



INITIATIVE EVANGELISM

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

THE BIBLE AND INITIATIVE EVANGELISM

What does the Bible say about initiative evangelism? Why should we go to people and offer them the Gospel? As we look at Scripture and the example of Jesus, we find at least five compelling reasons.

1. Jesus took the initiative to come to us. Jesus came to “seek and save” the lost. We do not seek God according to Romans 3:10-12. God has always been the one pursuing us. During His life, Jesus was continually pursuing people and speaking with them about the Kingdom. Jesus also sent His disciples out two-by-two, from village to village to proclaim the kingdom. (Luke 9:1-6 & Luke 10: 1-11)

2. Jesus commanded us to go and take the gospel to all peoples. Read Mark 16:15 and John 20:21—just as the Father sent Jesus into the world to pursue people, so He has sent us.

3. The example of the apostles and the early church. As you read through the book of Acts, it is quite clear that the apostles and other leaders in the church were continually going to people and not waiting for people to come to them – some of the many examples in Acts:

Acts 5:42 in the temple and from house to house

Acts 8:4-13 Phillip to Samaria

Acts 10 Peter to the Gentiles

Acts 13-21 Paul’s 3 missionary journeys

4. People cannot and will not hear unless we go to them. Read Romans 10:13-15. Some people do not have an existing relationship with someone who can explain to them the gospel—both individuals here on campus and entire people groups overseas. The Gospel cannot

spread relationally for some, because there is no relationship unless someone goes and establishes one.

5. God is preparing the hearts of people to hear the Good news. There are some who are ready and want to know, and all we have to do is be willing to be used.

ACTS 8:25-40

Take a moment to read Acts 8:25-40 below:

“When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road — the desert road — that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

“How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: “He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.”



The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?” And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.”

There’s a lot of thoughts and concepts in there but some of what should be observed are the following:

- Phillip was already having a successful ministry where he was.
- The Lord led Phillip to a specific place .
- He finds a person of significant influence —the first black man to hear the Gospel, treasurer in the court of the Queen.
- The eunuch’s heart is already prepared—a Jewish proselyte, reading Isaiah.
- The Spirit’s role in leading Phillip (we need to walk in the Spirit continuously and be sensitive to His leading).
- Phillip’s obedience to go up to a total stranger—why might have this been something he could have hesitated to do?
- The need for someone to explain the Gospel to him.
- Phillip “opened his mouth” — a key principle in witnessing !
- The eunuch believes at the hearing of the Word and expresses his faith.
- The Spirit takes Phillip away indicating that the Lord is going to take care of the eunuch’s follow up (usually we can follow up a person and should but sometimes we can’t and that is OK—the Lord will take care of them).
- It is believed that this eunuch was the one to take the Gospel to N. Africa to begin the church there.

COMMON MYTHS ABOUT EVANGELISM

After looking at the Scripture, let’s now look at some common misconceptions about evangelism that are often held to by believers in our culture and process them in light of what we just saw in Scripture.

1. If we just live a good enough life, people will come to us and ask us and then we can share our faith with them.

Response: Of course people ought to be seeing the difference in our lives and that should make them thirsty for what we have, but often they still don’t come to us and ask how to know Jesus, unless we bring it up. Or even if they know that the difference in our lives is because we are Christians, they often still don’t understand the Gospel and why they need Jesus or how to receive Him. We need to offer that understanding to them.

2. If we go to people we will turn them off.

Response: Yes if we are obnoxious, pushy and insensitive. But if we learn how to sensitively approach people and offer them the opportunity to interact on the Gospel and have a dialogue if they are interested, then we won’t turn them off. If we preach at people, don’t listen and don’t give them a choice to interact with us but rather force the message upon them, then they aren’t too positive. But that is not initiative evangelism in the power and sensitivity of the Holy Spirit.

3. People don’t want to hear the Gospel, they don’t want to be bothered.

Response: True, some are not interested at all or at this time in their lives, but there are always some who do want to hear or want to understand more so they can consider it later on if they are not ready to turn to Christ right then. We can trust God to lead us to the ones who are hungry now and to lead us to ones for whom our role is going to be just to sow the seed. Plus if our approach is dialogue and interaction rather preaching, most people enjoy discussing issues related to the Gospel.

4. You can’t share Christ with someone until you have a relationship with them.

Response: Most importantly the Bible doesn’t teach that and we will see that in the lesson below. While having a relationship is really valuable and often most effective, the question is how long does it take to build a relationship and trust? A month, a year? Sometimes trust and rapport can be developed in 5 minutes. God prepares many hearts of people for us to talk with whether or not we have a relationship. In fact, offering



to rescue lost people with the Gospel is the most loving thing we can do for them – we are being selfish if we don't!

Illustrations:

If a house is on fire and someone is trapped on the 3rd floor and about to be burned to death and you are on the ground with a ladder laying there, would you say in your mind, “I really don't have enough of a relationship with that person to help them”? Of course not! People are dying and headed for Hell and we have the “Gospel ladder” to extend to them – we are being selfish if we don't offer it, regardless of how well we know them.

Or if a person is drowning in a lake and you are on the boat with a life preserver in your hand, would you say in your mind, “I really don't have enough of a relationship with them to throw them this life preserver”. Again, of course not! Now they may refuse to use it because they think they are a strong enough swimmer and with a little more effort they are going to make it without your help, but you would still offer them the life preserver. Love takes action and initiates to meet a serious need!

5. Initiative evangelism means street corner preaching or knocking on doors.

Response: While God uses that and on occasion we may be involved in those forms of evangelism, 95% of the initiative we want to be doing on campus and the rest of our lives will involve more relational connection with people –there are many different ways to initiate, ie. following up a contact from a dorm outreach, dorm surveys taken, a Greek, athletic or campus wide outreach, paintball outreach or most often, initiating with someone you already know from a club you are in, your dorm, house or from class – taking the initiative simply means I am going to offer them the opportunity in some loving and sensitive way to interact about the Gospel.