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INCREASING UNDERSTANDING AND SHARING OF THE
GOSPEL AMONG COLLEGIANS AT ARKANSAS STATE
UNIVERSITY BAPTIST COLLEGIATE MINISTRY

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GOSPEL AMONG COLLEGIANS AT ARKANSAS STATE
UNIVERSITY BAPTIST COLLEGIATE MINISTRY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
PREFACE.....	vii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Context.....	2
Rationale.....	8
Purpose.....	9
Goals.....	9
Research Methodology.....	10
Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations.....	11
Conclusion.....	12
2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL.....	14
Introduction.....	14
The Gospel as the Realized Hope of Israel in Jesus the Messiah.....	16
The Gospel as the Hopeful Invitation to Be Made Right with God through Jesus the Savior.....	22
The Gospel as the Partially Realized Hope of God’s Reign with His Covenant People.....	27
Conclusion.....	33
3. CONTEXTUAL EVANGELISM.....	34
Evangelism as Spiritual Discipline.....	35
Evangelism as Praxis.....	41

Chapter	Page
Evangelism to Generation Z	51
Conclusion	58
4. DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT	59
Preparation	59
Goal 1: Assessment.....	60
Goal 2: Curriculum Development	63
Goal 3: Teach Curriculum	64
Goal 4: Increase Evangelism	70
Conclusion	72
5. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT	73
Evaluation of the Project Purpose	73
Evaluation of the Project Goals	74
Goal 1: Assessment.....	74
Goal 2: Curriculum Development	76
Goal 3: Teach Curriculum	77
Goal 4: Increase Evangelism	78
Strengths of the Project	79
Weaknesses of the Project.....	80
Personal Reflections.....	81
Conclusion	83
Appendix	
1. GOSPEL UNDERSTANDING AND EVANGELISM PRACTICES INVENTORY	84
2. CURRICULUM EVALUATION TOOL.....	88
3. CURRICULUM	90
4. CONVERSATION TRACKER	104
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	105

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Results of the knowledge portion of the assessment	61
2. Results of the practice portion of the assessment.	62
3. Number of weekly gospel conversations.....	70

PREFACE

This project would not have been possible without the support of many friends, family, and supporters. Most notably, I am in awe of my wife Jana. She has been a constant encourager to me. Our son, John Edward, was born after our second seminar in this program, and Jana never wavered in her support for me to continue this program.

I'm also grateful to the faculty of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary from whom I have learned so much. I am especially thankful for Dr. Beougher, my advisor, and Dr. Haste, our program director for working with me and encouraging me through the fulfillment of this project.

Finally, I am so thankful to our BCM students and staff. I am in debt to those who participated and those who encouraged and checked in on me and my writing. It is an honor to serve students at my alma mater. I pray that God uses this project to propel the gospel further on our campus.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The churches of the Southern Baptist Convention have held the missional task of making disciples in the highest regard since before the convention's inception in 1845.¹ In fact, "Great Commission Baptist" was offered and officially accepted by messengers of the churches as an alternative name for the convention in 2020.² The heart of the Great Commission is Jesus commanding his followers to "go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19).³ The goal for American Christians to make disciples of every nation is more accessible than ever. Students from various countries all over the world come to study in American universities each year. In addition, many American students walk the campus every day without recognizing Jesus as their King, but open to conversations about spirituality as they embrace adulthood and experience the ability to decide their spirituality and future path for themselves. The college campus is the perfect place for gospel mission and strategic opportunity to collide. For these reasons Arkansas Baptist State Convention churches have placed Baptist Collegiate Ministries on more than thirty college campuses in Arkansas to meet lostness with the hope of the gospel and

¹ The General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions was formed in 1814. The Southern Baptist Convention was essentially a split from this group. See Robert E. Johnson, *A Global Introduction to Baptist Churches* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 142.

² Adelle M. Banks, "Southern Baptist Warm to Alternate Moniker 'Great Commission Baptist,'" Religion News Service, September 16, 2020, <https://religionnews.com/2020/09/16/southern-baptists-warm-to-moniker-great-commission-baptists/>.

³ Unless otherwise noted, all Bible references come from the CSB.

mobilize this generation to be laborers for God's kingdom.

Context

The Baptist Collegiate Ministry (BCM) at Arkansas State University is an on-campus ministry of over 1,400 local Arkansas Baptist churches. The BCM draws financial support from nearly twenty churches in northeast Arkansas. With many large churches in the Jonesboro area, the BCM is not asked to be a church for students because many of the local churches reach out to new students, have small groups Bible studies and midweek worship services just for young adults, and mobilize students for mission work. However, there are still several thousand collegians who are not involved in these churches. In addition to these churches who have resources and a strategic vision to reach and disciple college students, the BCM also represents churches in the area that do not have those staff or resources. Therefore, the BCM's missional effort might be comparable the cooperative effort of churches through the International Mission Board (IMB) or North American Mission Board (NAMB). With those two organizations, churches see the need for strategic gospel presence internationally and in North America. Still, there are many Southern Baptist churches that send teams and missionaries to serve and witness in these places. The fact that churches are involved directly does not stop the cooperative work of these same churches and many others in trying to reach people with the gospel.

The BCM acts as a facilitation organization to connect churches to the campus and students to Christ and his church. Regardless of the size or resources of our churches, they are all able to offer discipleship through mentors, Bible studies and teaching. The BCM is then a place where students from many different local churches can meet to be encouraged and mobilized for the sake of the gospel. Some ministry practices are duplicated between BCM and the local church such as worship services, groups, and mission projects. However, BCM strives to offer a service that is evangelistic in nature where students can bring a friend to hear the gospel as well as be encouraged and

challenged in their own gospel witness. In addition, the BCM seeks to disciple students. Jesus's commission was not to make converts, but to make disciples. Still, we do this in partnership with local churches. BCM strives to have strong communal small groups that teach spiritual disciplines and apologetics to help students nail down what they believe. Exegetical book studies or deep discipleship curriculum is left to the local churches. The BCM aims to mobilize students to engage other students with four major connection points: connecting personally to other students, connecting to Jesus through his gospel, connecting to a local church, and connecting to God's mission at Arkansas State University and around the world. As those four connection points were previously identified, this project evaluated those areas as areas of strength or weakness.

Two of these areas were identified as strengths. Connecting with students personally was a strength area for the BCM. One of the main differences between collegiate ministry and youth ministry or any other age group type ministry is the intentional effort toward constant recruitment. In typical church-based age group ministries, the ministry does not lose twenty to twenty-five percent of their group each year. Additionally, church ministries might expect some students to graduate from the youth group and join the college group. At BCM, we historically have not had this pipeline, so recruiting was identified as a vital element. When it came to connecting with students personally, the BCM had two main recruiting seasons. Recruiting began in August usually before the first week of class. During the week before classes, the BCM tried to reach out to sorority students participating in rush as well as other organizations that had moved in early like the band, athletes, international students, Resident Assistants, etc. In the fall of 2021, our organization did five service activities the week before school and served over 450 students. Then, the first three weeks of school we hosted fifteen events or outreach activities to connect with students and we interacted with about 150 unique students through those events.

The first three weeks of school were identified as extremely important because they are the time when collegians established patterns and new routines. Students were being recruited by multiple organizations and were open to trying new things during this period. If we were able to get into their routine and connect with them personally, then we would be able to help them make the other three connections. Similarly, there was a small window of recruitment in the spring semester. This might be students who transferred, wanted to give the ministry a second chance, or even made a spiritual New Year resolution.

Meeting new students was more of an individual pursuit outside of these major recruitment times. The BCM organized different activities on campus and encouraged students involved in the ministry to make friends in their areas of influence such as band, classes, workplace, intramurals, or other student organizations. Once we secured those contacts, we encouraged students to set up connection meetings with those students to help identify which of the four connections we can help them make. Considering these things, I would submit that connecting with students personally was generally a strength. We connected with many students and cast a wide net.

The next area of strength was connecting students to the local church. We have done this through a barrage of messaging and exposing students to churches. First, if students were already connected with a church, then we encouraged them to lead out in that. Our role then was to help those students focus on the mission of God on campus and around the world. For everyone else, we desired to connect them to a local body of believers. We exposed them to church leaders often. We partnered with our churches during welcome week and always gave the church time to invite students. We invited a church leader to speak to our students once per month at our weekly worship service. We also had a church feed a meal before the service each week and allowed that church to tell about itself and encouraged their leaders to mingle and make connections.

One of the unwritten rules of collegiate ministry is “students go where their friends go.” Time and time again the most effective method of getting new students involved with a church was having another student invite or even physically bring them. We encouraged all our Bible study leaders to invite their group members to church with them and we never paired two students from the same church as coleaders so that there were always multiple churches represented. Our motto when it came to the local church was “we only win, if they win.” We took a lot of steps in the past few years to make this a strength area of our ministry. We constantly communicated that we are a missions organization, and that we, along with our churches, were all on one mission and on the same team.

There were also two connection points that are weaknesses. First, connecting to Jesus through His gospel was an area that our staff and student leaders struggled. Numerically speaking, two students chose to follow Jesus in the past calendar year. Praise God for his salvation in their life. They were both students who understood justification by faith alone. They could even articulate it and had been serving in our ministry for over a year. The issue was that they had never submitted to Jesus as Lord and surrendered control of their life. Unfortunately, in our context we had many students who knew only a little about the gospel. They grew up in the church or at least grew up church adjacent. They picked up enough knowledge to know that Jesus was good, that he died on the cross, and that if you believe in him you can go to heaven one day instead of hell. This understanding of the gospel was not the entirety of the gospel message. These students only knew the part of the gospel that helped them. When we stood back and looked at this viewpoint objectively, we considered it selfish or even narcissistic. It led students to place themselves instead of God at the center of the biblical narrative. The students we talked with knew a few facts about Jesus, but they did not know the fullness of Jesus’s story and they certainly did not know about the mission of establishing his kingdom.

The way that I taught our students to share the gospel was to help their lost

friends see the gospel story as the Gospel writers described it and not as Paul dissected it in his letters. Some of our students were beginning to grasp the concept of the kingdom of God and Jesus as the ruling king. They understood salvation was traded for on the cross, but they were just beginning to grasp that repentance was realigning our hearts in submission to the King and his kingdom. They were beginning to understand how the writings of the New Testament describe heaven breaking through in God's kingdom people now with fewer mentions of securing a ticket to some future paradise.

Coincidentally, while we were beginning to help students understand the fullness of the biblical gospel, we also encountered a generation who was not compelled by the old narrative. The hell, fire, and brimstone message that saw many who were afraid of death turn to Christ in the past seemed to have lost its effectiveness on a generation who was not concerned with death. Students were simply trying to get through the day without a mental meltdown. So, on the Arkansas State University campus a shallow, incomplete gospel was meeting a generation of students who were consumed with their brokenness but indifferent to the old evangelistic friend, death.

The final connection point our ministry focused on was connecting students to the mission of God on campus and around the world. This was another area of weakness. The basis of the BCM as a missional organization has already been discussed as well as the difficulty among students of sharing the gospel on campus. This carries over into the areas of service and mission. We had little service presence on campus or in the community besides the occasional homeless drive. When I arrived, we took four students each on our first two trips. We had twenty-six students signed up for a spring break trip that was canceled because of COVID-19. Once virus restrictions lessened, we were able to take 18 students to Washington DC, 6 students to New Orleans, 18 students to do Disaster Relief work in Louisiana after Hurricane Ida, and 20 students to work with churches in New York City. These numbers were improving, but not yet where we wanted them.

The goal for us was to help students build a habit of evangelism and service. We wanted to expose students to possible long-term opportunities. When it came to mission trip opportunities, we said, “We send students short term and pray they will get the vision to serve long term.” We typically worked with NAMB or IMB for a week at a time. As we served, we also taught our students about semester opportunities and two-year Journeyman opportunities. Over the summer, the majority of our fourteen students that served in a summer program were involved with a paid Christian summer camp position. We had one student serve internationally and one student serve nationally. As much as I appreciated camps, our heart was to see students mature in their faith to a point that NAMB and IMB opportunities were a priority for them. It was our goal for every student to have the confidence, attitude of obedience, and support to go and make disciples of all nations. We pushed students toward missions every chance we got. However, them answering the call was few and far between.

Because the main weakness areas were both related to understanding and sharing the gospel, my plan was to create a six-week training program that was both educational and practical in nature. In this training program, students were exposed to a robust picture of the gospel based off the kingdom themes in the book of Matthew. These include an understanding of what was expected of Jesus through his lineage, what he accomplished on the cross, and redefining the gospel as a kingly narrative about Jesus. At the same time, there were soft evangelism skills built into the curriculum that the students used and reported their conversations back to the group each week. These skills were developed through survey questions. Each week, students were asked to practice what they were learning by engaging two non-Christians with the gospel. There was an assessment that was given at the beginning and end of the curriculum to evaluate both knowledge of the gospel and confidence in sharing the gospel. The desired result was to have a group of students who were knowledgeable about and motivated to share the gospel.

Rationale

The greatest area of need in our ministry was to help students understand and share the gospel. While there were several areas that could have been improved, mobilizing students for the sake of the gospel was the purpose of our organization. It is why churches created us and continued to sustain us. Messengers to the Arkansas Baptist State Convention confirmed the priority of evangelism when they adopted the mission statement of the Collegiate and Young Leaders Team. The goal of the team is “to serve Arkansas churches by reaching next generation leaders with the Gospel on the most strategic mission field in the world.”⁴ Helping students find community and become strong disciples was important and we did these things.⁵ However, those were not the primary tasks we had been asked to accomplish. We were asked to help students know and share the gospel. As we sought to see lives changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ it seemed appropriate that this area should be improved from a weakness to a strength.

I believed if we could increase students’ knowledge and motivation to share the gospel then all other connection points of the ministry would flourish, and that we would see more students connecting to one another personally as well as connecting to God’s church and His mission. We believed helping students understand the fullness of the gospel story and building confidence in their witness would also help them as they built relationships and shared the gospel in one-on-one conversations. As students put their faith in Christ, it would be natural to connect with a local church, join discipling relationships, and begin serving. Finally, as students understood and shared the gospel they would be equipped and prayerfully, by the power of the Holy Spirit, be prompted to

⁴ *2021 Annual of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention in the One Hundred Sixty-Eighth Session (173rd Year)* (Little Rock, AR: ABSC, 2021), 64, <https://www.absc.org/files/uploads/2021Annual.pdf>

⁵ The importance of community can be found in 1 Corinthians 1:10, Galatians 6:2, and Hebrews 10:24 among other texts. The importance of discipleship is highlighted most prominently in Matthew 28:16–20 as well as the life of Jesus.

participate in God's mission on campus and across the world. I was convinced that solving the bottleneck of gospel equipping in our mission's mobilization pipeline would help the gospel flow freely on our campus and across the globe.

Focusing on gospel understanding and motivation would also help to change the culture of our organization. We desired to see students putting others first and becoming more courageous in their witness to their peers (Phil 2:3-4). Many of our students did not share their faith because they feared they did not know enough or they were consumed with other priorities such as materialism, growing their platform, career projection, finding a spouse, etc. While some of these ideas were not necessarily bad, many of these pursuits represented a lack of surrender to God's reign in the student's life. God did not have control over the student's priorities. Channeling student's ambitions for kingdom purposes continues to be crucial during this formative period of their life. Students career paths, relationships, and breaks from school had the potential to be transformed into assets for the kingdom of God if we could help their worldview be transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. The goal of gospel transformation made it so important that we help students understand the fullness of the gospel and encourage and challenge them to be faithful witnesses for the rest of their lives.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to increase understanding and sharing of the gospel among college students at the Arkansas State University Baptist Collegiate Ministry.

Goals

This project addressed a multi-faceted problem in the BCM ministry and therefore several different types of goals were needed. To properly address the issues faced, we needed to build knowledge through training. However, the knowledge would only be pragmatically successful if it led to quantitative results concerning personal

evangelism.

1. The first goal was to assess BCM students' current understanding and sharing of the gospel.
2. The second goal was to develop a six-session curriculum that would equip BCM students with increased increase knowledge of the gospel and confidence in sharing the gospel as well as teach soft evangelism skills.
3. The third goal was to increase knowledge of the gospel and confidence in sharing the gospel among BCM students by teaching students the curriculum that was developed.
4. The fourth goal was for each participant to average one personal evangelism conversation per week over the course of the six-week training.

A specific research methodology was created to measure the successful completion of these goals. This methodology will be described in the next section.⁶

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project depended upon the completion of four goals. The first goal was to assess BCM students' current understanding and sharing of the gospel. This goal was measured by administering a survey to at least fifteen students who attended BCM at least twice per month. The goal was considered successfully met when fifteen students completed the survey, and the data was analyzed and yielded a clearer picture of the current understanding and sharing of the gospel at the BCM. The results of the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

The second goal was to develop a six-session curriculum that would equip BCM students with increased knowledge of the gospel and confidence in sharing the gospel as well as teaching soft evangelism skills. The goal was measured by an expert panel who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum. The goal was considered successfully met

⁶ All 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.

when the panel decided all criteria met or exceeded “sufficient” level on the rubric.

The third goal was to increase knowledge of the gospel and confidence in sharing the gospel among BCM students by teaching students the curriculum that had been developed. The effectiveness of this goal was measured by administering a post-assessment and comparing the results to the pre-assessment. The goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre-assessment and post-assessment scores.

