

Main Idea: Our fourth commitment as a God-centered church is a joyful commitment to God-centered evangelism. We’re going to consider an example of what this looks like in 2 Corinthians 4:1-6, and then we’ll consider six implications.

I. Let’s consider an example of God-centered evangelism in 2 Corinthians 4:1-6.

- A. It takes a mercy-focus (1).
- B. It takes a refusal to use methods that manipulate (2a).
- C. It takes a commitment to keep presenting the truth (2b).
 - 1. Our aim is to stir man’s conscience, not just his emotions.
 - 2. Our ambition is God’s approval.
- D. It takes a proper understanding of the problem (3-4).
 - 1. People are perishing.
 - 2. People are blind.
- E. It takes preaching the Lordship of Jesus Christ (5).
 - 1. We must see ourselves as slaves.
 - 2. We must do all we can to make our Master known.
- F. It takes the miracle of creation (6).
 - 1. God must turn on the light.
 - 2. When He does, a sinner begins to see and love Christ.

II. Let’s consider six implications of God-centered evangelism.

- A. Our mission is to make disciples, not just get decisions.
- B. Our message must be our focus, not our methods.
- C. We must think rightly about numbers.
- D. We must build redemptive relationships with lost people.
- E. We must take world missions seriously.
- F. We must remember that election makes evangelism possible.

Response: Because God is sovereign, we keep looking up and out, not in and around.

There’s such incredible joy in seeking to be a God-centered church, which is our desire at WBC, and this summer we’re considering twelve joyful commitments that God has wired into our DNA.

We began with, “*Our Joyful Commitment to Expository Preaching.*” And then, “*Our Joyful Commitment to Preaching the Whole Counsel of God.*” Why these commitments? Because God is a revealing God, and we treasure what He has revealed, this precious Book.

In this Book we discover the wonderful reality that not only does God *reveal*, but He also *redeems*. Indeed, this Book is the story of His work of redemption. Therefore, being God-centered means that we treasure His work of redemption. This brought us to our third commitment, last week, “*Our Joyful Commitment to Sovereign Grace in the Conversion of a Sinner.*” We love sovereign grace at WBC. We know that we wouldn’t be here were it not for the grace of God, for we were dead in our sins, deluded by this world system and the devil, and doomed to the just penalty of eternal destruction. But God! God chose us, and chose to save us, by His grace, through the work of His Son.

So what’s the right response when you have experienced the saving miracle of sovereign grace? Celebration, yes! Worship, yes! Thanksgiving and praise, yes! But something else must follow. We cannot keep this good news to ourselves! Which brings us to this morning’s message, “*Our Joyful Commitment to God-centered Evangelism.*”

Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:1-7

God has given us an eternally significant mission as a church. Jesus said to His followers, “Go (lit. “in your going”), make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19).”

^{**} Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the message preached at WBC in 2011 in our series, “Nine Marks of a Healthy Church.”

And, “As the Father sent me, so I am sending you (John 20:21.” And, “And you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).”

This is what our Savior has called us to do. This is our mission, to make known to our neighbors and the nations the glorious message that has brought us hope and eternal life.

We are joyfully committed to *God-centered evangelism* at WBC. What does that mean? It might be helpful to give a couple of illustrations of what it does *not* mean.

The first, *rice Christians*. Ever heard the term? It refers to the efforts used by some missionaries in the past who used rice as an incentive to get people to listen to their gospel presentations. By definition, a rice Christian is someone who converts to Christianity, not out of a love for Jesus, but in order to get something else, like a bag of rice, or other food, or medical care, which is offered to the person who is willing to “accept Christ”.

You can quickly see the danger in this approach. The evangelist can be very sincere. He loves Jesus and truly wants others to do the same. But his man-centered approach to evangelism leaves behind entire people groups “convert” to Christianity, not because they truly believe in Jesus, but because they want the rice, or something else.

