

PERSPECTIVE

JANUARY 2018

**BE A
GOSPEL
NEIGHBOR**



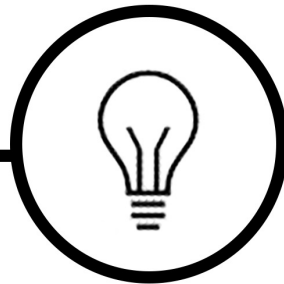
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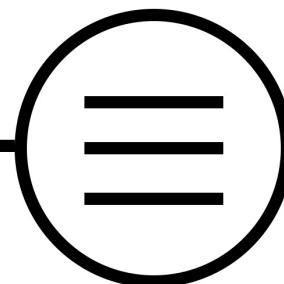


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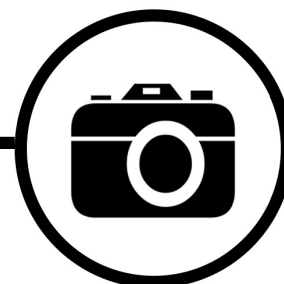
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Be a Gospel Neighbor

The aim of hospitality is to forge relationships strong enough to bear the weight of truth.

Dustin Willis & Brandon Clements

I'll never forget Andrew. He joined the church several years ago. He came from the UK and didn't plan to be in the states very long. Andrew was young, single, and lived in a small apartment. He had every excuse under the sun *not* to be a good neighbor. And yet, he is one of the most hospitable men I've ever met. He regularly welcomed co-workers, next-door-neighbors, and church members into his home. During his last Sunday here, I asked the evening gathering if they'd ever been in Andrew's home. Nearly every hand went up. In a small but important way, Andrew made a difference. By opening up his home and sharing his life, he helped others see the priority of the Lord, Jesus Christ. He is a gospel neighbor.

Every Christian wants to make a difference. It's part of our spiritual DNA. We know humanity's greatest need is salvation, so we long to see our friends respond to the gospel in repentance and faith. But if we're honest, we'll admit we struggle here. We know our friends need the good news, but we have a hard time opening our homes and opening our mouths to make the gospel known. Too often, we're like a postal carrier with the best letter ever who can't seem to leave the driveway.

Being a good neighbor is a crucial component of being a faithful evangelist. We should all aspire to be gospel neighbors. But first, I want to assess a couple of common ways we measure evangelistic success.

THE METRICS OF SUCCESS

It's tempting to equate healthy evangelism with results. I recently heard a Christian leader lamenting the lack of baptisms in our state. He assumed this is because we aren't evangelizing enough. He may be right! We should certainly pray for more baptisms. But since God is *the* giver of life, a decrease in the number of baptisms is not necessarily due to a lack of evangelism. After all, we plant the seeds—evangelism, but it's up to God to give the growth—baptism (see 1 Cor. 3:6). Therefore, I don't think a "number of baptisms" is the best metric for assessing our commitment to evangelism.

Instead of counting the number of baptisms, we could instead count the number of times we share the gospel in any given week. Counting evangelistic conversations is a

much better metric. It reminds us, though salvation is in the hands of the Lord, we must tell people about Jesus (Rom. 10:14). Should I, as a pastor, challenge every member to share the gospel once a day? I'm thinking about it and do think the frequency of evangelistic conversations is a better gauge of our spiritual health than the number of baptisms we register.

However, there is an even better way. In addition to praying for baptisms and encouraging numerous evangelistic conversations, the faithful Christian will seek to open up life and home in the biblical practice of hospitality. I love how Dustin Willis and Brandon Clements put it: "The simplest way to change the world is to leverage your ordinary life for his history sweeping mission of hospitality."¹ Simply being a good neighbor, a gospel neighbor, is an important part of living an evangelistic life.

IS NEIGHBORING BIBLICAL?

A number of passages in the New Testament call us to be good neighbors. The most obvious is the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37. Christians are to show mercy to the overlooked and unwanted. Every Christian should have a Christ-like disposition to all—happily loving those in need. This is the spirit of the first half of Galatians 6:10 where Paul tells the churches to "do good to everyone." This applies to the Syrian refugees around the world, the homeless man across town, and the lonely widow and busy young family right next door.

