

6

GOING OUT



Where do you feel most safe?

QUESTION #1

THE POINT

Engaging others with the gospel means going where they are.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Increasingly, people are devoting anywhere from around forty thousand to more than eight million dollars to install a bunker on their property. The philosophy behind spending this much money is simple: in case of disaster, people want to be safe and comfortable, and to potentially be safe and comfortable for a long period of time.¹

You may not be ready or able to shell out millions of dollars to install a bunker, but we can all relate to the desire for safety, stability, and comfort. These are all good desires, but if they are incorporated into a church, they can be counterproductive to the church's mission.

Though the majority of churches in America are not closed to outsiders; many have a “bunker” mentality. They stay safe and warm on their own church property. They want other people to visit, however, and even get involved. They may even make guests feel welcome—if they come to church.

Unfortunately, most people never come to the church building. We need to come out of our church bunker, go where people are, and extend the invitation.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Acts 16:6-8

⁶ And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷ And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. ⁸ So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas.

Paul never had a bunker mentality. His entire life was devoted to going out and meeting people wherever they were with the message of the gospel. Sometimes that meant meeting Jews in the synagogue; other times it meant meeting Gentiles in the marketplace. How Paul presented the message of the gospel differed from occasion to occasion because he adapted his method to fit the audience (see 1 Cor. 9:20-22), but his core philosophy remained the same: don't wait for them to come to you; go to where they are.

It's important for us to see just how eager Paul was to reach others. He wanted to go into Asia, but the Spirit stopped him from doing so. This is the opposite of what many of us experience. We are hesitant to share because we're concerned with getting the words right. So we look for some kind of divine confirmation that *this* is the right moment, and *this* is the right person. We should have the opposite perspective. The gospel should be so readily on the tip of our tongues that we reckon any moment is the right moment and any person is the right person. This was how Paul approached his life and ministry.

What might keep us from having that same kind of passion and perseverance in sharing the gospel?

- ▶ **Prosperity.** One of the most subtle but dangerous enemies of our passion and perseverance in evangelism is prosperity. Prosperity inevitably makes us feel comfortable—and the more comfortable we are, the more hesitant we are to do anything that might disrupt that sense of comfort. The temptation is to simply keep the status quo.
- ▶ **Busyness.** Going out to reach others for Christ will take time—a lot of time. And time is a scarce resource in our culture. If we want to be about the business of evangelism, then the time to

When have you been thankful God told you “no”?

QUESTION #2

witness to others is going to have to come from somewhere. We may have to rethink all our activities and rearrange our priorities to make time to do so.

- **Faithlessness.** One final obstacle to our passion and perseverance in evangelism is simply a lack of faith. Do we *really* believe the gospel has the power to change people's lives? Perhaps our own lack of faith is one of the reasons it is sometimes difficult for us to tell others about Christ.

Compounding these obstacles of prosperity, busyness, and our lack of faith is the simple reality that sharing the gospel isn't always a one-time conversation. It often requires an investment of time in a relationship that provides several opportunities not only to talk about the good news about Jesus, but also to faithfully model the gospel.

Acts 16:9-10

⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."¹⁰ And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Paul was constantly looking for an opportunity to share the gospel, and the Holy Spirit was faithful to give him a dream that specifically directed him to cross over into Macedonia. Paul immediately obeyed.



Who in our community might be saying, "Cross over... and help us!" today?

QUESTION #3

ENGAGING OTHERS

From the list of words below, circle all the words that describe how you feel when you think about sharing the gospel with someone else.

unqualified	petrified	comfortable	experienced	inexperienced
unsure	blessed	cared	afraid	nervous
grateful	terrified	ready	personal	empowered
unashamed	failure	rejection	desire	embarrassment
weakness	inadequate	guilt	joy	prepared

Write a prayer asking God for wisdom and courage to engage others with the gospel wherever they are.

"To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some."

—1 CORINTHIANS 9:22

You probably won't have a dream directing you to travel to a particular place, but the truth is you don't need one. Jesus has already given us the clear command to go into the entire world and share the gospel as His witnesses. (See Matt. 28:19; Acts 1:8.) What we need more than a dream is a posture of ready awareness.

To assume this posture of ready awareness, we must keep certain truths before us:

- ▶ **Jesus is coming back.** It could be today. Like now. Or now. Or now. Or maybe tomorrow. That's kind of the point. Jesus taught a series of parables that all centered on His return and how His people should prepare. (See Matt. 24:4-41.) Then He declared in Matthew 24:42: "Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming."
- ▶ **Opportunities are all around us.** God has gone before us to prepare opportunities for us to speak and demonstrate the truth of the gospel. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).
- ▶ **We have the tendency to drift.** No one drifts toward Jesus. Instead, like a boat not anchored in the middle of the sea, unless we are actively and alertly fighting against it, we will always move away from our original position. "Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it" (Heb. 2:1).

