

CHAPTER 6

EVANGELISM . . .  
FOR THE PURPOSE OF GODLINESS

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*Disciplined faith is a faith that is likely to survive  
and lead to faith in others.*

ALISTER E. MCGRATH

Only the sheer rapture of being lost in the worship of God is as exhilarating and intoxicating as telling someone about Jesus Christ.

Some of the most rewarding times of my life have been during mission trips when I have done nothing but talk about Christ, on the streets and in homes, with one individual or group after another, all day long. Likewise in my own locale—nothing so excites me as a conversation about Christ with someone who does not know Him. But my experience is not unusual; talking to a person about Jesus can be an intensely rewarding experience for any believer.

And yet nothing causes an eye-dropping, foot-shuffling anxiety more quickly among a group of Christians like myself than talking about our responsibility to evangelize. I know many believers who feel confident they are obeying the Lord when it comes to their intake of Scripture or to their giving or serving, but I don't know a single Christian who would boldly say, "I am as evangelistic as I should be."

Evangelism is a broad subject, and I won't attempt to be comprehensive about it in this chapter. The main idea I want to

communicate here is that godliness requires that we discipline ourselves in the practice of evangelism. I'm convinced that the main reason many of us don't witness for Christ in ways that would be effective and relatively fear-free is simply because we don't discipline ourselves to do it.

## EVANGELISM IS EXPECTED

Most of those reading this book will not need convincing that Jesus expects evangelism of each of His followers. He does not expect all Christians to use the same *methods* of evangelism, but He does expect all Christians to evangelize.

Before we go further, let's define our terms. What is evangelism? If we want to define it thoroughly, we could say that *evangelism* is presenting Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to sinful people, in order that they may come to put their trust in God through Him, to receive Him as their Savior, and to serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His church.<sup>1</sup>

If we want something more concise, we could define New Testament evangelism as communicating the gospel. Anyone faithfully relating the essential elements of God's salvation through Jesus Christ is evangelizing. Evangelism occurs whether the words of the gospel are spoken, written, or recorded; delivered to one person or to a crowd.

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself has commanded us to witness. Consider His authority in the following:

- “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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)
- “He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.’” (Mark 16:15)
- “[He] said to them, ‘. . . that repentance and forgiveness

of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” (Luke 24:46-47)

- “Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.’” (John 20:21)
- “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

These commands weren’t given to the apostles only. For example, those of us in the United States can say that the apostles never came to *this* nation. For the command of Jesus to be fulfilled and for America to hear about Christ, the gospel had to come here by other Christians who understood that they, too, were charged with going to “all nations.” And the apostles will never come to your home, your neighborhood, or to the place where you work. For the Great Commission to be fulfilled there, for Christ to have a witness in that “remote part” of the earth, a Christian like you must discipline yourself to do it.

Some Christians believe that evangelism is a gift and the responsibility only of those with that gift. They appeal to Ephesians 4:11-12 for support: “He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” God does gift some for ministry as evangelists, but He calls all believers to be His witnesses and provides them with both the power to witness and a powerful message. Thus while God calls every believer to be a witness, He calls only a few witnesses to the vocational ministry of an evangelist. Just as each Christian, regardless of spiritual gift or ministry, is to love others, so each believer is to evangelize whether or not his or her gift is that of evangelist.

Think of our responsibility for personal evangelism from the perspective of 1 Peter 2:9: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.” Many Christians are familiar with this part of the verse, but do you know

the rest? It goes on to say that these privileges are yours, Christian, so “that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” We normally think of this verse as establishing the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. But we may equally identify it as one that exhorts us to a kind of prophethood of all believers. God expects each of us to “proclaim the excellencies” of Jesus Christ.

## EVANGELISM IS EMPOWERED

If it is so obvious to almost all Christians that we are to evangelize, how come almost all Christians seem to disobey that command so often?

Some believe they need months of specialized training to witness effectively. They fear speaking with someone about Christ until they feel confident in the amount of their Bible knowledge and their ability to deal with any potential question or objection. That confident day, however, never comes. What if the blind man whom Jesus healed in John 9 had thought that way? Would he ever have felt ready to witness to the scholarly, critical Pharisees? And yet within hours, perhaps minutes, of meeting Jesus, he bravely told them what he knew of Jesus.

