

Why Are We Here? To Evangelize!
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.
July 26, 2026

Text: Acts 2:42-47

Purpose: To help the church realize that a part of our purpose is to evangelize the lost. The church needs to recognize the type of atmosphere they are projecting to the un-believing world and adjust, if necessary, to accomplish a critical purpose of the church.

A Sunday school teacher decided to have her young class memorize one of the most quoted passages in the Bible - Psalm 23. She gave the youngsters a month to learn the chapter.



Little Rick was excited about the task - but he just couldn't remember the Psalm. After much practice, he could barely get past the first line.

On the day that the kids were scheduled to recite Psalm 23 in front of the congregation, Ricky was so nervous. When it was his turn, he stepped up to the microphone and said proudly, "The Lord is my shepherd, and that's all I need to know."

Maybe when it comes down to it all, this kid has it right – “The Lord is my shepherd, and that’s all I need to know.” He got the “Being” right. He accepts he is in the family of God and that is enough.

The other half of “Being” involves “Doing.” Before we can set out to do something, we need to revisit that foundational question, “Why are we here?”



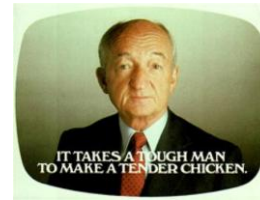
Last week we began looking at the question of “Why are we here?” If we are honest with ourselves, we would agree that we have asked that question a time or two over the years being involved in church. If you look on the back of your bulletin, you see the five primary areas which I believe the church should be involved in. Those are *Evangelism, Worship, Community and Fellowship, Ministry, and Discipleship*. Today I want to focus on Evangelism.

James Emory White, in his book, *Rethinking the Church*, gives us some insight as to how we need to re-examine evangelism in order to reach this generation for Christ.

Many of you are familiar with the automobile, the *Chevy Nova*. This car was manufactured off and on from 1962 to 1988 and was fairly successful here in America. The auto maker was encouraged by its sales here and decided to expand its market into Mexico and other South American countries. According to an urban legend, sales there were awful. The sales force increased advertising but sales were still bad. They could not understand why it had sold well here in America, but was not doing well in those countries. When they discovered



the answer, they were rather embarrassed. In Spanish, the word, “*No va*” means “not going.”



The business world is filled with examples of such stories. For example, when Perdue Farms translated into Spanish its popular slogan, “*It takes a tough man to make a tender chicken,*” they had hoped to expand sales into that market. But again, the sales were less than they anticipated. They later discovered that when it was translated into Spanish, it said, “*It takes a virile man to make a chicken affectionate.*” I am sure that is not what Frank Perdue had in mind.

What does this have to do with evangelism? Everything! When we attempt to communicate our message to others, sometimes our words, goals, objectives, purposes, get lost in the translation. Effective evangelism involves communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ with the goal of converting an individual to the Christian faith. The New Testament’s model calls us to present our faith in such



contextualization

a way that it makes sense to the person hearing it. It is called contextualization. Think about Jesus and His method of evangelism.

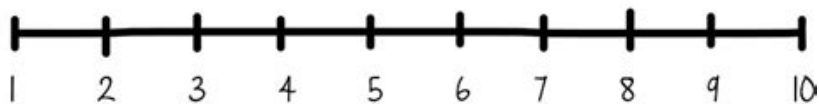
- With the woman at the well, he talked with her about receiving “*Living Water.*”
- When he met Peter, he invited him to become a “*Fisher of Men.*”
- When he talked with the tax collector, Zaccheus, they first discussed money.

- The Apostle Paul talked with people at Mars Hill about the idol they had made to an unknown God.
- In I Corinthians 9:22, Paul writes that he became “*all things to all men so that by all possible means, some might be saved.*”

The message of the gospel is unchanging – but the method of communicating the gospel must change according to the language, culture, and background of the audience. George Bernard Shaw once said, “The greatest problem in communicating is the illusion that it has been accomplished.”

YESTERDAYS METHODS OF EVANGELISM vs. TODAY’S UNCHURCHED

When we begin to think about evangelism, reaching those that are not involved with the church, we need to consider who our listeners are.



Picture an imaginary scale from 1 to 10. On the left of the scale, we have someone that is completely divorced from a relationship or knowledge of Christ. On the other end of the scale, at the 10 mark, is that point in time the individual came to a saving knowledge of Christ.

