

## **Our VISION: Personal Local Evangelism**

(Week 2 of 2 on “Personally Shares the Gospel Locally and Globally”)

2 Corinthians 5:16-20 on October 27, 2024

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*Please read 2 Corinthians 5:16-20 before going further in this transcript.*

Next week, we’re going to dive into a brand-new sermon series on the Gospel of Luke. For today though, we’re going to wrap up with our final sermon on our Mission, Vision, Core Values, and Discipleship Pathway. Last Sunday, we talked about Personal global Evangelism, today we’ll talk about Personal local Evangelism. Both of these sermons flow right out of our core value of “evangelizing the lost,” and they’re directly connected to our VISION: We will be a church... who “personally shares the gospel locally and globally.”

Even though I’m a pastor, I’ll admit that I don’t feel like I’m a very good evangelist. In fact, evangelism often intimidates me; I’m much more comfortable, and much more inclined, to preach/teach to people who are already believers. Even so, I feel prompted by God’s Word, and compelled by His Spirit, to share the Good News about Jesus with anyone who is still spiritually lost. As we noted last week, we don’t want to miss out on God’s missionary heart, which includes His heart for the spiritually lost right here in our own hometown. 2 Peter 3:9 says, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” So today, we’re going to focus in on Personal Local Evangelism, and as we do we’re asking God to infuse us with a greater passion, and a greater BURDEN, for the spiritually lost in our own backyard. The 4th G in our Discipleship Pathway is GO, and today we’re going to consider what it means for us to “GO with the gospel,” locally.

**Personal Local Evangelism means that each Christ-follower should...**

### **1) Be involved in local evangelism.**

By evangelism, we mean openly addressing people’s deepest spiritual need: salvation from sin and its consequences. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 says, “...[God] reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.” That message is that through Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, each person on the planet is offered the opportunity to not have their sins counted against them. By grace, through faith in Christ, our sins can be added to Christ’s account, “put on His tab” as it were. And as those who ourselves have been reconciled to a right relationship with God, we’ve now been entrusted with the ministry of urging

others to be reconciled to God. 2 Corinthians 5:20 states it plainly: “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.”

But what does it mean for us to be Christ’s “ambassadors” in the Bemidji area? The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it this way:

Ambassador = “an authorized representative or messenger, especially a diplomatic agent to a foreign government as the resident representative for a special and often temporary assignment.”<sup>1</sup>

Now, that’s a mouthful, but the clear connection to verse 20 is that each and every Christ-follower is His “authorized representative.” Last week we talked about how in Matthew 28 Jesus has commissioned His followers to act on His authority. And not only do we act on His authority, but we also deliver His message: we GO, as messengers of the gospel. Now, this mention of a “foreign government” might make it sound like we’re returning back to our global focus from last week. However, the point of an ambassador isn’t just that he or she goes to a foreign place, but that they are from a foreign place, or at least they represent a foreign place.

Philippians 3:20 says, “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.” You see, even though we haven’t actually been to heaven yet, we’re representatives of heaven’s king. Once we become Christ’s ambassadors, we no longer consider this world our home. We’re just passing through on our way to a much better place; better in every way, including the lasting permanence of being eternal residents of heaven.<sup>2</sup> In other words, we are the foreigners here, and we’re acting as resident representatives “for a limited time only”; we’re on special assignment, until the Lord takes us home. Our mindset here on earth should really be more like a camping trip than establishing a long-term homestead. Or, more like we’re just renting for a while, and when you’re renting a place, it’s best not to get too attached to it, because it’s not really meant to be a long-term, permanent arrangement. So as ambassadors, our temporary assignment is personal evangelism; personal evangelism that’s done locally...

## **Personal Local Evangelism means that each Christ-follower should... 2) Be involved in evangelism locally.**

Being involved locally means actively evangelizing the people who live right here in our immediate vicinity: our neighbors and classmates, the people we work with, and the people who we bump into as we make our way throughout our local community. Our commission is to actively spread the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ambassador>

<sup>2</sup> More precisely, the new heaven and earth. See Revelation 21:1-3.

Good News about Jesus to the people right around us. So this means that we make intentional efforts to build relationships with people beyond our circle of church friends.

One of the ways that I remind myself of this call to local evangelism is the wooden cutout map that I usually keep in my office; it's on the communion table this morning. My wife Debbie gave it to me as a gift to encourage me, and to



remind me, of my mission field here in Bemidji. In the words of Acts 1:8, it's a great way to visualize our "Jerusalem." Sometimes I'll also prayerfully look over a map of our region: sometimes it's a roadmap or a geographical plat book, and sometimes it's a county map like the one on the screen, which helps me to visualize the equivalent of our "Judea and Samaria."

