to the world, represented Christ to the world, and spoke with Christ's authority to the world through the entrusted gospel. Indeed, Paul proclaims that God himself makes his appeal to the world through his ambassadors, and this awareness

⁴¹Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 288-89.

⁴²Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 171.

⁴³Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 445.

results in his impassioned plea for his hearers to be reconciled to God (v. 20). Guthrie states, “Paul has a firm conviction that God speaks his message of reconciliation through him. This conviction serves as the basis for his exhortation”⁴⁴ Seifrid writes, “The apostle thus serves as Christ to the world, without, of course, replacing or supplanting Christ.”⁴⁵ This ambassadorial ministry coincides then with Jesus’ commissioning of this disciples in John. As the Father has sent Jesus, so Jesus sends his disciples, and God continues to carry out his great work of reconciliation in the world.

David Garland refers to the role of suffering in this ministry of reconciliation described by Paul in this passage. He argues that Paul’s use of the word *διακονίαν*, *ministry* of reconciliation, provides an image that “may derive from the humble servant who waits at a table,” and he then links the concept of that service to Christ’s suffering service at the cross.⁴⁶ As Christ has suffered to save us, so Christians are his sent ambassadors to the world to endure suffering and sacrifice for the sake of others’ salvation.

The Surrender of Rights and Freedoms to Serve Others the Gospel (1 Cor 9:19-23)

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul provides an example of how the love of Christ compels the believer to sacrificial service with the goal of saving others through the clear communication of the gospel. Verses 19 through 23 contain the climax of an argument Paul began in the first verse of the chapter. He has argued that as an apostle, he has the right to certain provision from those to whom he ministers (v. 11), but he has given up that right to refrain from placing any “obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ” (v. 12). Thus, at a cost to himself, he has labored so as not to obstruct others from receiving the

⁴⁴Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 311.

⁴⁵Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 259.

⁴⁶Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 290-91.

gospel and obtaining salvation. Paul provides himself as an example to the Corinthian believers, that they too should surrender their rights in order to serve others with the gospel. David Garland notes, “The Corinthians have benefited from his preaching, but they also benefit from his example of self-sacrifice and self-control on behalf of others. He implies that they should imitate him in his all-consuming concern to save others.”⁴⁷

Free to Become a Slave

Beginning the climax of his argument, Paul pronounced his freedom from all, in that he had suffered the cost of making himself financially independent from the people to whom he ministered. His sacrifice had resulted in the absence of obligation on his part to his hearers; he was free from all. Paradoxically, Paul had used that freedom to make himself the slave of his hearers, and his one aim is that his hearers might be won with his gospel (v. 19). Gordon Fee argues that Paul’s making himself a slave is predicated on the example of Christ, who took on the form of a servant of all in order to bring salvation. Fee writes, “Free, in order to become slave/servant to all—this is surely the ultimate expression of truly Christian, because it is truly Christlike, behavior.”⁴⁸ Anthony Thiselton adds, “Paul very subtly but also emphatically presses in what precise sense Christian believers and Christian leaders are free and in what sense voluntary slavery performs a wholesome, even essential, saving purpose in Christ-like obedience and love for the other.”⁴⁹

Paul’s controlling passion was to “win” others to salvation through the clear communication of the gospel. Garland observes that Paul uses the verb κερδήσω (to win,

⁴⁷David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 421.

⁴⁸Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014), 471.

⁴⁹Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 701.

to gain, to derive profit) five times in the passage; the profit Paul derives “comes from spreading the gospel among Jews and Gentiles.”⁵⁰ Whether his hearers were Jews under the law (v. 20) or Gentiles outside the law (v. 21) or weak (v. 22), the “profit” of others’ salvation is what drove Paul to enslave himself to them—to “become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (v. 22). Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner write, “His ultimate concern for the gospel and utter lack of concern for the social prejudices of others could hardly be stated more bluntly than to say that for the sake of the gospel, he, though free, willingly became the slave of all.”⁵¹ Paul’s sacrifice had others’ salvation as its aim, and in this way Paul imitated Christ as he labored in the ministry Christ had entrusted to him. As the Son of God chose not to grasp his equality with God but made himself nothing to save sinners, so Paul chose not to grasp his rights, considering others more important, in order to save them (Phil 2:3-8). Mark Taylor remarks, “Just as God’s folly, the cross, is the power of God unto salvation (1:18) so also is Paul’s enslavement to different classes of men the best possible means for gaining others for Christ.”⁵² The implication for the Corinthians (and future Christians reading this letter) is that the aim of others’ salvation calls for the sacrifice of all those who follow Christ. If anyone claims to be in Christ, his ministry should have “its focus on the priority of reaching others with the gospel message.”⁵³

All Things to All People

In verses 20 through 22, Paul illuminates the way in which he has voluntarily enslaved himself to all. He explains that he has pointedly contextualized his ministry to

⁵⁰Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 429.

⁵¹Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2010), 422.

⁵²Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, The New American Commentary, vol. 28 (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2014), 218.

⁵³Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 423.

different peoples. Paul has chosen to incarnate himself in this way, identifying with various peoples to effectively reach them with the gospel. Characteristically, Paul begins with how he has ministered to his fellow Jews. He became “as a Jew” to the Jews and “as one under the law” to those under the law (v. 20). These two descriptors essentially refer to the same people group, although Mark Taylor suggests that “the Jews” could refer to Jews by ethnic origin and “those under the law” could refer to Jewish proselytes.⁵⁴

Paul’s point is that he became “as” them. He was incarnate and contextual as he identified with the Jewish people. Though Paul knew he was not obligated to keep ceremonial Jewish laws and traditions, he occasionally did so to accommodate the success of his gospel preaching. F. W. Grosheide alludes to Timothy’s circumcision by Paul (Acts 16:3) and the cutting/shaving of hair for vows (Acts 18:18, 21:23-24) as ways in which Paul became “as one under the law.” Grosheide writes, “Certainly, this observance of the law cannot for Paul have been anything more than an accommodation to certain circumstances in order that he might win the Jews and avoid being a stumbling block for his compatriots.”⁵⁵

Paul’s strategy of going first to the synagogues where the Jewish religion was promoted and taught could be added as an example of Paul’s service to them. Garland maintains that his submitting to the discipline of flogging for his gospel preaching in the synagogues was the primary way Paul became “as a Jew.” His preaching Jesus as the Christ would have been considered blasphemy, and Paul accepted the punishment for his doing so, as one under the law. Garland states,

For Paul to submit to this punishment *five times* testifies not only to his mettle but also to his extraordinary sense of obligation to his people. They are his kindred, for

⁵⁴Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 219.

⁵⁵F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1953), 212.

whom he has great sorrow and unceasing anguish and could wish that he were accursed and cut off from Christ if it meant their being saved (Rom. 9:2-4). His identification with Christ so controls his spirit that he would cut himself off from Christ, if he could, to save his people.⁵⁶ (Emphasis in the original)

Paul's embrace of the commission Christ had given him was demonstrated in his own suffering service for the salvation of his hearers. As in the 2 Corinthians 5 passage, the love of Christ compelled him to suffer for the sake of the gospel's proclamation and reception.

Turning to the next category of people, Paul then refers to how he had become a slave to the Gentiles; to those outside the law, he became as one outside the law (*ἀνομος*) with the aim of winning them with the gospel (v. 21). Paul does not provide specific examples of how he did so, but surely one of the ways would include his work to understand their view of the world as those with no connection to God's written revelation, as Paul did in Athens (Acts 17:19-34). Another way Paul became as one outside the law lay in his opposition against "any effort to impose Jewish legal requirements, such as circumcision, as a component of conversion to Christ (Acts 15, Galatians)."⁵⁷ Paul knew that salvation is obtained only through faith in Christ, and he engaged the Gentiles in such a way that he placed no barrier to their hearing that gospel message and receiving it.

Paul is careful, however, to show that his becoming as *ἀνομος* did not mean that he was willing to engage in sinful practices in an effort to win those outside the law. He acknowledged that he was not himself outside the law of God but under the law of Christ (v. 22). What is this law of Christ? Garland suggests, "It could denote Christ's pattern of sacrificial living for others that has become Paul's norm," a lifestyle Paul will address further in the letter when he writes, "Let no one seek his own good, but the good

⁵⁶Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 430.

⁵⁷Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 220.

of his neighbor” (10:24).⁵⁸ Since ἀνομοῦς could be understood as ungodly, lawless living, Paul carefully identified his standing under the ethical principles of the law of his Creator, a law that Christ summarized with the two great commandments of love for God and love for fellow man. Paul did not contextualize the gospel to Gentiles with sinful living; rather he served them the gospel with self-sacrificial engagement.

The “weak” is the final category Paul lists in the explanation of his enslavement to all: “To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak” (v. 22). Both Garland and Taylor note that Paul breaks the grammatical pattern in this final category (not that he *became as weak*, but that he *became weak*), and Garland argues the unlikelihood that this is a simple style variance.⁵⁹ Paul became weak to win the weak. Garland acknowledges that Paul could be referring to the weak believers whom he served in order to strengthen them so they would not fall away—the strong in the faith identifying with the weak in the faith in order to keep them from straying. This interpretation fits well within the context of what Paul writes about idol food elsewhere in the letter. The immediate context of this passage, however, suggests a different interpretation. That context has to do with winning the lost to Christ, and Garland contends that these are the weak to whom Paul refers. Garland writes,

The gospel is the story of the Son of God taking on weakness for the sake of humankind, and Paul asserts that he follows this same divine paradigm (2 Cor. 13:4; cf. 2 Cor. 8:9; 6:10). This is why he boasts in his weakness (2 Cor. 11:30; 12:5, 9-10; 13:9), because God’s power is made perfect in weakness and is more effective in winning others to the gospel of Christ’s cross.⁶⁰

Following Christ’s footsteps, Paul’s ministry involved an intentional and sacrificial identification with those he sought to reach; he became weak to win the weak.

The apostle reaches the zenith statement of his argument when he writes, “I

⁵⁸Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 432.

⁵⁹Ibid., 432-33.

⁶⁰Ibid., 434.

have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (v. 22). His passion to see the lost come to faith in Christ resulted in deep sacrifice on his part, though he also refused to be lax in personal holiness or in the essence of the gospel message. He strove to identify with the people to whom Christ had sent him and to tailor his presentation of the gospel for their understanding. Paul lived free in the gospel, yet he enslaved himself to others so that they might share in its blessings (v. 23). Ambrose offered this beautiful summary of Christ’s and Paul’s ministries:

He who did not think it robbery to be equal with God took the nature of a slave. He became all things to all men to bring salvation to all. Paul, an imitator of him, lived as if outside the law while remaining accountable to the law. He spent his life for the advantage of those he wished to win. He willingly became weak for the weak in order to strengthen them. He ran the race to overtake them.⁶¹

Knowing himself to be sent on an enterprise of divine compassion, Paul showed himself faithful to follow in his Lord’s footsteps.

Conclusion

In his incarnation, the Son of God became man, identifying with the sinful race he came to save. Jesus revealed God to us in his actions, his words, and most clearly in his sacrificial death on the cross for our sins. He suffered for our salvation. In his final words to his disciples, Jesus commissioned them and, by extension, the future disciples who would believe through their message. The three passages reviewed in this chapter do not contain all that could be said about that Great Commission. For example, this chapter has focused much on the evangelism component of the commission and little on the instruction component in which we are to teach all that Jesus commanded.

What these three texts reveal, however, is that the commissioning Jesus gave to his disciples requires the church’s engagement in an evangelistic ministry that is linked to Christ’s own—an incarnational evangelism in which new creations are sent into the old,

⁶¹Bray, *1-2 Corinthians*, 87.

sin-diseased world to sacrificially engage others with the gospel. Christians are called to suffer as slaves to all in order that others might too be saved. In this ministry, God's great work of salvation is extended to the end of the earth. The next chapter will provide theoretical, historical, and practical issues related to equipping the church for such incarnational evangelism.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL, HISTORICAL, AND PRACTICAL
ISSUES RELATED TO INCARNATIONAL
EVANGELISM

Introduction

The thesis of this chapter is that the church's mandate for incarnational evangelism is seen foremost in the actions of Christ and Paul's imitation of him and demonstrated in the corporate witness of the church and the labor of cross-cultural missionaries. An examination of Jesus' ministry and Paul's subsequent imitation of Christ will demonstrate a pattern of suffering service for others in order to clearly communicate the message of salvation. The historical witness of the church will demonstrate a pattern of sacrificial compassion that makes visible the gospel message proclaimed. Finally, the witness of cross-cultural missionaries will demonstrate a pattern of patient and sacrificial labor to engage people groups with the gospel.

The Ministry of Christ and Paul's Imitation of Christ

Jesus of Nazareth is the premier evangelist and the supreme example in the task of proclaiming the good news of salvation to the world. In his ministry, we see the nature of perfect obedience to the Father who sent him. The love of God motivated his coming into the world and the flawless fulfillment of the mission he came to accomplish. All that Jesus said and did was in dependence upon the Father's will and the power of the Holy Spirit. His ministry was a mission of immeasurable love—the love of the Triune God that reaches out to the rebellious human race with salvation wrought by selfless, sacrificial service.

Jesus is also the unique evangelist. In a crucial sense, his ministry cannot be

imitated or duplicated, for Jesus did not come only to proclaim the good news of salvation; Jesus *is* the good news of salvation. He did not come merely to tell sinners the way to God but to be the way to God for sinners. Jesus of Nazareth is the unique evangelist because he is both the messenger and the message. Only he could provide the ultimate suffering service of the cross. Only the guiltless and righteous could satisfy the wrath of God so that the guilty might be set free from eternal punishment and receive eternal life.

Jesus' ministry of proclaiming himself as the good news of salvation, however, provides the definitive model Christians are to emulate in the ongoing ministry of that proclamation. Mark Terry writes, "The church's later ministry of evangelism drew its inspiration and direction from the evangelism of Jesus. The evangelists of the early church testified to Jesus' life and imitated His methods in their proclamation."¹ The recorded actions and words of Jesus provide instruction on seeking and engaging the lost with the gospel and on developing others in the work. Furthermore, his incarnation itself and his unrepeatably service at the cross provide instruction on the contours of evangelistic ministry.

Obedience in Love

Jesus' relentless focus in ministry was to do the will of his Father who sent him. His perfect obedience flowed from pure and reciprocal love with the Father. The Gospel of John emphasizes this obedience in love in that "Jesus was not a passive instrument of the Father: he was actively involved in his own sending," and "the glory of God, his Father, is the ultimate goal of his mission."² In his condescending birth, selfless

¹John Mark Terry, *Evangelism: A Concise History* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 3.

²Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Jesus and the Twelve*, vol. 1 of *Early Christian Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 213.

life, and sacrificial death, Jesus glorified the Father by making the unseen God known, and Jesus was uniquely qualified to do so as the only Son of God, loved by the Father (John 1:18, 17:4, 24). Eckhard Schnabel argues that Jesus is then “more than an envoy; only the Son, the only Son, whom the Father loves could have his complete confidence to represent the interests of the Father and to implement the will of the Father.”³ Christ’s obedience flowed from the pure and reciprocal love within the Godhead.

That love reaches outward and serves to rescue the world God created yet who has rebelled against his rightful rule. Love prompted the coming of the Christ, and through his obedience, the love of God was displayed for sinful humanity to embrace through faith and receive eternal life (John 3:16). To Jesus, his purpose on earth was to accomplish the Father’s will, so much so that he considered obedience as the food that sustained and nourished him (John 4:34). And the God-willed purpose for which he was sent was “to seek and to save the lost” and “to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Luke 19:10, Mark 10:45). Lewis Drummond asserts, “If anything exemplified our Lord, it was his unreserved and unfettered love. Jesus had compassion for all people.”⁴ In his *Evangelism Handbook*, Alvin Reid states that the incarnation of God’s Son was evangelistic in its intent: “the coming of Christ demonstrated the evangelistic heart of God.”⁵ Revealing the love of God was the passionate purpose of Jesus’ ministry, and he did so in word and deed—all of which served to point sinners toward his supreme act of obedience on the day he laid down his life at Calvary.

Paul’s imitation of Christ involved passionate obedience fueled by God’s love which was demonstrated in Christ’s obedience. In the commission Jesus had given, the

³Schnabel, *Jesus and the Twelve*, 214.

⁴Lewis A. Drummond, “Prayer and Presence Evangelism,” in *The Gospel for the New Millennium*, ed. J. Chris Schofield (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2001), 82.

⁵Alvin Reid, *Evangelism Handbook: Biblical, Spiritual, Intentional, Missional* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2009), 60.

love of Jesus compelled Paul to proclaim the good news of salvation to others and to plead for a response of repentance and faith (2 Cor 5:14-20). As Jesus' ministry was defined by obedience to the Father, Paul's ministry would be marked by obedience to Jesus. Paul considered himself a soldier whose aim in life was to please the one who had enlisted him (2 Tim 2:4). He considered his own obedience as the product of ongoing daily faith in Jesus and his love applied through the presence of the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5-8, Gal 2:20). Christ in Paul was the fountainhead of his passionate obedience, thus the purpose of Paul's life became the glory of God in sinners hearing and responding to the gospel of God's love in Jesus.

Through the indwelling of the Spirit, Jesus enabled Paul to fulfill the two Great Commandments to love God supremely and love his neighbor as himself. That love fueled Paul's evangelistic ministry. Mark Dever explores reasons why Christians fail to evangelize, and one reason he gives for this lack of obedience is the lack of love: "We are called to love others. We share the gospel because we love people. And we don't share the gospel because we don't love people."⁶ As was the ministry of his Lord, Paul's ministry was marked by obedience in love. J. I. Packer writes,

This meant simply that in every situation, and by every means in his power, it was his business to seek other people's good. From this standpoint, the significance of his apostolic commission to evangelize and found churches was simply that this was the particular way in which Christ was calling him to fulfill the law to love his neighbor. He might not, therefore, preach the gospel in a harsh, callous way, putting it before his neighbor with a contemptuous air of 'there you are—take it or leave it,' and excusing himself for his unconcern about people on the grounds of his faithfulness to truth. Such conduct would be a failure of love on his part. His business was to present truth in a spirit of love, as an expression and implementation of his desire to save his hearers. The attitude which informed all Paul's evangelism was this: 'I seek not what is yours but you . . . I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls' (2 Cor 12:14-15).⁷

The love of Christ compelled Paul to love others with the gospel; that service of love

⁶Mark Dever, *The Gospel & Personal Evangelism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 27.

⁷J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 54.

became the primary purpose for his life. Paul Little argues that evangelism involves “genuinely seeking ways to express the love of Jesus Christ effectively. He has come into our lives and given us the capacity to get out of ourselves and love others. It is his love ‘shed abroad’ in our lives that we want to pour out for others.”⁸ After his conversion on the Damascus road, passionate obedience in love marked Paul’s life and ministry. In this obedience, he followed the example of the Savior.

Identification with Hearers

In his incarnation, the Son of God identified with those he came to save. He became flesh and dwelt among us to make God known to us (John 1:14, 18). Though equal with God, he made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, and was born in the likeness of men (Phil 2:6-7). He left the glory he shared with the Father before the world existed to walk the earth among sinful men, tempted in every respect as we are, yet without sin, and he is thus able to sympathize with our weaknesses (John 17:5, Heb 4:15). His purpose in doing so was to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). Mark Terry states, “Jesus’ evangelism was personal in that He dealt with people personally. He did not send a proxy; He came Himself. Jesus’ ministry was incarnational. He truly was God in the flesh (John 1:14), and He identified Himself with humanity.”⁹ The incarnation is the ultimate example of intentional connection with sinners for the purpose of serving them for their eternal well-being.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus was intentional in seeking the lost by identifying with them. Reid recounts,

Jesus sought people. In Luke 19, we read how Jesus sought Zacchaeus. He intentionally set out to meet him and even made an appointment to meet him at the tax collector’s house. He met Zacchaeus where he was as he sat in a tree (v. 5). He

100. ⁸Paul E. Little, *How to Give Away Your Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1966),

⁹Terry, *Evangelism*, 6.

identified with a sinner, regardless of the consequences (v. 7). Jesus further convicted Zacchaeus of his sin. Finally, this account shows us Jesus did not just *meet* sinners; He sought to save them (vv. 9-10).¹⁰

Reid continues by noting different ways in which Jesus connected with people. In John 3, “Nicodemus crept in at night, was a religious leader, and flattered Jesus. Jesus replied to him directly, admonishing him to be born again.”¹¹ In the next chapter of John, however, Jesus “approached the woman of Samaria with great care and kindness, despite her failure and sin. She had after all been married and divorced five times and was currently living with a man. Yet Jesus spoke to her in a way that compelled her to consider His truth.”¹² This particular encounter happened because Jesus intentionally went through Samaria “even though centuries of enmity existed between Jews and Samaritans. Even though weary from the journey, our Lord made time to speak to others.”¹³

The religious leaders were often upset over Jesus’ identification with sinners. They grumbled, “This man receives sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2). Jesus responded by telling three parables that demonstrate the sinner-seeking love of God, with the final parable exposing the unloving, self-righteous spirit of the religious leaders themselves (Luke 15:3-32). In this way, Jesus reached out to the religious leaders as well. Dave Earley avows, “Jesus was the only human who ever really had the right to look down on another person, but He never did. He identified with people as fully as possible. Apart from sin He was fully one of us.”¹⁴ Such was the intentional identification of Christ’s incarnation.

