



From the Moderator:

During the 212th Associate Reformed Presbyterian Synod, I was pleased to join Mike Jones and ONA by announcing September of this year as *Evangelism Month*. In my understanding of the Word of God, we are given a mandate to proclaim Christ and to make disciples. As we see in 1 Peter 2:9 we are His chosen to proclaim his excellencies to a lost world.

“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

Ask God’s Holy Spirit to enable you to love Him with all your heart. Make it the priority of your church, family, presbytery and our synod to seek with all your heart, soul, mind and strength the blessing of boldly proclaiming the gospel one-on-one to the unredeemed. If we are obedient to the Word and proclaim the excellencies of Christ, we will see the lost saved and our churches will grow.

Prepare, pray and ask God to put someone in front of you and witness Jesus Christ every day through the month of September. Personally, my prayers are that by the end of September the practice of witnessing Christ to everyone will be a way of life for us all.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!

By God’s Grace,
Phil Williams

September 1

Matthew 22:37-40

Rev. Mike Jones, ONA Executive Director

Moderator Williams has chosen the great “Shema” (Deut. 6:4-9 and Mt. 22:37-40) as the theme of our Synod this year. Jesus quoted it when the rich young ruler asked him, “What is the greatest commandment?” Today it may sound like, “Jesus, tell me the bare minimum I need to pass.” (Like my teenagers in chemistry class!) He thought he would find a shortcut to heaven. Yet Jesus replied, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*’ *This is the first and greatest commandment.*” That’s a tall order! Many of us are seeking to do that as much as we can in this life. But often, we forget the rest of the commandment. “*And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.*” (Mt. 22:37-40)

So, how’s that going?

When we think of outreach, evangelism, making a gospel impact or growing the church, it’s often easy to overlook an important and readily available weapon that just about all of us have. What is this weapon? Our home and our neighborhood. How “offensive” is your home? How are you using it as a weapon to penetrate the darkness of your local neighborhood?

Dr. Jim Hatch of the PCA Mission to North America recently quipped, “What are your neighbors like?” I asked the same to a family in one of our churches. The memorable response was, “They’re great neighbors! They leave us alone and we leave them alone.” Sounds nice, but not very biblical. Many of us love some of our neighbors, but not all of them. Many of us don’t even KNOW all of our neighbors- much less love them. And while we love the Lord our God, we often times neglect the second part of the commandment. Yet, God has sovereignly placed neighbors to the left, right, behind and in front of us (and in some cases even above and below us)! GK Chesterton said, “We make our friends; we make our enemies, but God makes our next door neighbor...We have to love our neighbor because he is there.” Think about it. If each one of us seized the opportunities (Col. 4:5) that the sovereign Lord gives us each day with our neighbors, how profound the Kingdom impact would be!

I recommend two resources to help learn how to engage your neighbors. Dr. Dave Runyon, in a book called *The Art of Neighboring*, provides some very helpful tools to intentionally implement a ministry to all the neighbors the Lord has supplied. Dr. Rosario Butterfield, in the last chapter of her book *Openness Unhindered*, explores the amazing gospel impact that hospitality and community can have on your neighbors.

So, how are you doing with the second greatest commandment?

September 2

Acts 8:29-31

Alex Pettet, World Witness Director

Chariot Seatmates

And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." So Philip ran to him [the Eunuch] and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. (Acts 8:29-31)

Most likely, the eunuch was a God fearing Gentile barred from the inner-courts of the temple. As such, the eunuch never felt quite whole. He would be confused and disappointed by Scriptures that pointed towards, but yet concealed, the full picture of Yahweh. Then, he was sent a seatmate and we know the rest of the story.

I find myself with lots of seatmates, usually on airplanes versus chariots. I have not encountered a non-Christian seatmate who was already reading the Scriptures, let alone Isaiah, but certainly I have had seatmates with lifelong disappointments like the eunuch. And, rather than giving them answers, I listen to their story with genuine interest and then share mine.

In 1996, before I left for the mission field, I attended a missionary training center where I learned how to share my "story" (i.e., testimony) in 5 minutes, 2 minutes, and then 30 seconds. Though I remember little else from the center, I still recall and use this today. As you know, people may not want to hear someone else's story, but they are often willing to hear yours if you have taken the time to hear theirs. In the end, my story always ends with His story and His work on the cross.

We all have seatmates in life whether they are in an airplane, in a pew, at work, in a gym or hunting stand. Let's hear their story, share ours and end with His.

September 3

Matthew 9:35-10:15

By Rev. Clint Davis

Jesus calls us to participate in his mission to redeem sinners by prayer and action in this passage. We are to pray to the Lord of the Harvest to send out laborers, and we are to participate in the harvest. Notice the following four points about Jesus' life, ministry, and expectations for his disciples in this passage.

First, Jesus was actively involved in a ministry that demonstrated and exercised the power of his kingdom. He taught in the synagogues. He proclaimed the good news of his kingdom. And, he healed every disease and affliction.

Second, Jesus had compassion on the crowds of people who had gathered around him because they were harassed and helpless. They were weary, tired, exhausted, exposed, and dejected. Their leaders, who were supposed to care for them, had abandoned them, burdened them, and blamed them.