The fourth goal was for each participant to average one personal evangelism conversation per week over the course of the six-session training. Participation in personal evangelism was defined as “having at least one conversation per week concerning faith where a student shares their hope in Jesus.” This goal was measured by providing a conversation tracker that the students were asked to complete at the beginning of each training session. This goal was not considered successfully met because participants did not average one gospel conversation per week during the six sessions.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

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

Gospel. The news that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah of Israel and God incarnate. Jesus’s life, death, burial, resurrection, and appearances simultaneously fulfil the story of Israel and inaugurate the kingdom of God where God reigns as “all in all” in covenant relationship with his people.⁷ Covenantal relationship between God and men is made possible through Jesus’s substitutionary atonement for sins on the cross. Jesus offers forgiveness via his atonement to people who respond in

⁷ The death, burial, resurrection, and appearance of Jesus are emphasized by Paul in his gospel explanation in 1 Cor 15. Paul culminates his presentation of the gospel with God becoming “all in all” in verse 28.

belief to his Lordship. In addition, the kingdom of God is realized in the eschatological foreshadowing of the resurrection.⁸

Personal evangelism. Rebecca Pippert’s definition that “evangelism in its simplest form is introducing our friends to Jesus”⁹ is efficient and thought provoking. However, for this project, a slightly more formed definition by Scot McKnight argues the act of “gospeling” is to “announce good news about key events in the life of Jesus Christ. To gospel for Paul was to tell, announce, declare, and shout aloud the Story of Jesus Christ as the saving news of God.”¹⁰ This speaks to the content of personal evangelism, but Alvin Reid adds the motivation and goal of sharing the content is “so that unbelievers become followers of Jesus Christ in His church and in the culture.”¹¹

One limitation applied to this project. The students who are enrolled at Arkansas State University and involved with the Baptist Collegiate Ministry changes each semester. To mitigate this limitation, all parts of the project involving students were completed in one semester.

Conclusion

The mission of God to bring his gospel to all 13,772 collegians at Arkansas State University is likely too large for one person.¹² However, developing students

⁸ Many of the elements of this definition are described separately in Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 47–62.

⁹ Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker and into the World: Evangelism as a Way of Life*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999), 133.

¹⁰ McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*, 50.

¹¹ Alvin Reid, *Evangelism Handbook: Biblical, Spiritual, Intentional, Missional* (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 31.

¹² Arkansas State University, “Fall 2021 Enrollment Shows Gains in Several Areas, Total of 13,772,” last modified September 9, 2021, <https://www.astate.edu/news/fall-2021-enrollment-shows-gains-in-several-areas-total-of-13-772>.

missionally can create a catalyst for more students to know Jesus's story. The following chapters will demonstrate an effective method of training students to see and share the fullness of the gospel. Chapter 2 will explore biblical and theological concepts related to the gospel and personal evangelism.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING
OF THE GOSPEL

Introduction

Gospel is a term that is used often in our churches. Many leaders have claimed the gospel as the foundation of our churches, Christian ministries, and mission organizations. It is often referenced as the message that we invite unbelievers to accept. This common use in the Christian vernacular leads to an important question for theologians “What exactly is the message of the gospel?” Is it simply a choice between heaven or hell or is there something more? I believe we would best be served by exploring the biblical precedent for the gospel. Two main biblical concepts come to mind immediately. First, we will look at Paul’s very explicit definition of the gospel in his first letter to the church in Corinth. Then we will examine the gospel from the Gospels and see what the key elements are in Matthew’s presentation.

Paul writes to the church in Corinth,

Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, the gospel I preached to you, which you received, on which you have taken your stand and by which you are being saved, if you hold to the message I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. Then he appeared to over five hundred brothers and sisters at one time; most of them are still alive, but some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one born at the wrong time, he also appeared to me. (1 Cor 15:1–8)

In this example, it appears the ingredients to the Gospel are an understanding of Jesus’s role as the Christ or Messiah, his death, burial and resurrection, and his appearance to many witnesses after his resurrection. Plus, it seems Paul assumes that the reader will be able to understand some of the theological or historical meaning behind these events.

Paul goes on after this opening statement to discuss two important topics. Both topics are inferences Paul makes from the historical statements in the opening lines of the chapter. First, we believe that Jesus was only the first one to be resurrected and that in the future when Jesus returns, dead citizens of Jesus's kingdom will rise again (1 Cor 15:20). Secondly, Paul writes about Jesus's kingly reign. He indicates that in the future Jesus will give away control of the kingdom to God the Father (1 Cor 15:24). This indicates that Jesus is currently reigning now, although Paul does not elaborate or explain this. So, looking at this explicit charge from Paul we can see three main points to his gospel presentation. First, to Paul the reader must understand Jesus as Messiah. Second, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is paramount to the gospel message. Finally, Paul believes it is important to understand the impact of these events on our understanding of God's kingly reign in the world.

The other major teaching of the content of the gospel is found in the Gospels. The early church came to refer each writing as "The Gospel According to" Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, respectively. Mark even begins his account, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). Each Gospel tells the story of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, but no two Gospels are exactly alike in vocabulary, design, emphasis, or narrative content. Due to this it would not be wise for this project to trace the content of the gospel throughout all four Gospels as too much time would need to be spent attempting to harmonize the four books' content. However, I do believe that an exploration of the Gospel of Matthew will clearly demonstrate that the same elements present in Paul's explanation of the Gospel are expounded upon in Matthew's writing. By exploring Matthew's Gospel, we will see that there are three essential ingredients to the story. The gospel is the realized hope of Israel in Jesus the Messiah, the invitation to hope for every man to be made right with God through Jesus the Savior, and the partially realized hope of God's eternal reign with His covenant people in Jesus the bridegroom. Without each of these three elements, we do not preach the fullness of the gospel.

The Gospel as the Realized Hope of Israel in Jesus the Messiah

We must start at the beginning and follow the chronological path of Matthew when attempting to understand the message of the gospel the way the Gospel writers understood it and intended it to be understood. The opening lines of Matthew's Gospel may present a boring genealogy to many Western readers. However, when we understand why this genealogy is present then we begin to appreciate it and its message. R. T. France suggests,

The prominent repetition of the title "Messiah" (or, in many English versions, "Christ") in 1:1, 16, 17, 18; 2:4, together with the other related titles which recur in these opening paragraphs of the gospel ("son of David," 1:1, 20; "King of the Jews," 2:2) makes it clear that Matthew is aiming to present an account not just of a historical figure (Jesus of Nazareth) but of the long-awaited deliverer of God's people Israel.¹

In other words, the genealogy is important for connecting Jesus to his ancestors, and a connection with his ancestors would have signaled something to the Jewish reader. Specifically, Jesus shared the same royal bloodline as the prophesied messiah. John's Gospel confirms that this was the common belief when he states, "Doesn't the Scripture say the Messiah comes from David's offspring and from the town of Bethlehem, where David once lived?" (John 7:42). It appears John is appealing to passages such as Jeremiah 23:5, Isaiah 11:1, and Micah 5:2. Those same passages would have been in mind as Jewish readers considered Matthew's opening genealogy, and the Jewish reader would not have missed what Matthew was trying to accomplish by beginning in this way. Matthew was making the bold claim that Jesus had all the qualifications of the Messiah.

Many scholars have noted the beauty of the three sets of fourteen generations between Abraham and David, David and the exile, and the exile to Jesus that appear in this genealogy. This pattern is intentionally designed to point the reader to the connection that Jesus is from a royal bloodline. N. T. Wright speculates that there might even be a

¹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 25.

hint that Matthew is trying to put forth six sets of seven generations. Beginning with Abraham instead of Adam draws the reader to the idea that this genealogy is concerned with the story of Israel. Jesus being listed as the beginning of the seventh set of seven generations is the climax of the story of Israel.²

Wright is fair to mention that W. D. Davies and Dale Allison object to this interpretation because they argue that Matthew would have just come out and said it if the author intended to use the genealogy in a climactic way.³ It seems to me that Matthew is not always forthright and clear as he uses much symbolism and allusion from the Old Testament in his writing. This can be seen even in instances where he is not directly quoting an Old Testament passage. Wright's argument is compelling to me not only because it elevates Jesus in a Christological sense, but because it also sees Jesus as the crowning and completing moment of Israel. This is to say that a proper understanding of the content of the gospel also sees Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel's story. This fulfillment aspect of Jesus's life and ministry declares that the gospel was first interpreted as the culmination of the Jewish story.

This is why I believe Paul states later that he is "not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek" (Rom 1:16). The term salvation can also be translated as "deliverance" which indicates a removal from a harmful situation. This idea links back to the exodus event but also pushes forward the concept of God's deliverance from sin through faith in Jesus.⁴ Putting these ideas together, I see Jesus's fulfillment of the role of Messiah as the final offering of deliverance or salvation to the Jewish people.

² N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 385, Kindle.

³ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark, 1988), 162.

⁴ Donald K. McKim, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2014), 102, 316, Ebsco.

Daniel Harrington writes about the opening chapters of Matthew in another way, stating, “Mathew’s infancy story situates Jesus within the history of Israel.”⁵ This is the pivotal point. The gospel of Jesus is situated in a particular history. As we will discuss in the next section, Jesus did come and offer salvation to the world. However, that is not where the story begins and ends. It is a disservice to God’s activity in history to simplify our understanding of the gospel down to only personal salvation when God was active for hundreds of years before Jesus. This is equivalent to assuming that the gospel starts with us in the modern day, or even more dangerous that we are the center or the main point of the gospel instead of Jesus. The good news of Jesus impacts people in our modern day, but our modern day cannot be confused with the original actions that were interpreted in that day as good news. Furthermore, when we disconnect Jesus’s Jewishness and unhinge the gospel from the Old Testament, we fail to grasp the totality and weight of what his incarnation meant to the people who were the sole heirs of God’s grace for most of human history until Jesus’s coming.

This is not just speculation. There is also biblical precedent in other parts of the New Testament for the way that the gospel was explained. Let us consider a few examples of how the Gospel was shared after Jesus’s death, burial and resurrection. It is necessary to begin after this pivotal moment because this is what most people consider the main set of events of the gospel. One of the first examples is when Jesus appears to the two men traveling to Emmaus in Luke’s Gospel. They are confused about Jesus’s death and the thing that concerns them most is that they “were hoping that he was the one who was about to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:21). They understood him to be a prophet, but they were hoping he was more than a prophet. They were hoping he was the Messiah. Jesus then rebukes them as foolish because they don’t understand the prophecies about

⁵ Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 30.

the Messiah. He explains that it was necessary that the Messiah had to suffer in order to be glorified. Then, if you consider Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection as the main event of the gospel, something unexpected happens. Jesus interprets all the Scriptures from Moses and the prophets about the coming of the Messiah (Luke 24:13–26). Darrell Bock says it this way, “By taking them back to the Scripture, Jesus is noting that what took place was part of God's plan and promise.”⁶ What is fascinating about this moment is that Jesus doesn't offer forgiveness of sins or a path to heaven. He doesn't even offer a simple explanation that he is the Messiah. Instead, Jesus finds it appropriate to take the time to interpret all the Scriptures with these men so that they understand that he is, in fact, the Messiah. It appears Jesus did not want to be their Savior and Lord without also being their Messiah. In fact, the conversation began with the topic of suffering. Jesus and the two men appear to be talking about the crucifixion when Jesus tells them that the key to understanding suffering and the crucifixion event is to truly understand Jesus's role as the promised Messiah. In other words, the two men misunderstood the meaning of the cross because they misunderstood the Scriptures about the messiah.

In addition to Jesus's own interpretation, it also seemed that an understanding of Jesus's messianic nature was essential in the early church. There are several passages where people come to salvation, or the message of the gospel is explained that also include direct or indirect references to Jesus's messianic nature. In Peter's famous sermon in Acts 2, he notes that Joel prophesied about the resurrection of the Messiah and later claims, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah” (Acts 2:31, 36). Peter's direct address to the people of Israel and closing remark about the Messiah indicates that some, if not most of the Jews, had missed the promised messiah, Jesus. Only once they realized

⁶ Darrell Bock, *Luke*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 385.

who Jesus was, then what he did on the cross mattered to them and they repented and were baptized. As mentioned above, Paul begins his argument about resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 with a short explanation of the gospel that begins with “Christ died for our sins.” Paul is assuming his Jewish readers understood the background of Jesus as the Christ or messiah.⁷ The Samaritan woman in John’s Gospel who interchanges the words for Messiah and Christ obviously understands the correlation between the two terms. This text is also one of the rare times in the Gospels that Jesus affirms a title put on him (John 4:25–26). This title of Christ or anointed one is how the early writers would distinguish Jesus from other men with the same name. But to most modern Western readers, we read Christ as a last name instead of remembering that most of the New Testament is basically referring to Jesus as “Jesus, the Messiah.”

Understanding Jesus’s genealogy also gives credit to his ministry. The genealogy becomes a very important claim because Jesus’s validity as the Jewish Messiah hinged on his bloodline and therefore his ministry and platform hinged on his bloodline. Jeannine K. Brown explains that Jesus comes with an identity but also an agenda. She says, “The Gospel of Matthew is written to followers of Jesus during the latter part of the first century CE to portray Jesus of Nazareth as God’s Messiah, who paradoxically ushers in the reign of God and restoration for Israel and the nations through his ministry and death as a servant.”⁸ All of what Jesus wants to accomplish would be considered invalid to the Jewish people if his bloodline was not pure.

Consideration must also be given to a question about the act of gospeling. Must a person understand Jesus’s Jewishness to receive salvation? This is an extension of the common question “what is the minimum a person must know or understand in order

⁷ Michael F. Bird, *Jesus Is the Christ: The Messianic Testimony of the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 16.

⁸ Jeannine K. Brown and Kyle Roberts, *Matthew*, Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 20.

to be saved?” I reject the second question out of principle because it assumes that personal salvation is the only goal of Jesus and therefore evangelism. I will entertain the first question. There are two main reasons to find the Messianic story as an essential piece of the Gospel story. First, it helps people understand that they are being “grafted in” as Paul says to a story that has been going on well before them (Rom 11:17–24).

Understanding the messianic background of Jesus and the story of Israel in the Old Testament is important because this understanding immediately moves the impetus of the gospel away from humanity as the object of salvation and restores God as the hero of the story that he has been writing for all of history. This is to say, that God loves humanity and invites them into a relationship that is purchased on the cross, but it is an ongoing relationship that has a history of activity between God and mankind.

In addition, understanding the Messianic background of Jesus and the story of Israel as presented in the Old Testament establishes a history of sin and an understanding of humanity’s major failures that indicate its need for a savior. This means tying Jesus to the Old Testament and its history is to help people understand their need for a savior because of the shortcoming of the Jewish people and their failure to live in the old covenant with God. Even if this is not completely apparent with the genealogy, Matthew unpacks this idea as his narrative proceeds with Jesus’s constant rebuke of the Jewish leaders and his redefining of “fulfillment” of the Jewish law (Matt 5:17). He keeps telling the people through his words and his actions that their understanding of what happened in the Old Testament and what they should do in light of the law is wrong. Jesus demonstrates through his teaching and his actions what it looks like to live as God’s covenant people. A covenant that can only be understood by examining what has already been happening in history and the broken covenants that have come before this new one that Jesus is establishing.

The Gospel as the Hopeful Invitation to Be Made Right with God through Jesus the Savior

The gospel cannot be understood without its climax. The pivotal, contentious, and somewhat confusing cross stands at the center of the good news of Jesus. Anecdotally, Jesus's crucifixion gets most of the focus in gospel presentations of evangelists and preachers followed by brief interpretations of the resurrection. In these presentations, there is little contextualization of the cross and resurrection. Still, it cannot be discounted that Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection are central to the Gospel message. Every gospel writer records a similar passion narrative including those events (Matt 26–28 // Mark 14–16 // Luke 22–24 // John 18–20). The question becomes, what do the events mean? What is their importance? And what role do they play in our understanding of the gospel? Answering these questions through the biblical text is essential to understanding one of the three essential elements of the gospel. The gospel is consistently portrayed in the Gospels and Paul's letters as the hopeful invitation to be made right with God through Jesus the savior. We will examine how Matthew unpacks the theme of salvation throughout his Gospel and examine how some of Paul's soteriology from Romans compliments Matthew's own presentation.

Consider how Matthew establishes the theme of salvation as a part of his Gospel from the very beginning. Immediately after the genealogy, Matthew includes a narrative of an angel coming to Joseph and telling him what to name the coming child. The angel tells Joseph, "You are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21). This is because the name Jesus literally means "Yahweh saves."⁹ In mentioning this at the very beginning, Matthew is introducing salvation as a key theme that will be part of his Gospel's message moving forward. Another logical question that proceeds from this conversation is, "What does Matthew mean by salvation?" If he

⁹ Charles L. Quarles, *Matthew*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B&H, 2017), Introduction (1:1–4:16), "1:21," para. 2, ProQuest.

begins with this concept and references salvation a few other times, then what is salvation? The gospel itself has clues to answer this question.

Matthew's narrative sees Jesus interpreting the cross twice. This is significant not because it opposes a Pauline interpretation of the cross but because it demonstrates that the Gospel writers left clues as to how the cross should be understood. In each instance, Jesus is preparing the disciples for what is going to come. First, when Jesus is teaching the disciples about service and suffering, he concludes with, "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt 20:28). Admittedly the cross is not the focus of the passage, but in this case suffering is an exemplar for the disciples. Still, Jesus says something interesting in the statement about how he views the events of the cross. For Jesus, one of the keys to understanding the cross is understanding the term ransom. According to Grant Arnold, "'Ransom' ($\lambda\acute{\upsilon}\tau\rho\nu$) has its background in the OT idea of the kinsman-redeemer (Boaz and Ruth) but mainly in the idea of the payment made to redeem the firstborn (Num 3:46-47; 18:15) as well as the Hellenistic idea of freeing a slave or buying the freedom of a prisoner of war."¹⁰ I agree that these three concepts are exegetical keys to unlock the idea of ransom that Jesus was attempting to portray. I don't believe that we have to pick just one passage as the lens to examine ransom through. In all three instances there was a trade involved. The question in Matthew's Gospel presentation is, "What is Jesus trading for on the cross?" It seems he is fulfilling each of the roles Arnold puts forth. He is the kinsman redeemer of Israel as he is trading himself on the cross just as a family member would have to buy back a widow. Israel is the one who has no husband because they have turned their back on God their bridegroom. Jesus is also the Passover lamb as he is submitting his blood on the cross as a trade for the wrath of God to pass over his people.

¹⁰ Grant R. Arnold, *Matthew*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins, 2010), 793.

Finally, he is trading his life via the cross for the freedom of his people from sin so that they might live. This is just like a slave would have had to purchase their freedom.

