

Process of Evangelism

Introduction

I spent twenty years as a professional golfer. I wrote and published two gospel presentations for golfers, and I distributed these to golfers I met at the airports, on shuttle busses, spectators, marshals, standard bearers, and anyone else that had an interest. I am a teacher and I used my teaching gift to produce these gospel booklets so that I had an easy way to participate in evangelism. I also wrote and published my testimony. We distributed thousands of these testimonies, and they included a gospel presentation. At the U.S. Open one year, people stood in line for over an hour to get one of these autographed testimonies. I sowed a lot of seeds, and we saw some fruit, but I did not see many people come to Christ.

Then, the Lord opened the door for me to go into prison ministry. I saw thousands of men come to Christ. In my last year at the Cobb County Adult Detention Center, we saw about two thousand men make a decision for Christ. Bob Smith, another chaplain that was on staff, kept a chart on the wall with all the decisions for Christ in all the pods. Bob was an evangelist and a reaper in the harvest. I am a teacher and I spent 30% of my time on evangelism and 70% of my time on making disciples. Bob and I became close friends, and we would fellowship together and pray together. Bob was a fisher of men. In Matthew 4:19, Jesus invited us to follow Him, and promised that He would make us fishers of men. It seemed like in professional golf that I fished all night and did not catch anything. But, when I went into prison ministry, the fish were trying to jump into the boat. If I did not have several people per day pray to receive Christ, I would wonder if something was wrong. Inmates walking down the hall in chains would see me and ask, “Preacher, how do I get saved?” It was quite a different picture. I did a lot of reaping, and I reaped in fields that other people had sowed into. I saw many men come to Christ, and there is no telling how many moms, brothers, sisters, cousins, grandparents, and others had prayed for them, and sowed gospel seeds in their lives.

What was the difference? The difference was that these men were at different places in the evangelism process. These men were white for harvest. Many of the people that I came across on the PGA Tour were not white for harvest. They were at a different stage in the harvest process than the inmates.

I had a friend in Orlando named Louis Roman, and he had six children. He worked at a hospital as an LPN, and I really loved Louis and his wife Laurie. They were humble servants that were trying to raise godly children. As I got to know Louis, I discovered that he would consistently lead 25-30 people per year to the Lord. Considering that 90% of Christians surveyed have never led someone to the Lord, his numbers were impressive. I asked Louis how he did it. He shared that when he brought people their meals, he would ask them if they would like him to bless their food. He would pray a blessing on their food, and then say a brief prayer for the patient. Many of these patients would later ask him questions. His prayers had opened up a door of opportunity for him to share with them. As I thought about Louis and his patients, they were in a similar place to the inmates at prison. Many of these patients were suffering, and facing life and death situations. These patients were white for harvest. Their hearts had been softened and they were ready for the gospel.

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In John 4:31-38, after speaking with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus told His disciples, “do you not say, ‘there are yet four months, and then comes the harvest.’ Behold I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest.” Jesus was using the agricultural process to teach about the gospel. People, like crops, are at different stages and places in their lives. Some are ready to be reaped, and some are days, weeks, or months away from harvest. Their hearts may be hardened and they are just not ready.

I had a neighbor in Orlando many years ago named Bob. He complained to me that every time a certain person came over he was trying to force the gospel down his throat. He said he was trying to save him on his own front door. Bob’s house was his house and this man had no business trying to preach to Bob at his house. Bob was very agitated and bothered by this man. Bob was not ready to be reaped. He was not white for harvest. He was not at that stage of the process and his friends good intentions were actually doing more harm than good. The soil of Bob’s heart needed to be cultivated and prepared before seeds were sown. The seeds needed to germinate and grow and mature before being harvested. The wrong actions by a farmer will damage the crop, and it will not yield its fruit in its season. I spent time cultivating a relationship with Bob. He came to our men’s small group. We played Walleyball and had fun together. He got to know some of the other men in our church. Then, he came to a Bible study. One day Bob came over with tears in his eyes. He couldn’t make his mortgage payment. He and his wife had lots of toys and they both worked, but they had not managed their money. I had a large family and a single income, but we lived debt free. I paid Bob’s mortgage payment for him. He was in shock that someone would do something like that for him. God was softening Bob’s heart, and he was using me to prepare him for harvest.

After Jesus had spoken about the white harvest field, He said that the one “who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal, that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.” Sowing and reaping are two different activities that are necessary in producing a crop. Jesus is communicating to His disciples that evangelism is a process and there are different stages in the process. Sometimes we are sowing, and sometimes we are reaping, but the work we do depends on the stage of the crop. Another man had tried to reap Bob, but that was not where he was at. Bob needed to be cultivated and to be sowed into.