Third, Jesus relieved people's burdens. He healed their afflictions in his grace and mercy. This healing, however, was not merely a physical one. Jesus proclaimed the good news of his kingdom while healing them of their diseases and afflictions. The outward healing illustrated the inner healing of the gospel in their lives.

Fourth, Jesus expects his disciples to have compassion on people as we participate in his ministry of relief. The harvest is plentiful. We need more laborers. And, the need is urgent.

Therefore, pray earnestly for laborers for the harvest (9:38). Pray for spiritual eyes and a compassionate heart so that you may see people as they really are and discern their needs (9:36). And, be prepared to be the answer to your prayer as you participate in the harvest by doing gospel ministry (9:35, 10:1-15).

September 4

Psalm 37:4

By Charlie Phillips

Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. (Psalm 37:4)

I recently heard a minister use this verse to prove to his congregation that God wants to give them all the material wealth for which they yearn. He said that if they delight themselves in God, He in turn will give them the riches they desire deep down in their hearts. This is a complete misapplication of the text, and most of us would never dream that God wants to fulfill our desires for earthly treasure. Having said that, we often substitute other things for worldly treasure such as a different job or more children. And while a new job or another addition to the family are both good things; might there be other desires we ought to have as Christians?

What if our delighting in God led to desires for things outside of our personal interests? What if instead of God's people using Psalm 37:4 to justify personal gain, they looked to fortify their hope in Him? What if this verse was all about gaining God's desires for His glory and His kingdom? How might we apply it differently?

Certainly the Lord desires that the gospel be preached to the lost. He proved this by giving us a Great Commission to complete through the power of the Holy Spirit. So maybe our delighting in God ought to strengthen our desire for the lost to be saved. Maybe our delighting in the Lord should cause us to pray for those around us that need to hear the gospel. Maybe our delighting in Christ ought to give us the courage and resolve to build relationships with people in our communities that are in need of eternal hope.

As we delight in the Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit, may he give us the desire to see the Great Commission be fulfilled!

September 5

John 4:7

By Rev. John Kimmons

“A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink.’” (John 4:7)

What is the first word in evangelism and discipleship? It's simply, **HELLO**. Jesus met a lot of people who were not on the "religiously approved" list. He talked with a bi-racial woman and healed lepers, in spite of the fact that touching them was forbidden by the religious authorities. He healed the sick, blind, lame, and was accused of being a friend of sinners.

"Door-to-door" Mormon missionaries have about a .1% conversion rate. But their success in recruitment is about 50% when there are interpersonal ties.

For believers seeking to share their faith, there is a greater rate of conversion with a greater number of **hellos**. It's all about relationships! It begins by talking to God about people before we talk to people about God. Prayer and **hello** should go hand-in-hand as we ask God to lead us to people whose hearts He is preparing to receive the gospel.

Seldom do people come to Jesus at their first meeting. Be ready when God opens the door to share a simple presentation of how a person can trust Christ and mature. Presentations vary according to circumstances, Biblical knowledge, background, age, past history, and even a question that may be asked. Relationships where we have an opportunity to share the gospel most often begin with **hello** and a genuine concern for the person that we're addressing.

If God allows us to build a friendship with a person, then we certainly want them to know our best friend, Jesus. It worked for Dr. Jim Polhill, a fellow ARP, who said **hello** to me, a lonely guy at the University of Georgia. His **hello** established a friendship that brought me to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Whose life will your **hello** change?

September 6
Proverbs 9:13
By Jay Crout

“The woman Folly is loud; she is seductive and knows nothing.” (Proverbs 9:13)

It can be easy for us to forget what it was like to be a non-Christian. In fact, many of us probably don't even remember a time when we didn't know Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior. So, for us, it can be easy to read a verse like this and understand it only in the context of living out the Christian life – our sanctification.

Yes, Lady Folly presents a constant challenge for believers every day of our earthly life. We struggle to battle against her, and we often fail to accurately see the dangers of our sin. Worse, sometimes we even choose to follow the foolish paths even when we know how they will end.

But we, as believers, are no longer under the bondage of sin. And this means that Lady Folly – as seductive as she may be – no longer has dominion over us. But far too often we forget (or cannot even remember!) what it was like when we were unable to see the foolishness of Lady Folly's loud and seductive calls.

Non-Christians live every minute, of every day, of every year, of their entire lives in this state. And without intervention, the result of Lady Folly's dominion over them is found a few verses later: *“But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.”* (Proverbs 9:18)

Lady Folly knows nothing and yet is proud to boast in it. Her words are smooth and cunning. And they bring with them deadly results. But the Lord has given us a greater word – the word of the cross. And while it is folly to those who are perishing, it is the power of God to those whom are being saved. It is this word – the word of the cross – that we have been given to proclaim. And it is our responsibility to make sure that those around us never cease to hear this call. Lady Folly may be loud and seductive, but the word we proclaim is truly transformative. Proclaim it!

September 7
1 Samuel 15
By Rev. Tom Shoger

In 1 Samuel 15, King Saul gave the prophet Samuel a list of excuses for his failure to obey a clear command of God. Samuel got straight to the heart of the matter in verse 22 when he said, “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice...” In essence, Samuel said Saul's actions proved Saul's heart was not right with God. You probably understand this truth that obedience proves the true status of one's heart.