Davies and Allison argue against reading too much into the word ransom here. They conclude, “almost every question we might ask remains unanswered. What is the condition of ‘the many?’ Why do they need to be ransomed? To whom is the ransom paid—to God (so John of Damascus and Calvin), to the devil (so Origen and Gregory of Nyssa), or to no one at all (so Gregory Nazianzus and Abelard)?”¹¹ In other words, Davies and Allison are suggesting that because Matthew is not explicit here in defining the innerworkings of how the ransom plays out that he could not possibly be proposing an atonement theory. David Turner rebuts, “No doubt there are some unanswered questions, but the general thrust is clear.” For Turner it is clear that, “Matthew teaches that Jesus saves his people by shedding his blood as a ransom, which frees them from the bondage of their sins.”¹² I agree with Turner. It seems Davies and Allison are refusing to let the themes of the Old Testament interpret Jesus’s words. They also don’t offer an alternative to what Jesus would be referencing if he is not referencing the cross. If Matthew 20:28 was the only reference to atonement, then it would be difficult to see a pattern emerge from Matthew’s Gospel. However, there is another key reference that Jesus uses to help us understand the cross.

Jesus also interprets the cross in Matthew 26:28 during Matthew’s narrative on the Lord’s Supper. During the meal, Jesus breaks the bread and distributes the wine of which he says, “For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” Note the difference between Matthew and the presentation of the same narrative in Mark and Luke. Mark states, “This is my blood of the covenant, which

¹¹ Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 100.

¹² David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 488–489.

is poured out for many” (Mark 14:24). Luke is slightly different as it reads, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you” (Luke 22:20). Each Gospel writer is careful to include that Jesus is interpreting his bloodshed on the cross as the establishment of a new covenant which is offered for many or for you [Jesus’s disciples]. However, Matthew is the only writer who provides an additional interpretive key in adding “for the forgiveness of sins.” For Matthew, there is something about shedding of blood that equates to an offering of the forgiveness of sins.

It is likely that Jesus was invoking language or themes from Isaiah.¹³ Isaiah 53:12 states, “Therefore I will give him the many as a portion, and he will receive the mighty as a spoil, because he willingly submitted to death, and was counted among the rebels; yet he bore the sin of many and interceded for the rebels.” Isaiah sees the messiah bearing the sins of many as a priestly function of intercession for the people. Specifically, the Messiah is meeting with God so that the rebels do not have to. When we use this passage to interpret Jesus’s words we see Jesus, through the cross, is taking on the punishment of sin so that his followers don’t have to. Another interesting observation about Isaiah’s statement is that Isaiah gives an accusation against the people when he references them as rebels. If it is not clear what the grievous sin is that people have committed that is worth Jesus dying for, Isaiah gives an overarching picture of sin in one word: rebellion. This is a relational and legal term that describes people who have acted against their covenant relationship with God. Therefore, Isaiah is summarizing the sin of man as rebellion or a break of the covenant between God and man. Then Jesus in Matthew is saying that his blood will both forgive that transgression and establish a new covenant with the people.

The allusion to Isaiah certainly gives hints to what Jesus means by establishing

¹³ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Durham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 41.

a connection between blood and the forgiveness of sin. However, Matthew 26 still leaves the reader wanting to know how Jesus's blood will allow sins to be forgiven. The action is explicit, but there is no explanation of how the forgiveness occurs. This is where it is helpful to understand that Matthew has been unveiling a consistent theology and this question has already been answered. Matthew 26 is silent on what is happening in the spiritual dimension, but Matthew 20 has already answered, "through ransom or trade." Meanwhile, Matthew 20 is silent on what is happening in the physical dimension, but Matthew 26 is saying "Jesus's blood forgives sin." This is another way of responding to Davies and Allison's objections that there is not enough information in Matthew 20:28 to draw a conclusion. I believe the two texts were meant to be read as part of a wholistic Gospel narrative and therefore they answer each other.

One important question remains as we construct Matthew's theology. He spends much time considering how men should be righteous and they will be repaid according to their deeds (Matt 5:20; 16:27). What is the relationship between this purchased salvation and the works that Jesus is asking his followers to do all along? While writing about Matthew 26:28, John Noland claims, "that Matthew does not think that his saving death on the cross is some sort of alternative to the stringent demands of discipleship is clear from 20:25–28, where, precisely as salvific, the cross becomes the supreme example of the servant role to which his disciples are summoned."¹⁴ This is beautifully said. When we read the two passages together and add in Matthew 1:21 we see that throughout Matthew's Gospel he is building a Christocentric soteriology where Jesus is the great savior who offers forgiveness of sins and entrance into a new covenant with him. As Matthew builds his theology into his Gospel, we see that Jesus is presented as the savior of the world from the beginning, he is the one who trades himself for the

¹⁴ John Noland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1083.

people, and specifically he bears sin through his blood on the cross. This is the offering of salvation to mankind. They can now be made right with God and enter this new covenant with Jesus because he has traded his life for theirs and bore their sin.

The Gospel as the Partially Realized Hope of God's Eternal Reign with His Covenant People

Understanding the significance of Jesus's arrival for the nation of Israel and for personal salvation is paramount, but stopping here would leave an analysis of the Gospel incomplete. After all, Matthew and the other Gospel writers include many other teachings and narrative markers in their Gospels. We have traced the past and the present realities of the gospel message. Jesus's arrival has closed the chapter on Israel and Jesus's sacrifice on the cross has invited everyone to a restored relationship with him. We now turn to the future implications of Jesus's gospel message. What, if anything, does the gospel mean for the future of humanity? How does the gospel impact our eschatology, but also what hope is there until the end of time? Matthew's Gospel has much to say about the future of God's covenant people, but it also gives a small blueprint for God's interim plan. This section will look at Matthew's Gospel and how he presents the church as the partially realized vision of God's kingdom until the new heavens and new earth. To do this, we will need to trace the thread of kingship and covenant people throughout Matthew.

A gospel is a royal announcement of a new king. This type of announcement was common to the Roman Empire. N. T. Wright gives insight into the tradition of gospels:

When a new emperor came to the throne, there had obviously been a time of uncertainty. Somebody's just died. Is there going to be chaos? Is society going to collapse? Are we going to have pirates ruling the seas? Are we going to have no food to eat? And the good news is, we have an emperor, and his name is such and

such. So, we're going to have justice and peace and prosperity, and isn't that great?¹⁵

Matthew's gospel follows suit by presenting Jesus as the king and announcing his reign. Alfred Plummer summarizes the kingly narrative through the first few chapters saying Matthew "has shown us how the Magi from the East have done homage to the newborn Messiah, and how the usurper-king tried to kill Him and failed. The true King, exiled for a time, outlived the usurper and returned to His own country, but not as yet to reign. At last the time draws near, and he has His herald in John the Baptist."¹⁶ John the Baptist cries out in the Judean wilderness, Jesus begins his preaching ministry, and then uses these same words in commissioning the disciples later, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!" (Matt 3:2; 4:17; 10:7).

One of the repeated vocabulary themes is the mention of the kingdom of heaven. The interpretation of this terminology has been widely debated, but I side with Jonathan Pennington's analysis of this phrase: "this important Matthean phrase serves one primary point: God's kingdom, which is in heaven and heavenly, is radically different from all earthly kingdoms and will eschatologically replace them (on the earth). It is the coming kingdom which is proclaimed by Jesus and is embodied in himself, the unexpected servant-leader."¹⁷ Rodney Reeves simplifies Pennington's explanation by saying, "'Kingdom of heaven' was an expression that signaled that God's reign 'in heaven' was coming to earth, to the land of Israel, through his Messiah, Jesus."¹⁸ Both explanations put forth the idea of the inaugurated kingdom of God coming to earth

¹⁵ Trevin Wax, "Gospel Definitions: N. T. Wright," The Gospel Coalition, September 4, 2008, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/gospel-definitions-nt-wright/>.

¹⁶ Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew* (London: E. Stock, 1909), 20.

¹⁷ Jonathan T. Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew* (Boston: BRILL, 2007), 330, ProQuest.

¹⁸ Rodney Reeves, "Matthew," in *Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*, ed. J Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hayes (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020), 805.

through Jesus.

I believe we should add the physical and visual realities to our understanding. If the kingdom of God is the inauguration of heaven coming to earth, then we should expect glimpses of heaven to come with Jesus. Jesus delivers on this through his miracles. The blind see, the lame walk, and the sick are healed not just to point to Jesus's divinity, but to let people know that the heavenly kingdom is being established. Jesus also demonstrates glimpses of heaven through his teachings about the correct way to follow God. His critique of the religious leaders and parabolic teachings were designed in a way that would help teach people how to live as citizens of heaven on earth.

Two threads that are interwoven between Jesus's ministry and teaching and provide insight about the future and therefore help us to understand the partially realized hope of the Gospel. First, Jesus teaches about relationships. He leaves instructions for how his followers should work together and get along in his physical absence. He occasionally references the church, but most of the time he is simply teaching his disciples what it means to follow him and be identified with him as a new community (Matt 16:18; 18:17). Anna Case-Winters summarizes Jesus's teachings concerning relationships and the future of the church in Matthew 18: "This new community is to be a place where the least are the greatest and the "little ones" come first and the lost get found."¹⁹ This would have been paradigm-shifting for Jesus's listeners. For the Jewish people, the marker of their faith and relationship to God was the law. Suddenly Jesus shifted the metric to justice and servanthood. This is the consistent ethic of Jesus's teaching. In Matthew 24, Jesus shares an apocalyptic vision of the destruction of the temple as well as Jesus's eventual return.²⁰ He then shares a parable that challenges his

¹⁹ Anna Case-Winters, *Matthew: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2015), 219, ProQuest.

²⁰ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God (London: SPCK, 1996), 438, Kindle.

disciples to be ready for this moment when he says,

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me; I was in prison and you visited me.” (Matt 25:31–36)

This text finally reveals that the Son of Man is in fact the king.²¹ And the king will divide the goats and sheep. The sheep are a metaphor for the people of God or true followers of Jesus while the goats represent everyone else or even the Jewish religious people who refused to follow Jesus. The marker of the people of God according to this text are that they fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, took in the stranger, clothed the naked, took care of the sick, and visited those in prison. According to Jesus, the people of God are people who physically display the love of God for humanity. This is the vision of the kingdom.

We have established that the kingdom has been inaugurated and Jesus is giving glimpses of it through his ministry and by teaching his disciples how to truly be the people of God, but we also see a paradox. There are times in Matthew’s Gospel narrative when it feels like Jesus is not in charge. There are times when uncertainty clouds Jesus’s reign. One example of this is that Jesus refuses to let his followers coronate him as the king even though he is publicly demonstrating his authority over sickness, evil powers, and death.²² The greatest time of uncertainty comes with Jesus’s death. All hope of Jesus reigning as king seems lost, but Jesus’s resurrection provokes a new hope that he is indeed the worthy king of the world. Just when it seems Jesus will take his place as king

²¹ R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Tyndale, 1975), 240.

²² Grant R. Osborne and Clinton E. Arnold, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins, 2010), 291, ProQuest.

and his kingdom will come to have physical power and authority, he ascends into heaven leaving his disciples to navigate the world and manage Jesus's spiritual kingdom until his return. This remnant we now call the church.

The plan until Jesus's return is for the church to carry on the announcement and spread of the kingdom (Matt 28:18–22). The church is left knowing who the king is, knowing his authority, holding on to glimpses of Jesus's ministry and God's presence in the world, all while waiting for the future return of the king. Gregg Allison says it this way, "The church is not the ultimate reality in the redemptive plan of God, but as it lives the inaugurated reality of the kingdom of God, it fixes its hope on the eschatological kingdom to come."²³ In this sense, the gospel is also the partially realized hope of God's reign with his covenant people in Jesus the bridegroom. The gospel is a foretaste of the eternal relationship with and reality of the presence of God.

To get a better understanding of the expected presence of God we should look to John's apocalyptic vision. I would like to focus particularly on the recurring theme of the city of Jerusalem as it is the primary metaphor to describe the relationship between God and his people in the final chapters of Revelation. Early in the vision, John shares that members of the church who persevere in their faith will be marked with the name of God and the name of Jerusalem (Rev 3:12). John is distinguishing that there are some who represent a true following just as Jesus indicated in Matthew 25 that there would be a separation of the goats and sheep. He also introduces the concept of the city of Jerusalem as a key character or place. G. K. Beale summarizes the importance of Jerusalem in John's Apocalypse, "The church, composed of people from every nation (21:24–26; 22:2), will enter this eternal city."²⁴ The city appears again at the end of the

²³ Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 99.

²⁴ G. K. Beale and David Campbell, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2015), 353, ProQuest.

Revelation. Just as in chapter 3, John notes twice more that he sees Jerusalem coming down into the earth (Rev 21:2, 10). This time, he gives added details about the beauty of the city. He even includes that this new city will not have a temple. Keener explains, “That the new Jerusalem itself is a temple city promises us a continual experience of worship; as its citizens, we should begin to enjoy that worship now.”²⁵ The end of time will be marked by the people of God worshipping God fully and faithfully. It must also be noted that there is significance in the location of the city. It moves from heaven to earth. Wright explains, “the end of Revelation offers an ultimate rejection of a detached, other-worldly spirituality in favor of an integrated vision of new creation in which ‘heaven’ and ‘earth,’ the twin halves of created reality, are at last united.”²⁶ This reuniting of heaven reflects an inverse of the fall in Genesis 3 and answer to the Lord’s Prayer, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10). The eschatological aim of the repeated phrase “the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” seems to be that God and his people will be fully present together on a new earth.

Many scholars disagree about when and how end-time events will occur, but the result is less disputable. God’s people will be resurrected (1 Cor 15:20). Then they will be united with God to worship and live with him forever. Jesus came to establish the kingdom and the church lives out the ethic of the kingdom until the kingdom is fully realized at the second coming of Jesus. This is an important part of the gospel message because it gives God’s people hope, purpose, and identity. Admittedly, it is not the most explicit message in Matthew. However, the threads are there in Jesus’s teachings, and seeing this eschatological vision of the gospel gives a perspective that the gospel is not all past tense and continues to be good news for those who trust in Jesus the king.

²⁵ Craig S. Keener, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins, 1999), 338, ProQuest.

²⁶ Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 469–70.

Conclusion

Jesus is good news. Jesus is good news because his life, death, and resurrection tell the story of God intervening in history. Jesus is good news because the world needed a messiah, and he is better than we could have imagined. Jesus is good news because through his death, burial, and resurrection every person has the opportunity to have a relationship with God through faith and repentance. Jesus is good news because he gives us a foretaste of heaven, and commissions his people to live out the ethic of heaven until his return. Jesus is good news.

One of the most comforting aspects of the gospel as presented through Matthew is that the spread of the gospel is assumed in the announcement itself. At the end of his prophecy in Matthew 24 Jesus says, “This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” All nations have a chance to hear and respond to the gospel. Also, once Jesus reveals how powerful of a king he is, he commissions his disciples to go and make more disciples throughout the earth (Matt 28:16–20). Jesus demonstrates his compassion for the world. As his disciples, we have been given the mission to help people understand the full implications of the gospel on the world and in their life. Jesus is good news and it is our responsibility to herald this beautiful truth in the present age.

CHAPTER 3

CONTEXTUAL EVANGELISM

If the gospel is an announcement or message, then that message must be shared. The content of the gospel must be communicated. Communication involves senders transmitting messages through a channel or medium to a receiver who provides feedback. Senders must encode a message in a way that will be decoded by the other person with the intended result.¹ If we apply this principle to communicating the gospel, we infer it is the evangelist's responsibility to make sure the gospel message is transmitted in a way that the receiver can understand, ask questions, and eventually respond. This means the evangelist must be a student of the person they intend to share the gospel with.

For this project, it is important to examine key characteristics of the demographic that we desire to train and desire to share the gospel with. A better understanding of this age group will help communicate the gospel clearly and effectively. One consideration is how to motivate young people to share the gospel. Additionally, it is important to explore which methods of evangelism might be successful in reaching Generation Z. This chapter will discuss evangelism as a spiritual discipline, explore potentially successful evangelism methods, and key generational traits among Generation Z to inform an effective collegiate evangelism strategy.

¹ Daniel S. Brown, *A Communication Perspective on Interfaith Dialogue: Living Within the Abrahamic Traditions* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.sbts.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=549060>, 197.

Evangelism as Spiritual Discipline

Why do some Christians share the gospel regularly and others do not? There are a variety of potential pitfalls from fear of rejection to lack of knowledge. Regardless of the reasons for a lack of evangelistic effort, it seems Scripture is clear that the spread of the gospel is both necessary for the fulfillment of God's plan and a requirement for those who claim Jesus as their king. Consider Jesus's words to his disciples just after the resurrection, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15–16). Jesus explicitly calls for the proclamation of the news of his resurrection saying that it is the key to salvation. While the ending of Mark is often debated these ideas are also posited in Matthew's Gospel as well as Acts.² Jesus is telling his followers to go and tell others about him and invite them into his kingdom. Based on the biblical mandates, I agree with what Will McRaney claims, "The norm should be that every Christian is actively sharing his faith."³ The problem then is that Jesus's disciples do not participate in his mandate to make more disciples.

As mentioned earlier, there are sometimes perceived social barriers to sharing the gospel. Potential evangelists never share because it can be awkward or risky for a person's social reputation. Another reason people do not share is a lack of motivation. Some are convinced, if we can just find the right buttons to push to motivate a person then they will go out and share the gospel. Matt Queen shifts the conversation by proposing there may be good biblical motivations and not just personality or persuasive techniques to get people to evangelize. He believes Christians need to pay attention to the motivations for sharing the gospel found in Scripture such as God's glory, obedience, and

² Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 730.

³ Will McRaney, *The Art of Personal Evangelism: Sharing Jesus in a Changing Culture*. (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2004), 44.

love.⁴ I agree that we see desires for the attributes that he lists in the Bible, but I believe all of these proposed motivations are actually byproducts of a sanctifying relationship with Jesus. Instead of finding each person's unique motivation as if it were a personality test, I am more interested in finding a way to propel people past their excuses to participate in evangelism even when they do not feel like it or it might seem risky. For a spiritual problem, I think we need to look for a solution that forces us to address our own faith and spirituality in addition to the practical nature of evangelism. This is why I believe we should look at evangelism as a spiritual discipline.