For our second negative example, let’s go back to 1960, when Joseph Bayly wrote an insightful little book called *The Gospel Blimp*. It’s sort of a modern day parable that pokes fun at what evangelical churches have done to fulfill our God-given mission. Here’s the book summary:

George and Ethel are concerned about the salvation of their door neighbors, but don’t know how to reach them with the gospel. During an evening get-together of George and Ethel’s Christian friends, everyone is captivated by the sight of a blimp flying overhead. Then Herm gets a bright idea. Why not use a blimp to proclaim the Christian message to the unchurched citizens of Middletown?

So the group incorporates, buys a used blimp, hires a pilot, then commences to evangelize their hometown by towing Bible-verse banners, ‘firebombing’ folks below with gospel tracts, and broadcasting Christian music and programs over loudspeakers.²

As you can imagine, the results were disastrous, as man-centered approaches to evangelism so often are.

The rice Christian approach is still around. “Do you want a better life, a better marriage, a better bank account? Then come to Jesus.”

So is the gospel blimp approach. Firebomb your neighbors with stories about hell, how terrible it is, and then pop the question, “Do you want a way out of this nightmare? It’s simple. Just pray this prayer.”

It’s the flat, horizontal, transactional, man-centered approach to evangelism. Yes, our gracious God can use imperfect presentations of His perfect gospel to rescue sinners, and does. But there’s a better way, a God-centered way.

At WBC, we truly believe that God is the author of salvation from start to finish. We believe that God, in His amazing love, has chosen to save sinners, and goes after them, raises them from the dead, and gives them new life in His Son! He not only made salvation possible, but guarantees it will become reality. God grants the sinner new birth, and God grants the sinner the faith that’s necessary for salvation.

So, if this is true, then what are we to do? Evangelize, yes, but how? Here’s the answer, with a *joyful commitment to God-centered evangelism*. We’re going to consider an example of what this looks like in 2 Corinthians 4:1-6, then consider six implications.

² <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0312733/plotsummary>

I. Let's consider an example of God-centered evangelism in 2 Corinthians 4:1-6.

The apostle Paul wrote this letter to a church that had broken his heart. According to Acts 18, Paul went to Corinth and introduced many people to Christ, then nurtured them in their spiritual infancy. But as they moved to toddlerhood, they turned against their spiritual father. Some false teachers spread rumors about him, saying he was in the ministry for personal gain, that he dipped into the offering and using some of the money they had collected for the famine-stricken believers in Jerusalem, that he wasn't really an apostle, and that he couldn't be trusted. And sadly, many of the church members believed these lies and turned sour towards Paul.

As much as he hated to talk about himself (for he'd much rather talk about Christ), Paul became very autobiographical in this letter. For the sake of the church, he had to defend himself lest the false teachers completely demolished God's work in Corinth. So in 2 Corinthians Paul opened up his heart and defended his ministry, sharing why he ministered, how he ministered, and what he experienced in the ministry.

When we come to our text in 2 Corinthians 4, we've arrived at a vital text. This is the passage I chose for the first sermon preached in this building, at its dedication in November 1990. This is the passage that perhaps most clearly reveals Paul's approach to evangelism, his *God-centered* approach to evangelism. What does it take to engage in God-centered evangelism and thus fulfill our mission? By example, Paul models six essentials.

A. It takes a mercy-focus (1). "Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart." In the NIV, "Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart."

We have a ministry, says Paul. It's the ministry of the new covenant. Paul was an apostle. I'm not an apostle, but I participate in the ministry of the new covenant, and it's your calling too, if you know Christ. "He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant," says Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:6.

Why do we have this ministry? We certainly don't deserve it. Indeed, we don't deserve the privilege of knowing Christ, let alone telling others about Him. The truth is, we wouldn't be God's children, let alone be His ministers, were it not for this attribute of God. Since through God's *mercy*, we have this ministry.

Several years ago, a man called me to talk about the tragic death of a pastor in his community. As we finished our conversation he said to me, "I don't think most people have any idea what a pastor faces day after day, the challenges, the expectations, the demands. I guess that's why nobody should ever be a pastor unless he's called to it."

