

REACHING YOUR *OIKOS*



A STUDY ON RELATIONAL
EVANGELISM FOR INDIVIDUAL OR
(IDEALLY) SMALL GROUP USE

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Reaching Your *Oikos*!

In this study on relational evangelism, we will go on the world's most exciting mission together—sharing the good news of all that God has done for us in Christ Jesus with the people God has placed in our lives. Proceeding by steps, we will learn everything (well, maybe not *everything*, but a whole lot anyway) we need to proclaim the gospel boldly, winsomely, and in culturally compelling ways. I am so excited you've decided to come along on this journey!

How should you use this study? While it is possible to do this as an individual, we know that God calls his people into community. After all, Jesus sent his followers out two by two when they first participated in his mission (Luke 10:1). We gain so much more when we strive to follow God *together*. With that in mind, I would highly encourage you to do this study with a small group of Christ-followers. That could include an elective class at your local church, a study with your small (home, community, life) group, or an informal activity with some friends. What matters most is that you have fellow pilgrims on the journey to encourage (and be encouraged by) you as you travel.

You'll notice that the individual lessons have four elements (though not every lesson has every element): Consider, Reflect, Practice, and Apply. In the Consider sections, you'll dig into what God's Word has to say about outreach, and learn from a few seasoned evangelists as well. In the Reflect sections, you'll have an opportunity to work through what you're learning at the heart level (and often in prayer). In the Practice sections, you'll put the principles you're learning into practice in the safe space of the study and group. In the Apply sections, however, you'll carry it into the real world as you interact with the people God has placed in your life. (But don't worry—we'll take you there one step at a time!)

The lessons are, by necessity, a tad unbalanced. Some will ask you to "Consider" more, which means more time reading and studying. Others will ask you to "Apply" more, which means you'll need to find time in the week to meet with and talk to the people you're seeking to reach with the gospel. You would do well to look ahead at what's coming in each lesson so that you can budget your time accordingly. In terms of pacing for your group, you could meet weekly or every other week. If you choose weekly, you may need to shift the last "Apply" section in Lesson 6 (Ask) to Lesson 7 (which is lighter on application).

Play around and find what works for you and your group. The most important thing is that—no matter your pace or group makeup (or if you're flying solo)—*you actually apply what you're learning!* We do not want to be mere hearers of the Word, especially when it comes to reaching others with the gospel. It is pointless to study but not proclaim, for they will not believe unless they hear, and they will not hear unless we actually speak to them (Romans 10:14)!

Finally, I would like to express my deep indebtedness to Jonathan Dodson, Sam Chan, and Rosaria Butterfield (among others). In this study, I am standing on the shoulders of the giants, and am mostly collating the wisdom they've gleaned on the field and shared in their immensely helpful works.

May God bless you on your mission with an abundant harvest—to his glory alone!



REACHING YOUR *OIKOS*

Lesson One **PREPARE**

CONSIDER

HEART CHECK

Most of us get a bit squeamish when we hear the word *outreach*. We want to follow Jesus, want to grow in our faith, and probably even want to see people we love and care for come to know him in a similar way. We're just not so sure we want to be the ones God uses to bring that about!

And yet, we know we must, for God calls us to mission. In this study, we will dig deep into the missional life, learning what God's mission is and how we can be a part of it. It is our sincere hope that your passion for the lost will increase significantly, and that you will develop confidence and ability to engage with people where you live, work, and play as you begin to live #LifeOnMission. Along the way you'll learn how to pray for the people you know who aren't yet believers, how to invest in their lives—listening well and asking good questions in response—and ultimately how to engage them with the good news of all that God has done for us in Christ.

Some of you may be quite excited at this prospect. For a long time now, you've been hoping to grow in this area, to get in the game. Others may be nervous, scared, or humbled at the thought of having a gospel conversation with a friend or neighbor. (Don't worry, by the way! We'll take it slow and prepare you for every step of the way.)

And still others might be downright cynical at this point. As Jonathan Dodson points out in his excellent book *The Unbelievable Gospel*, "Evangelism is something many Christians are trying to recover from. The word stirs up memories of rehearsed presentations, awkward door-to-door witnessing, and forced conversions in revival-like settings." If you've been a part of endeavors like these—witnessed evangelism that is "impersonal, preachy, intolerant, and uninformed about the real questions people ask"¹—you may have given up on the whole idea of mission, throwing the proverbial baby out with the bathwater. If that's you, we hope you'll give us the benefit of a hearing, as we set a different course for mission in this culture.

¹ *The Unbelievable Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 11.

REFLECT 

As you prepare to set out on this adventure, the mission God has given us, what is your immediate response? Are you eager? excited? daunted? resistant? overwhelmed? Use the space below to journal your first, unfiltered, visceral thoughts and feelings about living the missional life.

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Now turn those thoughts and feelings into a prayer. How would you like God to work in your heart this year as we pursue his mission together? What sinful attitudes, if any, would you like to confess? What needs do you want to present to him, knowing he is sufficient for them?

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CONSIDER

OUR MOTIVATION

I suspect many of us already knew we should be engaging in mission regularly. In fact, if you're at all like me, you probably feel a low-grade guilt churning in the back of your mind most of the time: "I should be doing more. I should be making a bigger difference." So, if it's not a lack of awareness keeping us from living #LifeOnMission, what is it?

The trouble is (as it almost always is in the Christian life) that outward change doesn't happen without an inward transformation occurring first. That's why guilt is an insufficient motivator. Let's face it: if guilt were enough to change us, we'd all be very different people! No, we need to experience *heart change* first—a change in our passions, our affections, our deepest desires. Once that occurs, our outward actions always follow.

What heart change will lead to a zeal for mission? From where will our motivation spring? Let's consider Paul's words to the church in Corinth:

¹¹ Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. ¹² We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. ¹³ If we are "out of our mind," as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴ For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:11-21

In this passage, Paul identifies four key motivators for our ongoing mission.

First, he mentions the *fear of the Lord* (verse 11). If you were to look back at verse 10, you would see that Paul has just reminded his readers that they "must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." There will come a day when we will all stand before the Lord and give an account for how we lived our lives. Like the servants who were entrusted with bags of gold before their master left (see Matthew 25:14-30), we have been entrusted with the unfathomable treasure of the gospel. What are we doing with it? Will we hear that treasured accolade, "Well done, good and faithful servant," when we stand before the throne? The fear of the Lord—the reverential awe when we consider God's glory—motivates us "to persuade others."

Second, Paul mentions the *love of Christ* (verse 14). Christ's love compels us because we understand the magnitude of the sacrifice he made on our behalf: "we are convinced that one died for all." Loving self-sacrifice like that compels a response in us. His overwhelming, undeserved love fills us up, brimful and overflowing, and that love spills out into the lives of those around us. He left the comforts of glory to seek and save lost sinners like us, so we are willing to leave our comfort zone to seek the lost in response.

Third, Paul mentions the *plight of humanity* (verse 16). We can no longer regard people from a worldly point of view. Christ died for us—*because we deserved eternal death!* That is the hard but unshakable truth. Every one of us has turned from God to seek our own way, and in our rebellion we have forfeited our right to existence. In the holiness and justice of God, he must count "people's sins against them" (verse 19); he cannot simply "forgive and forget," anymore than a civil magistrate can arbitrarily forgive and forget the crimes of murderers or thieves. (We wouldn't call that mercy; we would call it *corruption*.) When we honestly face humanity's plight, grapple with the reality of eternal condemnation, it spurs us to participate in God's great rescue mission.

Finally, Paul mentions the *responsibility of ambassadors* (verse 20). God has not only reconciled us to himself through Christ's substitutionary death; he has also entrusted the ongoing ministry of reconciliation to us. We are now his ambassadors, as though he were making his appeal through us. We are God's mouthpiece to the world! They cannot believe what they haven't heard—and they won't hear what we don't say. What message do we speak? The gloriously good news of the gospel: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (verse 21).



Before we press on, spend a moment reflecting on the motivation for mission. Which of these four resonates most with you? With which do you struggle most? Why do you think that is?

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CONSIDER

THE VISION

In *The Unbelievable Gospel*, Jonathan Dodson asks a penetrating question: “How is the gospel good news to those we evangelize? Not *what* is the good news, but *how* is our news good for others?”² Christians are usually reasonably proficient at rehearsing the content of the gospel message: Christ died for our sins. But are we able to share that content in a way that is *compelling* for our listeners? (We’ll talk more about this in later units.)

I suspect one reason we don’t share such gloriously good news in compelling ways is because we’ve lost sight of just how gloriously good the news really is. (This probably explains why recent converts are often the most passionate proselytizers as well!) After a time, it seems our passion cools, the glory dims, and our message becomes dull obligation instead of enflamed zeal.

So let’s remind ourselves of what makes our news so good—and in so doing, let’s recapture a *vision* for what our gospel witness should be. Read Paul’s summation of the gospel to the church in Ephesus:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.¹⁰ For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

This is your story, if you are a Christian. At one time you were “deserving of wrath”—do you remember that time? Do you remember living to gratify your flesh, even if you grew up in a Christian home? That’s where every story begins. But then we come to the sweetest words in all of Scripture: “But. . . God. . .” (verse 4). He “made us alive with Christ” not because of anything we had done to deserve it, but only “because of his great love for us.”

² Ibid., 12-13.

REFLECT 

What makes this such gloriously good news?

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What thoughts and feelings does this reminder stir up in your heart? Why?

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Notice in verse 10 that God saved us by grace through faith “to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” As we saw in 2 Corinthians, one of the primary works he has given us is the ministry of reconciliation, that is, serving as his ambassador proclaiming the message of reconciliation. Are you prepared to be a minister of reconciliation, God’s very own ambassador? Are you willing to be used by him as an agent of his power and love as expressed in the gospel? Journal your thoughts below.

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Now turn those thoughts and feelings into a prayer. Ask God to give you a personal “mission vision.” What would you want to say to Jesus about becoming his ambassador and being used by him to reconcile others to God?

