

Irresistible Evangelism: The Driver
By Jason Huff
2 Corinthians 9:6-15, Acts 5:12-16, Titus 3:1-8

Today's final Scripture reading comes from Titus 3:1-8. Listen now to God's Word. "Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men. At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone."

During seminary, I worked for three months for Hospice of the Bluegrass. My main assignment was caring for veterans at a nursing home. Most of the job involved sitting and praying with older gentlemen who could no longer walk or speak. Those hours blurred together. To a few other patients, I was just good company. But there's one patient I won't ever forget.

His name was Joseph. He told me the first time I met him that he was an atheist. I told him that it wasn't a problem for me if it wasn't a problem for him. He agreed. It turned out he'd been under hospice care for nearly two years...his cancer should have progressed far faster than it did, but it didn't. Over the course of several conversations, Joseph shared with me his life story...he had been sent over to the United States as a teen from Germany shortly before WWII. His joining the war effort didn't keep his entire family from being murdered in Auschwitz. That experience had hardened him. If the Jews were God's people and this could still happen, he couldn't believe in God. Over the years, he waited for someone to show him he was wrong until his beliefs became hard as stone. I asked questions and mostly just listened to him.

What he said to me several times haunted me..."if only someone like you had come earlier in my life...if only a Christian had reached out to me rather than condemning my Jewish heritage, maybe I would have faith." I wonder if the reason Joseph survived two years in Hospice care was to have someone reach out to him in faith. I don't know. Under the program's policies, I couldn't contact former patients, so I can't tell you the end of Joseph's story. What I can tell you is this: we can make sure that his story isn't wasted. We can make sure that people around us have been touched with the love of Jesus Christ before their minds are set.

Today, we're continuing our series on irresistible evangelism. Last week, we talked about how evangelism is like golf – you've got to use the right club at the right time to play a good game. The apostle Paul made clear the ground rules of evangelism – we don't lie or attempt to trick anyone. We share faith for the sake of people's souls, not the sake of the church's bottom line. And we do it realizing there's risk involved in sharing our lives with other people. This week, we're moving on to the first tool in our toolbox of evangelism...the driver.

The driver is the first club we use on most holes in golf. We use it when we are farthest away from the pin. Used correctly, no other club can get you further down the course. It's an easy club to miss with, but even a bad swing will usually move you closer to your goal...and the only way you're going to learn to use it is to keep swinging. Using our gardening analogy, nothing starts growing in your field until you plant the seeds. Not every seed is going to grow into a healthy plant, but others will succeed and reach maturity. You plant lots of seeds knowing that some will make it if tended properly. Other steps are necessary, but you gotta have seeds.

The driver in terms of evangelism is really simple: we touch people with the love of Jesus Christ in physical ways they can understand through active kindness. We aren't trying to convince anybody of anything or arguing with them about faith. We just show them that God loves them in a real and practical way. The whole of what we do in this stage is this: we give somebody something or do something for them and say, "We're from Church of the Covenant, and we're just trying to show you God's love for you today." That's it! That's all you have to do. People can argue with words, but you can't argue with action. If I hand you a Pepsi and say, "We're just giving these out to show God's love. Have a great day!," you can argue whether or not God exists or God loves or whatnot. But you can't really argue with the Pepsi!

In a minute, we'll talk about different practical ways we can show God's love. But first, I want to look at today's passages to give you a scriptural basis. Many of us have been taught that evangelism is about going door-to-door and trying to convert somebody to Christianity the first time we meet them. But Jesus rarely if ever did that. Jesus planted seeds and cultivated them for at least three years before the disciples started harvesting in earnest. Here and there, people came to believe in Jesus during His lifetime; they were the early fruits. But it's not until the Holy Spirit comes that the apostles make huge headway.

Here's the first lesson from this morning's scriptures: *because of our sinful state, we need to see God's mercy in action before we can respond to it.* Titus 3 says, "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another." That's all of us. Apart from God, we're all self-centered instead of God-centered, and wickedness flows out of us as a result. That makes us the enemies of God, but God moves toward us and works within us to draw us closer to Himself. The passage goes on to say that Christ shows us great kindness by saving us, not because of what we had done but out of His mercy. It also says God justifies us through the grace of Jesus Christ. That means that believers are considered righteous by God because of Jesus' grace to us...and now we get to show that grace to others so they might experience it too.

