

# WHAT IS EVANGELISM?

## A TRUE STORY

God wants to be known. He didn't have to create anything. No one forced him. But the Bible says that he made everything for his glory. Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork." Isaiah 6:3 says, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" Isaiah 11:9 reveals God's plan for his creation: "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea." (See also Num. 14:21 and Hab. 2:14.) Isaiah 43:6-7 indicates that God made his children for his glory, and verse 21 says that God made his people so that they might declare his praise. Even the redemption of sinners through the cross of Christ, a plan made before the foundation of the world, was for the "praise of his glorious grace" and "to the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:6, 11, 14).

We often hear or read the word "glory," but what does it mean? The Hebrew and Greek words translated as "glory" refer to weight, value, riches, honor, or reputation. But theologian and pastor Jim Hamilton provides a more useful definition: "I would suggest that the glory of God is the weight of the majestic goodness of who God is, and the resulting name, or reputation, that he gains from his revelation of himself as Creator, Sustainer, Judge, and Redeemer, perfect in justice and mercy, loving-kindness and truth."<sup>1</sup>

When God made the first people, Adam and Eve, he made them in his image (Gen. 1:26-27). This does not mean that they looked like God. Rather, they were made to reflect God, his character, and his glory within his creation. They were supposed to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (Gen. 1:28). Since they were made in God's image, and since they were to multiply and fill the earth, we can assume that they were supposed to have children, who also would have children, all of whom would reflect God's glory. If they obeyed God, they would fill the earth with his glory.

Think of it this way: imagine the image of God as the logo of a sports team. Fans wear hats, sweatshirts, and t-shirts (and many other things) that bear the team's image. Since they are good fans, they continue to represent the team by sporting the team's logo (on mugs, bumper stickers, posters, etc.). Anyone else can see that they are fans of that team, and as the fans represent the image of the team in the world, they reflect the team's glory.

Well, Adam and Eve were supposed to be fans of God, so to speak. They were supposed to obey his commands and reflect his glory all across the world. As they tended the garden, they were supposed to subdue the area beyond the garden. The garden represented God's presence on earth. In other words, it was paradise. As Adam and Eve multiplied, they were supposed to subdue the rest of the world, the wilderness beyond the garden. The idea is that they would

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<sup>1</sup> James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 56.

continue to fill the earth until all of it was filled with people bearing God's image, reflecting his glory.

Of course, we know the story. Adam and Eve failed. They were cast out of the garden, and the whole creation was put under a curse.

God seems to have started over with Noah. After the flood, when everyone outside of Noah's family was destroyed in judgment, God gave Noah the command to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (Gen. 8:17; 9:1). It didn't take long for disobedience to enter into Noah's family (see Gen. 9:20-23), as well as curse (Gen. 9:25).

God seems to have started over, once again, with Abraham. The "be fruitful and multiply" language appears once again, though in a subtler form (Gen. 17:6; 22:17). This language is repeated to Abraham's son Isaac (Gen. 26:22, 24), his son, Jacob (Gen. 28:3-4; 35:11), and his children (Gen. 47:27; 48:4, 16; Exod. 1:7, 12). The basic idea remained the same: God's people were supposed to reflect his glory, multiply, and fill the earth, thus filling the earth with God's glory. God told Abraham that in him, all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3). Somehow, blessing and God's glory would emerge from this one man and his family.

After the nation Israel was brought out of Egypt, God made a covenant with them. If they obeyed his commandments, they would be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:6). If Israel obeyed God, they would reflect his glory to the nations around them. They would bless the nations around them by mediating God's presence. That's what priests do. They mediate between God and man.

Douglas Stuart, in his commentary on Exodus, understands the theological significance of this.

"Israel's assignment from God involved intermediation. They were not to be a people unto themselves, enjoying their special relationship with God and paying no attention to the rest of the world. Rather, they were to represent him to the rest of the world and attempt to bring the rest of the world to him. In other words, the challenge to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" represented the responsibility inherent in the original promise to Abraham in Gen 12:2-3: "You will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you ... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Priests stand between God and humans to help bring the humans closer to God and to help dispense God's truth, justice, favor, discipline, and holiness to humans.<sup>2</sup>

While the text doesn't say *how* Israel would be a kingdom of priests, Stuart believes that they would do this by being a good example to the world, proclaiming the truth of God to the world and inviting the world to come to God, interceding for the world, and being stewards of the promises of God.