Acts 16:11-15

¹¹ So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. ¹³ And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. ¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

From this simple story, we learn a few key things about sharing Christ with others:

- ▶ **Sharing Christ requires a verbal testimony.** An old saying states: "Preach the gospel at all

times. If necessary, use words.” Speaking the truth of the gospel has little effect if the words are not backed up by a lifestyle that exemplifies the love and compassion of Jesus. But this statement is erroneous if implying words isn’t necessary. Preaching the gospel always requires words.

- ▶ **Responding to Christ requires the work of God.** Paul and his companions did their part—they gave a faithful witness to the truth of the gospel. Lydia and the other women at the river were listening intently. And that’s when “the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.” This is an important truth: responding to Christ requires the work of God.
- ▶ **Sharing Christ produces ripples.** After Lydia believed, the effects of that gospel encounter began to ripple outward. Lydia believed—and so did her whole household! It was through those ripples that the believing community in Philippi grew and Philippians was eventually written. We should not underestimate the power a single conversation can have in the hands of God.

How would you describe God’s part and our part in leading others to Christ?

QUESTION #4

How can the truths of these verses help our group be more welcoming?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

The church should *not* be a bunker. Instead, we must go where others are. Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Pray about fear.** What is your biggest fear or apprehension about sharing the gospel with someone else? Share that fear with someone in your group and ask him or her to pray for you to overcome it.
- ▶ **Seek the opportunity.** Who is one person in your relational circle you know does not believe the gospel? Pray and look for the opportunity to share with that person.
- ▶ **Serve together.** Brainstorm with your group about practical ways you can go out together to serve and speak the word of the gospel.



To truly be a welcoming church, and to obey the commission of Jesus, we cannot sit around and wait for people to come into the church building. We must instead take the initiative and go to where the people are.

My thoughts

1. Madeline Stone, "The Upcoming Election Is Causing Luxury Bunker Sales to Soar," *Business Insider*, October 8, 2016, <http://www.businessinsider.com/luxury-bunker-sales-are-soaring-due-to-election-2016-10>.



HOSPITALITY AS A SPIRITUAL GIFT

BY DARRYL WOOD

A journey to a strange place creates uneasiness in many people. A friendly smile, warm welcome, and relaxed surroundings ease the stress of travel. People have practiced such hospitality in various ways throughout history. The first century of the Christian church was no exception.

Background of the Term

The term often used for “hospitable” and “hospitality” developed from a compound of the Greek words *xenos* (stranger, foreigner) and *philos* (friend). The resulting word, *philoxenia* (hospitality) or *philoxenos* (hospitable), came to refer to “treating a stranger as a friend” demonstrated through concern for those outside a person’s usual relationship circle.

Hospitality appears to have been interwoven into the Hellenistic culture. The ancients practiced hospitality long before the Christian church began. Early Greek city-states extended care to representatives of other friendly cities. They recognized a humanitarian obligation to provide aid to others. A religious motive drove the concept in some cases.¹ Aristotle, Homer, and other ancient Greek writers mentioned hospitality and hospitable people.² The early church developed in an environment that knew hospitable treatment of strangers.

The Jewish roots of the early Christians also influenced them toward hospitality. The concept of hospitality appeared often in the Old Testament.³ Frequently care extended not only to strangers but also to their animals. Provision of hospitality came with an unspoken expectation of reciprocity. In spite of this, though, Judaism tended to see strangers as a potential threat to Hebrew life and faith.



First-Century Practices

Due to increased travel opportunities, the need for showing hospitality expanded in the first century. Travel boomed for three interdependent reasons. First, massive road building efforts facilitated greater mobility of the population. Second, trade and commercial development in the Roman Empire necessitated travel. Third, the growing Roman presence supported a peaceful environment that made travelers more secure. Certainly crime still existed. The Romans, however, worked to protect routes for travel and trade.

Having a hospitable nature, though, should flow naturally from a Christ-like outlook.

Movement from place to place increased the demand for food and shelter along travel routes. The lodging industry failed to advance adequately. Few inns of any size or quality existed. The mobile population sometimes received help from kind people on their route. Thus the tendency toward hospitality that pervaded the Greek culture expanded with the times.