Donald Whitney describes spiritual disciplines as “the God-ordained means by which we bring ourselves before God, experience Him, and are changed in Christlikeness.”⁵ Notice that Whitney is not saying we should discipline ourselves in order to earn God's grace or become moral people. His argument is that by repetitive and disciplined practice of our faith in certain areas we encounter God and are transformed into the image of Jesus. In other words, our goal in the spiritual disciplines is to become like Jesus. This is important because I believe the only real solution to a Christian's lack of evangelism is to become more like Jesus.

It would be wise here to pause and explore what Jesus modeled concerning evangelism. First, we see that the incarnation of Jesus was because God intended to save the world. Matthew writes, “She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matt 1:21; cf. Luke 2:10–11; 19:10; John 1:29). All over the Gospels we see that Jesus came to earth to save. His very presence was an evangelistic witness to humanity. Secondly, Jesus prayed for the lost. We consider prayer a spiritual discipline that aligns our hearts with God and forms us into his

⁴ Matt Queen, *Recapturing Evangelism: A Biblical-Theological Approach* (Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic, 2023), 81–91.

⁵ Donald Whitney, *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health* (Colorado Springs: Nav-Press, 2001), 91–92.

image. Matthew tells us that Jesus looked out on people and had compassion on them and instructed his disciples to pray that God would send workers to “harvest” the people (Matt 9:36-38). Scholars for centuries have interpreted this as an evangelistic edict that the message of Jesus the Messiah was ready to be received by the crowds if only there were more workers.⁶ Next, we see Jesus inviting disciples to participate in the sharing of the gospel. He invites some of his disciples to change their vocation from professional fishermen to fishers of men (Matt 4:19). He includes the disciples in his working of miracles such as feeding the five thousand, and he sends them out with power to do his work (Matt 14:19 // Luke 9:1-6). Jesus seems to expect that if you follow him then you will participate with him in his ministry. It also must be stated that Jesus preached the gospel himself and invited people into a relationship with himself (Mark 1:14–15). Jesus’s evangelism approach was at times both broad and interpersonal. It involved direct evangelism and equipping and sending others. No matter the method, the heart of Christ for the lost was on display throughout the Gospels. If we want our evangelistic methodology to become effective it must start with aligning our hearts to Christ.

One issue that must be considered is the difference between spiritual discipline and spiritual formation. Spiritual disciplines might be considered a tactic or a habit that helps a person in their spiritual formation. Spiritual formation is the overall process of spirituality and speaks to its goal. Nathan Finn describes the divide between the two approaches to spiritual formation. One camp has branched from Richard Foster’s *Renovaré* retreat experience. Finn calls this pathway of spiritual formation eclectic, ecumenical, and egalitarian. It has the tendency to embrace social justice. This *Renovaré* approach to spiritual formation seems more mystical or ethereal to me as it emphasizes experiencing God, while the other “New Calvinist” approach is generally characterized

⁶ For example see Jerome’s comments in Manlio Simonetti, *Matthew 1–13* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 421–22, ProQuest.

by a commitment to inerrancy, complementarianism, and evangelism. The goal of this approach is personal holiness.⁷ The New Calvinist approach is more conservative and claims the goal of spiritual formation is to be formed into the image of Christ instead of experiencing him.

I tend to not see much difference in the writings of some of the champions of each approach. For instance, Dallas Willard, who is in the Renovaré tradition, also says, “So it is absolutely essential to our growth into the ‘mind’ of Jesus that we accept the ‘trials’ of ordinary existence as the place where we are to experience and find the reign of God-with-us as actual reality.”⁸ In other words, he says we must put our faith into practice in this world and this is how we are truly formed spiritually. It seems his goal is also to be formed into the image or “mind” of Christ, but he adds that the formation must end in a practical application lived out in the world. This is likely where the social justice rebuke that Finn mentions comes in. I don’t think we should lose sight of the practical outflowing of spiritual formation unless we are also prepared to lose the application of evangelism in the process. I fall more in line with the New Reformed perspective of spiritual formation. The goal of spiritual formation is to be conformed to the image of Christ in holiness, but I sympathize with the Renovaré emphasis on practical application. This implication is that disciplining ourselves in spiritual matters helps us to be sanctified and more like Christ. So, when we think of evangelism as a spiritual discipline it is best to think of it not as a way to simply experience Jesus. Instead, we practice the discipline of evangelism as a way to become more like Jesus.

Now, we return to the practice of evangelism as a spiritual discipline. Donald Whitney is the only person to dedicate a full chapter of a book to evangelism as a

⁷ Nathan A. Finn and Keith S. Whitfield, *Spirituality for the Sent: Casting a New Vision for the Missional Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 25–26.

⁸ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 350.

spiritual discipline. He says, “Unless we discipline ourselves for evangelism, we can easily excuse ourselves from ever sharing the gospel with anyone.”⁹ Whitney’s words here capture the heart of this project. We will not drift toward evangelism. It takes discipline. It is important to note again that I believe discipline is not the end goal. Just doing evangelism is not even the end goal, and I don’t believe we can evangelize more by simple willpower. Seeing evangelism as a spiritual discipline is about us disciplining ourselves to align our hearts and our minds with Christ. Evangelism then is both a byproduct of becoming more like Christ and it is a means by which we are sanctified and become more like Christ. Nevertheless, there is still much to gain from Whitney’s discussion on evangelism.

Whitney basically offers two practical actions to form the evangelistic discipline. First, he encourages Christians to intentionally be around lost people more. This is important for ministers and laypeople. We can all get caught up in our Christian communities and forget about the lost. So, we must discipline ourselves in the way we spend our time. This means we must plan for evangelism. We can welcome people into our homes. set up meetings with coworkers, spend time at coffee shops or other events where we know we will begin to meet lost people. Second, he says we should make sure we know the gospel.¹⁰ Can we write it and communicate it succinctly? Gospel is a buzzword in Christianity that is often used, but rarely defined. In my personal experience leading Generation Z and working with church members of all ages I have seen that it is very rare for two believers to define the gospel exactly the same. People leave out parts or emphasize different things. Revisiting the gospel and clarifying what we believe helps us to appreciate it and want to share it more. I believe Whitney is correct in putting forth

⁹ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 130, Kindle.

¹⁰ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 130.

these two activities to build evangelism as a spiritual discipline.

Prayer is the one area I believe is missing in Whitney's discussion of evangelism as a spiritual discipline. This might be because he handles prayer in a different chapter in his book. I think it is worth exploring as part of the spiritual discipline of evangelism. Prayer is essential. We must ask for God to help us see people the way that he sees them. We must ask that the Spirit move in people's lives because we can save no one.

There are several prompts that we can use to strengthen our evangelistic prayer life. Timothy Beougher offers several practical prayer tips. He says you can pray for specific nonbelievers, God to bring effective witnesses across those peoples' paths, the Holy Spirit to convict people of sin and lostness, and more laborers to share the gospel. He also encourages prayer walking in areas of lostness and asking God to break down walls, praying over every seat before an evangelistic event, getting more people to pray via technology, and inviting church members to share the first names of lost friends and family among many other suggestions.¹¹ I believe these are great prayer suggestions because they force Christians to align their hearts and minds with what God thinks about people while confessing their dependence on God to work and move. This positions the evangelist as humble and available.

Prayer is not the only spiritual discipline that helps with evangelism. Alvin Reid adds that many other disciplines contribute to evangelism such as Bible study, fasting, meditation, and service.¹² I agree with him, as I think all the disciplines that he mentions lead Christians to be more closely aligned with the heart of Jesus. However, it seems that those activities are not all direct activities that relate to evangelism.

¹¹ Timothy Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism: Sharing the Gospel with Compassion and Conviction*, Invitation to Evangelism Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2021), 153–57.

¹² Reid, *Evangelism Handbook*, 220–26.

Accountability is also essential to all discussions on spiritual disciplines. Without accountability, most spiritual disciplines fail. There is a biblical example of this as Jesus asked for reports from his disciples after they went out to do ministry (Mark 6:30; Luke 9:10; Luke 10:17). Part of the lesson here is that evangelism is a skill that must be honed and can be improved with feedback, but as it relates to discipline, evangelism is also a practice that needs accountability or else it will be stifled by time given to other activities. Robert Coleman lays out the process of supervision as an important part of teaching others to evangelize, “We dare not assume that the work will be done merely because we have shown a willing worker how to do it, and then sent him or her out with a glowing expectation of results.”¹³ For Coleman eagerness and even being equipped does not equate to successful or consistent evangelism. This is a transferable principle with all spiritual disciplines. We force ourselves to do the disciplines and ask for the help and accountability of others because we lack consistency. Evangelism is no different.

Evangelism as Praxis

To discipline yourself to consistently share the hope of Christ with others is a noble endeavor, but consistency alone doesn’t make a person effective at sharing the gospel. But what is effectiveness? When we evaluate who is responsible for salvation, we understand that God is the only one who can save. J. I. Packer writes:

While we must remember that it is our responsibility to proclaim salvation, we must never forget that it is God who saves. It is God who brings men and women under the sound of the gospel, and it is God who brings them to faith in Christ. Our evangelistic work is the instrument that He uses for this purpose, but the power that saves is not in the instrument: it is in the hand of the One who uses the instrument.¹⁴

I agree with Packer. If the results of salvation and bringing someone to conversion are not

¹³ Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1993), 86.

¹⁴ J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 27.

the priority of man, then it should follow that effective evangelism is not based on results. Instead, Ryan Denton offers, “The Christian who faithfully shares the gospel from a motive of love for God and love for man can never be a failure when evangelizing.”¹⁵ While I agree with the heart of Denton’s statements about obedience to God and motivation of love, I would also add that effective evangelism must mean that the gospel is communicated clearly and in context.

The process of sharing the gospel with someone can be broken down into several clear communication steps. These steps include approaching someone and beginning a conversation, shifting the conversation to the gospel, sharing the content of the gospel, and inviting a person to respond. I remember these steps using the acronym A.S.C.C. which stands for approach, shift, content, and call.

All evangelistic conversations begin with an approach. Reid defines the approach as “the initial contact with a lost person, through words or actions, which establishes enough relationship to allow a witness for Christ.”¹⁶ Many potential evangelists are stopped here. They simply don’t know how or care enough to approach another person to talk about the Gospel. One way to overcome this is to be curious about other people. Beougher calls this “exploring.”¹⁷ He advocates that you can learn a lot about people by observing the way a person dresses, speaks, or decorates their home or office.

Asking questions can unveil even more common ground. Typically, through questions an evangelist will find a window of opportunity to share the hope of Jesus.¹⁸ Queen proposes that there are potential downfalls to asking too many broad questions. He

¹⁵ Ryan Denton, *Ten Modern Evangelism Myths: A Biblical Corrective* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2021), “MYTH 3: Evangelism Is Unsuccessful If No One Is Converted.”

¹⁶ Reid, *Evangelism Handbook*, 253.

¹⁷ Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism*, 184.

¹⁸ Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism*, 184.

argues this could lead to never getting to share the gospel. Instead, he suggests having a specific set of questions that will guide the conversation to the content of the gospel.¹⁹ It seems Queen is mostly concerned with ensuring the content of the gospel gets communicated. He rushes to the next step: shifting the conversation to the gospel. However, I believe we can not skip past this first important step of having a good approach with someone. This helps us build rapport with a person so they will later value what we have to say. Additionally, I agree with Reid when he shares, “Effective evangelistic conversations connect the unchanging gospel with the specific issues people face.”²⁰ If Reid is correct then evangelists must take time to learn about the specific issues in the other person’s life so that they can contextualize the gospel.

Queen instead worries that if the evangelist spends too much time building a relationship then they will never be able to share the gospel. I understand this principle because often the time constraint of a spiritual conversation may be only a few minutes in line or speaking to a waiter at a restaurant. Queen goes on to add that “personal evangelists in the New Testament did not make friends with strangers in order to tell them about Christ after a period of time; rather they shared Christ with strangers and, as a result, relationships were established.”²¹ I think this is a bad approach to exegeting the New Testament. Certainly, the New Testament shows us many examples of preaching, offering an invitation and people repenting and coming to faith immediately. The thing that Queen fails to mention here is that often the evangelistic strategy of the early church was to go to the Jews first because they shared a worldview and a common knowledge on which the disciples could build their presentation of the gospel (Acts 2:5; 3:25; 7:2; 9:20; 13:14–15). We can contrast this with Peter’s great speech extending salvation to Gentiles.

¹⁹ Queen, *Recapturing Evangelism*, 227–228.

²⁰ Alvin Reid, *Sharing Jesus without Freaking Out* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2017), 68.

²¹ Queen, *Recapturing Evangelism*, 234.

He spends a significant amount of time explaining how the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus offer hope and victory over death and darkness, and he fits all this into the context of prophecies of the Old Testament and demonstrates how the gospel is for all people (Acts 10:34–43). In other words, Peter realizes that for non-Jewish evangelization he would need to explain why Jesus was significant, how Jesus’s story fit into the historical narrative, and how that would apply to this audience. In modern evangelism, how we approach people is going to give us insight into how we can apply the gospel to our audience. We need to get to know the people that we are talking to so that we can adequately explain the intricacies of Jesus’s story.

The next step is shifting the conversation to the gospel. This is a skill that Queen calls “evangelistic fluency.” Queen says, “getting to the gospel requires believers to listen for the spiritual cues the other person verbalizes when casually chatting. These indicators provide Christians prompts by which they can advance the discourse in an evangelistic direction to discuss spiritual matters.”²² Disregarding his earlier comments, Queen offers that the best way to do this may be to ask questions. Beougher calls this practice “stimulating.” Stimulating the conversation occurs when “we bring spiritual salt into the conversation by making a statement or asking a question that points to spiritual realities. This is where we move from the secular to the sacred.”²³ Many evangelism books have lists of questions that can be used to help stimulate the conversation or transition it to the gospel, but Reid proposes the acrostic “F.I.R.E.” He says you can ask about a person’s family, interests/hobbies, religious background, and offer exploratory questions that are more pointed about a person’s salvation.²⁴ Beougher has the best list of questions as they are categorized by potential bridges to the gospel. He recommends

²² Queen, *Recapturing Evangelism*, 262.

²³ Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism*, 185.

²⁴ Reid, *Evangelism Handbook*, 259.

asking about a person's previous church experiences, personal spiritual experiences with Jesus, intellectual objections to Jesus or the gospel, personal opinions of Christianity or some of its specific characters or beliefs, how a person thinks the Bible addresses a common modern topic of the day, the spiritual status of celebrities, and prayer requests among many others.²⁵ The thing that I love about Beougher's list of questions is that they get the other person thinking about Christianity, Jesus, and faith without doing so unnaturally or abrasively in a way that might cause the other person to shut the conversation down. This can help make the conversation feel more organic or authentic.

Communicating the content of the gospel is the most important step because it is the substance of the message. Queen summarizes this step, "Enabled by the Spirit to encode the message, a believer shares the good news of Jesus with the other person. After the gospel is decoded, the other person generally responds to the personal evangelist with feedback."²⁶ Queen's definition is good. The question to consider is, "What is the essential content that must be encoded?" In chapter two I argue for the substance of the gospel having three parts. It is the realized hope of Israel in Jesus the Messiah, the hopeful invitation to be made right with God through Jesus the Savior, and the partially realized hope of God's eternal reign with his covenant people in Jesus the Bridegroom. I believe that a complete presentation of the gospel must include the past, present and future implications of the news being shared.

Evangelism experts have their list of essentials. Queen proposes a mental exercise to remember what content to share:

To explain the gospel simply and faithfully, recall the gospel message you heard and believed. At its core, it likely included the reality and consequences of sin; the truth that the God-man Jesus Christ died for your sins, was buried, and raised on the third day; and an invitation to repent of your sins, believe in Jesus Christ and his death,

²⁵ Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism*, 187–195.

²⁶ Queen, *Recapturing Evangelism*, 253.

burial, and resurrection for your salvation, and verbally confess, “Jesus is Lord.”²⁷ Queen’s gospel essentials are all necessary, but he fails to share why these elements are important and he gives no perspective as to their impact on the past or future. He is focused only on personal salvation. Beougher offers the important gospel content involves “a message about God; a message about humanity; a message about Christ including the person, work, and resurrection of Jesus; a necessary response that includes repentance and faith.”²⁸ Beougher spends a lot of time explaining each section and his presentation is helpful because it does not start with the individual, but it can be difficult to remember all the explanations behind these various core components. Conversely, McRaney’s list is very specific:

God-be convinced that there is only one, eternal, holy, just, personal God who desires a relationship with them (Acts 17:24–31; 14:15–17)

Jesus Christ

Jesus is God (John 1:1; Titus 2:13–14)

Jesus Christ lived, died on the cross for our sins, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven (1 Cor 15:1–5)

Jesus’ death on the cross paid the penalty for our separating sin against God (Rom 5:8).

Jesus is the only way to a relationship with God (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim 2:5–6).

Jesus will come back in glory to judge the living and the dead (2 Tim 4:1; 1 Pet 4:5).

Individuals and People

People cannot pay the eternal debt of their sin by their efforts of righteous acts (Eph. 2:8–9).

People must trust Jesus solely as Savior, the forgiver of their sins (Col 1:20–22); the supreme and sole leader of their lives, as they choose to turn from self-leadership to yield to His direction as Lord (John 3:36; Matt 7:20–21).²⁹

²⁷ Queen, *Recapturing Evangelism*, 267.

²⁸ Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism*, 103–111.

²⁹ McRaney, *The Art of Personal Evangelism*, 82.

McRaney and Beougher's lists together read like a systematic theology textbook on salvation. These contrast slightly with the gospel narratives of the New Testament. The Gospel writers certainly hit on some of the points mentioned, but the gospel's take their reader on a journey to reveal a worthy king who offers salvation for his people. It is much closer to what Reid describes when reflecting on Tim Keller's explanation of the gospel. Reid posits, "The great idea, the wonderful story of the gospel starts in the mind of God, moves through creation, recognizes the fall, sees the providence of God, centers on the work of Christ on the cross and His resurrection, and looks for future consummation of this life and the hope of heaven in eternity."³⁰ Taking people on a spiritual journey through conversation allows for people to understand two important distinctions. First, they are entering a story that has been going on long before them. Second, they are being invited into an eternal spiritual journey with Jesus that will last much longer than a simple decision. These two points together shift the focus of evangelism to Jesus and his invitation to be a person's king. Conversely, people are shifted away from self-serving questions like, "What's in it for me?" or "Where will I spend eternity?"

