

WHAT CHRISTIANS SHOULD KNOW, VOLUME II (#WCSK2), PART VIII: EVANGELISM, THE GOSPEL, & DISCIPLESHIP

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The series What Christians Should Know Volume II (#WCSK2) boosts your understanding and shows you how to apply Biblical principles to everyday life. All Scriptures are taken from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted. Biblical references are examples and are in no way intended to be exhaustive. Many of the ideas here build upon the series [What Christians Should Know, Volume I](#) (#WCSK), which provides education on core beliefs and doctrines in the Christian faith. All of the lessons are best used as a general guide as you engage in your own Bible study.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalms 119:105).

How this Biblical principle applies to your everyday life: Evangelism doesn't have to involve traveling around the world to engage others very far away. You can lay the foundation for effective evangelism by what you do each and every day with those very near to you. By proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ, evangelists open the door to others and lay the foundation to make disciples.

Introduction

What is evangelism? Evangelism means proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel refers to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, including all the things Jesus taught us during His earthly ministry. Evangelism does not proclaim ethical living, politics, or neighborliness. Evangelism exclusively declares a unique message that instructs and teaches others *about the gospel*. The word *gospel* is derived from the Greek word *euangelion*, which means “good message.” So evangelism simply refers to telling others about the “good message” or the “good news.”

The gospel is *good* news because it informs others about the facts concerning their salvation; it is the vehicle by which God empowers some to respond to Him in faith; and it expresses the promise of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Basically, if John Q.

Public does not hear the gospel, he goes about his everyday life knowing nothing about sin, knowing nothing about Jesus, and knowing nothing about an eternal life with God in heaven. The gospel not only makes him aware of all of these things but also reveals the way to be reconciled with God (Jesus). After all, how can John Q. Public believe in Him of whom he has never heard?¹

What is discipleship? In the introduction to the eBook [What Christians Should Know Volume I](#), I wrote the following:

“WCSK aims to begin the process of transforming *believers in Christ* into *disciples of Christ* as they walk that path. *Matheteuo*, the Greek word for *disciple*, is very interesting because it simultaneously implies an inner role as a pupil and an outward role as a teacher. By implication, to teach well, *you* must first have an ironclad grasp on the subject matter.”

Discipleship, then, means more than just *believing God*. It means *following Jesus*. Believing simply refers to an awareness of and acknowledgement that something is true, but there can still be a large gap between believing that value and owning that value. For instance, I could read the Ten Commandments² and *believe* that coveting is wrong, but I can still yearn to have when I see a new Jaguar zip by me on the highway. When I become a disciple and *follow Jesus*, all of my decisions and actions are based on His values. Because of who I am (*being*), what I believe, and what I value, my behaviors and actions (*doing*) are characteristic of Christ.

Now let’s make sure we understand a crucial concept. Discipleship means much, much more than taking a discipleship course. It means more than attending a church seminar. It means more than reading an online Bible study program called *What Christians Should Know*. Discipleship means taking the red letters in the Bible with the utmost seriousness. Discipleship means having your way of life threatened.³ Discipleship means giving up the things you value the most in this life to follow Jesus.⁴ Discipleship means when Jesus calls, you leave everything and follow Him.⁵ Christ told us what discipleship means: You have to deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow THE LORD. This is an idea so important it is recorded in three separate locations in the New Testament.⁶

The Great Commission

The reason evangelism and discipleship are covered in the same lesson is simple: The gospel isn’t something intended to be proclaimed to people who are then left alone. Evangelism is the first step that introduces people to Jesus. Discipleship is the subsequent

¹ See Romans 10:14.

² Exodus 20:1–17

³ For example, see Acts 14:19 and II Corinthians 11:25.

⁴ See Matthew 19:16–30; Mark 10:17–27; Luke 18:18–27.

⁵ Luke 5:1–11

⁶ Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23

process that equips, builds, and nurtures Christian infants into mature Christian adults. Remember, all the disciples that Jesus chose were regular people living everyday lives who subsequently “heard a message” and answered the call to follow Jesus. After all these imperfect people were educated and trained for a time, they went out into the world to tell others about the good news of Jesus. Hence, the cycle that Jesus started continued with the disciples, who evangelized and raised up more disciples, who then repeated the process.⁷

We can be confident that evangelism and discipleship are within God’s will because of what Jesus says in The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20):

“Go therefore and make *disciples* of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to observe all that I commanded you*; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (emphasis added).

