

# Evangelism in the Church Plant: Part 2

## Pre-class Preparation:

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- We spent our time in the last session and today we're going to continue talking about evangelism. In particular, today we're going to talk about finding and ministering to a people group. So how do we get the background on these people?

## ⊕ Find out about the group through:

- Focus groups.

- Now when we think of a focus group, generally what comes to mind is a political focus group. In that setting, a group is gathered together by a candidate to ask questions about what he needs to do to be elected. In a new church plant, a focus group is really a people group to whom we're trying to minister. It happens as a group of unchurched people from the area are gathered. And in that setting they are asked, "What's the opinion of the community about church?" A group of people can really help you in this process to avoid things that would be a turn-off in the area. You will need to be creative in gathering such an unchurched group: maybe meet a group at their work site providing them lunch or go training institution servicing local residents or offering a public meeting for people to voice suggestions for community improvement. Whatever you do,

you want “pure” unchurched opinions from such efforts. Another way to understand your people group is through . . .

- **Demographics.**

- It's important to gather all of the statistical evidence of the population in your area to gain a general picture of the people group. Another way to find out about them is through . . .

- **Dialoguing.**

- Just ask people about ideas they may have for an effective church. You might ask for instance, “What do you think might be an effective strategy for reaching out to single moms in this community?” Asking people will give you a good idea of opportunities for ministry for your new church. Talking to existing pastors in the area can be a tremendous help in this way. By assuring them your desire and interest is reaching unchurched people, you will normally endear yourself to their friendship and help. And then we need to . . .

- **Understand felt needs.**

- Felt needs are those needs that people feel they have. When you ask people about what they need, you'll get responses such as spirituality, a better family life, or helping out teenagers. But they also have needs that are not so pressing in their minds. So as church planters we need to . . .

- **Understand real needs.**

- They have a real need for a relationship with Jesus Christ, forgiveness of sin, and to live a life under the authority of His Word. Your task as a missionary is to meet people at their point of contact or felt need, and to move them to the place where they understand fully their real need.

One new church plant held a week-long evangelistic conference entitled, “How to Make the Rest of Your Life the Best of Your Life.” Many people came because it touched that point of contact where they weren't satisfied with the status quo in their lives. They were yearning for more. In the course of the week, those who came were encouraged one night on the topic of setting priorities. And in the message as they talked about various priorities, Christ was present as the priority needed for a good life. Most of these people had simply given Him a

place at the periphery of their lives, if at all. So Christ was presented as the center of a good life and everything else came after Him in priority. And as felt needs were addressed, the issue of real needs began to emerge and be confronted.

Another church was locating in a community where there were lots of starter homes. In the area were many young couples with children. And so a point of contact they used was offering potty training for young children. They held a seminar sponsored by the church in a local library. They brought in a Christian doctor who shared her ideas along with her faith. The people were invited to join a soon-to-begin Bible study where they were promised more biblical information about raising families. A number of churches in the area protested, telling the people in this church that what they were doing was wrong and how they needed to focus on the gospel. But this church was using these seminars to touch that felt need and thereby share their real need. As a result, four families joined an outreach Bible study and two or three of them committed their lives to Christ. It's called servant evangelism. Meeting felt needs is a tool for relationship building and a way to open hearts to Christ.

Now the problem with all of this is that in some churches, they never move beyond felt needs. Every message on every Sunday is a felt needs message at a felt needs service. What all of this ultimately produces is a Christianity that is very "me-focused." It glosses over the cost of discipleship and the cause of Christ.

### ⊕ Probe the focus group for their:

- **Perceptions about church and denominations.**

- You're asking them, "What do you think about my denomination?" If you're in an area where there are some bad perceptions about your denomination, you've got to make some decisions about how you'll reach out in that context. You can probe the group about . . .

- **Unmet needs.**

- You may find some areas in the community that can become a point of contact for the church. Find out about . . .