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REACHING YOUR *OIKOS*

Lesson Two **PRAY**

CONSIDER

THE *OIKOS*

In this lesson, we want to introduce you to the concept of the *oikos*. *Oikos* is a Greek word meaning “household.” (If you squint, you can just about see it in the word “economy” (*oik*-onomy), which originally meant household management.) For many of us today “household” would refer to our immediate family only, but in Greco-Roman culture, it would include the many non-family persons living and working in a wealthy house too. Thus, we might take the word *oikos* to mean “sphere of influence”—the people you rub shoulders with regularly.

What does any of this have to do with mission? Simple. Our mission will take place primarily (not exclusively, of course!) within our *oikos*. These are the people we know well, in whose lives we are invested, with whom we share good conversation about circumstances and issues. This is where our primary gospel opportunity exists.

In fact, we see this very pattern throughout the gospels and Acts. Consider just a few examples:

³⁸ *The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹“Return home [oikos] and tell how much God has done for you.” So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.*

LUKE 8:38-39

²⁴ *The following day [Peter] arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.*

ACTS 10:24

¹⁴ *One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. ¹⁵ When she and the members of her household [oikos] were baptized, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.*

ACTS 16:14-15

³¹ *They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household [oikos].” ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house [oikia].*

ACTS 16:31-32

At the inception of the church, in the missional endeavors of the very first Christians, we see a laser-like focus on the household. Once God began drawing a someone to himself—such as the demon-possessed man, Cornelius, Lydia, and the Philippian jailer—the influence was immediately felt throughout the *oikos*.

REFLECT

Why do you suppose God often worked through the *oikos*—the sphere of influence? Do you think he works differently today, or would you expect the same pattern to hold?

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What encouragement do you draw from this particular pattern of God’s saving activity?

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CONSIDER

YOUR *OIKOS* LIST

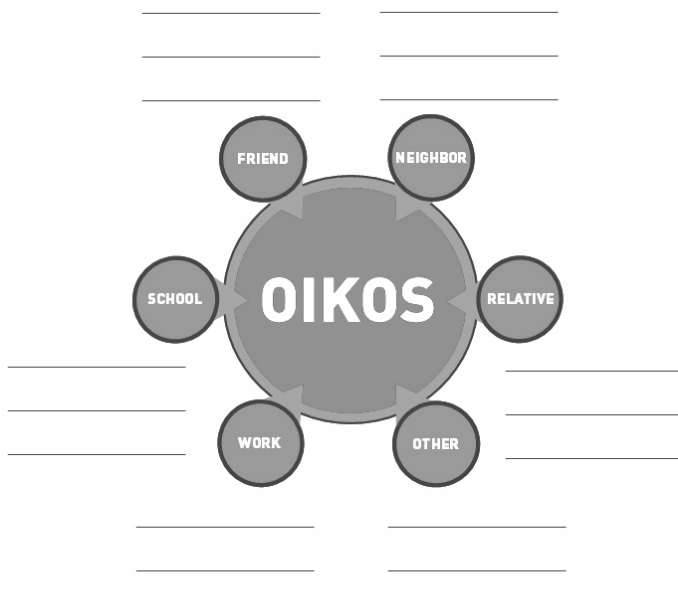
As we've seen in this brief tour through the early church, once God saves a person, we should notice reverberations in his or her sphere of influence as well. That means we are going to approach our mission in this study with the *confident expectation* that God has plans for those in our lives.

That raises the big question: *who exactly is in your life?* One of the great struggles we face as Christians is our isolation from people who do not yet believe. We are so caught up in the life of the church (which is a good thing) that we have no contact with those outside the church (which is a bad thing).

So our first step in reaching our *oikos* has to be identifying (or even establishing) our *oikos*. Pay attention to where you go and what you do this week. What places do you visit at least weekly? What people do you rub shoulders with (however briefly) on a regular basis? If we pay closer attention, we might discover that our *oikos* is larger than we thought—and that there are mission opportunities all around us!

APPLY

Complete the following chart. Try to think of two or three people in each area of your *oikos* who do not yet have a saving faith in Jesus. You might know them well already, or you might see an opportunity to get to know them better going forward.



If you jotted down two or three names for each of the six areas, you should have a fairly lengthy list of people. In fact, it might be just a little too long.

Take some time this week to pray through this long list of names. Which three or four people do you sense God laying on your heart specifically? Why do you think that is?

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God has free rein to alter the list at any point (the privileges of being the King of the universe!), but if he doesn't, this will be your *oikos* list for the remainder of this study. As we progress, you will keep your focus on these people that God has placed on your heart.

CONSIDER

PRAYING FOR YOUR *OIKOS*

Almost all of us struggle to evangelize as often as we would like. We recognize we *should* be evangelizing more, but that doesn't always translate into action. As you consider your own mission habits, what would you say are the primary obstacles to your regular evangelism?

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Now tuck that away for a moment so we can consider Paul's closing words to the church in Ephesus:

¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

EPHESIANS 6:18-20

As Paul challenges the Ephesian church to pray "on all occasions with all kinds of prayers," he requests prayer for himself as well in two particular areas. First, he asks that *words* would be given to him as he seeks to make the "mystery of the gospel" known to the lost. In other words, he isn't always sure what to say, or how best to present the glorious truths of the gospel in ways that are compelling to his listeners. Second, he asks that he would be able to "declare it fearlessly," as he knows he should. Even the apostle Paul—the greatest evangelist the world has ever known—feels he lacks *boldness* in his missional living!

Words and *boldness*. That's what he asks the Ephesians to pray for him. And isn't that exactly what we need too? I'd be willing to guess that more than a few of you answered something like, "I don't know what to say," or, "I was nervous I'd be rejected," or something similar for the question above. We hesitate to evangelize because we get scared, and we're not sure we know what we're doing. We need *words* and *boldness*.

Will you commit to praying for yourself *daily* throughout this study, that God would give you the words and boldness you need to live #LifeOnMission? Why is this so important?

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Of course, we shouldn't just be praying for ourselves. We want to be praying for our *oikos* list as well. We should be praying that:

- ✓ God would provide opportunities for us to invest in their lives and engage with them spiritually
- ✓ God would prepare their hearts to hear the gospel message
- ✓ God would orchestrate circumstances in their lives so that they feel their gospel need
- ✓ God would give them eyes to see his glory and hearts to understand his gospel.

As you get to know the people in your *oikos* better, you will be able to add your own, specific requests for each of them. The important thing is that we *keep praying*. Only God can bring a sinner to repentance. Only God can take a heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh. Only God can raise us to new life through faith in Jesus Christ.

Will you commit to praying *every day* for those three or four names on your *oikos* list? Why not start now? (Jot down some notes below to help you pray specifically.)

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REACHING YOUR *OIKOS*

Lesson Three **SERVE**

CONSIDER

INVESTING IN YOUR *OIKOS*

In the last section, you learned about your *oikos*—what it means and who is in it. Hopefully by this point you are praying regularly for a few people within your *oikos*, that God would give you opportunity to deepen the relationship and ultimately share the gospel.

Of course, the *gospel*—the good news about God’s saving work on behalf of his people through Christ’s substitutionary, atoning death on the cross—is both the content *of* and the motivation *for* mission. We proclaim the good news of Christ’s death and resurrection because we have experienced its goodness in our own lives.

All this might lead us to believe that living #LifeOnMission is a matter of mere proclamation, as if all that was needed was our rehearsing some (vitally important) truths for someone else to learn. This, however, is not the pattern Jesus set for us. By observing Jesus’ life, we see that he wedded gospel *speaking* with gospel *living*. He not only proclaimed the good news; he also embodied it in the way he loved and served those he sought to reach. “For even the Son of Man,” Jesus said, “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). In order to accomplish our salvation, Jesus had to take “the very nature of a servant” (Philippians 2:7)—and Paul tells us we are to share his mindset (2:3-5)! In fact, after Jesus takes the role of the lowliest servant and washes his disciples’ feet, he tells them, “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (John 13:15). That means we should expect to serve those God places in our *oikos*—not just speak the gospel at them.

Consider Matthew’s account of Jesus’ gospel ministry:

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

MATTHEW 9:35-38

As Jesus ministered throughout the country, he taught and proclaimed the good news of the kingdom. His mission included *words*. But at the same time, he had compassion on the people, addressing their physical needs by healing every disease and sickness. His mission included *deeds*. As he looked out at the crowds, he knew he would soon depart and leave the mission to his followers, and so he taught them to pray for more workers—more men and women who would take up his mission. Now think for a moment: shouldn’t we expect that our mission would look like his? And if so, shouldn’t our ministry include *words* and *deeds* too?

In fact, this is exactly what we see when we turn to the book of Acts:

Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. ⁶ When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. ⁷ For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was great joy in that city.

ACTS 8:5-8

REFLECT

What does ministry in “word and deed” mean?

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How did Philip minister in word and deed while in Samaria? What was the result?

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Now read Acts 9:31-43. How do Peter and Tabitha minister in word and deed?

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Thinking broadly, how can the church today take up Jesus’ mission in word and deed? Why is it important that Christians do both—and what happens if we don’t?

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MEETING NEEDS

If we are to make the gospel known in both word *and deed*, we need to think deeply about what deeds make the most sense in our *oikos*. Making clothes worked well for Tabitha in Acts 9, but might not be the best option for most of us today. To love and serve people well, we need to know how best we can serve them—and that means carefully identifying their needs, so we can determine how to meet them.

Hopefully you're beginning to invest more deeply in those three or four relationships you identified in the last lesson. (If not, the next few lessons will provide a blueprint for how to go about that.) Regardless of whether or not you've begun to invest more intentionally your *oikos*, your assignment is to **begin considering the needs of those three or four people. Complete the following chart to help you think through their needs, and to turn that reflection into regular prayers for them—that God would meet their needs, and give you opportunity to make the gospel known to them in word and deed.**

EXAMPLE

Name: *Elizabeth*

Relationship: *Neighbor, friend, book club members*

Situation/Need: *I've heard her make a few offhand remarks that lead me to believe her marriage is struggling. In addition, I know she and her husband are having a very hard time with their youngest child, who might be kicked out of school. She seems open to spiritual conversations, but has steadfastly refused any invitation to church or church activities.*

Prayer: *That God would use the struggles she's facing—especially her sense of inadequacy and hopelessness regarding her youngest child—to make her realize she needs spiritual support. Ultimately, that she would realize that support comes through Jesus, as she learns to trust and abide in him.*

YOUR OIKOS LIST

Name:.....

