**Class 11, Evangelism: Sharing Christ with your Colleagues**

*If you have a bunch of great stories about workplace evangelism to sprinkle through the class, that’s great. In that case, eliminate or reduce the questions at the beginning, the second on being ambassadors at the end of the Introduction, and streamline the section on definitions.*

1. **Introduction**

Let’s start by clearing one thing up. I’m not leading this class because I’m some rock star evangelist. I do workplace evangelism, but I’m also convicted during talks like this that I don’t share the gospel nearly as much as I ought to, which frankly is a function of my weak faith and cowardice.

Let’s start with a few questions. Just a quick show of hands:

* 1. Raise your hand if you’ve ever shared the gospel with someone from your workplace.
  2. Raise your hand if you’ve ever had the opportunity to share the gospel with someone from work and **didn’t**? [Anyone want to share why not?]
  3. Raise your hand if the Lord has blessed you with the opportunity to see someone you’ve shared the gospel with at work come to saving faith in Christ. [Briefly share the stories]

Thank you for that. For those of us who *have* shared the gospel with colleagues from work—praise God for that boldness and faithfulness. We all know how scary that can be. For those who haven’t—well, this is a great opportunity to change that. Obviously, you’re here because you want to grow in that area. Whatever the case, your salvation is secure because of the finished work of Christ on the cross, not because of your good deeds. Good deeds don’t save, and they don’t improve our position in Christ. You can’t really improve your standing beyond being an adopted son or daughter of the Lord. But the joy of being his son or daughter should normally flow into evangelism—and that includes with our friends from work.

How does God see this? Well, look at how Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 5:17, 19 – 20:

If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! . . . And [God] has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

Did you ever think about that? As a Christian, you are a fully credentialed, decked-out ambassador of Jesus Christ, High King of the universe. God’s committed to *you* the message of reconciliation, the message of the good news that Jesus reconciles sinners to God. And guess what? That’s as true from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday as it is for any other hour of your life. When you go to church, you’re an ambassador for the King. When you hang out with friends, you’re an ambassador for the King. When you go to work, meet with a client, participate in a meeting, work on a project, drive a nail, create a blueprint, welcome a customer, or write a white paper, you’re an ambassador for the King. Evangelism isn’t the primary purpose for our work; God’s primary purpose for our work is that it bring him glory. Our work is mainly there to show off his work in us. But of course, a big part of that—a big part of being Christ’s ambassadors—is sharing the gospel with our coworkers.

So how can we faithfully share the gospel with people at work? That’s what we want the think about for the remainder of our time. Let’s start out by defining some terms.

1. **Defining Our Terms**
2. **Evangelism – What it is**

When we’re talking about evangelism, what are we talking about? What is evangelism?

It’s sharing the gospel. Calling the lost to repentance from their sins and placing their faith in Jesus Christ.

1. **Evangelism – What it isn’t[[1]](#footnote-1)**

Sometimes to get clarity around a definition, it’s helpful to think about what something is NOT

Evangelism is NOT an **Imposition** – Someone might ask, "Isn't it wrong to impose our beliefs on others?" (Given the way evangelism is often done, I can understand the confusion!) But when you understand what the Bible presents as evangelism, it's really not a matter of imposing your beliefs.

That’s because you’re not forcing people to convert against their will; you’re simply presenting a message and praying for God to do the work of conversion. And beyond that, you’re not having a conversation about the gospel against someone’s wishes; you’re responding to their own questions.

Evangelism is NOT sharing your **Personal Testimony** – It’s not telling people how you became a Christian. The risk there is that it’s about your personal experience. A testimony alone doesn’t convey to the person you’re speaking with that *they’ve* got a problem and that they too need a Savior.

Evangelism is NOT **Social Action and Public Involvement** – Getting someone to vote for a constitutional amendment isn’t evangelism. Protesting outside an abortion clinic isn’t evangelism. Feeding the poor, in and of itself, isn’t evangelism. It may commend the gospel, but there’s no saving power in your good deeds.

Evangelism is NOT **Apologetics** –You’re not sharing the gospel when you defend the authenticity of Paul’s letters to the Corinthians. You’re not evangelizing when you make your case for a virgin birth or the resurrection. You’re defending truth – praise God for that – but it’s not evangelism. As pastor, Andy Davis of FBC Durham, said, “You can’t check-mate someone into Heaven.”

A personal testimony, social action, and apologetics may all accompany evangelism—but they are not evangelism.