Sometimes we fail to speak of Christ because we fear that people will think us strange and reject us. In law school I became friends with a fellow student. When I realized he was not a Christian, I became burdened to share the gospel with him. I did my best to model the character of Christ around him and prayed for opportunities to witness to him. One day near the end of the school year, just as the first bell rang he surprised me by asking, “Why are you always so happy?” Although class was about to start, I could have given my friend a clear testimony, even if it were only one sentence. I could have answered, “Because of Jesus Christ.” Or I might have said, “I’d like to tell you why after class.” But when the opportunity I’d prayed for finally came, I froze in fear that he might think less of me for my faith and said, “I don’t know.”

In some cases we can trace our evangelophobia to the method of witnessing we're asked to use. If it requires approaching someone we've never met and striking up a conversation about Christ, most people will be terrified and indicate it by their absence. Although a few enjoy it, most people tremble at the thought of going door-to-door to share the gospel. Even methods that call for witnessing to friends or family, if they involve a forced, confrontational, or unnatural approach, fill us with fear at sharing the best news in the world with the people we love the most.

I've never heard it expressed, but I think the seriousness of evangelism is the main reason it frightens us. We realize that in talking with someone about Christ, heaven and hell are at stake. The eternal destiny of the person looms before us. And even when we rightly believe that the results of this encounter rest in God's hands and that we bear no accountability for the person's response to the gospel, we still sense a solemn duty to communicate the message faithfully, as well as a holy dread of saying or doing anything that might rise as a stumbling block to this person's salvation. Many Christians feel too unprepared for such a challenge, or simply have too little faith and falter at entering into such an eternally important conversation.

One researcher offers another explanation for Christians' fear of evangelism:

One dominant reason underlying the increasing reluctance of Christians to share their faith with non-Christians pertains to the faith sharing experience itself. In asking Christians about their witnessing activities, we have found that nine out of ten individuals who attempt to explain their beliefs and theology to other people come away from those experiences feeling as if they have failed. . . . The reality of human behavior is that most people avoid those activities in which they perceive themselves to be failures. As creatures seeking pleasure and comfort, we emphasize

those dimensions and activities in which we are most capable and secure. Thus, despite the divine command to spread the Word, many Christians redirect their energies into areas of spiritual activity that are more satisfying and in which they are more likely to achieve success.<sup>2</sup>

What is success in evangelism? When the person you witness to comes to Christ? Certainly that's what we want to happen. But if we measure evangelistic success only by conversions, are we failures whenever we share the gospel and people refuse to believe? Was Jesus an "evangelistic failure" when people like the rich young ruler turned away from Him and His message (see Mark 10:21-22)? Obviously not. Then neither are we when we present Christ and His message and people turn away in unbelief. We need to learn that sharing the gospel *is* successful evangelism. We ought to have an obsession for souls, and tearfully plead with God to see more people converted, but only God can produce the fruit of evangelism called conversion.

In this regard we are like the postal service. They measure success by the careful and accurate delivery of the message, not by the response of the recipient. Whenever we share the gospel (which includes the summons to repent and believe), we have succeeded. In the truest sense, *all* biblical evangelism is successful evangelism, regardless of the results.

The power of evangelism is the Holy Spirit. From the instant that He indwells us He gives us the power to witness. Jesus stressed this in Acts 1:8 when He said, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Jesus expects evangelism of every Christian because the Spirit empowers every Christian to evangelize. But Christians often misunderstand this power. The Spirit does not empower all Christians to evangelize in the same way; rather, all believers have been given power to be witnesses of Jesus Christ. And the evidence that you've

been given the power to witness is a changed life. The same Holy Spirit power that changed your life for Christ is the power to witness for Christ. So if God by His Spirit has transformed you into a follower of Jesus, be confident of this: God has given you Acts 1:8 power. This means that in ways and methods compatible with your personality, spiritual gift, opportunities, and so on, you do have the power to share the gospel with people. Having Acts 1:8 power also means God will empower your life and words in the sharing of the gospel in ways you will often not perceive. To put it another way, the Holy Spirit may grant much power to your witness in an evangelistic encounter without giving you any *feeling or sense* of power in it.