Let us use this scale to evaluate yesterday’s evangelism strategies to reach unbelievers. Many unbelievers in the 1960’s would say that they accepted the deity of Christ; they believed that truth existed, and they accepted the Bible as trustworthy. The church was held in high esteem, their

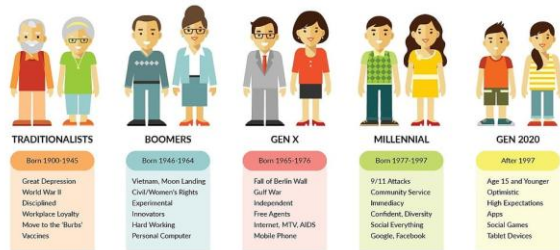
prior church experiences were healthy, they had a foundational knowledge of the essential truths of Christianity, and had a built-in sense of knowledge related to the value system of Christianity.

During the 1960’s door-to-door evangelism, Sunday school, revival, and bussing were well suited for this environment. For example, **door-to-door evangelism** worked well because people welcomed the minister into their home and were willing to listen to his message. **Sunday schools** were fruitful because people were not too intimidated to begin their exploration of God in a small group setting in the church building. Once a person enrolled in a Sunday school class, they had a built-in sense of conviction that they needed to attend and be involved in the church. **Revivals** were successful in that, those that needed to hear the message would come and respond when an invitation was given.

That was a time when people were invited, people would **ACTUALLY KEEP THEIR WORD** and come. The bussing ministries of the 1960’s would be difficult to duplicate today. They would drive a bus around town, pick up children, take them to another part of the city, they would spend several hours at church and then would be taken back home.

On a scale of 1-10, I would say, in the 1960’s, these unbelieving individuals were about an 8. A one-time cold call on an individual could result in moving that person from an 8 to a 10. After all, they did not need to be moved very far down the line – only two points.

Our pressing question for today is, “Are the conditions and attitudes that created such a successful context for those strategies still in place today? Are the people we are trying to reach the same as they were in the 1960’s? From everything I have read recently, the answer is NO.



Today’s average person is a secular person. They have no basic understanding of Christianity. Those

that are considered “Generation X” those born from 1963 to 1977 are the first generation in America that lacks the memory of a hope-giving gospel.

Today many people struggle with the deity of Christ. They accept Jesus was a good man, but not the Son of God. Today, 72% deny the existence of absolute truth and few have confidence in the historical accuracy of the Bible. Two-thirds of America has no idea what John 3:16 is. Less than 25% know what the word “gospel” means. (It means Good News.) And 10% believe that Noah’s wife’s name was Joan of Arc.

The unchurched people of today have seen scandal after scandal in the church. The percentage of adults that have confidence in the church has dropped dramatically.

The most recent report out of the SBC details Baptists are just as guilty as other denominations when it comes to sexual misconduct among its convention staff and local ministers and staff.



In 1974, 49% had confidence in the church. In 1989 it had dropped to 22%. Imagine what it is today. George Barna, the research expert, in 1993, found that of the four major denominations, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Lutheran – none had a reputation that were rated “very favorable” by even one-third of the population.



There is a growing trend towards situational ethics. Robert Bulla, the sociologist, said he met a woman named Sheila who typified this attitude. “I believe in God. I’m not

a religious fanatic. I can’t remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It’s “Sheilaism.” Just my own little voice.”

Where would you say our culture is on this 10-point scale? I would say about a two or a three.

With child abuse cases being reported everyday in the newspaper; do you think many families are going to let their children get on a bus and travel across town with strangers? How many people will open the doors to a stranger to discuss religious topics? When you do invite someone to church, HAVE THEY EVER COME?

To begin rethinking evangelism, we need to look at it as a process and an event. It takes time to move someone down that scale towards their decision to accept Christ.



Whenever a couple begins dating, they take time to get to know each other. They spend time together; they talk about their past and their future goals. Each person wants to make

sure the other person is the right person for them. It is a rare couple that meets on one evening and gets married the next week. The decision to accept Christ is much the same way. It takes time. It is a process of introduction, learning, discussing, and then sometimes much later, commitment.

In today's culture, it will take more positive exposure to Christ's redemptive word and Christ's people, to move people from a 3 to a 10, than in past generations. If you have ever seen an incubator work, you can understand what I am saying. An incubator that is used to hatch baby chicks is a small box that is kept at a constant, just right, warm temperature for 21 days until the eggs hatch. If it is turned off, or not set right, the small baby chicks inside could die.