Relationship:.....

Situation/Need:.....

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Prayer:.....

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Name:.....

Relationship:.....

Situation/Need:.....

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Prayer:.....

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Name:.....

Relationship:.....

Situation/Need:.....

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Prayer:.....

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Some of you may be wondering how we discover needs, or even how to connect with skeptics and seekers so that you can have an *oikos* list! To help in these areas, we are going to push ourselves out of our comfort zones by forcing ourselves out of our homes this week too.

Even as you are thinking and praying about the needs of those on your *oikos* list, we'd encourage you to go on a prayer walk. Prayer walking is a common practice with a long history. In essence, it involves praying on site. Instead of thinking through neighbors or colleagues, we actually walk through our neighborhood or office, praying for the people we encounter as we walk. The great benefit of prayer walks is having our eyes opened to the needs around us. Even though you've probably walked the same street or hallway many times before, walking those same steps while praying in the Spirit will help you to see things very differently—and that will help you to pray much more specifically and fervently.

Plan where and when you want to take your prayer walk. When you arrive, ask God to prepare your heart for what you're about to do, and to open your eyes to see the needs of those around you. Look, listen, pay attention—and then pray as the Spirit leads. You might consider bringing a passage or two of Scripture with you to focus your thoughts as you pray. Some possible passages include:

If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. ¹¹ The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. ¹² Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

ISAIAH 58:10-12

And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

MICAH 6:8b

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

1 JOHN 3:16-18

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

MATTHEW 9:36

Jot down notes from your prayer walk below. Be prepared to share about your experiences with the group.

Place and Time:

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Scripture(s):

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Summary of Experience/Insights:

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REACHING YOUR *OIKOS*

Lesson Four **WELCOME**

CONSIDER

PRACTICING HOSPITALITY

In the last lesson, we considered the importance of making the gospel known in both *word* and *deed*. Without words there is no gospel (which means “good news”); but without deeds the gospel is incomplete, and the evangelist will probably come across as hypocritical or disingenuous. People took Jesus seriously when he spoke of God’s love because they saw God’s love embodied in his life (and likewise the apostles).

In this lesson, we take the next logical step. If we are to make the gospel known in word and deed, what deeds should we be doing? If we are to serve the needs of those with whom we share the gospel, what needs do they have? These are not easy questions because they are intensely personal (i.e., specific to each person). Even just looking back through some of the passages we considered in the last lesson, we see that Tabitha was making clothes for the poor, Philip was casting out demons, and Peter was healing diseases. Which deed was required depends on whether the person had economic, spiritual, or physical needs.

The trouble many of us face as we try to take up Jesus’ mission is that *we don’t know the needs of those around us*. Most of the people we know will be economically stable, in good health, and not demonized (as far as we can tell!). Although we can assume needs exist, we might not be sure how to unearth them, especially given how private many people are. So how can we make the gospel known in deed if we don’t know what our *oikos* needs?

Enter biblical hospitality. I use the phrase *biblical* hospitality because without it many of us will default to a thoroughly *unbiblical* view, which involves doilies, an immaculate house, and a three-course meal that would be the envy of most chefs. While there’s nothing wrong with entertaining well, the plain fact of the matter is that the unbiblical view will keep most us from practicing *any* hospitality because we know we can’t measure up. Let’s face it: if you can’t stand the thought of someone seeing dishes in your sink and unsorted mail on your front table, you’re not going to let people into your home very often!

And that’s why we need to have a biblical view of hospitality. The Bible is a very real book. It acknowledges the deep messiness in our lives. It is stained with dirt and grime, just like we are. So it never calls us to sweep our messes (literal or figurative!) under the rug, but to let others enter into the mess. The floor may be dirty and the meatloaf dry, but what matters most is the home—and heart—open to the Spirit’s movement.

Why is biblical hospitality so important? When we invite others into our home and into our lives, we get to know people (and let them get to know us) at a very different level. In her outstanding book, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in a Post-Christian World*, Rosaria Butterfield explains what happens in an oft-repeated, memorable phrase: strangers become neighbors, and neighbors become family—as they become a part of the family of God by faith in Jesus.¹

¹ *The Gospel Comes with a House Key* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018): 31.

When you invest in people deeply, when you rub shoulders and enjoy table fellowship with them regularly, you will learn much more about them. You will begin to hear about their spiritual, emotional, and physical needs, so that you can love them in word *and deed*, having the same active compassion for them that Jesus has for us.

REFLECT

How would practicing “radically ordinary hospitality” help you to know your oikos at a different level?

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APPLY

As you think through your *oikos*, is there an invitation you can make this week? Jot down what you plan to do, and if you’re able to give the invitation, how it was received. (If married, be sure to discuss this with your spouse first!) Remember, this doesn’t have to be a literal invitation to your house, but an invitation to go deeper in the relationship. Your aim is to invest deeply in these relationships.

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CONSIDER

THREE HOSPITALITY STRATEGIES

In his excellent evangelism manual, *Evangelism in a Skeptical World*, Sam Chan outlines three relational evangelism strategies that will help us welcome our *oikos* into our lives and homes.² Let's consider each in turn.

STRATEGY #1: GET OUR FRIENDS TO BECOME THEIR FRIENDS

As humans, we evaluate truth claims in light of our pre-existing plausibility structures. Simply put, plausibility structures are the ways we think about and understand the world (beliefs, convictions, etc.) that make truth claims believable (plausible) or not (implausible). They are the reason you would probably remain quite skeptical of a friend who told you a UFO landed in his backyard the night before, but at the same time accept that a dead man rose from the grave and now reigns alongside his Father in heaven. (By the way, put yourself in your skeptical friend's shoes for a moment: which of the two stories sounds crazier?)

In order to persuade people of the gospel, we need to adjust their plausibility structures. That raises the question of where people get these structures. They come from three main sources: community, experience, and facts/evidence/data. Perhaps most shockingly, they come *in that order!* That is, most of us would like to believe we've developed our plausibility structures on the basis of evidence. While that may play a part, it has far less impact than your community!

What does that mean for our evangelistic efforts? People will find a story more believable if a larger segment of their community—friends, family, neighbors—also believe the story. The easiest way to do this is to connect those on your *oikos* list with the members of your church family. Look for strategic opportunities and strategic connections. For example, if someone on your *oikos* list works in the airline industry and has small children, invite him and his family to your kid's birthday party with your friend from church who works in the airline industry and has small children. Or, you might consider hosting an "*oikos* event," where you intentionally invite Christian friends and skeptical friends to the same progressive dinner, wine tasting, nature hike, or golf outing—whatever their interests might be!

As your skeptical friends become a part of a new community, their plausibility structures will begin to shift. In many ways, people today need to *belong* before they *believe*—and now we know why!

² *Evangelism in a Skeptical World: How to Make the Unbelievable News about Jesus More Believable* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan: 2018): 40-51. Chan outlines six strategies in total; we're focusing on the first three here.

STRATEGY #2: GO TO THEM BEFORE THEY COME TO YOU

This is an essential balance to the previous strategy. One reason Christians have so little success in hosting *oikos* events is that they don't show up to the events their skeptical friends invite them to. If you're hoping your friend will come to your kid's birthday party (so he can meet your airline industry buddy from church), make sure you've attended *his kid's* birthday party first.

In essence, we want to do as much as possible with our skeptical friends, neighbors, and family. We hang out with them whenever possible, privileging their invitations, because we are truly friends, truly love them, and enjoy being together. If the only time you ever hang out is when you're inviting them to an *oikos* event (where they'll be ambushed by the gospel), they'll (rightly) feel like a project rather than a friend.

STRATEGY #3: COFFEE, DINNER, GOSPEL

The big question many of us have—and the question we'll spend most of the rest of this study seeking to answer, really—is how we get to the bit where we feel we can talk about Jesus with our friend. The “coffee-dinner-gospel” sequence helps us out. (And remember, we'll keep unpacking this throughout this study, especially how to navigate the specific conversations.)

In this strategy, we're seeking to develop the friendship by creating greater intimacy. Whether literal or figurative, moving from coffee to dinner to the gospel illuminates the process. First, we grab coffee (or whatever) with the person a few times. Next, we get dinner together—a very different stage of the relationship, especially if the dinner is in one of your homes. Finally, gospel conversations begin to happen organically. In this way, we shift from thinking of evangelism as a single-appointment presentation (event) to a multiple-appointment conversation (process).

This strategy works because the intimacy of the events mirrors the intimacy of the conversation topics at those events. Conversation topics work like layers of an onion. At the outer layer, we talk about our *interests*. Sadly, this is where most of our conversations settle, because we're not intentional about building friendships with skeptics and seekers. At this level, we talk about the weather, sports, hobbies, or basic biographical information (like marriage and kids). This conversation happens in the hallways at work or while standing on the sidelines of your kid's soccer match.

As the relationship develops over coffee however, we move to a layer deeper in the conversation onion. At this point, we begin to discuss *values*. Because these are touchier subjects, the relationship must be sufficiently strong to move here. We might discuss political or cultural values, including thoughts about current events, our approach to our children's schooling, or how to respond to a family member with mental health issues.

Finally, as the relationship continues to develop, even over dinner at this point, we peel the conversation onion all the way back to its core, our *worldviews*—what we think about God, life, death, humanity, morality, and the like. What happens to people when they die? How do we know what is good or evil? Does God exist—and if so, what sort of God is he? Of course, if we're having conversations like these, we're in the thick of gospel conversations.³

³ Another way to think of this progression is from the front yard, to the back yard, to the dining room. At first, we wave to neighbors as they pass us walking their dog. If we stop and chat, we're covering the weather at best. As we get to know them (and especially if you

This is how relationships—and the conversations that attend them—develop. We chat about interests, which are safe and easy. We begin to talk about values, which requires the safety of tolerance and mutual respect, with worldview requiring still greater safety. As our relationships develop, our friends will give us clues that they plan to move to the next level. A neighbor with whom you’ve only ever discussed lawn care might mention a marriage struggle or health concern, for example. Being sensitive to the Spirit, we look for these clues and follow as permission is given. We can also encourage deeper conversations by the questions we ask.