I'll be transparent. There's a heart battle that goes along with being in the ministry. As a shepherd you pour your life into people, month after month, year after year, all the while knowing that the day may come when those very sheep may question your motives and turn against you, and may leave you looking for greener grass, and even attack your ministry. And that's what those who profess Christ may do, not to mention what the world may do.

What keeps the minister going? You say, "The encouragement of the faithful. That's the motivation of the minister."

Yes, it is a blessing to receive the encouragement of the faithful, but it's not enough. We need something else, something stronger, and we have it. What?

Notice the end of the verse, and then work backwards. Paul concludes, "We do not lose heart." In the KJV, "we faint not." We don't quit. Paul had many reasons to throw in the towel, and the Corinthian defection was yet another thorn in his heart, but he kept going. What motivated him? This did. He kept remembering *the mercy of God*.

Since through *God's mercy* we have this ministry, we do *not lose heart*. This is what keeps us going in our ministries, dear friends, no matter what we may be facing. That's true of your ministry with your kids, parents, or your Sunday School class, or your outreach to your unsaved neighbors or classmates. If we're going to fulfill our mission of reaching people for Christ, it takes a mercy-focus.

Friends, how could I ever give up on people who hurt me? No one has ever done anything to me that even begins to compare with what I did to God. He gave me life, and I used that life to live for myself and hurt Him deeply. I broke His laws, and He kept causing the sun to shine on me. I ignored Him, slighted Him, tried to use Him, demeaned His glory, questioned His goodness, and defied His right to shepherd my life.

And what did He do to me? He poured out His mercy on me in countless ways. He gave me loving parents that took me to a church where I learned of His loving Son. He chose to punish His own Son on the cross so that He might forgive me and make me part of His forever family. And then He gave me His Spirit, blessed me with a spiritual gift, and called me into a ministry He tailor-made for me to fulfill.

A few days ago a young man asked me, "Does God ever give up on people? I was just wondering because I've done some pretty bad things in my life." I'm so thankful I could tell that young man, and you, about God's mercy.

Friends, I stand here today because of God's mercy. I'm in the ministry because of God's mercy. I'm not losing heart today because of God's mercy. Friends, if we take our eyes off of divine mercy, we'll never make it. If we're going to fulfill our God-given ministries, it takes a mercy-focus. This is the first essential of a God-centered ministry.

B. It takes a refusal to use methods that manipulate (2a). "But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word..."³

Paul's critics said he was a manipulator. No way, says Paul. He affirms that he refused to do anything that would upstage the glory of the gospel.

He said he *renounced secret and shameful ways* (NIV). "Underhanded ways" is how the ESV puts it. A preacher can do that, you know. He can do underhanded things to get his audience to respond.

Like, rice Christians.

Like preachers in America too, who promise health and wealth to listeners, if only they will trust Christ (and often, send a few dollars to the preacher!). These are *underhanded* way to reach people.

There are other ways too. A church has a softball team. Could be a good idea. Great way to have some fellowship. The church team joins a church league, and the league rules stipulate the players must belong to your church. Your neighbor, Bill, is a great shortstop. Problem is, Bill isn't a Christian, let alone a member of your church. So you invite Bill to a practice, tell him you'd love to have him play in your league, if only he'd "get saved and join the church." So you tell him how great your church is, how good it would be for his family, and about all the fun you have in your Sunday School class. And as a result, because Bill loves sports, his kids, and having a good time, Bill tells you, "Sure, sounds good. Count me in." And so, it's not long before Bill prays the sinner's prayer, gets baptized, and joins the church. Now he's a Christian, right? Maybe, but more likely, a rice Christian.

Friends, it's not evangelism merely to invite people to church. And it's certainly not God-centered evangelism to use rice or softball or anything else to get people to add Christ to their lives. If Jesus Christ Himself isn't enough, if people need something

³ "Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God (NIV)."

besides Him as incentive to embrace the gospel, then there's reason to question whether they truly have entered the family of God. And once the rice is gone, you'll see.

I'm not saying that people haven't come to know Christ that way. I am saying that Paul refused to use manipulation. He refused to *distort the word of God*, "to tamper with God's Word," says the ESV. He didn't try to trick people, to bait and switch them into a response. That was out of the question for him.