In many ways, we as the church need to structure our environment so that those that are seeking Christ, can be kept warm, with the temperature right, until they accept Christ.

Let us look at the different kind of church incubators there are in the world today.

The Seeker Hostile

As hard as it may seem to us today, a church can be openly **hostile** towards individuals seeking to find a relationship with God. A young woman by the name of April was trapped in a demeaning world of prostitution, drug addiction and alcoholism. Wanting to escape this environment, she tried to break free from this vicious lifestyle. She tried everything she knew but every time she couldn't find freedom. She even tried suicide. She



almost succeeded but was rescued at the last minute and her life was saved.

April turned to the church for her answers. She had been used by men, rejected by the world, and she was hoping that she could find hope in the church. Halfway through the church service one Sunday morning, the pastor recognized her from her life on the street. Before the church and congregation, he pointed her out and then lectured her for defiling the house of God with her presence. He then ordered her out. This may sound harsh, but it is so true in a few places of worship.

A few years ago, I heard about a black family that was seeking a church in which they could have a funeral for their young daughter that died suddenly. The first church told them to go to the black churches. The second one simply refused since they were not a member. But a third church, a white church opened their doors to that family and told them they would do what they could to minister to that family during this time of crisis. When it was all over, the family returned to that church and provided a meal for the entire church as a way of saying "Thank-You" for opening their hearts to them.

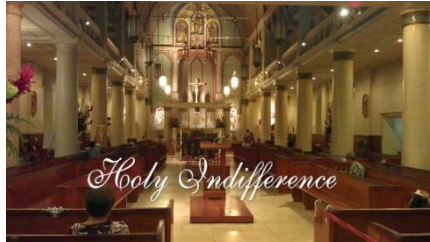


How many churches have turned their backs on a couple that has decided to live together rather than get married? In Fremont I met a couple that lived together for 25 years because their pastor would not marry them. After talking with them over a long period of time, I eventually married them in their home, while she was lying in a hospital bed only a few weeks from death.

How many churches have turned their noses up at a young woman that has become pregnant before she got married? How dare we judge others and cast them aside. We need to be welcoming people in all walks of life into our doors! Maybe not affirming their sin or lifestyle, but loving them into the kingdom of God.

The Seeker Indifferent

This second type of church is not really hostile towards those outside the church; they are just **indifferent** towards the outside unbelievers. I have heard some Baptist pastors tell me that they cannot grow their church because there are no more Baptists in their area! They are completely unaware that unbelievers do not care if you are a Baptist or a Methodist! They only want to know if you care enough about their situation. Sadly, some churches and individuals simply do not care enough about another person's eternal destiny.



The Seeker Hopeful

A third kind of church that James Emory White described is one he has called, **seeker hopeful**. These churches want to create an environment where seekers can come and meet Christ. They provide altar calls, revivals, Sunday school campaigns, but nothing that they have done effectively brings in seekers, much less bring people to Christ. Yes, the regular attenders participate in these altar calls, revivals and Sunday school outreaches – but no one else new comes. This type of environment is like going out into the pond with your boat, baiting the hooks and then



dropping the line back into the boat – holding hands and praying that the fish will jump into the boat and bite their hook. It just doesn't happen that way, does it?!

The Seeker Sensitive

Some churches have finally gotten the idea of intentionally creating an atmosphere of nurture. I would describe those churches as attempting to be **Seeker Sensitive**. They are on the verge of reaching their community, but often those churches spend most of their time focusing on those already committed – those already involved in church.



The Seeker Targeted

It is my prayer for this church to intentionally remove all these barriers that become walls for unbelievers that are seeking out Christ. If you have ever been in some churches, you may notice that the words to the songs are projected on a screen on the wall for people to follow. The scripture verses are also put up on the wall to follow along as the pastor reads. Some churches include what page the scripture can be found in the pew Bible so they will not have to feel foolish fumbling for Jude or Malachi. In these type churches, there is a conscience effort to create an atmosphere that is relational, intentional, and evangelistic. The incubator has to have the temperature set just right. Few churches are **Seeker Hostile**, but even fewer are seeker sensitive.

To begin to reach our culture today, George Barna has noted that we need to understand why our message is irrelevant to unbelievers.

First, they do not see the relevance;
second, they do not understand the message we are trying to bring to them; and thirdly, they are having difficulty accepting what the Christian answer is from what they thought it would have been.

With all this said, our question is, “What is effective evangelism today?”