In the next two lessons, we’ll spend more time on *listening* for clues and *asking* good questions, so don’t panic if you feel like you don’t get this all just yet! For now, continue to invest in relationships with those on your *oikos* list. Look for occasions to connect them with members of your faith community, opportunities to attend *their* events, and ways to take the relationship to a deeper level.



These strategies are truly effective *provided we actually employ them!* With that in mind, what practical step can you take this week to put one (or more) of these strategies into practice? Be as specific as possible.

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have children), the conversation will move to the back yard. Sitting on the deck, watching the children play, the conversation will get deeper (values). Finally, you’ll invite them in for dinner, and your conversations will get deeper still (worldview).

What opportunities or strategic connections do you see for those on your *oikos* list to get to know members of your church community? What would you like to do about that?

Think of at least one event you could attend in the next few weeks that someone on your *oikos* list has invited you to. What is it? When?



REACHING YOUR *OIKOS*

Lesson Five **LISTEN**

CONSIDER

THE BIG STORY

In the last few lessons, you learned the importance of serving and welcoming your *oikos*—making the gospel known in deed first so that when you make it known in word, your *oikos* is more receptive and welcoming to the message. Hopefully you’ve been able to have some of your friends or neighbors into your home, serving them through your hospitality, and also learning more about their needs as you get to know them better.

In this lesson, we are going to focus on that very last part—learning more about our *oikos*. In particular, we want to make sure we are listening with gospel-shaped ears so that we can discern the spiritual needs of our *oikos*, as well as the spiritual longing that all humans share (whether aware of it or not).

Before we get to that, however, we need to take a brief detour into theology and the “big story” of the Bible. Although the Bible comprises 66 books written by many authors across thousands of years, it is at the same time the product of a single Author telling a single, glorious story. As theologians have noted throughout the centuries, that story is told in four acts: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation.

CREATION

In Genesis 1-2, we read of God creating the universe. Moses, the author of Genesis, takes great pains to show us the perfection of creation. All that God made was good—and after creating humanity, the pinnacle of creation, God himself even declares it all to be “very good” (Genesis 1:31). We might say Creation shows us how the world ought to be, if we hadn’t ruined it with sin. Of course, we can still catch glimpses of how things ought to be, because the beauty and goodness of Creation still shines through, like rays of sunlight making their way through a thick forest to illuminate the ground below.

FALL

Very early in the story, things fall apart. Adam and Eve, humanity’s parents, give in to Satan’s deceitful temptation and eat the forbidden fruit. Of course, the fruit is not the issue: the real issue was their desire to be their own gods, to forge their own meaning, purpose, and values. As a result, all of us are now born in a state of depravity, with our hearts bent in on ourselves, rather than stretching toward our loving Creator. We might say the Fall shows us how the world is, with all of humanity in selfish rebellion against God. Evil, suffering, death, injustice, natural disasters and the like are all products of the Fall. The world is a broken place, and we all experience that brokenness on a daily basis.

REDEMPTION

But God had a plan. Sin was never going to have the last word. Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, we read of God's promises to make things right again. Sometimes it's just a hint, a whisper, a shadow, but peeking through on every page of the Old Testament is a glorious plan of redemption. When we arrive at the New Testament, God brings the plan to fruition by sending his Son, the promised Savior. By his perfect life, substitutionary death, and subsequent resurrection, Jesus saves his people and breaks the power of sin and death. We can be saved by grace through our faith in Christ's atoning work. We might say Redemption shows us how this world can be. In saving us, Christ makes us new, and slowly but surely we become more like him in holiness. Things can change. We can change, by God's grace.

CONSUMMATION

Of course, we're still not perfect yet. God is changing us, but all too often our old nature shows up unannounced, and we revert to old patterns of sin and selfishness. We also continue to experience the effects of the fall: our bodies grow old and die, the created world groans for redemption, injustice and evil still seem to rule the day. And so we long for Consummation, when Jesus will return and set all things right. When he came as a baby in Bethlehem, Jesus inaugurated a new kingdom, but—as he even said in his teaching—that kingdom is like a mustard seed: it starts small and is still growing. One day, Jesus will return and bring the fullness of his kingdom with him. He will recreate the heavens and the earth, and the two will exist together in the New Jerusalem. Those who belong to Christ will reign with him in the very presence of God. There will be no more death, no more tears, no more suffering or pain. Oh, what a glorious day! Consummation shows us how the world will be. The end of the story (already written, already certain) is a perfection beyond God's original creation.

It is important to see that we live with significant tension between these four acts in God's big story, especially as Christians. When considering a difficult colleague or family member, for example, we simultaneously experience (1) a recognition of her inherent worth as God's image-bearer, (2) frustration at her sinful nature, which makes her difficult to be around, (3) an acknowledgment that she *could* be different if God changed her—and gratitude that he has so moved in your life, and (4) a longing for her to be different and these frustrations to end.

PRACTICE

LISTENING FOR THE STORY

Now that we've got something of a handle on God's Big Story in four acts, we can start to consider why it matters for our mission that we know each act well.

If the Bible is true (as it surely is), and if the story it tells is indeed the story of humanity (as it surely is), then we would expect every person to *feel* the story at the deepest level (as they surely do). Every person would experience at least *some* wonder at the majesty of Creation: a sharp intake of breath, an audible gasp, even a mist in the eyes when beholding painted canyons, dappled sunsets, ancient mountains. Every person would bemoan the effects of the Fall: complaints about growing old, grief at the loss of loved ones, anger at injustice and suffering. Every person would see the need for Redemption: trusting in finances for security, pinning hopes on politics to make the world right, looking for love to satisfy our deepest longings. And every person would long for Consummation: yearning for wrongs to be made right, desiring a true and better and lasting home.

Now, if every person *feels* this story to be true in some sense at the deepest level, we would expect to hear it when we listen closely to people expressing their hopes, dreams, frustrations, and the like. It might take some time for us to develop the skill of listening to deep spiritual longings, so let's practice together without the pressure of navigating an actual conversation with an unbeliever.

For each of the following statements, think of how they connect to God's grand story. Do you hear Creation, Fall, Redemption, or Consummation (or a combination of a few) lurking behind seemingly innocuous comments? Then describe how you might move from each statement to an aspect of the gospel message. Then we'll discuss the different options together as a group.

EXAMPLE

"Oh, doesn't that sunset just take your breath away!"

Creation. My friend recognizes the something "very good" in God's perfect creation, even though it's marred by sin. I might simply say something like, "Absolutely. When God created our world, he said everything was very good, and I think he was right about that!"

“I can’t believe the direction our country is headed. We’re so divided, no one is even civil anymore. And on top of all that, our problems are getting worse and worse. I feel hopeless.”

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“Three more years until retirement. I can’t wait to be done. We’re moving somewhere with better weather, and are finally going to get to just enjoy ourselves.”

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“We switched our son to a private school. He was struggling so much, especially with his peers, that we knew he needed a fresh start. I’m sure it will do him a world of good.”

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“Another round of layoffs at work. I’m worried I’m next.”

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“I’m putting in 70 hours a week. It’s the only way to get noticed at my company. It’s hard on the family now, but once I get the promotion, things will be better—and we’ll finally be comfortable financially.”

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“Family is the most important thing. They are my whole world.”

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LISTENING LOG

Now that we've considered some statements we might hear people in our *oikos* make in a safe, "laboratory" environment, we can take the next step. If we're listening carefully, we could easily shift these conversations into gospel opportunities.

I'm sure most of us still feel a bit of trepidation at the thought of actually seizing those opportunities, however. So this week we're only going to dip our toes into the water by trying to listen for and identify actual statements our family, friends, colleagues, and neighbors might make that tie to God's story. (Please note that these statements don't have to come from your *oikos* specifically—in fact, they might even come from believers! Our goal now is simply to listen for them, whatever the source.)

Keep a Listening Log. Try to listen for at least five statements from those around you that show God's story is truly written on the human heart. Record the statement, as well as what aspect(s) of the story it expresses, and how you might respond to it.

EXAMPLE

Statement: *"I'm so tired of doing the same thing week in and week out."*

Response: *Fall/Consummation. She is feeling the meaninglessness of routine apart from God, and is longing for a better world. I might ask, "Why do you think we get so tired doing what we need to do? Do you think there is something more we might be missing—like we're striving after the wrong things?"*

Statement #1:

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Response:

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Statement #2:

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Response:

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Statement #3:

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Response:

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Statement #4:

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Response:

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Statement #5:

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Response:

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Come prepared to discuss your experience with the group!



REACHING YOUR *OIKOS*

Lesson Six **ASK**

CONSIDER

INTERESTING QUESTIONS

In the last lesson, we focused on listening well, so that we can hear and respond to the deepest longings of those on our *oikos* list. People regularly express wonder at creation, frustration with the fall, a need for redemption, and longing for consummation.

At the same time, we might never hear those expressions because we are too distracted by our own worries and cares. An acquaintance at work won't open up about struggles in parenting as you pass in the hallway without breaking stride. A neighbor can't voice her desire for a fresh start if you merely nod your head while continuing to mow the lawn. Even when we engage in chit-chat, we will rarely get to hear people's hearts without inviting them to go deeper. How do we do that? By asking interesting questions.

We are self-absorbed creatures by nature. That is the nature of sin: making life about me, rather than devoting my life to the glory of God and the good of my neighbors. What that means practically is that we all prefer to speak rather than listen. I find my own anecdotes and obscure facts relentlessly interesting, but those of my conversation partners tedious and tiresome—and I'd be willing to bet you're the same way! If we're honest, we may even admit we don't truly *listen* all that much during conversations, but instead simply wait for a pause or breath so we can break back in with all the comments we stored up while our interlocutor was droning on. I exaggerate, but you get the idea.

