

Evangelism

Week 3: “Illustrations”

Hook



Main Point: No one accidentally shares the Gospel. It is a prioritized commitment and focused endeavor.

Personal Story from Young Singles Minister Chase Sims: When I was growing up, my family had a fish camp on the coast that we would visit every weekend during the summer. We would ski and swim every afternoon and then fish deep into the night to set the table for each evening’s celebratory feast.

One weekend, we were at the boat ramp putting Dad’s bass boat in the river when he turned to my brother and me and said he had to go into town for the afternoon, and it was our responsibility to take the boat and catch the fish. We loaded the gear and took to the river with a mission to fish. By this time, it was about one o’clock in the afternoon, the water was as smooth as glass, and we had plenty of time to catch fish. So, we decided to break out the skis, kneeboard and inner tube and take on the river for a few hours before filling the boat with fish for the evening’s feast. We played, explored, and rode the river for a few hours with every intention of catching fish. After all, that was our ultimate goal from the beginning!

At four o'clock, just three short hours later, with plenty of sunlight to spare, Dad called back and said, "It's time to clean and cook the fish. Come on back to the house."

"But, Dad!" I exclaimed, "We have plenty of time left to catch fish! Our boat is empty!"

Dad responded, "It's time for dinner. Come back home."

My brother and I made our way back to our father's feast and stood sun-burned and wind-chapped, yet empty-handed. "Where are the fish?" my father exclaimed.

"The same place they were when we got here," we regrettably replied. "We were going to catch the fish, Dad. We just thought we had more time."

Discussion Questions:

- *How does someone make evangelism a priority?*
- *What are the consequences for a believer who fails to share his faith?*

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Lesson Summary: Today’s lesson is the last of three in an evangelism series. Lesson three provides three examples of witnessing from the New Testament.

Illustration 1: The Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26–40)

Sub Point: Evangelism is an intentional commitment.

Verses 26–27: Choose to become active in sharing your faith.

Philip has just come out of a revival in Samaria where he preached and saw many repent, believe, and be baptized. He is on his way back home to Jerusalem when the Lord prompts him to head south toward Gaza on a less-traveled road to a place that was mostly desert. Philip doesn’t “stumble upon” this opportunity to speak the soul-saving, life-changing truth of the Gospel; instead, he heard and heeded the Lord’s voice to “go” and he made an intentional commitment to do so.

No one *accidentally* shares his or her faith and articulates the Gospel; it is a commitment to obey Christ’s command and actively seek opportunity by the Spirit’s prompting. When Jesus calls His first disciples, He says that He will make them (and us) “fishers of men.” Have you ever heard of anyone waking up, getting dressed, preparing for the day, and *accidentally* catching a fish on the way to work? In order to catch a fish, you have to find a body of water with fish, take the necessary tools, and commit to fishing. A believer’s commitment to share his faith must be equally as intentional. The fisherman who does not frequent the lake will not taste the sweet satisfaction of the harvest.

- *What are some practical ways to create space and opportunity for evangelistic conversations?*
- *How does someone become more attuned to the promptings of the Holy Spirit?*

Verses 29–40: Earn the right to invite.

Philip was an apostle. The eunuch was a high-ranking official for the Ethiopian queen. Only the economically elite of their day had the financial means to enjoy the luxury of a chariot as the

eunuch did. Philip saw his God-given opportunity when he heard the man reading the Scriptures aloud. He ran over, engaged in conversation, and helped the eunuch understand what he was reading.

We live in a time and place where most of our neighbors, coworkers and classmates have enough knowledge about Jesus and His Church to make them disinterested. Our daily lives are filled with people who have grown up in or around a church, know the stories of the Bible, and can recite John 3:16 on the spot. However, their issue isn't *knowledge* as much as it is *trust*. They're scared of or scarred by the Church in some capacity that has created a gulf of distrust. This eunuch was a religious man who longed to understand the things of God and the truths of His Word. Many of our neighbors and coworkers *think* they don't want anything to do with Jesus and the Church because they have never truly understood the Gospel of Jesus and the eternal kind of life that He promises.

