

Evangelism is a Team Effort

Ashworth Road Baptist Church on March 25, 2018

My Roll on a Basketball Team

I really enjoy playing basketball. Maybe it's because I've always been tall - but basketball has been a part of my life for as long as I could dribble a ball. I still try to play at least once a week, but I'm definitely beginning to feel my age. Anyway, here's the thing about me - I'm really not very good at scoring, or shooting, or even dribbling. But I'm tall and lanky, so I'm a good defender and I can still jump so I'm really good at rebounding.

The problem is, sometimes I get on a team with a bunch of guys like me who are good at defense and rebounding but none of us can shoot 3's or drive to the hoop or dribble - and when I get on a team like that, we get beat badly. If however, I am on a team with a short quick guy who can dribble well and somebody who can shoot threes but is terrible at defense, then my rebounding and defense is a huge help in filling a role on the team.

You see, a team where everybody complements one another with different skills, where they know their role, and they fulfill that duty is often much more successful than a team full of all-stars who are all trying to do the same thing. We've seen that with some Cinderella upsets in the NCAA tournament going on right now, and we understand that about life. A strong team of complementary components always wins. And not surprisingly, we even find that in the Bible.

Team Effort in the Bible

Our last two weeks as we have talked about evangelism, we have held up the Apostle Paul as an All-Star who is this phenomenal evangelist. But he couldn't have done any of what he was doing without a team of people around him. Evangelism for Paul was truly a team effort. And **evangelism for us today is still a team effort.**

Today we are going to look at Paul's letter to the Colossians. Like many of his letters, he concludes this letter by sending greetings on behalf of the team that's partnering with him. Let's take a peek at how Paul ends this letter he sent to the church at Colossae:

Colossians 4:7-15: 7 Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant a in the Lord. 8 I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. 9 He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.

10 My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.) 11 Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my co-workers

for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. 13 I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. 14 Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. 15 Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

Do you see all these different people who play such different roles on Paul's team which is spreading the name of Jesus all over the Mediterranean. In just these few verses, he refers to 10 people by name.

1. **Tychicus** - dear brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant.... A messenger and encourager
2. **Oneisimus** - also faithful and dear to Paul - going with Tychicus to deliver this letter
3. **Aristarchus** - in prison with Paul on behalf of the ministry
4. **Mark** - also a teammate of Paul's. We know from other NT writings that Mark joined Paul on his first missionary journey but abandoned him after the first city. So Paul's team was like teams we have been on - there are people you have some friction with. But clearly Paul and Mark worked it out. Maybe there are people in this church that you struggle to get along with at times in the past. That's normal. That's what happens when lots of people with different gifts are all put on the same team. But in a successful team, people find a way to work together and bury the hatchet. Oh, and one of the benefits of not discarding Mark is that he wrote one of our Gospels.
5. **Barnabas** - he's only referred to here as Mark's cousin, but Barnabas was Paul's first traveling companion on the first journey. In Acts 13 we are told that one day at a prayer meeting at a church service, the Holy Spirit told the people to set apart Paul and Barnabas and to send them out to bring the Good News of Jesus to other cities.
6. **Jesus** - called Justus (probably because it was confusing to be called Jesus after THE JESUS came) - another co-worker for the Kingdom of God who brings comfort for Paul.
7. **Epaphras** - a guy from Colossae who is "always wrestling in prayer" for you. I love that phrasing - and I love the role he plays in constantly praying for his hometown.
8. **Luke** - the doctor - who recorded the life of Jesus and of the early church and coincidentally wrote more words in our New Testament by writing the books of Luke and Acts than Paul wrote when you combine his 13 letters.
9. **Demas** - a nice shout out - apparently was traveling with Paul - but unfortunately we know from a letter Paul wrote to Timothy later in life that, "Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica." (2 Tim 4:10). So even the early church had its difficulties.
10. **Nympha** - the first woman on the list, who had a home so large the church used it for meeting and she likely then was a leader within the church.

So when taken as a whole, we see Paul's ministry team which was focussed on spreading the Good News of Jesus all across the Mediterranean included people who are in constant prayer, people who are opening their home for others to meet at, people who travel with Paul and keep him safe, and people who move the letters that Paul writes all around to the various cities.

Without any one of these people, these incredibly important jobs would not be fulfilled and Paul's ministry as the world's greatest evangelist would not have been as successful.

Jesus modeled Team Ministry

And Paul wasn't the first to operate with a team when spreading the Good News of the Kingdom. Look at the life of Jesus. He always traveled with his disciples. Did he need them for preaching or security- not at all. Remember Jesus was once pushed to the brink of a cliff by an angry mob and somehow, supernaturally, walked right through the mob and out of danger. But even he knew he couldn't be an island. And when Jesus sent out his disciples to go to other cities to preach about the Kingdom, he sent them out two by two. So clearly there is a benefit in approaching evangelism and ministry as a partnership or as a team. Perhaps the basis for this is described in **Ecclesiastes 4:9-10** where the wise teacher who wrote Ecclesiastes said:

*9 Two are better than one,
because they have a good return for their labor:
10 If either of them falls down,
one can help the other up.*

Models of Evangelism

So while our last 2 weeks we have taught you about how to share the Good News of Jesus with others without being so awkward, today I'm telling you the good news that when it comes to evangelism, you are on a team. You don't have to feel like you're out on an island having to do this all on your own - you have a team of people here at Ashworth who want to support you, encourage you, and even go with you when that's helpful.