1. **What is the Gospel?**

So if evangelism is about sharing the gospel, what’s the gospel? In short, the good news of Jesus Christ – that He lived and died for the sin of all those who repent of their sins and put their faith and trust in Him.

I find it helpful to explain the gospel using four words: God, People, Christ, Response.

* **God** – God made us. He made us to show off how amazing he is.
* **Man** – But we’ve lived to show off ourselves instead. We’ve gone our own way and rebelled against God. The Bible calls this “sin.” And because God is a Good and Holy God, He’s right to judge us guilty of our sins and give us what we deserve, which is death and hell.
* **Christ** – But this is where Jesus fits. Fully God, Fully Man - He lived a perfect life but then—amazingly—died the death we deserved in our place on the cross. And God raise him to live three days later.
* **Response** – and that demands a response – that we turn from sin – turn from following our own way – and putting our faith and trust in Christ. (“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”)

If we aren’t sharing the gospel, we aren’t evangelizing.

1. **Evangelism Barriers**

So what are some of the more common reasons we don’t practice evangelism in our workplaces? Let me reel off a few:

**Fear of man** –We don’t want to be thought less of by our colleagues.

* + Losing our reputation. Somethings, it’s as simple as not wanting to be thought less of by our colleagues. We want to fit in, we want them to like us—and being known as an evangelical Christian gets in the way. We don’t want to rock the boat in our friendships, so we largely leave God out of the picture.
  + Losing our jobs. This is a real issue for many of us. We’ve had church members threatened with their jobs simply for responding honestly to questions about their faith by coworkers even when they’re not at work. MATTHEW 10:16 – “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” We need to be faithful—and wise.

But not all the barriers are sympathetic-sounding as that one. Here are some more:

**Time/Attention**. You get so wrapped up with work, you actually don’t think about evangelism much—or the eternal future of the people all around you.

**Propriety.** As Christians, we’ve got some of the same concerns about workplace evangelism as your HR department: we don’t want to be guilty of harassment or of creating a hostile work environment. And yet the most loving thing we can do for our friends and coworkers is to share the gospel with them. Figuring out how to do that in a way that’s appropriate can sometimes be paralyzing.

**Ill-prepared** – We actually don’t feel all that confident that we can articulate the gospel clearly. Mike Tyson once said, “Everybody’s got a plan until they get hit in the mouth.” Our memory of the gospel gets very unsteady when circumstances don’t line up in a way we’re comfortable.

**Don’t really know any non-Christians** – For some of us, a class like this makes us realize that while we have a lot of non-Christians as acquaintances, we have very few as actual friends.

**It’s discouraging** – Maybe you’ve shared the gospel a few times and you’ve seen no fruit from it. In fact, maybe you’ve been made fun of, or you’ve seen how it’s changed your relationship with someone you really liked in ways you didn’t anticipate.

Some reasons why, generally, we don’t evangelize. I bet you could add a few more. So what do we do about this?

**IV. Tools/Habits of a workplace evangelist**

Let’s get practical now about how we can grow in our evangelism in the workplace. There’s no magic formula here, just a starter list of effective practices that I’ve seen that can help us in our evangelism. I’ll split them up into things you do privately and things you do publicly.

**A. Privately – Behind the line of visibility**

1. **Pray** – First things first, pray. Pray for the lost around you. Pray for opportunities to share the gospel. Pray that you would grow in boldness. Pray that God would be big and people would be small.

And don’t just pray by yourself – pull your brothers and sisters into it—ideally other Christians at work. Tell other members of your church to pray for two or three people you see frequently who are lost. My friend Hunter led Jamie’s coworker Ashok to the Lord; had his men’s Bible study group praying for Ashok from the moment he started asking him about his Christian faith.

1. **Know the gospel** – in 1 min; 10 min; or 1 hr; I think memorizing the gospel and practicing it is really important because you want your mind clear when opportunity arises. Two Ways to Live is a great little booklet for getting the 1 minute version down.
2. **Adopt the right metrics** – Measure your evangelistic efforts by your faithfulness to clearly presenting the gospel. Don’t measure it by the response you get. The response will far more often be tepid, disinterested, condescending, maybe a little annoyed or downright angry. Our job is to faithfully present the message; God chooses to do the work. Now—if people are upset at you for sharing the gospel, it’s a good opportunity to see if they’re partly right. Maybe you’re to blame more than the gospel. But on the other hand, don’t assume that if you do everything just right, people will respond well.
3. **Cultivate humility** – Along these lines, understand that you’re likely to be thought less of in the workplace if you put Christ on the table and actually share the gospel with a colleague. And the temptation will be to guard your reputation more aggressively. No one wants to be thought of as a dimwit. But that may be exactly the consequence of aligning yourself publicly with Christ. Rather than fretting about this and making an idol of your reputation, consider Luke 14:27 where Jesus addresses the cost of discipleship. He says, “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me cannot be my disciple.” There’s a cost to following Christ – for some of us in the workplace, it may be negative consequences from being known as a Christian and sharing the gospel.