The Holy Spirit not only empowers people who share the gospel, the gospel we share is itself embedded with the power of the Holy Spirit as well. "I am not ashamed of the gospel," said the apostle Paul in Romans 1:16, "for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." That's why people can be converted whether they hear the gospel from a teenage teacher of a vacation Bible school class or a seminary-trained evangelist with a PhD; whether they read it in a book by an Oxford scholar like C. S. Lewis or in a simple tract. It is *the gospel* God blesses like no other words.

That does not mean the gospel is a kind of magic wand we can wave over unbelievers and the power of God will automatically spring from it and convert all who hear. You are probably like me in that you heard the gospel many times before you were saved. Doubtless you can think of several people who have heard the gospel repeatedly and have not experienced the new birth. God must also grant faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) with the hearing of the gospel, "for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who *believes*" (emphasis added). Nevertheless, it is *through the gospel* that God gives the power to believe. That's the meaning of Romans 10:17: "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."

When you speak the gospel, you share "the power of God for

salvation to everyone who believes.” Sharing the gospel is like walking around in a thunderstorm and handing out lightning rods. You don’t know when the lightning will strike or who it will strike, but you know what it will strike—the lightning rod of the gospel. And when it does, that person’s lightning rod will be charged with the power of God and he or she will believe.

That’s why we can be confident that some will believe if we will faithfully and tenaciously share the gospel. The gospel is the power of God for salvation and not our own eloquence or persuasiveness. God has His elect whom He will call and whom He has chosen to call *through the gospel* (see Romans 8:29-30; 10:17). Otherwise we would despair when people reject the gospel, and their unbelief would convince us to stop evangelizing. But the power for people to be made right with God comes through the message of God’s Son. If we will give that message, we can be assured some will respond.

Living a life openly devoted to Christ also manifests a power that augments evangelism. This power, strange as it may sound, can be illustrated by one of my favorite barbecue restaurants. Its best advertising isn’t the typical media variety aimed at the eye or ear. Its best advertising is directed to the *nose*. They barbecue the seasoned beef and pork where its tangy smoke can waft across the four-lane highway. Every day, people driving by become interested in the “message” of the restaurant simply because of its fragrant aroma.

Paul described the power of godliness that way in 2 Corinthians 2:14-17:

Thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God’s word, but as



men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

The Lord empowers the life (see verses 14-16) and the words (see verse 17) of the faithful believer with a power of spiritual attraction, making them like a fragrant aroma that attracts people to the message about His Son.

The most powerful ongoing Christian witness has always been the speaking of God's Word by one who is living God's Word. A few years ago, Caffy started a women's Bible study in our home at the encouragement of two new believers. To the second meeting they brought Janet, a mutual friend who was very cynical about the whole thing. In a song about her spiritual pilgrimage, she later wrote, "Sex and drugs and rock-and-roll [were] my trinity." Her thinking had been further blurred by involvement in a cult. But something began that night that only Janet knew about. Months afterward, she said that from their initial meeting an aroma from Caffy's Christian living, especially in her own home, combined with the meat of God's Word in the Bible study made her want to taste more. She couldn't get enough of the aromatic message that had changed these people's lives so beautifully. Today Janet is a fresh and living "aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing."

Because of the nature of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures, evangelism is empowered.

## EVANGELISM IS A DISCIPLINE

Evangelism is a natural overflow of the Christian life. Every Christian should be able to talk about what the Lord has done for him or her and what He means to him or her. But evangelism is also a *Discipline* in that we must discipline ourselves to get into situations where evangelism can occur, that is, we must not just wait for witnessing opportunities to happen.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, "Let your light shine before others,

so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” To “let” your light shine before others means more than simply, “Don’t do anything to keep your light from shining.” Think of His exhortation as more proactive, as in, “Let there be the light of good works shining in your life; let there be the evidence of God-honoring change radiating from you. Let it begin! Make room for it!”

Why, then, don’t we witness more actively? As mentioned earlier, some place the blame on the lack of adequate training to share their faith. Indeed, I wish many more could enjoy the advantages of some good instruction about the specifics of sharing the gospel. But as we think again about the blind man Jesus healed in John 9:25, we realize that we cannot attribute our failure to witness to a lack of training. Though he had been a believer in Jesus only for a few minutes and obviously had no evangelism training at all, he was willing to tell others what Jesus had done for him (“One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see”). So any Christian who has heard biblical preaching, participated in Bible studies, and read the Scriptures and Christian literature for any time at all should have at least enough understanding of the basic message of Christianity to share it with someone else. Surely if we have understood the gospel well enough ourselves to be converted, we should know it well enough (even if as yet we know nothing else about the faith) to tell someone else how to be converted.