■ **Musical preferences (Arbitron).**

- A missionary going to a tribal area in New Guinea doesn't go in with a cassette of the great hymns of the faith. Instead, they go to a tribe and they listen to the tribe's music. They teach them the Bible and see them come to Christ and then they develop indigenous worship based upon the music of the tribe. Today, church planters do the same thing when they go to a city. When they pull into Phoenix or Seattle, they find out what people are listening to on the radio. And a musical style is then developed according to the taste of the people group. Some say this is compromising with the world. The question then is, how do you choose a musical style? Is it something that God mystically reveals to you or do you simply go in with a song book filled with 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century hymns? What criteria do you use if you want to attempt to make the message of the music relate to these new tribes—to this new people group? You can get information by asking the focus group about their musical preferences. You can call the local radio station to take a look at the Arbitron ratings to find the key stations and determine what they're playing. And so you modify the musical preferences based upon these findings. Again, the message of the music is still the unchanging truths of God's Word; it's simply a style of music to which you are adapting. There's no such thing as Christian music, only Christian lyrics set to the musical style of the day. And that has been the history of church music over the ages; using the cultural preferences to share the message in song. The problem is that we prefer what we like. And we want them to worship in styles that we like. But if God has called you to missions, you must speak to the culture in ways they can comprehend. Your ministry must be incarnational as you proclaim the gospel in that setting. This is what good missionaries do. Paul did this—and we need to follow his God-inspired strategy. Paul said whatever cultural context he found himself in, he adapted his styles so he could effectively connect and communicate the Gospel (see 1 Corinthians 9:19ff). Then, you can talk to the focus group about . . .

■ **Recreational patterns.**

- An Anglican church in the Detroit area capitalized on the Detroit Lions football team. They ran an ad that read: "Even today the greatest challenge to Christianity is the lions." The ad had a picture of the arena with lions all around. And then it encourages the people to use the VCR to tape the Lions game and come to church on Sunday and then they shared Christ with those folks. They were addressing the recreational patterns of lost people in the area and connecting with those patterns. Another area to cover with the focus group is . . .

- **Spending habits.**

- This provides a picture of where their values are and what is important to them. If you're in a community where people are spending money on musical instruments, your music better be quality. If it's a community with lots of children and they spend a lot on money for sports for those children, consider investing in a sponsorship of a little league team where visibility is high. In the focus group you can ask about . . .

- **Political affiliation.**

- Knowing how people think and feel about issues and political positions helps you to understand thinking patterns and the accepted values in the area.

Every church does some of this to one extent or another. For instance, you do not use the internet to reach Senior Adults. You use methods and venues that speak to senior adults in their cultural context. If you're going to reach young adults, you need to use appropriate mediums such as an internet website. We're not talking about theological preference and biblical worldview or doctrine. We are simply talking about reaching people at a point of contact. The Bible determines our message, but our focus determines when, where, and how we communicate it. Again, it's thinking like fish. If you're going to understand the people group you must . . .

⊕ **Understand their barriers and objections.**

- Language: If I were going to plant a Korean church I would first need to learn the Korean language. And for that matter, anywhere you go as a church planter, there are languages being spoken by the people in the area that you must learn in order to present Christ to them. If

the only language I know is the one I learned growing up, or the one I acquired in seminary, I'm going to need to learn the cultural language of the setting where God is calling. Another barrier is . . .

Culture: As we've been saying all along through this study, understanding the cultural barriers is key to reaching people for Christ. It's about being indigenous. If you aren't sensitive to the culture, you're going to run into a whole host of objections from the people in the area.

North America will agree that Jesus was a good teacher who taught us to love one another. But the story of why Jesus needed to die on the cross for their sin is lost.

So they understand the basic components of love in the gospel story but not the centrality of the cross in the redemption of mankind. Another question Steffen says to consider is . . .Is this culture a shame or guilt culture? Asian cultures tend to be more shame oriented when someone converts to a different faith. Whereas North American cultures are more guilt oriented. You should read Steffen's book if you're interested in this. And then he asks . . .

How will this culture understand Christian rituals? How will they view baptism and how might they misunderstand it as well? Crusade evangelism is near to being a ritualistic practice among many evangelicals. So if we're planning an evangelistic crusade in a Muslim country, we might consider a different name since "crusade" carries a lot of historical baggage in those cultures.

What is the best delivery system for exposing the people of this culture to the gospel? The reality is that there is no "right" method that works in every area. What works in one area may not work in another area.

What works in a multi-housing complex may not work in an inner city context. There are biblical non-negotiables in presenting the gospel. Obviously, the central delivery system in a community is the church. But if a revival is too foreign to the culture, then don't use it. But on the other hand if it has been proven to work in similar types of people groups, try it. The challenge being that those who were most successful in the last paradigm often have a hard time in the new paradigm. So it's important to develop an evangelism strategy. Then . . .