¹⁰Reid, *Evangelism Handbook*, 62.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 63.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴Dave Earley and David Wheeler, *Evangelism Is...: How to Share Jesus with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 40.

The classic text that demonstrates Paul's imitation of Christ in identifying with hearers is 1 Corinthians 9, covered at length in this paper's preceding chapter. Paul's desire was to seek the lost at all costs, and he was willing to identify with them by any means possible without engaging himself in sin. Mark Terry asserts, "Paul would not compromise or change his message or doctrine, but he was flexible in other ways. He tries in every way to adapt to the culture in which he was working."¹⁵ A case in point was Paul's decision to circumcise Timothy as he brought the young man into partnership with him in ministry. Since Timothy's father was a Gentile but his mother was Jewish, it would have been a tremendous hindrance to their gospel ministry among the Jews if Timothy were uncircumcised. Neither Paul nor Timothy hesitated to remove this needless offense. They did what was necessary to identify with their hearers.

Paul provides a concise summary of his intentionality in connecting with his hearers in his first letter to the Thessalonian church. He writes, "So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us" (1 Thess 2:8). Such affection and desire caused Paul to make any sacrifice to identify with the people he sought to reach with the good news of Christ. To deliver the gospel to them, he was willing to devote his whole self for them. In this way, Paul followed Christ's example. Richard Bond writes,

As God personally brought the Good News to mankind, so we are to "incarnate" Christ to the lost, that is, to penetrate, (pitch our tent) significantly into the lives of the non-Christian for the purpose of not only verbalizing the Gospel but also to live it before them.¹⁶

Drummond contends for what he calls "presence evangelism" and states, "Simply put, no one witnesses for Christ, if no one personifies and proclaims the gospel We must be

¹⁵Terry, *Evangelism*, 19.

¹⁶Richard Bond, "Understanding a Relational Model of Evangelism and How It Relates to Evangelism Explosion," <http://www.youthee.org/articles/reemodelee.htm>, quoted in Earley and Wheeler, *Evangelism Is...*, 184.

there. We must relate to unbelievers in a myriad of ways and share Christ.”¹⁷

Intentionally identifying with others to reach them is a costly endeavor; it was costly to Paul and to the Christ he sought to imitate. Laying down self-interests for the well-being of others is the spirit of the incarnation Christians are called to emulate (Phil 2:4-8). Rebecca Manley Pippert argues that Jesus intends for us to see people as he sees them:

Jesus wants us to see their needs, their loneliness, their longings, and he wants to give us the courage to reach out to them. If we are to do that, we need to do two things: we will have to take risks as well as get beneath the surface of people’s lives. To take initiative opens us up to the risk of rejection. To let people inside our lives is a frightening but essential ingredient in evangelism. It is risky to abandon our security blankets in order to penetrate the lives of others.¹⁸

The link between identifying with hearers and obedience in love is obvious. Love is the motivation behind costly sacrifice aimed at another’s well-being. Packer writes, “The right to talk intimately to another person about the Lord Jesus Christ has to be earned, and you earn it by convincing him that you are his friend, and that you really care about him The truth is that real personal evangelism is very costly, just because it demands of us a really personal relationship with the other person.”¹⁹

Contextualization of the Message

In his incarnation, the Son of God intentionally connected with sinful humanity by identifying with us, and he did so for the express purpose of saving us. His aim was not merely to connect but to clearly communicate a message. The message was Jesus himself as the promised Christ and what he came into the world to accomplish. Jesus is the good news of salvation, and Jesus was the master at contextualizing the message.

Whether he was teaching his disciples, preaching before crowds, or conversing

¹⁷Drummond, “Prayer and Presence Evangelism,” 78.

¹⁸Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker and into the World: Evangelism as a Way of Life*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 103.

¹⁹Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 81-82.

with individual persons, Jesus labored to speak his message in a way that would expose his hearers' need and his sufficiency to meet that need. He told stories to illustrate the message; he probed with questions and listened closely to determine his hearer's knowledge and understanding. Mark Terry concludes,

Jesus could evangelize people because He understood them and spoke their language. Jesus' evangelism was personal also because He dealt with people as individuals. His method was not "one size fits all"; instead, He varied His approach according to the needs of persons and their level of understanding. He began with people where they were and led them to where they needed to be.²⁰

For each person in any given situation, Jesus sought to tailor the communication of his message so that it could be grasped.

Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4 is a superb example of his contextualization of the message. The conversation is often analyzed to gain insight into Jesus' method of personal evangelism. Schnabel identifies six strategies Jesus employed in this encounter.²¹ First, Jesus set aside at least five obstacles to engage the woman. The woman's gender, low education level, poor reputation, and Samaritan ethnicity were cultural barriers Jesus pushed through to speak to her. Also, his fatigue from a long journey was an obstacle he overcame. Second, though Jesus' aim was to get a message through to her, he allowed her to set the course for their dialogue. Jesus began by requesting water to drink, and after that initial engagement, all that he said was in response to a question or remark she made. Third, Jesus showed patience with her slow but progressive understanding. He considered the ongoing interaction with her more important than an immediate correction to her misunderstandings. Fourth, Jesus engaged her as an individual person. "His message is 'universal,' but he patiently accepts the interventions of the woman, the abrupt changes of subject; he is willing to speak about the personal situation of the woman. He accepts the risk of misunderstandings because

²⁰Terry, *Evangelism*, 6.

²¹Schnabel, *Jesus and the Twelve*, 243-47.

the conversation partner is, as a person, important to him.”²² Fifth, though he allowed the woman to set the course in the dialogue, Jesus labored to lead her into progressive understanding. Sixth, he stirred the woman’s curiosity. “He does not simply deliver theological truth to the woman, expecting her to somehow deal with it.”²³ The nature in which he approached her and each remark he made drew the woman deeper into the conversation and ultimately closer to recognition and understanding.²⁴

The encounter with the Samaritan woman is a model of contextualization, but it is one among many such encounters we find in the Gospels. William Schweer states,

We cannot help but be impressed by Jesus’ method and style. He dealt with no two persons in the same way Every person was important. He treated them with respect, dignity, and sympathy. He was always tender and compassionate with sinners. At the same time, he made clear demands upon their lives.²⁵

With the devout Nathaniel, Jesus was more direct (John 1:47-51). With the rich young ruler, Jesus moved swiftly to expose the idol of man’s life (Matt 19:16-22). Jesus was confrontational with Nicodemus (John 3:1-15), as he often was with the religious leaders. With the woman caught in adultery, he was tender and compassionate (John 8:2-11).

Another method of contextualization of his message Jesus employed was through meeting immediate, physical needs. He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, made the lame to walk, liberated the demon-possessed, even raised the dead, and every miracle was performed to reveal his identity as Savior and Lord—to contextualize his message. He healed the lame and declared his authority to forgive sins (John 5). He fed the hungry and declared that he is the bread of life to be received by faith (John 6). He

²²Schnabel, *Jesus and the Twelve*, 245.

²³*Ibid.*, 247.

²⁴Paul Little sees eight actions by Jesus in this encounter: he made contact with the woman, established common ground, piqued her interest, initiated and kept the conversation going with his statements, proceeded with patience, refused to condemn, refused to get sidetracked, and finally confronted her with his identity (Little, *How to Give Away Your Faith*, 62-86).

²⁵G. William Schweer, “Telling the Gospel One on One,” in *The Gospel for the New Millennium*, ed. J. Chris Schofield (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2001), 208.

showed compassion toward those in need because he loved them, and he served to meet their needs in order to more clearly communicate the good news of his provision for their greatest need.

Imitating Christ, Paul considered it his life's purpose to make Christ known to those who do not know him. Evangelism necessarily entails speaking the gospel of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the salvation of sinners (1 Cor 15:1-8), for it is only by hearing and responding to the word of the gospel that a person is saved (Rom 1:16, 10:14-17). To evangelize is to speak that good news in a way in which the hearer can understand it, and Paul labored to appropriately contextualize that message for those he sought to reach.

Paul's speeches in Acts are exemplary in regard to contextualization of the gospel. In the Jewish synagogue of Pisidian Antioch, Paul stood before a congregation of Jews, Jewish proselytes and Gentile God-fearers—people who would have been well acquainted with Scripture and the history of God's dealings with Israel. There, Paul traced God's promises of a deliverer, quoting or alluding to several passages of Scripture, and he proclaimed that God's promise has been fulfilled in Jesus, through whom forgiveness of sins is found. (Acts 13:16-41). In pagan-populated Lystra, however, Paul presented the message in a different way. God worked through Paul to heal a man lame from birth (thus meeting a physical need), and when the pagan people responded in a pagan way (ascribing worship to creatures—Barnabas and Paul—rather than to God), Paul bore witness by pointing them to the revelation of God in the natural realm (Acts 14:8-17). Again, in Athens, Paul evangelized cultured, polytheistic hearers by referring to their altar to an unknown God and quoting one of their poets (Acts 17:22-31).

Concerning Paul's labors to contextualize the gospel, Packer writes,

Paul sought to save men; and because he sought to save them, he was not content merely to throw truth at them; but he went out of his way to get alongside them, and to start thinking with them from where they were, and to speak to them in terms that they could understand, and above all, to avoid everything that would prejudice them

against the gospel and put stumbling blocks in their path.²⁶

Tim Keller notes, “Paul varies his use of emotion and reason, his vocabulary, his introductions and conclusions, his figures of speech and illustrations, his identification of the audience’s concerns, hopes, and needs. In every case, he adapts his gospel presentation to his hearers.”²⁷ Keller proceeds to argue that, although there are differences in the presentations of Paul’s witness, there are very definite similarities. In every case, Paul challenges what his hearers are currently believing (epistemological) and how his hearers are currently living (personal). He then presents Jesus “as the answer and solution to their sin.”²⁸ The content of Paul’s gospel never changed, only his presentation of it. Like Jesus, Paul started where people were in their knowledge and beliefs and sought to bring them toward an understanding of truth. Keller concludes, “These speeches of Paul give us a strong biblical case for engaging in careful contextualization. They remind us that there is no universal, culture-free formulation of the gospel for everyone.”²⁹

Susan Hecht contends that an authentic walk with Christ will result in careful contextualization of the gospel to unbelievers. She writes,

The approach to evangelism that I am suggesting involves moving out into the unbelieving, postmodern culture, establishing relationships with unbelievers, and persuading them to consider the gospel message. To engage in such an approach requires wisdom and humility on our part. It is an approach that invites us to be patient students of those we seek to reach, able to guide a conversation with gentleness and respect.³⁰

Paul’s submission to Christ and dependence on Christ was the fountainhead of a ministry

²⁶Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 55.

²⁷Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 113.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., 114.

³⁰Susan Hecht, “Faithfully Relating to Unbelievers in a Relational Age,” in *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 253.

marked by humility and intentional contextualization of the gospel.

Development of Leaders

During the course of his ministry, Jesus intentionally developed others who would take his message onward. At the outset of his ministry, he chose twelve men who would spend three years at his side, watching, listening, and learning from him. Christ's plan for the gospel of his coming to spread throughout the world and until the time of his return required the development of people who would lead in that mission—people who would in turn develop others to lead in the mission and so on. Robert Coleman states of Jesus, "His concern was not with programs to reach the multitudes, but with men whom the multitudes would follow The initial objective in Jesus' plan was to enlist men who could bear witness to his life and carry on his work after he returned to the Father."³¹ Coleman has produced an excellent study of the process that Jesus used in developing leaders in evangelism, suggesting eight characteristics of Jesus' instruction in their lives.³² Coleman writes,

Such close and constant association, of course, meant that Jesus had virtually no time to call his own. Like little children clamoring for the attention of their father, the disciples were always under foot of the Master. Even the time he took to go apart to keep his personal devotions was subject to interruption at the disciples' need (Mark 6:46-48; see Luke 11:1). But Jesus would have it no other way. He wanted to be with them.³³

This intentional preparation of the disciples required a great sacrificial investment of time and energy on Jesus' part, but he did so willingly, knowing that when he had ascended to heaven and the Holy Spirit descended upon them, they would be his witnesses to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).

³¹Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1972), 21.

³²The characteristics Coleman lists are as follows: Selection, Association, Consecration, Impartation, Demonstration, Delegation, Supervision, and Reproduction. In his book, Coleman devotes a chapter to each of the characteristics. *Ibid.*

³³*Ibid.*, 38.

For his entire ministry before the cross and for forty days after his resurrection, Jesus poured himself into these men. He taught them, modeled for them, corrected them, encouraged them, challenged them, and empowered them. Above all, he loved them, and as a result his gospel would go forth through them to the world. Alvin Reid asks,

How did Jesus lead others? He taught the multitudes. He sent out 70 to preach. But he called 12 to walk with Him, live with Him, learn from Him. Then He especially poured His life into three—Peter, James and John. Did the church erupt and spread through the multitude He taught? No, some of those He taught yelled ‘crucify!’ before His death. He poured His life into a few. And today you read this book because of their impact.³⁴

Such was the intentional process of leadership development that Jesus modeled in his ministry.

Paul labored to imitate Christ in this sacrificial investment for the purpose of leadership development. He poured himself into young believers like Titus and Timothy, taking them with him on his journeys to carry the gospel into new lands. Like Jesus, he taught them and set them an example to follow. When they were ready, Paul sent them out on their own, but he was diligent in following up with them to provide correction, encouragement and further exhortation. Paul knew that this investment in training others would serve to multiply the work of gospel ministry and extend that ministry long after he was gone. Also like Jesus, Paul expected those he trained to be faithful to, in turn, develop more leaders. He wrote to Timothy, “You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:1-2).

Coleman sums it up well when he writes,

What really counts in the ultimate perpetuation of our work is the faithfulness with which our converts go and make leaders out of their converts, not simply more followers The test of any work of evangelism thus is not what is seen at the moment, or in the conference report, but in the effectiveness with which the work

³⁴Reid, *Evangelism Handbook*, 238.

continues in the next generation.³⁵

Again like Jesus, Paul's love for these leaders he developed was evident. The final letter Paul wrote, as he awaited execution in Rome, was addressed to his child in the faith, Timothy. Paul ended that letter expressing his deep desire to see Timothy again (2 Tim 4:9).

Suffering, Sacrificial Service

The vein that pulses through Christ's incarnational ministry and Paul's imitation of Christ is that of sacrifice and suffering in service to others for their good. Jesus is the epitome of this suffering, sacrificial service. He is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world by his willing sacrifice (John 1:29). He was sent by God to bear our griefs and sorrows (Isa 53:4). He willingly entered suffering the moment he came from heaven to take on flesh, and he did so to serve (Mark 10:45). He served others with compassion as they languished in misery and need. He fed the hungry, healed the sick, and washed dirty feet, and in all of it, he incessantly spoke the good news of his purpose in coming. Coleman recounts,

Jesus came to serve, and in that role he went about doing good. When he saw need, he had compassion and reached out to help (Matt. 9:36) And through it all, he held forth the word of life, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom. Little wonder that multitudes were drawn to him. People always respond to love when it finds practical expression in ministry, the more so when it is empowered by the Spirit of God.³⁶

Jesus' ministry was marked from beginning to end by sacrifice for others, and at the cross was the climax as he was pierced for our transgressions (Isa 53:5). To those who would follow him, his call is for them to deny themselves, take up their crosses daily, and follow him (Luke 9:23).

Paul wholly answered this call to suffering service, following his Lord's

³⁵Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 94-95.

³⁶Robert E. Coleman, "The Lifestyle of the Great Commission," in *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 256.

example. To the Corinthians, Paul wrote, “For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor 4:5). To Paul, evangelism and sacrificial service go hand in hand. Tim Savage comments on this verse, “Interestingly, only here does Paul use the verb for preaching with more than one object, one denoting verbal content (Christ Jesus as Lord) and the other denoting behavior (ourselves as your servants). Central to Paul’s *kerygma* is the proclamation both that Jesus is Lord and the he, Paul, is a servant.”³⁷ Paul understood that while Christ’s suffering was redemptive for mankind, Paul’s suffering would be a representative witness to those he sought to reach with Christ’s gospel. Don Howell remarks concerning Paul’s list of his suffering for the gospel’s sake in 2 Corinthians 11, “If you want to recognize true servants, Paul says, observe the level of their sacrificial imitation of the suffering Servant.”³⁸

In the Great Commission recorded in John’s Gospel, Jesus indicated a direct link between his being sent by the Father into the world and his sending the disciples into the world. Jesus’ suffering service on the cross is complete and sufficient; it is not service that his disciples could ever repeat, but his cross does reveal the nature of the believer’s ministry of his gospel to neighbors and the nations in the world. John Stott maintains that the commission statement in John is the “crucial form in which the Great Commission has been handed down to us (though it is the most neglected because it is the most costly).”³⁹ It is costly because to be sent into the world by Jesus just as the Father sent his Son into the world is a commission to sacrificially serve others for their well-

³⁷Tim Savage, “The Church,” in *The Gospel as Center: Renewing Our Faith and Reforming Our Ministry Practices*, ed. D. A. Carson and Timothy Keller (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 224.

³⁸Don N. Howell Jr., “Paul’s Theology of Suffering,” in *Paul’s Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours*, ed. Robert L. Plummer and John Mark Terry (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 101.

³⁹John R. W. Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 23.

being.

In John 12, Jesus spoke of his approaching crucifixion and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24). As Jesus spoke thus of the hour of his suffering, he then made clear that anyone who sought to escape suffering in this life does not belong to him, but those who serve him will follow him on the road of suffering service (John 12:25-26). Packer offers these remarks concerning Christ’s call to such sacrifice:

That law can be stated thus: before there is blessing anywhere, there will first be suffering somewhere. Scripture does not explain this, but simply sets it before us as a fact The natural implication is that (Jesus) requires all who are his to live by the same law of harvest that he lived by himself, becoming the seed that dies to bring forth fruit.⁴⁰

Paul’s imitation of Christ in suffering, sacrificial service to reach the lost with the gospel is evident from his conversion onward. Christ’s words concerning Paul were fulfilled in the apostle’s ministry: “I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” (Acts 9:16). Suffering for Jesus’ name to reach the lost is the nature of following the Christ who came to serve and give his life a ransom. Paul’s words to the church were these: “. . . just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 10:33-11:1). Incarnational evangelism involves imitating Jesus in identifying with the lost and serving them humbly and sacrificially, putting their interests ahead of our own (Phil 2:4-8).

The Witness of the Church

Since Paul’s apostolic command from the Lord to the church was to imitate him as he imitated Christ, we should see evidence of that imitation in the church’s evangelistic life and ministry. Indeed, such evidence is plentiful in the early church of

⁴⁰J. I. Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1992), 262-63.

Scripture and beyond. The witness of the church demonstrates a pattern of sacrificial compassion that makes visible the gospel message proclaimed.

Mass Participation

The early church in Acts grew exponentially because ordinary believers were scattering throughout cities and regions, telling people about Jesus. Jesus' promise of power to bear witness, upon the coming of the Holy Spirit, is demonstrated as fulfilled from the second chapter of the book through its final chapter. The evidence given reveals growth that took place in response to apostolic preaching, but the majority of the lost who were saved and added to the church were reached by unnamed members of Christ's church engaged in personal evangelism.

Luke's first summary statement for the church reveals the whole church devoting themselves to preaching, worship, fellowship, prayer, and evangelism, "and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:42-47). Together, the believers prayed for courage to speak the gospel in the face of threats and persecution, and "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:23-31). Stephen was the first recorded martyr for his bold evangelism, and Philip took the good news to Samaria and to the Ethiopian eunuch; neither man was an apostle (Acts 7-8). When much of the church scattered from Jerusalem, the apostles remained behind; yet Scripture records "those who scattered went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:1-4). The first multi-ethnic church came into being through the witness of unnamed faithful evangelists (Acts 11:19-21), the very church from which Paul and Barnabas would be sent on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-3).