Let me ask you a question: would you say that our church should be more like a *free clinic* with spiritual help that's available for anyone who wants to come in? Or, should it be more like a *training center* for spiritual EMTs who are sent out into our community each day, to offer spiritual assistance to those in need? Ideally, I suppose our church should really be some of each. In other words, some of our church's outreach is composed of simply being open and available to anyone from our community who walks in our door, but there should also be a component in which we actively and intentionally go forth into our community for the sake of those who won't make it through our door for one reason or another.

Mark 2:16-17 says, "When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." These words of Jesus illustrate a pattern in His earthly ministry.<sup>3</sup> Jesus spent a LOT of time with unsaved people; He took advantage of these opportunities to minister to them and to teach them. He was intentional about being out among the everyday people who were spiritually lost; Jesus didn't limit Himself to being with the religious folks inside the temple. This is instructive for our church today: Are we getting the message of the Good News about Jesus out to the spiritually sick, to those who need a doctor to heal their sin?

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<sup>3</sup> In its immediate context, these verses are confronting a group of people who don't think they need any help from Jesus in order to be righteous; they feel they can be righteous on their own efforts (which is hogwash by the way).

In terms of Personal Local Evangelism, let's put it this way: We shouldn't be spending all of our time with already saved people. Jesus spent a lot of private time teaching and training His closest disciples, but He also spent a lot of time traveling around in public, and teaching and evangelizing the masses.<sup>4</sup> So if you and I don't have very many non-Christian friends, then one of the most God-honoring ways that we could respond to today's message, would be to come up with a plan to make some, to intentionally spend more time with spiritually lost people.

There's a classic book on Evangelism titled "Out of the Saltshaker." It's basic premise is that Christians can't have an impact on this world unless we get out of the church and into the world. We can't spend all of our time in the saltshaker folks; we need to shake ourselves out so that we can be in close proximity to people who are spiritually lost. With this in mind, let me challenge you with this thought: Getting out of the saltshaker is so important that we should regularly say "no" to opportunities to spend time with our Christian friends, in order to prioritize more time with the spiritually lost. This is directly related to denying ourselves and taking up our cross daily, by choosing to die to that which is most comfortable and convenient for us. Let's be willing to wade through some of the awkwardness and discomfort that sometimes comes, when we spend time with people who believe and behave differently than we do.

Paul explains it this way in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, "Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law."

*[So Paul makes it clear that we shouldn't morally compromise ourselves or rationalize personal sinfulness as a ploy to somehow be more effective in evangelism. We should continue embracing holiness, in the midst of hanging out with unholy people.]<sup>5</sup>*

Verses 22-23 conclude, "To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings."

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<sup>4</sup> We'll soon see this as we journey through the Gospel of Luke together.

<sup>5</sup> Paul also warns us in 1 Corinthians 15:33, "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'" So we need to remain vigilant in pursuing holiness. Also consider the warning in 1 Corinthians 10:12.

In terms of “Personal Local Evangelism,” we could put it this way: To those in Bemidji, I became like those in Bemidji. So even as we talk about some of the inconveniences and challenges of spending time with the spiritually lost in our community, this is still our community. Quite the opposite of the global evangelism we talked about last week, local evangelism enjoys the familiarity of our local surroundings (which frankly makes our ambassador role as a foreign representative a bit easier). In fact, we can delight in the fact that we’re the people who are best suited for it, much more than someone coming from the outside. This doesn’t mean that local evangelism won’t have its challenges, but the typical challenges of global evangelism, like learning a foreign language and culture, are pretty much non-factors.<sup>6</sup> Up here in “Lumberjack Country,” you and I are the *experts* at reaching our fellow lumberjacks with the gospel.

*Why? Because we’re locals!*

No one else on the planet is as uniquely suited to gospel ministry in the Bemidji area, as those of us who live here:

- > making a living here,
- > participating in community events,
- > hunting and fishing, and
- > enjoying life together in these beautiful Northwoods.  
(40 degrees below zero? “It’s not a problem!”<sup>7</sup>)



You and I know the local language and culture. We understand the apologetic concerns and questions about God. We’re aware of the obstacles, and the false teachings, which are being promoted in our area. Anything and everything that a missionary coming into our area would normally need to study and prepare for, you and I, already know! Local evangelism is included in God’s heartbeat for this lost and fallen world. So we dare not adopt an aloof or indifferent attitude toward local evangelism; we dare not allow our church to wane in its commitment to reaching our own community.<sup>8</sup> Those of us who are “becoming deeply devoted followers of Jesus together” need to develop a local vision for the gospel.

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<sup>6</sup> “God so loved the world” most certainly includes the people way up here in northern Minnesota, which, if you think about it, many would deem “the ends of the earth.”

<sup>7</sup> Frozen septic tank? “We can deal with that.” Cutting firewood with a chainsaw? “TOO easy!” 200 miles from the Twin Cities? “A simple day trip; we can do it our sleep!”