So, what are good strategies for inviting people into the story of the good news of Jesus? Some potential options are a marked New Testament Bible, gospel tracts, testimonies, or memorized presentations such as the "Faith" (Faith, Available, Impossible, Turn, Heaven).³¹ Presentation tools such as illustrations or tracts have varied for years. One of the classics is "the bridge" illustration which shows how sin causes a gap between humanity and God, but Christ and his sacrifice on the cross allows a bridge across the divide. Illustrations are extremely helpful as Tim Elmore shares, "There is a significant impact in the learner when a visual aid is connected to a verbal explanation. It actually speeds up the learning process. According to the 3M corporation, the brain

³⁰ Reid, *Evangelism Handbook*, 136.

³¹ Reid, *Evangelism Handbook*, 259–261.

processes visual information 60,000 times faster than text.”³² This indicates that a graphic illustration or tract with pictures would be more helpful to an unbeliever when sharing the Gospel than just talking and sharing Bible verses using a method like The Romans Road. Additionally, 58 percent of non-Christians say it is not very appealing or not at all appealing when Christians quote Scripture or texts from the Bible as evidence for Christianity.³³ This may be off-putting for evangelists some because Scripture is how God has chosen to reveal himself, but the gospel flowed through illiterate societies for centuries. With this generation, a visual illustration may be more beneficial in initial conversations with non-Christians.

My favorite illustration is the “three circles.” This method starts with the reality that the world is broken, retraces back to God’s original design, and identifies sin as the cause of brokenness, it then identifies Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection as the hope we have for recovering and pursuing God’s design again through repentance and faith in Jesus.³⁴ The three circles method is preferable to me because I believe it presents a more robust picture of the gospel. This presentation situates substitutionary atonement in the context of how God has been working throughout history. This is different than many gospel presentations which present a simple choice between two final destinations. The three circles present the cross and the empty tomb as the means to transformation and the beginning of the renewal process where following Jesus for eternity has a purpose.

The final step in evangelism is inviting someone to respond to the news they have heard in the gospel. I agree with Beougher when he says, “The gospel calls for a

³² Tim Elmore, *Marching Off the Map: Inspire Students to Navigate a Brand New World* (Atlanta: Poet Gardener, 2017), 147.

³³ “Chapter Two: What’s Working (or Not) | Barna Access,” accessed December 31, 2023, <https://barna.gloo.us/journals/reviving-evangelism-next-gen-us-chapter-2>.

³⁴ Dustin Willis and Aaron Coe, *Life on Mission: A Simple Way to Share the Gospel* (Nashville: Lifeway Press, 2014), 15.

response from each of us; the biblical response is repentance and faith.”³⁵ We see this in Paul’s letter to the church in Rome as he writes, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation” (Rom 10:9–10). The confession that Jesus is Lord is itself an act of repentance that we are not the Lord of our life. It is a confession of turning away from sin and to Christ.

Jesus modeled the practice of invitation often as he frequently beckoned people “Follow me” (Matt 4:19; 8:22.) We must follow Christ’s example in our evangelism. Packer shares that invitation is not optional, “Evangelizing includes the endeavor to elicit a response to the truth taught. It is communication with a view to conversion. It is a matter, not merely of informing, but also of inviting. It is an attempt to gain, or win, or catch, our fellow-man for Christ.”³⁶ In other words without the aim of enlistment and calling for a response we are just sharing informational thoughts with people.

Understanding when a person is ready for an invitation can be difficult. Reid shares three types of questions that will help in gauging whether a person is ready for an invitation: “Does what we have been discussing make sense to you?”, “Is there any reason why you would not be willing to receive God’s gift of eternal life?”, and “Are you willing to turn from your sin and place your faith in Jesus right now?”³⁷ Queen offers that there are only really three scenarios outside of outright rejection when evaluating where a person is at spiritually in the midst of an evangelistic conversation. First, the person indicates they are convicted of their sin and desire to repent and believe. He encourages the evangelist to encourage the person to pray to God indicating their

³⁵ Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism*, 109.

³⁶ Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 50.

³⁷ Reid, *Evangelism Handbook*, 264.

sinfulness, need for Christ, confession of Jesus as their Lord, and thankfulness for God's grace. Second, it might become clear to the evangelist that the person is not understanding the gospel message or the need to respond to it. In this case, the evangelist should encourage them to keep thinking and might set up a follow-up to answer more questions. Finally, the person may believe they are ready to follow Christ, but the evangelist doubts that they have adequately counted the cost of following Jesus. In this scenario, Queen suggests revisiting the demands of the gospel with the person and then proceeding with either the first or second options above.³⁸

Once a person has indicated that they desire to repent of their sins and follow Jesus then evangelists must discern how to guide them. The most common way is the sinner's prayer. McRaney shares very clearly, "You can ask them if they would prefer to (1) pray themselves, (2) repeat a prayer after you, or (3) pray after you finish praying for them."³⁹ There is much controversy around the "sinner's prayer" because many have repeated the words of an evangelist and later seen no fruit or transformation in their lives. Beougher summarizes well the benefit of a sinner's prayer, "There is nothing magical about saying the words of any prayer, including the Sinner's Prayer. Also, we do not find this exact prayer in the Bible. We do find examples of sinners crying out for mercy and being assured their prayers were heard (Luke 18:1–14; 23:39–43), and we are promised 'whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved' (Rom. 10:13; Acts 2:21)."⁴⁰ The evangelist must always share that repeating words does not save a person, but it is repentance and faith through the work of the Holy Spirit that brings one into relationship with God.

The practice of sharing the gospel with others is a skill that I believe gets better

³⁸ Queen, *Recapturing Evangelism*, 273.

³⁹ McRaney, *The Art of Personal Evangelism*, 189.

⁴⁰ Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism*, 255–256.

with repetition. As with any skill repeating mistakes or not having a plan will not help in development. This is the same for evangelism. The process laid out here is simple to remember with the A.S.C.C. acronym. The acronym is easy to remember because it sounds like the word “ask.” The four-part progression of the conversation unfolds via an approach, shift to spiritual matters, the content of the gospel is shared, and a call is extended to repent and follow Christ. This acronym serves as a road map in the conversation for the evangelist so that they can stay on track and work to develop conversation skills in each of the four parts.

Evangelism to Generation Z

This project focuses on the college campus and a specific age demographic called Generation Z. This group is defined as those born between 1997 and 2012.⁴¹ There are always two people involved in evangelism and in our context we are trying to equip and inspire Generation Z to evangelize Generation Z. This chapter will explore the state of Generation Z as evangelists and highlight three characteristics of Generation Z that can inform evangelism.

Generation Z are young in evangelism, but they are finishing high school on one end and heading into the workforce on the other end. This seems to be the ideal time for training and releasing Generation Z for evangelism, however, studies show that sixty-eight percent of Christian Generation Z have never had evangelism training.⁴² Furthermore, a 2021 study found that only twenty percent of all churchgoing Christians know what the Great Commission is and why it is important.⁴³ This command from Jesus

⁴¹ Michael Dimock, “Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins,” *Pew Research Center* (blog), accessed January 6, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>.

⁴² “Chapter Three: What Could Be | Barna Access,” accessed July 26, 2023, <https://barna.gloo.us/journals/reviving-evangelism-next-gen-us-chapter-3>.

⁴³ “Chapter One – (Mis)Understanding the Need | Barna Access,” accessed December 31, 2023, <https://barna.gloo.us/reports/the-great-disconnect-chapter-1>.

to “go and make disciples of all nations” is one of the most popular texts used to call Christians to evangelism (Matt 28:18–20). The lack of awareness of this passage demonstrates that there is a great need for inspiration, education and practical training among Christian Generation Z if they are to be released as an evangelism force.

Data and experts share insights about Generation Z that are helpful to understanding their passions and general personalities. These are helpful when considering how to contextualize the gospel. Three primary characteristics define Generation Z and can help contextualize gospel conversations. The characteristics that we will explore are this generation’s desire for authenticity, their struggle with anxiety, and their desire to see a just world.

The character and lifestyle of an evangelist is just as important to this generation as the message the evangelist shares. Over half of Generation Z says that appealing evangelism happens when Christians live out their faith.⁴⁴ Authenticity has become the theme of Generation Z and one of the few characteristics that generational experts seem to agree on. But how does authenticity impact communication? Jed Medefind shares about communicating with the next generation, “Real substance is the one great foil to a faux world of marketing. That’s why authenticity is viewed as today’s highest virtue, even when it’s ugly or vicious. In a world yearning for authenticity, any Christian message that draws its impact from technique, technology, or “new paradigm” methods will do no more than draw short-lived attention. We must make truth touchable”⁴⁵ If Medefind is correct then we must consider our authenticity in the approach stage of evangelism. We must work to make sure that we are relational. Elmore adds, “Our work with students must feel organic; it can not be too packaged, but must

⁴⁴ “Chapter Two: What’s Working (or Not) | Barna Access.”

⁴⁵ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church . . . and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 237.

come across as being real and authentic. Too often, Millennials and Generation Z avoid our plans because we have over-programmed or over-produced them.”⁴⁶ Elmore recognizes that we must leave space for conversation and questions to come naturally when evangelizing.

The need for authenticity in evangelism has also been confirmed by practitioners. Steve Shadrach has been a leader in collegiate evangelism for thirty years. In his book, which inspires students and leaders toward evangelism, he shares, “Gaining someone else’s trust is a process that takes time, effort, intentionality and also a heart full of authentic love. God uses all our various contacts and gestures (i.e. trust points!) with others to open up and soften their minds and hearts, thus creating a beautiful pathway for the gospel right to the core of a person’s soul.”⁴⁷ These “trust points” are ways that evangelist share their life and allow the gospel to be received well by Generation Z.

Authenticity can not just be a way to get your foot in the door with someone and start a conversation, it must be demonstrated throughout evangelistic conversations. Over 45 percent of non-Christian Generation Z desire to talk to someone interested in other people’s stories. However, it is not enough to just be interested because 57 percent say that not forcing a conclusion in the conversation is a sign that the evangelist is comfortable sharing their faith.⁴⁸ This does not mean that evangelists should not share what they believe about Jesus. It just means that evangelists need to demonstrate social awareness when they are sharing. Springtide Research Institute summarizes their findings on Generation Z’s need for authenticity stating, “The importance of being real is something young people want to not only practice themselves, but also see modeled and embraced by those with influence of any kind. Young people know that authenticity

⁴⁶ Elmore, *Marching Off the Map*, 71.

⁴⁷ Steve Shadrach and Paul Worcester, *The Fuel and the Flame* (Fayetteville, AR: CMM Press, 2020), 132.

⁴⁸ “Chapter Two,” 2.

invites authenticity. When one person starts to take down their walls, it encourages others to do the same.”⁴⁹ All of this is really driving toward the nonconfrontational, nonjudgmental trait of Generation Z. They desire acceptance of who they are. Springtide’s research indicates, “To be welcomed is to be received warmly, greeted intentionally, and accepted without obstacle or condition upon arrival.”⁵⁰ Being accepted without condition is difficult for evangelism purposes, but it shows that Generation Z will not allow their lifestyle to be critiqued before a relationship has been built. This is reflected in Barna’s evangelism research as well. Their study shows 66 percent of non-Christians say that a confident evangelist is someone who listens without judgment.⁵¹ Despite their desire for unconditional acceptance Generation Z expects more from Christians. Christians cannot be hypocritical and expect Generation Z to engage with them. One survey showed that 42 percent of those with no faith indicated that “The hypocrisy of religious people” was the biggest factor in doubting Christians’ beliefs.⁵² To an older reader, this might seem contradictory, but this is how Generation Z defines authenticity. The conflict then is that the evangelist carries a provocative gospel aimed at pointing people to Jesus and the cross while Generation Z desires relationships that are nonconfrontational. I propose we look at how the gospel addresses issues that Generation Z cares about to see where we can start those conversations.

Anxiety is at an all-time high. A 2014 study showed that high school students are experiencing stress at the same level as the average psychiatric patient in the 1950s. Another study showed that each year, one in five Generation Z high school students will

⁴⁹ Josh Packard, *Meaning Making: 8 Values That Drive America’s Newest Generations* (Bloomington, IN: Springtide Research Institute, 2020), 54.

⁵⁰ Packard, *Meaning Making*, 58.

⁵¹ “Chapter Two.”

⁵² “From Talking About Jesus to Living Like Jesus | Barna Access,” accessed January 5, 2024, <https://barna.gloo.us/articles/spiritually-open-issue-8>.

have a panic attack.⁵³ Even popular culture has taken notice as Disney and Pixar have added anxiety to their second animated movie *Inside Out 2*. The movie uses characters to personify the emotions inside of us. Anxiety appears in the second movie as a character next to the more traditional emotions of joy, sadness, anger, fear, and disgust.⁵⁴ It seems that anxiety has become so normative today and there is a lack of understanding on how to address the issue that it has become its own category. I disagree, however, with the idea that anxiety is a unique emotion. I believe anxiety is just a subset of fear. The common professional psychological opinion distinguishes between anxiety and fear by stating fear is “an emotional response to a real or perceived imminent threat, anxiety refers to the anticipation of a future threat.”⁵⁵ In other words, fear is a reaction to present danger while anxiety is fear of the future. The reason this is important is because when we release the emotion of anxiety to have its own place in society as a core emotion then people do not really know how to address it. Anxiety seems like something new that we are dealing with and we have no historical answers for it. Instead, if we put anxiety back under the umbrella of fear and see it as a type of fear then we can reuse tools for fear that help us address anxiety. The opposite of fear is trust and the antidote for fear is hope. How do we get Generation Z to trust in a hopeful future? Jonathan Morrow suggests,

What are some of the words being internalized by today’s children, teenagers and young adults as they grow up in a fallen world? Unloved. Less than. Unpopular. Uninvited. Inadequate. Unlovable. Ashamed. Broken. Victim. Hope-less. Alone. Unseen.

Now imagine if instead they were rooted in and lived out of a gospel-centered identity:

- Because I am made in God’s image, I am valuable and worthy of dignity and respect (Gen. 1:27 cf. Jas. 3:9).

⁵³ Elmore, *Marching off the Map*, 62.

⁵⁴ “Disney and Pixar Introduce a New Emotion in ‘Inside Out 2’ Trailer,” The Walt Disney Company, November 9, 2023, <https://thewaltdisneycompany.com/disney-and-pixar-introduce-a-new-emotion-in-inside-out-2-trailer/>.

⁵⁵ Alfons O. Hamm, “Fear, Anxiety, and Their Disorders from the Perspective of Psychophysiology,” *Psychophysiology*, no. 2 (2020): 1–2.

Because I am forgiven in Christ, I am no longer a slave to guilt and shame (Rom. 8:1, Gal. 5:1).

Because I am adopted into God’s forever family, I now have a place to belong (John 1:12, 1 John 3:1, Gal 3:26, Rom. 8:15).

Because I have been justified and redeemed in Christ, I don’t have to earn God’s love (Rom. 3:24, Titus 3:4–7).

Because I am perfectly loved in Christ, I don’t have to look to the approval of others to find significance (Rom. 5:1–2, Gal. 1:10, 1 Thess. 2:4, Prov. 29:25).

Because I am a child of God and fellow heir with Christ, my future is secure (Rom. 8:17, 8:35–39; Eph. 1:3).

Because I am God’s workmanship, my purpose is to walk in the good works prepared for me (Eph. 2:10).⁵⁶

Morrow’s list is a good start because it replaces fear of the future with hope and a new identity for life. Generation Z needs a gospel that consists of reliable content that they can trust in and presents a tangible future they can hope in.

Finally, Generation Z needs a big gospel that impacts the world. Corey Seemiller’s research shows, “Generation Z believes in equality, and these students have a great deal of passion for social justice issues. We found nearly 56 percent of Generation Z students are concerned about racism, another 56 percent about sexism, and 61 percent about poverty.”⁵⁷ This passion for social justice issues has also impacted how non-Christians think about Christianity. Over 27 percent indicated that they would be more interested in Christianity if the church cared more about social justice.⁵⁸ Luckily the Bible has much to say about how Jesus’s kingdom cares for the needy and underserved. Springtide’s research expresses the social justice concern as Generation Z having a desire to be “impactful.” They say, “To be impactful is to practice social responsibility. Social scientists define the value of *impactful* as having two fundamental commitments: actively

⁵⁶ “Resilience in the Making: Gen Z & Faith | Barna Access,” accessed January 5, 2024, <https://barna.gloo.us/reports/gen-z-vol-2-chapter-3>.

⁵⁷ Corey Seemiller and Meghan Grace, *Gen Z Goes to College* (Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 40.

⁵⁸ “Chapter Two.”

engaging key social issues, and thoughtfully minimizing harm.⁵⁹ Generation Z's pull toward social justice is a sign that they recognize the brokenness of the world and desire to fix it. Therefore, this must influence the way that we share the gospel with them. Kris Kandiah shares,

The consumer gospel that promises a life of happiness from now until eternity is wearing thin for street-smart, networked young adults. This gospel of personal fulfillment is either bolted onto the busy lives of twenty- and thirtysomethings as a lifestyle improvement app or dismissed as a cheap marketing pitch. Either way, this gospel is powerless to help the next generation resist the riptide of consumerism, individualism, and materialism that is the dark side of our modern culture. We need to rediscover the Bible's grand narrative and teach an all-encompassing, multi-dimensional gospel. By showing how the life and death of Christ bring reconciliation with God, neighbor, creation, and self, young adults will hear the call to live as a prophetic sign of God's coming kingdom.⁶⁰

I agree with Kandiah. The gospel that we present to this generation must recognize the brokenness of the world and must demonstrate how the reign of Jesus is good news because life in God's design radically transforms individuals, families, communities, nations, etc. This is why I favor the three circles method of evangelism. It includes brokenness as the starting point of every conversation and offers a solution in the gospel.