Mark Terry writes, "The Book of Acts makes it clear that lay evangelism was

the rule rather than the exception in the New Testament church.”⁴¹ Michael Green

agrees:

Christianity was from its inception a lay movement, and so it continued for a remarkably long time They were scattered from their base in Jerusalem and they went everywhere spreading the good news which had brought joy, release and a new life to themselves. This must often have been not formal peaching, but the informal chattering to friends and chance acquaintances, in homes and wine shops, on walks, and around market stalls. They went everywhere gossiping the gospel; they did it naturally, enthusiastically, and with the conviction of those who are not paid to say that sort of thing.⁴²

In Paul’s first letter to the church at Thessalonica, only months after he and Silas had planted that church on the second missionary journey, Paul commended them for setting a fine example in that “the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you . . . everywhere, so that we need not say anything” (1 Thess 1:7-8). Schnabel asserts that this praise was for “the missionary commitment of the church” and “their evangelistic proclamation of the gospel.”⁴³ Concerning the Philippians, Paul thanked God for them because of their “partnership in the gospel” (Phil 1:5). Schnabel contends here that this partnership was engaged “through their financial support of the apostle and through their own missionary activity in Philippi.”⁴⁴ In these letters from Paul, the evidence matches that of Acts. There was mass participation in personal evangelism by the whole church—an obedience in love that imitated that of Christ and Paul.

What was the case in the first century should be the case in the twenty-first century. Tim Chester and Steve Timmis argue, “Most gospel ministry involves *ordinary people doing ordinary things* with gospel intentionality. Whether it is helping a friend, working at the office, or going to the movies, there is a commitment to building

⁴¹Terry, *Evangelism*, 25.

⁴²Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 243.

⁴³Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul & the Early Church*, vol. 2 of *Early Christian Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 1459.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 1460.

relationships, modeling the Christian faith, and talking about the gospel as a natural part of conversation”⁴⁵ (emphasis in the original). Every Christian is a grateful recipient of the Holy Spirit’s presence and power to bear witness to the world for Christ. The Great Commission calls for mass participation of all Jesus’ disciples.

Living and Speaking the Gospel

Like Jesus and Paul, the witness of the church entailed identifying with hearers and contextualizing the unchanging gospel. The historical record of their witness crossing cultural boundaries is the undeniable evidence of their meeting people where they were and communicating the good news in a way that hearers could understand. They were to be ever ready, in any context, to give a reason for their hope and always with gentleness and respect (1 Pet 3:15).

Michael Green offers Gregory’s conversion under the witness of Origen as a prime example of personal evangelism in the early church. When Gregory and his fellow travelers happened to be deposited at Origen’s abode, Origen “studied by all means to keep us in close association with him, contriving all kinds of arguments . . . and bringing all his powers to bear on that object.”⁴⁶ When Origen learned that Gregory and his friends were aimed at philosophy, he asked questions beginning with that subject that started them along the path to the truth of the gospel. Origen made a deep impression on Gregory: “He possessed a rare combination of a certain sweet grace and persuasiveness, along with a strange power and constraint.”⁴⁷ Green reports, “The zeal and opportunism of Origen stand out So does his tact, his persistence, his friendship, and his singleness of purpose: ‘He did not aim merely at getting us round by any kind of

⁴⁵Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 63.

⁴⁶Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 344.

⁴⁷Ibid.

reasoning; but his desire was, with a benignant, affectionate and most generous mind, to save us.”⁴⁸ This account of Origen’s faithful labor in evangelism provides a picture of intentional connection and careful contextualization.

Sacrificial service and selfless generosity adorned the church’s gospel witness, incarnating the gospel they proclaimed. Love was divinely decreed to be the visible apologetic to their audible witness. There are multiple texts that present the church’s love as an argument for the validity of the faith. Jesus said it would be visible love that would serve to convince the world that he is the Savior sent from heaven and that the church is indeed his disciples (John 13:35, 17:23). Whereas John wrote at the beginning of his Gospel account that the incarnation of Jesus has made the unseen God known, he wrote in his first epistle that the church’s love provides observable evidence of God as he abides in them (John 1:18, 1 John 4:12). John Stott is helpful here:

John 1:18: “No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son has made him known.” “That’s wonderful, people say, “but it was 2,000 years ago. Is there no way by which the invisible God makes himself visible today?” There is. We return to 1 John 4:12: “No one has ever seen God.” It is precisely the same introductory statement. But instead of continuing with reference to the Son of God, it continues: “If we love one another, God dwells in us.” In other words, the invisible God, who once made himself visible in Christ, now makes himself visible in Christians, *if* we love one another. It is a breathtaking claim. The local church cannot evangelize, proclaiming the gospel of love, if it is not itself a community of love.⁴⁹ (Emphasis in the original)

The love demonstrated by the church puts flesh on the gospel proclaimed—a visible apologetic for God before a watching world.

Love is not solely an inward feeling but an outward action. The church’s love is displayed through acts of mercy, compassion, sacrifice, and service. When the Syrian Antioch church heard of an impending famine, love prompted them to send relief to the brothers in Jerusalem (Acts 11:28-30). Paul sent word to the Corinthians of the

⁴⁸Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 345.

⁴⁹John Stott, *Personal Evangelism* (1949): 3-4, quoted in Mark Dever, *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 50-51.

Macedonian churches who begged for the grace of taking part in relieving others by giving even beyond their means (2 Cor 8:3-4). Paul then exhorted the Corinthians to give freely as well—not as a command, but to prove the genuineness of their love—and their doing so would be an imitation of and witness to Christ himself, who “though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor 8:6-9). Through selfless sacrifice, the church imitated Jesus, embodied the gospel, and thus lived as incarnational evangelists in the world. Visible witness to Christ accompanied audible witness to Christ. Edmund Clowney asserts,

The heart of the gospel moves the church to mission and to deeds of mercy which have always been part of the Christian mission. The Christian who has tasted the compassionate love of God in Christ must ask the question put by Jesus: ‘To whom am I a neighbour? I, to whom the Lord of glory became neighbour on the cross – who is it that now needs my compassion, the love that reflects the love of Calvary?’⁵⁰

Likewise, Stott contends, “In this case philanthropy is not attached to evangelism rather artificially from the outside, but grows out of it as its natural expression. One might almost say that social action becomes the ‘sacrament’ of evangelism, for it makes the message significantly visible”⁵¹

J. D. Greear maintains that acts of service are signs of the gospel of Christ’s kingdom proclaimed. He writes, “Our main responsibility in the present age is indeed to witness to the King through speaking His message (Acts 1:8), but we should also be giving signs of the kingdom through acts of physical and social healing, showing that the kingdom is one of justice, progress, equity, health, and sacrificial love—just as Jesus and the apostles did.”⁵² Danny Akin similarly avers,

⁵⁰Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church, Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 161.

⁵¹Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 26.

⁵²J. D. Greear, “Great Commission Multiplication,” in *Great Commission Resurgence: Fulfilling God’s Mandate in Our Time*, ed. Chuck Lawless and Adam W. Greenway (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2010), 332.

The ultimate motivation for the Great Commission is love of God and a passion to be on mission with Him. After all, the Great Commission is His mission! But flowing out of love for God also will be a genuine love for people, something too many of us have lost somewhere along the way. The results have devastated our witness. If we do not love them, we have no right to expect them to listen. If we do not serve them, we have no reason to expect them to trust us.⁵³

There is no evangelism without speaking the good news of Christ's death and resurrection for sin, but loving and serving others is the embodiment of that message—that which gives the message flesh for people to see and experience. A heart of love and service sent Jesus to the cross; a heart of love and service sends us into the world with that good news. Proclaiming that message will require selfless, sacrificial love, living out the gospel as we speak it.

The Work of Cross-Cultural Missionaries

Those who have left the familiarity and comfort of home to serve the gospel to unreached people in faraway lands are sometimes considered extraordinary participants in the Great Commission. While cross-cultural missionaries ought to be commended, honored, and encouraged (and may countless more hear and answer the call to go!), their work should be seen, not as extraordinary, but as the work of ordinary Christians only in a different place and among different people to whom the Lord has called them. Every Christian, wherever they are and with whomever they are, should be about the primary labor of cross-cultural missionaries. That labor calls for singular purpose and willing sacrifice, characteristics displayed in both Christ's incarnation and Paul's ministry. The witness of cross-cultural missionaries demonstrates a pattern of patient and sacrificial labor to engage people groups with the gospel.

Singular Purpose

Cross-cultural missionaries move from their homes to other places for this

⁵³Daniel L. Akin, "Axioms for a Great Commission Resurgence," in Lawless and Greenway, *Great Commission Resurgence*, 349.

purpose: to seek the salvation of lost people by their hearing, understanding and responding to the gospel of Jesus Christ. To accomplish that purpose, missionaries seek first to study and learn the people they are called to reach. Acquiring what is necessary to clearly communicate the gospel demands that the missionary learn the language, traditions, and cultural norms of their hearers. The missionary's aim is to be an incarnational witness for Christ to the people group to whom he has been called. Without this diligent effort to intentionally connect with the people, the missionary would be ineffective in that mission.

Duane Elmer argues that there are six steps involved in serving the gospel across cultures. First is the step of openness. Elmer writes, "Openness with people different from yourself requires that you are willing to step out of your comfort zone to initiate and sustain relationships in a world of cultural differences."⁵⁴ To be open to others is to be hospitable toward them, inviting them into your life. The second step is acceptance, "the ability to communicate value, worth and esteem to another person."⁵⁵ Acceptance involves seeing people with dignity as persons created in the image of God. Step three is trust, "the ability to build confidence in a relationship so that both parties believe the other will not intentional hurt them but will act in their best interest."⁵⁶ Elsewhere, Elmer writes, "It takes time to build trust," and it "is built in slow progressive steps Trust starts with small acts and builds into a solid and healthy relationship. Patience pays off."⁵⁷

The fourth step is learning. To intentionally connect across cultures requires

⁵⁴Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Servanthood: Serving the World in Christlike Humility* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 38.

⁵⁵Ibid., 58.

⁵⁶Ibid., 77.

⁵⁷Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Connections: Stepping Out and Fitting In Around the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 104.

teach-ability, which demands humility. Elmer describes that learning is “the ability to glean relevant information about, from and with other people.”⁵⁸ Understanding is the fifth step, “the ability to see patterns of behavior and values that reveal the integrity of a people.”⁵⁹ Understanding involves a determination to see the other culture’s or person’s perspective on life and reality. The final step is serving, relating “to others in a way that leads them to sense Jesus’ presence or consider his claims.”⁶⁰ Elmer’s six steps provide a helpful snapshot of a cross-cultural missionary’s labor to intentionally connect with his hearers in order to serve them with the gospel message.

The Great Commission is the very reason the missionary is present in his place of service; *the same is true for the “ordinary” Christian in his home culture.* Charles Kraft writes,

When we attempt to communicate, we reach out to other people across whatever gap separates us from them. This may be a comparatively small gap, as between members of the same family, or a very large gap, as between members of widely different cultures. At the very least, there will always be differences in the life experiences of those who participate in the communicational events. Frequently, the participants will possess additional gap-widening characteristics, such as differences in sex, social class, age, educational background, occupation, subculture, dialect, and the like. Often such differences affect less visible factors, such as trust and openness, that strongly influence communication at the deepest levels. If effective communication is to take place, such gaps need to be bridged.⁶¹

The Great Commission calls for mass participation of the church, and wherever the evangelists serve the gospel, they will have to cross some type of chasm between them and other people to do so.

Will McRaney quotes this excerpt from Kraft and concludes, “We are not dump trucks with the gospel. We do not just back up to people and dump our load. We

⁵⁸Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Servanthood*, 93.

⁵⁹Ibid., 125.

⁶⁰Ibid., 146.

⁶¹Charles Kraft, *Communication Theory for Christian Witness* (Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1983), 10.

are to communicate as effectively as possible, checking for understanding and commitment along the way.”⁶² Incarnational evangelism involves entering the other’s life and welcoming him into your own. Patient effort is required to intentionally connect and then contextualize the gospel for the hearer to understand.

Crossing generations can sometimes seem as daunting as crossing cultures. In the United States, the Millennial generation (people born between 1980 and 2000) is the largest generation in the nation’s history, and research shows the majority of Millennials would not agree that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven.⁶³ If a local church is predominantly made up of senior adults, how will they reach this younger generation with the gospel? They will reach them by determining to be patient cross-cultural witnesses of the gospel. The encouraging news for the church described above is that the Millennials seem open to relationships with older mentors.⁶⁴ The need is for evangelists who see it their purpose to sacrifice whatever it takes to cross the chasm and reach them.

Willing Sacrifice

Cross-cultural missionaries willingly sacrifice so that unreached peoples can hear the gospel. They forego familiar surroundings, comforts and other opportunities to obey the Great Commission. They embrace the hardships of entering a different culture in order to live and speak the gospel to its people. Sherwood Lingenfelter states, “Becoming incarnate in another culture will be a trial by fire, a test of inner strength, of personal faith, and most of all a test of the veracity of one’s love.”⁶⁵ In short, this

⁶²Will McRaney Jr., *The Art of Personal Evangelism: Sharing Jesus in a Changing Culture* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2003), 100.

⁶³Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials: Connecting to America’s Largest Generation* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2011), 23.

⁶⁴Ibid., 88.

⁶⁵Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 25.

incarnational evangelism is the pattern of life for one who obeys the command to imitate Paul and thus imitate Christ.

William Carey, now known as the father of modern missions, drafted a covenant with his partners in mission that included eleven statements of purpose. As they labored in India, Carey and his co-laborers determined “to set an infinite value on men’s souls, to acquaint ourselves with the snares which hold the minds of the people, to abstain from whatever deepens India’s prejudice against the gospel, to watch for every chance of doing the people good, to preach ‘Christ crucified’ as the grand means of conversion, to esteem and treat Indians always as our equals, to give ourselves without reserve to the Cause, ‘not counting even the clothes we wear our own.’”⁶⁶ Carey determined that his purpose was to reach the Indians, and he would willingly sacrifice whatever it took to learn about the people and remove any hindrances to their receiving the gospel. In the local church that I pastor, we are in partnership with cross-cultural missionaries today who have assumed the same singular purpose and at great sacrifice.

What we must embrace with all seriousness and joy is that our purpose is no different in Louisville, Kentucky, and our labors should then look very similar to our cross-cultural missionary partners. Alvin Reid exclaims,

The biblical church invades the world Jesus invaded the world through His incarnation! Such a church will be in the culture among the people making an impact for the gospel. It is the church that emulates the life of Jesus, who left His home in glory to come and live among us to give us the opportunity to be a part of His kingdom.⁶⁷

All believers are called to forego familiarities, comforts, and other opportunities for the singular purpose of reaching the world with the gospel. All believers are called to give

⁶⁶Timothy George, *Faithful Witness: The Life and Mission of William Carey*, spec. movie ed. (Birmingham, AL: Christian History Institute, 1998), 123. Other statements of purpose included “to guard and build up ‘the hosts that may be gathered,’ to cultivate their spiritual gifts, ever pressing upon them their missionary obligation, since Indians only can win India for Christ, to labour unceasingly in biblical translation, to be instant in the nurture of personal religion.”

⁶⁷Reid, *Evangelism Handbook*, 308-9.

ourselves without reserve to the cause. The primary characteristics of our labor in the Great Commission should look very similar no matter where on the globe we serve.

Conclusion

As disciples of Jesus, we have been sent into the world just as the Father sent Jesus into the world. Our Lord has sent us out to be incarnational evangelists, empowered by his presence through the Holy Spirit. For the love of God and neighbor, we obey the Great Commission by identifying with our hearers and contextualizing the message entrusted to us, with words and accompanying deeds. To serve and save the lost, we willingly embrace sacrifice and suffering. And since we are assured that the witness will indeed proceed to the end of the earth, we develop others to be faithful incarnational evangelists also.

CHAPTER 4

DEVELOPING AND TRAINING CHURCH LEADERS TO BE INCARNATIONAL EVANGELISTS

One of my greatest concerns as a pastor of BBC has been the lack of growth of the church through baptisms. A local church is either growing by reaching people with the good news of Christ or it is dying. While the Lord of the harvest alone brings growth, he has commanded us to pray for workers to be sent out into fields that are ripe for harvest and to be ready to be his answer to those prayers. My concern has been that the lack of growth at BBC indicates a membership that has been less than faithful in the work of evangelism. I am not alone in that concern as various members have expressed theirs as well.

Also, as a pastor of BBC, I recognize that the responsibility for equipping the saints for the ministry of evangelism has been entrusted to me and my fellow pastors. If the church is not evangelizing faithfully, I certainly do not point my finger in judgment on the rest of the church. Rather I look in the mirror of my pastoral ministry to evaluate my faithfulness in exhorting, equipping, and setting an example for God's people in fulfilling the Great Commission. Together, we needed to grow in our understanding of what a vibrant evangelistic lifestyle entails. We needed to know and embrace what is involved in living as incarnational evangelists.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the process of developing a curriculum and to explain the implementation of its lessons designed to equip leaders of BBC in incarnational evangelism. This project served as the initial stage in an overall process of equipping BBC members to be faithful evangelists, with the intent that leaders will teach and model for others what they have learned and are applying in their own

lives. The goal was to train leaders at BBC in biblical principles for an evangelistic lifestyle to equip them for implementation of those principles in everyday life.

The equipping project lasted for twenty-two weeks. The tools developed included a pre-study survey called an Evangelism Practices Inventory (EPI), five lessons or leader guides, an evaluation rubric for the lessons, a participant's workbook, and a post-study EPI for evaluation of the project's effectiveness. The five lessons/leader guides were developed during weeks 1 through 5 of the project, utilizing the material presented in chapters 2 and 3 of this paper. In week 6, the pre-study EPI and evaluation rubric for the lessons were submitted, along with all five lessons, to a panel of four experts for evaluation. Weeks 7 and 8 were dedicated to scheduling the lessons and promoting it among the leaders at BBC. During week 9, the lesson evaluations were received and the curriculum revised in response to the panel's recommendations. The five lessons were taught in weeks 10 through 14, beginning with the pre-study EPI as part of the first lesson. Weeks 15 through 20 were dedicated to allowing participants time to put into practice the principles they had learned. In week 21, the post-study EPI was administered, with the inclusion of open-ended questions to ascertain the helpfulness of the study. Week 22 was dedicated to the evaluation of comparing pre-study and post-study EPI's.

This project was designed to be a first step in developing an evangelistic culture within the life of BBC by equipping leaders of the church to lead others in obedience to the Great Commission. For church members to be faithful evangelists, we need to know the characteristics of an evangelistic lifestyle—characteristics that are modeled in Christ's incarnation, in Paul's ministry, in the early church's witness, and in the work of cross-cultural missionaries. In the promotion of the upcoming study to church leaders, I encountered several more church members, from all age-groups, who desired to participate as well. I certainly was not going to block these members from doing so. In fact, their very desire to participate in this study communicated that they

have the desire to learn and to lead others to learn. As a result, there were a total of nineteen participants in the project.

Development of the Curriculum

A crucial component of this project was developing the curriculum to utilize in equipping church leaders to lead others into a culture of evangelism. A pre-study EPI and five lessons were the tools needed to equip these men, women and children to be incarnational evangelists.

Weeks 1 through 9

The pre-study EPI¹ was developed in week 1, along with the first lesson of the curriculum². The purpose of the EPI was to establish a baseline for the understanding and practice of evangelism by the study's participants. The remaining four lessons were written during weeks 2 through 5, along with the development of a rubric for evaluating the faithfulness to Scripture and practicality of the lessons³.

During week 6, the EPI, the five lessons, and the evaluation rubric were sent to an expert panel of colleagues for review. The panel consisted of four pastors, and I intentionally chose colleagues who spanned a wide spectrum of age, experiences, and fields of service to be a part of this evaluation process. One panel member serves in Kentucky as senior pastor of a growing local church and as a professor of personal evangelism at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Another panel member has served as senior pastor for nearly forty years with a single Alabama church that has experienced tremendous growth and maturity during his ministry. A third panel member is a young man serving a church in Georgia, having recently been called there as senior

¹See appendix 1.

²The five lessons of the curriculum are found in appendix 3.

³See appendix 2.

pastor. The final panel member is a retired pastor who served faithfully for several decades among tribes of Native Americans in the Dakotas and Montana.