We should also acknowledge the common objection that people do not witness because of the lack of time. Between job, family, and church responsibilities, there simply isn’t enough time to “go witnessing.” Before we adopt this objection to evangelism, let’s ponder this: Do we really want to say that we are too busy to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ to make disciples (see Matthew 28:19-20)? Do we expect that at the Judgment Jesus will excuse us from the single most important responsibility He gave us because we say, “I didn’t have time”?

Let’s work from the assumption that God has given us most,

even all, of our time-consuming responsibilities. And, for the sake of argument, let's accept as fact the statement that we don't have room on our calendar for one more regularly scheduled activity. Even if God did put everything on our to-do list, He is also the Author of the Great Commission. He still intends for each of His followers to find ways to share the gospel with unbelievers. In whatever context the Lord places us to live our lives, He calls us to find ways to fulfill the Great Commission there, however limiting the context might be. Raising children in the "discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4) is one way of fulfilling the Great Commission. Supporting the work of a church and its missionaries financially is another. But what about those unbelievers outside our families? And who will do the evangelistic ministry of a church but people like you who comprise the membership of that church?

Isn't the main reason we don't witness the simple lack of *disciplining* ourselves to do it? Yes, there are those wonderful, unplanned opportunities God appoints to give the "reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15). Nevertheless, I maintain that apart from making evangelism a Spiritual Discipline, most Christians will seldom share the gospel.

As a minister, I could spend twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week with Christians and never finish the work. With sermon preparation, counseling, committee meetings, Bible studies, hospital visits, and the like, I could invest all my time exclusively with professing believers (except for large group settings or in cases where unbelievers ask to meet with me privately). And since my ongoing ministry with God's people never finishes, I could "justify" as easily as anyone my lack of individual contact with non-Christians. But what potential for winning unbelievers to Christ would I have if I was never with unbelievers? None. When would I share the gospel with a lost person except when it's part of my job? Never. That can't be right.

Ministers and others who work daily in churches and in Christian organizations and institutions aren't the only ones in this

situation. The Christian homemaker, for example, who rarely has the opportunity to see anyone except her children and her friends from church, may live with the same dilemma.

“That’s not my problem!” says someone. “At work I’m surrounded all day long by the most worldly people you can imagine.” Assuming you don’t try sharing the gospel with them on company time, when will you? The point is not so much how many unbelievers you see every day but rather how often you are with them in an appropriate context for sharing the gospel. Despite the important work-related discussions you may have throughout the day, how often do you have the kinds of meaningful conversations with co-workers where spiritual issues can be raised? If you never have an opportunity to talk about Jesus, it doesn’t matter how many non-Christians you are around—your potential for evangelism is little better than mine might be.

That’s why I say evangelism is a Spiritual Discipline. Unless we discipline ourselves for evangelism, we can easily excuse ourselves from ever sharing the gospel with anyone.

Notice in Colossians 4:5-6 the terminology indicating that disciplined thought and planning should go into evangelism: “Walk in *wisdom* toward outsiders, *making the best use* of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may *know* how you ought to answer each person” (emphasis added). We must think about evangelism whenever we talk with outsiders—wisely “making the most of the opportunity” (verse 5, NASB). Knowing how to respond to people as individuals implies reflection and preparation. These principles can be applied in as many specific ways as we have witnessing opportunities. But in general they support the idea that in addition to its spontaneous element, evangelism is a Spiritual Discipline.

For me that means I discipline myself to be with unbelievers. Sometimes Caffy and I schedule a meal with neighbors who don’t know Christ. We make sure to take food or a housewarming gift to the new family on the street and spend time getting to know them,

or check in on a neighbor in crisis. I try to focus on outsiders at social events in our church, even though I have more in common with the Christians there and usually enjoy the conversations with them more. Again, the goal is not just to rub shoulders with unbelievers, but to dialogue with them in such a way that their hearts and minds might be opened to the gospel.