As Christians, we cannot content ourselves with mimicking the world in this way. Because we are Christ's ambassadors, tasked with the ministry of reconciliation, we must overcome our natural tendencies and get to know our *oikos* at the heart-level. Eternity is at stake, so we must be quick to listen and slow to speak, as James counsels (1:19). And, if I could add to his advice, we must be quick to ask interesting questions as well.

I suspect many Christians assume non-Christians don't want to talk about religion, but I have not found this to be true. Many non-Christians don't want to *hear* about religion—at least not at first—but that's a different matter altogether. They're quite willing to tell you what they believe, think, and feel about all the big questions. I'd go so far as to say many of them would be *excited* to share it.

It's not hard to understand why. Because we are all self-absorbed, we rarely ask others meaningful questions. "Psycholinguists, those who study how we talk with each other, tell us that it is rare for a person to ask more than two meaningful questions of another person, especially if that other person is in distress. We want to help, to quickly resolve the struggle. But we don't want to suffer someone else's helplessness or confusion."¹ What a terrible indictment of us as humans! But it doesn't have to be this way.

When someone *does* ask us to share what we think, the floodgates open. Hugh Hewitt explains, "When you ask a question, you are displaying interest in the person asked—and in most settings this is a great boon to the pride and

¹ Dan Allender, *Leading with a Limp: Take Full Advantage of Your Most Powerful Weakness* (Colorado Springs, Waterbrook: 2006), 113.

self-worth of the person being asked. Most people are not queried on many, if any, subjects. Their opinions are not solicited. To ask them is to be remembered fondly as a very interesting and gracious person in your own right.”²

The benefits are legion: asking interesting questions will strengthen the relationship, demonstrate your genuine concern and love, provide insight into the person’s heart, and increase the likelihood of reciprocation. And remember, in this case reciprocation means your *oikos* asking what *you* believe—in essence, an invitation to share the gospel!

So, in this lesson, we’re going to practice asking interesting questions. Our goal is simple—to become excellent questioners, expressing genuine curiosity.

REFLECT

Before we dive into conversation, however, let’s take a moment to consider what some interesting questions might be. I’ve included a brief list to get us started. After reading the list, try to think of six to eight other interesting questions—questions that could lead into a deeper spiritual conversation.

- ✓ What was the best part of your week? What was the worst part of your week?
- ✓ What is your strongest memory from childhood? Why?
- ✓ How would those who know you best describe you?
- ✓ What first drew you into your career?
- ✓ What are your plans (or dreams) for the future?
- ✓ What do you like most about yourself? Why?
- ✓ What would you change about yourself, if you could change just one thing?
- ✓ If money weren’t an object, where would you travel?
- ✓ Who had the most significant impact on your life? How did they influence you?
- ✓ Did you grow up in a religious home?
- ✓ What is your favorite tradition? Why?
- ✓ How would you describe your family of origin? How has it shaped you?

² In, *But Not Of* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 172-173.

List your own questions:

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PRACTICE

This week, pick a question or two from the list to ask someone on your *oikos* list. Listen attentively to the answer—and then ask follow-up questions! Make it your goal to ask at least six meaningful questions during the conversation. Record your experience below. What did you learn about the other person? What insights did you glean about the power of asking questions?

CONVERSATION LOG (PART 1)

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REFLECT

CONVERSATION GOALS

As you develop the skill of asking interesting questions, you will learn more and more about the people you encounter. But what should we do with all the information?

Our ultimate goal is not to increase our knowledge of the people God placed in our *oikos*, but to communicate the message of truth, the gospel of our salvation (Ephesians 1:13), in ways that will be meaningful to different people. That means that the more we learn about an individual, the more targeted our questions should be.

We might think of this in terms of *conversational goals*. While at first we simply seek a deeper understanding, over time we develop a list of discussion topics we want to broach with the individual. A comment made in previous conversations might suggest a line of inquiry for us, for example. Or we might desire to take the conversation deeper by asking a bolder, more penetrating question. The nature of the goal depends on (1) the strength of the relationship, (2) your insight into the specific individual and where they are on their spiritual journey, and (3) the nature of the conversations you've already had.

For example, let's suppose I'm determining a conversational goal for a person to whom I am very close, such as a family member. In addition, she and I have had numerous meaningful (spiritual) conversations over the years, and so I know a good deal about her. I have invited her to church, and she has even managed to attend once or twice. She seems open to the idea of Christianity, but apathetic about doing much about it. In that case, my conversation goal might be something like, "I want to ask her what a relationship with God means to her, and whether or not she thinks she has one," or "I want to ask her if she has ever had an experience that made her think God exists."

Let's try another. In this case, I have a colleague who loves to challenge people—especially the religious, whom he considers to be inferior intellectually. He has no problem entering into spiritual conversations, but they always follow the same pattern: someone makes a religious claim, and he shoots it down in condescending, dismissive fashion. I can probably be quite direct, but I also want to pin him down in terms of his *own* beliefs, which are undoubtedly held by faith too. My goal might read, "I want to ask him what his main objection to Christianity is, and what it would take to change his mind on the subject." That way I would know what evidence he *would* find compelling. It would also let me know if he was being intellectually dishonest, in that he would accept *no* proof.

You'll notice that in each case the conversational goal includes a meaningful question. At this point in the process, a question is still the means to our goal. (In the next few lessons our goal will move to *sharing* the good news with our *oikos*.)

Here are some sample questions that are much more direct than last week's open-ended, information-gathering questions. These are questions that have a specific goal in mind—advancing the conversation as a whole toward the point where we can communicate the gospel.

- ✓ What is the purpose of life? What purpose do you see in your life?
- ✓ Do you think God exists? Why or why not?

- ✓ What do you think God thinks of you (if he exists)?
- ✓ Have you ever had an experience that makes you think God exists? What was the experience?
- ✓ What does it mean to have a relationship with God? Do you think you have one?
- ✓ How can we have a relationship with God given all the mistakes we've made? Why do you think God would accept you?
- ✓ Do you think people are basically good or not?
- ✓ What is your biggest problem with Christianity? What would convince you Christianity is true?
- ✓ What do you think of the Bible?
- ✓ What is holding you back from giving your life to Jesus?
- ✓ Would you be comfortable if I prayed for you in light of the concerns you've shared with me?

Before we start to ask questions like these to our *oikos*, let's pause to set some conversational goals. Be sure to spend some time in prayer before answering, trusting the Holy Spirit to lead you in the conversation.

Name:

Conversational Goal:

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Question (and Follow-Up Questions):

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Name:

Conversational Goal:

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Question (and Follow-Up Questions):

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Name:

Conversational Goal:

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Question (and Follow-Up Questions):

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APPLY



CONVERSATION LOG (PART 2)

As you've prayed for those on your *oikos* list, I trust the Holy Spirit guided you toward conversational goals for each of them. Continue in prayer as you ask the Spirit to direct you to one person on your list specifically, and then to give you a question or series of questions that would be best to ask in light of the work you did above.

Your assignment, then, is quite simple: Have the conversation. Ask the question. Listen attentively, respond with appropriate, sensitive follow-up questions. (While God may open the door for you to share with the person, you needn't feel any pressure to do so at this point. You may simply ask and listen. And keep praying!) Record your experience below. Be prepared to share with the group! (Please note: If you don't have time to have two conversations during this lesson, have this conversation during the next lesson instead, while you work on writing your testimony.)

If you have time, do it again! Seeking the Spirit's leading, either (1) ask a follow-up question to the same individual you had the conversation with, or (2) pick someone else on your list and ask a first meaningful question. Keep going!



REACHING YOUR *OIKOS*

Lesson Seven **SHARE**

REFLECT

WRITING YOUR TESTIMONY

As we ask good questions of people, inevitably they will reciprocate and ask us about our lives. One powerful tool we have in that moment is our personal testimony. In this lesson, we will learn how to develop and deliver our story.

Maybe you won't share the gospel with someone the first time you meet, but you can share your story. When we first meet someone—a new neighbor, colleague, acquaintance—we will likely have an opportunity to tell them about ourselves (especially if we've asked them good questions). And what an opportunity that is!

When you share about your life, do Jesus Christ and the gospel ever make it into the conversation? Why or why not?

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How far into your relationships do you get before people know about your faith?

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CONSIDER

Every Christian has a testimony. We can echo what Paul says of his life and ministry:

However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.

ACTS 20:24

This is a testimony to share! As believers, we have been recipients of God's grace—which means there is no such thing as a boring testimony. All of us "were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God,

who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved” (Eph. 2:3-5). If this is true of you, then you have a story to share.

The hope is that our testimony will open up opportunities to share the gospel. Even better, we can weave the gospel into our testimony. (As we’ll learn later, while our testimony is important, without the gospel it is *not* evangelism.) This is your story—the story of how God, through Jesus Christ, has saved you, and the journey you are on as you understand more and more the truth of God’s Word and the implications of that truth for your life. This is a story to be shared, and one that can be used in any relationship you have. Consider the words of the Apostle Peter as encouragement in developing your testimony:

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

1 PETER 3:15

In this lesson, you will be crafting a 90-second testimony. Why only 90 seconds? Because any longer than that and people will lose interest. Your goal here is to pique curiosity. If they want to hear more (and hopefully they will, especially if you craft it carefully), let them ask. Then you have an open door.

As you think through your spiritual journey, some questions to consider that can serve as your testimony outline are:

1. **Before Christ:** What was my life like before becoming a follower of Christ?
2. **Coming to Christ:** How did I come to believe in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior?
3. **Since Coming to Christ:** How has God been changing me since my conversion?