But how are you at applying it in your daily living? For example, Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.” (Matthew 28:18). From this position of authority, Jesus issued a command to His disciples to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). In other words, if by God’s grace you are a true believer in Jesus Christ, you are to replicate yourself by sharing the gospel of Christ with those you come into contact with on a daily basis. You are to pray for opportunities to be able to share the gospel. You are to pray for courage to be bold in sharing this life saving good news.

But the question is: Are you actively doing so? Do you actively share the good news of Jesus Christ with your family, neighbors, and acquaintances? Or, are you like Saul, giving a list of excuses instead? Think back and honestly answer this question: When was the last time I shared the gospel with someone? If you don’t know, then you are disobeying God’s clear command. Obedience proves your heart’s condition. The Lord takes “great delight” in obedience that flows from a heart transformed by the gospel of grace. Pray for grace to freely obey His command to share the gospel.

September 8

Psalm 37

By Rev. Ben Carver

The Psalms reminds us of the eternal promises of God for his people. In Psalm 37, the writer contrasts the life of wisdom with the life of folly. The former leads to righteousness and life, the latter to despair and death.

As Christians, we are called to share the good news of righteousness and eternal life through Jesus Christ. Because of his death on the cross and his resurrection on the first day of the week, you have the promise of peace with God, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal life with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God calls you and I to share the message of salvation with others. We don’t redeem lost people, but we tell them about the Redeemer. Salvation belongs to the Lord.

Psalm 37 reminds us of this truth. *“The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; he is their stronghold in the time of trouble.”* (Psalm 37:39)

Salvation is God’s divine work. Our task is to share the message of salvation with coworkers, neighbors, friends, and relatives.

Today, take a moment to thank the Lord for your salvation. Then prayerfully ask the Lord to give you boldness to talk with others in your life who need to hear the good news of redemption in Jesus Christ.

September 9

John 4:39

By Rev. Greg Conover

Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." (John 4:39)

Why would any of us brag about Jesus? The answer can be found in the Samaritan Woman's story in John 4. She was "loose" and had many men. She was an outcast, sinful, from the "other side of the tracks," and was rejected by the "good people." No good religious person would go near her.

As Jesus sent his disciples into town for some sandwiches, He drew near and engaged her at a well. He asked her questions. She lied and tried to deflect the conversation. He knew better. He exposed things about her that would make us all blush. He knew all of her sin and deepest secrets. She could not hide her shame from Him.

But, He did not reject her; He loved her. She had been thirsty for love and acceptance searching for it in men, in one-night stands and with multiple husbands. They never satisfied. They just made her thirsty for more of what never quenched her need for love.

Jesus then told her about the real living water – the water that completely satisfies. The living water that meets us at our deepest sin and cleans us from all unrighteousness. This water was the water she needed. This living water is Jesus! Then she ran home and told everyone about Jesus. She couldn't keep it to herself.

What compelled her to run and tell? The fact that Jesus knew everything about her and loved her anyway. She knew how sinful she was, yet was loved and accepted not scorned and rejected. She had a life of guilt and shame – now she was loved.

You see this woman is you and me, seeking idols to worship thinking they will satisfy. We seek love and acceptance in someone or something other than Jesus. We thirst.

When we see our sinfulness and yet we're still pursued by the relentless love of Jesus we will brag on Him. Thirsty people given water that fully satisfies will tell others about this never ending well.

September 10
Ephesians 2:10
By Rev. Jan Sattem

Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” The context is where Paul is describing how each one of us was saved. 2:10 indicates that which follows next — good works. One of those good works is surely to tell others about the new life we have been given.

In the ancient city of Susa, a young woman pondered her life and her good fortune. It would be death for her to approach the king. Yet her uncle Mordecai was encouraging her in just that vein. It was wonderful that she was now the queen, but at the moment Mordecai was asking her to point out a specific problem to the king. Ester was filled with fear and perhaps even looked for another to take this burden. Mordecai explained that God could raise up another to save the Jewish people from this hate-filled plan, but He had not. He says to her, “. . . who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?”

Evangelism is a sharing of the good news of salvation. It is to tangibly be used by God in the harvesting of souls. This is one of the reasons we have all been born-again — to tell starving beggars where we just found a sumptuous banquet. It is God who regenerates the heart and it is that same God that uses us to give them the right hand of fellowship into the family of God! Praise God that he still uses His children in this manner!

September 11
1 Peter 3:15-16
By Ali

“But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.” (1 Peter 3:15)

Taken by itself, verse 15 could well be speaking generally of apologetics. The context reveals it is about our Christian response to persecution.

Much has been made, and rightly so, of the suffering of our Middle Eastern brothers and sisters at the hands of ISIS. One of Scripture’s messages to them, and to us, is that when we are reviled for our faith in Christ, it is an opportunity to explain why we are people of such great hope, rather than people paralyzed by fear and anxiety. 1 Peter 3:15-16 is an exhortation to boldness about the gospel in the face of maltreatment by

people whose eyes are blinded to God's grace. Evangelism in the context of persecution is proclaiming our inner hope to those who have no hope.

As with everything else the Lord lifts us to, our Christian calling with regard to evangelism is a very high calling. There is no prideful defense, no haughty claiming of our rights to better treatment. Instead, Peter tells us our attitude is to be gentle and respectful, consistent with our unassailable character reflecting Christ.