The requirement for hospitality gets to the heart of neighboring. It's actually a qualification of elder leadership. Any man who wants to shepherd God's flock must be hospitable (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8). In describing an elder's calling, Alexander Strauch noted, "An open home is a sign of an open heart and a loving, sacrificial spirit. A lack of hospitality is a sure sign of selfish, lifeless, loveless Christianity."²

Though Strauch applies this qualification to hospitality *within* the body of Christ, there are good reasons to think Paul intended a broader view. For example, the author of Hebrews exhorts us "to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb. 13:2). Like Paul, he is very concerned about hospitality inside the church. He may be exhorting believers to open up their homes to Christian travelers, but the language is broad enough to include those who don't know the Lord.³ Paul has a similar message in Romans 12:13–14, "Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them." Paul demands a spirit of generosity to

all: the brother or sister, the stranger, and even the enemy!

Faithful pastors and Christians alike will strive to be good neighbors. They will open up their homes to people around them. Such hospitality is not without cost (it takes time and money). If this cost seems high, remember the words of our Savior in Luke 9:23, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

Yes, gospel neighboring is biblical.

COWARD IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?

Gospel neighboring is important. Just to be clear, I pray tons of impromptu evangelistic conversations are taking place throughout the week. Not only that, I encourage Christians to invite their unbelieving friends to church gatherings. These public meetings are a good place to hear the gospel. But I fear if we neglect the hard work of gospel neighboring, any culture of evangelism we build will be far too thin and shallow. Gospel neighboring makes our evangelism thick and deep. Though it’s great to share the gospel with whomever you meet—God’s Word is sufficient to save—it’s appropriate to share the gospel in the context of sturdy relationships. Gospel neighboring strives to make such relationships a reality.

If pastors are faithful to share the gospel to the gathering on Sunday morning but are not faithful to make Christ known on their own block, are they really evangelistic? As the quotable Dallas pastor Matt Chandler challenges, “If you’re a beast in the pulpit but a coward in your neighborhood, something has gone wrong.” But this isn’t just a criticism for pastors. All of us need to hear this. If you are willing to engage in a ten-minute conversation with your Uber driver but are unwilling to invest in the people God planted in your family, workplace, or neighborhood, are you truly a faithful evangelist? I don’t think so.

A CHALLENGE AND A CAUTION

The challenge is for every church and Christian to see the importance of engaging our neighbors—the people God has specifically put in our lives. The Spirit may be prompting you to engage a family you drive past each and every morning or a co-worker you talk to each and every day.

The cold hard truth is many of us don’t know who’s living next door to us. Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon in their

book, *The Art of Neighboring*, devised an ingenious exercise to see how well we know our neighbors. Draw a chart with nine boxes (think tic-tac-toe) and mark your home at the center. The other boxes are the eight nearest neighbors in your apartment complex, dorm, or block. In each box, jot down three items of information about each neighbor: First, their name. Second, a simple fact—e.g., “works at UPS” or “mother of three.” Third, an in-depth fact—e.g., “wants to be a lawyer” or “had a bad experience with religion.” Pathak and Runyon have come to refer to this as the “chart of shame” because so few of us can get past question one.⁴

You see the challenge, don’t you? It’s hard to have meaningful conversations about *anything* with your neighbors if you don’t actually know them.

The caution is just as important. We must not treat our neighbors as projects. They aren’t machines that need their controls adjusted before they overheat. Care about people for who they are (God’s image bearers) and not simply for whom they may become (our brothers and sisters in Christ).⁵

This is a tension I feel when I look at my calendar. Life is full, and I want to be a good steward of my time. I’m not looking for deep friendships with people who don’t know Christ. And yet, if I make *no* room for unbelieving neighbors, am I really living out the Greatest Commandment (Matt. 22:37–38), much less the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20)? And if I engage them *only* because they may one day be children of God, don’t I risk seeing them as a battle to be won instead of a neighbor to be served? I think so.

The challenge is to know our neighbors. The caution is to beware of treating them as objects that need to be fixed instead of people who need to be loved.

THE END GOAL

As a Christian, I cannot deny how much I long for my neighbors to know what I know: Jesus Christ is the Lord. We have been made to know and love God. All of us fall short and deserve eternal punishment. God, in his love, made a way of escape. The Father sent the Son into the world. Jesus lived a perfect life and, thus, could die as a perfect sacrifice in the place of all who would turn and trust in him. His resurrection proves he really is the King of Kings, and now all are called to follow him. This is the gospel, it’s the heart of my life, and it’s what I want my neighbors to hear and believe. This is not the *only* goal of

good neighboring, but it is the end goal. I appreciate how Willis and Clements make this point:

Clearly, the aim of hospitality is more than merely inviting someone into our home, sharing a good meal and a few stories, and calling it a night. We are missionaries, after all. Paul reminded us, “We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us” (2 Cor. 5:20). And pastor Charles Spurgeon said, “Every Christian...is either a missionary or an imposter.”