(John 4:35-38) “Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, and *then* comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. {36} Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. {37} For in this *case* the saying is true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ {38} I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor.”

The evangelism process, like the farming process has a goal. The farmer wants to harvest and sell his crops. In evangelism, the goal is the harvest, which is people coming to Christ. In verse 36, Jesus said they are gathering fruit for life eternal. The harvest is souls. But, like a farmer, we have to be aware of where people are at in the process. We cannot try to harvest a crop that is not ready. We have to cultivate, sow, or irrigate the crop and wait until it is ready to be harvested. In this session we want to look at the various stages in the process of evangelism. We will look at cultivation, sowing, and reaping.

The Process of Evangelism

1. The Cultivation Process
2. The Sowing And Growing Process
3. The Reaping Process

1. The Cultivation Process

In the natural cultivation process, the soil is being prepared for the crop. Over time soil gets hard and crusty. Water cannot get down to the roots. In addition to water, plants need air, and when the ground is compacted and hard, the air is squeezed out of the soil. The combination of an inability to get water and the lack of air makes it difficult for plants to grow. So the soil must be periodically broken up. Hunters are keenly aware of this. They look for deer trails. Where the deer routinely walk, their weight is transferred to the small area of their hooves. The downward pressure per square inch is very high, and it compacts the soil. As the soil gets hard and compacted, the plants cannot get any water or air, and so nothing grows in those areas, leaving a trail. Hunters look for these deer trails so they know where to set up their deer stands.

When I worked as the General Manager of a Golf Club, I learned a lot about the importance of this. From regular foot traffic on the greens, the greens would get hard and compacted. The water would run off the greens rather than go down to the roots. Therefore, we had to aerate the greens a couple of times a year. We had a machine with tines that took out long narrow plugs. We then spread sand and some organic matter on the greens that would get swept into the newly created holes. The aerating broke up the hardened greens and allowed the roots to get water and air. The golfers did not like the bad greens, but it was necessary to do it to keep them healthy.

In addition to air and water, cultivating the soil helps control the weeds. The weeds are brought to the surface, exposing them, which causes them to die. The cultivation interrupts the germination of the weeds and systematically removes them. The removal of weeds is important as they compete with the crop for the water and the nutrients.

During cultivation, large stones are also removed. When breaking up the ground, farmers would pick up any big rocks that were exposed and put them to the side of the field. They could be used for stone walls or other things. Once the ground was broken up and conditioned, they would sow their seeds. For many years I had a garden and used a Toro tiller to cultivate my soil. When I hit a rock I would stop the tiller and carry the rock off to the side of the garden. I wanted to remove anything that would prevent the roots of my vegetables from going down and getting established.

Our lives and our hearts can get hardened. People get offended and mad, and their hearts get hardened. I was offended as a young boy and my heart was hardened. Additionally, observing the hypocritical behavior of others can harden the heart of a person.

In Matthew 13, we have the parable of the sower and the soils. Some seed fell on the hard ground, and the birds came and ate the seed. Some fell on the rocky soil and it sprang up quickly, but because its roots had no depth, it withered. Some fell on soil with weeds, and the weeds choked out the plants. Only the seed that went on the good soil produced a crop. It produced a crop of 30, 60, and 100 fold. The cultivation process recognizes the condition of the hearts and where people are at in the process. In the cultivation process, we work with God to prepare the crop. Only God can change a heart, but there are things that he will have us do in the process.

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Last week I was at an Airbnb in Galveston. I was having a conversation with the couple that owned the house. The man was a Catholic and the woman was a Jew. She went to the synagogue and he went to Catholic mass. In fact, he was on the worship team. He played bass and drums. We were discussing politics. I told them that I don't preach politics, I preach righteousness. All at once the woman blurted out that I needed to teach my church to love people. She obviously knew what Jesus had commanded, "that we love one another." It was also very clear to me that this woman had been offended by one or more Christians and had a hardened heart. This lady was not at the reaping stage. She was not white for harvest. This woman needed to have her heart cultivated and softened.

As a side note, as I have reflected on this woman's outburst against Christians, I think the world has a skewed perception about love. If you do not accept homosexuality as a lifestyle, you are full of hate. If you do not embrace the liberal agenda, you are full of hate. Love does not mean that we have to accept any lifestyle. God is love, and He set our moral standards for us. Fornication may be okay in our society, but it is sin to God. A homosexual lifestyle may be okay in our culture, but it is sin to God. Our love for people does not require us to accept their behavior or lifestyle as acceptable. We can be patient with them. We can be kind to them. We can be gentle and meek towards them. We can bear with them and serve them. We can overlook a wrong suffered. We can love them with sacrificial love, and with agape love. They have been told that if we do not embrace their lifestyle, we are full of hate, which is not true.

