

Home Visit Evangelism (a lecture)

by Rev. Tom Aicken

My subject is Home Visit Evangelism, and I think a good place to begin is to talk about how important the work of evangelism really is, and important not only for ministers, but for **all our members** as well. The Church, as you know, is under orders from the Lord to go and preach the gospel to all the world, and from the very early years of the New Testament Church that's precisely what we see happening. We read in Acts 8, "All those who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word" – literally, evangelizing – and, while some may think that it was only the apostles who did this, we are specifically told that it was everyone **except** the apostles who did so.

One may get the impression from Eph. 4, particularly, that ministers of the gospel are to do this work themselves – that there is no responsibility here for anybody else – but the best translation of the Greek text is that pastors are appointed, rather, "for the **equipping of the saints** to do the work of ministry" (including evangelism), and again that pastors are appointed "for the **equipping of the saints** to do the edifying of the body of Christ." These are shared tasks, in other words, and so pastors are not to do all this work themselves, but to be **coaches**, rather, in training their people to do this same work as well.

Well, if this is the case, why is it that most Christians do not evangelize? Sadly, it's because, in many cases, they have never been trained to do so, and, without proper training, the vast majority of Christians feel too intimidated to share what they believe about the Lord with unbelievers. "What if I say something that's wrong? What if I'm asked something, and I don't know the answer? What if I do more harm than good?" And under the grip of such fear, they shut down and turn away.

What's needed, then, and what our Lord provided His own disciples, is on-the-job training. Not just **teaching**, notice, but teaching with **practice**. With practice comes **experience**, and, of course, with enough experience comes **confidence**. It's rather like driving a car. No one just jumps in the car for the first time and drives off. No, that's too frightening. But give someone the instruction that is needed to drive the vehicle, the kind of instruction that is accompanied with practice, which in turn leads to experience, and before long that fear is overcome with confidence.

This is what I would like to do today: I would like to encourage all our churches to provide workshops, workshops with hands-on training for their members to take up the task of 'home visit evangelism'. This is how the saints are properly prepared and made ready, as we read in 1 Pet. 3:15, to give an answer to unbelievers regarding the hope they have within them. It's through effective workshops that Christians can be so equipped.

Now, what do I mean by 'home visit evangelism'? This is the least intimidating way of doing any kind of evangelism, and it's the best way therefore for believers **to begin**, at least, the task before them. It isn't confronting total strangers, whether on the street or in one's own neighbourhood. It is, rather, visiting people who have attended your church – maybe they've even attended a few times, so they've already expressed at least some interest in Christianity – and now you are expressing an interest in them – how? – by doing a follow-up call with them in their own home. Just having expressed an interest in Christianity, of course, does not mean that they are Christians themselves – that's true – but now, visiting them in **their** home, you can

find out more whether or not they really are committed to Christ, and go on from there.

Who can you get to participate in such a workshop? Well, ask for volunteers among your members. You may be surprised who, and how many, would like to take such a class. Tell them it will take 8 – 10 weeks, which is usually about right, and that they are expected to attend every class. If you get 4 volunteers (two groups of two), you can have a workshop. 6 is ideal, but you could have as many as 8. We asked for volunteers in Langley, and we had to have two workshops!

On the other hand, what can you tell those believers who might like to do 'home visit evangelism' but feel too daunted by the task ever to take such a course? Be prepared for that, for there are such people. Here are two great encouragements the Lord Himself has given us to evangelize, and you may need to tell those very people about these encouragements in order for them to proceed in spite of their underlying fears:

First, it's a most thrilling experience for a believer to share his faith, the unsearchable riches of Christ, with an unbeliever, and seek to lead him to Christ in doing so. One has to experience that for himself, of course, in order to know that it's really true – but it is true. It's a blessing to talk about Christ with another believer, yes, but, oh, what a blessing to do so with an unbeliever – especially if he is to any degree responsive to what we tell him. This is an awesome responsibility, to be sure, but it's also a great privilege. Have you ever spent a sleepless night, not out of anxiety or fear, but just because you were so overwhelmed with the joy of the Lord in talking to an unbeliever about Him? I first learned that when I was in my late teens, and I still find it to be so six decades later!

Second, another great encouragement the Lord has given us to do evangelism: The Lord does not leave us on our own to share the gospel with anyone, but speaks through us in order to achieve His own appointed goal. This does not mean that every unbeliever we talk to will become a Christian, no – he may indeed reject everything we tell him, both at that time and even later on – but it is the Word of the Lord that we are passing on to him, after all, and God’s Word does not return to Him void. It will achieve every time what He, the Lord Himself, has purposed for it. Think about that. Is it not utterly amazing, and most encouraging, believer, that so much can be accomplished through such weak and stumbling means as we show ourselves to be? But it’s the Lord who is behind it all, remember, and He does not fail! He never has, and He never will. I know of parents who were converted through their five-year old son – out of the mouths of babes and nursing infants He has ordained strength – and that’s how mighty the Word of God is!