What was his approach? He tells us at the end of verse 2, "...but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God." The NIV says, "...by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." There's how God-centered evangelism works, essential #3.

C. It takes a commitment to keep presenting the truth (2b). It's not methods, but a message. That's what the Spirit of God uses to transform a sinner. I don't use methods of manipulation, says Paul, but rather, I keep putting the truth of God's Word in front of people.

Billy Graham was once speaking to a group of pastors in England and acknowledged that if he had his ministry to do all over again, he'd do two things differently. One, he'd spend more time studying and less time preaching. And two, he'd spend more time praying.⁴

Donald Grey Barnhouse, a well known pastor and Bible teacher who died in 1960, once said, "If I was going to have only three years in which to minister, I'd study and prepare for two of them."⁵

Why this emphasis on *study*? Because you can't present truth you don't know, and you can't present truth well if you don't know it well, and you won't know it well if you don't study it. As Paul told Timothy, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15)."

Brothers and sisters, when it comes to evangelism, let's remember two things.

1. *Our aim is to stir man's conscience, not just his emotions.* "To everyone's conscience," says Paul. That's what we're after. The sinner has a God-given conscience, and our aim is to stir it. How? With scare tactics? No. Tear-jerking stories? No. We might get his attention that way, but if we're going to touch his conscience, we need a different surgical tool, and the tool is the truth. And not just truth in general, but *gospel truth*, as Paul emphasizes in verse 3.

But what if he mocks the message we share? He may. So we need to settle this.

2. *Our ambition is God's approval.* It was for Paul. Hear him again, "We commend ourselves to every man's conscience *in the sight of God*." There's the audience Paul sought to please, an audience of One. And so, for us. If we're going to do God-centered evangelism, we must present the truth to men, yes, but do so *in the sight of God*. It's God that matters most to us, His assessment, His pleasure, His honor. It's His power that we're seeking, for He alone can raise the dead, which is what needs to happen.

If we don't settle this, we'll not tell people the truth they need to hear. Friends, the message we share contains bad news before the good news, and we must not shrink from presenting the bad news.

A man once came to see me who was struggling with life. I listened, and then said, "My friend, your problem is a whole lot worse than you thought, and the solution is a whole lot better than you could ever imagine. It's worse because it's not just you that's dissatisfied with your life, but God. He is offended by your disobedience. But He's

⁴ As told by John Stott, *Between Two Worlds*.

⁵ As told by John Stott, *Between Two Worlds*.

provided a way for your forgiveness by sending His Son to pay sin's penalty. Are you interested in hearing more?"

That raises the fourth essential of God-centered evangelism.

D. It takes a proper understanding of the problem (3-4). "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

If we don't get this, we won't engage in God-centered evangelism as we ought. The reason we need to do evangelism is because there's a problem. What is it? Paul says it's twofold.

One, *people are perishing*. And two, *people are blinded*. Those are the Spirit-inspired words Paul used in this text. Our gospel is veiled to those who are *perishing*, and those who are perishing are *blinded* by the god of this age.

This is the predicament of the non-Christian that sits next to you in class, or at work. And of the one that lives next to you, or perhaps lives with you. He is *perishing*, a term that means he's under the sentence of destruction, just one heartbeat away from the fire of hell. But he's also *blinded*, which means he doesn't see that he's under the sentence of destruction.

Here's why we're not going to argue someone into the family of God. Or scare him in. Or lure him in with the offer of temporal blessings. His problem is too severe for such surfacy tactics. Friends, the lost person is perishing and blinded.

Notice, not just blind, but *blinded*. There's an ongoing blinding agent at work in his life that Paul identifies as "the god of this age." The devil has blinded, not eyes, but the *minds* of lost people so that they cannot see the light of the gospel we're sharing with them. That's why when we share Christ with them, they see the words on the page, but they can't see them. Their minds are blinded.

So how are they ever going to see Christ's beauty and believe in Him? There's only one way, as Paul will tell us in verse 6. They don't just need light. They need the ability to see the light. Which means they need a *miracle* to occur.