I want to share Christ with my Uber driver, my barista, and anyone that crosses my path. However, I want to be especially faithful with those God has planted in my life. These are my nearest neighbors, and I have a unique responsibility to show them Christ. Furthermore, I don’t want to be a beast in the pulpit but a coward in my neighborhood! I’m sure you don’t either.

MOVING FORWARD

How can you (and I) grow in being a gospel neighbor for the glory of God? Here are ten imperatives I pray God uses to move us in the right direction.

1. *Name the people God has placed near you.* This goes back to the “chart of shame” mentioned in *the Art of Neighboring*. Give yourself a few weeks or even months, but do all you can to figure out who is around you.

2. *Start praying for your neighbors by name.* Be like that persistent widow in Luke 18. Plead with God to open doors for “effective work” (1 Cor. 16:9). He can do this.

3. *Strategize ways to welcome them into your life.* In a few weeks, we’ll be giving members of Mount Vernon *The Simplest Way to Change the World: Biblical Hospitality as a Way of Life*. It’s full of practical and easy ways you can open up your home to your neighbors. Please read it and use it well. It’s going to take some work to figure out if you need to spend more time going to block parties or simply open up your home once a quarter for a cookout. You may already have relationships with neighbors you can pursue. Is it time to see who’s interested in reading the Bible with you?

4. *Welcome neighbors into your life.* At least for me, the hardest part is not strategizing how to have neighbors over, it’s actually doing it. For some of you,

this is very easy. But for many of us, it’s hard. This may be due to a lack of time, energy, or courage. You’ll need all three!

5. *Love them for who they are.* Again, in order to be a good neighbor, evangelism shouldn’t be your only goal. Enjoy getting to know your neighbors. Ask them questions. Find ways to serve and spend time together. They are magnificent image bearers. You don’t know their future, so try to love them where they are.

6. *Be consistent.* We want to aim for gospel neighboring until the Lord returns. Let’s commit to neighboring for the long haul. That may require setting fairly modest hospitality goals. Better to do a little over a long period of time than to overextend yourself for a month.

7. *Find accountability.* Do you have a Christian brother or sister who challenges you to read your Bible and pray faithfully? Consider asking him or her to encourage you in the discipline of hospitality as well.

8. *Share what you love the most.* If you are a Christian, you love Christ the most. Period. How you get to the gospel with your neighbors takes wisdom. Again, you don’t want them to feel like a project. But you don’t want to be silent too long, either. Willis and Clements are helpfully honest: “Yes, as you take the bold step of speaking the good news, you may feel nervous and reluctant for fear that you will be rejected, but understand the gospel you have is so attractive to the hurting who live right next door to you.”⁷ So true.

9. *Keep first things first.* We all know someone who focuses so much on discipleship he neglects evangelism. This is not good. But let’s not forget the full command of Paul in Galatians 6:10, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Paul prioritized the local church. This is surely because he remembered Christ’s words, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Being a faithful next-door neighbor starts with being a faithful church member.

10. *Rest*. Do you remember Andrew, the young man who opened up his apartment to literally dozens of friends? We aren't all like Andrew. For him it seemed to come naturally. Thankfully, our hope isn't in being like Andrew. Our confidence is in God who made each of us just the way he wanted us to be. Our success in gospel neighboring, therefore, doesn't depend on our charm, ability to throw a party, or excellent outdoor grilling. It comes from the power of the Spirit of God who exalts the Son of God and all for the glory of God. Because of this, even as we work hard at being a gospel neighbor, we can rest.

~Aaron Menikoff

¹ Dustin Willis and Brandon Clements, *The Simplest Way to Change the World: Biblical Hospitality As a Way of Life* (Chicago: Moody, 2017), 143.

² Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1995), 194.

³ "In verse 2 the author teaches that this brotherly love should even extend beyond the church." R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in Hebrews* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2017), 220.

⁴ Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring: Building Genuine Relationships Right Outside Your Door* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 37–38.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 102.