<sup>8</sup> We can’t afford to detach ourselves from the compelling LOCAL dimension of the gospel, as though the people living right around us have already heard the gospel. We shouldn’t say something like this: “Anyone living in Bemidji has had ample opportunity to hear the gospel, so we don’t need to bother repeating it.”

## Personal Local Evangelism means that each Christ-follower should...

### 3) Be personally involved in local evangelism.

One of the best ways that we can be personally involved is by serving in our own local church ministries, and by ensuring that each of our ministries includes a community outreach component. Our church's core value of "evangelizing the lost" should guide each of our ministries to keep outreach at the forefront of our planning. In fact, for the past year or so, our elders have been prayerfully studying and strategizing how to increase our church's evangelistic effectiveness. We've been preparing to launch some strategies which we hope will help us to become more effective in reaching the spiritually lost in our own community.<sup>9</sup> Apart from the official ministries of our local church, there are also many ways that each of us can be personally involved in local evangelism. This brings to mind the godly example of Don and Mabel Emery.



Don and Mabel are now with the Lord, but they were both actively involved in our church for many years. Together they illustrate a wonderful example of active intentionality in Personal Local Evangelism. Over the span of some 35 years, they invited countless people over for lunch (*probably even some of the people reading this transcript today*). Many of their lunch guests were believers, but many were not. A good number of them were students from BSU, who came to Bemidji from overseas, and hadn't had much opportunity to hear about Christ.<sup>10</sup> You see, Don and Mabel had some connections at the college who would put them in touch with new students, and then they made intentional efforts to invite those students over to their house for lunch. They weren't what some people might call "preachy" when they invited people over. They were simply kind and hospitable hosts, who represented Christ well. They'd pray before the meal and invite people to Christian events, but mostly they spent time just getting to know people and showing them God's love. In terms of today's

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<sup>9</sup> So in the months ahead, we'll be talking about this more and more; not just during the Sunday sermons, but all throughout the week, and all throughout the various ministries of our church. We're going to reevaluate and reassess each ministry area of our church to make sure that we're being mindful and intentional about reaching the spiritually lost. To be clear, we're not talking about major changes, but rather minor adjustments, which we hope will gradually increase our church's evangelistic passion, and effectiveness, over time.

<sup>10</sup> So the Emery's local evangelism actually had a distinct global outreach built into it.

message, they developed a culturally strategic, and effective way, to share the Good News about Jesus with people in Bemidji who needed to hear it.<sup>11</sup>

With this in mind, let's consider some specific...

**Ways to get involved with "Personal Local Evangelism":**

**1) Invite someone to lunch, someone who doesn't know Jesus.**

(In the words of Mark 2:16, eat with some "tax collectors and sinners")<sup>12</sup>

**2) Prayerfully consider your everyday local evangelism opportunities.**

This includes everything from work and school, to community events and hobbies. Each and every one of these can be a gospel opportunity, with just a little strategic thinking and prayer. Be intentional with the MANY people who you're already naturally around, people who don't know JESUS, but they do know YOU.<sup>13</sup>

**3) Invite someone to our church's outreach events.**

Don't just attend by yourself, or with your church friends, maximize our outreach by bringing someone with you to the Men's Breakfast or the Women's Tea, etc.

**4) Be creative in your own Personal Local Evangelism...**

After all, YOU are the resident expert on local Bemidji culture. You know the language and history of this area; you know the demographics and the lay of the land. Use these to your gospel advantage and come up with a strategy for Personal Local Evangelism. The truth is, none of you really need my suggestions today, because your ideas will likely be better than mine.

Anyone who considers themselves a deeply devoted follower of Jesus, should seriously, and prayerfully, consider how God is calling him or her to local evangelism. Let's keep in mind Jesus' encouraging words in Matthew 28:

- He's commissioned us to act on His authority, not our own.
- He is surely with us, to the very end of the age.

So let's remain vigilant in prayerful dependence, as we go forth empowered by His Spirit, to share the Good News about Jesus. We've been given a Great Commission Mandate to share the gospel in a faraway and exotic place called "Bemidji." We're here to make disciples, and to baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and to teach them to obey everything that Jesus has commanded.

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<sup>11</sup> Many of us know their son Gardell, who's also known as "the E-Free coffee guy." He told me about their strategy to invite people from church over for lunch each Sunday afternoon. During the morning, they'd each invite a few people over for lunch. Don kept a few maps in his pocket with directions to their house, Mabel made sure to prepare enough food to have plenty for company. After the service each week, the two of them would compare notes and then calculate the total number of folks who'd agreed to come. Such a simple but profound way to make an impact, not only on the unsaved, but also on our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

<sup>12</sup> I know a number of people from our church who find opportunities to share Christ with those they meet while eating out at McDonald's or Burger King.

<sup>13</sup> Embrace these daily opportunities as a starting place for making a gospel impact. Make the most of these opportunities, and approach them as a chance to be salt and light.