**B. Publicly – Out front**

1. **Put Christ on the table** - Everyone in your office should know that you’re an evangelical Christian, that your faith is central to you and that you’re a regular church-goer. If people don’t know you’re a follower of Christ, who are they going to talk to when they have religious questions?

Obviously you shouldn’t do this obnoxiously or irresponsibly. But maybe recounting your weekend, describing a Bible study that you’re in, leaving a Bible or a Christian book you’re reading on your desk or book shelf, sharing how you pray and generally putting “God on the table,” people will know. Make sure that you’ve taken a simple, initial, and oftentimes scary step and make sure that you are identified with Christ. The fact that this church is “Southern Baptist” can be a useful fact for people to know. I’ll be honest—associations people have with that phrase aren’t always positive. But knowing you’re in a Southern Baptist Church will tell people you really believe that Bible, that you are countercultural on social issues like gay marriage, that you believe in a real heaven and hell. Having those facts as background knowledge as they get to know the real you—assuming the real you counters some of their negative impressions about these things—can open up some valuable gospel conversations.

Let me make a few suggestions about being appropriately public with your faith:

*Ask good questions*

Questions are a great way to condition yourself to not be self-focused and self-absorbed. They draw people out, and they tend to cause people to ask you questions back…which occasionally creates opportunities to put Christ on the table.

Here are some useful questions:

* What are you reading right now?
* If I were to pop in on you on a Saturday or Sunday, what might I find you doing?
* Did you grow up in a religious family?

Which often leads to deeper questions, like…

* What does it mean to be Jewish/Hindu/Muslim/etc.?
* Tell me what Judaism/Hinduism/etc. teach about who God is?
* Christianity talks a lot about sin – the idea that all of us have gone our own way – that we’ve rejected God’s way for our lives. Is sin part of your faith?

Or consider making yourself available to provide a Christian perspective on topical issues – “I know marriage is in the news. I don’t know how many Christians you know, but if there are ever any questions you have about how someone of faith might see these big cultural issues, feel free to ask me.”

*Get to know your boss or direct reports*

In one sense, it can be hard to share the gospel with those in a reporting position. But on the other hand, those are generally some of the people you work with most closely. So make it your ambition to get to know them as people, not just as business associates. So you might say something like this: “I have found that the best managers I’ve worked for spent some time up front getting to know me and vice versa. So if it’s okay, can I ask what you like to do outside of work? If you didn’t have to do this for a living, what would you give more of your time to?” That usually opens up avenues for me to at least put my faith on the table.

Jamie’s talked about how he assumed that it would be nearly impossible to share the gospel with direct reports when he was in business—but in fact, those turned out to be most of the gospel conversations he had. Quite simply, as people began to trust him as a boss who had their best interests in mind, they began to ask for advice in personal matters outside of work. To which he’d often say something like, “well, you know I’m a pretty religious person. Is it OK if I give you a pretty religious answer to that question?” Enter the gospel.

*Get to know your coworkers outside of work.* You’ll notice that this is a class about evangelism to your coworkers—not necessarily evangelism in the workplace. Some workplace environments really are pretty hostile and persnickety about this. In talking to Christians who are in HR, what they say is that companies are really concerned about protecting against harassment and discrimination—as they should be. In general, I’d not advocate for having long gospel conversations on the job – you’re paid to work and be productive, so do your job well. But you also need to eat – so go out to lunch. Or have your colleagues over to the house for dinner. If you travel, see if you can expand the topic of conversation beyond work while you’re on the road together.

1. **Be excellent at what you do** – When you put Christ on the table, you need to understand that you’re also essentially volunteering to hold a giant microscope up over your head. So make sure that your work reflects the creativity, purpose, and goodness of God, the Great King.