We'll talk more about what they need in a moment, but for now, let's talk about what we need. If that's the sinner's condition, then in our evangelistic efforts we need to refuse to do anything that would minimize the sinner's problem.

I just finished reading *Canary in the Coal Mine*. It's the story of a "doctor's courageous fight to save a small town from a silent epidemic that threatened the community's future - and exposed a national health crisis." The author is Dr. William Cooke. The small town is Austin, Indiana. The story of what happened less than a decade ago in Austin reminds me so much of our own community.

Listen to the book promo, "When Dr. Will Cooke, an idealistic young physician just out of medical training, set up practice in the small rural community of Austin, Indiana, he had no idea that much of the town was being torn apart by poverty, addiction, and life-threatening illnesses. But he soon found himself at the crossroads of two unprecedented health-care disasters: a national opioid epidemic and the worst drug-fueled HIV outbreak ever seen in rural America."⁶

I'm not endorsing everything in the book. What I found particularly helpful was Dr. Cooke's description of the difficult life circumstances of so many hurting people, and his compassion for them, and willingness to make sacrifices. So very needed. What I found less helpful was the underlying man-centered anthropology which is so common in most substance abuse recovery efforts.

⁶ <https://www.amazon.com/Canary-Coal-Mine-Forgotten-Community/dp/B093CN5KWS/ref=sr>

Why do people engage in self-destructive behaviors? Yes, there's often been trauma and abuse in the person's past, and a lack of a loving home environment and support system, and other things. And as important as those things are, there's a more fundamental problem that must be addressed.

Allow me to illustrate. Suppose we found a homeless man living under the overpass, started talking to him, and discovered he was a high school dropout, jobless, and addicted to meth. Suppose to help him, we took him to Bob Evans for a nice meal, then bought him some new clothes, housed him, educated him, and trained him for a job. Those would be significant changes, and I'm thankful for people like Dr. Cooke and others who work hard to bring about these changes.

Yet something's still missing. There's an underlying root problem that still has not yet been addressed, and therefore has not changed in this once homeless man. He may be clean on the outside, but his fundamental condition has not yet changed.

According to God's Word, this man is still perishing and blind. He still under the wrath of God and cannot see the beauty of the only One who can rescue him, the very person who gave him life, a mind that could get an education, and hands that can work his new job. That's his problem, as it was ours.

What's the solution for his problem? What alone can change the fundamental orientation of a person who is dead in their sins? The answer is the fifth essential of God-centered evangelism.

E. It takes preaching the Lordship of Jesus Christ (5). Paul says, "For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." In the NIV, "For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake."

We don't *preach ourselves*. That's not what our friend needs from us, not advice on how we cleaned up our lives, nor even what the latest experts are saying. Paul says, we preach *Jesus Christ*.

But not just general truth about a generic Jesus. We preach Jesus Christ *as Lord*. Jesus is not merely one option on the religious shelf. He is the Creator and Owner of the universe, who alone possesses the power to address our fundamental problem. It's this Person that we preach, the One who died a horrible death on a cross in order to take care of our sin problem, then conquered death itself, who now calls on us to believe in Him and submit our lives to Him, and gives us His resurrection power if we do.

So we preach not ourselves, but Him. That's what happens when we engage in evangelism.

And what is our posture in this endeavor? Paul says, we preach *ourselves your servants* (Greek *doulos*, 'slaves') *for Jesus' sake*. That's our role in evangelism.

1. *We must see ourselves as slaves*. That's not a demeaning term. In the first century world, to be a slave of a high ranking official carried great honor for the slave. It was not inherent honor, but a delegated honor. How much more for us! We have the delegated honor of serving in behalf of the Highest Ranking Official in the universe, Jesus Christ Himself.

And what is our task? It's not complicated.

2. *We must do all we can to make our Master known*. We don't offer people religion, but a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

We must see ourselves as slaves. Whose slaves? His slaves. But also the slaves of lost people. *Ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake*, says Paul. Which means, no sacrifice is too great. It's our privileged calling to do all that we can to make our Master known to those who are perishing and blind.