Weeks 7 and 8 were given for promoting the study and scheduling a time that was suitable for church leaders to participate. It was during this time that several church members whom I had not approached expressed their desire to participate. For this reason, I chose to schedule the study on Sunday evenings. We had been using this timeslot for small group Bible study, and most of the members who were regularly attending the small groups on Sunday evenings wanted to be equipped through the project. I developed a five-week schedule for the “Sent as Incarnational Evangelists” study and communicated from the pulpit and through the church newsletter a summary of the lesson topics. The invitation was thus opened to all who would commit to attending the five weeks of study, and nineteen people signed up.

In week 9, I received the lesson evaluations from the panel of colleagues and found their responses to be positive overall. One panel member advised addressing the hindrance of fear to evangelism during the teaching, but he saw no need to change any part of the lessons themselves. Relatedly, another panel member recommended addressing the joy of total dependence on God’s power in evangelism, and that this awareness generates confidence and excitement. Though neither of these evaluations called for a change in the curriculum, they did prompt my giving sharp focus to these subjects in the teaching of the lessons.

The rubric score of one panel member, however, did call for a resubmission of the curriculum. His concerns were two: there was too little emphasis on prayer in the lessons, and the curriculum seemed to suggest that cross-cultural missionaries were only those who moved to distant places to serve. I discussed these matters with him by phone and resolved the matter concerning cross-cultural missionaries without revision to the lessons. I explained that while the lesson on cross-cultural missionaries does indeed single out those who have answered the call to move to distant lands to reach the lost, the

intent of that lesson is for church members to recognize that we too are called into similar sacrificial service to the lost around us, including crossing cultures where we live. With that discussion, he was satisfied with no changes to the curriculum concerning that matter.

His counsel on the matter of prayer, however, did prompt changes in the curriculum. The necessity of prayer was present in the biblical texts I had covered in the lessons; I had only to sharpen the focus on prayer in the lessons themselves. This man's counsel on the matter of prayer served to strengthen the curriculum in addressing our total dependence God in evangelism, a revision that helped me address the two concerns offered by other members of the evaluating panel simultaneously. After I resubmitted the revised curriculum to him, his evaluation reached the desired score. I am grateful to all four of these men for their help and counsel which made the curriculum more beneficial and the overall project more effective.

Survey and Lesson Implementation

Week 10 marked the beginning of the actual implementation of the project. Those church members who had signed up for the study became involved in the project by completing the pre-study EPI and being taught the five lessons.

Week 10

In week 10, the first session of the project took place, lasting approximately an hour and a half. We began and concluded each of the five sessions with a time of prayer, asking the Lord to teach us and strengthen us to be the bold, sacrificial evangelists we are called to be. During the initial thirty minutes of the first session, the participants were instructed concerning the EPI and given time to complete this pre-study survey. The questions in the EPI served to evaluate the participant's knowledge of what evangelism is and their present practice of an evangelistic lifestyle. The questions were meant to gauge the participant's understanding of the necessity of clear communication of the gospel in

evangelism, the responsibility of evangelism that is held by all believers, and the dreadful fate of all who do not hear and respond to the gospel. The survey also was intended to measure each participant's current evangelistic activity, their present level of confidence in doing so, and expose hindrances to their being faithful evangelists.

To foster candid answers to the survey's questions, the EPI was to be completed anonymously, with each participant assigning a PIN to the survey rather than affixing his or her name. The purpose of this survey was to establish a baseline for their understanding and practice of evangelism in their weekly lives before the training was implemented. The survey questioned the participants on components of an evangelistic lifestyle that would be addressed in the five lessons to be taught. The pre-study EPI's were completed, turned in, and filed for future use, to be scored and compared to the post-study EPI's when the project was completed.

The next hour of the first session marked the beginning of the teaching component of the project. Participant workbooks⁴ were distributed, and I gave instruction about completing the workbook—filling in the blanks—as we progressed through the lesson. I also gave an overview of the topic of each of the coming sessions, indicating that we would study the incarnation and ministry of Jesus, the ministry of Paul, the witness of the early church, and the work of cross-cultural missionaries in the first four sessions. These first four lessons would be primarily instruction, but I encouraged the participants to offer discussion and ask questions throughout. The final session would be less instructional and primarily devoted to discussing specific applications in our individual lives and in the corporate life of our church. At the beginning and end of each session, I asked the participants to pray about and meditate on the lessons we were learning, write in their workbooks their ideas about how to apply those lessons, and be ready to discuss those ideas in the week 5 session.

⁴See appendix 5.

The first lesson focused on the evangelistic example of Christ in his incarnation and ministry. The lesson presented the Great Commission passage in John 20:19-23 as the foundational passage for the entire study, focusing on the link the passage indicates between the mission of Jesus and the commission he gave to his disciples. All of the participants recognized the link and agreed that since that link exists, there are attributes of Jesus' ministry that should color and shape our lives as faithful evangelists. We acknowledged together that while Jesus' mission was a unique one that only he could accomplish, his ministry also provides us an example to instruct us in living on mission with him today.

The lesson then called the participants to see four components of Jesus' ministry: obedience in love, identification with his hearers, contextualization of his message, and suffering, sacrificial service. We discussed how these components are found in the full scope of Jesus' incarnation—from his coming into the world, throughout his life and ministry, and culminating in his sacrifice at the cross. We spent most of our time looking at various texts in the Gospels that set forth the four components. In the discussion, there were questions about the word, contextualization, and I devoted time to explain the meaning of the word. We considered several instances in Scripture in which Jesus went to great lengths to see that his hearers understood and were able to process his message concerning their need and his sufficiency to meet that need. As we progressed through each of the four components, the participants responded with understanding and agreement, and some began to voice ideas for application of these components in their own lives.

Week 11

On week 11, we considered the ministry of Paul and his commitment to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. The lesson began with a consideration of Paul's instruction in 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 that believers are a people who have been radically changed by the

gospel and sent into the world as ambassadors, entrusted with the gospel message. The participants were quick to see themes in the 2 Corinthians passage that were also found in the Great Commission statement in John 20—themes such as the peace Jesus provides us through reconciliation with God, that all who have experienced that peace are sent into the world, and they are sent as messengers to serve others through the faithful communication of that message.

After laying this groundwork, we considered Paul's own ministry of the gospel and how that ministry was clearly shaped by that of Christ's ministry. To make Paul's imitation of Christ evident, we traced the record of his ministry by considering several passages in Acts and in his letters and found the same four components of ministry that we had found in Jesus—obedience in love, identification with his hearers, contextualization of his message, and suffering, sacrificial service. An exciting and encouraging element of this lesson was to hear the participants connect with their lives the need for the same imitation we find in Paul. This needed connection was underscored as we considered Paul's charge to the church in 1 Corinthians 10:33-11:1, to be imitators of him as he was of Christ, not seeking our own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.

In this session, we addressed the apathy and fears and self-centeredness that hinder a faithful evangelistic lifestyle. Participants noted how the love of Jesus compelled Paul to obedience, and his witness was bold and confident because Paul was dependent upon Jesus to speak and work through him. Fear and apathy can be conquered through dependence on Christ and the obedience that faith fuels. They noted how Paul gave up his preferences in order to identify with people and how he labored to start with his hearers' current knowledge and worldview and then lead them toward an understanding of the gospel. Most encouraging of all, the participants began to see in Paul's ministry that living evangelistically will require sacrificial service and suffering on the part of those sent by Christ into the world. As in the first session, ideas of application

began to surface. We discussed briefly about ways in which service and gospel witness go together and the self-sacrifice that evangelism entails. I encouraged the participants to write these application ideas down for deeper discussion in our final session.

Week 12

The Sunday evening of week 12 marked the teaching of the third lesson. In this session, we focused our attention on the witness of the early church recorded in Scripture and the early centuries of church history. The lesson was structured to indicate two aspects of the early church's witness that should be present in the life of the church today.

The first aspect was that the evangelistic ministry of the church involved mass participation. We saw in Acts that the first recorded summary of church life reveals the whole church devoting themselves to preaching, fellowship, worship, prayer, and evangelism (Acts 2:4-47). We saw that in answer to prayer, all the believers were filled with the Spirit for bold witness (Acts 4:23-31). We saw that the apostles remained behind when the church was initially scattered from Jerusalem by persecution, yet those who scattered went preaching the gospel (Acts 8:1-4). We saw that the first multi-ethnic church was planted through the witness of unnamed evangelists (Acts 11:19-21). In Paul's letters, we found evidence of mass participation in personal evangelism by the whole church. This aspect solidified what we had already seen in the first two sessions: the responsibility and privilege of evangelism rests upon every disciple of Christ.

The second aspect of early church witness we studied was that it involved living and speaking the gospel. We found examples in Scripture and extra-biblical church history of a commitment to intentionally connect with others and carefully contextualize the gospel message. We also noted that this gospel proclamation was paired with sacrificial service and generosity. We compared John 1:18 with 1 John 4:12, noting that in John's Gospel account, the incarnation of the Son of God has made the

unseen God known, and in John's first letter, the church's love as God abides in us provides evidence of the unseen God. The Bible declares love not solely as an inward feeling but an outward action, and so we see evidence of the church ministering sacrificially to meet the needs of others as they proclaim the good news of Jesus that alone brings peace with God.

The participants acknowledged the thrust of this second aspect of witness to be that while there is no evangelism without speaking the gospel, loving and serving others is the accompanying embodiment of the message we speak. One of the participants remarked that incarnational evangelism is "telling others the gospel while putting skin on the gospel for them to see." There was discussion in this session about the need for going beyond the delivery of memorized gospel presentations and doing the hard work of getting to know people, discovering how they view life, embracing opportunities to serve them, and leading them to an understanding of who Jesus is and what he has done for us in his life, death, and resurrection.

Week 13

I taught the fourth lesson of the curriculum in week 13. In this session, we considered the work of cross-cultural missionaries. I explained that for the purposes of the lesson, cross-cultural missionaries would be defined as those who have left the familiarity and comfort of their home to serve the gospel to unreached people in various places around the world. The lesson was structured around two aspects of a cross-cultural missionary's ministry.

The first aspect we considered is that the work of cross-cultural missionaries involves a singular purpose. All the participants agreed that the sole reason missionaries leave their homes and move to another place is to seek the salvation of the people among whom they will serve, by those people hearing, understanding, and responding to the gospel. Since that work is the missionary's singular purpose, we explored what the

missionary must do to accomplish that purpose. Missionaries devote time, energy, and much labor to learning the people they seek to reach, including the people's language, traditions, and culture. Their aim is to be able to identify with the people in order to clearly communicate the gospel to them.

Drawing from the research shown in chapter 3 of this paper, I presented material that missiologist, Duane Elmer, has published concerning six steps in serving of the gospel across cultures. Those steps include openness, acceptance, trust, learning, understanding, and serving.⁵ We discussed each of these steps with our focus fixed on how each would apply in our own setting of Louisville, Kentucky. By the time we finished this exercise, the participants were primed for the primary point this part of the lesson was intended to make. The purpose for every Christian in the field of service God has placed them is no different than that of cross-cultural missionaries: to seek the salvation of people by their hearing, understanding, and responding to the gospel. The participants voiced acknowledgment that just as the missionary does the hard work of identifying with people and contextualizing the gospel, so should every believer.

As I stated in the opening chapter of this paper, the congregation at BBC is made up of a large percentage of older believers who may feel a lack of confidence in reaching younger generations. We acknowledged that crossing generations can be just as daunting as crossing cultures. To address this hindrance to evangelism, I presented a case study drawn from the research of Thom Rainer and Jess Rainer, also covered in chapter 3 of this paper. That research reveals that the majority of the largest generation in U.S. history—the Millennials—have not embraced the gospel, but the research also indicates that this generation is receptive to older mentors who will speak wisdom into their lives.⁶

⁵See pp. 59-60 of this paper for a summary explanation of these six steps. Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Servanthood: Serving the World in Christlike Humility* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

⁶Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2011).

The participants agreed that reaching that generation with the gospel will necessarily involve older believers who see it as their purpose to sacrifice whatever it takes cross the generational chasm and reach them.

At this point in the lesson, we focused on a second aspect of the ministry of cross-cultural missionaries—that of willing sacrifice. As stated in the first chapter of this paper, BBC is partnered with missionaries in distant lands, and we entered into a discussion about the comforts and familiarities that these missionaries have sacrificed to obey the Great Commission. We also discussed the hardships that these missionaries have embraced to reach people with the gospel. The participants voiced agreement that our lives should follow that same pattern. Remarks were made about our tendency to be caught up in the business of our culture and everyday lives while giving little thought to the purpose Christ has for us in our spheres of influence. All indicated agreement that we are called to the same singular purpose and the same willing sacrifice as our missionary partners. The only difference is our present place of service.

Week 14

In week 14, the participants came with anticipation for the final lesson of the curriculum. We had learned together about the characteristics of an evangelistic lifestyle as we studied the ministry of Jesus, Paul's labors after him, the church's witness, and the work of our missionary partners. This final session was devoted foremost to a review of the primary thrusts of those first four lessons and a time of discussing specific applications in our lives. The goal of this session was to brainstorm together about concrete ways to act on what we had learned. In each of the previous four sessions, ideas for application had been voiced, and I had asked the participants to write those ideas down in their workbooks so that we might discuss the more deeply. This session provided the setting for that deeper discussion, and the responses were encouraging.

As we reviewed what we had learned, I asked pre-planned questions designed

to help us think through and articulate specific applications. The hindrance to faithful evangelism that fear of man creates was one of the first subjects addressed in our discussion. Participants talked of how the love of God and the peace we have in Christ empowers us to overcome fear of man in evangelism. Participants noted that fear often results from simple forgetfulness of the fact that God works through the power of his gospel as we tell it to others. A reminder of that fact breeds confidence in our witness as we depend upon the power of God. It was also expressed that even when we do feel fear, we can combat that fear by simply choosing to obey the God who has loved us, asking him for strength and boldness. Our sole desire should be to please God by telling others about him, and obedience in the face of fear is a part of our sacrifice in the work of evangelism. One participant voiced that we will face rejection and ridicule from time to time, but rejection and ridicule is a part of the suffering we experience in our sacrifice for the well-being of others. He reminded us from lesson 1 that our Savior's incarnation and ministry was marked by suffering, sacrificial service. Thus, our lives as his incarnational evangelists should be so marked.

Complacency was another hindrance directly addressed in the discussion. We spent more time addressing this hindrance than any other. There seemed to be unanimous agreement that we often fail to evangelize because our own schedules, comforts, and agendas outweigh the Great Commission in our priorities. We lose sight of our Lord's purpose for us in our spheres of influence and become self-focused. To break out of that pattern requires the willing sacrifice of self, and we discussed what such sacrifice might entail.

To intentionally identify with others requires our time, energy, and compassion. We must invite others into our lives, welcome them in love, and seek to understand them. To learn about others, how they view life, and their core beliefs requires commitment and the hard work of truly listening. To search out and seize opportunities to serve others in meeting their needs will certainly involve some level of

sacrifice. To properly contextualize the gospel may require our tearing down misconceptions of Christianity in a person's mind or lovingly exposing inconsistencies in their beliefs in order to clearly communicate the truth of who Christ is and what Christ has done. All of these activities require sacrifice, and it was exciting to hear the participants express such sacrifice as characteristic of an evangelistic lifestyle.

A few participants and I offered ideas for living such a lifestyle. One idea was to make a list of people in our spheres of influence who do not know Christ and begin to pray for them daily. This idea is certainly a proper starting point. Another idea was to invite one person who does not know Christ for coffee or lunch every other week and start the work of truly getting to know something about them. Another voiced idea was to make a list of tangible needs that you see in a neighbor's life, and circle one or two of those needs that you would like to meet. It was noted that this idea would be fitting for the corporate life of our church as well. We could make a list of community needs we see, choosing one or two ways for the church to serve our neighborhood while praying for and seizing opportunities to begin relationships and gospel conversations with our neighbors. As these and other ideas were discussed, I was encouraged to hear the understanding and excitement among these church leaders and their desire to embrace the characteristics of an evangelistic lifestyle.

The final session concluded with another brief period of instruction concerning an aspect of Jesus' and Paul's ministry that we had not yet given direct focus. The subject of this closing instruction was that of leading others to lead. We considered Jesus' sacrificial commitment to prepare his disciples to lead, and we considered Paul's imitation of Jesus in training and equipping future leaders. The closing applications were twofold. First, I asked that each participant select one person to be a partner in holding one another accountable as faithful incarnational evangelists. Second, I asked that each participant consider asking one or two other church members who had not participated in this project to study these brief lessons with them.

The primary intent of the study was to equip these church leaders to embrace the characteristics of an evangelistic lifestyle. The immediate goal was to see BBC leaders faithful in serving the gospel to the lost in their spheres of influence and leading the rest of the church to do the same. The long-term goal was to create a culture within BBC in which all members are engaged in sacrificing ourselves for the responsibility and privilege of the Great Commission. The participants in this study seemed to fully understand the concepts and principles we saw displayed in the ministries of Jesus, Paul, the early church, and cross-cultural missionaries. Intentionally applying that understanding to our daily lives was the task before us. The aim is to be faithful incarnational evangelists.

Application and Evaluation of the Lessons

Before conducting the post-study EPI, I allowed a period of six weeks for the participants to begin applying the lessons we had learned. The post-study EPI then administered was identical to the pre-study EPI except for the inclusion of five open-ended questions. The project was concluded with the exercise of comparing pre-study and post-study EPI's and evaluating the effectiveness of the project.

Week 15 through 20

During this period, the participants were given the opportunity to respond with action to the lessons learned in the five sessions. Some participants approached me during this period recounting with excitement conversations they had with family members, friends, and co-workers for whom they had been praying. At least one participant also candidly expressed her ongoing battle with timidity and fear. In every instance, I sought to encourage them to continue in the fight of faith to live out the principles we had learned. The testimonies I heard from the participants during these weeks encouraged me that the project was making an impact in their practice of evangelism.

Week 21

The Sunday evening of week 21 saw the participants gathered again to complete the post-study EPI. I added five open-ended questions to the end of the EPI to provide participants the opportunity to express their responses to the study in their own words. I sought their opinions concerning the effectiveness of the project in their commitment and practice of evangelism. They were asked to articulate if the study had helped them to overcome hindrances of fear, apathy, and distractions in sharing the gospel with others. No participant had yet begun to take another church member through the study, but all participants appeared to be engaging the principles of the lessons in some way. All the participants expressed some level of enthusiasm for what they had learned, and most indicated that their desire to be faithful evangelists had been strengthened as a result. The tenor of the responses was encouraging to me as their pastor.

Week 22

Week 22 was devoted to comparing pre-study and post-study EPI's, measuring results, and assessing the outcome of the project. A baseline for the understanding and practice of evangelism was established by scoring the results of the pre-study EPI. The effectiveness of the project was determined by scoring the post-study EPI and comparing the two. I also took into account the responses to the five open-ended questions in determining if the project had moved the participants forward into more faithful evangelism. The results of this analysis are presented in the final chapter of this paper.

In addition, I formed an outline for recording the implementation and evaluation of this project in writing. I reviewed the lessons, recalled my notes from the discussions, and gathered other materials needed to write this chapter and chapter 5 of this paper. My hope is that this project and the materials produced may help BBC for ongoing training and future growth in the work of evangelism.

Conclusion

This project was intended as a step toward developing a culture of faithful evangelism at BBC. Many lessons were learned throughout the entire project. As I conducted research and an analysis of the components of the ministries of Christ, Paul, the early church, and cross-cultural missionaries, the hindrances to a vibrant evangelistic lifestyle were exposed in my own life. As I led the participants through the study, we learned together about the characteristics present in the lives of incarnational evangelists. The participants and I would agree that the entire project was a valuable learning experience for us all.

The effort to produce a congregation of obedient, sacrificial, joy-filled evangelists at BBC of Louisville, Kentucky, is ongoing. This project was a vital step in that direction, and a step that hopefully will be replicated throughout the entire membership of our church. Certainly, the desire of the leaders who participated in the study is that our church be living the Great Commission our Lord has given us, trusting in his power and presence with us in the task.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The evaluation of this project is an examination of its purpose, goals, strengths, and weaknesses along with proposed modifications that could enhance its effectiveness. Theological observations and personal reflections will also be included in the final segment of the evaluation.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to design and implement an incarnational evangelism strategy among the members of Bethany Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. This purpose was appropriate since, over the course of several decades, BBC's membership had declined steadily. During the first five years of my pastoral ministry with BBC, we had witnessed a healthy increase in long-range missions participation through sending and going to the nations with the gospel. But we were not seeing an increase in short-range missions—reaching our own community with the gospel. The number of additions to our membership by baptism have been few and seldom. While we are not in control of the harvest and people's response to the gospel, my concern was that we were being less than faithful to effectively serve our community with the gospel so that they had a real opportunity to respond. God brings the harvest through faithful gospel witness; my concern was that BBC's membership was lacking either in motivation or in being equipped to evangelize our neighbors.