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<sup>2</sup> Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 423.

The history of Israel is long, complex, and filled with many ups and downs. Though there were many faithful Israelites throughout history, as a nation, they failed. This was evident when the kingdom split after Solomon's idolatry and apostasy, and it was clear when both Israel and Judah were besieged by foreign countries because of their own idolatry and apostasy. Israel did not do a very good job of being a kingdom of priests.

Eventually, God sent Jesus, his son, to be what Adam, Noah, and Israel could not be. Jesus was the perfectly obedient son, the true king, the true priest, the true intermediary between God and man. Just as there were twelve tribes of Israel, Jesus called twelve disciples to himself. He taught them, he sent them out to preach (Matt. 10; Luke 10), and after he died and rose from the grave, he gave them the Great Commission:

<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20).

This commission, given to the disciples and to be taught to all other disciples, is essentially the one given to Adam and to Israel. But there are differences. Like the first people, the disciples are to be fruitful and multiply, but they do this through evangelism and discipleship, not necessarily through procreating. (Though you can surely evangelize and disciple your own children.) Adam and Eve were supposed to have dominion over the earth, under God's rule. Now Jesus, the second Adam, is the one who has dominion. Since he has all authority, his disciples can go out into the world with great confidence. Unlike Israel, which was supposed to bring people into Jerusalem to worship at the temple, the church, the new temple of God, is able to go out into world to fill it with God's glory as they make disciples. Jesus remains with all of his disciples, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, even to the end of the age.

At the end of Luke's gospel, Jesus shares a similar message:

<sup>44</sup> Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, <sup>46</sup> and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, <sup>47</sup> and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:44-49).

Then toward the beginning of Luke's sequel, the book of Acts, Jesus tells his disciples, "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" (Acts 1:8).

After Jesus ascends to heaven, this is exactly what happens. The disciples receive the Spirit, thus becoming the new temple, the dwelling place of God on earth.

Interestingly, the “be fruitful and multiply” language continues throughout the book of Acts. In Acts 6:7, we read, “And the word of God continued to *increase*, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.” Acts 12:24 reports that the “word of God *increased and multiplied*.” Acts 19:20 says, “So the word of the Lord continued to *increase* and prevail mightily.” One can read this language in Colossians, when Paul writes that “the word of the truth, the gospel” is “*bearing fruit and growing*” (Col. 1:5-6). Paul even prays that the Colossians would be “*bearing fruit* in every good work and *increasing* in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10).

The temple theme is picked up by Peter in his letter to Christians in Asia Minor. He writes, “you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5). He then writes, “But 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” (1 Pet. 2:9). Christians are now the “royal priesthood” (or, in Rev. 1:6, “a kingdom, priests to his God and Father”) and “holy nation.” As priests, we mediate God’s blessings to the world. We do this by sharing God’s word, worshiping, and making intercessory prayer for the people, just like priests. And we “proclaim the excellencies” of God. Commenting on this passage, New Testament theologian Tom Schreiner writes, “The declaration of God’s praises includes both worship and evangelism, spreading the good news of God’s saving wonders to all peoples.”<sup>3</sup>

### WHO SHOULD EVANGELIZE?

Before I define evangelism, it seems natural to address this issue. *Who* should evangelize? If you are a Christian, you should. This is why we exist. We are here to glorify God and to try to point others to him. If you are tempted to think that the Great Commission is only for “super disciples,” for people who are outgoing and can teach the Bible, you are mistaken. We all have a role to play in evangelism, as the 1 Peter passage shows.

Perhaps we should also consider 2 Corinthians 5. Much of the chapter is devoted to evangelism. After considering the reality of a future judgment, Paul writes, “Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others” (2 Cor. 5:11). A few verses later, he writes these words:

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them,

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 116.

and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:17-20).

I could appeal to more verses in the New Testament, but I think this is sufficient. We all have a role to play in bringing people to Christ. As royal priests, as commissioned ambassadors, we are supposed to implore people to be reconciled to God the Father through God the Son. The basis for this reconciliation is Jesus' death on the cross.