Peter's words shine brightly in our troubled times, when it is no longer difficult to imagine the stripping away of our religious freedoms resulting in our own suffering for Christ. Let us prayerfully prepare our hearts and our lives for the defense of the hope that God has placed inside us.

September 12

God's Role and Our Role in Evangelism (part 1)

2 Corinthians 4:1-7

By Rev. Alan Avera

While there is a pain line we have to cross in being a witness for Christ, we sometimes make it more difficult on ourselves by trying to do too much. The pain line we have to cross is fear of how people will respond. We never know when we open our mouth to speak of Christ whether we will face hunger or hostility. But we can make the task even more difficult if we try to do the work of the Holy Spirit.

In 2 Corinthians 4, the Holy Spirit teaches us through the Apostle Paul that evangelism is supernatural work. It is supernatural work because of the diagnosis of why unbelievers are unbelievers. The diagnosis, verse 4, is that "the god of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

If Satan has blinded the minds of unbelievers, then a supernatural work is required to overcome the work of Satan. Who opens blind eyes? Not us. That's the Holy Spirit's job. No amount of persuasion, apologetics, or clever argument will work unless God does the prior work of opening blind eyes. Verse 6 says, "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Evangelism begins with prayer for the Holy Spirit to open blind eyes. We can't cause that to happen, God does.

So what is our role? Verse 5 tells us. "For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." Our role is to proclaim Christ and to serve people for Jesus' sake.

September 13
God's Role and Our Role in Evangelism (part 2)
2 Corinthians 4:1-7
By Rev. Alan Avera

In yesterday's devotion, we saw that a supernatural work is required for someone to put their faith in Christ as savior. That supernatural work is an opening of blind eyes so that they see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. This is described in verse 6, "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

But God gives us a part to play in the process. Our part is to proclaim and to serve. Look at verse 5, "For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake."

What we proclaim is Jesus Christ as Lord. It's not about us, but about his authority and his glory. We don't have to put a spin on the gospel to try to make it more attractive. Verse 2 tells us, "We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God."

That's one reason the Christianity Explored course uses the Gospel of Mark to present the gospel. We believe the power is in the Word of God. God has given us four books that tell us about his son. Any one of them is a great place to start.

We not only proclaim, we also serve. We serve others for Jesus's sake. Serving begins by noticing. As Mary Schaller and John Crilly of Qplace Ministries put it, "Jesus was a noticer." A first step in serving people for Jesus sake is to notice people like Jesus notices them. Jesus noticed people because he came to seek and to save them.

September 14
Hebrews 4:9-10
By Rev. Andrew Savill

"So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from His." (Hebrews 4:9-10)

Presbyterians have held, based on Hebrews 4 and other passages, that God's rest was type witnessing to the joys of eternal life with Him. As we keep Sabbath, we witness to the world in word (read, preached, and spoken to others) and deed (resting and worshiping for a day) that there is eternal life and rest beyond the toil and misery of the fall through faith in Jesus Christ. We also will have many opportunities to give a reason for the hope that is in us, and thus to do the important work of personal evangelism.

Recently, my three oldest children (9,8,7) were invited to a birthday party on Sunday afternoon. Oh no, I thought, we've wanted to share the gospel with this single mother and this isn't going to help.

A few days later, I was outside and saw her. I told her that the children would not be able to go Sunday afternoon because we kept the Sabbath as a whole day to the Lord. I explained that we didn't keep Sabbath to earn our salvation, as we believe we are sinners forgiven and given eternal life and rest as a gift of grace through faith in Jesus Christ. But, we believe that God calls us to rest and worship Him for a whole day that we might honor Him, commune with Him, and be instructed and encouraged in our faith and hope.

Her response was, "That's really beautiful" and then asked about coming to church. I gave her the information and her and her son for ice cream at our house the next week to celebrate his birthday, which she did.

Why was I worried? I had forgotten that the Lord's Day is a witness to eternal life, and that keeping it is therefore a significant step towards fulfilling our calling to the important work of personal evangelism.

September 15
1 Thessalonians 1:7-8
By Rev. David Vance

"From you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything." (1 Thess. 1:7-8)

Paul and his fellow missionaries rejoiced that the Thessalonian church had already made their labors unnecessary in that region! This is how Christianity became a major world religion in the first three centuries, though it was illegal and persecuted for most of that time.

Church historian Philip Schaff gives this wonderful summary: "It is a remarkable fact that after the days of the Apostles no names of great missionaries are mentioned till the opening of the middle ages, when the conversion of nations was effected or introduced by a few individuals as St. Patrick in Ireland.... There were no missionary societies, no missionary institutions, no organized efforts in the ante-Nicene age; and yet in less than 300 years from the death of St. John the whole population of the Roman empire which then represented the civilized world was nominally Christianized. To understand this astonishing fact, we must remember that ... while there were no professional missionaries devoting their whole life to this specific work, **every congregation** was a

missionary society, and **every Christian** believer a missionary, inflamed by the love of Christ to convert his fellow-men. The example had been set by Jerusalem and Antioch, and by those brethren who, after the martyrdom of Stephen, 'were scattered abroad and went about preaching the Word'"¹

Celsus, the second-century pagan critic of Christianity, scorns the gospel as a message spread abroad by women at the laundry, weavers, and cobblers. Origen, in the early third century, describes how the city churches sent their members to herald the gospel in surrounding villages. May the church today regain this joyful ambition to become a great and glorious gospel army advancing under the banner of their gracious King, every congregation a missionary society, and every member a missionary.