How do hardened hearts get softened? I believe that God softens and prepares hearts. I also believe that we are collaborators with Him. I believe that God moves in response to our prayers softens hearts. We need to pray for lost people. My little sister prayed for me. Others prayed for me. So prayer is important. One of the ways that soil is softened is with slow rain. In our lives I believe this is the work of the Holy Spirit. We should pray and ask the Holy Spirit to soften hearts. I also believe that positive experiences and interactions with Christians soften hearts. When people see the love of Christ evidenced in our lives, their hearts are softened. Jesus was not afraid to hang out with sinners. He spent time with them and loved them. Many of them were untouchable and unlovable. He touched lepers and hung out with tax collectors. Nobody wanted anything to do with these people, but Jesus lovingly touched their lives by associating with them.

I had an agreement with a new company in the Middle East. The two partners got into a disagreement and one of them was very offended. He began accusing the other person of wrongdoing, and emptying the closet of all the wrong things he about. He betrayed his partner by sharing confidential things. I listened to both sides, and then I wrote a lengthy letter to one of them, trying to reconcile them. Both of these men are Sunni Muslims and I was trying to reconcile these two Muslims. When the man received my email, he had his wife and daughter read it. His daughter was amazed at what I had written, and told her father that he needs to fly to Houston and meet this man. He was in Canada at the time and preparing to return to Bahrain with his family. But, he paid \$600 and changed his ticket to fly to Houston to meet me this week. What was I doing? I was trying to remove stones of offense in the heart of this man. I was cultivating a relationship with this man. I was also sowing seeds of peace and reconciliation. This man has not received Christ yet, but he is one step closer. There are many people who have been offended, and as we cultivate relationships with them, we can help them work through these offenses. We can love them with God's love and encourage them. God will use us in their lives to soften their hearts and break up the hard ground.

2. The Sowing and Growing Process

In the parable of the sower and the soils, we see that seeds were cast everywhere. (See Matthew 13:3-23.) Good seed was cast that fell on the hard ground. Good seed was cast on the rocky soil. Good seed was sown on the weedy soil. And, good seed was sown on the good soil. Oftentimes, we don't know the condition of hearts. We learn of their condition by their responses. Our job is to sow seeds. When we see the condition of their hearts, we will know more about what is needed and how to pray for them. We should always be sowing seeds, but we should also be keenly aware of the responses that we get with people.

There are lots of ways to sow seeds. I found that having a color picture of my family with my testimony was an effective way to sow seeds. I wrote the two gospel tracts for golfers because it was a very effective way to sow seeds. I still give away a lot of gospel tracts to golfers. This week while I was in Galveston, I met with a man who had wanted to play professional golf. He was a golf enthusiast. I took a copy of *Good News About Fundamentals*, wrote a nice note, signed it, and gave it to him. That man will read that booklet and the gospel message is clearly presented. If I had not come prepared, I would not have been able to sow those seeds. I put one or two of those booklets in my briefcase every time I go somewhere.

The woman at the well sowed seeds and she did not have a golf booklet. She said, "Come and see." She invited people to come see the Messiah. She did not have a degree in theology, but she cast some seeds to all the people in her town. She told people that the Messiah had told her all the things that she had done. She testified about her encounter with Jesus. We can all share our testimonies with people. It is a great way of sowing seeds. (We will be learning about writing and sharing our testimonies in Session 5.)

(John 4:29-30) "'Come, see a man who told me all the things that I *have* done; this is not the Christ, is it?' {30} They went out of the city, and were coming to Him."

In the Sowing and Growing Process, we sow lots of seeds, and we make sure the plants are watered. We water them with words of encouragement. We water them with prayers. We water them by serving them. Some people call this servant evangelism. Servant evangelism is really just one of the ways, one of the tools that we have to help people move forward in the process of evangelism. It is not the final answer; it will not work on everyone. It is just one of the ways that we can sow into people to move them one step closer to Christ.

Being a friend to someone is one of the best things that we can do. As we cultivate and maintain a relationship with them, they are able to see Christ living through us. As we introduce them to other believers, they are getting to see the body of Christ. As we accept them and do things with them, there will be more opportunities to sow more seeds.