The core characteristics of Generation Z should inform the way we share the gospel with them. Research only shows broad trends. Every person is unique so the gospel must be contextualized even further, but a good starting point is to recognize these three trends. First, authentic conversation from a genuine evangelist is the place to start. This means being willing to listen and not forcing a decision. While Generation Z desires acceptance a good strategy could be to present elements of the gospel that address their common pain points or concerns. These pain points are informed by the other two generational characteristics: anxiety and brokenness. Anxiety and fear terrorize this generation. There are many causes for this, but it is impossible to go back and fix

⁵⁹ Packard, *Meaning Making*, 87, emphasis original.

⁶⁰ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 216.

systemic issues. The evangelist instead can present a trustworthy gospel message that is intellectually sound and answers the possible objections of the hearer while presenting a strong case for hope. This hope is a secure future in Christ. Finally, evangelists should address how the gospel can and will change the world. Generation Z is not satisfied with the brokenness and evil that exists in the world. Social justice is often the secular way of crying out against sin, brokenness and evil. The gospel of Jesus when embodied by his disciples changes lives, families, and communities. It cares for the poor and the underprivileged. In these ways, the world is changed as we wait for the world to be fully made new and good when Christ returns.

Conclusion

Mobilizing collegians to evangelize their peers is a complex task. The key to mobilization seems to be helping students see evangelism as a spiritual discipline and giving them training. When we align our hearts with Christ through spiritual disciplines then we can share more frequently. Practical evangelism training must involve conversation tactics and helping evangelists contextualize the gospel for Generation Z. This looks like equipping evangelists with a conversation road map through the A.S.C.C. acronym, providing questions that help the evangelist transition the conversation to the next phase, and having visual tools like the three circles. Contextualizing the gospel means that these young evangelists must be genuine in their faith, inspire hope for a fearful generation, and present a robust gospel that addresses not just the individual but also demonstrates how the gospel can change the world. Generation Z is unique, but the gospel is good news for all people. As evangelists, we can adapt these principles to share the good news of Jesus fluently and see the power of gospel transform this generation into dedicated disciples of Jesus.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The gospel is the hope of all mankind and worthy to be shared. The college campus is rich soil for the gospel as many lost students are more open to exploring religion and conversing about Jesus like no other time in their life. This project aimed to increase students' understanding and sharing of the gospel. Increasing understanding is important because it clarifies what is essential about Jesus's story and builds confidence in the evangelist's message. However, understanding cannot be the ultimate goal. Evangelists must share the good news about Jesus. Evangelism is a practical skill and discipline, but many students have never been encouraged and trained to share their faith. This project equipped students with the knowledge and skills to spread hope on their college campus.

Preparation

In preparation for the project, I began by reaching out to our 40-student leadership team. I invited each member to participate in the six-session course on how to share their faith. Then I attempted to establish a time. There were two factors in considering a time to teach the curriculum. First, the sessions needed to occur during the day and close to the lunch hour for the praxis section of each class to be effective. This time frame is when students are active on campus. Many students sit alone eating lunch or can be found in lounge areas before their next class. This is a great opportunity for our students to engage in spiritual conversations.

Second, there needed to be at least one hour for our students to participate in the class and get to their next obligation. This meant working around the class schedule.

Typically, classes that meet Monday, Wednesday, and Friday are offered in one hour blocks while Tuesday and Thursday courses are offered in 90-minute blocks. Thirdly, I believed if I could host the class around lunch and provide free food that our retention rate would increase. Students could eat while I taught content and be done in time for the praxis portion of the training.

With all of this in mind, I first pitched 11:00 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. on Tuesdays. I hoped to use the longer class block to make the class less rushed. After polling our leadership students, many could not attend due to class scheduling conflicts during that time. Several interested students suggested we hold the class on Wednesdays from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. We advertised this at our Monday large group worship meeting two days before the first meeting and then again two days before the second meeting. Any student could attend, although I already had a commitment from a core group of leadership students. Leadership students made up 65 percent of the attendance. We had 17 total participants throughout the training and while 15 students attended the first meeting, the average attendance was 10 students. Everyone who completed the post-assessment attended at least three sessions of the training. Two students did not complete the post-assessment and therefore were not included in the research.

Goal 1: Assessment

The first goal of the project was to assess BCM students' current understanding and sharing of the gospel. This was completed by administering a preassessment to participants. Participants were given this assessment at the beginning of the first session. Two students did not attend the first session and completed the assessment before the second session. The inventory was a self-assessment consisting of 17 statements. Seven statements evaluated the participant's knowledge concerning key tenets of the gospel (see table 1). The remaining ten statements evaluated confidence in sharing the gospel such as common fears and deficiencies (see table 2).

Table 1. Results of the knowledge portion of the assessment

Statement no.	Percentage Indicating Strongly Disagree (SD)	Percentage Indicating Disagree (D)	Percentage Indicating Disagree Slightly (DS)	Percentage Indicating Agree Slightly (AS)	Percentage Indicating Agree (A)	Percentage Indicating Strongly Agree (SA)
1 ¹	—	—	—	13	27	60
2	—	—	13	7	47	33
3	—	—	—	7	40	53
4	—	—	13	47	13	27
5	—	—	—	—	—	100
6	—	—	—	—	27	73
7	—	7	—	7	53	33

Analysis of the pretest indicates several patterns from participating students. Every participant indicated that they strongly agreed with the statement “Salvation through faith in Jesus as savior is important to my understanding of the gospel.” This is a great foundation. Most gospel presentations emphasize personal salvation so it is not surprising that students would be most confident in this area.

Students were less agreeable that they understood the gospel well enough to communicate it to someone else. Students were also less agreeable about the importance of the role of Israel and the concept of the new heavens and new earth to the gospel message. There are several possible conclusions from these results. Based on this inventory it seems the students understood the personal implications of salvation but indicated that there were nuances and implications of the gospel narrative that they were less familiar with. This correlates to the lack of confidence in being able to understand

¹ Percentages are rounded up.

the gospel well enough to communicate it to someone else.

Table 2. Results of the practice portion of the assessment

Statement no.	Percentage Indicating Strongly Disagree (SD)	Percentage Indicating Disagree (D)	Percentage Indicating Disagree Slightly (DS)	Percentage Indicating Agree Slightly (AS)	Percentage Indicating Agree (A)	Percentage Indicating Strongly Agree (SA)
8 ²	20	20	13	47	—	—
9	—	7	7	20	67	—
10	13	40	33	13	—	—
11	60	20	13	7	—	—
12	—	7	13	33	27	13
13	—	—	40	33	13	13
14	33	40	13	13	—	—
15	—	—	—	27	53	20
16	27	33	7	27	7	—
17	—	13	13	13	33	27
18	—	—	—	7	53	40

The practice portion of the assessment was designed to grasp the motivations, comfort levels, and obstacles participants might have with the practice of personal evangelism. Statements 10, 11, 13, and 14 expected a negative result because the goal of this project was to help move them more toward an answer of strong disagreement. Students indicated that there were several negative factors in their ability to evangelize including that students spend time mostly with other Christians, they feel they need more

² Percentages are rounded up.

training to share their faith, and over half don't believe they are able to transition everyday conversation to gospel conversations. The curriculum addresses each of these issues.

Two statements that surprised me were that 86 percent disagreed that they were afraid someone would ask a question that they did not know the answer to and the same percentage indicated that the fear of rejection did not keep them from personal evangelism. These are two reservations that students have commonly voiced to me in the past. However, social pressure and the ability to answer questions or criticism do not seem to be primary obstacles for this group.

Goal 2: Curriculum Development

The second goal was to develop a six-session curriculum that would equip BCM students with increased knowledge of the gospel and confidence in sharing it. The curriculum was also designed to teach soft evangelism skills. I have simply titled this curriculum *The Anatomy of a Gospel Conversation* (AGC).³ This curriculum sought to address build confidence in college students by addressing the two key areas of theological content and practical communication skills. This goal was measured by a panel of three collegiate ministry practitioners. They used a rubric to evaluate the curriculum.⁴ This rubric evaluates HTSAJ in the areas of biblical accuracy, scope, pedagogy, and practicality. The goal was considered successfully met when the panel decided all criteria met or exceeded the "sufficient" level on the rubric.

The panel included collegiate ministry experts and experienced evangelists. Ryan Scantling is the campus minister at the University of Arkansas. He has over 10 years of campus ministry leadership experience and is currently pursuing a PhD. in

³ See appendix 3.

⁴ See appendix 2.

Evangelism from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Arliss Dickerson is the retired campus minister of Arkansas State University who served here for 32 years. He still actively travels across the country to speak and train campus ministers. Dr. Gary Stidham served as a Campus Minister at UT Arlington for 20 years and now serves as the Director of Training for Texas BSMs, travels often to speak to college students on evangelism, and is an adjunct professor of collegiate ministry for Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. The collective collegiate ministry experience and evangelism expertise of this group ensured that the curriculum would be evaluated strongly and fairly.

The Anatomy of a Gospel Conversation was developed using much of the research in chapters two and three of this project. It focuses on the A.S.C.C. (Approach, Shift, Content, Call) model of evangelism by unpacking each area over four weeks. The curriculum adds one week of introductory material focused on understanding the key tenets of the gospel and one week of closing material designed to help students continue in their evangelism habits.

Goal 3: Teach Curriculum

The third goal was to increase knowledge of the gospel and confidence in sharing the gospel among BCM students by teaching students the curriculum that was developed. The curriculum was taught to students over a six-week period from March 27, 2024, to May 1, 2024. The assessment tool was given again at the end of session six to measure potential increases in knowledge of the gospel and confidence in sharing the gospel sharing the gospel. The results of the assessment will be discussed in chapter 5.

Each one-hour session consisted of teaching, praxis, and evaluation. The first twenty-five minutes of each lesson were dedicated to interactive content, then students would go onto campus for 30 minutes in pairs and begin spiritual conversations with students they encountered, and finally we would come together to share experiences and

pray for those students we had met. Typically, students would have one to two conversations during that time.

The first week began by providing a historical framework for the use of the term gospel in the ancient world. The term was associated with a royal message about a new king who typically shared their resume or stories about their might. The lesson then turned to the Christian gospel by emphasizing how gospel writers delivered messages about King Jesus. The group then did a large brainstorming session about the content that early evangelists shared. We examined Paul's gospel presentation in 1 Corinthians 15 and then thought through how Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all proclaim the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Each Gospel writer and Paul also emphasize Jesus as Israel's Messiah as well as the future hope of resurrection. Again, we see the past present, and future implications of the gospel. Week one ended with explaining the three circles' gospel sharing method and practicing it. Only 1/3 of students indicated familiarity with the content of the three circles method before we began. Only two students indicated that they had ever shared the three circles with another individual. By the end of the class, each student had shared the three circles with a classmate.

Three homework assignments were given at the end of the first session. First, students were instructed to make a list of five students who they believed were lost and put the list in their Bible to remember to pray for them. Second, students were to practice sharing the three circles method with two other Christians and ask them for feedback on how to share it better. Lastly, students were asked to write down two or three things they learned from these conversations and turn it in at the beginning of the next class.

Session 2 focused on the approach. After reviewing last week's material, I asked for homework to be turned in. Only one student wrote down a reflection, but several students indicated verbally that they had practiced the three circles. Then we began the lesson where we introduced evangelism as communication. We discussed the basics of communication theory and then introduced the A.S.C.C. model. Then we broke

down the approach by using Alvin Reid's definition of the "initial approach through words or actions, which establishes enough relationship to allow a witness."⁵ Then we discussed advice on how to start conversations. The first principle was to have a reason to approach someone. This could be something as simple as "I'm with this church or group, and we are trying to get to know the campus better, and I'm asking people about their spiritual beliefs. Would you be willing to talk to me about some of your beliefs?" The second practical principle of approach is if you don't have a reason to approach someone then look for common ground. Does the evangelist have a shared experience that they could comment on such as that they are headed to the same place, have a class together, frequent the same gym, or that the line they are in together at the coffee shop is long? The approach can be as simple as starting a friendly conversation and working at it to guide it toward spiritual matters.

After introducing the practical approach principles, I gave out homework assignments. This week's assignment was to approach 2–3 strangers and write down two or three things that the student learned from those encounters to turn in at the next session. Students were also encouraged to add those students to their prayer list. After the homework assignment, I paired students up and sent them out on campus to practice as many approaches as possible and to see where the conversation would go. We wrapped up by spending 10 minutes together debriefing about conversations, discussing problems that arose, and praying for those we had met.

The next session addressed shifting conversations to spiritual matters. After reviewing highlights from the first two sessions and asking for reflections on homework, I asked how students were doing in praying for the lost and adding people to their prayer lists. I shared some of the names on my personal evangelism prayer list from the past week and even older names who had been on my list for a while. Then we turned the

⁵ Reid, *Evangelism Handbook*, 253.

lesson to the shift. I knew from the preassessment that this would be an important lesson because less than half of the students agreed that they could transition everyday conversations to spiritual conversations on that assessment.

The key for shifting the conversation is to ask good questions. Evangelists should be curious and ask questions about the person they are talking with because it builds rapport. The kind of questions we ask can even guide the conversation into intentional areas. In the training we focused on Reid's F.I.R.E. acronym. We talked about asking questions related to family, interests, religious background, and exploratory questions. I also offered suggested questions from Beougher's book which offers more options on how to explore a person's religious background or even use pop culture or divisive topics to move a conversation toward faith. The key transition after asking questions is for the evangelist to ask, "Could I share how I would have answered some of these questions?" The other notable transition comes from the three circles training. This transition occurs whenever the evangelist hears the other person share hurt, hardship, or brokenness. The evangelist can simply say, "I haven't been through that exact thing, but I have had similar problems. Can I share something with you that's really helped me?"⁶ Equipped with these questions and these transitional phrases the evangelist is prepared to shift the conversation. After the teaching portion, I assigned homework. This assignment was like past weeks as students were instructed to approach two to three strangers and start spiritual conversations. The challenge this week was to practice shifting the conversation to spiritual matters. Students again were instructed to add those students to their prayer list and write down two or three reflection points about their conversations to turn in. After I assigned homework, students were paired off and sent to campus to start conversations and try to shift them to the gospel. Then we came together for ten minutes

⁶ Jimmy Scroggins and Steve Wright, *Turning Everyday Conversation into Gospel Conversations* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 67–68.

at the end to debrief. Many of the pairs said they went further into conversations this day than the previous day.

The fourth session was mostly a review. This session focused on content as the next step in a gospel conversation. We began by discussing the previous sessions and their content and discussing conversations students had from the assigned homework. During this session we spent time reviewing gospel essentials that we identified in session one. I also gave a defense for the three circles model of evangelism by sharing facts about visual learning and increasing trends among non-Christians from the research done in chapter three. Emphasis was given to the shared experience of brokenness as a great platform to introduce the gospel. We also reviewed the three circles' method of evangelism. We introduced alternative ways to share the three circles in addition to drawing a diagram. These included the concept of sharing the three circles verbally and using the *Life on Mission* phone app. This week, for homework, students were given the same assignments, but they were encouraged to try to get to a point in their conversations with strangers where they could share the three circles with them. Students then repeated the process of going out on campus in pairs to have conversations with students and debriefing.

The fifth session focused on calling for a response. After reviewing previous material, we looked at what to do after sharing the content of the gospel. We discussed what the three circles curriculum calls green, yellow, and red light responses based on Acts 17:32–34. These responses happen when the evangelist gives a clear call to action like “Are you ready to repent and commit to following Jesus?”

Red light responses are when people openly say they aren't ready or interested in the gospel. The goal when the evangelist receives a red light response is to be gracious so that there is a possibility of future gospel conversations by you or someone else. The evangelist must end the conversation in a way that the other person is not hostile to future conversations. Yellow light responses occur when the individual indicates that they are

interested in learning more about the gospel but are not ready to make a commitment yet. When the evangelist receives a yellow light response the goal is to continue the conversation. Practically this means they need to schedule a time immediately to follow up with the individual in the future. Green light responses are when people indicate to the evangelist, they are ready to receive the gospel.⁷ One solution is the sinners' prayer. In this session we talked through the pros and cons of the sinner's prayer. We then had students practice the sinner's prayer with a partner. This is important because if an evangelist gets to the point where they need to lead a person in the sinner's prayer and they have not done it, they may get nervous and say something theologically incorrect. The homework challenge for this week was to again approach two to three strangers and try to get all the way to the point where the evangelist could call for a response. Then, we finished with students going out on campus in pairs and starting spiritual conversations.

The final session encouraged students to continue in personal evangelism after the training. First, we reviewed homework. Then, there were two focuses. The first focus was discussing building evangelistic rhythms. The preassessment indicated that most students spend most of their time with other Christians and that they don't have many friends who do not already attend a church or campus ministry. It is essential to evangelism that people put themselves in positions where they can interact with the lost. In this session, we started with the evangelistic rhythms of spending time in places where lost people spend time. The second emphasis of building evangelistic rhythms was setting aside a one-hour timeslot or selecting an individual to share with each week. Lastly, we talked about gospel hospitality. This is the concept of creating space in your home, dormitory, or apartment to have lost people come over for meals or activities. This practice helps build relationships and opens doors for evangelism.

The second teaching focus was on building evangelism as a spiritual discipline.

⁷ Scroggins and Wright, *Turning Everyday Conversation into Gospel Conversations*, 94–101.

Throughout the six-week course, we had been building a prayer list that stays in the student's Bible with the first name or initials of lost students they were praying for. We added students each week that we met on campus. During this session, we also introduced the concept of fasting for those people on our list. Only thirty-four percent of students indicated on the preassessment that they had someone in their life that would hold them accountable to evangelism. This last session talked about the importance of accountability and encouraged students to continue practicing evangelism through accountability. We ended the teaching portion of this session discussing prayer and different evangelistic prayers and prayer methods such as asking the Holy Spirit to convict people of sin, praying for more laborers, or prayer walking in places where the gospel might be shared. After the teaching lesson students took the assessment again, then finished by going out and having spiritual conversations on campus as they had done in the previous sessions.

Goal 4: Increase Evangelism

The fourth goal of this project was for each participant to average one personal evangelism conversation per week throughout the six-week training. In order to track their conversations, I provided a chart that was completed at the beginning of every class.⁸ On the chart, I defined a gospel conversation as “conversations with strangers or people whom you intentionally shared about Jesus. In these conversations, you should at least share some content of hope in Jesus that you find in the story of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection.” We asked them to turn these in after session six. The data is recorded in table 3.