There are of course many different evangelism programs that are in use in churches today – clearly, some of them are better than others. The one I use is a makeover of one that was popular some 50 years ago. If any consistory is interested, I would be happy to send you a copy – in which case you could either use it yourself as is – **or**, do what I did, and simply make it over again into something else. But what I want to take up with you today is not **my** program at all, nor **any** particular program, but simply some general tips on evangelism which I hope you’ll find useful regardless of the program you choose to use.

Here are 8 points, 8 things to remember for any one-on-one or small group evangelism: #1, This may seem obvious – but I’m going to say it anyway as a good reminder to us all – pray for the person you want to visit before you go to see him. Don’t rely on your own powers of

persuasion or presume that the one you are talking to has the capacity to distinguish truth from error. No, lost souls coming to Christ is the work of God's sovereign grace – God working in them to will and to do His good pleasure – and that's why we need to pray. It's the Word of God you're handling, remember, the Word of God which is the power of God to those who are being saved, and it's that power of God which is so needed to change the hearts of those who are enslaved to sin. Be sure, then, to pray. Pray before you go, and continue praying later on!

#2, When you do visit, begin by asking about the life of that person and his church background. This is common courtesy anyway, and it shows respect. But it's also very beneficial, for what he tells you about his life and church background (if he has any church background) may be very revealing and even change, not your message, no, but perhaps your approach in telling it. This is what you need to know upfront, something about the person you're talking to. So, always begin with **him**, with **his** life, especially if you don't know much about him, and try to glean from that what you can in talking with him.

#3, Give him your own personal testimony, which is a brief account of the circumstances of your coming to the Lord Jesus Christ yourself, along with what He has done for you and how much He means to you. Too often this is left out – but that's a big mistake – for your own personal testimony can a great incentive for someone else to seek refuge in Christ. So, be positive in giving him your testimony of Christ. Don't hold back in expressing your love for the Lord, but keep it brief – no more than three minutes, (why no more than three minutes?) – because you don't want this fellow squirming in his seat having to endure a lengthy account of **your** life and church background.

#4, You have come now to a pivotal point in your visit. You may have learned by this time whether this fellow is a Christian – but maybe not, and you **need** to know – so, what can you do to draw this information from him? Don't ask him if he is a Christian. He may tell you, "Yes, I am", without even knowing what a Christian is. No, you need to ask some other question, something that will tell you more accurately where he really stands before the Lord. You might ask something like, "Have you come to a place in your life where you know for sure that you are going to heaven when you die, and, if so, what do you base that on? How do you know that you are going to heaven?" What he tells you may end the evening right there in a time of rejoicing – two believers delighting together in the Lord – **or**, if you discover that he's not a Christian, this may well be your opportunity to proceed right then and there with the gospel message.

#5, If you do proceed, start with the fact that everyone is a sinner, and that God has given us His law, the Ten Commandments, to show us that. Now many Christians don't want to start there, with sin. It sounds too negative, too off-putting. They would rather begin with the solution rather than with the problem. Do you know the trouble with that? It doesn't go anywhere. Who wants to hear about the solution to a problem if he isn't first made aware of the problem that needs to be solved? It's like you're feeling rather sick, so you go to the doctor, and the doctor tells you, "I'm scheduling surgery for you next Thursday morning at 8 o'clock. Be there." You say, "Wait a moment! What do you mean 'surgery'? I don't even know what's wrong with me." He tells you, "It doesn't matter. We'll look after that with you when we open you up. If it's a new heart you need, or any other vital organ – don't worry – we'll take care of it while you're still on the operating

table.” You say, “No, I don’t think so. Until I know what’s really wrong with me, until I know what can be done about it and my chances of surviving the ordeal, I don’t want to have anything to do with it!”

Always, then, begin with the problem. That’s what people need to hear first if they are ever going to show any interest in would-be solutions. Tell him, “Everyone born of a human father and mother is a sinner.” Ask him, therefore, “Have you ever **disrespected** your parents? If so, you have broken the 5th commandment.” (He might tell you, ‘You know something? I never thought of that!’) Tell him, “The Bible makes it clear that if you have ever just **hated** anyone – let alone killed him – you have already broken the 6th commandment, or **lusted** after anyone, you have already broken the 7th commandment.” Ask him, “Have you ever stolen anything? If so, you have broken the 8th commandment.”