Additionally, I was concerned that we might be lacking a full understanding of the characteristics of an evangelistic lifestyle. While I considered that the majority of BBC's membership recognized the necessity of speaking the gospel to the lost for

evangelism to take place, I feared that we were not laying down ourselves in sacrificial service to others in order to show the love of Christ and gain a hearing for the gospel. I longed to see us embodying the description of Paul's ministry that he expressed in his correspondence with the Thessalonian church, being affectionately desirous of the lost around us so that we are ready to share not only the gospel of God but also our own selves (1 Thess 2:8). I feared that our personal schedules, agendas, and comforts were capitalizing our lives and hindering faithful, incarnational outreach into our community.

The timing was good for this project because the majority of BBC's members were cognizant of the problem of decline we face. The recent preaching schedule in our corporate worship services had included an in-depth study of the book of Acts. That series of sermons concluded during the implementation of this project. A planned part of our study of Acts saw our small groups engaging in discussion about the dynamic witness of the church that is surrendered to the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. Our study in Acts and the resulting discussions had laid a foundation for us to build on as we considered the nature of incarnational evangelism through the project.

Finally, I was concerned that BBC leaders were not zealously laboring to truly lead and equip others to be faithful disciple-makers for Christ. My aim was to construct a tool that would be useful not only in equipping leaders to be passionate evangelists but also to be passionate equippers of other church members in evangelism. Though only the initial change in the knowledge and practice of evangelism among the church leaders would be measured at the project's conclusion, the long-term goal was for the project to be the initial step toward fostering an evangelistic lifestyle within the whole of the church.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

Goals were chosen as the means of accomplishing and measuring the success of the project. I considered it important to develop goals that successively built on one

another toward accomplishing the project's stated purpose. The first goal was to design a questionnaire to assess the current understanding and practice of evangelism among a pastor-selected group of leaders at BBC. The second goal was to develop a five-session curriculum that would equip church members for incarnational evangelism. This curriculum was used to accomplish the third goal, which was to equip the group of leaders for incarnational evangelism. These lessons and the accompanying participant workbooks would be used for future training of more of the membership of BBC for incarnational evangelism. The success of this third goal would be evaluated by administering the pre-study questionnaire in a post-study setting. The compared results would indicate if the understanding and practice of evangelism had increased among the church leaders.

Goal 1

The first goal was to assess the current understanding and practice of evangelism among a pastor-selected group of leaders at BBC. A questionnaire, the Evangelism Practices Inventory (EPI), was developed on the Likert scale for the purpose of accomplishing this goal.¹ The questions covered the material to be found in the lessons developed and taught to the participants over five successive weeks. Those who participated in the assessment were asked to answer according to their degree of agreement or disagreement with each statement of the questionnaire. A Likert scale of 0 to 6 was used to assign a point value for each response. Higher point values were determined by the degree of correctness and conviction in the participant's marked answer. Twenty-two statements were included in the EPI. For fourteen of the statements, a marked answer of "strongly agree" would merit a point value of 6, and for the remaining eight statements, an answer of "strongly disagree" would merit a point

¹See appendix 1.

value of 6.²

The EPI, along with the five-lesson curriculum, was evaluated by an expert panel of colleagues. Information from the panel's evaluation will be shown under the section concerning goal 2 below. As I awaited the panel's response, I found it beneficial to slightly modify the first goal of the project. I had planned to select 6 to 12 recognized church leaders to participate initially in the study. The majority of BBC's membership, however, was aware of my work in developing the curriculum, and several people I had not planned to select to participate expressed a desire to do so. As I reported in the previous chapter, I modified this first goal to open the training to any member who would commit to the five weeks of study. As a result, a total of nineteen people participated and were administered the EPI at the beginning of the first session.

Out of a possible high score of 132, the average score of the pre-study EPI was 91. The lowest score was 63, and the highest was 120. I learned several things as I analyzed and scored the pre-study questionnaire. First, the scores indicated a relatively wide range in the understanding and practice of evangelism among the participants. I had anticipated such a range, and the scores confirmed it. Some of the participants possessed a healthy understanding of what evangelism is and were actively engaging the lost around them with the gospel. Others were unsure of their responsibility in evangelism, and their practice of it was minimal at best. One of the statements of the questionnaire read, "Jesus has commanded me, personally, to evangelize unbelievers," and I was admittedly surprised to find one participant strongly disagree. On the other hand, I was excited to see this range of responses, since the intent of the project was to strengthen those who were already engaging the lost with the gospel while bringing those who were confused about the Great Commission into the joy of obedience. To further encourage the active

²See appendix 1. For statements 1 through 6, 8, 10, 11, 14 through 17, and 22, an answer of "strongly agree" merited a score of 6. For statements 7, 9, 12, 13, and 18 through 21, an answer of "strongly disagree" merited a score of 6.

evangelists was certainly my desire, but to see those who had been inactive gain great strides forward in the work of Christ's kingdom would mean a significant first step toward fostering an evangelistic culture at BBC.

The results of the EPI also proved that a good understanding of evangelism does not necessarily result in faithful practice of it. Some of the statements in the EPI focused on knowledge of what evangelism is, while some dealt with the practice of evangelism. Overall, the participants scored higher on knowledge but lower on practice. For example, every participant either agreed or strongly agreed that unbelievers will spend eternity in hell if they do not put their faith in Jesus. Yet thirteen of the nineteen participants agreed to some degree that they had not shared the gospel with anyone in the previous month. These results confirmed for me that our need was to be equipped to put our knowledge of evangelism to work and discover ways to engage the lost around us with the gospel.

The application of the EPI provided a snapshot of the participants' biblical understanding concerning evangelism and some hope about what progress might be achieved through the project. The survey also confirmed to the participants that the upcoming lessons were needed and produced a level of excitement about our journey of study together. Overall, the evaluation process was thus encouraging. With the committed participation of the group of nineteen members, the first goal was considered successful.

Goal 2

The second goal was to develop a five-session curriculum that would equip church members for incarnational evangelism. These lessons were designed to achieve the purpose of the project. The first four lessons considered the characteristics of the ministry of Jesus, the ministry of Paul, the witness of the early church, and the work of cross-cultural missionaries. The final lesson was designed to be discussion-oriented by

asking questions formulated to explore specific application of the principles learned in the first four lessons. The fifth lesson also included instruction on the subject of equipping other church members to be faithful evangelists.

I developed the lessons using the material gained from my previous research and study for the project, which is contained in chapters 2 and 3 of this paper. When the first draft of the curriculum was completed, I forwarded the five lessons, the EPI questionnaire, and an evaluation rubric to a panel of four colleagues for their evaluation.³

The curriculum was to be evaluated and scored in three areas: biblical faithfulness, scope, and practicality. A total of ten questions were asked concerning these areas to gauge the sufficiency of the curriculum. Each question marked as “sufficient” or “exemplary” carried a score of ten points; each question marked as “insufficient” or “requires attention” carried a score of zero. Goal 2 would be considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the sufficient level. In the initial return of evaluations, the average score of the total of four evaluation rubrics was 87.5 (as shown in table 1 below), indicating an insufficiency in the curriculum and the need for revisions.

Table 1: Scores from initial evaluation rubrics

Area	Reviewer 1	Reviewer 2	Reviewer 3	Reviewer 4
Biblical	30	30	10	30
Scope	30	30	10	30
Practicality	40	40	30	40
Totals	100	100	50	100

³See appendix 2 for the evaluation rubric

As I reported in the previous chapter, the concerns of the reviewer who scored the curriculum as insufficient had to do with the subjects of prayer and the definition of a cross-cultural missionaries. He counseled that the curriculum did not stress strongly enough the importance of prayer in evangelism, and he sensed that the lessons limited the definition of cross-cultural missionaries to those who move from their homes to distant lands. After I discussed further with him the intent of the curriculum to motivate all believers to model their lives after cross-cultural missionaries, he was satisfied with no changes to the curriculum concerning that subject. His counsel concerning prayer prompted me to revise the lessons in order to stress the necessity of prayer and dependence on God in evangelism, and after a resubmission of the revised lesson, the reviewer returned a second evaluation indicating a score of 100. Thus, the final score of the panel of reviews was 100, indicating a sufficient curriculum of study.⁴

After the evaluation process and lesson revisions, I developed a workbook for the participants to use throughout the study.⁵ The workbooks were designed in a fill-in-the-blank format, with lesson 5 also including several open-ended questions crafted to prompt discussion of the applications of the material. The participants were encouraged to record their names on their workbook and to keep them for future reference. The hope is that these workbooks will continue to be utilized in the ongoing equipping of additional BBC members. Extra workbooks were printed to have available for that purpose.

The lessons were designed to have Scripture lead participants to see their responsibility and privilege in evangelism. In each session, we read passages from God's Word and filled in the workbook blanks with answers found in the Bible. My objective was to see Scripture better inform the participants on the characteristics of an evangelistic lifestyle. I took care to make the workbooks easy to use with the intent that believers of

⁴See appendix 4 for panel members' remarks included in their evaluations.

⁵See appendix 5.

all ages and maturity in the faith could follow along, learn, and then use the material to help equip others. With the final evaluation average score being above 90 percent, goal 2 was considered successful.

Goal 3

The third goal was to utilize the curriculum to equip the group of church leaders for incarnational evangelism. This goal was achieved by teaching through the five-lesson curriculum with nineteen church members who had committed to the study. The intent was to increase the participant's knowledge of scriptural truth concerning evangelism and the characteristics of an evangelistic lifestyle. The curriculum aimed at both increasing knowledge and fostering a spirit of joyful obedience to the Lord by serving the lost with faithful gospel witness.

The lessons were taught over a period of five consecutive weeks. Each lesson was taught in a 60- to 90-minute session. Lesson 1 began with a general introduction, including the completion of the pre-study EPI, before the actual material was covered. Lessons 2 through 4 began with a brief review of the previously-studied lesson(s) before moving into the current lesson. Lesson 5 consisted of a thorough review of all the material, with the bulk of the session's time devoted to discussing the application of the material in the individual participants' lives and in the corporate life of BBC. Lesson 5 concluded with the biblical call to develop and equip other disciples of Christ to be faithful incarnational evangelists. The lessons began in early January and concluded in early February. All nineteen participants attended every session, and the study was enthusiastically embraced by all involved.

The lessons were followed by a period of six weeks that allowed the participants to begin to put into practice the principles they had learned. The aim was to see all participants embracing the characteristics of incarnational evangelism. At the close of the six weeks, the participants gathered again on a Sunday evening for an

evaluation of the effectiveness of the study. The evaluation was accomplished by administering a post-study EPI identical to the pre-study EPI and then comparing the scores via a *t*-test.

The evaluation revealed a marked improvement in the average EPI score. The mean score progressed from 91.1 to 101.8, a 10-point increase over the pre-lesson average. The *t*-test also indicated that the absolute value of the *t*-stat was larger than the *t*-critical value, and the *p* value was less than .05. I was encouraged to find that the teaching of the lessons to the select group of median persons made a statistically significant difference resulting in the increase of their knowledge of the material covered and their evangelistic practice ($t_{(9)} = 3.769$, $p < .001$) (see table 2).

I found it exciting that the score comparison indicated a significant increase in knowledge and practice among those who scored lowest in the pre-study EPI. While the aim of the progress was to see every participant gaining ground in evangelism, to see those who had been lethargic making great strides forward would be a significant step in a churchwide evangelistic culture. I was thankful to see the active evangelists growing but was even more so to see those who had been inactive in evangelism greatly strengthened by the study.

I was alarmed, however, to find that three of the participants scored lower on the EPI after the study than before the study. The last thing I wanted to happen was for anyone to digress rather than progress in living evangelistically! After a closer analysis of the questionnaires, I found first that the decrease in scores was primarily related to questions that dealt with the practice of evangelism rather than the knowledge of what evangelism is. Secondly, many of the questions that saw a decrease in score addressed an acknowledgment of the reasons behind a lack of evangelism. All three of these participants had scored high on the first EPI (two of them above a score of 100), and their lower scores on the second EPI seemed to indicate that they had become more sensitive to the reasons why they sometimes fail to evangelize. These findings gave me a measure

of relief and understanding about their decrease in score.

Table 2: Comparison of pre- and post-study EPI scores

Participant	Pre-Study	Post-Study	Difference	
1	63	71	8	
2	67	107	40	
3	71	104	33	
4	79	94	15	
5	81	96	15	
6	86	87	1	
7	86	117	31	
8	88	102	14	
9	89	88	-1	
10	92	107	15	
11	96	104	8	
12	97	99	2	
13	99	105	6	
14	100	102	2	
15	100	109	9	
16	104	114	10	
17	105	99	-6	
18	109	111	2	
19	120	119	-1	$t_{(9)} = 3.769$

Additionally, it was at this point that I was thankful to have included several open-ended questions on the post-study EPI to help measure the effectiveness of the

study. All nineteen participants expressed gratitude for the lessons they had learned. Many gave specific ways the study had strengthened them, especially in seeing the call to sacrificial service, welcoming lost people into their lives, and striving to understand others' worldviews in order to communicate the gospel in a clear manner. I was pleased to see several participants honestly acknowledge their ongoing struggles, and I was thankful to read their remarks about how the lessons had strengthened them and helped them to grasp the characteristics of incarnational evangelism. With the average increase in EPI scores, coupled with the positive responses to the open-ended questions, the third project goal was considered reached.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Project

In my analysis of the achieved goals, I identified three primary strengths of the project. First, the EPI enabled me to have a picture of participants' understanding and practice of evangelism going into the study. Without the questionnaire, I would have had no knowledge of what the participants' starting point was. The questionnaire actually served a dual purpose, however. As the participants answered each question, they were brought to consider the hindrances to faithful evangelism that were present in their lives. This process prepared them for the material that would be taught them in the coming weeks.

Second, the curriculum drew a strong focus upon the characteristics of an evangelistic lifestyle. The lessons were constructed to form a picture of what incarnational evangelism should look like in the believer's life. The study of Christ, Paul, the early church, and cross-cultural missionaries showed us a pattern that is to be existent in every Christian. Furthermore, the characteristics that we found addressed each hindrance to evangelism that the EPI had exposed. This process of learning served as a source of strength in overcoming those hindrances and striving to see the characteristics evident in our own lives.

The third strength is anchored in the achievement of the final goal of equipping the participants in incarnational evangelism. If an increase in knowledge and practice of evangelism had not been achieved, the project would have served only as a lesson in a process that did not work. I am thankful that the project made a difference in the lives of the participants, helping them to bear faithful witness with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. That goal was the whole point of the project.

I identified two weaknesses in the project. First, the study presented no formal method of sharing the gospel. The introduction to the first lesson indicated that the study was not designed to provide a common, reusable presentation for evangelism but to consider the characteristics of an evangelistic lifestyle. My goal was for the participants to grasp these characteristics and seek to pattern their lives accordingly. I still believe that goal was good and necessary. I found indication in the post-study EPI's, however, that some of the participants still felt less than fully equipped to be faithful evangelists. They expressed a desire to exhibit the characteristics of an evangelistic lifestyle but also a level of trepidation about clearly communicating the good news. The study could have addressed this problem with the inclusion of a structured outline of the gospel message.

The second weakness had to do with equipping the participants to be faithful leaders who equip others. Though the primary goal of the project was to equip leaders for faithful evangelism, the long-term goal was for the participants to take what they learned and teach it to others in the church. Their doing so will help to foster an evangelistic culture within BBC. Though the curriculum did reveal that leading and equipping others was a characteristic of Christ's and Paul's ministries, that subject was not addressed until the end of the final lesson. Thus, we had little time for discussion about the application of that characteristic. I had intended for the subject of leading and equipping others to serve as something of an exclamation point at the end of the study, but in the actual teaching of the lessons, I fear it appeared to be more of an afterthought.

Proposed Modifications

The modifications I propose for the project address the two weaknesses identified in the paragraphs above. Given the opportunity to repeat this project, I would include a sixth lesson that provided a helpful, structured tool to clearly communicate the gospel. That lesson would still caution against a one-method-fits-all approach to evangelism but would arm the participants with a framework for speaking the message of salvation. There are various tools and diagrams that are already available to aid in evangelism, and another option for future participants would be to simply incorporate the learning of one of those tools as a follow-up to the study. Doing so would hopefully increase the participants' sense of being equipped.

The second modification would be to sharpen the study's focus on equipping others for evangelism. This weakness could be alleviated by including this characteristic throughout the lessons rather than leaving it for the conclusion. As the participants are shown that equipping others was a major component of Jesus' ministry, Paul's ministry, the life of the early church, and the work of cross-cultural missionaries, the call for their embrace of that characteristic in their own lives would be more thoroughly communicated. The curriculum was designed to be easy to use in equipping others, and with a sharper focus on that responsibility, participants would be more motivated to do so.

Theological Observations

My desire in this project was to equip the local church and increase its evangelistic fervor through a consideration of the characteristics of an evangelistic lifestyle. With John's Great Commission account as the foundation, the lessons at the heart of the project were designed to explore the practical implications of the link Christ revealed between his own incarnational ministry and the mission he entrusted to his disciples. While Christ's ministry was supremely unique, the characteristics of that ministry set an example that is to shape and color the proclamatory mission of his people.

I have used the term, incarnational evangelism, to capture and communicate that truth.

A primary characteristic of incarnational evangelism that surfaced is that of intentional service. Jesus fulfilled the ultimate intentional service for mankind. Christ's service *is* the gospel we proclaim, but the ministry of his witnesses should be characterized by the same serving spirit Christ demonstrated. Showing generosity, seeking to meet needs, welcoming others into our lives with sincere hospitality, and striving to understand their worldviews are all forms of service that should accompany and illustrate the wonderful news we share.

Intentionally serving others in order to clearly communicate the gospel is a costly endeavor, which leads to another crucial characteristic of incarnational evangelism. That characteristic is the sacrifice of self. Approaching this project, my concern was that we often fail to evangelize because we are so busy with other activities, but I wondered what exactly we were so busy doing. In our present culture, believers are bombarded with the temptations of personal comfort, ease, entertainment, safety, and self-focused pursuits. These temptations are not new, of course. The church has always faced the temptations of the pursuits and pleasures of the present world. The call to follow Christ is a call to die to self and follow him who gave himself as the supreme sacrifice for us. Faithful witness involves the selfless surrender of the right to our own agendas and schedules, laying down our lives so that the lost might come to hear of Christ and know him. We are accustomed to thinking this way about missionaries who sacrifice the comforts of home to reach lost people groups, but I longed for us all to see that a similar life of sacrifice is to characterize all of Christ's ambassadors.

These characteristics of sacrifice and intentional service are tied to a focused purpose in mission. The purpose of Christ's incarnation lay at the cross, and all that he did in life and ministry had that purpose in view. In Paul's ministry, the early church's witness, and the work of cross-cultural missionaries, a singular purpose is in view. That purpose is to clearly communicate the gospel to a lost world, regardless of the cost to the

communicators. My desire was that BBC have that singular focus in view as we live our lives and carry out our ministry.

This focused purpose finds its taproot in the love of God. God's love sent the Son into the world and was demonstrated in Christ's perfect obedience even unto death on a cross. Christ's love controlled Paul's ministry and was displayed in the visible and verbal witness of the Spirit-powered Church. The love of God prompted the incarnation of the Son of God, and only the love of God can form and fuel the incarnational proclaimers of that good news. Living an evangelistic lifestyle then is both a response of loving obedience to the God who has loved us—loving him supremely—and a participation in delivering God's love to the world—loving our neighbors as ourselves. In chapter 1 of this paper, I defined incarnational evangelism as sacrificial service to and intentional identification with unbelievers for the purpose of a clear, compassionate communication of the gospel. The love of God is the fountainhead from which all the characteristics of such a lifestyle flow.

Personal Reflections

The development and implementation of this project carried me to a deeper understanding of the nature of the awesome privilege and responsibility that is ours in evangelism. My personal knowledge has increased along with my expectations for my own life and the life of the church I serve. At the outset of the project, I had a plan about the direction of the research and some ideas of the characteristics of the evangelistic lifestyle I would find, but the results exceeded my expectations. In particular, the characteristic of sacrifice loomed large in my findings. I began to ask myself hard questions about the level of sacrifice I lay down to carry out the commission the Lord has given me. I asked those same questions concerning the life of BBC overall. Does the life of our church indicate a people who lay down self for the eternal well-being of our neighbors? Does our church calendar indicate a church hungry to reach our community

or a church that is bloating itself with ministries that serve ourselves?