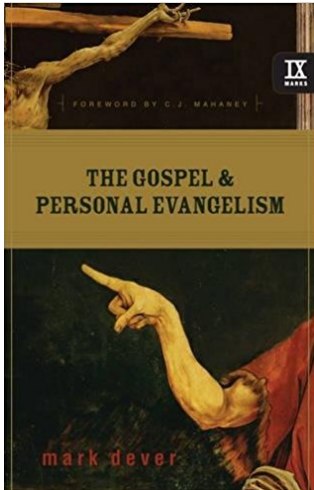
⁶ *Simplest Way*, 119.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 121.

The Gospel & Personal Evangelism

Written by Mark Dever

Bookstall Price \$10



The gospel and evangelism are the very core of the Christian faith; however, they are also two topics that make people squirm when discussed. Ask a typical believer to summarize the gospel and you are likely to hear something vague and disappointing. Ask a typical church member about their practice of evangelism and the awkwardness gets worse. Why is it we struggle so much with that which is so central to our faith? In *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism*, Mark Dever eases the struggle by making the Gospel clear and the practice of evangelism doable.

How we evangelize, who we evangelize, what message we proclaim, where, and when are not accidents that we stumble into by some God-ordained chance. Evangelism is an essential and practical part of the Christian life in the church that must be cultivated and encouraged. “In fact, the outworking of faith through the community of a local church seems to be Jesus’ most basic evangelism plan.”

Through the book, Dever sets out to answer several foundational questions around the gospel and evangelism such as: *why don’t we evangelize, what is the gospel, how should we evangelize, and what isn’t evangelism?* He carefully answers these and other questions as he encourages us to share the gospel honestly, urgently, joyfully, and with clarity. In numerous places, he concisely communicates the gospel in clear and practical terms that can be easily understood and remembered.

The book is easy to read and encouraging to apply. I wholeheartedly recommend it to all believers. If you take the time to read this short volume on the gospel and evangelism you will walk away abundantly encouraged by a clarified understanding of the precious gospel as well as a renewed and empowered vision for sharing it with others.

“The good news of Jesus Christ is crucial. Until you recognize that, I can say nothing helpful to you about evangelism. It will be no more for you than an unpleasant duty or an occasional impulse. When the message of the cross captures your heart, then your tongue—stammering, halting, insulting, awkward, sarcastic, and imperfect as it may be—won’t be far behind. As Jesus said, ‘Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks’ (Matt. 12:34).”

– RECOMMENDED BY DENNY CROSBY

Excerpts From the Book

1

“The news that we, as Christians, have to bring is so great, so tremendous, not only because our depravity is so pervasive and our sin so widespread, but also because God’s plans for us are so different, so wonderful.”

–What is the Gospel?, p. 35

2

“Evangelism is not declaring God’s political plan for nations nor recruiting for the church—it is a declaration of the gospel to individual men and women.”

–What isn’t Evangelism?, p. 76

3

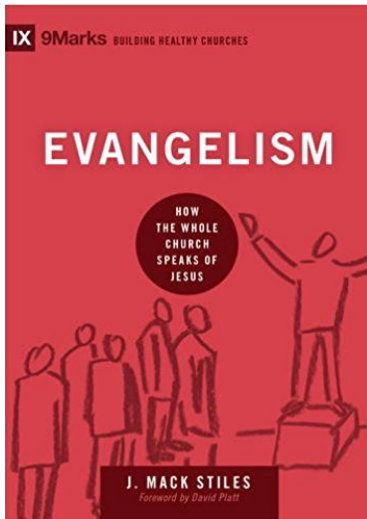
“We do not fail in our evangelism if we faithfully tell the gospel to someone who is not subsequently converted; we fail only if we do not faithfully tell the gospel at all.”

–Conclusion, p. 112

Evangelism

Written by Mack Stiles

Bookstall Price \$13



Every true believer in Jesus Christ has been touched by evangelism. God is the author of salvation and uniquely uses his Word and the testimony of his people as the means to draw people to saving faith. Every true believer bears the weight of the biblical mandate to make disciples. In evangelicalism, there is much confusion about the individual's responsibility and the church's obligation to evangelize. In *Evangelism: How the Whole Church Speaks of Jesus*, Mack Stiles carefully provides a biblical understanding of evangelism and gives a clear, practical

picture of how the local church can fulfill our biblical mandate by engaging in a culture of evangelism.

The first chapter provides a biblical foundation for evangelism. Stiles concisely defines evangelism as "teaching the gospel with the aim to persuade." Stiles then provides practical guidance by walking through eleven "yearnings" that should mark a healthy local church culture of evangelism. He also touches on connecting the church with local evangelism efforts and how to be intentional. In his final chapter, Stiles provides some very practical points on sharing your faith.

