

The “Good News” Of Evangelism

The English word, “evangelism,” comes from the Greek word euaggelion. Most literally translated in the noun form, euaggelion means: “gospel” or “good news.” In the verb form euaggelizesthai, the meaning of the word changes slightly to “announce” or “bring good news.”

This article is an attempt to reframe evangelism. As a campus pastor I see a lot of students who don't think they are quite yet ready for outreach. While I would agree that evangelism should be taken seriously, as a means of bringing the radical, transformative light of Christ into the lives of the people around us, evangelism is surprisingly simple and fun. If you don't yet believe me, then I would like you to answer the following questions: Do you like people? How about hanging out with them? This, I would argue is about as scary as evangelism ever gets: two or more people, having a conversation and sharing thoughts on topics that really matter.

A lifestyle of Evangelism

Evangelism at its core is bread-and-butter Christianity. It is as radical as hosting friends for a meal at your apartment, as counter-cultural as saying “hello” to your classmates, as revolutionary as treating the people in your life as if they were made in God's image and therefore worthy of being known.

Now, would you like to learn the life-altering secret to becoming an amazing evangelist? Ask questions. Ask a lot of questions. Evangelism is about seeking first to understand, and then to be understood. Once you have an open door to that relationship, learn to ask more penetrating questions. Develop an interest in people! And guess what? It can be incredibly fun! I'm not asking you to go to prison for Jesus, just to have coffee with people who don't yet know him. How easy is that?

Evangelism, therefore isn't something that we do whenever our ministry organizes an event; it's a way of life. The university setting offers us a dynamic and exciting arena in which to play. Our time spent in college should be spent missionally, taking every advantage of how easy it is to engage in significant friendships.

Seeing college as a mission field

College campuses are overflowing with potential new friends. It is unlikely that at any other time in your life you will have access to this many people with open hearts and open minds. Just think of the incredible numbers of international students from predominantly non-Christian countries who are paying a premium to get an education and learn about American culture. College is an amazing opportunity to make friends from around the world and love them like Jesus loves them.

We often miss the opportunities around us, not because of some great sin in our lives, but simply because we aren't looking. Henry Blackaby wrote that if we truly want to experience God, we must “find out where [He] is at work, and join Him.” God is at work in the lives of the hundreds of

thousands of college students in DFW, and dozens of campus ministry communities have joined Him! The question is: have you?

Jesus in Matthew 5 calls His disciples “the light of the world” and invites them to let their light shine before others. This is our unique and exciting role! Remember, you have been called to be a light, not the Las Vegas Strip with announcements blaring and bothering every passerby. Nor does your light need to be the brightest. You are called simply to be a light, something every Christian, regardless of their training or Biblical knowledge or maturity, can do. So shine! “God is light” and we reflect Him. Do the people around you on campus feel His warmth when you're around?

Shine in how you treat your Christian and non-Christian roommates. Shine when you eat on campus by meeting someone new, asking them their story, and caring. Shine when you play games and invite others to join. Shine by encouraging your professors and treating them as human beings who also have emotions and need God’s love. Shine in mundane, day-to-day, normal interactions by inviting others to join you, just as Jesus did. This is what truly living missionally on a college campus looks like.

Our work starts there, but it ends with one of my favorite verses, Revelation 21:5: "I am making everything new!" In Jesus, God has come to earth to remake it, and shape it into His image. He does this by starting with us individually, by forgiving us, teaching us, and sending us back out to help others become new. Jesus started his ministry with 12 disciples. Over the period of 3 years He poured into them, and they still didn’t understand what He was really on about until His death. Then Jesus rose again and an explosion happened! This Kingdom of God that Jesus was talking about came into fruition, like a tree sprouting branches upon branches as new lives are grafted in. This is the same Kingdom we are still building today, a Kingdom where people start to live differently. We see the Kingdom come to fruition when people are meeting together daily, selling their things to give to the poor, and asking God to bring ever more branches into our family tree.

This is the good news for our classmates, which should move us from a place of fear to excitement! Our humble ministry is a part of something greater, something huge that God himself is building. The lonely, the lost, and the rejected fill the colleges we are a part of, but God has invited you and me to help in making them new. That is good news.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

Try something!

In Luke 10, Jesus sends 72 of his followers to go out to different towns and talk to people. They go out in pairs, but are not allowed to bring any belongings, make housing arrangements, or even pack food. The intent being that God will take care of them as they go.

It would be easy for us to assume that these are Jesus' legion of super-Christians who obviously were born ready for this task. But these are the same people who just 2 chapters before are chided for their lack of faith as storms swirled around them. They certainly didn't show any super-Christian virtues that day. Like most of us, they sat and cowered.

Jesus' disciples are no different from us--just normal people whom a great God is able to work through, if we allow Him. Too often though, we are still cowering like those disciples in the boat, afraid of the wind and the waves. We are afraid that we don't know enough or that we will mess things up. We are afraid of being uncomfortable or saying something awkward. Jesus doesn't seem concerned by our fear, and He is not afraid of these things; rather, He invites you to join Him in spite of it.

Jesus' disciples barely knew what they were doing when He first sent them out, and it is ok if you don't either. Just go. You don't need to understand every objection to Christianity before you ask someone spiritual questions. If anything, your humility can be a breath of fresh air to a world that is fed up with arrogant, know-it-all Christians. Sometimes as disciples we impress people, other times quite the opposite, but we go out anyway just like the 72, full of eagerness and expectation.

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.

I want to challenge you to go. To ask deep and meaningful questions to your friends and classmates. To live a lifestyle that is open to conversation and that invites others to join. Remember, Jesus didn't just *tell* good news, He *was* good news to people. Being good news is a big part of bringing it to people!

Evangelism is a means of bringing the radical, transformative light of Christ into the lives of the people around us. Go and discover that for yourself; simply look for where God is moving and join Him.

Some things you can try:

Questions on Display

Choose to engage when your community hosts an outreach opportunity. We often call these “Questions on Display,” and you can organize your own with your core. The goal is to use the display as a talking point and an entryway into more meaningful spiritual conversation.

Campus Conversations

Go on campus with a partner (or alone) and just talk to people--to make a new friend. Ask them questions about life, about their spiritual journey, and about what they think of Jesus. If things go well, follow up and invite them to hang out and be your friend. See this opportunity as an extension of welcome week. Your core can even meet together sometime on campus, pray, and be sent out two-by-two to engage your campus

BYOF - Bring Your Own Friend Events!

As a core or friend group, host an event that you can bring your non-Christian friends to. This can be a sporting event, dinner, game night, bonfire, or anything else you like to do for fun. The goal is to bring Christians and non-Christians together and build meaningful friendships. Often the people in our lives aren't interested in God yet, but they are interested in community. This is a great way to bridge that gap.