There is a tendency in the church to believe that evangelism is only for certain people, those who have unique gifts. While it is true that the New Testament speaks of people who are particularly gifted to evangelize (see Acts 21:8; Eph. 4:11), we all have a role to play in sharing the gospel.

### WHAT IS EVANGELISM?

Evangelism is simply sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ, with the goal of persuading people to repent of their sin and believe in Jesus, and thus be saved from eternal condemnation. The word evangelism comes from the Greek word that means "to announce the good news." The good news is the evangel (*euangelion*, in Greek), or the gospel.

We will discuss the gospel's content later, because that is of utmost importance. But for now, we can say that the gospel is the story of God, sinful humans, and Jesus. If we are to successfully share the gospel, we need to talk about who God is (the sovereign, almighty, all-knowing, perfect, Creator and Judge), who people are (created by God, rebelling against God, spiritually dead and in need of salvation), who Jesus is (Son of God, fully God and fully man, sinless), what he did (lived a perfect life and died an atoning death), and the only right and appropriate response to Jesus (repentance and faith).

I always find it helpful to read multiple definitions of a term, in order to understand it better. This is what J. I. Packer writes about evangelism:

Evangelism . . . means presenting Christ Jesus and His work in relation to the needs of fallen men and women, who are without God as a Father and under the wrath of God as a Judge. Evangelism means presenting Christ Jesus to them as their only hope, in this world or the next. Evangelism means exhorting sinners to *accept Christ Jesus as their Saviour*, recognizing that in the most final and far-reaching sense they are lost without Him.<sup>4</sup>

Packer does an excellent job of showing the necessity of talking about the human need for salvation, for the Savior.

The First International Congress on World Evangelism, held in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974, created another helpful definition of evangelism. The world's most influential figures in

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<sup>4</sup> J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 39.

evangelical Christianity came together to discuss evangelism. This is what they wrote in the Lausanne Covenant:

To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is every kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Savior and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the Gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus calls all who would follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify themselves with his new community. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his church and responsible service in the world.<sup>5</sup>

This is an excellent definition of what it means to share the gospel. Notice that it says, “In issuing the Gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship.” We must tell the complete gospel, not a shallow version of it. This definition also hints at what evangelism is not.

### **WHAT *ISN'T* EVANGELISM?<sup>6</sup>**

Sometimes it is helpful to define a term by clarifying what it is not. Because there seems to be quite a bit of confusion regarding evangelism and the gospel, this seems quite necessary.

#### **1. Evangelism is not coercion.**

Though we know we have the truth, we must never try to force people or manipulate people to believe the gospel. Most of us would never think to use force, but there has been a history of manipulation and pressure in the church. We can never force people to believe. Pastor Mark Dever acknowledges this truth when he writes, “The Bible presents the human problem as one that can never be solved by coercive force of imposition. Therefore, all I can do is present the good news accurately, live a life of love toward unbelievers, and pray for God to convict them of their sins and give them the gifts of repentance and faith.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in D. J. Tidball, “Theology of Evangelism,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 240-241. The entire Lausanne Covenant can be found at <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lausanne-covenant.html> (accessed January 8, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> This section modifies information found in Mark Dever, “A Biblical Understanding of Evangelism,” in *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, expanded ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004); *idem*, “What *Isn't* Evangelism,” in *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Dever, *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism*, 71.

## 2. Evangelism is not personal testimony.

Sometimes we confuse giving the story our conversion to Christianity with sharing the gospel. There is nothing wrong with sharing our personal story, but conversion stories are subjective experiences. The gospel is an objective message about the facts regarding God, humankind, and Jesus. No one can be saved by believing in my testimony. They must believe in the gospel.

I should add that personal testimonies can help us share the gospel. They are useful and there is certainly a place for them, but they cannot replace sharing the gospel. According to Dever, “An account of a changed life is [a] wonderful and inspiring thing, but it’s the gospel of Jesus Christ that explains what it’s all about and how it happened.”<sup>8</sup>

## 3. Evangelism is not good works, social activism, or politics.

There is also a temptation to think that evangelism is done by doing good things to make the world a better place. Christians should do good works like caring for the poor, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, and trying to make their communities and their country more just. But this is not the gospel. Good works can and should accompany our evangelism. In a certain way, they substantiate our claims of being transformed by God. Jesus himself said that the world would know that we are his disciples by our love for one another (John 13:34-35). But Jesus didn’t say that the world would know him or his gospel by our love for one another. There is a difference. The gospel has the power to save, whereas our love does not. Like personal testimonies, good works reinforce our message, but they are not the actual message itself.