In the Great Commission⁸ Jesus spoke as the one who had been given “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). He, as the head of the [church](#), told His disciples to go out into the world to spread the good news by teaching others what He taught them. So here, in the Great Commission, is where evangelism and discipleship have an intimate connection. First, as I mentioned previously, Jesus told His disciples—people who already knew something about Him—to go out into the world. Thus, in order to tell others about the gospel, you have to know what the gospel is and basic facts about it. Second, Jesus didn’t tell *a disciple* but His *disciples*. This communal body of those who believed in and followed Him points to one of the central missions of the church today:⁹ to go out into the world in order to teach others about Jesus. Third, Jesus did not say, “Tell somebody, then walk away.” Jesus commanded his followers to *make disciples*, which requires more than an initial introduction. It requires the purposeful intent to grow and foster nurturing relationships after the gospel is proclaimed. Biblical evangelism, then, *is followed* by discipleship—grounding others in the full counsel of God and developing those who hear the gospel so that they can mature.

As I hope I have made clear by now, discipleship also marks the transition from spectatorship to servanthood. In the former case, you may be on the team, but you watch others actively participate in the game. In the latter case, you’re ready to be an active participant and help other members to accomplish a unified goal.

⁷ For an example, see Acts 2, 10:34–38.

⁸ It is also important to note that Jesus declared this commandment atop a mountain (Matthew 28:16) in front of His chosen disciples. This commandment opened up a new chapter in the story of redemption and defined the conditions of a relationship between Christ and His followers. Similarly, in the Old Testament, God delivered the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1–17) from atop Mount Sinai in front of His chosen people. These commandments opened up a new chapter in the story of redemption and defined the conditions of a relationship between God and His chosen people.

⁹ Of course, in the present day the church is the communal body of believers in Christ.

“Making disciples of all the nations” invariably involves *seeking* because the One who commands us in the Great Commission (Jesus) already told us what His mission statement is: “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). We, as the church, cannot save but we certainly can seek. Furthermore, *seek* (*zēteō*) not only means searching but implies an earnest desire to “find” what you’re looking for. In other words, Biblical seeking isn’t apathetic or half-hearted. It sincerely desires for others to know God, and it is this posture that animates our “seeking.”

The Power of Witnessing

Here is an important point. In Acts 1:8, before He ascended to heaven, Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would empower *us* to accomplish the commands set forth in the Great Commission. I say “us” because the Spirit is not exclusive but indwells *all* believers.¹⁰ Acts 1:8 says, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My *witnesses* both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (emphasis added). The Greek word for *witness* (*martyrs*) does mean a witness in a legal sense, like someone relaying testimony, but it also means being a witness in an ethical sense, meaning those who, *by example*, prove the strength and genuineness of their faith in Christ. It is not coincidence that those who die for their faith are called *martyrs*, because the death of a martyr serves as a means to *witness* to others. In a more practical sense, each day we can demonstrate effective witness to others by acting ethically in accordance with what Christ commanded us.

Now let’s be clear: Witnessing is not evangelism. You can be an effective witness, for example, for Buddhism or libertarianism, but this is not evangelism because you are not proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. You can even be a very good witness for THE LORD, for example, by showing mercy to others and treating them with kindness, but this is still not evangelism because these acts do not proclaim the gospel.

The clear distinction between witnessing and evangelism does not diminish the effectiveness of being a dedicated witness for Christ—that is, living by example in how you conduct yourself in everyday life. By living this way, a person may one day ask you, “Hey, you’re different. You don’t behave like everyone else. You treat me in a special way. What’s your deal?” It is then that we begin to evangelize and tell this person the gospel: “Well, I’ll tell you what my deal is. Have you ever heard of Jesus?” In the contemporary church, people tend to think that evangelism is an isolated event that is characterized by traveling all the way around the world and speaking to people who live in remote areas. Certainly, such efforts are wonderful but this incomplete understanding diverts attention away from assessing one’s ongoing interactions with people encountered every day. Just consider the plethora of opportunities for evangelism that would exist if we all took the effort to effectively witness in every area of our life.

