

## EVANGELISM 101

### Week 1: Lost Without Christ

#### **Opener: (10 min.)**

- Describe the last time you were physically lost. What caused you to become lost? How did you find your way to your destination?

#### **Series Overview: (10 min.)**

These four studies on evangelism will address a topic that can be scary (and even strange) for many Christians. Even though we may believe strongly in Christ ourselves, when it comes to sharing our faith with others, we often feel unmotivated, uncomfortable, and unprepared. These studies will cover some basic ideas that we need to understand to begin overcoming some of those hurdles. Specifically, we will learn that evangelism is only possible when we . . .

- 1) . . . *believe people are lost without Christ.*
- 2) . . . *value people who do not know Christ.*
- 3) . . . *spend time with people who do not know Christ.*
- 4) . . . *learn to communicate our faith in a simple, winsome way.*

If any of these four things are missing in our own lives, we will be highly unlikely to ever develop a lifestyle that points other people to Jesus. For example, we may intellectually believe people need Christ, and even have a heart for “the lost” (#1 and #2), but if our lifestyle is such that we never have any contact with non-Christians (#3), we won’t be very effective evangelists. So for each of the next four weeks, we will examine one of the above statements and the level to which they are true in our own lives.

#### **Are People Really Lost Without Christ? (25 min.)**

Jesus made some rather bold claims about himself. Read the following three verses to hear three of them:

- John 14:6 (Jesus is the only way to God.)
- John 6:51-53 (Jesus is our “spiritual bread” --we have no life apart from him.)
- Luke 19:10 (We are lost apart from Jesus--his purpose for coming was to find and save us.)

These verses and others like them clearly show that Jesus saw himself as a unique figure--one who alone has the power to reconcile us to God and grant us spiritual life. That is most basic and fundamental teaching of Christianity, but it is extremely hard for people in our society to swallow.

**Question:** How might a nonChristian respond to being told that they are lost and spiritually dead without Christ? How might they view you for holding such a belief?

If we were to be honest, even those of us who have been Christians for many years often have a hard time understanding or believing the “exclusiveness” of Christ. It becomes very easy to think that people who don’t know Jesus are really doing okay; that their beliefs “work” for them. At such times, it might help to equate being spiritually lost with being physically lost.<sup>1</sup> Often, when we get lost we aren’t even aware of it. We may be doing the best we can, following the directions we’ve been given, and sincerely believe we’re right on course. We may even resist being told that we’re lost and need new directions (especially if we’re male). But eventually it becomes apparent that we aren’t getting any closer to our destination.

In the same way, people who are lost spiritually are often sincere and content in their beliefs, and may strongly resist being told that they need a new map--Christ. But Scripture is very clear that this indeed is the case. And over time, a person’s life circumstances will often show them that they aren’t getting any closer to where they want to be. It is then that the claims of Christ tend to make the most sense--if we are prepared to share them.

### **Small Group Discussion: (45 min.)**

- When you hear the word “evangelism,” what is your immediate emotional response, if any? Why do you respond that way?
- Which of the four “prerequisites” for evangelism is the hardest for you to believe or apply? (1. believe people are lost without Christ; 2. value people who do not know Christ; 3. spend time with people who do not know Christ; 4. learn to communicate our faith in a simple, winsome way.)
- Is believing that Christ is the only way to God hard for you? Is there anything about that idea that you resist?
- Think back to the time before you knew Christ. What is the biggest difference in your life between then and now?
- Suppose you met a person who sincerely believed and practiced a faith different from yours and seemed to have quality character and relationships. What would you tell such a person if they asked you why they need Christ?

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<sup>1</sup>For a full development of this idea, see the book *Out of Their Faces and Into Their Shoes* by John Kramp.

## EVANGELISM 101

### Week 2: A Heart For the Lost

#### **Opener: (10 min.)**

- What's the most valuable thing you've ever misplaced? How did you feel when you realized it was gone? How did you feel when you found it (if you did)?
- What is your most prized possession? What makes it so special to you? How would you feel if it was lost?

#### **Study Overview: (5 min.)**

Last week we saw that the most basic aspect of evangelism is believing that people need to be evangelized--that they are lost without Christ. But that alone is not enough. It is entirely possible to hold that belief in your mind but not care in your heart about people who are lost. Many times, in fact, we who are Christians are turned off by those outside the faith and their lifestyles. We may lack compassion for them and the motivation to reach out to them.