Now saying that doesn't give you an out to believe that you never have to share your story or talk about spiritual things with another person. Just because I'm not a great shooter or a great ball-handler doesn't mean that when I play basketball I should never shoot or dribble. That's part of the game, it's just not my specialty. And in the same way, going out and engaging strangers with the Gospel may not be your things, but if somehow the Holy Spirit creates that opportunity for you, then you have a responsibility to wade into that conversation.

To tie this all together and clarify what I'm saying today, I think it's helpful to think of the **3 models we see of Evangelism in the Bible** and which should ALL be some part of our lives.

Everyone an Evangelist

The first model is what I just mentioned - those 1-on-1 conversations that simply come up as we go about in life. It's Paul being questioned by the rulers and him taking that opportunity to share his story and the Good News of Jesus.

2 By 2

Next, we see have the model of Jesus sending out his disciples 2 by 2. This was intentional evangelism, going out with the purpose of sharing the message of Jesus with others, and bringing along a companion to help. Maybe what that means is when you have a cookout and invite the neighbors, you invite one other couple from church to join you. It helps you build more connections, perhaps encourages you to be more open about your faith, and adds somebody else who might join you in praying for your friends. At my now famous annual Oktoberfest BBQ with my neighbors this past year, we invited another couple from church to join us. And while I was talking with one neighbor about church at my side of the table, my friends from Ashworth were having a spiritual conversation with another neighbor at the other end. Teamwork!

Or if you view your gym as your mission field, invite somebody from church to workout with you so there are 2 of you challenging one another to engage in spiritual conversations. Remember *“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor.”*

As a Church Team

Now thinking beyond personal evangelism within your sphere of relationships or the mission field you can bring a partner with you to try and impact, have you ever thought about evangelism as a team effort of each church? What’s your role in the evangelism efforts at Ashworth? Many times each year we reach out to our community with crazy events in hopes of making connections and beginning spiritual conversation and interest. And each one of us can play an important role in making those events more successful.

Just this past Wednesday night, we had the Create Place with an Easter egg hunt. Over 125 people came and heard all about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They did crafts with each one pointing to Jesus. Of those who came, over 100 of those people do not attend our church and most of them not Christian. And I'll tell you that that event took a lot more than just the efforts of our Ashworth Kids Director, Kerri. We had the entire youth group helping run the stations at the tables, we had women who serve the meal in the kitchen every single month, we had several of our own people just milling around the crowd talking with families. Pastor Brent told the story of Jesus, some volunteers were greeters at the door while others spread out the Easter eggs. It was truly a team effort to get the word of Jesus out to over 100 people who have perhaps never heard the story. The egg hunt wasn't just about plastic eggs - it was about evangelism as a church.

And it's not just the Create Place, this summer we will have two Movie Nights, a month of Kid Cafe, Swim Night and Vacation Bible School. All of these events require lots of behind-the-scenes work to create an attractional event that brings people out and gives us the opportunity to share with them why we do what we do. That's why we need so many volunteers help make those events happen. And it’s not just the people doing the work that we need. We need others walking through the crowds and talking with parents and asking them where they go to church and finding out if they know Jesus. Like Epaphras, we need people of prayer who are lifting up every one of these events in prayer and pleading with God that the seeds of the Gospel would bear fruit and that people would experience the life-changing grace that is found in Jesus.

Find Your Roll on the Team

Perhaps in previous years you've enjoyed all the activities we've done as a church. Maybe you had a lot of fun with your kids participating. But what if this summer you looked at all these events as an evangelism opportunity for your family? What if instead of just sitting with your family and watching the movie, you came early and spent 30 minutes walking around the crowd and making conversation with people? What if you truly tried to live like Paul walking through Athens and connecting with the crowd?

Or what if at VBS, you took an opportunity to share your personal story of coming to faith in Jesus with one of the kids that you make a connection with during the week. Sometimes the meaning of the Good News of Jesus comes to life when people see how it's actually affecting somebody who they care about.

Throughout this series we have acknowledged that for many of us sharing our faith is an awkward conversation. But part of its awkwardness comes from our simple lack of experience and from not thinking about it as often as we should. We need to recognize that evangelism is simply something that we have the opportunity to do every single day. Whether it be talking to a co-worker, or sharing our faith story with our own children, evangelism is just talking about how our faith is important to us and makes a difference in our lives. Even serving at church events is a great way of being part of the evangelism that our Church does within our community.

I'm not trying to lay a guilt trip on anybody, but Evangelism should be a way of life for every Christian. Fortunately, God knows the different gifts, skills, and strengths he has given to each of us. And so how we live out evangelism is going to look different for each one of us. Not every 1st century Christian was like Paul, preaching boldly to large crowds. Paul needed an Epaphras in prayer for all those people hearing the seeds of the Gospel and a Nympha opening her home for the church.

Evangelism truly is a team sport, where God has brought all of us together, with our different skills and giftings and called us to reach our circles and our community. And God doesn't make mistakes - all of us are needed - all of us are valuable to this team. **That's why all of us need to know our role and do it!**

Let's stop thinking that evangelism is only for the super Christians. Remember, great teams aren't made great because they are full of super-stars who all have the same skill set. They are great because they are full of people who know their role and do it the best that they can. For us to be a church that's great at Evangelism, we don't need all of you to become a bunch of super-evangelists - we simply need you to know the role you play on our team, and serve in that way with all your might. Stop worrying that Jesus expects you to be having awkward conversations with total strangers, and start recognizing evangelism as a natural conversation which God can lead you into on any random day of our lives... while you serve popcorn at movie night or greet people at swim night. Let's allow evangelism to become normalized in our lives. And as we become accustomed to talking with people about Jesus, and serving in our role on the team, the awkwardness of evangelism will fade. And Lord willing, we'll get to experience the incredible excitement and joy of watching other people find freedom in Jesus.