Step One: Bridge Building

The first step is establishing a relationship with others – Building a Bridge. The typical unbeliever today is divorced from any contact with the church. They don’t listen to Christian TV, they don’t listen to Christian radio, they don’t read Christian books, they don’t read their Bible, they don’t attend revivals, and they surely don’t read those tracts left in the bathroom! The only way to reach them is through getting to know them, sharing your life with them, helping them at a time of great need.

Again, George Barna gives us some insight into the world of the unbeliever. Some churches spend a great deal of money on billboard advertising. Others use media advertising, some have resorted to telemarketers, and many continue to go out on Tuesday nights for visitation. According to Barna’s research, all four of these have a **NEGATIVE** impact on the unbelieving community. The two major ways that have a positive influence on a person is through event marketing (a large crusade) or through a personal invitation.



This concept of building a bridge is revolutionary if we begin to understand its impact. We are so comfortable with going to the same grocery store, going to the same gas station, going to the same hair dresser that we never try to engage others in a relationship. We need to befriend some new people. Christians have so isolated themselves from the world of non-Christians that we are no longer salt and light to our communities. When we turn inward and hug ourselves only, we essentially smother ourselves to death!

Step Two: Verbal Witness

Once a relationship is built, we need to be ready to give a verbal, clear, understandable word about our Christian faith. The scripture tells us to “*Be ready in season and out of season to give a word for the hope that is within us.*” (2 Timothy 4:2)



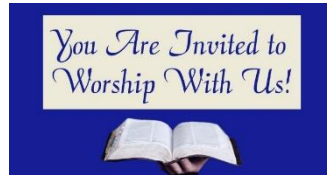
When we need a doctor, we ask our trusted friends. When we need legal advice, we turn to our trusted friends. We need to be in a position to share our faith at the right time and in the right place. It is true; we can become burdensome if we are not sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s leading. But we must be ready when we are called.

I believe that the early church was so successful because those that were saved could not contain their joy. It passed through Jerusalem like gossip often does.

Barna says that *only one-third* of Christians feel that it is their responsibility to share their faith with others. I can tell you that is not right! We need to be willing to share such a great gift with everyone we know.

Step Three: Invitation to an Evangelistic Environment

We need to provide a clear presentation of the good News of God's redeeming love and grace through a well-planned evangelistic environment.



Billy Graham has established this as his model for reaching our culture. In Billy Graham's biography, William Martin noted that it was Graham's approach to use "whatever techniques to hook 'em in, then punch them with the gospel. Whatever it takes to get their attention."

In the 1996 crusade in Charlotte, they used the *Charlie Daniels Band* along with *DC Talk*. It was said that this is not your father or your grandfather's crusade anymore. Yet the plan for Billy Graham's crusades included building bridges. Friends bringing friends to hear the word of God proclaimed in a clear, understandable manner.

Today almost one-fifth or 20% of all churches are offering a "seeker service" that is targeting unbelievers. These seeker services may vary in style or dynamics but they have a common theme. They include anonymity, time to decide, a "user friendly" message, encouragement of spiritual questions, and casual dress. These services are not to be confused with Worship services – which are usually targeted for believers that are maturing in the faith.

A Change in Values

The key to seeing the changes around us is to understand how the world has changed. We need to see that the approaches of the past may not work today.

James Emory White was leading a conference in Florida about the use of contemporary music in worship. After the conference an elderly woman made her way down the aisle with her walking cane. James knew that he was done for. This woman was going to blast him about changing her church service.



She said, "Young man! Do you mean to tell me that this is the kind of music we need today to reach people?"

James hesitated because he knew what was coming. But he said, "I believe so. What do you think?"

She said, "About as contemporary as I get is Lawrence Welk on Saturday night. But if this is what it takes, then 'Let's Boogie.'"

She went on to say, "It's not my style of music, but if it will reach people for Jesus, I like it. Besides, the church doesn't exist for my needs. It exists to win the world."



I love that phrase, "The Church exists to win the world." We are called to win the lost at any cost.

I'm not saying that we need to change the music around here. What I am saying is that we need to be intentional in building bridges to the unsaved people in our community. We need to be ready once those bridges are built, to be ready to share a word about our faith when the time arises, and create opportunities in and around our church to attract unbelievers.

Moving individuals up the scale towards a 10 is the most difficult task the church faces today. If we intentionally attempt to do this, both individually as well as a church, we can succeed.

Why are we here? One answer to that question is to **evangelize** our community.

LET US PRAY