This was certainly true of a group of people in the New Testament called Pharisees. In Luke 15, we're going to see that they criticized Jesus for doing that which he came to do--seek and save the lost.

#### **Learning to Value the Lost: (30 min.)**

Read Luke 15:1-2 and answer the following questions:

- What was the Pharisees criticism of Jesus? Why do you think they held this attitude?

Jesus answers his critics by giving three parables back-to-back. Let's read and discuss each of them in turn, starting with Luke 15:3-7 (read those verses and answer the following questions):

- How might a sheep become lost?
- Why would the shepherd leave the 99 sheep to find the 1 that was lost? Does that make good business sense?
- What is the point of this story?

Now read Luke 15:8-10 and answer these questions:

- How might a coin become lost?

- Does the woman's reaction when she finds the coin seem a bit excessive? Why or why not? [Note: the silver coins mentioned here were probably worth about one day's wage.]

Finally, read Luke 15:11-31 and answer the following questions:

- Was the father wise to give his son this money? Why might he have done that?
- Shouldn't the father have given his son at least a stern lecture when he got home? And was a party really necessary?
- How does the older brother feel about his father and his younger brother? Is his response justified?

There is a common thread through each of these stories: something valuable has been lost, and great rejoicing occurs when it is found. The sheep was probably lost by its own carelessness in wandering from the flock; the coin was almost certainly lost by accident; and the son was lost through his own willful choices. But in each case, that which was lost was still valued and searched for diligently.

These parables tell us something about God's view of lost people. He values them! He is willing to go to great lengths to recover them, and He leads a tremendous celebration when even one sinner repents. Unfortunately, this attitude of God's does not always rub off on His children. In our small group time, we'll discuss our own hearts toward those who have wandered from God.

### **Small Group Discussion: (45 min.)**

- Rate your own compassion for the lost on a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being low and 10 being high). Why did you give yourself this rating?
- What factors influence your level of compassion for lost people (i.e., attitudes or lifestyles they subscribe to, attitudes of your own, etc.)?
- Has there ever been a time when you felt a deep desire to see someone come to Christ? Why did you feel that way? What did you do as a result?
- In the story of the prodigal son, do you identify more readily with the younger son or the older son? Why?
- Is it easy for you to see yourself as being received by God as the prodigal son was? If not, how does that affect your attitude toward the lost?
- Close by praying for each other that God would increase your sensitivity and compassion toward those who do not know him. Pray also for specific individuals you want to see God reach.

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**Week 3: Rubbing Shoulders With the Lost**

**Opener: (10 min.)**

- When you were growing up, who were the people your parents warned you to stay away from (if any)? How did you feel toward that group of people?
- When you were growing up, was there a notorious part of town you were warned to avoid? What kind of people went to that part of town?

**Study Overview: (5 min.)**

Last week we saw that one of the criticisms Jesus' opponents directed at him was that he spent too much time around "sinners" like tax-collectors, prostitutes, etc. Jesus explained his actions by saying that his very purpose for coming to earth was to seek and save the lost--and to do that, he had to hang around with them! The same will be true for us. As believers, it can become very easy to spend all of your social time among fellow Christians. Certainly we need relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ, but we also need to cultivate friendships with those who don't know the Lord. That will be the focus of our study tonight.

**Jesus & the Woman at the Well: (30 min.)**

John 4 describes an unusual encounter Jesus had with a person that all of his contemporaries would have looked down upon (to say the least). Read John 4:4-9:

- What factors might have made it easier for Jesus to avoid this conversation?  
*(Possible answers are: the fact that he was tired, the Jews hatred of Samaritans, the custom of Jewish men not associating with women in public.)*

Now read 4:10-26 and answer the following questions:

- How does Jesus introduce spiritual/moral issues into the conversation?
- How would you describe the woman's response? *(Leader: you may want to note that she changes the subject a couple of times--in verses 19 and 25.)*
- What about this conversation might serve as a model for our encounters with nonChristians?

The main thing to see in these verses is that Jesus had to cross a lot of barriers to reach out to this woman. She was of a despised race, a different religious background, and had questionable morals. Yet Jesus took the time to talk with her and to reveal himself to her (and if you read on to verses 39-42 you'll see that many Samaritans came to Christ as a result).

