EVANGELISM

Definition

"The spreading of the Christian gospel by public preaching or personal witness."

(English Oxford Dictionary)

Bosch (Transforming Mission, 1991) suggests that the Greek term εὐαγγελίζω (euangelizo)[1], used in the New Testament, has come to mean many different things to different groups of Christians leading to a plethora of definitions. Some consider 'evangelism' to be markedly different than 'mission', some use the two terms synonymously and still others view 'evangelism' as contained within 'mission' whilst maintaining its own distinctive characteristics. After a long discussion highlighting 18(!) features of 'evangelism', (see Bosch, Transforming Mission, pp. 411-420), Bosch arrives at the following definition,

> '…we may, then, summarise evangelism as the dimension and activity of the church's mission which, by word and deed and in the light of particular conditions and a particular context, offers every person and community, everywhere, a valid opportunity to be directly challenged to a radical reorientation of their lives, a reorientation which involves such things as deliverance from slavery to the world and its powers; embracing Christ as Saviour and Lord; becoming a living member of his community, the church; being enlisted into his service of reconciliation, peace, and justice on earth; and being committed to God's purpose of placing all things under the rule of Christ.'
>
> - David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* p420

There are an abundance of evangelism courses and programmes available to the church, each with its own merits. From 'introduction to Christianity' courses such as 'Christianity Explored'[2] or 'Alpha'[3], to those that encourage a lifestyle of evangelism such as 'Living & Telling'[4], to street evangelism initiatives such as 'The Turning'[5], to follow on courses such as 'Freedom in Christ'[6], to those that form a more ongoing

[1] At root, the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον means, εὖ = "good", ἀγγέλλω = "I bring a message"; the word "angel" comes from the same root. An evangelist is, therefore, a 'good news messenger'.
[2] http://christianityexplored.org/
[3] http://alpha.org/
[4] https://www.agape.org.uk/living-and-telling/
[5] https://theturning.eu
[6] http://www.ficm.org.uk/the_fic_course

catechumenate such as the excellent 'Pilgrim' course[7], there is certainly enough material readily available for those who wish to use it!

Rather than critiquing evangelism courses, our time would be more usefully spent considering how each of us might become increasingly a part of the mission of God in our context, whether we consider ourselves to be gifted 'Evangelists' or not. With that in mind, I offer you the following, taken from missiologist Michael Frost's publication, *'Surprise the World'* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2016).

B-E-L-L-S

Rather than producing another short-term evangelism programme, Frost encourages us to develop permanent rhythms of life that are intentionally missional in nature. His desire is that evangelism will become less 'something we do' and more a reflection of 'who we are'.

Drawing on an extensive portfolio of work that Frost (and others such as Alan Hirsch) have conducted and published, *'Surprise the World'* is designed to be an accessible, thought-provoking and practical guide that can be used individually, in small groups or to form the basis of a teaching plan in churches.

Frost identifies five 'habits' that if implemented encourage 'missionary discipleship'. They are,

- **B**less
- **E**at
- **L**isten
- **L**earn
- **S**ent

BLESS

In Session 4 (Missional Themes) we briefly considered the Covenant that God made with Abraham, (Gen. 12:2-3) and our commission as those who have experienced the blessing of God to make God's blessing known to the world.

> 'If we are in Christ, we not only share in the blessing of Abraham, *we are commissioned to spread the blessing of Abraham*. The last phrase of Gen 12:2 is actually an imperative in Hebrew – "Be a blessing!"… The skeleton message of Gen 12:1-3 is this: "Go… and be a blessing… and all nations will be blessed through you."'
>
> - Chris Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, pp.72-73

Part of the etymology of the term "to bless" is "to add strength to another's arm." What does it mean to do that?

[7] http://www.pilgrimcourse.org/the-course

"Anything that relieves their burden in life. Anything that helps them breathe more easily. Anything that lifts their spirit or alleviates their distress."

Michael Frost, Surprise the World, pp30-31

Ways to bless;

- Words of Affirmation
  - *a note, email, text etc.*
- Acts of Kindness
  - *cutting a neighbour's lawn, doing shopping for someone who is ill, babysitting for an exhausted couple etc.*
- Gifts
  - *a food hamper for someone who has lost their job, a cot for a single mum's first baby, a box of chocolates for… just about anyone etc.*

Evangelistic impact of blessing

Ferguson in his book *'Discover Your Mission Now'*, cites a doctoral thesis entitled *'Blessers Versus Converters'*. Two teams of short-term missionaries visited Thailand; the 'blessers' went just intending to bless those they were amongst, the 'converters' went intending to evangelise everyone they met using traditional methods with the aim of converting them.