¹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 2:1:6.

September 16

Matthew 5:13-16

By Rev. Nathan Scholl

It has been a hot summer. Thus, my kids like to play in water. One of their favorite ways to play in water is to get out the little plastic pool and fill it with water in the front yard. What fun! But I am always careful to move the pool back to the rocks the same day that the kids brought it out. Why? Because if I don't, the grass underneath the pool will wither and die. The grass needs light. Light is indispensable to the health, growth and life of my yard. This same principle was true in daily life in Biblical times when it came to salt. Salt was indispensable to the health, growth and life of people. It preserved, it purified, and it fertilized.

Sometimes we like to think God may not want or need us to accomplish his purposes on this earth. But that is not the message of Matthew 5:13-16. Our witness as disciples of Jesus Christ is of vital importance to the world!

Our witness to the world starts with the gracious activity of God. God the Father knows and seeks us, God the Holy Spirit works in and through us, and God the Son died for us and gives us a new life. And with this new life comes a new identity. This **new identity is truly a powerful force** at work in this harsh and dark world.

We are given the same identity as the first disciples in Matthew 5. We are the salt and the light of the earth. This is a big deal. The mission is to see the world glorify our Father in heaven, and we have been given a key role in that process. We are, every one of us, of vital importance for the accomplishment of God's purpose in the world. We constitute the salt and light without which the earth cannot survive and remains in

darkness. This mission of God is accomplished in the words and deeds of our daily existence. What a privilege!

When people taste and see the Kingdom at work in our words and our lives: They are amazed and curious. They want more. For this, this is real life and real love and real hope found in Jesus Christ alone.

September 17

Haggai 1:13

By Rev. Don Watkins

According to the authors of *Way of the Master* evangelism training program, the greatest obstacle to believers sharing their faith is fear. Fear of people and how they will react to the message and more significantly, react to them.

We can learn from an Old Testament prophet, Haggai, how to motivate ourselves and others to share the gospel. The key factor is not letting our fears control us-- fear of rejection, fear of embarrassing ourselves, fear of not knowing what to say. In Haggai 1:13 we read, "Then Haggai, the LORD'S messenger, spoke the LORD'S message to the people, saying 'I am with you, says the LORD.'" Isn't that what we are, messengers of the Lord? The Great Commission in Matthew 28 confers messenger status on all of us: "Go therefore..." And the message is the message of the gospel, the life, death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The good news that God has come to save sinners who will place their trust in him and what he has done on their behalf.

We read in Haggai 1:12 that "the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him, and the people feared the presence of the LORD." The returned exiles had plenty to be afraid of. They had returned 20 years earlier and started rebuilding the temple, but the project had been stalled for at least 16 years due to various parties who opposed them. The key to the returnees facing down their fears was to have a greater fear of God. And the key to overcoming our fears of people and how they might react when we tell them about Jesus is to have a greater fear of God.

John Donne, seventeenth century pastor of St. Paul's in London, found himself apparently afflicted by the same deadly plague that was afflicting many in London. He wrote that he was afraid of everything during that time. He prayed that God would give him a "fear of which he was not afraid." That is the fear of God. He found that when he was not fearing God he feared everything, and when he feared God he feared nothing. May the Lord give us a greater fear of Him than the fear we have of sharing the gospel message he has given us, his messengers, to share.

September 18

John 3:16

By Rev. Mark Bolhofner

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Say what Jesus said. Use his words in John 3:16 to share the gospel. And as you do, help the person to whom you are speaking relate to what you're saying by adding some of your own connection to what Jesus said.

Jesus says a Christian is someone who does not perish, but has eternal life. Can you recall not knowing what it was like to know you had eternal life? Or maybe the way knowing you have eternal life has really given you hope in a difficult time? Share that.

Jesus says God so loved the world that he gave his only son. Can you recall when you first grasped that Jesus died for you? When it became personal to you? Can you recall how knowing Jesus paid for your sin has helped you when you've felt burdened by some sin you committed? Put that into words.

Jesus says whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. Can you recall when you trusted in Christ instead of anything you might do for a relationship with God? Can you recall the peace that brought, or some way it immediately changed your life? Can you recall how being "saved by faith, and not by works" has reassured you in life? Describe that.

Say what Jesus said, and make it personal, relate it to your life.

September 19

Romans 1:16

By Lee Shelnutt

When we share the *gospel*, we herald Jesus! We are *royal heralds of the King of Kings!* What is *there to fear if he is our King?* The Apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, *heralded a subversive message:* For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (Romans 1:16)

When are we tempted to be ashamed of the *gospel?* Isn't it when we think we might face opposition, ridicule, or even persecution?

On his desired trip to Spain, Paul wanted to stop at Rome to minister in the church to which he wrote. Where? Rome, the very seat of the most powerful ruler in the world of that day, the Roman Caesar - Nero!

The official titles of the Caesars included, “*Son of God.*” The birthdays of Caesars were heralded as “Good News.” The Caesars demanded loyalty and would even demand to be worshiped.

Into that context, Paul is unashamed of the gospel - Jesus is the true Caesar. It is Jesus who is the true Son of God and it is Jesus who has true power - the power over sin and death, for Jesus is the resurrected One who has ascended to the highest throne. One day every knee shall bow and tongue confess that *he* is Lord!