These questions about our corporate life should begin on the individual level, and the first individual I must see to is myself. As pastor of BBC, my responsibility is to equip the church for the work of the ministry, and a significant part of that work is to lead by example (Eph 4:11-12, 1 Tim 4:12). Does my life indicate a man who lays down self for the eternal well-being of my neighbor? Does my weekly schedule indicate a pastor hungry to reach my community? From the beginning of my ministry at BBC, I had labored hard to lead the church to sacrificially send and go to the lost nations in distant lands, but I had not labored nearly hard enough to lead the church to expend the same level of sacrifice for our immediate lost community. The Lord has used the research and development of this project to reprove, correct, and strengthen me in that regard. My life and our church's life in Louisville ought to look remarkably similar to our missionary partners we come alongside as we send and go.

Conclusion

The project's participants and I have been convicted, challenged, and encouraged as we have taken this journey of study in incarnational evangelism together. The project has led us to consider the Christlike characteristics that should be evident in our lives as we serve the gospel to the world Christ died to save. Our passion to consistently exhibit those characteristics has increased due to what we have learned. Our practice of incarnational evangelism has been strengthened as well.

The time devoted to the project has proven to be a strategic step toward fostering an evangelistic culture within BBC. Whether the study is utilized to its full potential in regard to church leaders equipping other church members in the evangelistic lifestyle remains to be seen. I am encouraged, however, to see the immediate impact the study has made in people's lives. I have hope that the labor invested here will continue to be useful and profitable for the church's faithful evangelistic witness in the world.

APPENDIX 1

EVANGELISM PRACTICES INVENTORY (EPI)

The following instrument was used to assess the current understanding of evangelism and practice of evangelism among the participants. The open-ended questions at the end of the survey were included and to be answered only during the post-training evaluation.

EVANGELISM PRACTICES INVENTORY (EPI)

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure your understanding of evangelism and your practice of evangelism. This research is being conducted by Kenneth W. Vickery for the purpose of equipping church members to embrace a lifestyle of evangelism. In this research, you will take the survey now, at the beginning of the project, and you will take the survey again at the project's conclusion. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

Please select four digits to be your Personal Identification Number (PIN) to be applied to your surveys both before and after the project. Since it is necessary for you to use the same PIN on both surveys, I would advise that you use the last four digits of your Social Security Number.

By your completion of this survey, and providing a PIN below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Date: _____

PIN (4 digits): _____

Directions: Please mark the answer that best represents your current agreement with the statement, based on the following scale:

SD = strongly disagree
D = disagree
DS = disagree somewhat
AS = agree somewhat
A = agree
SA = strongly agree

1. Unbelievers in my life will spend eternity in hell if they do not put their faith in Jesus Christ. SD D DS AS A SA
2. If I were asked to articulate the gospel to another person, I would feel comfortable doing so. SD D DS AS A SA

- | | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 3. I pray daily for opportunities to speak the gospel to an unbeliever. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. I have a strong desire to evangelize. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. I feel equipped to evangelize. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6. Every Christian is biblically mandated to evangelize. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. Living a Christian life before others is sufficient to lead someone to Jesus; words are not absolutely necessary. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. In the past month, I have had a conversation in which I have shared the gospel or part of the gospel at least once per week. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9. In the past month, I have not shared the gospel. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 10. Jesus has commanded me, personally, to evangelize unbelievers. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 11. I pray for specific unbelievers, by name, that I know every day. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 12. The greater responsibility to evangelize others falls upon pastors. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 13. One can practice evangelism by serving and meeting needs; words are not absolutely necessary. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

- | | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 14. I devote time each week to serve unbelievers with an aim of speaking the gospel to them. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 15. I intentionally plan for and seek to develop relationships with unbelievers in my life. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 16. I live as though the purpose of my living where I do is to reach my community for Jesus. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 17. The way I treat and interact with other Christians gives good evidence of the gospel's power. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 18. I often fail to evangelize because I am so busy with other things. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 19. I often fail to evangelize because I fear rejection. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 20. I view the community around me as hardened to the gospel, and this is why I do not often evangelize. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 21. I often fail to evangelize because I do not want to be seen as intolerant of other's beliefs. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 22. I view evangelism as an activity that brings me joy. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

Open-ended questions for post-study survey:

Were there any characteristics of an evangelistic lifestyle that this study brought you to consider more closely?

Did this study help you to overcome apathy in your witness for Jesus? Distraction? Fear? If so, how?

Did this study help you to desire to be more faithful in evangelism?

APPENDIX 2
CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following evaluation rubric was distributed to an expert panel consisting of four local pastors of varied age and experience. One of those pastors also serves as a seminary professor who regularly instructs on the subject of personal evangelism. This panel evaluated the curriculum for biblical fidelity, thoroughness, and applicability for equipping in evangelism.

Curriculum Evaluation

Name of evaluator: _____ **Date:** _____

1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; 4 = exemplary

Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments (block will expand as you type)
Biblical Faithfulness					
1-The curriculum is shaped and driven by Scripture.					
2-The curriculum is hermeneutically sound. All Scripture is properly interpreted and applied.					
3-The curriculum is theologically sound.					
Scope					
4-The curriculum sufficiently covers the basics of personal evangelism.					
5-The curriculum sufficiently addresses its question concerning the motivation for evangelism					
6-The curriculum sufficiently addresses its question concerning the characteristics of an evangelistic lifestyle.					
Practicality					
7-The curriculum utilizes adequate and varied teaching tools (direct questions, discussion, case studies) to accomplish its goal.					
8-The curriculum includes opportunity to expose and address hindrances to personal evangelism.					
9-At the end of the sessions, participants should be more motivated in personal evangelism.					
10-At the end of the sessions, participants should be better equipped to embrace the characteristics of an evangelistic lifestyle.					

APPENDIX 3

SENT AS INCARNATIONAL EVANGELISTS: TRAINING LESSONS

Lesson 1: “Learning from the Example of Christ”

The Bible does not present evangelism as a task carried out by a few special Christians. Rather, the Bible reveals that every single person who trusts and follows Jesus has the privilege and responsibility of communicating his gospel to the lost. While we would all likely give assent to that statement, we would also probably acknowledge that the actual task of evangelism in our daily lives falls short of what it should be. This study’s aim is to help us all be more faithful evangelists.

These lessons do not offer a “cookie-cutter” method of sharing the gospel with others. In fact, part of what we will learn is that evangelism should look different in our varied interactions with unbelievers, as we seek to clearly communicate the unchanging message of God’s saving grace to each person. This study does not seek to answer a “How to?” question concerning evangelism. Rather, in these five lessons, we will seek to answer these two primary questions: “What are the motivations behind our evangelism?” and “What does a faithful evangelistic lifestyle look like?” To answer these questions, we look first to the example of the Savior.

JESUS COMMISSIONS HIS DISCIPLES – John 20:19-23

The four Gospels and the book of Acts record the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16, Luke 24:44-49, John 20:19-23, Acts 1:8). We are going to begin our study with a focus on the Great Commission passage in John. This passage signals a link between the mission of Jesus and the commission he gave to his disciples. **This passage is the foundational passage for this study.**

- A. The link begins with an understanding of the position of those Christ sends.
 1. What does Jesus’ greeting to his disciples in v. 19—words that he repeats in v. 21—reveal about the disciples’ position?
 2. When Jesus announced, “Peace be with you,” he assures his disciples that he had accomplished what the Father sent him to do. At the cross, Christ has brought peace between Holy God and sinful man. **This greeting was common in the day. But the repetition reveals that Jesus intended is as more than a simple greeting. Jesus was announcing what he had accomplished at the cross.**
 3. In verse 20, what was the disciples’ emotional response to Jesus’ greeting?
 4. Those Christ sends are those who have experienced the joy of entering that peace.
- B. The Sent One becomes the Sender.
 1. What word stresses the link between Jesus’ mission and the disciples’ commission? “as” (or “just as”)
 2. The disciples’ mission in the world is inseparably linked to Jesus’ own.
 3. The foundational work of Christ’s mission has been completed at the

cross, yet his mission continues through his disciples whom he has sent into the world.

- C. Who is the power behind the disciples' mission?
 1. Jesus assures his disciples of the promised Holy Spirit who would empower them for the task before them. **Throughout this study, we will see that evangelism is totally dependent upon God.**
- D. What is the content of the mission?
 1. God alone has the authority to forgive sins, and he does so only through a person's faith in Christ, whom he sent into the world to die and rise again for our salvation. The content of the mission is the spoken gospel. **If the gospel has not been communicated, evangelism has not taken place.**
- E. Since his sending his disciples into the world to proclaim the gospel is linked to the Father sending the Son, Jesus' incarnational ministry provides an example for Christians to follow in evangelism.

THE INCARNATIONAL MINISTRY OF CHRIST

- A. The incarnational ministry of Jesus was an act of obedience in love.
 1. John 3:16: What prompted Jesus' incarnation and ministry? The love of God prompted the coming of Christ, and through his obedience, the love of God was displayed.
 2. John 4:34: What was most important to Jesus? To Jesus, his purpose on earth was to obey the Father's will.
 3. Luke 19:10: The God-willed purpose for which Jesus was sent was to seek and to save the lost.
- B. The incarnational ministry of Jesus involved identification with his hearers.
 1. Philippians 2:6-7: The incarnation is the ultimate example of intentional connection with sinners for the purpose of serving them for their eternal well-being.
 2. Luke 19:1-10: Jesus intentionally sought out Zacchaeus, met with Zacchaeus in his home, and identified with Zacchaeus at risk to himself.
 3. John 3:1-14: Jesus confronted the religious Nicodemus with his need to be born again.
 4. John 4:1-26: Jesus overcame barriers to encounter the Samaritan woman and treated her with patience, drawing her to consider his words carefully. **What were some of those barriers Jesus overcame? (His weariness, racial-Jew/Samaritan, gender, a woman of questionable reputation).**
- C. The incarnational ministry of Jesus involved contextualization of his message.
 1. Whether he was teaching his disciples, preaching before crowds, or conversing with individuals, Jesus spoke his message in a way that would expose his hearers' need and his sufficiency to meet that need. **His approach was not a "one-size-fits-all" approach. He prodded people with questions and listened closely, meeting them where they were.**
 2. John 4:1-26: Jesus allowed the Samaritan woman to set the course for their conversation. He stirred her curiosity and was patient with her as he worked to lead her into progressive understanding.
 3. John 1:47-51: Jesus was direct with the devout Jew, Nathaniel.
 4. Matthew 19:16-22: Jesus moved quickly to expose the idol of the rich, young man's life.
 5. Jesus contextualized his message through meeting immediate, physical needs. **His miracles were signs pointing to who he was and the salvation he came to provide.**
 6. John 5: Jesus healed the lame and declared his authority to forgive sins.
 7. John 6: Jesus fed the hungry and declared that he is the bread of life to be received by faith.

8. Jesus showed compassion toward those in need because he loved them, and he served to meet their needs in order to more clearly communicate the good news of his provision for their greatest need of salvation.
- D. The incarnational ministry of Jesus involved suffering, sacrificial service.
1. John 1:29: Jesus is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world by his willing sacrifice.
 2. Mark 10:45: Jesus willingly entered suffering the moment he came from heaven to take on flesh, and he did so to serve.
 3. Isaiah 53:4: Jesus was sent to bear our griefs and sorrows.
 4. Isaiah 53:5: From beginning to end, Jesus' ministry was marked by sacrifice for others; the cross was the climax as he was pierced for our transgressions.

CONCLUSION

- A. The Great Commission Jesus gave to his disciples requires engagement in evangelistic ministry that is linked to Christ's own.
- B. Luke 9:23: To those who would be his disciples, his call is for them to deny themselves, take up their crosses daily, and follow him.
- C. The Great Commission requires incarnational evangelism in which Christ's disciples are sent into the world to sacrificially engage others with his gospel message.

Lesson 2: “Learning from Paul’s Imitation of Christ”

In the first lesson, we looked at the example of the Savior to learn about the motivations and actions of an evangelistic lifestyle. In this lesson, we will look to the example of Paul’s ministry as he sought to follow in Christ’s footsteps.

AMBASSADORS COMPELLED BY CHRIST’S LOVE – 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

In this text, Paul speaks of the nature of believers in Christ as people who have been radically changed by the gospel and then sent into the world as ambassadors, entrusted with the message of reconciliation.

- A. What is the position of ambassadors revealed in vv. 17-18?
 1. The position of those sent is one of peace with God (reconciliation) and a radical change of life (new creation). **This is the same good news delivered in the Great Commission passage of John 20 (peace and the promise of the life-changing Spirit).**
- B. What is the motivation of ambassadors revealed in vv. 11 and 14?
 1. A healthy fear of God motivated Paul to an evangelistic ministry marked by integrity. **He would use no trickery or manipulation.**
 2. The love of Jesus compelled Paul to lay down his own life in gospel service to the world for Jesus’ sake. **Paul saw himself as a conduit of Jesus’ love.**
- C. Who is the power behind the ambassadors’ mission revealed in v. 20?
 1. God makes his appeal through Christ’s ambassadors. **If God is the one making the appeal, why should we fear? This is God’s work!**
- D. What is the content of the ambassadors’ mission revealed in v. 19?
 1. The content for those sent is the gospel—the message of reconciliation. **It is not our message but God’s message entrusted to us. We are simply to share it.**
- E. We could translate “ministry” in v. 18 as “service.” The ministry of reconciliation given to believers is one of service, following the example of Christ who brought that reconciliation through his own service.
 1. As Christ suffered and sacrificed to save us, so Christians are his sent ambassadors to the world to endure suffering and sacrifice for the sake of others’ salvation. **Christ’s incarnation gives us a model for our evangelism.**

THE EVANGELISTIC MINISTRY OF PAUL

- A. The evangelistic ministry of Paul was an act of obedience in love.
 1. 2 Corinthians 5:14-20: The love of Jesus compelled Paul to speak the good news of salvation to others and to plea for a response of repentance and faith.
 2. 2 Timothy 2:4: As Jesus’ ministry was defined by obedience to the Father, Paul’s ministry would be marked by obedience to Jesus.
 3. Galatians 2:20: Paul’s obedience was a product of his ongoing faith in Jesus and his love. **What Jesus commands, Jesus provides as we trust him and obey.**
- B. The evangelistic ministry of Paul involved identification with his hearers.
 1. 1 Corinthians 9:19-23: Paul’s desire was to seek the lost at all costs—giving up his own rights and freedoms—and was willing to thus identify with them by any means possible to reach them for Jesus. **He laid his own preferences aside to reach others.**
 2. Acts 16:1-3: Paul chose to circumcise Timothy in order to remove a hindrance to their gospel ministry among the Jews.
 3. 1 Thessalonians 2:8: Paul’s affection for the lost made him willing to

- devote his whole self for them, making any sacrifice necessary.
4. Philippians 2:4-8: Laying down self-interests for the well-being of others is the spirit of the incarnation Christians are called to emulate. **This is the mind of Christ that is ours by faith in him—selfless service.**
- C. The evangelistic ministry of Paul involved contextualization of his message.
1. Acts 13:16-41: With people who were acquainted with Scripture and the history of God's dealings with Israel, Paul traced God's promises of a Deliverer. He quoted or alluded to several passages of Scripture and proclaimed that God's promise was fulfilled in Jesus.
 2. Acts 14:8-17: With people who had no knowledge of Scripture, Paul was enabled to meet a physical need (a healing) and then spoke about the revelation of God in creation.
 3. Acts 17:22-31: Paul evangelized cultured, polytheistic hearers by pointing to their altar to an unknown God and quoting their own poets.
 4. The content of Paul's gospel never changed, only his presentation of it. Paul strove to adapt his gospel presentation to his hearers. **We should not simply throw truth at people, but we should come alongside them. Listen to them and learn from them about how they see the world.**
- D. The evangelistic ministry of Paul involved suffering, sacrificial service.
1. 2 Corinthians 4:5: To Paul, evangelism and sacrificial service go hand in hand. Paul understood that while Christ's suffering was redemptive for mankind, Paul's suffering would be a representative witness to those he sought to reach with Christ's gospel.
 2. Acts 9:16: Christ's words concerning Paul were fulfilled in Paul's ministry. Suffering for Jesus' name to reach the lost is the nature of following the Christ who came to serve and give his life as a ransom.
 3. Acts 20:24: Because Paul was dead to self, he was freed to focus on finishing his race and the ministry Jesus had given him. **That ministry was a proclaimer of the good news of God's grace.**
 4. 1 Corinthians 10:33-11:1: Paul's charge to the church was to be imitators of him as he was of Christ—"not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved."

CONCLUSION

- A. Paul's ministry gives us an example of one who has been radically changed by the gospel of Christ and sent into the world as a faithful ambassador. Paul's life was lived in the footsteps of the Lord who had saved him.
- B. Philippians 2:4-8: Incarnational evangelism involves imitating Jesus in identifying with the lost and serving them humbly and sacrificially. It involves putting their interests ahead of our own.
- F. Christians are called to suffer as servants to all in order that others might be saved.

Read John 12:2-26. Jesus was talking first about his own sacrifice in these verses. He would die and bring forth the fruit of the salvation of sinners. But then, he applied the same principle to those who would follow him. We are to serve as he served. Before there is the blessing of fruit, there must be death to self—a willingness to sacrifice and suffer. Applied to evangelism, we must be willing to die to our own comforts, schedules, etc. in order to reach the lost with the Good News.

Lesson 3: “Learning from the Witness of the Church”

In the first lesson, we looked at the example of the Savior to learn about the motivations and actions of an evangelistic lifestyle. In the second lesson, we looked at the example of Paul’s ministry as he sought to follow in Christ’s footsteps. In this lesson, we look to the witness of the church in its early years.

Since Paul’s apostolic command from the Lord to the church was to imitate him as he imitated Christ, we should see evidence of that imitation in the church’s evangelistic life. Indeed, such evidence is plentiful in the early church of Scripture and beyond. **Review the four aspects covered in the first two lessons (1-obedience in love, 2-identification with hearers, 3-contextualization of the message, and 4-suffering, sacrificial service). We will see two aspects of the witness of the early church.**

THE EVANGELISTIC MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

- A. The evangelistic ministry of the church involved mass participation.
1. Acts 2:42-47: Luke’s first summary of church life reveals the whole church devoting themselves to preaching, fellowship, worship, prayer, and evangelism. **Where do we see that evangelism was taking place here? (The Lord added daily. The church was spreading the news about Jesus).**
 2. Acts 4:23-31: In answer to prayer, all the believers were filled with the Spirit for bold witness. The Holy Spirit is the power for the mission, and evangelism is God making his appeal through us. Prayer is essential for the mission! **Evangelism is God’s work through us. Our own strength and wisdom will not suffice.**
 3. Acts 8:1-4: When much of the church scattered from Jerusalem, the apostles remained behind. Yet Scripture records that those who scattered went preaching the gospel. **“Ordinary” believers were the ones out preaching the Good News.**
 4. Acts 11:19-21: The first multi-ethnic church was planted through the witness of unnamed evangelists. **This was also the church where Paul and Barnabas were first launched to the nations on mission.**
 5. 1 Thessalonians 1:7-8: Only a few months after Paul had planted the Thessalonian church, he commended them for setting a fine example of faithful evangelism.
 6. Philippians 1:5: The gospel partnership Paul speaks of involved their financial and prayer support of his ministry and their own evangelistic endeavors in Philippi. **They were involved in the same work as Paul.**
 7. There was mass participation in personal evangelism by the whole church. Dependent on the Spirit through fervent prayer, the believers displayed the obedience in love that imitated that of Christ and Paul.
- B. The evangelistic ministry of the church involved living and speaking the gospel.
1. The record of the church’s witness crossing cultural boundaries is undeniable evidence of their meeting people where they were and communicating the gospel in a way that hearers could understand. **How could they reach people if they did not intentionally cross the divide?**
 2. 1 Peter 3:15: They were to be ever ready, in any context, to give a reason for their hope and always with gentleness and respect.
 3. Case study: In his book, *Evangelism and the Early Church*, Michael Green gives the witness of Origen as an example of personal evangelism by the early church. **This was early 3rd Century.** Through Origen’s witness, Gregory was saved through faith in Jesus. **He would go on to become a bishop of the church.** Gregory and some friends were traveling and were

welcomed into Origen's home (hospitality shown/immediate need met). When Origen learned that Gregory and his friends were interested in philosophy, he asked questions beginning with that subject that started them along the path to the truth of the gospel (identification/contextualization). **He met them where they were and began there to lead them patiently to the gospel.** Gregory later wrote that Origen "studied by all means to keep us in close association with him, contriving all kinds of arguments... and bringing all his powers to bear on that object.... He did not aim merely at getting us round by any kind of reasoning; but his desire was, with a benignant, affectionate and most generous mind, to save us." Origen's faithful evangelism is a picture of intentional connection and careful contextualization.