The result? Unsurprisingly the 'blessers' made a greater social impact but…

'Secondly, and here is what is so surprising, they discovered that the 'blessers' also had 50 times as many conversions than the 'converters'! The 'blessers' were 50 times more successful at helping people find their way back to God!'

- Dave Ferguson, *Discover Your Mission Now*

A warning…

Frost reminds us that we should bless others simply because our calling is to bless people… we should not bless others in order to convert them (p36). That said, we should not be surprised when God's Spirit works through the blessing, prompting an interest in the one who has been blessed in the Good News that they have just experienced!

CHALLENGE

Bless three people this week – at least one of whom is not a member of your church.

EAT

Eating together has been at the heart of Christian practice since the very beginning of the Church (Acts 2: 42,46), not just the Eucharist but as a way to express love and belonging.

Hospitality is amongst the most unused spiritual gifts in the Western Church. It represents an openness of oneself to the other, a warm inclusivity and a generous welcome. In so doing, it reflects something of the very nature of the Triune God…

> 'Hospitality is an attitude of the heart which is about openness to the other… This mirrors the hospitality of the Trinity as God chooses to open himself to the other through Incarnation and to subject himself to the created order… it mirrors the activity of God towards creation.'
>
> - Janice Price, *World-Shaped Mission, p.24*

We glimpse some recognition of the evangelistic impact of hospitality with things such as the 'Alpha meal'. It is powerful when we eat together; it expresses something of the character of God in a tangible and experiential way. So, why do we stop doing it once the Alpha course is finished?

Frost points out that the table is the great equalizer in relationships; the place we share stories, hopes, dreams, fears, disappointments; the place we open up to each other. As we do, it also becomes a place we naturally share our faith (p.47).

> 'Sharing meals together on a regular basis is one of the most sacred practices we can engage in as believers. Missional hospitality is a tremendous opportunity to extend the kingdom of God. We literally eat our way into the kingdom of God! If every Christian household regularly invited a stranger or poor person into their home for a meal once a week, we would literally change the world by eating!'
>
> - Hirsch & Ford, *Right Here, Right Now, p.203*

It is notable how many occasions in the ministry of Jesus that the setting is around a meal. Tim Chester's book, *A Meal with Jesus* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), sets out the deeply theological importance of eating with others as seen in Luke's gospel. He points out that Jesus was nearly always the guest and not the host on these occasions. We too should be ready to accept the invitation of others as well as extend it.

For those whose home circumstances make missional hospitality more challenging, might a meeting in a coffee shop or a pub serve a similar purpose? Maybe as churches we could do more to make hospitality one of our foundational missional practices…

See Watchet Baptist Church's weekly 'Community Meal' in this short video –

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TRVV0iBaW3E

CHALLENGE

Eat with three people this week – at least one of whom is not a member of your church.

LISTEN

The spiritual discipline of listening to God comes more easily to some than to others yet it is an essential part of our missionary discipleship. Listening to the Spirit of God not only allows us to be directed in our missional practice, to gain wisdom in order to answer the questions of others and know how to deal with challenging missional situations we face; listening to God in solitude is a necessary balance to the many communal activities associated with evangelism (such as hospitality!). It is here we find the source of Good News we are proclaiming in word and deed. It is here we find food and drink for our own spiritual journey.

> 'If we regard hospitality as a missional imperative, then our participation in the *missio Dei* requires that we engage in disciplined practices, such as solitude, silence and prayer that will sustain our commitment to hospitality and lend substance and authenticity to our evangelistic and missional programs.'
>
> - Joshua & Roy Searle, *Monastic Practices and the Missio Dei, Journal of Missional Practice 3 (Fall 2013)*

How to… a beginner's guide[8]

- Set aside a designated time
  - *a block of time (maybe an hour) at least once a week… cross it out in your diary.*
- Eliminate distractions
  - *no music, no phone, find a comfortable position, persevere with silence*
- Let God In
  - *sit quietly, enjoy God's presence, don't speak to God… just listen, maybe use a simple 'centering prayer' if you need focus ('Maranatha', 'Abba', 'Jesus' etc.)*
- Follow God's promptings
  - *allow the Spirit to bring to mind the name or face of a person who you are to bless or eat with this week or to re-engage with after some time. Ask and listen as the Spirit directs how you ought to bless them, what you might say to them…*

CHALLENGE

Spend at least one period of the week listening for the Spirit's voice.