Many old models of evangelism never used the driver because the driver wasn't necessary. It was like playing a par 3 where you don't need it. American Christianity has changed a lot over two hundred years, but in many times and places, it was dominant. Children grew up learning portions of the Bible not only in church but also in school. Most people knew the Ten Commandments and had an understanding of the Christian faith. That doesn't mean they were believers, but they had the background. There was an assumption, right or wrong, that people knew that the Christian church was loving and caring and would reach out to the least, the last, and the lost.

Our culture now is wildly different. Attacks on religion are common; books promoting atheism are best-sellers. Many people go through life without a real Christian friend. All they know of religion are churches burning the Quran or picketing military funerals, and we all look mean-spirited. The culture tells us to forget about God and believe what you want. The sinful state that Titus mentions is not just tolerated but applauded. The folks we are called to reach are often oblivious to, if not antagonistic toward, Jesus Christ.

The driver, then, means outreaching to people with compassion and mercy in physical ways they can appreciate. We have to take care of some need that hits them where they live that shows them this is a reality to us, not just a bunch of words written ages ago but a living faith that means something now. It doesn't have to cost a lot of money, but it's a sacrifice to show we mean business about the fact that Jesus loves everybody.

In today's passage from Acts, the apostles are healing people. Word spreads because they met a need. People saw God's power because the apostles spent their days caring for others. Jesus Himself cared for physical needs, sometimes healing, sometimes feeding crowds of thousands. And not all the physical needs Jesus met He did through miracles. He washed the feet of His disciples, a job so low in His culture that a servant couldn't be asked to do it...Jesus lowered Himself to nothing in order to take care of His friends. He showed active kindness.

Active kindness is only limited to your imagination. How can you reach out? Take a look at our connection card in your bulletin and think about ways you could get these into people's hands. We can give away newspapers on a Saturday morning on a street corner. We can give sodas and hot dogs away from our parking lot or water at a community 5K. We can do a free car wash where we don't accept donations. We can wrap Christmas gifts for free or bag groceries. We can mow lawns or clean up yards. You can pay for the meal of the person behind you in line at McDonalds or feed a parking meter or wash windshields. We could go give little gifts to seniors at Presbyterian Village or have a workshop day where fix-it guys around the congregation repair bikes. At our old church in Indiana, you could get your oil changed for free while you were in worship. The possibilities are endless!

These little touches can make a big impact. It's about getting the ball further down the course...about getting people closer to Jesus than they were the day before. Because people are all across the spiritual spectrum, some may be really grateful; others may be scared or angry. It doesn't matter. We're showing people that Jesus Christ is real and changes our lives. These touches may not get folks into our doors right away, but they will get people thinking about Jesus. They may disagree with our message, but they'll see what we do. As 1 Peter 2:12 says, "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."

The second step we see from our passages is this: *fruitfulness in our active kindness corresponds with our generosity*. In our passage from 2 Corinthians 9 today, we're told, "Remember this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." To actively plant seeds, we have to give of ourselves to make it happen. Now this passage is normally used in the context of stewardship, and we'll be talking about that a little bit after church today. But I want to move it into the realm of evangelism.

Simply put, virtually all the ways that we touch people for Christ cost money. The driver is the most expensive club in the golfer's bag, but no other club can match it for getting you down the course. In the same way, when we touch people for Christ by providing for their physical needs, we don't want to scrimp. We need to give both money and time to do it. One without the other just won't work. Many of you have already shown generosity towards reaching people in this way. I've got a hundred cans of pop and water in my office that you all brought in so we could give something to folks who are here for the road testing in our parking lot. That's a fantastic start. But not a lot of people come in here from the road testing. There's nothing like getting into the community and making a personal invite through meeting a need.

All of us can do this kind of outreach. Not everybody can repair a bike or change oil or wash a car, but everybody can participate in some way. The Holy Spirit is the One who changes hearts, and we need people supporting our outreach with prayer, asking God to move in people's hearts so the work is effective. And as a church, we are going to do enough different kinds of outreach that everyone can participate. Nobody is going to be able to say, "I can't do that." Because when one person is changing that tire or washing a windshield, somebody else can be praying or sharing a cup of coffee and starting a conversation. There is always a job you can do.

What we have to determine is how faithful we are going to be. Deciding to buy a stranger's meal or paying for their parking meter is a "rubber meets road" situation, where the cost is right there in front of you. It's a conscious decision to give real cash away for someone we don't know. It goes against a lot of what we've been taught in our culture, but it's exactly the way Jesus taught us to be. When we think of the story of the Good Samaritan, we remember that the Samaritan gave his money and his time and risked his own safety for a man his culture said was his enemy. To reap a large harvest, you've got to sow generously, even in thorny places.