Do you see how much of a challenge the gospel was to the earthly powers of that day? Do you see how gloriously subversive it was? You know what? It still is! May the true Lord give us grace never to forget this and faith not to fear for we know our King is truly King of *Kings and Lord of Lords!*

September 20

Jude 1:20-23

By Rev. Justin Westmoreland

*"But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; **save others by snatching them out of the fire**; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh."* (Jude 1:20-23)

Recently, my family moved into a new home on a Friday. The next Monday, my wife was unpacking in the boys room and believed she smelled smoke coming from our attic. At her call, I ran upstairs to investigate. We could not locate a fire or its cause, but we knew that smell was foreign to our home and it was dangerous and it was highly important to solve the mystery. Faced with this unsolvable, urgent problem, I dialed 9-1-1 and asked for a fire truck to be sent to our home. The firefighters discovered a smoking bird's nest in the light fixture of a ceiling fan on our back porch. Had we not called for help and they not discovered it and called the NFD, our new home would have burned to the ground.

C. S. Lewis once wrote, *"Christianity is either true and of infinite importance or not true and of absolutely no importance, but one thing Christianity can never be is moderately important."*

Our current cultural moment demands that the ARPC be filled with churches who share this valid inference from studying Scripture with everyone they encounter. As a pastor, and now a man who has been a Christian longer than I was an unbeliever, I am thoroughly convinced of this truth. My actions, however, do not always present Christianity as if it is of infinite importance. Many other urgent and even mundane

matters give my neighbors the false perception that I only believe that Christianity is moderately important. Many people in Norman, OK wrongly affirm that it doesn't matter what one believes, as long as he or she believes sincerely and doesn't take others to task if he or she disagrees.

Friends, we live in communities filled with homes with smoking bird nests threatening to ignite. Our first task is to open the attic filled with smoke—something stinks. Our second task is to lead them to call for help by calling upon the one name under heaven through which mankind may be saved: Jesus Christ.

September 21

Mark 16:15

By Rev. Heiko Burklin

Jesus said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." (Mark 16:15)

Tim Keller writes, "the book of Galatians is dynamite; it is an explosion of joy and freedom." Why? Because the essence of that brief Pauline letter is about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the best news ever and it is for everyone. It is revolutionary.

Our challenge is: how to get that message out to the people, friends, family members, neighbors. What do I need to make that happen? Let's think in 4 steps:

1. **Experience the gospel myself:** I need to be gospel-saturated, feeding off the Good News, living in the flow of God's grace, experiencing the Father-heart of God. Before I can even begin to think about sharing the gospel, it needs to affect all of my being.
2. **Know how to verbalize the gospel:** I need to know the essence of the gospel, to be able to explain it succinctly and precisely. Many tools are available: the Roman Road, Evangelism Explosion, 4 Spiritual Laws, etc. Learn to use at least one. Make it your own.
3. **Plan to share:** think in terms of you being responsible for the neighbors living around you. God has placed you in that spot for a reason that goes beyond convenience, school district zones, property values, family connections, etc. Feel responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of your neighborhood.
4. **Pray for opportunities:** pray that the Lord of the harvest would provide divine appointments.

September 22

2 Timothy 4:5

By Rev. Greg Duke

“As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” (2 Timothy 4:5)

Day by day they sit there, squarely tucked between the front windshield and dashboard of my truck. Every now and then they're pulled away to load some firewood, hook up a utility trailer, or for some other difficult work. But over the years my old leather work gloves have fulfilled a much grander kingdom purpose in serving as a daily reminder that I am to do the difficult work of evangelism.

This glove idea came to me soon after reading of the life and ministry of Alexander Maclaren; a great Scottish preacher of the 19th Century. History tells us that Maclaren (known as “The Prince of Expositors”) daily wore an old clunky pair of work boots into his study to remind him that his study and sermon preparation was to be a difficult work. He was an excellent expository preacher and evangelist. Maclaren had his work boots. I have a pair of gloves.

It is an understatement to say that evangelism is hard work. More often than not, it's extremely messy and painful work wading into the complicated lives and jacked up thoughts of broken people. Some may find it easier, or perhaps think it best, to spend their time with spiritually like-minded individuals who live and think like them. But we're called to more as the body of Christ. We're called to a gospel partnership with God the Holy Spirit in evangelism as we make disciples of all nations. Besides, is it not unbelievably exciting and rewarding to see men and women come to faith after having gently, patiently, and freely offered the gospel of redemption in Christ to them? And here's one more quick thought as we consider our hard work in the area of evangelism. Maclaren said, “If you would win the world, melt it, do not hammer it.”

September 23

John 14:6

By Rev. Peter Kemeny

What about those who have never heard? The Bible is unyielding in its claim that Christ's work on the cross is God's only provision for the salvation of sinners. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except

through me” (John 14:6). Peter preached, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Paul wrote, “there is one mediator between God and men” (I Timothy 2:5).

If there were other ways for sinners to be made right with a holy God, then surely the Father would have allowed Jesus, who prayed, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me” (Mt. 26:39), to circumvent the cross.

But, what about those who have never heard the gospel? Three things may be said in reply.

First, remember that God does not send people to hell for never hearing about Christ. He sends them to hell for their sin, and is just to do so.