Jesus was accused of eating with tax collectors and sinners. Meals are a wonderful time to have conversations with people. Invite unbelievers over for a meal. That is a wonderful way to effectively evangelize. Remember, evangelization is not reaping. Evangelism is sharing the good news with people. Effective evangelism is helping people move one step closer in the process of evangelism.

3. The Reaping Process

In John 4:35, Jesus told His disciples to lift up their eyes for the fields are white for harvest. How do we know when someone is ready to be reaped? What are the characteristics of a field that is white for harvest? There were people around them that were white for harvest and I don't believe that they saw it.

Going back to John 4, Jesus had just shared with a woman at the well. He told her that He was the Messiah, and she went and told the whole town that she had found the Messiah. Let's take a look at this woman. The text says that it was the sixth hour, meaning 12:00 noon. It was the middle of the day, and it was the hot part of the day. The women did not go out at the sixth hour; they would go together in the morning. This woman was by herself. She did not go with the other women; she was an outcast. The woman at the well had five husbands and the one she had now was not her husband. Her lifestyle was not accepted. Jesus' eyes were open and He saw that this field was white for harvest. This crop was ready to be reaped. I believe that Jesus wants all of us to lift up our eyes and be aware of the condition that people are in.

My mother has lots of fruit trees in her yard. We have been enjoying the peaches and figs. As I thought about these trees and their fruit, I asked myself, how do I know when they are ready to harvest. For the peach tree, the peaches that are not ready are hard and small. They do not have the sugar content and size. As they get ripe, they get bigger and softer. When I am checking them, I give a gentle squeeze. If the peach is not ready, it will be hard. If it is ripe, it will have a softness to it. Second, when the peaches are not ready, they are firmly attached to the tree. When they are ripe, a simple touch or movement of the branch can cause them to fall. You do not have to tug on them very much at all and they come off. There is not a struggle to reap the harvest. They are ready to be harvested and come off easily.

As I thought about the figs, the same was true. The figs that are not ready are hard, and they are firmly attached to the tree. As they become ripe, their color changes and they become darker. They become softer and they bend over. And, they are easy to pick; they fall into your hand with the slightest tug. If you have to pull hard and try to break the stem to get them off, they are not quite ready. The figs that are ripe for harvest are soft and come off easily.

The same is true spiritually. When someone is hard, they are not receptive to the gospel seeds. The seeds do not go into their hearts. They don't want to hear the word. They are not receptive and do not want to discuss the gospel message. They are often combative and argumentative. If you tried to harvest someone like this, you would have to get pruning shears to get them off the tree, because they are not going to come easily. When we see someone that is hard, we should not try to reap. We should try to cultivate a relationship with them. We should try to sow seeds of encouragement, peace, and love. We should pray for them, but we should not try to force conversations with them. They are not ready. We still sow, but we do not try to reap.

One year I was flying home to Atlanta on a Delta flight. There was a twelve year-old boy sitting next to me. I struck up a conversation and gave him a copy of my testimony with a color picture of my family. (That is sowing seeds.) He read it, and I asked him if he had ever received Christ into his life. He replied that he had not. Since he had been fairly receptive, I asked him if there was any reason that would prevent him from praying to receive Christ right now. (That is a reaping process question.) He said, not but he did not want to do that right now. The peach was

not ready to come off the tree easily. It was not quite ready. I did not pressure him, but I did encourage him to consider making the decision to follow Christ. He was not ripe and white for harvest. About half hour later, the Delta jet went into a nose dive. In all my years of flying, I have never had something like that happen. This plane went from flying horizontally to flying vertically, and it was vertically downward. There was a serious problem and at this pace it would be a matter of minutes till we all died. The young boy immediately grabbed my arm and said, “Mister, can we say that prayer right now?” I led him into a prayer for salvation. No sooner had we got done praying, the Captain was able to get the plane leveled out and he came onto the loud speaker and apologized. He did not say what caused the plane to go into this nose dive, but he apologized for it happening. Personally, I think that God had something to do with it. The seed had been planted, but the soil of his heart was a little resistant. God did something supernatural and moved him quickly in the process so that he was ready for reaping.

We can learn from the various analogies that Jesus used that evangelism is a process. Relational evangelism is the recognition that evangelism is a process. It is living and engaging with other people in such a way that non-Christians move one step closer to Jesus Christ as a result of my love and initiative in their life.

Small Group Break-Out

Sharing: Share one thing that you learned tonight that stood out, or one thing that you can apply in your own life.

Prayer: Pray for wisdom and direction as we reach out to those in our oikos. Pray for 1 person in each person’s oikos.

Homework: Examine the people in your oikos and identify what stage they are at. There is a chart on the following page to use.