Let us learn from Philip: earn the right to say "come" by first taking the intentional step to "go" into the chariots of the doubting, confused, frustrated, lonely world of the one who knows a lot about Jesus, but has never trusted Him personally. Heed God's call to go, seek God's opportunity to speak, and maximize God's divine doors to invest in those whom God has placed in your circle so that they can taste the sweet satisfaction and experientially know/trust the tangible goodness of God.

- *What principles can we learn and imitate from Philip's engagement with the eunuch?*
- *What are some practical things a Christian can do to gain trust and "earn the right" to say "come"?*

Illustration 2: The Philippian Jailer (Acts 16:25–34)

Sub Point: Evangelism is about people, not tasks.

Verse 25: Be mindful of the impressions you make.

Acts 16 finds Paul and Silas being imprisoned for doing the work of the ministry. The men were serving in Philippi and came across a slave girl who was possessed; due to her possession, she was able to foretell the future, bringing wealth to her owners. Paul exorcised the demon, infuriating the owners, and landed himself and Silas in jail. The charges levied were disturbing the city and advocating customs that were not lawful for Romans to practice. Roman colonies (like Philippi) allowed their inhabitants to practice their own religions; however, proselytizing

was against the law. Further damaging to the case of Paul and Silas was an attitude of anti-Semitism, a result of Emperor Claudius' decree that all Jews must leave Rome (Acts 18:2).¹

Jailing, as a result of bigotry and freeing a young woman from spiritual bondage, would most certainly take an emotional toll. However, the passage indicates that instead of furiously pleading their case or expressing displeasure, the men were singing and praying in their cell. Their joyful praise caught the attention of the other inmates who were listening attentively to the bizarre sounds coming from Peter and Silas's cell.

Before any Gospel-centered conversation was initiated, the captive disciples had already made a significant impression on anyone within earshot. The way in which the men responded to their poor and unmerited circumstances would either help or harm their case when the time came to share the hope they possessed.

Attitude gives insight to the health of one's heart. The disciples' response to God's character, and not their circumstances, reflected their trust and commitment to the Lord. Their choice to rejoice in the Lord painted a clear picture to the inmates and the jailer of the genuine nature of the Christ-followers' faith. The inmates were listening attentively, no doubt awestruck by such unique behavior. This time of singing and prayer would later earn Paul and Silas the opportunity to speak truth into the life of the jailer. Many believers cause harm to their potential to share the Gospel because of their dispositions. Does your attitude reflect your hope? You cannot control the circumstances around you, but you can control the way in which you respond.

- *How does a believer rise above responding in sheer emotion to circumstances?*
- *How are attitudes and actions connected?*

Acts 16:26–27: Prioritize others first.

This section of the story parallels the plight of Peter in Acts 12. Peter, a disciple, was locked away in prison and facing death. An angel appeared to Peter, released him from his shackles and ushered him out of the jail. When Herod learned of the event, the sentries responsible for Peter's detention were put to death.

Unlike the story in Acts 12, there are no specific directions from an angel for Silas and Paul to leave their captivity. Instead, the disciples have a choice: their preference (freedom) or the well-being of another (the life of the jailer). The miracle on that day in the Philippian jail was

¹ Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 399–400.

not meant to be an escape from captivity for the disciples, but an escape from the captivity of sin for the jailer.

Effectively sharing the Gospel often means putting yourself last. Your desires, comfort, finances and your schedule must play a secondary role when you encounter the lost. Believers are often confronted with divine appointments, seemingly happenstance introductions that have been orchestrated by God so that the Gospel might be shared.

The question is not whether or not you will have the opportunity to be used to evangelize, but instead what you will do with that opportunity. Your decision-making process is informed by your values. The lost were close to the heart of Paul; his priorities were informed by that value.