4. Sacrificial service and selfless generosity adorned the church's witness, incarnating the gospel they proclaimed.
5. John 1:18, 1 John 4:12: At the beginning of John's Gospel what has made the unseen God known? The incarnation of the Son of God. In John's first letter, what provides evidence of the unseen God? The church's love as God abides in us.
6. Love is not solely an inward feeling but an outward action. The church's love was displayed through acts of mercy, compassion, sacrifice, and service.
7. Acts 11:28-30: Love prompted the Antioch church to send relief to the church in Jerusalem.
8. 2 Corinthians 8:3-9: The Macedonian churches had begged for the grace of taking part in relieving others in need, and Paul exhorted the Corinthian church to give freely as well—not as a command, but to prove the genuineness of their love. **What might God do through us if we persistently asked him to show us needs in our community that he wants us to meet?**
9. Through selfless sacrifice, the church imitated Jesus, embodied the gospel, and thus lived as incarnational evangelists in the world.
10. There is no evangelism without speaking the good news of Christ's death and resurrection for our salvation. But loving and serving others is the embodiment of that message—that which gives the message flesh for people to see and experience.

CONCLUSION

- A. In the evangelism of the early church, we see mass participation in the service of living and speaking the gospel message.
- B. A heart of love and service sent Jesus to the cross; a heart of love and service sends the whole church into the world with that good news.
- C. Incarnational evangelism requires selfless, sacrificial love—living out the gospel as we speak it.

Read Matthew 9:35-38. This is our Lord's passion for the lost. If we know him and have his mind, should this not be also our passion? Should we not pray for Jesus to fill us with his passion?

Lesson 4: “Learning from the Work of Cross-Cultural Missionaries”

In the first lesson, we looked at the example of the Savior to learn about the motivations and actions of an evangelistic lifestyle. In the second lesson, we looked at the example of Paul’s ministry as he sought to follow in Christ’s footsteps. **(Review four aspects)**. In the third lesson, we looked at the witness of the church as all of its members were engaged in speaking and living the gospel. **(Review 2 aspects)**. In this lesson, we look to the work of cross-cultural missionaries.

Those who have left the familiarity and comfort of home to serve the gospel to unreached people in faraway lands are sometimes viewed as extraordinary participants in the Great Commission. While such missionaries certainly should be commended and celebrated (and may many more answer God’s call to go!), their work should be seen, not as extraordinary, but as the work of ordinary Christians only in a different place and among different people to whom the Lord has called them.

Every Christian, wherever they are and with whomever they are, should be about the primary work of cross-cultural missions. **Christians are Kingdom of heaven citizens going into the world with the message of the kingdom. In evangelism, we are crossing the greatest cultural divide.**

THE WORK OF CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONARIES

- A. The work of cross-cultural missionaries involves a singular purpose.
1. Missionaries move from their homes to other places for this purpose: to seek the salvation of lost people by their hearing, understanding and responding to the gospel.
 2. What must missionaries do to accomplish that purpose? They seek first to learn the people they are called to reach: language, traditions, cultural norms. **This requires hard, diligent labor on the part of the missionary.**
 3. The missionary’s aim is to be an incarnational witness for Christ to the people group to whom he has been called. **The aim is to identify with those the missionary seeks to reach and contextualize the gospel message to them.**
 4. Missiologist, Duane Elmer, writes of six steps involved in serving the gospel across cultures:
 - i. Openness: To be open is to be hospitable toward them, inviting them into your life. **Welcome them into our presence and lives, and make them feel safe.**
 - ii. Acceptance: To accept is to “communicate value, worth and esteem to another person.” **No matter our differences, we are all made in God’s image and have great worth. Note: we should not expect the lost to live as though they are saved!**
 - iii. Trust: This is working “to build confidence in a relationship so that both parties believe the other will not intentionally hurt them but will act in their best interest.” **Building trust takes time, and it is costly. Our hearers must see that their well-being is our goal.**
 - iv. Learning: To intentionally connect with others requires teachability, which demands humility. **A lost person will often be used to teach us about the application of the gospel in ways that we have not before considered.**
 - v. Understanding: This involves a determination to see the other person’s perspective on life and reality. **A person’s actions are**

driven by his worldview. We must understand their worldview in order to show its inconsistencies. Every worldview except the biblical worldview will have inconsistencies!

- vi. Serving: To serve is to relate “to others in a way that leads them to sense Jesus’ presence or consider his claims.” **Now, work back through this list in reverse order... We cannot serve without first understanding... We cannot understand without learning... and so on.**
5. The Great Commission is the sole reason the missionary is there in his place of service. *The same is true for the “ordinary” Christian in his home culture.* **Every Christian is a servant and witness to the risen Lord, wherever the Lord sends.**
6. Incarnational evangelism involves entering the other’s life and welcoming him into your own. Patient effort is required to intentionally connect and then contextualize the gospel for the hearer to understand.
7. Case study: Crossing generations can sometimes seem as daunting as crossing cultures. The Millennial generation is made up of those people born between 1980 and 2000. It is the largest generation in the history of the U.S., and research shows that the majority have not embraced the gospel. If a local church, such as BBC, has a large percentage of senior adults in its membership, how will we reach this younger generation? The answer is that we will reach them by determining to be patient evangelists who think and act as missionaries. *The encouraging news is that research also shows that the Millennials are open to having older adults as mentors in their lives.* The need is for evangelists who see it their purpose to sacrifice whatever it takes to cross the chasm and reach them.
- B. The work of cross-cultural missionaries involves a willing sacrifice.
 1. Missionaries give up familiar surroundings, comforts, and other opportunities to obey the Great Commission.
 2. Missionaries embrace the hardships of entering a different culture in order to live and speak the gospel to its people.
 3. Such incarnational evangelism is the pattern of life for one who obeys the command to imitate Paul and thus imitate Christ.
 4. Case study: William Carey, missionary to India and now known as the father of modern missions, drafted a covenant with his partners in mission that included these statements of purpose:
 - i. To set an infinite value on men’s souls.
 - ii. To acquaint ourselves with the snares which hold the minds of the people.
 - iii. To abstain from whatever deepens India’s prejudice against the gospel.
 - iv. To watch for every chance of doing the people good.
 - v. To preach “Christ crucified” as the grand means of conversion.
 - vi. To esteem and treat Indians always as our equals.
 - vii. To give ourselves without reserve to the Cause, not counting even the clothes we wear our own.
 5. Read those statements again slowly. **Substitute the words “my neighbor” in the place of the words, “men, people, India, or Indians.”** At BBC, we are in partnership with cross-cultural missionaries today who have assumed the same singular purpose and at great sacrifice.

CONCLUSION

- A. We must embrace that our purpose in Louisville, Kentucky, is no different from that of cross-cultural missionaries. **The only difference is our current place of**

- service.**
- B. We must embrace that our labors should then look very similar to our cross-cultural missionary partners. **Ours is the same singular purpose and same willing sacrifice.**
 - C. All believers are called to give up familiarities, comforts and other opportunities for the singular purpose of reaching the lost.
 - D. All believers are called to give ourselves without reserve to the cause of Christ. **Read 2 Timothy 2:1-10. This passage is a fitting, closing summary of what it means to be an incarnational evangelist.**

Lesson 5: “Reflection, Application and Leading Others to Lead”

We have looked at the example of the Savior to learn about the motivations and actions of an evangelistic lifestyle. We have looked at the example of Paul’s ministry as he sought to follow in Christ’s footsteps. We have looked at the witness of the church as all of its members were engaged in speaking and living the gospel. And we have looked at the work of cross-cultural missionaries as they work where they have been sent with singular purpose and willing sacrifice.

The questions we have been seeking to answer are: “What are the motivations behind our evangelism?” and “What does a faithful evangelistic lifestyle look like?” In this final session, we will review what we have seen and discuss ways to apply it in our own lives. We will also end with a consideration of one more aspect of such a lifestyle, displayed in the life of Christ and in Paul’s ministry.

REVIEW AND APPLICATION

- A. We saw that the position of those whom Christ sends is one of joy in having peace with God. Christians are new creations, reconciled with God, and given the ministry of reconciliation.
 1. Why is it so important that we begin with remembering our position in Christ?
 2. Do you think that faithful evangelism will serve to keep us focused on our position in Christ?
- B. We saw that the power in our mission is the Holy Spirit. God himself makes his appeal through us.
 1. Why is it so important to remember that the Great Commission is a work of God himself through us?
 2. Do you think that faithful evangelism will serve to keep us focused on the power of God that works through the gospel?
- C. We saw that the content of our mission is the spoken gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus for our salvation. By faith in Christ, guilty sinners receive forgiveness and peace with God.
 1. Why is it so important to remember that evangelism takes place only when the gospel is shared?
- D. The Great Commission passage in John shows a direct link between Jesus’ incarnation and ministry and the mission he has given us. If you were asked to pick two words to sum up Jesus’ motivation and Paul’s motivation after him, what would they be? Love and obedience.
 1. What part does the love of God have in our evangelism?
 2. What part does obedience to Christ have in our evangelism?
 3. What are specific hindrances that a focus upon God’s love and our obedience to him work to overcome in our witness?
- E. Both Jesus and Paul after him intentionally identified with their hearers in order to reach them. Jesus left heaven to take on flesh. Paul devoted his whole self for others. Cross-cultural missionaries work hard to identify with the people they have come to reach.
 1. What are specific ways we can seek to identify with those we seek to reach right where we live?
 2. Will you commit to obey Jesus and do so?
- F. Jesus and Paul were careful to contextualize the message for their hearers. Neither used a “cookie-cutter” method in their evangelism. The growth of the early church across cultures indicates faithful contextualization of the gospel as

does the labor of cross-cultural missionaries.

1. What might careful contextualization of the gospel look like in your sphere of influence?
 2. What role does patient study and learning of another person's beliefs and worldview play?
 3. How can acts of service and meeting immediate needs serve to help us contextualize the gospel?
 4. Will you commit to obey Jesus and do so?
- G. In our Lord's incarnation and ministry, he provided us an example that is to color our ministry in the mission he has given us. Though in a crucial sense, Jesus accomplished his mission on the cross, in another sense, he continues that mission through us as we live by faith in him. His example to us shows us that that mission is carried out through willing suffering and sacrifice for others. Paul's ministry after Christ was so colored. The corporate witness of the church was so colored. Our cross-cultural missionary partners' lives are so colored.
1. What might we be called to sacrifice to reach people in our immediate spheres of influence? What kind of suffering might we be called to face to reach others?
 2. What keeps us from making those sacrifices?
 3. Will you commit to obey Jesus and do so?
- H. Following in the footsteps of Jesus and Paul after him, missionaries leave one place and people and go to another place and people for the sole purpose of reaching those people with the gospel.
1. Has Jesus called us to anything different right where he has placed us?
 2. What hindrances are there to us seeing our sole purpose to be reaching the lost around us?
 3. What might God do through us if we considered that he has placed us strategically and specifically to reach this community for Christ?
 4. Will you commit to obey Jesus and embrace your purpose for him? Will you be an incarnational evangelist where Christ has called you?

CONCLUSION: LEADING OTHERS TO LEAD

There is an aspect of Jesus' ministry and Paul's ministry that we have not focused on during these sessions. That aspect is leading others to be leaders. I want us to close with a brief consideration of that aspect.

- A. At the outset of his ministry, Jesus chose twelve men who would spend three years at his side, watching, listening, and learning from him.
- B. His plan for his gospel to spread throughout the world required the development of people who would lead in that mission.
 1. This intentional preparation of his disciples required a sacrificial investment of time and energy on Jesus' part, and he made that sacrifice willingly.
 2. Jesus loved them, prepared them, released them in ministry, and held them accountable.
- C. Paul followed in Jesus' footsteps in this work of leading others to lead.
 1. In his missionary journeys and ministry, Paul brought others along with him, teaching and preparing them to lead.
 2. Paul loved them, prepared them, released them in ministry, and held them accountable.
 3. 2 Timothy 2:2: This text sums up faithful leadership development—training others who will be faithful to train others—making disciples who will faithfully make disciples.
- D. We close with at least two applications:

1. Accountability: Before you leave this final session, select one person to be your partner in holding one another accountable as faithful incarnational evangelists. Pray for one another regularly. Update one another. Encourage one another.
2. Development: This study is purposefully brief (only 5 sessions) so that it can be easily repeated with others. Ask God to lead you to one or two others in the church that you might approach and ask to go through this study with you.

Let's look to Christ and be faithful in the Great Commission he's given us. May God make us an army of incarnational evangelists.

APPENDIX 4

SENT AS INCARNATIONAL EVANGELISTS: EVALUATION COMMENTS

Evaluation by Timothy Beougher

Curriculum scored as sufficient or exemplary in all three areas.

1. Comments on the biblical faithfulness of the study:
 - Curriculum is based on Scripture and biblical passages drive the study.
 - Sound hermeneutical principles are employed.
 - Excellent.
2. Comments on the scope of the study:
 - Would like to see the issue of fear addressed more completely.
3. Comments on the practicality of the study:
 - The EPI identifies several hindrances; the curriculum could be strengthened by addressing them a bit more directly.
 - An excellent curriculum.

Evaluation by Al Jackson

Curriculum scored as sufficient or exemplary in all three areas:

1. Comments on the biblical faithfulness of the study:
 - Biblically solid.
2. Comments on the practicality of the study:
 - Good variety.
 - If they take this study seriously, their motivation will be greater.

Evaluation by Joshua Price

Curriculum scored as sufficient or exemplary in all three areas.

1. Comments on the biblical faithfulness of the study:
 - Biblical texts were not only cited but clearly and faithfully explicated.
2. Comments on the scope of the study:
 - The curriculum seems to assume a robust understanding of the gospel message. While considerations of study length is necessary, it may strengthen the study if some time was devoted to covering the gospel message that the participants are encouraged to articulate and contextualize.
 - The primary motivations for evangelism discussed in the study are love and obedience. These motivations are certainly biblical, true, and right. One further motivation that might also encourage participants in their personal evangelism is the promised successfulness of their task. God has promised that their love and obedience will not be fruitless. Christ will build his church and people from every tribe, tongue, and nation will be around the throne of the Lamb who was slain.
 - I especially appreciated the repeated encouragement to service and sacrifice. That is a vital component of incarnational evangelism that is not always highlighted. The study might more sufficiently address the characteristics of an evangelistic lifestyle if it spent time equipping participants to understand worldview and heart level issues so that they could better understand how to contextualize the gospel message.
3. Comments on the practicality of the study:
 - Different teaching methods were used and helpful. Including some personal illustrations may help to further encourage and equip the participants.
 - The curriculum includes ample opportunity to expose and address hindrances to personal evangelism. In particular, the specific example of an older congregation reaching a younger generation was helpful and thought provoking. The questions could be even further helpful to participants if some were designed to address very specific fears, blind spots, etc. like that case study exposed. Sometimes general questions lead to general answers and it can be helpful to people if they are led to think specifically.

First Evaluation by Phillip Beffort

Curriculum scored as requiring attention in all three areas.

1. Comments on the biblical faithfulness of the study:

- Re: Lesson #3. “Learning from the Witness of the Church.” I see a lack of emphasis on prayer which was prominent in the early church. In fact, in focusing on Acts 2:42-47 in A.1., preaching, worship, fellowship, and evangelism were mentioned in the lesson notes, but prayer was mentioned in verse 42, but left out of the lesson notes. Prayer is key to the life of the church, and also to evangelism. Over the last few years, I see a great lack of prayer in the church. It was prominent in the early church, as seen in Acts 4:23-31 and many other places. Without a vital prayer relationship with our Lord, we can do nothing.
- I tend to believe that it is sufficient, except for what I stated above from Lesson #3.
- I found nothing that would disagree with.

2. Comments on the scope of the study:

- Re: Lesson #4. The lesson seems to allude to cross-cultural missionaries as being those sent to other parts of the world. However, there are many cross-cultural opportunities for evangelism here in our own country. Native Americans (you and I both have experience with them) are a culture different from ours, and they differ in culture from tribe to tribe. Hispanics, oriental, European, etc., all have communities in the U.S. where they cling to the old culture from which they come. Even slum areas in our cities live in their own culture rather than main-line. These all have need for cross-cultural evangelism.
- I believe that it does.
- Except for the matter of prayer. I am a stickler on prayer. I see prayer—rather the lack of it—as the problem of the church today, and why the church is failing to meet the needs of our society and world.

3. Comments on the practicality of the study:

- I believe it is sufficient.
- Except where I stated above in #2 and #4, I believe it is sufficient.
- If a participant is a true believer and deeply committed to our Lord, I believe it will motivate.

- I believe it is a good study, and if participants will complete all five sessions, commit to what they have learned, and commit to the challenge given, they will be equipped to use every opportunity to share the gospel message of our Savior, Jesus Christ, with all that cross their paths.

Second Evaluation by Phillip Beffort

Curriculum scored as sufficient or exemplary in all three areas.

1. Comments on the biblical faithfulness of the study:

- With the changes you implemented that we discussed, I believe the curriculum is sufficient.
- It is sufficient.
- It is sufficient.

2. Comments on the scope of the study:

- After our discussion and your clarification, I believe it is sufficient.
- I believe that it does.
- With the changes, I believe it is sufficient.

3. Comments on the practicality of the study:

- I believe it is sufficient.
- I believe it is sufficient.
- If a participant is a true believer and deeply committed to our Lord, I believe it will motivate.
- I believe it is a good study, and if participants will complete all five sessions, commit to what they have learned, and commit to the challenge given, they will be equipped to use every opportunity to share the gospel message of our Savior, Jesus Christ, with all that cross their paths.

APPENDIX 5

SENT AS INCARNATIONAL EVANGELISTS: PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK

Lesson 1: Learning from the Example of Christ

The Bible does not present evangelism as a task carried out by a few special Christians. Rather, the Bible reveals that every single person who trusts and follows Jesus has the privilege and responsibility of communicating his gospel to the lost. While we would all likely give assent to that statement, we would also probably acknowledge that the actual task of evangelism in our daily lives falls short of what it should be. This study's aim is to help us all be more faithful evangelists.

These lessons do not offer a “cookie-cutter” method of sharing the gospel with others. In fact, part of what we will learn is that evangelism should look different in our varied interactions with unbelievers, as we seek to clearly communicate the unchanging message of God's saving grace to each person. This study does not seek to answer a “How to?” question concerning evangelism. Rather, in these five lessons, we will seek to answer these two primary questions: “What are the motivations behind our evangelism?” and “What does a faithful evangelistic lifestyle look like?” To answer these questions, we look first to the example of the Savior.

JESUS COMMISSIONS HIS DISCIPLES – John 20:19-23

The four Gospels and the book of Acts record the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16, Luke 24:44-49, John 20:19-23, Acts 1:8). We are going to begin our study with a focus on the Great Commission passage in John. This passage signals a link between the mission of Jesus and the commission he gave to his disciples.

The link begins with an understanding of the _____ of those Christ sends.

What does Jesus' greeting to his disciples in v. 19—words that he repeats in v. 21—reveal about the disciples' position?

When Jesus announced, “Peace be with you,” he assures his disciples that he had _____ what the Father sent him to do. At the cross, Christ has brought _____ between Holy God and sinful man.

In verse 20, what was the disciples' emotional response to Jesus' greeting?

Those Christ sends are those who have experienced the _____ of entering that peace.

The Sent One becomes the _____.

What word stresses the link between Jesus' mission and the disciples' commission?
“ _____ ”

The disciples' mission in the world is _____ linked to Jesus' own.

The foundational work of Christ's mission has been completed at the cross, yet his mission _____ whom he has sent into the world.

Who is the power behind the disciples' mission?

Jesus assures his disciples of the promised _____ who would empower them for the task before them.

What is the content of the mission?

God alone has the authority to forgive sins, and he does so only through a person's _____ in _____, whom he sent into the world to die and rise again for our salvation. The content of the mission is the spoken _____.

Since his sending his disciples into the world to proclaim the gospel is linked to the Father sending the Son, Jesus' incarnational ministry provides an _____ for Christians to follow in evangelism.

THE INCARNATIONAL MINISTRY OF CHRIST

The incarnational ministry of Jesus was an act of _____ in _____.

John 3:16: What prompted Jesus' incarnation and ministry? The _____ of _____ prompted the coming of Christ, and through his obedience, the _____ of _____ was displayed.