Some tips to keep in mind:

- ✓ *Start with a hook.* We all experience deep longings that can only be satisfied in Christ. Our hearts are restless, as Augustine famously said, until we find our rest in him. What made you restless? What longings did you experience? Some examples might include a desire for approval or acceptance, the pursuit of love, questions about life and death, and the like. Start your story in such a way that people can relate—and so want to hear more.
- ✓ *Include a brief gospel outline.* Next week’s lesson might help you here, so feel free to look ahead as you prepare. As you describe your conversion, share the message of truth, the gospel that brought you to salvation. You’ll be surprised at how easily this fits into your story. For example, you might say, “As I was struggling with feeling like I’ll never measure up, my friend shared with me how he doesn’t worry about that anymore, now that he knows his acceptance in God’s eyes is a result of what Jesus did in dying for him—and not what he has to do to earn it.”
- ✓ *Avoid insider language.* No one who hasn’t been a Christian for decades has any idea what it means to be “washed in the blood.” Even terms like sin, repentance, faith, and salvation are foreign to many people today. Explain these concepts in simple terms that all can understand.
- ✓ *Write how you speak.* This doesn’t need to sound polished. It needs to sound genuine.
- ✓ *Avoid insulting others.* Don’t speak poorly of any group (including other religions or denominations) or individual. Let the only offense you give be the offense of the cross!
- ✓ *Practice, practice, practice!* And practice out loud, so you know you can share it succinctly whenever you might need to. Remember, you don’t know when the door to share will



Write your testimony out and rehearse it to see if it can be told in 90 seconds. You can go back and revise anything you need to make it short enough. Although this might take a while to polish, we want to make a good start this week. Begin by outlining your testimony, then we'll move to fleshing it out.

Outline: Jot down some notes to turn into your testimony.

Before I became a Christian (include a hook)

How I became a Christian (include a brief gospel statement)

Since I became a Christian (how God met your longing, etc.)

Be prepared to share your 90-second testimony with the group this week (or in the next few weeks, as time allows).



REACHING YOUR *OIKOS*

Lesson Eight **CRAFT**

CONSIDER

WHAT IS EVANGELISM?

As you've been asking meaningful questions of others in the past few weeks, you may have found it easier than you thought. Asking good questions is pivotal to seeing a person's heart. The questions we ask and the information we gather from these conversations will make us more effective in our evangelism—which is where we're headed in this section.

There will come a time when we must engage our *oikos* in intentional conversations about the gospel. What exactly is evangelism? Mack Stiles defines evangelism this way, "Evangelism is teaching the gospel with the aim to persuade."¹ It's a simple but helpful definition, because nowhere in it does it suggest that we have the responsibility to convert a person. That leads to a paralyzing pressure, which will inevitably hinder our evangelistic efforts. Our responsibility is to share the gospel persuasively and then let the Holy Spirit work. We do not judge our faithfulness on whether or not people make decisions, but solely on whether or not we are sharing with them in the first place.

At the same time, as we consider our faithfulness, it is important to evaluate whether or not we are actually engaged in *evangelism*. There are many important activities that may precede or even accompany evangelism, but which are not evangelism in themselves, such as:²

- ✓ *Personal testimony*: Your story is important and can be used to prepare a person to hear the message of the gospel. However, sharing your personal testimony of God's work in your life isn't the same as sharing the gospel.
- ✓ *Social action*: Preaching the gospel requires words. Our efforts for justice spring from our gospel understanding, yes, but our actions don't tell people that Jesus Christ came to die on a cross to save sinners.
- ✓ *Apologetics*: All of us should be ready to defend what we believe, but we can cover all sorts of topics related to Christianity without ever sharing the gospel with a skeptic.

The apostle Paul emphasizes the importance of truly proclaiming the good news:

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

ROMANS 10:14-15

Now that we know what evangelism is and is not, spend some time checking your attitude toward evangelism.

¹ *Evangelism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 26.

² This list is adapted from the 9Marks study *Reaching the Lost: Evangelism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 14.

REFLECT

What emotions or objections come to mind when you think about evangelism?

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When was the last time you remember sharing the gospel with someone? How did it go?

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How have you seen “evangelistic pressure” in your life? How does Mack Stiles’ definition of evangelism take some of that pressure off?

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Write out a prayer based on your emotions, objections, and obstacles to evangelism.

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CONSIDER

CRAFTING A GOSPEL MESSAGE

Imagine having evangelistic conversations with two different people in the same week. First, you speak to a retired neighbor who grew up in a church-going home. He is familiar with the basic plot outline of Christianity, and understands that his moral framework is largely Christian. During college, however, he wandered from the faith, dabbling in casual sex and drugs. He moved onto your block a few years ago after a messy divorce. Although you've never gotten the whole story, it seems pretty clear that he cheated on his wife with a former colleague. Thus, when you speak of the gospel in terms of guilt and forgiveness, it resonates deeply with him. He feels like a prodigal son (a story he remembers), and he longs to lay his burdensome guilt down and experience the joy of forgiveness.

Feeling exuberant after such a fruitful conversation, you boldly engage the millennial barista at your local hipster coffee shop the next day. Because you're intentional about forming friendships with skeptics and seekers, you've gotten to know her reasonably well. She's a humanities major at a local college, and outspoken about her progressive political beliefs. You've inquired a bit about her upbringing, and have learned that her parents were cultural Christians at best. She views Christianity as culturally regressive, homophobic, and frequently oppressive. She has both "Coexist" and "Tolerance" bumper stickers on the back of her car. As you launch into your gospel presentation—the same one you shared with your neighbor yesterday—you get a very different response. Because she's a moral relativist, she doesn't feel guilty about her choices, and so feels no need for forgiveness. Frankly, one of her primary concerns with Christianity is that it makes people feel guilty for simply being who they are. The conversation gets progressively icier until she (mercifully) has to help another customer.

Two very different conversations with two very different people. What happened?

When we engage skeptics and seekers with the gospel, we need to be very thoughtful in how we craft our message. Many of us have learned one chief way of thinking through and speaking of the gospel—one gospel metaphor, if I could put it that way. Here in the West, for example, we primarily think in terms of the courtroom. We have broken God's laws, which makes us guilty. Jesus took that punishment on himself at the cross, so we could receive forgiveness instead. While that is all true, it is not the *only* way to understand what God has done for us in Christ. In a moment we will consider several other gospel metaphors.

One reason we've worked so hard to get to know the people on our *oikos* lists is so that we know how best to craft our gospel presentation. We want to contextualize (or personalize) the gospel message so that it speaks most powerfully to our audience. There is only one gospel, of course (see Galatians 1:8), but that gospel is like a many-faceted jewel. Which facet should we present in any given situation?

As you read through Acts, you will notice the apostles sharing the one gospel message in a wide variety of ways. How Peter speaks to the crowd at Pentecost (Acts 2:32-38) is very different from how Phillip approaches the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:30-35). Paul speaks differently in Pisidian Antioch, a Jewish audience (Acts 13:16-41), than he does in Athens, a pagan audience (Acts 17:22-31). In each case, the evangelist seeks common ground and a compelling approach to the gospel. This is why Paul begins with God's Word in Pisidian Antioch, because the Jewish Bible was common ground, whereas he quotes pagan poets in Athens.

Sam Chan suggests we are doing at least four things when we present the gospel:³

1. Laying out the gospel elements: who Jesus is and what he has done, the blessings of the gospel, the reality of sin and judgment, and the required response of repentance and faith.
2. Using a coherent biblical metaphor (or metaphors) to present the gospel elements.
3. As a result, necessarily leaving out other biblical metaphors.
4. In an attempt to be as persuasive and compelling as possible, being “sharply focused, penetrating, and to the point.”

The challenge we face as evangelists is knowing which biblical metaphor speaks most persuasively to any given individual (or group). To do this, however, we must develop substantial gospel fluency so that we *can* speak of the many different facets of the one gospel jewel. In the next lesson, we’ll work at developing this skill.

REFLECT

As you think back over times you’ve shared the gospel with different people, what might you have done differently in light of this lesson? That is, have you defaulted to a single gospel metaphor or presentation? What has been the result?

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What are the benefits of contextualizing the message for the person you’re addressing?

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³ *Evangelism in a Skeptical World: How to Make the Unbelievable News about Jesus More Believable* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018): 69.

CONSIDER

GOSPEL METAPHORS

Perhaps you have learned different canned methods to share the gospel. There's a chance many of us, if we have been in the church for a while, heard one of those gospel presentations. While there are testimonies of people who were converted through these means, it is much harder to use such methods effectively in persuading someone with the gospel in our current cultural setting. Because of this, Jonathan Dodson, in his excellent book *The Unbelievable Gospel*, encourages Christians to use gospel metaphors instead.

Dodson gives his reasons for thinking these flexible gospel metaphors are better than “canned” gospel presentations, which are told in the same way to every person. He writes, “Each gospel metaphor can be used to talk about Jesus in ways that are culturally appropriate and personally meaningful. If you take the time to invest in learning and understanding each of these gospel metaphors and then listen carefully to people’s stories, you will find yourself better able to discern how to communicate the gospel in a believable way.”⁴

Every person we meet has a unique background, obstacles to faith, questions, doubts, and life experiences. Therefore, when we share the gospel with people, we need to speak in a way that connects with them meaningfully as individuals.

Dodson outlines five gospel metaphors, and all speak powerfully to different people today:⁵

1. **Seeking acceptance.** People today long to feel accepted, to know they are welcome and won’t be rejected. Though we may try to deny or hide it, we all carry with us a sense of shame, a fear that we will be found out, rejected, and judged when people learn who we really are. When we explain that, through justification, the holy God offers perfect acceptance through his unique Son, Jesus Christ, it can bring tremendous relief and joy to those seeking acceptance.
2. **Seeking hope.** Most of us long for a fresh start, especially if our lives have been littered with failure, scarred by abuse, humbled through suffering, darkened by depression, or ruined by addiction need. In Christ, we can have the hope of being made a new creation. When we explain that, through God’s re-creating work, their old lives are cast off and God welcomes them into a new life in Christ, it shines a bright ray of hope in the lives of the hopeless.

⁴ *The Unbelievable Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 131.

⁵ The following summaries of the gospel metaphors are found at <http://gcdiscipleship.com/tug/metaphors.html>.