As Christians, it is easy to remain isolated and to avoid spiritual conversations with people that seem too different or too closed to the Gospel. Like Jesus we must cultivate time with nonChristians and use those times as a means of sharing the love of Christ with them. In our small group time we' ll talk some about ways to "rub shoulders" with nonbelievers, and next week we' ll focus more on how we can communicate our faith effectively to others.

**Small Group Discussion: (45 min.)**

- Where are the "wells" in your life--places where you commonly encounter nonChristians? Do these encounters ever lead to discussions of spiritual matters?
- Are there any good ways you' ve discovered for bringing up your faith in everyday conversations? What are they?
- Do you presently have any close friendships with nonbelievers? Do they know that you are a Christian? How do they feel about that?
- What person in your life do you consider least likely to ever come to Jesus? What obstacles do you see between them and Christ?
- What is one step you could take to meet more people who don' t know Christ?

## EVANGELISM 101

### Week 4: Communicating the Gospel

#### **Opener: (10 min.)**

- Can you recall the first time you ever heard the Gospel (the basic Christian message of salvation through faith in Christ)? Who communicated this message to you and what was your impression?
- What one person was most responsible for your coming to faith in Christ? What did they do to help you take steps toward God?

#### **Study Overview: (5 min.)**

The topic for this week is, for most of us, the most intimidating aspect of evangelism: actually communicating the Gospel to someone who doesn't know Christ. Many of us may not know exactly what to say; others may feel afraid of offending others or seeming weird (after all, giving your life to a man who lived 2000 years ago and was executed as a criminal does sound a bit far-fetched!). But no matter how nice we are, no matter how attractive our lives are, unless we actually tell others about Christ and how they can know him, their lives will never be impacted for eternity. So as we conclude our study of evangelism, we will examine a few simple ways of communicating our faith to others. [Note: these methods are adapted from the book *Becoming a Contagious Christian* by Bill Hybels, et al.]

#### **Basic Evangelism Styles: (30 min.)**

*[Leader: you may want to break into four teams to examine these passages, as some of them are rather lengthy.]*

##### **Read Acts 2:14-15,22-24,36-41**

- Based on these verses, how would you characterize Peter's style of presenting the Gospel?
- Was there anything Peter said that might have offended or disturbed his listeners?
- What was the result of Peter's preaching?

##### **Read Acts 17:16-34**

- How would you describe Paul's presentation of the Gospel to the men of Athens?
- In what ways did Paul draw connections between the Christian faith and the culture of the Athenians?
- What was the result of Paul's preaching?

##### **Read John 9:13-34**

- In this encounter between the Pharisees and a (formerly) blind man, what underlying attitudes and assumptions do the Pharisees seem to be operating from?
- How would you describe the blind man's responses to the Pharisees?
- What was the result of the blind man's testimony?

## Read Luke 5:27-31

- After Levi (also known as Matthew) made a decision to follow Christ, what is the first thing he did?
- Who did Levi invite to the banquet he gave in honor of Jesus? What might have motivated Levi to do this?
- What was the result of Levi's efforts?

These verses basically describe four approaches to evangelism: Peter adopted a very **confrontational** approach in Acts 2. Paul's message in Acts 17 was more **intellectual** or philosophical (he tried to build bridges between the Christian faith and the back-ground of his listeners). The blind man in John 9 had a **testimonial** style--he simply told what Jesus had done for him, even though he couldn't answer all his listeners questions. Finally, Levi used an **invitational** approach--he created an event that he could invite friends to so that they would meet Jesus (note: BayMarin's Sunday morning service is just such an event!).

The important thing to realize here is that there are a variety of ways to help people come to know Christ. We need to adopt a method that fits both the situation and our own personality/make-up. Some of us are more bold and confrontational by nature; others are more relational or intellectual--but God can use each of us. Also, note that there was a varied response in these verses--sometimes the message was received readily, at other times it created hostility. The same will be true for us as we share Christ with others, so we should never judge our "success" by the results.

## Small Group Discussion: (45 min.)

- What is the worst reaction you've ever received when trying to talk with someone about your faith? Why did the person respond so badly?
- Have you ever tried to lead anyone to Christ using any of the four styles we discussed earlier? What was the result?
- Which of the four styles best fits your temperament? Why?
- What is the one thing that most keeps you from sharing your faith with others?
- Is there any one person in your life right now that you desire to share Christ with? What approach might work best with that person?