But the question remains, how will they ever see? They're dead, blinded, perishing. The answer brings us to the sixth element of God-centered evangelism.

F. It takes the miracle of creation (6). “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

Paul seems to have two events in mind with this reference to light shining out of darkness. The first is creation itself. He takes us back to the Genesis account to illustrate what must happen in order for a sinner to be saved. Remember, the sinner is blind. So when we share the truth of Christ with him, he can’t see it. His only hope?

1. God must turn on the light. Just like God turned on the light at creation, and darkness fled, so God must do for the sinner. Until God says, “Let there be light,” the sinner will never see the beautiful Christ we’re presenting to Him.

This brings us to the second event Paul seems to have in mind, not just the creation work that God accomplished in Genesis, but the creation work that God accomplished in his own life.

It’s an incredible story, and we find it in Acts 9:1-9, “But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. ⁴ And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ ⁵ And he said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.’ ⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸ Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.”

There’s Paul. Without sight. Blind. In darkness. He can’t see. What will it take to change His condition? There’s absolutely nothing he can do to remove the blinders. This is something that Jesus Christ Himself must do, and did, working through His servant.

Notice Acts 9:17–18, “So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized.”

Don’t miss this. God must turn on the light. And...

2. When He does, a sinner begins to see and love Christ. That’s why I use the phrase *God-centered evangelism*. Evangelism means we tell the good news, that’s our assignment. *God-centered evangelism* means we tell the good news in God-honoring, God-dependent, God-expectant ways, knowing that God alone can produce the miracle we’re after.

And friends, it is truly a miracle, a miracle of creation. We know that what needs to happen is something that lost people cannot do. They are blind. They need a miracle from God so that they will see the Savior and embrace Him as their Lord and Rescuer. And according to His sovereign, gracious purposes, this is exactly what God does. He says, “Let there be light,” and the sinner begins to see.

These are the elements of God-centered evangelism, as modeled by Paul. It takes a mercy-focus, a refusal to use methods that manipulate, a commitment to keep presenting the truth, a proper understanding of the problem, preaching the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and a miracle of creation.

Now let’s talk implications.

II. Let's consider six implications of God-centered evangelism.

Because we are joyfully committed to engaging in God-centered evangelism at WBC, there are things we will do and *not* do in our evangelistic efforts.

A. Our mission is to make disciples, not just get decisions. Many churches operate with a *decisional* approach to evangelism. Their church services are structured to “get decisions” for Christ. The highlight of the morning service is the “altar call” when people are urged to walk an aisle and “make a decision for Christ” or “for baptism” or “for church membership” or “for rededication.”

At WBC we don't deny that our mission involves calling for decisions, and if you are here today and have never been saved, you need to trust Christ, get baptized, and join the church. But we believe the decisional approach is off target. Why? Because in the Great Commission, Jesus told us to *make disciples* (Matt. 28:19), not merely get decisions. And He told us how to make disciples, too, by “baptizing them” and then “teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.”

Many churches schedule what they call “revival” meetings, some yearly, some twice a year. Often behind the revival approach is a mindset, a philosophy of ministry that's very decisional. You need to make a decision for Christ, so we'll structure it right into our calendar. Every Sunday morning we preach salvation messages to get people to make decisions for Christ. The Sunday morning focus is clearly on the lost person. The message is “evangelistic,” and the Christians just listen passively to a message they don't need (since they've already “made a decision for Christ”).

The problem is, Christians that don't get fed become weak and sickly and struggle with life. So, every six months or so, the church offers special *revival* services to get the Christians back on track again. And they often use special music to attract people and create a climate for more decision-making. And since decisions wear off or get lost in the shuffle of cluttered lives, they give more opportunity to renew those decisions in six months. The result is often a roller-coaster approach to the Christian life, up the aisle and back down again, up and down.

We are not against the idea of having special meetings from time to time. But often the very revival methodology confuses the issue of what our mission is. Jesus told us to *make disciples*. So every week we're supposed to gather, not to preach evangelistic sermons to non-Christians, but to edify the saints through meaty expositional teaching, so that saints can grow, and then go out and do evangelism, and reach the lost for Christ.