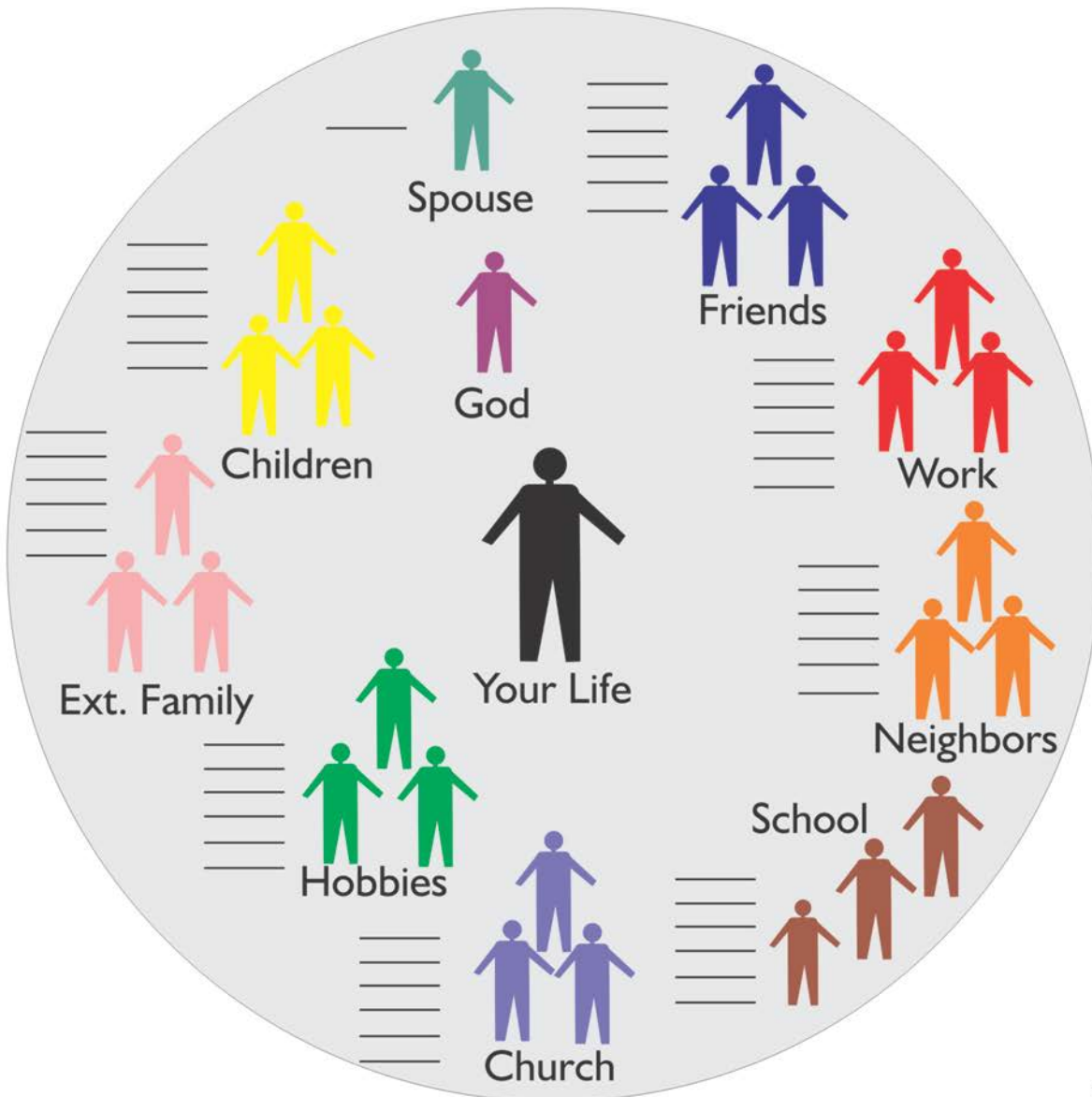
Scripture Review Matthew 28:18-20 and Matthew 4:19.

Memory: Memorize Romans 3:23.

The Circle of Life

Identifying our Relationships

1. List below those in your “oikos” that you know on a first name basis, and/or see with some sort of regularity. If you know they are a Christian, put a C by their name. If they are not a Christian, put a NC by their name. If you are not sure, put a ? by their name.
2. Next, besides those who are not a Christian, put a C next to the question mark if you believe they are in the cultivating stage. Put a S next to the question mark if they are in the sowing stage. Put a R beside the question mark if they are in the reaping stage.



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