3. **Seeking intimacy.** We have a deep desire for intimacy in relationships. And yet, even the best friendship or marriage isn't enough for our insatiable demand to be noticed, loved, and cared for. We want relationships that are secure, where we feel safe to share our innermost thoughts and darkest struggles. When we explain that, through union with Christ, people can enter into the most intimate, loving, unbreakable, fulfilling relationship known to humanity, it can bring deep healing and joy to those seeking intimacy.
4. **Seeking tolerance.** Tolerance is a popular word these days. However, many don't know the difference between true tolerance, which requires respect for differences of opinion, and the new tolerance, which only tolerates views it finds acceptable (and is thus wholly intolerant!). That alone can be an illuminating conversation that deepens mutual respect and admiration between people.

Others will not like the exclusive claims that Christianity makes. However, before scoffing at their perspective or trying to crush their worldview, ask questions to get on the inside of their perspective and appreciate their views. They often have good reasons or difficult stories attached to their objections. Respectful dialogue can go a long way in over-turning bigoted impressions of Christianity. In fact, it will open doors that would remain closed otherwise. Through his redemptive work in us, Jesus allows for a redemptive tolerance that offers all people an opportunity to experience grace and forgiveness while not demeaning those of other faiths. When we explain this carefully, it can be very liberating.

5. **Seeking approval.** The thoughts and opinions of parents matter to their children. What our parents thought about us as children means so much to us: a kind word or careless opinion could lift or crush us in a moment. We are made for approval, and though our parents are often the first ones to give this (or withhold it), the truth is that we seek this approval from others all the time. Sharing that, through adoption, God the Father offers an undying approval in his Son Jesus can radically change people's view of God, and thrill them with the hope of a Father's love.

Chewing on these metaphors for an extended period of time will help us develop a greater appreciation for the richness of the gospel, while also offering us greater insight as we share the gospel with those on our *oikos* lists.

Of course, these are not the only gospel metaphors. The gospel is truly a multi-faceted jewel, and we would do well to consider as many facets (and ways to present) as possible. We might, for example, consider how the seven "I Am" statements of Jesus (recorded in John's gospel) provide avenues for gospel proclamation. As we reflect on the titles Christ gives himself, they suggest different aspects of our sin/brokenness and gospel response.

Here are a few examples to get you started on your own reflection:⁶

Title for Jesus	Sin/Brokenness	Gospel Response
Good Shepherd	Wandering	Following
Bread of Life	Starving	Eating (Satisfaction)
Truth (and Word)	Falsehood	Understanding and Belief
Resurrection and/or Life	Death	New Life
Vine	Separation (Withering)	Union and Participation
Light of the World	Blindness	Illumination

We could try similar exercises using the titles given to God the Father (such as Creator, King, Holy, Judge, Father) too. There is no shortage of ways to present the marvelously good news of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus when we come to him in repentance and faith.

⁶ See Sam Chan, *Evangelism in a Skeptical World: How to Make the Unbelievable News about Jesus More Believable* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018): 70-71.

PRACTICE

Pick another title given to Christ, or a title given to God the Father, and work through a gospel presentation from that perspective. What problem or sinful state does it suggest? What is the proper gospel response? What blessings would a response bring?

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REFLECT

How do you see gospel metaphors being helpful in your evangelism?

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CONSIDER

CONCEPTS OF SIN

We need to explore one more aspect of our gospel presentation before we engage someone on our *oikos* list with the gospel. Remember, in sharing the gospel elements, we must share the reality of sin (and the judgment it merits). Needless to say, sin is not a popular concept in our culture today. In fact, it is one of the primary reasons people reject Christianity. As a result, we must think very carefully how we speak about sin. Much like the various gospel metaphors, Scripture speaks of sin in many different ways. Different concepts of sin will compel different people.

For example, think back to the two individuals we met back in the beginning of this lesson. The first, our retired neighbor who had just undergone a messy divorce resulting from his affair, immediately resonated with the concept of sin as *guilt*. He felt guilty for transgressing a moral law—one he probably held even when he wasn't a Christian, as society at large still generally frowns on adultery—and so a gospel addressing his guilt/transgression spoke powerfully to him. However, our millennial barista has no sense of guilt. If anything, she feels religion produces false guilt in people, and is thus a tool of repression and/or oppression. To speak to her as though she feels guilty is to confirm for her all her worst fears about what religion is—and why she should avoid it. We need to address her with a different concept of sin.

The Bible uses three primary metaphors for what's wrong with us:

1. **Transgression:** To cross (transgress) a boundary; to break a law; to commit a crime
2. **Sin:** To miss the mark (as in archery); to fall short
3. **Iniquity:** To be broken or bent; to be unclean

All three concepts speak to who we are and what we do. They complement each other—that is, they're not speaking of different behaviors, but rather different elements of the same behavior. That is why David, for example, when he confesses raping Bathsheba and murdering her husband, uses all three words: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my *transgressions*. Wash away all my *iniquity* and cleanse me from my *sin*" (Psalm 51:1-2).

Sam Chan explains why we must understand these concepts well in order to evangelize effectively:

When we share the gospel, one metaphor will often resonate more than others with the person we're speaking with. For example, in a modern culture, which is strong on absolutes, people might see their sins as transgressions. But in a postmodern culture, which is strong on community, people might see their sins as falling short. Or in a society which is strongly aware of the prevalence of social injustices, people might see their sins as brokenness.⁷

Notice too, that sin manifests in different ways. We feel the *internal* effects of sin when we struggle with our own feelings of inadequacy, depression, shame, and guilt. We see the *horizontal* effects of sin in damaged relationships, oppression,

⁷ *Evangelism in a Skeptical World: How to Make the Unbelievable News about Jesus More Believable* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018): 74.

injustice, and abuse. And, as Christians, at least, we recognize the *vertical* effects of sin, which is rebellion against God, meriting his just punishment. When we evangelize, we often point immediately to the vertical effects, when it might be much more profitable to begin elsewhere. When speaking to the woman at the well, for example, Jesus picks at the woman's internal shame and horizontal broken relationships first. Interestingly, *she* moves the conversation to the vertical realm (see John 4:13-20).

Putting all these together (plus a few more), we could easily approach a gospel conversation using any of the following concepts of sin—whichever would speak most powerfully to our audience.⁸

1. **Shame/Dishonor:** We now live in a culture of public shaming (especially online), in part because our law/guilt foundations have eroded with the advent of moral relativism. Because people no longer care about breaking a code, many resort to shaming to achieve the same effect (in essence, repentance). With its emphasis on tribes and community, the shame model speaks powerfully to our current culture. Our misdeeds shame ourselves and the community to which we belong, and dishonor God. The ashamed long for restoration and reconciliation.
2. **Guilt:** The default concept for the past century or more in the West. For those of a certain generation, or those who come from traditional/religious upbringing, the feeling of guilt is still very real. They understand they have broken God's laws and deserve his punishment as a result. The guilty long for forgiveness.
3. **Defilement:** The Bible speaks powerfully of Christ cleansing us from our sin. Sin—whether our own or the sin of others against us—pollutes and defiles us. Those who have suffered physical or sexual abuse, for example, often feel defiled. Those caught up in addictions, such as drugs or illicit sex (including pornography, hookups, or prostitution) often feel they have defiled themselves. The defiled long for cleansing.
4. **Self-Righteousness:** Curiously, this concept has found new life in our culture. There are certainly many religious types who feel they have earned God's favor, and who disdain those who haven't lived up to their standards. But at the same time, progressive humanism has produced its own brand of self-righteousness (and intolerance). Many today disdain those who hold differing political views, or who don't follow humanism's moral code (in areas like environmentalism, social justice, and equality). The self-righteous long for the freedom of an outside righteousness, which liberates them from the need to measure up constantly—and which allows them to love others well.
5. **Brokenness:** Sin fractures our world: relationships, societies, and psyches. We could all point to relationships that have suffered as a result of sin. For example, one study showed that only one out of every 100 men has a warm, intimate relationship with his father. At the societal level, this brokenness shows up in racial and class tension. The broken long for restoration and reconciliation, for a feeling of peace (*shalom*).
6. **Idolatry:** Because God designed humans for worship, we will all worship someone or something. If a person doesn't worship the one true God, he or she will find a god-substitute (such as security, power, or comfort) to worship instead. No idol can satisfy the soul, however, so these substitutes—no matter how good—leave us feeling empty and unsatisfied. The idolatrous long for lasting satisfaction, the true freedom only surrender to Christ provides.

⁸ I am drawing most of these, and many of the ideas in this section, from Chan, 73-85.

While not an exhaustive list, hopefully this helped expand your understanding of sin (and its many concepts), and gave you greater insight into how to approach sin with the people you engage with the gospel. Our challenge now is to think through which concept would resonate most deeply with the individuals God has placed in our lives.

REFLECT

Which concept of sin speaks most powerfully to you? Why do you think that is?

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If you remember, what concept of sin did the person who shared the gospel with you (whether a parent, pastor, friend, or even street evangelist!) use? How did it resonate with you?

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REACHING YOUR *OIKOS*

Lesson Nine **ENGAGE**

REFLECT

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Let's pull together everything we've learned so far and put together an action plan for sharing the gospel with someone this week. We believe that God is at work, that he intends to save some of the people he has put in our sphere of influence, and that the fields are ripe for harvest. With that confidence in God, let's think through how to craft the gospel presentation in light of what we've learned about the person with whom we're sharing (in the Listen and Ask lessons) and the many facets of the gospel and concepts of sin (in the last lesson).

With which person do you hope to share the gospel? Why do you think God is leading you to share with him or her?

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What thoughts and emotions are you experiencing as you prepare to share the gospel?

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What concept of sin will the person find most compelling? Why do you think that is?

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What gospel metaphor will address the longing that sin concept produces and speak most powerfully to the person where he or she is now? Why do you think that is?

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How can you move the conversation into sharing the gospel by using the most helpful metaphor or sin concept?

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Will you use any aspect of your testimony as part of your gospel presentation? Why or why not?

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Are there any visuals that will be helpful in your gospel sharing?¹ Keep in mind that every visual assumes a certain concept of sin and employs a specific gospel metaphor. Only use a visual if it will buttress the approach you plan to take based on your understanding of the person with whom you're sharing!