Disciplined evangelism might also involve having coffee or lunch with neighbors or coworkers periodically and learning to ask good questions about the personal side of their lives. The same kinds of opportunities might arise at company-sponsored athletic or social events, or during informal times while traveling on business with fellow workers. Through conversation and good listening, you will discover their felt needs and, hopefully, explore with them their deepest need, their need for Christ.

Whether with someone you're around frequently or with someone you've met for the first time, the best way I've found to turn the conversation toward spiritual matters is to ask the person how you can pray for him or her. Although such a question is common to the Christian, most non-Christians don't know of anyone who prays for them. I've often seen unbelievers deeply moved by this unusual (to them) expression of concern. I had a neighbor for more than seven years with whom I'd been unsuccessful in discussing the things of God. But the first time I told him I frequently prayed for him and wanted to know how I could pray more specifically, he began to disclose some family problems I never knew existed. I once went through my neighborhood asking for needs our church could pray for that night in a special service. At almost every home I was amazed by people's responses and their unprecedented openness to talk about spiritual issues. A few days or weeks afterward they were open to a follow-up inquiry about their prayer request, which in turn often led to an opportunity to share the gospel.

But the point in all these possibilities is that you will have to discipline yourself to bring them about. They won't just happen. You'll have to discipline yourself to ask your neighbors how you can

pray for them or when you can share a meal with them. You'll have to discipline yourself to get with your coworkers during off-hours. Many such opportunities for evangelism will never take place if you wait for them to occur spontaneously. The world, the flesh, and the Devil will do their best to see to that. You, however, backed by the invincible power of the Holy Spirit, can make sure that these enemies of the gospel do not win.

As mentioned earlier, I don't want to leave the impression that the Discipline of evangelism requires that we all share the gospel in exactly the same ways. Throughout this chapter you may have had a picture of certain methods of evangelism that seem terrifying to you. But the preconceived style of evangelism you fear may not rank among the best ways for you to help make disciples for Christ.

In his first letter, the apostle Peter divided all spiritual gifts into the two broad categories of serving gifts and speaking gifts (see 1 Peter 4:10-11). Some find that they evangelize better through serving, others more through speaking. Evangelistic serving might involve hosting a meal and living the gospel in front of your guests. As they see the distinctives in your home and family life, immediate or eventual opportunities to voice the gospel may arise. Perhaps you might cook a meal or grill some burgers to provide an open door for your spouse to share his or her faith. I'm told that every family averages a "crisis" once every six months. During that time of illness, job change, financial crunch, birth, death, and so on, being a Christlike servant to that family frequently demonstrates the reality of your faith in a way that piques their interest. Through serving, you may have a chance to give a Bible or some evangelistic literature, or to initiate a gospel conversation in some imaginative way.

I know a church well where people have hosted home evangelism meetings. They invite neighbors, coworkers, and friends into their homes for the expressed purpose of hearing a guest talk about Jesus Christ and answering their questions about Christianity and the Bible. The hosts may not feel confident about their ability to articulate the gospel, especially to groups of people, but by serving

through hospitality, they provide an opportunity for evangelism by someone whose strength *is* a verbal presentation of the gospel. By opening their homes and working with other believers, evangelism takes place that wouldn't have happened otherwise. But this kind of evangelistic serving still requires as much discipline as any other. It still requires the discipline to put the date on the calendar, to invite the people, to prepare the meal, to pray for the gathering, and so on. Without such discipline, evangelistic serving never happens.

On the other hand, some are more adept at communicating the gospel directly. As I've pointed out, if you're better at speaking than serving, you may be able to work with someone who specializes in evangelistic serving in ways that will provide more witnessing opportunities than you've had before. However, just as servers may need to serve in order to open a door for speaking the gospel themselves, so those whose strength is in speaking may need to discipline themselves to serve more so they will have chances to speak. In short, speakers often need to serve first so they can verbalize the gospel, and evangelistic servers must eventually speak the words of the gospel. Regardless of how shy or unskilled we may feel about evangelism, we must not convince ourselves that we cannot or will not verbally share the gospel under any circumstances.

I heard the story of a man who became a Christian during an evangelistic emphasis in a city in the Pacific Northwest. When he told his boss about it, his employer responded with, "That's great! I am a Christian and have been praying for you for years!"