## 4. Evangelism is not apologetics.

According to one prominent apologist, “Apologetics (from the Greek *apologia*: a defense) is that branch of Christian theology which seeks to provide rational justification for the truth claims of the Christian faith.”<sup>9</sup> Put more simply, apologetics is giving people reasons or evidence for our faith. That Greek word mentioned above is used in 1 Peter 3:15: “. . . 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. . . .” The context is not strictly about apologetics, but this has become the key text for apologetics.

Evangelism and apologetics have similar goals (glorifying God by bringing people to faith), but they are not the same. Evangelism is sharing the gospel message, while apologetics is defending or giving proof of the trustworthiness of the message. It has been said that “apologetics is the handmaiden to evangelism.”<sup>10</sup> We will discover later how apologetics can help us in sharing the gospel.

## 5. Evangelism is not the fruit of evangelism.

We must realize that when we share the gospel, we are not in control of the results. If we tell the gospel truthfully, and we tell people the cost of following Jesus, we must be satisfied

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>9</sup> William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 15.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Mittelberg, “An Apologetic for Apologetics,” in *Reasons for Faith*, Norman L. Geisler and Chad V. Meister, ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 18.

with that. As Dever writes, “According to the Bible, evangelism may not be defined in terms of results or methods, but only in terms of faithfulness to the message preached.”<sup>11</sup>

We must also realize that no matter how accurately, persuasively, and lovingly we share the gospel, some people will still not respond. To some, our message will be the aroma of Christ, and to others it will smell like death (2 Cor. 2:15-16). Only God can change hardened hearts to receive his gospel.

### **WHY SHOULD WE EVANGELIZE?**

It seems hardly necessary to indicate why we should share the gospel. According to Michael Green, the apostles evangelized “because of the overwhelming experience for the love of God which they had received through Jesus Christ.”<sup>12</sup> He continues: “In a word, Christian evangelism has its motivation rooted in what God is and what he has done for man through the coming and the death and the resurrection of Jesus.”<sup>13</sup>

God’s love for us should motivate us to share that love, and to share the good news that Christ died for sinners. If you think about it, when you love someone, you want to praise him or her. When you know of something very valuable or helpful (a diet, a good book, a good restaurant), you want to tell someone about it. It should be more natural for us to share our love for God and the value of the gospel. According to Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, “Christians whose love for the Lord Jesus flows from new hearts kept soft by the Holy Spirit have an instinctive desire to commend their Savior to others. At the very least, we want to speak of him to those who do not love him because we want God to be honored.”<sup>14</sup> Peter and John found it natural to speak of the gospel. When facing possible persecution from the Sanhedrin, they said, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19-20).

In addition to God’s love for us, there are at least two other motives for evangelism. “There are, in fact, two motives that should spur us constantly to evangelize. The first is love to God and concern for His glory; the second is love to man and concern for his welfare.”<sup>15</sup> In observing these two motives, J. I. Packer is echoing the two greatest commandments: love God and love your neighbor (Matt. 22:37-40).

If we love God, we will seek to glorify him. As we have seen, this is why everything exists. We glorify God and love him by obeying his commandments. We glorify him by telling the world how great he is. We also glorify God by telling the world the great things he has done.

We evangelize because we want God to be glorified, and sharing the gospel and making disciples is one of the greatest ways to glorify God. Because we love God, we obey his commandments, and one of them is evangelizing.

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<sup>11</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 135.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 274.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 53-54.

<sup>15</sup> Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 73.



Before we discuss the second motive, this must be said: evangelism should be a joy. Though we face rejection, ridicule, and scorn, we also must realize that we have a tremendous privilege. We represent Jesus to the world and we have the truth, an always-relevant and much-needed truth. Though opening the door for evangelism is difficult, it should give us joy to talk to others about God.