### ⊕ Develop material to connect with your subgroup

- Rick Warren's invitation letter is the most widely used and the most widely known example. The Saddleback Valley Community Church core sent out 15,000 pieces of direct mail ten days before their first public worship. Two hundred and five people attended their first service. The Christian and Missionary Alliance started over 100 churches on one day using this letter. In the letter we see . . .

Warren's complaints:

Church is boring

Church members are unfriendly to visitors

The Church is more interested in money than people

The quality of child-care is poor.

Since the letter will go to the unchurched, it must use unchurched language. Unchurched people do not know (or care) what inerrancy is. Your denominational affiliation usually does not matter to them. When pastors write these letters, they often write a letter to other pastors. Here are actual examples from letters sent to unchurched people:

“Holding forth the infallible word of God.”

“Joel 2:7 ministry available.”

“Come help us grow.”

These things may be good, but they mean absolutely nothing to those who are unchurched. The question is: who are you trying to reach—or to say ‘impress’? Do you want to speak to other pastors in the community or the lost people in the community?

### ⊕ Why do people object to “focusing?”

- Some people fear it’s an attempt to water-down the gospel. We must stand firm on our conviction concerning the inerrant and authoritative Word of God. But you are in the business of planting a church and not a social club.

Good missionaries always ask these questions. Each of us is a missionary! And that’s not just a word for church planters. Every Christian has been called to be on mission (see Romans 10: 14-15 and John 17:18 and 20:21). So we must not forbid our North American missionaries to do the very thing we require our international missionaries to do. Do people go too far in contextualization? Of course they do. Each of us has seen excesses where the method has over-emphasized felt needs above real needs. It’s critical to do the hard work it takes in reaching the people in your area. And if you don’t care enough to understand them, then you will continue to be frustrated through unfruitful and ineffective efforts. It takes understanding them before you can present the gospel in ways that they can understand and be changed by its power. And when people object to focusing share with them . . .

The response:

Focusing helps you to know who you can reach best first. And then you move out from that successful center to reach others—because as your resources of workers and gifts increase, you can increase your harvest.

The point is not to make winning people to Christ a "target" for your "gospel bullet" and potential notches on your Bible holster, but rather to understand more fully the context in which you work, and the contextual nature of your ministry. You do this because you want to love Jesus and people He died for—so you can be obedient to your Lord who has called you.

## Evangelism in the Church Plant: Part 2

Here is a sample focus profile:

Who is the average person this church will reach?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ If married, spouse name: \_\_\_\_\_

(example: Millcreek Mark and Mary)

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Race: \_\_\_\_\_

(example: 30-35 years of age)

(example: Anglo or Multi-cultural)

- Musical preference: \_\_\_\_\_  
(example: soft rock and contemporary country)
- Children: \_\_\_\_\_ Education: \_\_\_\_\_  
(example: preschoolers) (example: 2 years of college)
- Job/vocation: \_\_\_\_\_  
(example: first generation white collar or well paying blue collar)

Possible implications of the above listed observations:

- Preaching style that will best minister: \_\_\_\_\_  
(example: topical expository; teaching orientated)
- Worship style that will best minister: \_\_\_\_\_  
(example: contemporary style- not too enthusiastic, band, Vineyard-type music)
- Care system that will best minister: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Sunday school, cells, mentoring) (example: cell groups, Sunday school later for content study)
- Dress that will be appropriate: \_\_\_\_\_  
(example: casual- some do not have suits, others wear them all week)
- Best outreach strategy: \_\_\_\_\_  
(example: telemarketing and direct mail; country music radio)

- So finding the right focus group and understanding them is essential to the task of your effectively introducing them to Jesus. It's not easy to do this but the more you understand them the more likely you are to reach them. Of necessity it will involve some trial and error, but more time spent in gathering the facts will help decrease the errors in ministry. To this culture, you have been sent to adapt yourself and reach them for Christ—even as the Lord Jesus did for us in leaving all His prerogatives behind and becoming a human. He said, “As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you” (John 20:21). As a church planter you are being sent to understand the cultural context of the community to which you have been called to reach.