But the new believer was crestfallen. "Why didn't you ever tell me you were a Christian? You were the very reason I have not been interested in the gospel all these years."

"How can that be?" the boss wondered. "I have done my very best to live the Christian life around you."

"That's the point," explained the employee. "You lived such a model life without telling me that it was Christ who made the difference, I convinced myself that if you could live such a good and happy life without Christ, then I could too."

The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 1:21 that “it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.” Often it is the message of the Cross *lived and demonstrated* that God uses to open a heart to the gospel, but it is the message of the Cross *proclaimed* (by word or page) through which the power of God saves those who believe its content. No matter how well we live the gospel (and we must live it well, else we hinder its reception), sooner or later we must communicate the *content* of the gospel before a person can become a disciple of Jesus. The *example* of Christianity saves no one; rather it is the *message* of Christianity—the gospel—that “is the power of God for salvation” (Romans 1:16).

Before closing this section, I want to emphasize that the Discipline of evangelism also applies to the support of missions. For the same reasons we should discipline ourselves for sharing the message of Christ with those around us, we also should discipline ourselves to help those who are fulfilling the Great Commission in places far from us. Disciplining ourselves to support missions by giving, praying, informing ourselves, and being open to go if God calls (or to let our children go if God calls them) is a part of the pursuit of godliness.

## MORE APPLICATION

*Because evangelism is expected, will you obey the Lord and witness?* In one sense, of course, every Christian constantly witnesses. By our words and lives, at every moment we testify—well or poorly—to the power of Jesus Christ. But I am speaking now of witnessing by design, not by default.

Are you willing to obey Jesus Christ and to witness *intentionally*? Intentional evangelism will necessarily be customized by your spiritual gift, talents, personality, schedule, family situation, location, and so on. But having taken all that into consideration, every believer must realize that it is sinful not to seek ways to spread the message about our Lord Jesus.

Please don't get the impression that because I've written this



chapter and shared some experiences that I consistently model bold, dynamic evangelism. Besides the failure I've admitted in the previous pages, I could list many other occasions when I should have spoken about Jesus and did not, usually because of fear. But I believe we can find long-term solutions to our inconsistency and frequent lack of witnessing if we will discipline ourselves for evangelism.

*Because evangelism is empowered, will you believe God can use your words in the salvation of others?* God blesses words, the words of the gospel. It was the *words* of the Lord Jesus, the *words* of Peter, and the *words* of Paul that God blessed in the conversion of people in New Testament times, and words are what He still blesses today. He will bless *your* words when they contain the words of His powerful gospel.

Some fear witnessing because they don't feel confident enough in their persuasive powers or their ability to answer all imaginable objections to the gospel. But the power for evangelism is not in our ability; it resides in His gospel. You may have never imagined that an unbeliever could actually be born again by hearing of Christ from your lips. But that's not humility; it's doubt, a denial of God's blessing upon His gospel just because you were the speaker. Don't doubt the power of God to add His blessing upon your words when you speak of Christ.

Throughout his life, John Bunyan, author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, insisted that overhearing the conversation of some poor women, talking of the things of God while sitting in a sunlit doorway, was a critical turning point in his coming to Christ. Believe that in the same way the Lord can use what you say as the catalyst in a conversion.

Let's pause and make sure we're not taking something for granted: Do you know the words of the gospel? Try this experiment first on yourself and then, if you dare, in your church, class, or small group to reveal their clarity on the gospel. Distribute paper, then ask people how many times they think they've heard the gospel.

Some, if they've professed faith in Christ for many years, may answer that they've heard it hundreds or even thousands of times.

"Good!" you say. "Now, please write the gospel on that piece of paper."

Then watch people freeze, and stare at you as though you've asked them to list the capitals of every country in the world.

"Didn't you just say that you've heard the gospel many times? And to become a Christian you had to hear the gospel and believe it so as to be saved, right? For you can't be saved by a gospel you don't understand and believe. So please, simply write down in a paragraph or so the message people must hear to be made right with God and go to heaven."

Be prepared for an uncomfortable silence and for many blank sheets of paper—despite the presence of some of your best, most devoted members.