Welcoming travelers as an expression of hospitality was one of many actions the early church took in practicing charity toward those in need. Other charitable expressions included care for church leaders, widows, orphans, the sick, prisoners, slaves, and support for other churches, as well as further acts of kindness.⁴

Association of hospitality with the journey motif remains significant, though, for two reasons. First, the term's origin relates to care of strangers or aliens. That concept seems to be the purest application of the term. Second, hospitality supported expansion of the early church. The practice enabled Christians to convey the gospel message beyond their local communities.⁵

The New Testament includes numerous references that imply the practice of hospitality. Jesus modeled and taught self-sacrificial love as the primary basis for Christian living. Love engendered virtues such as generosity, compassion, respect for people, and hospitality. Jesus set the tone for the exercise of Christian hospitality to strangers, although He did not use the word specifically. He also received hospitality throughout His ministry.⁶

As they traveled from place to place, early Christian missionaries relied on fellow believers' hospitality. The New Testament contains several calls to hospitality and examples of it for missionary travelers and others.⁷

Additionally the early church probably met mostly in homes due to the lack of public meeting places. Hospitable believers opened their residences to the brethren. The practice facilitated teaching from guest instructors.⁸ Some writers commended hospitality to the churches as a part of their Christian ministry.⁹

Gift or Duty?

The key to understanding hospitality revolves around how the church interpreted the concept. Was it a spiritual gift the Holy Spirit gave to some believers? Or was being hospitable every Christian's duty?

All believers receive a gift or gifts from the Holy Spirit as a result of His grace. A simple definition of a spiritual gift is a divine, special ability the Holy Spirit gives to a Christian to be used for the common good of the church. The most inclusive New Testament gift lists come from Paul's writings.¹⁰ Other New Testament passages identify gifts on a more limited basis. Ultimately God determines the types of gifts and their recipients.

The New Testament never names hospitality specifically as a spiritual gift. Believers practicing hospitality in the early church, however, supports the notion that it was one of the gifts. Both Paul and Peter mentioned it in connection with other spiritual gifts. (See Rom. 12:6-13; 1 Pet. 4:8-11.)



Practicing the gift of hospitality meant using this divinely ordained ability to share unselfishly and joyfully with others, including strangers, in support of relationship building and spiritual growth in the church community. Writing to persecuted Christians, Peter explained the necessity for “intense love” within the church fellowship. Simon Peter pointed to the importance of service gifts to undergird Jesus’ love command. (See 1 Pet. 4:10.) Possibly he intended “show hospitality” in verse 9 to be an example of one of those service gifts. Practicing hospitality supported ministry both to Christian exiles suffering from persecution and missionaries attempting to expand the gospel beyond their home areas.

If “hospitality” is one of the spiritual gifts, does that prohibit its practice by believers not gifted with that divine, special ability? No. The New Testament shows that some practices are the duty of all believers. For example, each Christian should live out the works of kindness, evangelism, giving, faith, and hospitality—even if these are not the believer’s spiritual gift. Although other believers will not be as proficient in practicing hospitality as one gifted in it, every Christian should be hospitable.

Is hospitality a gift or duty? It is both. The New Testament indicates that some are gifted in hospitality. They possess a heightened aptitude to build relationships, welcome guests, and provide for their support—and to do so joyfully. Those gifted with hospitality enhance church ministry. Every believer will not be the consummate host like those gifted with hospitality. Having a hospitable nature, though, should flow naturally from a Christ-like outlook.

1. Gustav Stahlin, “*xe/noc, xeni/a, xeni/zw, xenodce/w, filoxeni/a, filo/xenoß*” (xenos, foreign) in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [TDNT], ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 17-18.

2. Aristotle, On Virtues and Vices 5.5, 8.3 in *The Loeb Classical Library*, trans. H. Rackham, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1935), 495, 503; *The Odyssey of Homer* 6.121, 8.576, trans. S. H. Butcher and A. Lang (New York: MacMillan, 1927), 96, 133. See Stahlin, “*xe/noß*” (xenos, foreign) in TDNT 5:17-18 for other references to hospitality and Greek writings.

3. For examples see Genesis 18:1-8; 19:1-11; 24:14-22; Judges 19:10-25.

4. Adolf Harnack, *The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, trans. and ed. James Moffatt, vol. 1 (New York: Books for Libraries, 1904), 190-249.

5. Donald Wayne Riddle, “Early Christian Hospitality: A Factor in Gospel Transmission,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 57, no. 2 (June 1938), 143-46.

6. See Matthew 25:35. For examples of Jesus’ reception of hospitality, see Matthew 9:10; Mark 7:24; 14:3; Luke 7:36; 10:38.

7. See Acts 16:15; 18:27; Romans 12:13; 1 Timothy 3:2; 5:10; Titus 1:8; Hebrews 13:1-2; 1 Peter 4:8-9; 3 John 5-6.

8. The Didache 10.3; 11.1; 12.1-2.

9. Clement of Rome, “The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians 1.2,” “The Shepherd of Hermas.”

10. See Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28; Ephesians 4:11.

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