Table 3. Number of weekly gospel conversations

⁸ See appendix 4.

Participant no.	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
1	0	1	1	0	0	0
2	0	0	1	0	1	0
3	0	0	0	0	1	0
4	0	1	2	1	0	0
5	0	0	0	1	0	0
6	0	0	0	0	0	0
7	0	1	0	0	0	0
8	0	0	1	0	0	1
Participant no.	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
9	0	0	0	0	0	0
10	0	1	1	1	1	0
11	0	1	0	1	1	0
12	0	1	1	0	1	1
13	0	0	0	0	0	0
14	0	0	0	0	2	0
15	0	0	0	0	1	0

One flaw of this reporting system was that students did not get to report one week after their last session. Instead, the data includes the first week. This data was not helpful as no student had a gospel conversation the week before the training began. Therefore, in averaging the data I only included the last five weeks. This provided a more accurate representation of how students were being impacted by the training.

Based on the data no participant averaged at least one gospel conversation per week. The closest a student came to averaging one per week were that participants four, ten and twelve each had four gospel conversations over the course of five weeks. The

most gospel conversations any student had in one week were two conversations and this occurred twice. Three students had no gospel conversations, and four had one conversation throughout the five weeks of reporting. In total 27 gospel conversations occurred outside of the prescribed session time over the course of five weeks

Conclusion

This project addressed a core need for the Baptist Collegiate Ministry at Arkansas State University. Student evangelism needed to increase, and therefore students needed training. This project included three stages to address training students in evangelism and increase their volume of sharing the gospel. First, the project was planned, then implemented, and finally, the project was evaluated. This chapter has provided a detailed summary of the implementation phase and how it was implemented successfully. Chapter 5 will evaluate the project and offer personal reflections.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter will evaluate the project's purpose, goals, strengths, and weaknesses. Throughout it, I will propose different ways that I would have done the project differently now that I have learned from executing it. Lastly, I will give final reflections on the project.

Evaluation of the Project Purpose

The purpose of this project was to increase understanding and sharing of the gospel among students at the Arkansas State University Baptist Collegiate Ministry. The project accomplished this purpose by meeting both criteria. The curriculum that was taught helped to increase understanding of the gospel. Understanding was assessed before and after the six-session curriculum was taught. The measure for this goal included a post-training survey, and the goal was met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre and post-training survey scores: $t_{(14)} = -2.956$, $p = .0052$. Additionally, while goal number four was not statistically met, the average number of weekly gospel conversations did increase among the students. Twenty-seven conversations occurred over five weeks. This is a dramatic increase compared to the preassessment where no student indicated that they averaged sharing the gospel more than once per semester. There were also stark exceptions as several students had no gospel conversations outside of the session time and, therefore, did not increase their amount of sharing. Still, based on averages it could be concluded that both purposes of the project were met successfully.

Evaluation of the Project Goals

This project set out to help students grow in knowledge and sharing of the gospel. To accomplish this vision several practical goals were established. These included assessing current understanding and sharing of the gospel, creating a curriculum to address these issues, implementing the curriculum, and measuring its effectiveness, and seeing participants average at least one gospel conversation per week during the curriculum implementation.

Goal 1: Assessment

The first goal was to assess BCM students' current understanding and sharing of the gospel. This goal was successfully met when 15 students completed the preassessment. The assessment asked students to indicate their history of sharing the gospel. Additionally, it evaluated knowledge, confidence and lifestyle habits that contribute to an individual's ability to share the gospel. The project contained two questions asking about the individual's gospel-sharing history. It contained seven questions related to knowledge of the gospel and 11 questions related to confidence and lifestyle habits.

After analyzing data from the assessment, it was clear that most students already scored highly on the knowledge portion of the gospel. Students indicated a disagreeable answer only five times in the knowledge section throughout all assessments. One possible conclusion that could be drawn from this data is that knowledge is not the greatest obstacle for these students in sharing the gospel. Instead, there might be other obstacles such as doubt or discipline. This is one possible interpretation.

Another possible interpretation is that the assessment questions did not provide enough detail for students to anticipate the direction of the question. For example, during the interactive session discussions, students indicated less familiarity with both past and future implications of the gospel than they did on the assessment. Students did not understand how the story of Israel, or the future hope of a new heaven and new earth fit

into the gospel narrative as well as the assessment initially indicated. If I were to assess students' understanding of the gospel again in the future, then I would include more specific questions in these areas such as "Jesus's role as the promised messiah of Israel is important to my understanding of the gospel" and "The promise of a future bodily resurrection is important to my understanding of the gospel." These questions are based on how the actual teaching was implemented.

The assessment also measured the lifestyle habits and skill confidence of students. Again, these questions may have been a little too general. They did a good job of giving a general picture of lifestyle indicators that may inhibit sharing, but the questions did not identify where spiritual conversations lost momentum. This was more of the focus of the curriculum. Instead, the questions mostly focused on barriers to starting conversations such as fears and potential questions. The questions did not address the different parts of a gospel conversation once it got started. Many of the lifestyle questions and questions that evaluated motivation to share the gospel were more about evaluating confidence which was not the goal of this project.

If I were to assess students in the future, I would delineate the questions based on the curriculum's A.S.C.C. model. The only part of the model assessed was the ability to shift everyday conversations to the gospel. Additionally, students assessed whether they understood the gospel well enough to articulate it. However, this question indicates more about their understanding than their skill level in articulating the gospel. In the future, I would add the following questions to assess students' skill level better: "I feel confident in my ability and skills to approach strangers and begin spiritual conversations," "I feel confident in my ability and skills to clearly articulate the content of the gospel in conversations," and "I feel confident in my ability and skills to clearly call someone to respond to the gospel."

Goal 2: Curriculum Development

The second goal was to develop a six-session curriculum that would equip BCM students with increased knowledge of the gospel and confidence in sharing the gospel. The curriculum was also designed to teach soft evangelism skills. This goal was considered successfully met because an expert panel indicated that the curriculum was sufficient or better in each evaluation category.

The curriculum was evaluated based on four categories. These included biblical accuracy, scope, pedagogy, and practicality. Panel members were also encouraged to make comments in these areas. Several panel members were complimentary of the curriculum's explanation of the sinner's prayer. There was a recent time when the sinner's prayer fell under great scrutiny among evangelicals. In this section, I argued for the practicality of helping people who don't know how to pray to express repentance and faith. Panelists were also complimentary of the way the curriculum builds over time and addresses the practical skills of having conversations. The curriculum lends itself to practice and not just theory.

One section of the curriculum that panelists felt was unnecessary or needed more explanation was the section on communication theory. Because of these comments, when the teaching occurred, I only briefly mentioned communication theory instead of spending more time explaining it. Another critique of the panel was that week six and week one, although foundational, were almost separate from the middle section. I will discuss possible improvements of the curriculum based on panel feedback and based on learning that occurred through the teaching process in the section that evaluates goal three on teaching the curriculum.

One thing that I would do differently with the curriculum evaluation is to allow panelists to read chapters two and three concerning theological and practical foundations so that they have more information to be able to critique the curriculum more strongly. The curriculum quoted some parts and was developed from the research in those

chapters, but it does not provide every detail or explain how the flow of argument was developed.

Goal 3: Teach Curriculum

The third goal was to increase knowledge of the gospel and confidence in sharing the gospel among BCM students by teaching students the curriculum that was developed. This goal was successfully met when the curriculum was taught to students over a six-week period from March 27, 2024, to May 1, 2024. The assessment tool was given again at the end of session six to measure potential increases in knowledge of the gospel and confidence in sharing the gospel. The goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre and post-survey scores.

I gained several insights into how to execute the teaching session better in the future. The first critique would be to increase the time allotted for each session. Every week felt rushed because we were trying to save enough time for having conversations on campus. In the future, I would attempt to have each session last an hour and half instead of one hour. This would allow more time for teaching and students to have discussions on campus. The time of day was excellent because there were people on campus to talk to, and it was great that it fit into a class period so students could fit it in their schedule. However, I would consider at hosting the sessions during a class block that was an hour and a half instead of one hour.

Another insight was in how to divide the curriculum itself and teach it. Week 1 felt like it was a little too heavy and could have been a longer session. Meanwhile, weeks 2 through 5 felt a little light and week 6 felt detached from the rest of the content. In the future, I would consider teaching this curriculum in three 90-minute blocks. This would include 45 minutes of content and 45 minutes of praxis. During the first session, I would teach the foundational material found in chapter one of the current curriculum. For the

second session, I would combine lessons 2 through 5 into one large practical training session. Then, for the third session, I would expand the work of evangelism as a spiritual discipline with more practical tips on how to make evangelism a habit. The downfall of this would be less praxis over time, and the curriculum would not build on each other from week to week.

Goal 4: Increase Evangelism

The fourth goal of this project was for each participant to average one personal evangelism conversation per week throughout the six-week training. This goal was measured by administering a pre- and post-analysis of current personal evangelism participation. In order to track student conversations, I provided a chart to each student that was completed at the beginning of each session. This goal was to be considered successfully met when BCM students averaged one gospel conversation per week during the six sessions. This goal was not successfully met as students averaged .36 gospel conversations over a measurable period of five weeks.

While the goal was not met, there was a positive correlation to the data. In the preassessment, no student indicated that they had averaged sharing the gospel more than once per semester. Over five weeks of sessions fifty-three percent of participants indicated that they shared the gospel at least twice. This indicates a positive increase in sharing over the pretest results. So, while the project did not accomplish this goal, it could be argued that positive improvement was made.

I believe the error I made was twofold. First, the method by which we recorded data did not lend itself to credibility or fuel more sharing. If I could do it again, I would have students enter the data digitally in a joint document or form. This would encourage students to see others sharing their faith. It would also give real-time results instead of students waiting a week to report. Secondly, I would change the goal of the project. Averaging one conversation per week is a high bar when most students indicated that

they previously averaged sharing their faith about once per semester. Using this project as a baseline, I would change this project goal to “sixty seven percent of participants will have at least two gospel conversations outside of the training sessions.” In the current project, fifty three percent of the participants had at least two gospel conversations outside of training sessions. Setting the goal at sixty seven percent would challenge me to more efficiently focus on this goal, but I believe it is also achievable.

Strengths of the Project

This project had many strengths. The first strength was the strong biblical exegesis, which created a foundation of clarity around the question, “What is the gospel?” Clarifying the essential components of the gospel message and its past, present, and future implications allowed me to teach the gospel clearly to students.

The second strength was the data collected by assessing students’ knowledge and sharing of the gospel. This data opened my eyes to students’ real challenges in sharing the gospel and challenged my presuppositions. I can now confidently address the issues facing students in our ministry.

The next strength of the project was the value that was created by developing a curriculum to train students in the gospel. This curriculum is strong because it is founded in research. It is also easy to condense or expand giving the ability to teach it in longer or shorter settings. The curriculum will be beneficial to use to train future groups of students and could even be shared with other collegians outside of our context.

The fourth strength of the project was the collective wisdom and resume of the panel that evaluated the curriculum. These men have many years of experience in the field, both with college students and with evangelism. This means they were uniquely qualified to review the curriculum. Their review strengthens and speaks to its usefulness.

The fifth strength was the praxis section of the curriculum. Some evangelism courses are only theoretical. At best, students may practice with a partner in the room

who is only a Christian. The unique thing about implementing the curriculum on a college campus was that the training allowed students to practice what they learned immediately. The praxis slowly built from week to week so students could focus on one skill per week and build up their skills over time. During the training, students were able to practice in an encouraging environment with accountability every week.

Another strength of the project was the timely feedback students received. At the end of each praxis time, students were able to talk with me and other classmates about the difficulties they experienced. This often included specific questions about the student's faith background, how to keep the conversation going, or how to change the direction of the conversation when it veered off course. Additionally, students received similar feedback at the beginning of each class when we reviewed discussions they had on their own throughout the week.

The final strength was the effectiveness of the project. We have argued that the project is strong in theory, but the data shows that the curriculum made a difference. This was the main purpose of the project. Students increased in knowledge and most of them increased in the number of gospel conversations they participated in.

Weaknesses of the Project

The project had many weaknesses. I have identified at least five. First, the time restraints included only one hour. Each week, we felt rushed. It was common for us to give inadequate time to review or rush the lesson to get to the praxis portion. In the future, I would expand the time of each session to allow for more time to review homework and the previous lesson.

Additionally, more time was needed for praxis. Students typically engaged one to two people per session. It would have been better if they could have engaged three to four people per session.

A second weakness was that the preassessment was limited only to session

participants. I should have circulated the assessment to more students before offering the training. If I had assessed more students, then I could have compared the data of students who were trained against students who were not trained. The assessment did a good job of evaluating students who participated, but there was no control data outside of the test group.

A third weakness of the project was the number of participants. Fifteen students were an adequate number for assessment and comparative analysis, but I wish several students in our ministry would have participated in the training. Many of the students who participated were strong in their faith, understood the gospel, and had some experience sharing it. It would be interesting to see how effective the training would be for students who were more novice in their skills and understanding.

Homework was a fourth weakness of the project. Many of the homework assignments required students to practice what they learned with others. Then they were asked to write a few reflections down and turn them in. Students often failed to do either type of activity. I received two written homework assignments throughout the entirety of curriculum implementation. One of the difficulties related to this was that there were no consequences for failing to do homework. Unlike students' normal classes, there was no credit or grade given for participation in this evangelism class.

A final weakness of the project was the lack of focus of the assessment questions. The assessment revealed a high score on many of the knowledge questions. This could indicate that the questions were not specific enough to cause answer differentiation. Also, as I mentioned in the assessment of goal number one, the assessment questions did not reflect the specific practical areas taught by the curriculum model well enough to evaluate specific areas of the curriculum using the assessment.

Personal Reflections

Our Arkansas Baptist State Convention College and Young Leaders team

mission statement says, “Each BCM serves Arkansas churches by reaching next-generation leaders with the Gospel on the most strategic mission field in the world—a college campus.”¹ Reaching students with the gospel has always been ingrained in me and is part of why I love collegiate ministry. However, my mind and heart keep coming back to another phrase from the mission statement. The college campus is “the most strategic mission field in the world.” It is a place where disciples are raised, and the lost are found.

By teaching and participating in this project, I have been reminded of the need to minister to the lost on our campus.. Even on a conservative campus in the Bible Belt, there are so many students who come to campus confused about Jesus but more open than ever before to encounter Him. One of the concerns is how to reach more. I believe the answer is to train and mobilize an army of Christian college students. When students are theologically and practically equipped then they can effectively engage those around them. College students then have the ability and availability to reach their peers, go to foreign countries, and enter the workforce as missionaries to those around them. This is how we see the great commission fulfilled in our generation. J. D. Greear speaks of mobilizing college students this way, “We have put in front of them a vision that many find revolutionary—though it is arguably the most basic component of Christian discipleship. It is this: Every follower of Jesus is called to leverage his or her life for the Great Commission.”² I agree completely. I am also convinced that in order for students to be able to follow through, they must be able to speak clearly about their faith. Trainings like this are essential so that this generation can reach the most strategic mission field.

¹ “Baptist Collegiate Ministry,” Arkansas Baptist State Convention, accessed August 3, 2024, <http://www.absc.org/ministries/baptist-collegiate-ministry>.

² J. D. Greear, *What Are You Going to Do with Your Life?* (Nashville: B&H, 2020), 36.

This project has also challenged and changed my personal evangelism. God has burdened my heart more for the lost as I have focused on the spiritual discipline of evangelism and praying for the lost. He has also convicted me to share about him more as I am asking students to do the same. There were several special conversations that I was able to have with lost students during this project where I was able to share about the hope of the gospel. I continue to pray for these students.

Conclusion

The goal of this project from the beginning has been to see God receive more glory from college students at Arkansas State University. This looks like more students following, worshipping, and growing spiritually because more students are sharing the hope of Jesus. This project has made a positive difference in collegians soaking in the gospel message and evangelizing their peers. It has also made a difference in me. I have learned so much about collegians, about evangelism, and about the power of the Gospel for salvation. My prayer is that God continues to be glorified through this work and that the gospel continues to advance on the college campus and to the ends of the earth.

APPENDIX 1

GOSPEL UNDERSTANDING AND EVANGELISM PRACTICES INVENTORY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding of the gospel and sharing of the gospel. This research is being conducted by Tyler Hoffpauir at the Arkansas State University Baptist Collegiate Ministry in Jonesboro, Arkansas for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide was held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses.

Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Part 1

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by placing an 'X' next to your answer.

1. What is your age?
 A. 18
 B. 19
 C. 20
 D. 21
 E. 22
 F. 23+

2. How long have you been attending Arkansas State University?
 A. 1 semester
 B. 2-4 semesters
 C. 5-8 semesters

3. How long have you been involved with the BCM at Arkansas State University?
 A. 1 semester
 B. 2-4 semesters
 C. 5-8 semesters

4. What is your gender?
 A. Male
 B. Female
5. How long have you been a Christian?
 A. 1-2
 B. 2-5 years
 C. 5-10 years
 D. 10+ years
6. How many times since you became a Christian have you verbally shared the hope of Jesus with someone personally?
 A. 0 times
 B. 1-5 times
 C. 5-10 times
 D. 10-30 times
 E. 30-50 times
 F. 50+ times
7. During a typical college semester, how often have you verbally shared the hope of Jesus with someone personally?
 A. More than once per week
 B. Once per week
 C. Once per month
 D. Once per semester
 E. Never

Part 2

Directions: These questions ask for your opinion using the following scale:

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

Please circle the appropriate answer in the chart below:

1.	I have an understanding the nature of the gospel.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
2.	I understand the gospel well enough to communicate it clearly to the lost.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
3.	The story of creation is important to my understanding of the gospel.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
4.	The story of Israel is important to my understanding of the gospel.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
5.	Salvation through faith in Jesus as savior is important to my understanding of the gospel.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6.	The Kingdom of God is important to my understanding of the gospel.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
7.	The concept of new heavens and new earth is important to my understanding of the gospel.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
8.	I am able to transition everyday conversation to gospel conversations when speaking with lost people.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
9.	The eternal fate of the lost motivates me to engage in personal evangelism regularly.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
10.	The fear of rejection keeps me from engaging in personal evangelism	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

12.	I have several relationships with people who do not go to church or a campus ministry.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13.	I feel unequipped to engage in personal evangelism because I have never been taught how to share my faith with an unbeliever.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14.	I am afraid that people will ask questions that I do not know how to answer when engaging in personal evangelism.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
15.	I pray for opportunities to witness to unbelievers.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
16.	I trusted in Jesus as a result of someone sharing the gospel with me outside of the church building.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
17.	I have people in my life who hold me accountable to engage in personal evangelism.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
18.	I want to engage in personal evangelism more consistently.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

APPENDIX 2

CURRICULUM EVALUATION TOOL

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Accuracy					
Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.					
Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.					
Scope					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.					
The curriculum sufficiently covers a biblical pedagogical methodology.					
Pedagogy					
Each lesson was clear, containing a big idea.					
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.					
Practicality					
The curriculum clearly details how to develop a lesson to teach the Bible.					