How would *you* do? Can you speak simply, but clearly about how all people have broken the Law of a holy God who created them and are under His condemnation because of their sin? Can you tell them of how in His mercy God sent His Son, Jesus, who perfectly kept the Law of God and was willing to offer to others the credit for His obedience? Can you speak of how Jesus was willing to sacrifice Himself on the cross as a substitute for sinners? Can you talk of how God raised Jesus from the dead, demonstrating His acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice and validating all that Jesus said and did? Can you urge people to repent of their sin and of living for themselves and to believe that Jesus' life and death can make them right with God and give them eternal life? If you have believed these things for yourself, you can share them so others can believe them.

I think there are many Christians who can clearly articulate the gospel and want to speak to others about the Lord, but do not for fear that the observable, daily sin in their lives undermines the integrity of their witness. *How can I ever witness to my boss, such thinking goes, after I angered him so much? Or, I'll never be able to*

*tell my neighbor about the power of Christ now that she's seen me yell at my children.*

If God does not use people like these—like us!—as His witnesses, there will be no human witnesses. Since there are no perfect people, there are no perfect witnesses. This does not change the fact that the more Christlike our lives, the more convincing our words about Christ. We need to do what we can to eliminate any sin that makes our words sound hollow. But while attempting to do that, we must be convinced that we cannot delay our witnessing until we reach sinless perfection. Otherwise, we would never share the gospel. Part of the beauty of our message is that God saves sinners, sinners like us. In fact, the Holy Spirit can make it possible to turn an occasion of sin into an opportunity to talk about the Savior. I've known Christians who returned to those who observed their sin or were victims of it, and by confessing the sin and asking forgiveness were then able to give a powerful witness. Such evidence of a changed life gets an unbeliever's attention. That boss supervises other people who anger him; that neighbor sees other people yell at their children. But when you humble yourself and acknowledge that you were wrong and ask forgiveness, you make a distinction between yourself and others who angered their boss or yelled at their children. The practice of consistent Christian living does empower evangelism, but a Christian recovery from your own *unchristian* living confirms your witness in another, very believable way. Through your failures and weaknesses, the life-changing power of Christ can be made visible and strong.

*Because evangelism is a Discipline, will you plan for it?* While preaching to his London congregation in 1869 about the responsibility of evangelism, C. H. Spurgeon said,

If I never won souls, I would sigh till I did. I would break my heart over them if I could not break their hearts. Though I can understand the possibility of an earnest sower never reaping, I cannot understand the possibility of an earnest

sower being content not to reap. I cannot comprehend any one of you Christian people trying to win souls and not having results, and being satisfied without results.<sup>3</sup>

If you are not content with your reaping of souls for Christ's sake, will you plan for more disciplined sowing? Will you calendar an event designed for evangelism? Could you set up a lunch meeting at work or with a neighbor? How about discussing with your pastor a home evangelistic meeting? Where can you get some evangelistic literature to give away? Who can you ask to pray for? Will you commit yourself to *at least one way* of intentional evangelism in the near future?

Evangelism is not often mentioned in books on spirituality and Christlikeness. So is evangelism really that important as a Spiritual Discipline? The following adaptation of 1 Corinthians 13 reminds us:

Though I speak with the tongues of scholarship, and though I use approved methods of education, and fail to win others to Christ, or to build them up in Christian character, I am become as the moan of the wind in a Syrian desert.

And though I have the best of methods and understand all mysteries of religious psychology, and though I have all biblical knowledge, and lose not myself in the task of winning others to Christ, I become as a cloud of mist in an open sea.

And though I read all Sunday School literature, and attend Sunday School conventions, institutes, and summer school, and yet am satisfied with less than winning souls to Christ and establishing others in Christian character and service, it profiteth nothing.

The soul-winning servant, the character-building servant, suffereth long and is kind; he envieth not others who are free from the servant's task; he vaunteth not himself, is not puffed up with intellectual pride.

Such a servant doth not behave himself unseemly between Sundays, seeketh not his own comfort, is not easily provoked. Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things.

And now abideth knowledge, methods, the Message, these three: but the greatest of these is the Message.<sup>4</sup>

Yes, there is a correlation between the pursuit of godliness and a passion for God's message. The more we pursue Christ, the more we want to proclaim Christ. But without discipline, our best evangelistic intentions often go unspoken. May we discipline ourselves to live so that we can say with the apostle Paul, "I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it" (1 Corinthians 9:23, NASB).