Second, if those ignorant of the gospel *can* be saved, then evangelism has the unintended consequence of sending millions of people to hell, for it has given men a knowledge of the gospel for which they are now culpable.

Third, the desperate need for unbelievers to hear the gospel is why we are to tell others of Jesus. The apostle Paul wrote, “But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” (Romans 10:14).

What about those who have never heard? We are to tell them. Pray that the Lord will give you an opportunity today for a gospel conversation.

September 24

Acts 16:14

By Ken

“The Lord opened her (Lydia’s) heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.” (Acts 16:14)

In keeping with Luke’s observation that Lydia’s open heart was a work of God, many observe that this and Luke’s other accounts in Acts should rightly be titled “The Acts of the Holy Spirit” rather than “The Acts of the Apostles.” But alongside this wonderful truth of God’s initiating and completing work is His calling work among us to go, speak, disciple, baptize, and teach.

In this 16th chapter of the “Acts of the Holy Spirit,” Dr. Luke suddenly changes from using the pronoun “they” (Paul, Barnabas, Mark, Silas, etc.) to “we”: “immediately we sought to go into Macedonia” (after trying to enter “Asia” and “Bithynia”); “we made a direct voyage to...Philippi;” “we remained in this city some days;” “we went...to the riverside;” “we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.” And then it says, “the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.”

I urge you, like Dr. Luke, to change the stories of the “Acts of the Holy Spirit” in your world from “they” to “we.” Join a Paul, or a Silas, or a Luke in your church, “seek to go,” go immediately and directly, let God direct and redirect you as you go, stay long enough to speak repeatedly where people gather (by the river, in the market, in homes, and even in the synagogue), and watch God open hearts, just as the Lord did by the river in Philippi. God opens hearts when we open our mouths!

September 25

Romans 10:15

By Steve Nichols, ARP Foundation

And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” (Romans 10:15)

My real estate broker friend asked if we could meet his buddy at Denny’s for breakfast on Friday. “He’s a business associate of mine and is struggling with his life and family; maybe you could share the gospel with him.” Of course! See you then.

Over breakfast, we talked long enough to know he was indeed struggling, but wary of religion. I’m not very confident at sharing my faith and for sure not in such a noisy, public setting – I was as nervous to share as he was to listen. But, God was gracious to open his heart to understand the difference between religion and relationship with a simple gospel message: “Do you know Christ personally?” “No, but I would like to know Him!”

The three of us prayed together as my new brother declared his desire to accept Jesus’ gift of forgiveness and asked Him to take control of his life. I wasn’t sure if he was sincere, or just didn’t want to disappoint – regardless, he had clearly asked the Lord to take charge of his life.

Ten years later, I got an amazing phone call: “Is this the Steve that shared the gospel with me in Denny’s? Yes, I am the guy. “I wanted to find you and tell you God has changed my life -- I have been able to share my testimony in my business circles now for many years – may I send you a copy?”

What better news could I get! My lack of expertise was trumped by availability -- to step out of my comfort zone and trust God for the results. The Lord faithfully returns His Word with joy!

September 26

Acts 1:6-11

By Rev. John Tucker

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 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." And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." (Acts 1:6-11)

In Acts 1:11 Jesus prepares his disciples to reach the world with the Gospel. He has taught his church for 40 days about the kingdom of God. He expands our vision for a worldwide kingdom that will be completed when he returns. He promises the coming of the Holy Spirit to accomplish this great task. He gave this Great Commission and ascended up into heaven where he is crowned king and his claim to glory validated. These verses are a part of what we commonly call the Great Commission but sadly the Great Commission has become the great omission. Jesus tells us how to regain the vision of the Great Commission.

1. We need the worldwide vision of Jesus (v. 6). The Apostles were concerned about the coming of the Kingdom that would be local and restricted to Israel. Jesus' vision was for the gospel was to reach every nation of the world. We omit the Great Commission when our vision is too small. The Great Commission is about an enlarged vision for the great throng of people worshipping in Rev. 4:9-10 from every tribe, language and people.
2. We need the eschatological vision of Jesus (v. 7 & 11). The Apostles, like people today were more concerned about date setting and wanted to know when he would return. Jesus does not satisfy inquiring minds but gets us back to the vision of the Second Coming, which is the spread of the gospel. The Kingdom of God is a present reality and will one day be consummated and time will come to an end. We look forward to that glorious day. Until then we are motivated to reach people with the gospel by love for God and lost people.
3. We need a Holy Spirit centered vision of Jesus (v. 8). He promises us power through the Holy Spirit to be his witnesses. While every Christian is not called to be an evangelist like the great D.L. Moody or Billy Graham, we are all called to be witnesses, beginning in our own community and extending to the entire world. Billy Graham may preach the gospel better than many of us, but he does not preach a better gospel.

4. We need the vision of victory (v. 9-11). The ascension of Christ is something we profess in the Apostles Creed but neglect in practice. The crowning of Christ as King in Rev. 4-5 is the affirmation and acknowledgement of Christ's resurrection from the death.

The Great Commission is my commission and your commission. We are at a crisis point in the world when it has never been darker, or more hopeless morally and spiritually. If we are coming to impact our world it has to be with the gospel. Do you need to expand your vision for the gospel to be as big as Jesus'?