The second motivation is our love for others. Jesus said we ought to love our neighbors as ourselves. Who is our neighbor? The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) tells us that anyone we see in need is our neighbor. Everyone needs Jesus. Packer writes, “What greater need has any man than the need to know Christ? What greater good can we do to any man than to set before him the knowledge of Christ?”<sup>16</sup>

If we love people who are not Christians, we will feel compelled to share the gospel with them. If we don’t share the gospel with those in need, we are being unloving and selfish. If you know Jesus, it is because someone shared the gospel with you. You should share it, in turn, with others. If we find ourselves not caring about the soul of our neighbor, we should examine our hearts. “If we find ourselves shrinking from this responsibility, and trying to evade it, we need to face ourselves with the fact that in this we are yielding to sin and Satan. If (as is usual) it is the fear of being thought odd and ridiculous, or of losing popularity in certain circles, that holds us back, we need to ask ourselves in the presence of God: Ought these things to stop us from loving our neighbour?”<sup>17</sup>

Our limited time should also motivate us. We all know that anyone can die at any time. We could die today. Our non-believing family, friends, coworkers, neighbors could die at any moment. Though we don’t like to think about these things, we must realize that if we don’t take intentional steps to share the gospel with people, we may never have that chance again.

### **WHOM SHOULD WE EVANGELIZE?**

Let me be brief: we should share the gospel with everyone. According to Millard Erickson, “if the church is to be faithful to its Lord and bring joy to his heart, it must be engaged in bringing the gospel to all people. This includes people whom we may by nature tend to dislike. It extends to those who are unlike us.”<sup>18</sup>

We should naturally start with those around us. Are there any non-Christians in your family? Tell them the gospel. Do you have any unbelieving friends? Tell them the gospel. What about your neighbors, do they know Jesus? How about your coworkers? The people who work in the shops that you frequent? Start there. It is always best to share the gospel with people we know and care for.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 77-78.

<sup>18</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 1063.

## HOW DO WE EVANGELIZE?

We will discuss possible ways to share the gospel later. For now, it will suffice to say that any way you can communicate the gospel message is a legitimate form of evangelism. Having a one-on-one conversation about Jesus is one way of evangelizing. Inviting someone to a gospel-centered Bible study is another way. You could invite someone to church. Some people preach on the streets or knock on doors. These are all possible ways of evangelizing, though some methods are more effective than others.

Perhaps the best way to evangelize is to love someone and become a friend. Get to know that person. Ask him or her questions. Spend time with that person. When these things occur, your opportunities to share the gospel will increase, and your friend will be more open to hearing the gospel message. “The right to talk intimately to another person about the Lord Jesus Christ has to be earned, and you can earn it by convincing him that you are his friend, and really care about him.”<sup>19</sup>

We should also be prayerful about sharing the gospel. It’s impossible to exaggerate the importance of prayer in this area. God has the power to bring someone from darkness into light, from death into life. We don’t have that power. Therefore, we should pray for opportunities to share the gospel with the people that we know, pray for them to believe that message and so be saved, and pray that God would lead us to others who need to hear the good news. Of our evangelistic commission, Packer writes, “It is a commission, not only to preach, but also to pray; not only to talk to men about God, but also to talk to God about men.”<sup>20</sup>

## EVANGELISM IS NECESSARY

The Bible tells us that God is sovereign. There is nothing he can’t do. He works everything according to his will (Eph. 1:11). As controversial as this topic can be, the Bible also says that God has predestined people to become Christians (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:5). My point is not to be controversial. My point is this: there are people in the world who do not currently know Jesus but who will someday be born again. We do not know who they are. It could be the worst person we know. Yet even though God has a plan to save people, he has chosen, in his sovereign will, to use human beings to preach the gospel. We are his means, his instruments, to reach the lost. God is sovereign, but we are responsible for sharing the gospel.

The apostle Paul, who was once a church-persecuting Pharisee, became a great evangelist. He is proof that God can save anyone he chooses. In Romans, Paul writes about the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. Paul shows that both groups are sinners in need of salvation. Knowing that everyone needs Jesus motivated Paul to preach. He realized that both Jew and Gentile needed to hear the gospel message. This is what Paul writes Romans 10:14-17:

<sup>14</sup> How then will they 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

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<sup>19</sup> Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 81.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

without someone preaching? <sup>15</sup> 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!” <sup>16</sup> But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” <sup>17</sup> So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

People need to hear (or read) the gospel message in order to be believe in Jesus and be saved. This is God’s plan. His normal method of operating in the world is to work through his people. If you are a Christian, God’s plan is to work through you.