B. Our message must be our focus, not our methods. Listen to Paul again, “By setting forth the truth plainly.” That's how he did evangelism, and so must we. It's not about our methods, but our message. We need to look for ways to make the message known.

And so we have a pregnancy care center ministry. Why? To make Christ known to women in difficult life circumstances. Several years ago, we offered English classes for our Chinese friends. Why? To create opportunities to make the message of Christ known. We offer free biblical counseling. Why? So we can share the gospel of Christ with hurting people.

In terms of personal evangelism, I recommend taking people through the Gospel of John, one chapter per week. Looking back, I recall with great delight how the Lord used weekly, one on one times in John's Gospel to produce faith in Ken and Dara, John, Steve, Nicole, and others.

C. We must think rightly about numbers. Do we want to grow as a church? Yes! Because God has people in this community that He purposes to save. We're not a holy huddle. God forbid that we come to church and get content with just seeing our friends.

Friends, this is not *your* church, nor *mine*. It is the Lord's. Our assignment, and it is a privileged assignment, is to work with Him so that new people are saved and added to this and other churches. This means there's no room for protecting our turf at WBC. Or our seats. What a joy it is to offer a visitor our seat, and then invite him for a meal after the service.

Do numbers matter? Yes, for numbers represent people. But numbers must not drive us. Are we more successful just because we've had higher attendance in the past six months? No. A church can do all kinds of things to increase numbers, and many do. But that doesn't mean the growth is *God-centered* and God-pleasing.

D. We must build redemptive relationships with lost people. Sometimes I'll be asked, "When do you do evangelism as a church?" Usually the person wants to know what program we're using, like a Thursday evening visitation, evangelism explosion, etc. My response? Redemptive relationships. That's our bread and butter when it comes to evangelism. We encourage our members to build relationships with lost people, where you work, where you go school, where you shop, where you live. Work at having a relationship with that lost person, a *redemptive* relationship. That means your goal isn't just to have another friend, but to befriend that person so you might share the message of Christ with him.

But our evangelism assignment isn't just for those we see.

E. We must take world missions seriously. "To the ends of the earth." That's what Jesus said. Not just your lost neighbor across the street, but the lost billions around the world.

Ever heard of Robert Woodruff? Even if you haven't, nearly all of us have been affected by his vision. Mr. Woodruff was the president of Coca Cola from 1923 to 1955 and he had the audacity to declare during WWII, "We will see that every man in uniform gets a bottle of Coca Cola for 5 cents wherever he is and whatever it costs." And when the war ended he went on to say that in his lifetime he wanted everyone in the world to have a taste of Coca Cola. Woodruff kept his personal creed in life right on his desk, "There is no limit to what a man can do or where he can go if he doesn't mind who gets the credit."

It's amazing what happened because one man set his gaze on the world. Can we do less? We're not talking about a soft drink. We're talking about the glory of God and the eternity destiny of seven billion people.

The world has more than doubled in my life time, from 3 billion in 1961 to nearly 8 billion in 2023. We presently support around twenty missionaries, but friends, the need for us as a church to embrace world missions is greater than ever. We need some who will go. We need all to pray and to give.

F. We must remember that election makes evangelism possible. That's what Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:10, "Therefore I endure everything [like persecution and prison] for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus." We can do evangelism with confidence. Why? Because we know God has chosen a people that He guarantees He will bring to Himself. And He privileges us to work with Him to that end.

So, as a church that's joyfully committed to God-centered evangelism, we must keep looking *up and out*, not just *in and around*. *Up*—it's all about Him, so let's do it ways that exalt Him. And *out*—we need to see the lost that are out there. Not just *in and around*—God forbid that we would view our church as our own little country club. This is a training ground for mobilizing the troops, a hospital for the sick, a refuge for the lost.

Closing Song: #297 "*I Love to Tell the Story*" (all three verses)

July Benediction: Isaiah 33:2 (NIV 1984)