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¹ E.g., "Two Ways to Live" (<https://www.matthiasmedia.com.au/2wtl/2wtlonline.html>), "Bridge to Life" (<https://www.navigators.org/resource/the-bridge-to-life/>), "3 Circles in 3 Minutes" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V7mURm-8cQI>), or "Four Spiritual Laws" (<https://knowgod.com/en/fourlaws>). For an evaluation of three of these, plus another effective visual,

CONSIDER

Remember, our very first lesson focused on the need for prayer to undergird all our missional endeavors. In light of that, here are some passages that might be helpful to pray through as you prepare to share the gospel.

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

MATTHEW 28:20b

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

COLOSSIANS 4:2-6

Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

EPHESIANS 6:19-20

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

ROMANS 8:26-27

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.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:20

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

MATTHEW 9:36-38

see Sam Chan, *Evangelism in a Skeptical World: How to Make the Unbelievable News about Jesus More Believable* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018): 86-99.

REFLECT

Using the above Scriptures, write out a prayer that you can be praying until your gospel meeting.

APPLY

At long last, the rubber meets the road! Having prepared yourself through prayer and reflection, engage someone on your *oikos* list with the gospel this week. Jot down how it went below. Come prepared to share your experience with the group!



REACHING YOUR *OIKOS*

Lesson Ten EVALUATE AND EQUIP

REFLECT

EVALUATE

Did you share the gospel with someone from your *oikos* (or someone else) this week? If not, why not?

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Write down your initial feelings, thoughts, and responses to sharing the gospel this week.

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What went well in the conversation? What do you wish you would have done differently?

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Stop here and pray that God would work in the heart of the person you talked to regardless of how we thought things went.

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The chances are good that the majority of our conversations ended without a person committing to Jesus Christ. This person is probably someone you rub shoulders with regularly, so make sure you don't avoid the foundation you've now established in the gospel. Regardless of your natural evangelistic style, you may start to see the relational or testimonial evangelism start to take shape more and more as you continue to bring the message and ministry of reconciliation to this person.

They know what you believe, and hopefully through the Ask and Engage sections you know a lot more about what they believe. It's time to start making an intentional plan for how you will continue to engage them from here. But remember, that doesn't mean that the gospel presentation will happen every single time. Keep asking them meaningful questions—including specifics about the gospel now

Was there anything from your conversation that would suggest a different gospel metaphor or concept of sin could speak directly to some of their doubts, life experiences, personality, etc.? If so, which?

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There is a simple mission or discipleship strategy that some people use called "X+1." "X" is the person you are talking to and the "1" represents one step. This equation encourages us to remember that every time we are with person "X," we are trying to help them move one step closer to God. Rarely will we get from A to Z in one conversation. It may take many encounters. So keep thinking a step at a time.

Greg Koukl offers another helpful encouragement for us to persevere in evangelism. He says that in every meaningful conversation he has, he wants them to walk away with "a pebble in their shoe." The idea is that he wants them to have some little annoyance—like a pebble in a shoe—that causes them to think and challenges their worldview. As they keep thinking through what you've said, the questions you've asked, our hope is that one day, when circumstances change or even threaten their life's foundation, the pebble will still be there, no longer as an annoyance, but now as a good friend, calling them to a sure foundation, Christ himself.

How do you plan to move this person one step closer in your next encounter with them? What is your long-term plan in engaging them further?

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EQUIP

I hope we have begun sharing the gospel with those in our *oikos*. I hope we have plans to continue gospel conversations—helping people move one step at a time, putting pebbles in shoes, and praying, praying, praying. I hope we keep forming new relationships, listening for spiritual clues, and asking meaningful questions. I would encourage us all to persevere, and to keep sharing our stories (positive and negative) with each other.

Of course, as we engage in evangelism, we may soon discover we're not as equipped as we'd like to be. Perhaps we got a question we couldn't answer well, or struggled to explain a particular gospel metaphor. In this last section, as we head toward summer break, we'll discuss ways we can improve as evangelists, suggesting resources that will equip us to carry out the commission God has given us.

Based on your experiences so far, where do you see room for improvement as an evangelist?

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What do you need to improve in these areas?

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EVANGELISM RESOURCES

Now that you've identified some areas where you'd like to improve, let's consider some helpful resources that can provide the equipping we need. There is no shortcut to developing this skill, which means it will require time and energy in study or training. But given the importance of evangelism, and the stakes involved, it will be well worth both.

Here are some books I would recommend about the gospel (the good news we share in evangelism) and the discipline of evangelism.

The Gospel

1. *Hope Has Its Reasons*, Rebecca Pippert
2. *Prodigal God*, Tim Keller
3. *Basic Christianity*, John Stott
4. *Scandalous*, D.A. Carson
5. *Gospel Fluency*, Jeff Vanderstelt

Evangelism

1. *The Unbelievable Gospel*, Jonathan Dodson
2. *Evangelism in a Skeptical World*, Sam Chan
3. *Tactics*, Greg Koukl
4. *Evangelism*, Mack Stiles
5. *Out of the Saltshaker*, Rebecca Pippert
6. *Stay Salt*, Rebecca Pippert
7. *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*, Rosaria Butterfield
8. *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism*, Mark Dever
9. *Questioning Evangelism*, Randy Newman
10. *Telling a Better Story*, Joshua Chatraw

What book stands out to you as one that could help you take a step forward as an evangelist? Why?

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APOLOGETICS

One of the areas Christians feel least equipped is *apologetics*. If you're not familiar with the term, apologetics refers to the defense of the faith. (The Greek word *apologia* means "defense.") Inevitably skeptics and seekers will raise questions and doubts about Christianity's many claims. Is the Bible reliable? Does God really exist? Aren't science and the Bible in conflict? Why would a good God allow so much pain and suffering? Isn't Christianity too narrow?

Those with an intellectual style will gravitate toward these discussions. But most of the rest of us will shy away from them *because we feel inadequate to answer them well*. While those feelings of inadequacy are real, they are not a sufficient excuse. As Peter reminds us, we all need to be ready "to give an answer [*apologia*] to everyone who asks [us] to give the reason for the hope that [we] have" (1 Peter 3:15).

This is so important because ultimately the question we, and everyone we evangelize, need to answer is *Is Christianity true?* It doesn't matter if we like it or not, if we disagree with it at points or not. If Christianity is true—if God exists, if he created us, if we rebelled against him, if he sent his Son to die as a substitute to accomplish our salvation, if Jesus rose from the dead in victory and vindication—then no response but repentant faith is enough. If we can show that Christianity is true, we will have done incredibly important evangelistic preparation.

So how do we improve in the area of apologetics? Two ways come to mind: study and practice.

First, we need to study hard—which most likely requires some reading (or podcast listening). Here are some resources I would suggest (* denotes a more difficult read):

General Apologetics (These often include chapters on the specific topics that follow.)

1. *Making Sense of God*, Tim Keller
2. *The Reason for God*, Tim Keller
3. *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis
4. *Gunning for God*, John Lennox
5. *Confronting Christianity*, Rebecca McLaughlin
6. *The Secular Creed*, Rebecca McLaughlin
7. *The Case for Christ*, Lee Strobel (and others in the series)
8. *Cold-Case Christianity*, J. Warner Wallace
9. *The God Conversation*, J.P. Moreland and Tim Muehlhoff
10. *Why Believe?* C. Stephen Evans
11. *Reasonable Faith*, William Lane Craig*
12. *Scaling the Secular City*, J.P. Moreland*

Pain and Suffering

1. *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, Tim Keller
2. *Can God Be Trusted?* John Stackhouse
3. “De Futilitate” in *Christian Reflections*, C.S. Lewis

Science

1. *God’s Undertaker*, John Lennox
2. *Darwin Devolves*, Michael Behe
3. *Intelligent Design Uncensored*, Jonathan Witt
4. *The Language of God*, Francis Collins
5. *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, Alvin Plantinga*

Other Religions

1. *Only One Way?* ed. Richard Phillips
2. *Unparalleled*, Jared Wilson
3. *No God but One*, Nabeel Qureshi (on Islam)

Narrowness of Christianity

1. *Relativism*, Francis Beckwith and Greg Koukl
2. *The Abolition of Man*, C.S. Lewis
3. “The Poison of Subjectivism” in *Christian Reflections*, C.S. Lewis
4. *Orthodoxy*, G.K. Chesterton
5. *The Gagging of God*, D.A. Carson*

The Reliability of the Bible

1. *Why Trust the Bible?* Greg Gilbert
2. *Can We Still Trust the Bible?* Craig Blomberg
3. *Can We Trust the Gospels?* Peter Williams
4. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, Richard Bauckham*

The Resurrection

1. *The Case for Easter*, Lee Strobel
2. *The Son Rises*, William Lane Craig
3. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, N.T. Wright*

There are many other resources, but this would make for a very good start.

As you look over the list, what issue stands out as one you'd like to research more? Why?

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With which book would you like to start? Why?

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Second, we need to practice. Even though you don't have all the answers—and never will—you can still begin having these conversations. It's like playing piano. You'll never get better unless you put your fingers on the keys and give it a go.

Two ways to practice, beyond engaging with seekers and skeptics in live conversation, are role-playing and reflection. In role-playing, you invite a believing friend to play the part of a skeptic, challenging your every assertion. This will give you the opportunity to think on your feet without worrying you're jeopardizing someone's eternity! (Don't worry: you don't have that much power anyway! That's in God's hands.)

Reflection takes place *after* you've had a conversation with a skeptic or seeker. Undoubtedly you will walk away from the conversation wishing you had done things a little differently. So, as you reflect on the conversation, practice responding differently. Have the conversation again, playing both parts yourself. I would recommend doing this out loud. Just warn your family members, so they know why you're having arguments with yourself!

Is there a Christian you can ask to help you practice apologetics by engaging in a role-playing conversation? Who? What topic would you like to practice?

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As we conclude our study, let me encourage you to keep praying and keep proclaiming. Walk through these ten steps—Prepare, Pray, Serve, Welcome, Listen, Ask, Share, Craft, Engage, Evaluate/Equip—on repeat. You can always improve, so keep honing your craft. And God is always faithful, empowering our feeble efforts with almighty strength. The fields are ripe for harvest—may we be found to be faithful laborers!