Furthermore, being an effective witness ties in to what Jesus said in THE LORD’S prayer ([Matthew 6:9–13](#)). As I wrote in the lesson on [prayer](#):

¹⁰ Acts 2:14–21; c.f. Joel 2:28.

“God’s kingdom *is unseen*, and when we pray that ‘Your kingdom come,’ this is a request that in every aspect of our individual lives and in the communal life of the church, we bring the invisible kingdom *into the visible realm*—this applies to every aspect of our lives, including family, relationships, community service, devotional life, schools, jobs, finances, behavior patterns, and methods of thinking.”

Effective witnessing makes the light of Christ visible to those who do not yet know Him. So, from the perspective of the [church](#), evangelism is the primary means by which the church looks out and relates to the world. From the perspective of the individual, being an effective witness (demonstrating) can therefore be the very vehicle that you need to open the door for evangelism (the actual proclaiming). For how will the world know we are disciples of Christ? By the love we have for one another.¹¹

What evangelism does

In Luke 24:1–9, we can see one of the first recorded instances of evangelism. Here, after the resurrection, the followers of Christ came to the tomb and found two messengers who then asked them:

“Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.” And they remembered His words, and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles. But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings only; and he went away to his home, marveling at what had happened.”

What these messengers told to those at the tomb relayed a very simple message about a person, Jesus Christ. They didn’t tell a new story but rather repeated the facts of events that happened. These facts form the core of exactly what is to be proclaimed:¹² the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and eventual return of Christ.¹³ These core truths are what distinguish evangelism from other messages that you hear in life. If you turn on the radio, you might hear a good message about reducing your debt. Indeed, such a message is *a* good message but not *the* good message. The business world, for example, speaks of “brand evangelists.” Though this label is cute, these “evangelists” are delivering a message about a product from a company. What defines genuine Biblical evangelism is that it is a message *about Jesus* that has been delivered to us *from God*. No part of evangelism entails telling someone what you believe or what you think or relaying secular wisdom. Quite simply, evangelism entails proclaiming that Jesus lived, died, resurrected, ascended, and will one day return. In contrast to messages about debt

¹¹ John 13:35

¹² See Matthew 3:1; Mark 16:15; Luke 4:18–19; Romans 10:14; I Corinthians 1:17, 1:23.

¹³ The fancy word that refers to the proclamation of these elements is *kerygma*. Generally speaking, when you read a sermon in the New Testament, these elements are preached.

reduction or a new app, the good news of the gospel has eternal ramifications. Once someone hears the good message, it has cataclysmic, eternal effects because it forever alters how he or she will spend not only life on earth but also eternity. Before the good news of Christ, people were left with uncertainty about what would happen after they died. Now, we realize our natural existence is but a small speck relative to the glorified state the faithful will enjoy with THE LORD in heaven. For those who are drawn to respond to the good news, the process of discipleship thus begins.

Conclusion

Evangelism focuses on a specific message about one specific person. Discipleship is not about focusing on one specific area of doctrine or Christianity but thinking “big” and contemplating Jesus in the context of the Bible as a whole. When we do this, it becomes clear that the drama of the Biblical narrative means much more when it animates our everyday lives. When Jesus sent His disciples into the world, He invited us to participate in the story of salvation. Hence, we play a part in the narrative, and the story unfolds each and every day in our thoughts, actions, words, and behaviors. That story is very simple and able to be told by everyday people to other everyday people. Certainly, some have special gifts, but every believer can be equipped with a basic message to be an evangelist and take the fundamental steps toward becoming a disciple.

*So how can we think about Jesus in the context of the “big” story of the Bible? The story begins “In the beginning” when Yahweh, the Trinitarian God, made the purposeful intention for humanity to be in a close, deep personal relationship with Him. God’s intent was perfect harmony and to dwell among us and walk in the Garden He prepared for us. God saw *everything* that He created, and all of it was *good*.*

However, a revolution happened. Adam and Eve thought they could do better than God, and so they sinned. As a result of this rebellion, unity turned into discord. Fellowship turned into separation, and the God Who walked among us became hidden and faraway. The world learned what a reality distant from God felt like—fallen. It was thereby possible to be a creation in God’s world but still not know God. Because of the transgression of Adam, our first parents were exiled from Paradise, and the rest of humanity inherited a sinful nature and the same rebellious tendencies. For the rest of human history, men and women would endlessly search for ways to get back into Paradise and escape death. They would try vague spirituality, other gods, reason, science, logic, philosophy, and politics, but none of these things could deliver them from the grip of death.