At the end of the course, participants was able to better teach others the Bible.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 3
CURRICULUM

The following six lessons comprise the curriculum taught to students over six sessions.

THE ANATOMY OF A GOSPEL CONVERSATION

A 6-session training

CONTENTS

Week 1 - *What is the Gospel?*

Week 2 - *Approach*

Week 3 - *Shifting to Spiritual Matters*

Week 4 - *Content of the gospel*

Week 5 - *Calling for a Response*

Week 6 – *Gospel Fluency/Discipline*

Week 1 - What is the Gospel?

PRE-TEST – 10 MINUTES

Administer the pretest to participants.

TRAINING - 40 MINUTES

What is the gospel worksheet - 10 minutes

Have participants answer two questions on paper for you to review:

1. "What is the Gospel?"
2. "How would you share the Gospel with someone else in conversation?"

Define the Gospel – 20 minutes

Read 1 Corinthians 15, Acts 13.

Identify and define keywords and themes: Messiah, Cross, Resurrection, etc.

Compare Paul's Gospel presentations to the four Gospel writer's presentations.

Offer a simple definition of the Gospel:

The hope-filled news of Jesus coming to restore people to covenant relationship and inaugurate his reign on earth. This story climaxes in his atoning death on the Cross and subsequent victorious resurrection.

Extended Definition:

The news that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised messiah of Israel and God incarnate. Jesus's life, death, burial, resurrection, and appearances simultaneously fulfill the story of Israel and inaugurate the kingdom of God where God reigns as "all in all" in a covenant relationship with his people.¹ Covenantal relationship between God and men is made possible through Jesus's substitutionary atonement for sins on the cross. Jesus offers forgiveness via his atonement to people who respond in belief to his Lordship. In addition, the kingdom of God is realized in the eschatological foreshadowing of the resurrection. – Adapted from Scott McKnight

Identify past, present, and future implications of the gospel message.

- The gospel is the realized hope of Israel in Jesus the Messiah
- The invitation to hope for every man to be made right with God through Jesus the Savior
- The partially realized hope of God's reign with His covenant people in Jesus the bridegroom

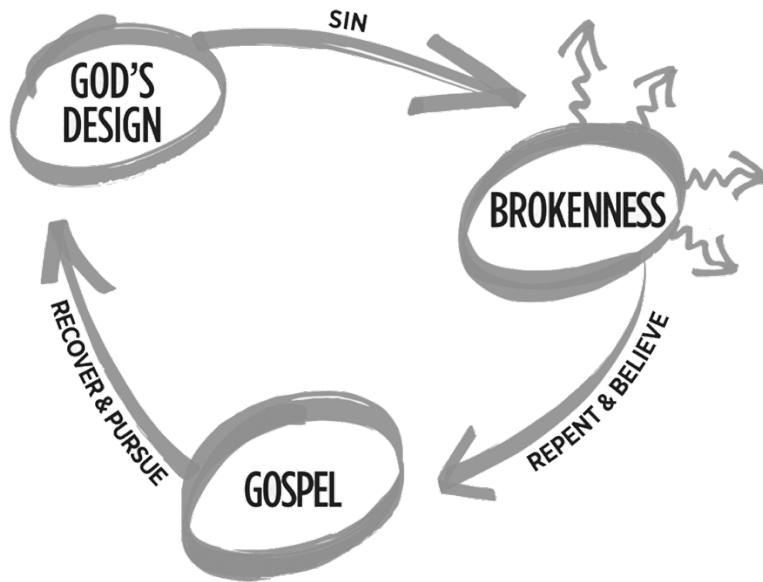
¹The death, burial, resurrection, and appearance of Jesus are emphasized by Paul in his gospel explanation in 1 Cor 15. Paul culminates his presentation of the gospel with God becoming "all in all" in verse 28.

“Gospeling” – 10 minutes

To “announce good news about key events in the life of Jesus Christ. To gospel for Paul was to tell, announce, declare, and shout aloud the Story of Jesus Christ as the saving news of God.” Scott McKnight

Introduce the 3 circles method

Emphasize that the 3 circles method contextualizes the gospel message.



PRAXIS – 10 MINUTES

- Present the gospel to a partner and receive peer coaching. (5 minutes each).

HOMEWORK

- Make a list of 5 people you know who are not Christians and pray for them by name at least 3 times this week.
- Write down 2-3 things you learned from these encounters to turn in at the next class session.
- Practice the 3 circles method with 2 Christian friends and ask for their feedback.

Week 2 - Approach

REVIEW – 5 MINUTES

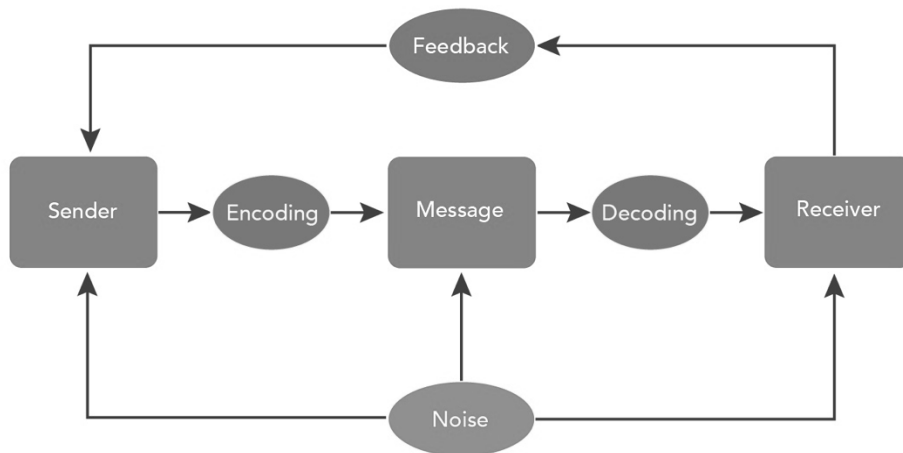
Definition of the Gospel
Past, Present, and Future implications of the gospel
3 circles method

TRAINING - 20 MINUTES

Evangelism as communication - 10 minutes

Communication Theory

Senders vs Receivers, Encoding and decoding messages, noise



A.S.C.C. Model

Approach, Shift, Content, Call

Tips for approach – 10 minutes

Approach: “The initial contact with a lost person, through words or actions, which establishes enough relationship to allow a witness for Christ.” – Alvin Reid

How we approach people is going to give us insight into how we can apply the gospel to our audience.

Nonverbal – Do you look calm or nervous on the outside? Do you look hopeful or sad?

Have a reason to approach someone - I’m trying to get to know what certain people think about religious topics, I’m following up on your visit to our ministry and I’d like to share what we’re about with you, I’m a part of an organization/church/group etc and we are trying to understand our community better.

If you don’t have a reason to approach them then look for common ground. Are you sharing an experience you can comment on? Heading to class, the weather is great, the line is long, I’ve seen you around campus a lot, do you work at ____? Part of the approach is just getting other people to talk and feel comfortable so that you might can shift the conversation to spiritual matters.

Pray for courage and make the approach.

PRAXIS – 35 MINUTES

Practice in Pairs on campus – 25 minutes

This week students will focus on having as many conversations as possible and nailing down the approach. The emphasis is not necessarily to share the content of the gospel, but they are equipped with the gospel content of the 3 circles if conversations can progress that far.

Debrief and pray – 10 minutes

This is an opportunity for students to share what they've learned through today's exercise and for the teacher to emphasize prayer in the process of evangelism.

HOMEWORK

- Approach 3 strangers this week and start conversations on your own and simply see where the conversation goes.
- Write down 2-3 things you learned from these encounters to turn in at the next class session.
- Find out their names and add them to your prayer list.

Week 3 - Shift

REVIEW – 10 MINUTES

What is the Gospel?
ASCC Model
Approach tactics
Homework

TRAINING - 15 MINUTES

The best way to shift a conversation is through asking questions.

“Getting to the gospel requires believers to listen for the spiritual cues the other person verbalizes when casually chatting. These indicators provide Christians prompts by which they can advance the discourse in an evangelistic direction to discuss spiritual matters.” – Matt Queen

Tips for Shifting to Spiritual Matters

F.I.R.E. – Alvin Reid

He says you can ask about a person’s family, interests/hobbies, religious background, and offer exploratory questions that are more pointed about a person’s salvation.

Timothy Beougher lists questions that could help you explore a person’s religious background or salvation history:

What have your previous church experiences been like?

Have you had any personal spiritual experiences with Jesus?

Do you have any intellectual objections to Jesus or the gospel?

Do you have personal opinions of Christianity or some of its specific characters or beliefs?

What do you think about how the Bible addresses insert common modern topic of the day?

What do you think about the spiritual status of insert celebrity?

Is there anything going on in your life that I could pray for?

AFTER you have adequately listened to another person’s beliefs, struggles, or thoughts on religious issues you have earned the right to ask: “can I share with you what I think about some of that?”

The 3 circles suggests anytime someone shares a hurt, struggle, or issue with you to say:

“I haven’t been through that exact thing, but I have had similar problems. Can I share something with you that’s really helped me?”

PRAXIS – 35 MINUTES

Practice in Pairs on campus – 25 minutes

This week students emphasize starting conversations, shifting the conversation to spiritual matters and then listening. The emphasis is not necessarily to share the content of the gospel yet, but they are equipped with the gospel content of the 3 circles if conversations can progress that far.

Debrief and pray – 10 minutes

This is an opportunity for students to share what they’ve learned through today’s exercise and for the teacher to emphasize prayer in the process of evangelism.

HOMEWORK

- Approach 2 strangers this week and start conversations on your own. See if you can shift the conversation to spiritual matters and listen to their answers.

- Write down 2-3 things you learned from these encounters to turn in at the next class session.
- Find out their names and add them to your prayer list.

Week 4 - Content

REVIEW – 10 MINUTES

ASCC Model
Approach tactics
Shift Tactics
Homework

TRAINING - 15 MINUTES

“The great idea, the wonderful story of the gospel starts in the mind of God, moves through creation, recognizes the fall, sees the providence of God, centers on the work of Christ on the cross and His resurrection, and looks for future consummation of this life and the hope of heaven in eternity.” – Alvin Reid

Ideas to consider

- The brain processes visual information 60,000 times faster than text. – 3M
- 58% of non-Christians say it is not very appealing or not at all appealing when Christians quote Scripture or texts from the Bible as evidence for Christianity. - Barna
- 78% of people who are not affiliated with any religion (nones) do not believe in Hell. – Pew Research
- Studies show 13-25-year-olds are experiencing stress at the same level as the average psychiatric patient in the 1950s. Elmore, Marching off the Map This is most likely due to the broken conditions of the world that they live in.

Conclusions: Visual presentations are helpful, brokenness is a good connection point.

This generation needs a gospel message that clearly presents hope for the world as well as their soul.

When we share the gospel we are sharing a hopeful antidote for a broken and poisoned world. Do you believe you hold a message that is the cure for the hurt in people’s souls?

PRAXIS – 35 MINUTES

Practice in Pairs on campus – 25 minutes

This week students emphasize starting conversations, shifting the conversation to spiritual matters and then listening AND presenting a message of hope in Jesus. They can use all or some of the 3 circles when sharing the content of the gospel.

Debrief and pray – 10 minutes

This is an opportunity for students to share what they’ve learned through today’s exercise and for the teacher to emphasize prayer in the process of evangelism.

HOMEWORK

- Approach 2 strangers this week and start conversations on your own. See if you can get to a point where you can share the 3 circles with that person.
- Write down 2-3 things you learned from these encounters to turn in at the next class session.
- Find out their names and add them to your prayer list.

Week 5 - Call

REVIEW – 10 MINUTES

ASCC Model
Approach tactics
Shift Tactics
Content
Homework

TRAINING - 15 MINUTES

“The gospel calls for a response from each of us; the biblical response is repentance and faith.” Timothy Beougher

“Evangelizing includes the endeavor to elicit a response to the truth taught. It is communication with a view to conversion. It is a matter, not merely of informing, but also of inviting. It is an attempt to gain, or win, or catch, our fellow-man for Christ.”

When it comes to the three circles a transitional response is “Where do you think you are on this map?” With the follow up question: “What is stopping you from repentance and faith right now?”

A direct question is always better: Is this what you believe about the gospel? Have you made repented and believed?

Possible Responses:

The 3 circles training curriculum offers 3 possible scenarios using Acts 17:32-34:

- Red light responses are when people openly say they aren’t ready or interested in the gospel. The goal when you receive a red light response is to be gracious so that there is a possibility of future gospel conversations by you or someone else.
- Yellow Light responses occur when the person is unsure about what they believe or want. They are not hostile or against Christianity, but they are not ready to accept it. The goal when you receive a yellow light response is to extend the conversation by setting up a follow-up appointment. Ask the person to read a passage, or send you some questions before you meet again.
- Green Light responses occur when the person indicates that they are ready to repent and believe the gospel. The goal when you receive a green light response is to assist them with a theologically accurate prayer that expresses belief and repentance. We cannot expect that a nonChristian would know how to pray. There are several ways to do this: Repeat phrases word for word, or bring up concepts and invite them to pray in their own words.

There are many objections to the sinners prayer. We do find examples of sinners crying out for mercy and being assured their prayers were heard (Luke 18:1-14; 23:39-43), and we are promised ‘whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’ (Rom. 10:13; Acts 2:21).” The evangelist must always share that repeating words does not save a person, but it is repentance and faith through the work of the Holy Spirit that brings one into relationship with God.

PRAXIS – 35 MINUTES

Practice in Pairs with a partner – 10 minutes

There is no guarantee that a conversation will get to the point of a green light response to the message of the gospel so we practice this with our partner in the class first. Practice asking the question, “Is there anything stopping you from repenting and believing in Jesus now? And following it with “is it okay if I lead you in a prayer to express that to Jesus?” Then leading your partner through a version of the sinners prayer.

Practice in Pairs on campus – 15 minutes

This week students are putting all they have learned together and trying to have 1-2 conversations with strangers.

Debrief and pray – 10 minutes

This is an opportunity for students to share what they’ve learned through today’s exercise and for the teacher to emphasize prayer in the process of evangelism.

HOMEWORK

- Approach 2 strangers this week and start conversations on your own. See if you can get to a point where you can share the 3 circles and call for a response!
- Write down 2-3 things you learned from these encounters to turn in at the next class session.
- Find out their names and add them to your prayer list.

Week 6 – Gospel Fluency/Discipline

REVIEW – 10 MINUTES

- ASCC Model
- Approach tactics
- Shift Tactics
- Content
- Call
- Homework

TRAINING - 15 MINUTES

- Building Evangelistic Rhythms
 - Set a time every week to go share
 - Being around lost people
 - Inviting lost people to dinner or friend hangouts

- Building Evangelist Disciplines
 - Fasting for lost people or evangelistic events/opportunities
 - Accountability is the key to any discipline (who will pray and go with me?)
 - Prayer

How to pray:

- Pray for:
 - Specific nonbelievers by name
 - Once or twice a week pray over your list
 - Everyday pray for 1-2 different people
 - God to bring effective witnesses across those peoples' paths
 - The Holy Spirit to convict people of sin and lostness
 - More laborers to share the gospel
- Prayer walk in areas of lostness and asking God to break down walls
- Pray over every seat before an event
- Use technology to get more people to pray through prayer chains or group texts
- Invite members to share the first names of lost friends and family among many other suggestions

ADMINISTER POST-TEST - 10 MINUTES

PRAXIS – 25 MINUTES

Practice in Pairs on campus – 15 minutes

This week students are putting all they have learned together and trying to have 1-2 conversations with strangers.

Debrief and pray – 10 minutes

This is an opportunity for students to share what they've learned through today's exercise and for the teacher to emphasize prayer in the process of evangelism.

APPENDIX 4
CONVERSATION TRACKER

WEEK	# OF CONVERSATIONS*	FIRST NAMES OF PEOPLE YOU HAD CONVERSATIONS WITH
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		

*Gospel Conversations are those conversations with strangers or people whom you intended to share about Jesus. In these conversations, you should at least get to the content stage where you are able to share some message of hope that you find in the story of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection.

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ABSTRACT

INCREASING UNDERSTANDING AND SHARING OF THE GOSPEL AMONG COLLEGIANS AT ARKANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY BAPTIST COLLEGIATE MINISTRY

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024
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This project was designed to equip students involved in the Arkansas State University (ASU) Baptist Collegiate Ministry (BCM) to better understand the gospel and share their faith. This equipping process involved assessing the level of understanding of the gospel and current evangelism habits. Using a newly developed curriculum, participants were challenged intellectually, spiritually, and practically. Chapter 1 introduces the BCM ministry context, the rationale, purpose, goals, research methodology, definitions, delimitations, and limitations of the project. Chapter 2 explores the biblical and theological implications of the gospel as found in several passages of Matthew by arguing that the gospel is the realized hope of Israel in Jesus the Messiah, the hopeful invitation for every man to be made right with God through Jesus the Savior, and the partially realized hope of God's eternal reign with his covenant people in Jesus the bridegroom. Chapter 3 delves into the theoretical and practical characteristics of personal evangelism by considering evangelism as spiritual discipline, exploring effective communication of the gospel as well as contextualization of the gospel particularly among Generation Z. Chapter 4 details the project including data, surveys, and curriculum. Chapter 5 evaluates the project with suggestions for improvement and further development.

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