- *Describe a time in which you experienced a divine appointment.*
- *Compare the circumstances of the imprisonments of Peter and Paul. When presented with an opportunity, how does a believer make the best choice?*
- *Read 1 Corinthians 9:19–23. Based on these verses, how would you describe Paul's priorities? How does Paul view his freedom in Christ compared to the opportunity to effectively evangelize?*

Verses 27–34: Be sensitive to others' needs.

Understanding the consequences for the escape of prisoners, the jailer prepared to take his life. As he clutched his sword, seconds from committing the act, Paul screamed for him to cease—no one had fled. His shout did not concern the man's sin nor the horrible fate the jailer would have been ushered into upon his death, or the hope of heaven. Paul gauged the situation and addressed the man's perceived need first: The inmates were accounted for; no harm would befall the jailer.

Perceived needs are those which are understood and therefore believed to be real. Actual needs are those which are real needs but perhaps not yet understood. Effectively communicating the Good News of Jesus requires the believer to acknowledge the perceived needs of the lost. These perceived needs include the need to receive love from others, to be recognized at work, to engage in a romantic relationship, and a litany of other possibilities; but *their actual need is Jesus*. The evangelist begins where the lost are and walks them toward the truth.

The jailer must have heard the disciples worshipping through the night and now he discovered that these men stayed when most others would have run. The result of what he had heard and his interaction with Paul led him to seek salvation. Not only the jailer, but his family, too, were released from the captivity of sin.

- *Think about your conversion experience. What were your perceived needs at the time? How did the Lord reveal your actual need to you?*
- *How does the evangelist help someone move from the perceived to the actual need?*

Illustration 3: Matthew, the Tax Collector (Luke 5:27–29)

Sub Point: The Gospel is for everyone.

Verses 27–28: Decide to be impartial.

Matthew was a tax collector in the ancient world. Tax collectors were hated because they were often dishonest, disrespected and disgusting to those around them. However, Jesus, showing perfect impartiality, approaches Matthew while he is sitting at his tax booth and calls him from a profession of dishonesty to a life of following the Truth. Verse 28 tells us that Levi (Matthew) “left everything and followed him.” The very next verse begins, “And Levi made Him (Jesus) a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at the table with them.”

- *The tax collectors were seen as pariahs by their culture. Whom would you identify as the “tax collectors” of our culture?*
- *How can believers best reach these “tax collectors”?*
- *How does someone fight his or her own partiality?*

Verse 29: Recognize that God has given you a story and people with whom to share it.

Matthew wasted no time inviting his friends to Jesus. There were no magic words to memorize, no formal training to accomplish, and no prerequisite for evangelism other than knowing and enjoying Jesus. Matthew jumped up from the tax booth where his sin was king and brought Jesus to his house for the purpose of throwing a party to introduce Him to his sinful, tax-collecting friends.

Matthew responded to Jesus’ call by immediately going home and hosting a party for his and Jesus’ and tax-collecting friends. He took the circle of influence and relationships that God had given him in his sin and used it for Gospel opportunity. In our response to go, chances are that you don’t have to go very far to find people in your circle who don’t know Christ. Our minds are so programmed to think of “missions” or “mission trips” as “some place that we go.” In reality, *life is a mission trip*. God has placed you where you are for a purpose. God has placed you among the people in your office, your classroom, your house, your grocery store and your neighborhood as a missionary. Prepare a meal, invite your circles, and bring them to the table with Jesus.

- *Describe the last time God used your faith story to influence a lost person.*

- *What are some creative ways in which you have introduced the Gospel to your circle of influence?*

Evangelism

Week 2: “The Conversation”

Took



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Class Activity

Provide your class with pens and paper. Ask them to divide their paper into three sections: “Before I knew Jesus,” “How I came to know Jesus,” and “Now that I know Jesus.” Ask them to devote no more than three sentences to each of these sections to formulate their faith story. Challenge your students to prayerfully share their faith story with the individuals they wrote on their REACH cards.

Lesson Conclusion: The Good News of Jesus is a message for everyone. The Lord will place the lost in your path; you must make the decision to prayerfully and lovingly engage.