This is the bad news, and without any good news, the spiritual story of humanity ends right here.

However, there is hope. The Bible tells us that God refused to abandon His creation. As humanity grew and grew, He narrowed His focus to a particular group of people (the Israelites) with one ultimate goal: to redeem a fallen creation and reconcile them back to Him. The only problem is that just like Adam, the Israelites also failed. They chose to rebel against God over and over *and over* again. So, the Israelites were exiled from their

“paradise,” the Promised Land, and were cast out into the hands of foreign conquerors. There was still hope, though, because those who speak on behalf of THE LORD (the prophets) told us that Someone was coming who would at last deliver humanity from its wretchedness. God did not leave creation alone.

Then the story *really* gets good. God pierced the veil of our existence and Incarnated as Jesus, fully God and fully Man. Throughout His life, Jesus showed us how to be divine and drew our attention back to God and away from the false systems of religion that were exposed as fraudulent. Jesus lived a life of perfect, flawless obedience and revealed to us that God loved His creation so much that He gave His only Son to us *for our sake*. He gave Him so that we could see Him, speak to Him, learn from Him, and understand that God was reaching us where we are *for our sake*. God told us that when we believed in His Son, we would inherit eternal life.

However, ironically, the same people that God first chose (the Jews) accused Jesus of being a heretic, and the Son of God was nailed to a Cross by the Romans. However, what the world didn't understand and intended for evil was what God used to fulfill His good purposes. Despite the fact that once again, God was walking among us, again we rejected Him. Yet Jesus willingly gave up His life and shed His innocent blood to serve as a substitutionary, eternal sacrifice to atone for the transgressions of humanity and to reconcile a broken relationship between God and creation. Jesus did not have to die for our sake. He could have, in His omnipotence, gotten off the Cross and struck all of His accusers down in the blink of an eye. Yet He didn't do that because God still refused to leave creation alone. Jesus willingly sacrificed Himself for our sake, was crucified in weakness, and then died on the Cross. Then—and this is the best news—He was raised from the dead three days later. The Messiah irrevocably conquered what previously had tainted creation—sin and death—and kept us out of Paradise. The resurrection was the ultimate signal that God cannot and will not leave His creation alone, and to deliver us from our iniquities and guarantee the salvation of the elect, He gave of Himself to redeem us. Out of the fallen creation came new life exclusively with THE LORD. Every shackle became loose and the deceiver was crushed as The King of Kings and THE LORD OF LORDS broke every chain that kept us from our loving Father in Heaven.

The good news is that the only One who can give you eternal life is the One who conquered death. The good news is that the only thing that you must do to inherit eternal life is to believe *in Jesus*. The good news is that you don't have to pick and choose, because there are not many roads to eternal life. There is only one: Jesus Christ. No one else died *for your sake* on a Cross, and when the Messiah returns to inherit His kingdom, every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.¹⁴

Soon after the resurrection of Jesus, He sent His disciples out into the world. For just as the Father sent Jesus, He now sends us into the entire world. We are sent to deliver the liberating message of the good news of God's kingdom: that those who are elect and have faith in Jesus as the Messiah will inherit eternal life. These disciples go out *from* the church, the place led by Jesus and where God's Spirit dwells. Those in the assembly of

¹⁴ Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10–11

the church spread the love and light of Christ to all human beings in word and deed. Through witnessing, the redeeming, transformative power of Christ is demonstrated to the entire world. It is at this juncture in the story of redemption that the history of the Bible meets us in the present and compels us to take action now. That is because in the final chapter of redemption, God will return. For those who have faith and worship Christ as Lord, this return will be a time of celebration. For those who reject the Messiah, this return will be a time of judgment. Hence, it is our task now to be culture-makers, because as the saying goes, the good news of Jesus is only good if it gets there in time.

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