John 4:34: What was most important to Jesus? To Jesus, his purpose on earth was to _____ the Father's will.

Luke 19:10: The God-willed purpose for which Jesus was sent was to _____ and to _____ the _____.

The incarnational ministry of Jesus involved _____ with his _____.

Philippians 2:6-7: The incarnation is the ultimate example of _____ with sinners for the purpose of serving them for their eternal well-being.

Luke 19:1-10: Jesus intentionally sought out Zacchaeus, met with Zacchaeus in his home, and identified with Zacchaeus at _____ to himself.

John 3:1-14: Jesus _____ the religious Nicodemus with his need to be born again.

John 4:1-26: Jesus overcame _____ to encounter the Samaritan woman and treated her with _____, drawing her to consider his words

carefully.

The incarnational ministry of Jesus involved _____ of his _____.

Whether he was teaching his disciples, preaching before crowds, or conversing with individuals, Jesus spoke his message in a way that would expose his hearers' _____ and his _____ to meet that need.

John 4:1-26: Jesus allowed the Samaritan woman to set the course for their conversation. He stirred her _____ and was patient with her as he worked to lead her into progressive _____.

John 1:47-51: Jesus was _____ with the devout Jew, Nathaniel.

Matthew 19:16-22: Jesus moved quickly to _____ the _____ of the rich, young man's life.

Jesus contextualized his message through meeting immediate, physical _____.

John 5: Jesus _____ the lame and declared his authority to _____ sins.

John 6: Jesus _____ the hungry and declared that he is the _____ of life to be received by faith.

Jesus showed _____ toward those in need because he loved them, and he served to meet their needs in order to more clearly _____ the good news of his provision for their greatest need of _____.

The incarnational ministry of Jesus involved _____, _____
_____.

John 1:29: Jesus is the _____ of _____ that takes away the sin of the world by his willing sacrifice.

Mark 10:45: Jesus willingly entered suffering the moment he came from heaven to take on flesh, and he did so to _____.

Isaiah 53:4: Jesus was sent to _____ our griefs and sorrows.

Isaiah 53:5: From beginning to end, Jesus' ministry was marked by _____

for others; the _____ was the climax as he was pierced for our transgressions.

CONCLUSION

The Great Commission Jesus gave to his disciples requires engagement in evangelistic

ministry that is linked to Christ's own.

Luke 9:23: To those who would be his disciples, his call is for them to _____ themselves, take up their _____ daily, and follow him.

The Great Commission requires _____ evangelism in which Christ's disciples are sent into the world to sacrificially engage others with his gospel message.

Lesson 2: Learning from Paul's Imitation of Christ

In the first lesson, we looked at the example of the Savior to learn about the motivations and actions of an evangelistic lifestyle. In this lesson, we will look to the example of Paul's ministry as he sought to follow in Christ's footsteps.

AMBASSADORS COMPELLED BY CHRIST'S LOVE – 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

In this text, Paul speaks of the nature of believers in Christ as people who have been radically changed by the gospel and then sent into the world as ambassadors, entrusted with the message of reconciliation.

What is the position of ambassadors revealed in vv. 17-18?

The position of those sent is one of _____ with God (reconciliation) and a radical _____ of life (new creation).

What is the motivation of ambassadors revealed in vv. 11 and 14?

A healthy _____ of God motivated Paul to an evangelistic ministry marked by integrity.

The _____ of Jesus compelled Paul to lay down his own life in gospel service to the world for Jesus' sake.

Who is the power behind the ambassadors' mission revealed in v. 20?

_____ makes his appeal through Christ's ambassadors.

What is the content of the ambassadors' mission revealed in v. 19?

The content for those sent is the _____—the message of reconciliation.

We could translate "ministry" in v. 18 as "service." The ministry of reconciliation given to believers is one of _____, following the example of _____ who brought that reconciliation through his own _____.

As Christ suffered and sacrificed to save us, so Christians are his sent ambassadors to the world to endure _____ and _____ for the sake of others' salvation.

THE EVANGELISTIC MINISTRY OF PAUL

The evangelistic ministry of Paul was an act of _____ in _____.

2 Corinthians 5:14-20: The _____ of _____ compelled Paul to _____ the good news of salvation to others and to _____ for a response of repentance and faith.

2 Timothy 2:4: As Jesus' ministry was defined by _____ to the Father, Paul's ministry would be marked by _____ to Jesus.

Galatians 2:20: Paul's obedience was a product of his ongoing _____ in Jesus and his love.

The evangelistic ministry of Paul involved _____ with his _____.

1 Corinthians 9:19-23: Paul's desire was to seek the lost at all costs—giving up his own _____ and _____—and was willing to thus identify with them by any means possible to reach them for Jesus.

Acts 16:1-3: Paul chose to circumcise Timothy in order to remove a _____ to their gospel ministry among the Jews.

1 Thessalonians 2:8: Paul's _____ for the lost made him willing to devote his whole self for them, making any sacrifice necessary.

Philippians 2:4-8: Laying down _____ - _____ for the well-being of others is the spirit of the incarnation Christians are called to emulate.

The evangelistic ministry of Paul involved _____ of his _____.

Acts 13:16-41: With people who were acquainted with Scripture and the history of God's dealings with Israel, Paul traced God's _____ of a Deliverer. He quoted or alluded to several passages of Scripture and proclaimed that God's promise was fulfilled in Jesus.

Acts 14:8-17: With people who had no knowledge of Scripture, Paul was enabled to meet a physical _____ (a healing) and then spoke about the revelation of God in _____.

Acts 17:22-31: Paul evangelized cultured, polytheistic hearers by pointing to their altar to an _____ God and quoting their own poets.

The content of Paul's gospel never changed, only his presentation of it. Paul strove to _____ his gospel presentation to his hearers.

The evangelistic ministry of Paul involved _____,

2 Corinthians 4:5: To Paul, evangelism and sacrificial _____ go hand in hand.

Paul understood that while Christ's suffering was redemptive for mankind, Paul's suffering would be a _____ to those he sought to reach with Christ's gospel.

Acts 9:16: Christ's words concerning Paul were _____ in Paul's ministry.

Suffering for Jesus' name to reach the lost is the nature of following the Christ who came to serve and give his life as a ransom.

Acts 20:24: Because Paul was dead to _____, he was freed to focus on finishing his race and the ministry Jesus had given him.

1 Corinthians 10:33-11:1: Paul's charge to the church was to be _____ of him as he was of Christ—"not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved."

CONCLUSION

Paul's ministry gives us an example of one who has been radically changed by the gospel of Christ and sent into the world as a faithful ambassador. Paul's life was lived in the footsteps of the Lord who had saved him.

Philippians 2:4-8: Incarnational evangelism involves _____ Jesus in _____ with the lost and _____ them humbly and sacrificially. It involves putting their interests ahead of our own.

Christians are called to suffer as _____ to all in order that others might be saved.

Lesson 3: Learning from the Witness of the Church

In the first lesson, we looked at the example of the Savior to learn about the motivations and actions of an evangelistic lifestyle. In the second lesson, we looked at the example of Paul's ministry as he sought to follow in Christ's footsteps. In this lesson, we look to the witness of the church in its early years.

Since Paul's apostolic command from the Lord to the church was to imitate him as he imitated Christ, we should see evidence of that imitation in the church's evangelistic life. Indeed, such evidence is plentiful in the early church of Scripture and beyond.

THE EVANGELISTIC MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

The evangelistic ministry of the church involved _____.

Acts 2:42-47: Luke's first summary of church life reveals the whole church devoting themselves to preaching, fellowship, worship, prayer, and _____.

Acts 4:23-31: In answer to _____, all the believers were filled with the _____ for bold witness. The Holy Spirit is the power for the mission, and evangelism is God making his appeal through us. Prayer is _____ for the mission!

Acts 8:1-4: When much of the church scattered from Jerusalem, the apostles remained behind. Yet Scripture records that those who scattered went _____ the gospel.

Acts 11:19-21: The first multi-ethnic church was planted through the witness of unnamed _____.

1 Thessalonians 1:7-8: Only a few months after Paul had planted the Thessalonian church, he commended them for setting a fine _____ of faithful evangelism.

Philippians 1:5: The gospel _____ Paul speaks of involved their financial and prayer support of his ministry and their own evangelistic endeavors in Philippi.

There was mass participation in personal evangelism by the _____ church. Dependent on the Spirit through fervent prayer, the believers displayed the obedience in love that imitated that of Christ and Paul.

The evangelistic ministry of the church involved _____ and _____ the _____.

The record of the church's witness crossing cultural boundaries is undeniable evidence of their meeting people where they were and communicating the gospel in a way that hearers could understand.

1 Peter 3:15: They were to be ever ready, in any context, to give a _____ for their hope and always with _____ and _____.

Case study: In his book, *Evangelism and the Early Church*, Michael Green gives the witness of Origen as an example of personal evangelism by the early church. Through Origen's witness, Gregory was saved through faith in Jesus. Gregory and some friends were traveling and were welcomed into Origen's home (hospitality shown/immediate need met). When Origen learned that Gregory and his friends were interested in philosophy, he asked questions beginning with that subject that started them along the path to the truth of the gospel (identification/contextualization). Gregory later wrote that Origen "studied by all means to keep us in close association with him, contriving all kinds of arguments... and bringing all his powers to bear on that object.... He did not aim merely at getting us round by any kind of reasoning; but his desire was, with a benignant, affectionate and most generous mind, to save us."

Origen's faithful evangelism is a picture of intentional _____ and careful _____.

Sacrificial _____ and selfless _____ adorned the church's witness, incarnating the gospel they proclaimed.

John 1:18, 1 John 4:12: At the beginning of John's Gospel what has made the unseen God known? The _____ of the Son of God. In John's

first letter, what provides evidence of the unseen God? The church's _____ as God abides in us.

Love is not solely an inward _____ but an outward _____. The church's love was displayed through acts of mercy, compassion, sacrifice, and service.

Acts 11:28-30: Love prompted the Antioch church to send _____ to the church in Jerusalem.

2 Corinthians 8:3-9: The Macedonian churches had _____ for the grace of taking part in relieving others in need, and Paul exhorted the Corinthian church to _____ freely as well—not as a command, but to _____ the genuineness of their love.

Through selfless sacrifice, the church _____ Jesus, _____ the gospel, and thus lived as _____ evangelists in the world.

There is no evangelism without _____ the good news of Christ's death and resurrection for our salvation. But loving and serving others is the embodiment of that message—that which gives the message _____ for people to see and experience.

CONCLUSION

In the evangelism of the early church, we see mass participation in the service of living and speaking the gospel message.

A heart of love and service sent Jesus to the cross; a heart of love and service sends the whole _____ into the _____ with that good news.

Incarnational evangelism requires selfless, sacrificial _____—living out the gospel as we speak it.

Lesson 4: Learning from the Work of Cross-Cultural Missionaries

In the first lesson, we looked at the example of the Savior to learn about the motivations and actions of an evangelistic lifestyle. In the second lesson, we looked at the example of Paul's ministry as he sought to follow in Christ's footsteps. In the third lesson, we looked at the witness of the church as all of its members were engaged in speaking and living the gospel. In this lesson, we look to the work of cross-cultural missionaries.

Those who have left the familiarity and comfort of home to serve the gospel to unreached people in faraway lands are sometimes viewed as extraordinary participants in the Great Commission. While such missionaries certainly should be commended and celebrated (and may many more answer God's call to go!), their work should be seen, not as extraordinary, but as the work of ordinary Christians only in a different place and among different people to whom the Lord has called them.

Every Christian, wherever they are and with whomever they are, should be about the

primary work of cross-cultural missions.

THE WORK OF CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONARIES

The work of cross-cultural missionaries involves a _____.

Missionaries move from their homes to other places for this purpose: to _____ by their _____.

What must missionaries do to accomplish that purpose? They seek first to _____ they are called to reach: language, traditions, cultural norms.

The missionary's aim is to be an _____ for Christ to the people group to whom he has been called.

Missiologist, Duane Elmer, writes of six steps involved in serving the gospel across cultures:

_____: To be open is to be hospitable toward them, inviting them into your life.

_____: To accept is to "communicate value, worth and esteem to another person."

_____: This is working "to build confidence in a relationship so that both parties believe the other will not intentionally hurt them but will act in their best interest."

_____: To intentionally connect with others requires teachability, which demands humility.

_____: This involves a determination to see the other person's perspective on life and reality.

_____: To serve is to relate "to others in a way that leads them to sense Jesus' presence or consider his claims."

The Great Commission is the _____ the missionary is there in his place of service. *The same is true for the "_____ " Christian in his home culture.*

Incarnational evangelism involves entering the other's life and welcoming him into your own. Patient effort is required to _____ and then _____ the gospel for the hearer to understand.

Case study: Crossing generations can sometimes seem as daunting as crossing cultures. The Millennial generation is made up of those people born between 1980 and 2000. It is

the largest generation in the history of the U.S., and research shows that the majority have not embraced the gospel. If a local church, such as Bethany Baptist Church, has a large percentage of senior adults in its membership, how will we reach this younger generation?

The answer is that we will reach them by determining to be patient evangelists who _____ and _____ as missionaries. *The encouraging news is that research also shows that the Millennials are open to having older adults as mentors in their lives.* The need is for evangelists who see it their _____ to _____ whatever it takes to cross the chasm and reach them.

The work of cross-cultural missionaries involves a _____.

Missionaries give up familiar surroundings, comforts, and other opportunities to _____ the Great Commission.

Missionaries embrace the _____ of entering a different culture in order to live and speak the gospel to its people.

Such incarnational evangelism is the _____ of life for one who obeys the command to imitate Paul and thus imitate Christ.

Case study: William Carey, missionary to India and now known as the father of modern missions, drafted a covenant with his partners in mission that included these statements of purpose:

- To set an infinite value on men's souls.
- To acquaint ourselves with the snares which hold the minds of the people.
- To abstain from whatever deepens India's prejudice against the gospel.
- To watch for every chance of doing the people good.
- To preach "Christ crucified" as the grand means of conversion.
- To esteem and treat Indians always as our equals.
- To give ourselves without reserve to the Cause, not counting even the clothes we wear our own.

Read those statements again slowly. At Bethany Baptist Church, we are in partnership with cross-cultural missionaries today who have assumed the same singular purpose and at great sacrifice.

CONCLUSION

We must embrace that our purpose in Louisville, Kentucky, is no different from that of cross-cultural missionaries.

We must embrace that our labors should then look very _____ to our cross-cultural missionary partners.

_____ believers are called to give up familiarities, comforts and other opportunities for the singular purpose of reaching the lost.

_____ believers are called to give ourselves without reserve to the cause of Christ.

Lesson 5: Reflection, Application and Leading Others to Lead

We have looked at the example of the Savior to learn about the motivations and actions of an evangelistic lifestyle. We have looked at the example of Paul's ministry as he sought to follow in Christ's footsteps. We have looked at the witness of the church as all of its members were engaged in speaking and living the gospel. And we have looked at the work of cross-cultural missionaries as they work where they have been sent with singular purpose and willing sacrifice.

The questions we have been seeking to answer are: "What are the motivations behind our evangelism?" and "What does a faithful evangelistic lifestyle look like?" In this final session, we will review what we have seen and discuss ways to apply it in our own lives. We will also end with a consideration of one more aspect of such a lifestyle, displayed in the life of Christ and in Paul's ministry.

REVIEW AND APPLICATION

We saw that the position of those whom Christ sends is one of _____ in having _____ with God. Christians are new creations, reconciled with God, and given the _____ of reconciliation.

Why is it so important that we begin with remembering our position in Christ?

Do you think that faithful evangelism will serve to keep us focused on our position in Christ?

We saw that the power in our mission is the _____. God himself makes his _____ through us.

Why is it so important to remember that the Great Commission is a work of God himself through us?

Do you think that faithful evangelism will serve to keep us focused on the power of God that works through the gospel?

We saw that the content of our mission is the spoken _____ of the death and resurrection of Jesus for our salvation. By faith in Christ, guilty sinners receive _____ and _____ with God.

Why is it so important to remember that evangelism takes place only when the gospel is shared?

The Great Commission passage in John shows a direct link between Jesus' incarnation and ministry and the mission he has given us. If you were asked to pick two words to sum up Jesus' motivation and Paul's motivation after him, what would they be?

_____ and _____.

What part does the love of God have in our evangelism?

What part does obedience to Christ have in our evangelism?

What are specific hindrances that a focus upon God's love and our obedience to him work to overcome in our witness?

Both Jesus and Paul after him intentionally _____ with their hearers in order to reach them. Jesus left heaven to take on flesh. Paul devoted his whole self for others. Cross-cultural missionaries work hard to identify with the people they have come to reach.

What are specific ways we can seek to identify with those we seek to reach right where we live?

Will you commit to obey Jesus and do so?

Jesus and Paul were careful to _____ the message for their hearers. Neither used a "cookie-cutter" method in their evangelism. The growth of the early church across cultures indicates faithful contextualization of the gospel as does the labor of cross-cultural missionaries.

What might careful contextualization of the gospel look like in your sphere of influence?

What role does patient study and learning of another person's beliefs and worldview play?

How can acts of service and meeting immediate needs serve to help us contextualize the gospel?

Will you commit to obey Jesus and do so?

In our Lord's incarnation and ministry, he provided us an example that is to color our ministry in the mission he has given us. Though in a crucial sense, Jesus accomplished his mission on the cross, in another sense, he continues that mission through us as we live by faith in him.

His example to us shows us that that mission is carried out through willing _____ and _____ for others.

Paul's ministry after Christ was so colored. The corporate witness of the church was so colored. Our cross-cultural missionary partners' lives are so colored.

What might we be called to sacrifice to reach people in our immediate spheres of influence? What kind of suffering might we be called to face to reach others?

What keeps us from making those sacrifices?

Will you commit to obey Jesus and do so?

Following in the footsteps of Jesus and Paul after him, missionaries leave one place and people and go to another place and people for the _____ of reaching those people with the gospel.

Has Jesus called us to anything different right where he has placed us?

What hindrances are there to us seeing our sole purpose to be reaching the lost

around us?

What might God do through us if we considered that he has placed us strategically and specifically to reach this community for Christ?

Will you commit to obey Jesus and embrace your purpose for him? Will you be an incarnational evangelist where Christ has called you?

CONCLUSION: LEADING OTHERS TO LEAD

There is an aspect of Jesus' ministry and Paul's ministry that we have not focused on during these sessions. That aspect is leading others to be leaders. I want us to close with a brief consideration of that aspect.

At the outset of his ministry, Jesus chose _____ who would spend three years at his side, watching, listening, and learning from him.

His plan for his gospel to spread throughout the world required the _____ of people who would lead in that mission.

This intentional preparation of his disciples required a sacrificial investment of _____ and _____ on Jesus' part, and he made that sacrifice willingly.

Jesus loved them, prepared them, released them in ministry, and held them accountable.

Paul _____ in Jesus' footsteps in this work of leading others to lead.

In his missionary journeys and ministry, Paul brought others along with him, teaching and _____ them to lead.

Paul loved them, prepared them, released them in ministry, and held them accountable.

2 Timothy 2:2: This text sums up faithful leadership development—training others who will be faithful to train others—_____ who will faithfully make disciples.

We close with at least two applications:

Accountability: Before you leave this final session, select one person to be your partner in holding one another accountable as faithful incarnational evangelists. Pray for one another regularly. Update one another. Encourage one another.

Development: This study is purposefully brief (only 5 sessions) so that it can be easily repeated with others. Ask God to lead you to one or two others in the church that you might approach and ask to go through this study with you.

Let's look to Christ and be faithful in the Great Commission he's given us. May God make us an army of incarnational evangelists.

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ABSTRACT

IMPLEMENTING AN INCARNATIONAL EVANGELISM STRATEGY AT BETHANY BAPTIST CHURCH, LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018
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This project was designed to implement an incarnational evangelism strategy at Bethany Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky. Chapter 1 provides the context of ministry at BBC and the rationale and goals of this project. Chapter 2 contains exegetical research of three passages of Scripture to show that, as in his incarnation, Christ was sent into the world to save the lost, Christians are sent by Christ into the world to be incarnational proclaimers of his saving message. Chapter 3 presents further research to show that the church's mandate for incarnational evangelism is seen foremost in the actions of Christ and Paul's imitation of him and demonstrated in the corporate witness of the church and the methods of cross-cultural missionaries. Chapter 4 describes the project itself, presenting the curriculum to be used in the equipping of church members for incarnational evangelism. Chapter 5 evaluates the overall effectiveness of the project in reaching the intended goals.

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