September 27

John 4:1-42

By Rev. Roger Wiles

I was walking in downtown Raleigh with my son one day. As we past the courthouse steps I notice a number of homeless, sick, and poor people on the steps. Like most people, I made sure not to make eye contact. I moved as near to the street as possible to avoid the smell. Then I picked up the pace to make it difficult for anyone to ask me for money. As I got farther down the street I looked back for my son. He was kneeling down talking to some of those people I had just so skillfully avoided. When my son caught up with me, I asked him why he had stopped? He said, "Dad, no human being deserves to be ignored."

In John 4:1-42, Jesus went to Samaria and encountered a woman living in sin. She had come to draw water in the heat of the day. She was an outcast from her own people. She seemed surprised that anyone, much less a Jew, would speak to her. Yet, God in the flesh engaged her in conversation around her daily routine of drawing water from a well. He told her of an ". . . everlasting spring of water welling up to eternal life." To which she responded, "Sir, give me this water" The woman believed. She told others. Many in her village said, ". . . this man really is the Savior of the world." Indeed!

When was the last time you went to a place out of your comfort zone, to speak to someone not like you about the saving grace of God, that they might believe in Jesus and be saved? Sadly, for too many of us the honest answer is "never." Set your heart to tell someone about Jesus today!

September 28

Matthew 28:18-20

By Wes Spring

I used to pray that God would place someone in my path that I would be able to share the gospel message with. A good friend of mine and I were having that exact discussion

one day. He suggested that perhaps I was missing the point of the Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20). As we continued our conversation, it became clear to me that perhaps he was right. I was depending on God to place a persona whom I would feel comfortable sharing my faith based on my self-assessment of my personal comfort and skill level.

God asks us to live our lives for Christ each and every day by our words and deeds. We each answer that call in our own way. Some become evangelists, pastors, and mission field workers. Others answer his call as volunteers in teaching Sunday school classes, elders, deacons, and small group leaders. The majority of Christians seek full time employment and careers in the secular world. We are called to share our faith and become role models for the Christian way of life by our actions and deeds as well as our words and language.

As my friend pointed out illustrating the words from the hymn, “and they will know we are Christians by our love,” God is not asking me to preach or to convince anyone, but to merely live my life in a way which will be a positive influence on others. My career as a management consultant afforded me daily opportunities in my interactions with clients to present the gospel just by my presence. As I taught leadership classes, I began to engage the audience in stories which illustrated God’s grace and mercy. I prayed for the Holy Spirit to give me the courage and strength to be bold as I assisted men and women in developing ways to bring to out the best in their people.

When I look out my front door, I constantly see opportunities to live out the gospel. Someone needs a kind word, a helping hand, encouraging smile or even a hug. I know that I am equipped already to speak those words, lend that helping hand, providing that smile, and gladly give that hug. God made us in his own image so be bold today and look out your front door. You will be blessed for it, I promise.

September 29

Jeremiah 29:4-7

By Rev. Morrie Lawing

We are now living in a post-Christian culture. Just a few generations ago, unwed pregnancy, “living together” and disrespect to parents were no-no’s and a homosexual lifestyle was shameful. By and large, Christian values were the morals of the majority. But, no longer. Today, those who accept evil as good and call good evil are our neighbors, and we are living among them. How are we to live in this evil age, in this Babylon?

“This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: “Build houses and settle down...Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you in exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”
(Jeremiah 29:4-7)

As Christians, we are pilgrims who have not yet arrived home to the New Jerusalem. We are people living in Babylon. We may be concerned to know how to personally evangelize our neighbor. Yet it may better serve the cause of Christ—long before we ever say anything— to start by asking: “How am I living in the presence of my neighbor? Do I seek to bless my neighbor? Do I pray for my neighbor?” Do I *really* love my neighbor as Christ loved me while yet a sinner? Loving and serving my neighbor and seeking the prosperity of my city may be the best groundwork for sharing the gospel. It takes time, effort and sacrifice. Let us pray to the LORD as we love our neighbors paving the way for the gospel seeds to take root in their hearts.

For an amazing example of this kind of living in “Babylon” see Rosaria Butterfield’s books *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* and *Openness Unhindered*.

September 30

John 4:35

By Jonathan Cowan

Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. (John 4:35)

Harvest comes early in Northern Maine and Western New Brunswick. In August the potato fields are full of white flowers, indicating an abundant harvest to come. Almost every fall this presents a great challenge. The local ads ask for laborers. Time is of the essence, the harvest plentiful and the laborers few. Jesus is describing a similar idea about evangelism. In another place Jesus states:

The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. (Luke 10:2)

It is interesting to note, as Jesus is describing fields white for harvest, where he is located. He is neither in Jerusalem nor his hometown. Jesus is in Samaria. He is speaking of a people long despised by the Jews. Why is Jesus there? John 4:4 states Jesus had to go to Samaria. Humanly speaking Jesus did not, but divinely speaking he had to, for the fields were white for harvest. The harvest was among the despised. So often we can get fixated on our “target audience,” that we do not lift our eyes to see our savior’s call. The fields are white for harvest. The despised, the down trodden, the immigrant, the “enemy” are all in that field. Our unfriendly neighbor, our uncomfortable relative, our friend at work, the one from the wrong side of the tracks could be in that field. The challenge, according to Christ, is never finding the harvest. It is going into the fields. The fields are white for harvest. Will you go?