Be aware of the evangelistic resources that are available to you in your work: F.A.I.T.H. Evangelistic Outreach, Evangelism Explosion, The Net, Family to Family, Becoming a Contagious Christian, etc. But be sure of this one thing: the key to effective evangelism is not in planning the work but in working the plan. If you have an evangelistic intent and you pray over it and work it through, and if you are relying on the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and if you are taking cues from your focus group, people will be led to faith in Christ. Personal evangelism takes place when someone like you, someone “with skin on him,” has done the work and takes the message of the cross to a world in need...that's personal evangelism. Learn your focus group. Learn how to reach them. And then go and do that very thing. As you do so, you will inspire your people to do the same in their daily lives. And that helps build an atmosphere for lives continually being brought to Christ and in turn bringing others to Him. You will need to plan and execute workable strategies for building people up in their faith in Christ along with your evangelism strategies, but this kind of church planting is a healthy church which can keep reproducing.



Something else you're going to have to understand is. . .

Perceptions: Understanding how people feel about you, your denomination, and your motives for planting a church are all going to be important to determine. This will help you as you begin your

work in planning your strategy. If there are objections to your work, how are you going to deal with them and address them? Whether the objections are legitimate or illegitimate, you've got to find ways to deal with perceptions. And then . . .

Religious views: What is the religious climate in your people group? Are they northern marginal Catholics, western New Age spiritual seekers, or are they southern evangelicals? Understanding their backgrounds will help you in your approach. So it's important to understand their barriers and objections. Then . . .

### ⊕ Determine what is working to reach your focus group.

- One of the things you'll want to find out is what are other churches doing to reach the kinds of people you want to reach? For instance . . .

If I want to plant a church in the inner city of Boston, and I hear about a church in another urban area in the Northeast United States that is reaching a similar group with success, I need to look at their strategy. I need to determine what might work in my context and try to tailor some of those methods to my area and put them to work. It's necessary to find something very similar to where I feel called to work. Similarity is the key to find what will work in my focus/people group. And then I need to. . .

### ⊕ Devise an evangelistic strategy.

- Tom Steffen gave us this list of questions to ask when designing an evangelistic strategy. Steffen is an internationally known missiologist who wrote this book we're quoting from and another excellent book for church planters entitled, *Passing the Baton: Church Planting that Empowers*. In *Reconnecting God's Story to Ministry*, Steffen addresses questions you should ask about any focus group you are trying to reach. So let's talk about . . .

### Questions to ask (from an international missiologist):

What is the worldview of the focus audience? How do they think? Are they hostile to Christianity? If so, that will impact the way you do your work. Are they open to Christianity? There are parts of North America where the church still has a good reputation. Churches in these communities have worked to maintain that perception.

What is the culture's decision-making pattern? In many cultures, the elder of the family or tribe makes a decision and then frequently, the rest of the clan follows suit. Is this true of situations in North America? Yes! If you reach a father in the home for Christ, you are more likely to reach the family. Of course, that doesn't mean you shouldn't try to reach other family members if the father doesn't respond; it simply makes the task easier if he is the first one to receive Jesus. It's a decision-making pattern to consider. And then . . .

What does it cost a person in this culture to become a Christian? For some people in areas of the Northeast where Catholicism is strong, there's a connection to family heritage and their particular faith. And to leave the Catholic faith is analogous to leaving the family. In parts of the south if you reach a Jehovah's Witness family and they accept Christ often they are shunned by friends and family. In areas of the Muslim world, if you commit your life to Christ you are immediately disowned from the family. In some places it can even result in physical violence or even one's life. So what will it cost those in your focus group to come to Christ? What will it cost someone living in an area of San Francisco where there is a high homosexual population? It will probably cost them the loss of their friends and relationships. Another thing to ask is . . .

What redemptive analogy is best for this culture? Don Richardson wrote two excellent missions books, *Peace Child* and *Eternity in their Hearts*. Richardson said that every people group has a redemptive analogy that can be used to bring people to faith in Christ. In *Peace Child*, the redemptive analogy involved warring tribes that ended a war by swapping the children of the tribe as hostages to the other tribe. The redemptive analogy here being that God sent His Son to die for the sins of mankind. And so that redemptive analogy became the point of connection.

How does this culture view Christianity? Emerging post modern generations tend to view Christianity in a very negative light. Boomers tend to view it more positively but with less institutionalization. Then we need to ask . . .

What does this culture understand about the basic components of the gospel story? Unchurched North America probably misunderstands the basic components of the gospel. Most people in