LEARN

Frost encourages us to 'learn Christ' as was the common practice of the Early Church through the Apostles (Acts 2:42) and later through reading the gospels. Put simply, we need to know Jesus if we're going to share him as the reason for the hope we have (p.72).

[8] Taken from Michael Frost, *Surprise the World* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2016) pp.62-68

Despite the marketeer's best efforts, this extends to much more than wearing a WWJD bracelet…

> '"What did Jesus say?"… is the wrong question for Christian thought just as "What would Jesus do?" is the wrong question for Christian ethics. "What would Jesus want me or us to think, be, and do, here and now?" is the right question.'
>
> - John Stackhouse, *Need to Know, p.63*

The more we engage with the life and teaching of Jesus, the more we will find ourselves shaped by it. Just as others passionately devour all the information they can find about their heroes, so we should intentionally desire to know all we can about the one we proclaim to the world! As those who meet their heroes are unstoppable in their desire to share the experience with all who will listen, so we…

Reading just the gospels, of course, makes no sense. The Jesus narrative is the pinnacle of the much larger story of God that can only be fully appreciated by engaging with the whole of Scripture. We need, therefore, to continue to read the whole Word of God… but we really, really need to 'learn Jesus'.

Frost suggests the following (pp.78-80),

- Study the gospels
  - *read, reread and reread again the four canonical gospels, 'marinate your mind and your soul' in them, read them by verse, chapter, section or whole book, consider the contexts they were written in and who they were written for, consider what kind of God they reveal and what difference that should make to your life and the world around you…*
- Read about Jesus
  - *there are whole libraries of books about Jesus… get reading, read authors with differing views, read scholarly and popular books about Jesus, ask questions of them, agree or disagree with them, be challenged by them…*[9]
- Further viewing
  - *Collect a library of films about the life of Jesus from 'The Jesus Film', to 'The Miracle Maker', why not be challenged by others interpretation of Jesus in films such as 'Godspell' and 'Jesus of Montreal', ask questions of them, allow them to make you think about Jesus and why the film-makers portrayed him in a certain way…*

CHALLENGE

Spend at least one period a week 'learning Christ'.

[9] A few to get you started…
N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 2000)
David Seccombe, *The King of God's Kingdom* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002)
James Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1985)
Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995)
Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *ReJesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009)

SENT

Finally, Frost encourages us to identify ourselves as those that are 'sent ones'. Even if we don't consider ourselves gifted 'Evangelists', we need to see that we are 'Good News Messengers' in our attitudes, actions and words. Frost wants us to recognise how and when we have announced or demonstrated God's universal reign to those around us, even if in tiny ways, by keeping a journal.

Journaling has long been recognised as a spiritual discipline which can enable us to process events, try to make sense of what we see God doing around us, record our Spirit-inspired insights in to situations and ask important questions of how we spend our time and what we do. Frost particularly suggests we take note of the following ways we have announced or demonstrated God's universal reign,

- Reconciliation
  - *Reconciliation is at the heart of God's mission (see the triangle from Session 1); whilst true reconciliation is the work of God, we are called to exercise the ministry of reconciliation in the world. Journal all the ways you have done this; mediating between warring work colleagues, reconciling with a friend or relative, sharing the Good News with someone that they can be reconciled with God through Jesus…*
- Justice
  - *Justice, especially for the poor and powerless, was at the heart of Jesus' mission (see Luke 4 and previous notes on 'Jubilee'). Record the ways you have spoken or acted for those who are poor, powerless and oppressed; campaigning for clean water for all, signing an online petition for safe refuge for those displaced by war, promoting fair-trade products, staffing your local soup kitchen, opening your home to someone in need…*
- Beauty
  - *Record places where you recognise the beauty of God; on a countryside walk, in a cathedral, listening to a piece of music, in a painting. If beauty is an expression of God's reign, we need to invite others to share in it; take them hiking, surfing, invite them to join you in an art class or 'yarn-bombing' your local area. Record ways you have created something that reflects the beauty of God - a painting, a song, a meal – and shared it with others…*
- Wholeness
  - *God alone makes us whole but are there ways that we can work for wholeness and/or recognise God's work of 'making us whole' in our lives or the lives of others? Has God used you to help repair a broken marriage or support those proving emergency relief to victims of natural disasters? Have we prayed for supernatural healing for someone? When people are healed (physically, emotionally, spiritually), record it…*

By journaling in this way, recording the ways we are mirroring God's work in the world, we start to see ourselves as those whose lives are part of the mission of God; we begin to see ourselves as 'sent ones', as messengers of the Good News of Jesus.

CHALLENGE - Journal throughout the week all the ways you alerted others to the universal reign of God through Christ.