Practically, you can work at this by trying to hold your work challenges up to the light of the gospel and see how your identity in Christ can have a profound practical impact on the way you are in your workplace:

* + - You are slaves to righteousness, so have integrity in all your business dealings (Rom 6:18)
    - You are assigned by God, so work with all your heart
    - You have been forgiven much, so extend grace to difficult people in your office
    - You are the aroma of Christ, so be joyful during your work day (2 Cor 2:15)
    - You are children of God, so “shine like stars in the universe as you hold outthe word of life.” (Phil 2:14-16)

As an aside, it’s amazing how much more leeway you get when you’re really good at your job and trustworthy in all your dealings.

1. **Build Relationships Lovingly -** While we don’t want our co-workers to be “projects”, we do want to be proactive and strategic about the relationships we build with co-workers.

The distinction between ulterior and ultimate motives might be useful. Having *ulterior* motive to evangelize in relationships with co-workers means that you don’t really value them as a person—they are merely a gospel project. Having an *ultimate* motive to evangelize is quite different. It means that you’re interested in forming a real friendship. You want to love them and serve them as you would every other friend. Ultimately, you hope to do that by sharing the gospel—but if that opportunity never arises, you don’t count that as a wasted relationship. After all, you’ve bettered the reputation of Christ in their life by being a good friend who’s known as a Christian. And who knows how God might use that.

Invest in the non-Christians in your workplace, not as projects but lovingly as those made in God’s image; and not superficially, but by sharing your life with them.

**4. Be Wise & Winsome (pleasant, endearing) and Not Worried and Wimpy**

Now, many of you here might be thinking: “I’m motivated and I want to build the Kingdom through evangelism, but, I also want to build my career and provide for my family.” And sometimes it feels like these are competing interests. How do I navigate that? Well, let’s just be honest: it can be hard.

- You’re new in an office and a controversial topic comes up and you know that a Biblical position on it will likely be at odds with what everyone else thinks. How should you respond?

- You have a good relationship with your boss, but you’re not exactly sure how it might affect your job status if he knew you thought he was going to hell. What’s the best way to broach the gospel? What if he asks you directly?

- Perhaps you’re friends with a lesbian coworker and you’re really not sure how to even discuss the gospel with her. How do you not immediately offend her and create a strained professional relationship?

- If you’re a manager or business owner, and you need to push others to get things done, how do you balance the bottom line of the company with a desire to invest in evangelism?

These things require a lot of judgment. But let me give you one word of wisdom here. The way most of us seem to be wise is to shut-up and to err on the side of not speaking about Jesus*. I want to push us to be more faithful to speak out, winsomely, but boldly.*

Have you considered that God might have you in a position to have awkward conversations and to spend some of your relational capital because he believes that you are an Ambassador who can handle it? You don’t need to be worried and wimpy: Jesus has already promised that “he will be with us to the very end of the age.” (Matt 28:20)

That doesn’t mean assaulting people with the gospel at the copier. It means praying for *good* opportunities to share the gospel. You’d be surpised how many good opportunities arise when we pray fervently for them, when we pursue colleagues as people not projects, when we’re not content to settle for mindless banter with coworkers, and when we pursue excellence in our jobs.

**5. Mobilization: *Have a “mission field” mind-set about your work.***

Have you ever considered that one of the reasons God may have deployed you to your job is so you can help break into a particular subculture with the message of the gospel? Throughout our society, there are countless groups of people who share much in common simply because they work in the same field. They speak the same jargon; they struggle with the same issues; they ask many of the same questions. And sadly, many of those subcultures are unreached people groups.

What group of people has the King deployed you to? Architects? Teachers? Auto salespeople? Thinking about it that way helps us to not get discouraged by the thought of millions of people who need to hear the gospel. Instead, we’re focused on a specific network of friends and relationships where we can speak truth that’s rarely heard.

You could also consider taking your job to another part of the world, even places where it may be difficult for career missionaries to go. The globalization of the business world is one of the most important developments in missions in all of history. Why not consider being an engineer in Shanghai? Do your business in Dubai, Istanbul, or Moscow, where millions of people from hundreds of nationalities live and work every day? These places need a strong gospel witness. Career missionaries who are already in many of these cities will be deeply encouraged by other Christians moving to their cities and putting their hands to the plow.

We could spend a lot of time talking about these initiates, but the most important part is to grow a heart for using your job in strategic places – either in the US or outside.

**V. Conclusion**

Let’s finish up with Paul’s encouraging words from 2 Corinthians 2.

**14**But 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.**15**For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, **16**to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? **17**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.

Let’s pray that we would be the aroma of Christ in the workplace.

1. From *The Gospel & Personal Evangelism* by Mark Dever [↑](#footnote-ref-1)