Remember too that Jesus hung out with notorious sinners and ate with them, showing love to them. Sometimes to reach unorthodox people, you're may wind up being a little unorthodox yourself. One church I read about bought a carton of cigarettes and went out giving homeless people a few each just to show that God cared about them. In the grand scheme of things, smoking meant a lot to these homeless folks and the health issues were very last on their list of concerns. It hit them right where they lived. Many new people came to the church that week. Another pastor wrote how he went to a reggae concert where his church's guitarist was playing and, following what he believed the Spirit was pointing him to do, bought one beer each for the next 10 people in line. He bought only one following the biblical principle of doing everything in moderation. Still, crazy, right? Nine of them showed up in church the next day.

I'm not telling you to do things you feel are wrong, but we serve the God who changed water into wine at a wedding. We don't want to sin or encourage sin. But most of us aren't thinking that one beer or three cigarettes are going to kill somebody but that beer and cigarettes are expensive. We have to remember that God may move us past our comfort zones to reach the lost...including the comfort zone of our wallet, the comfort zone of our free time, even the comfort zone of our own self-righteousness. But if it's what He's calling us to do, God will make a way to take care of it. As our passage from 2 Corinthians said, "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work." If you are willing to serve, God will provide the way for you to do it well.

Here's my final thought, and it's a short one, on using our driver of active kindness: *sharing at this stage doesn't require massive theological preparation but a willingness to show radical grace.* If you are doing this kind of outreach and somebody stops you wanting to debate evolution or the legal code of the Old Testament, we can say, "I don't know all the answers, but we can learn them together." As our passage from Titus 3 says, "be ready to do whatever is good...slander no one...be peaceable and considerate, and...show true humility toward all."

Grace is required to do that. My first instinct is to react, to defend, to put up the theological shield. But God doesn't need my defending. God is bigger than that. I can lovingly talk with somebody about the truthfulness of Scripture, but God isn't going to fall over if I can't answer every question on the spur of the moment. Moreover, having a deep philosophical conversation with somebody we don't know doesn't accomplish much. They may want to prove a point of view, but that kind of conversation isn't going to change somebody's heart. It's hard to show grace to that kind of person. But being peaceable and showing humility means that if and when it does happen, we move on, knowing that we've still been obedient to Jesus' calling. Jesus was rejected not only at His crucifixion but at various times throughout His ministry. If we are called to carry His cross, then we may face the same kind of persecution He faced.

We also have to remember that Jesus counted amongst His closest friends fishermen, guys who weren't known for being theological giants. Yet Peter had the words to say when the time was right. In Matthew 10, Jesus talks about His disciples being brought before the authorities as witnesses for God. He said, "Don't worry about what to say in your defense, because you will be given the right words at the right time. For it won't be you doing the talking -- it will be the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." This doesn't mean that we shouldn't be prepared by studying God's Word. But rather than worrying about what to say and not ministering to people, just do it! Just take the risk. It's great to practice out on the driving range, but eventually, you've got to get out onto the course. Your words may not seem perfect when you witness, but if you show God's grace, it will make a difference.

Here's an honest fact about this kind of evangelism: it doesn't typically draw in people right away. You might get folks who come once or twice; maybe a family will stay for a while. Immediate growth won't happen. But there's a greater impact I believe we'll see, and that will be in us. When you practice radical grace long enough, it becomes a regular part of your life. It changes who you are; it's part of God's transforming us back into His true image. And that transformed personality will shine God's light into places you might never imagine.

We're going to have our first Evangelism Day on Saturday, October 2, at 10am. We're going to do a simple prayer walk. Our Outreach Team is scouting out short routes through local neighborhoods. We're going to pray for families to stay together, for jobs to come through, for protection against foreclosure. As we go, we'll have fliers so we can invite people to *The Story*. Depending on the weather, we'll have wagons filled with sodas and water or hot chocolate or cider. We won't go door to door; we're just going to pray and meet people who happen to be out. We can do this in God's power. We're going to make at least one Saturday a month Evangelism Day so we can follow God's lead in touching people for Him. He is calling us to get on the course and hit the ball, to plant the seeds, to show active kindness to people around us. Won't you join in and help our friends and neighbors draw closer to our God?