Stiles has written three books on evangelism. I have read all three and I think this book is his finest work. Some would argue that Stiles is an evangelist and that evangelism is easy for him because he is so gifted. From my experience knowing Mack personally for several years, I believe that he is just a faithful Christian living out his faith. This book reflects the culmination of wisdom and experience of a faithful Christian who has persevered, matured, and allowed God to biblically shape his thinking and practice. Having observed Mack lead and influence in the context of a college student ministry and as an elder in his local church, he rightly places the culture of evangelism in the biblical mandate of the local church. He lives out his writing, which leads to a book overflowing with practicality. If I were to recommend just one book on evangelism, this is it.

— RECOMMENDED BY BRYAN PILLSBURY

Excerpts From the Book

1

"Evangelism is teaching the gospel (the message from God that leads us to salvation) with the aim to persuade. If a church does not understand biblical evangelism, over time that church will be subverted. If we don't practice healthy evangelism, the dominoes start to fall:

- ✦ The focus of preaching and teaching turns to living a moral life, not a gospel-centered life.
- ✦ Non-Christians are lulled into thinking that they are okay in their lost state.
- ✦ Christians think that non-Christians are believers because they made a superficial outward commitment.
- ✦ The church baptizes [unbelievers].
- ✦ The church allows non-Christians into membership.
- ✦ Eventually, non-Christians become leaders in the church.
- ✦ A church becomes a subculture of nominalism.

Unbiblical evangelism is a method of assisted suicide for a church, so there is much at stake in getting evangelism right."

—Of Alar Calls and Laser Lights, p. 39

2

"[In] 2 Corinthians 5:20-21[,] Paul calls us to remember the power behind the message: Christ himself. We are told of our astounding responsibility to be representatives of the kingdom of God. We are Christ's ambassadors. We are called to see people differently—to give up the human and worldly vision of other and to know and love them, understanding. That they are lost sinners who need to be reconciled to God."

—Actually Sharing Our Faith, p. 100



BLESSED
ARE
THE POOR IN SPIRIT
FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN
THOSE WHO MOURN
FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED
ARE THE MEEK
FOR THEY SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH
THOSE WHO HUNGER
& THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS
FOR THEY SHALL BE SATISFIED
MATTHEW 5:3-6

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

-Matthew 5:3-6

The beatitudes at the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount are some of the most well-known passages of Scripture. They are called the "beatitudes" because the word "beatus" in Latin means "blessed", which is how each one begins.

People often wrongly interpret the beatitudes. They assume Jesus is saying, "By living this way, you will become a my disciple and will have a blessed Christian life." This misses the context. Rather, Jesus is saying that those who already *are* his followers, those who are citizens of the kingdom of heaven, are characterized in this way. In turn, they are "blessed" or favored by God. They find their joy and happiness living under the good and loving authority of king Jesus.

Spiritual Poverty

It is fitting that the first beatitude would be humility. We are to be poor in spirit. We are to have an attitude of faith and repentance that comes empty-handed, offering nothing to God but begging for his mercy. When we do, we are given the gift of the kingdom of heaven, i.e., God's loving rule through king Jesus.

Mourners

"Blessed are those who mourn." Mourn over what? Our mourning is connected to our poverty of spirit. Thus, we mourn over our sin that has made us spiritually bankrupt, that has caused separation between us and God. When we come broken over our sin, God does not reject us but welcomes and comforts us. What mercy there is for the mourner!

The Meek

Those who have received undeserved kindness and gentleness ought to be characterized by the same kindness and gentleness they've been shown. There is no self-assertion insisting on our own priorities. Citizens of the kingdom are humble people that show mercy to others. That's how their heavenly Father has dealt with them. The Father will one day reward the meek with more than they could ask: "the earth."

Starving for Righteousness

We, who have been brought out of the domain of darkness into the kingdom of the beloved Son, long for righteousness, not wickedness. It is something we should constantly crave. In a world filled with wickedness, followers of Jesus long for righteousness like a man wandering in desert longs for water. Like always, the Father is faithful to provide. He satisfies their longing for righteousness by making them more like his Son.

– BRAD THAYER

NEW MEMBERS



Jean Colley



Laura Countess



Pedro & Ana Gabriela
Guerra-Reyes



Chidiebere
Okoli



Collier Pressnell



Ann Sanford



Marshall & Kailee
Young