Tell him, “You may think that you compare rather favourably to many other people you know – and most of us, not surprisingly, do think that about ourselves – but if you have done all of the above, plus ever **lied** about anyone and secretly **coveted** what belongs to others, you have already broken the whole second table of God’s law! The Bible tells us that the punishment for each and every one of these sins is eternal condemnation, and that there is nothing – absolutely nothing – that we ourselves can do to escape that punishment.” You probably think that this fellow is ready now to run away – but, no, someone has just confronted him for the first time with his sin – and he knows it!

#6, What he needs to hear now, clearly, is about God. So, tell him, “God is just and altogether righteous, and He must therefore punish all who commit sin, for, as He tells us, He will by no means clear the guilty. It doesn’t sound good for us, does it? Ah, but in His mercy there is

something God Himself has done for the salvation of lost sinners. He has sent His only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to do for us what we could never do for ourselves.” Already, then, there is hope of a solution, and this is when that hope needs to be clearly stated.

#7, Tell him about the Lord Jesus Christ, who He is, what He has done, and how salvation is not by anything we might do but through faith in Him and what He has done. And here is one more point:

#8, Most people don’t know what ‘faith in Christ’ is. They equate faith and faithfulness – i.e. faith and works together – so explain what faith is. Tell him, that we’re saved by faith **apart** from works, that faith is not merely knowing certain things or giving mental assent to irrefutable facts. The essential element of faith is **trust**. It’s a trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, a trust that He’s able to save to the uttermost all who come unto the Father through Him, a trust that commits **everything one is and has** to Him, that hangs on every word of the Lord, that stores it up in one’s heart and seeks to live it out in his life; and it’s a trust that **continues** to commit everything to Christ even when we are afflicted and don’t know what’s coming next.

Let me now move on to something else. What I want to give you here are a few practical things which need to be emphasized in preparing for evangelism. The first is to memorize **a Scripture verse and reference** for every point you seek to drive home. It’s not that you want to quote the verse for every point you make – no – but you want to be **ready** to quote the verse if he questions whether the Bible really teaches that, and you want as well to be ready to give the Bible reference in case he wants to look it up later on his own. He needs to be persuaded, in

other words, that nothing you're telling him is just from you, but from the Word of God – and **that's why** it's to be believed.

The second practical thing to emphasize in preparing for evangelism is this, don't be afraid to answer his questions (if he has any) as you go along. In fact, you should **encourage** him to ask questions. That may be his only way of keeping up and following everything you say. You will, no doubt, be able to answer most of what he asks anyway. But, if he asks one or two questions which leave you stumped, let him know that you will look further into those things and will get back to him the next time you see him. And, of course, the next time you see him, make sure that those answers are the first thing out of your mouth! It would not be the first time that someone has turned away from Christ as a result – at least as he sees it – of unanswered questions. That can too easily become his excuse for turning away.

Finally, a third practical point, there are at least two types of people you have to treat in a special way if they come to visit you. I don't know how they have made contact with you – they probably **haven't** visited your church – but, for whatever reason, they are now visiting you. Who are they, and how might you deal with them?

First, there is **the hardened atheist**, the fellow who is so conceptually opposed to the existence of God that he won't listen to a single word of what you say about Him, but will try to interrupt you at every point. I have found in such cases that it's better, therefore, **not** talk to him about the Lord – that's right – at least, not just then. Give him something to read later on when he's back at home by himself and in the quiet of his own room. Atheists are often more open to that. They like to do their own research. So, give him an article, some compelling

evidence for the existence of God, and then invite him back at a later date to discuss it. If he comes back – and there is a strong possibility that he will – he may have softened somewhat by then and will actually **want** to talk with you. After all, he has just read some things that he has likely never even thought about before, and, if so, this may be your opportunity to share with him the gospel. Just remember to be patient with him.

Second, there is **the cult member**, possibly a Jehovah's Witness or a Mormon. Typically, though – regardless of the cult – there are two special things you need to remember about this fellow: **A.** He thinks that his group is entirely right, and that yours is entirely wrong, and thus he will defend his beliefs and, like the atheist, not even **listen** to a single thing you say. So, show him from the Bible how everything he has been taught is false.* You have to start with that before he will ever listen to anything you have to tell him anyway, let alone be prepared to consider that it's actually true.

And **B.** When you have shown him from the Bible how everything he has been taught is false, share the gospel with him right away. **Don't wait.** And I say that for a reason. Too many people in cults, when their eyes are opened, when they see what's so wrong with everything they have ever been taught, begin to think that **all** religion is false – and guess what? – that just becomes their **next** false religion. No, share with him the gospel before he leaves your home, if you can, and be sure to invite him back if he ever wants to talk further about it!

(*For more information on the errors of the major cults, I recommend the paperbacks by Robert A. Morey on witnessing to Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons.)

