



REACHING THE LOST: EVANGELISM



Reaching the Lost: Evangelism

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INTRODUCTION

What does the local church mean to you?

Maybe you love your church. You love the people. You love the preaching, the singing. You can't wait to show up on Sunday, and you cherish fellowship with other church members throughout the week.

Maybe the church is just a place you show up to a couple times a month. You sneak in late, duck out early.

We at 9Marks are convinced that the local church is God's plan for displaying his glory to the nations. And we want to help you catch and live out that vision, together with your whole church.

The 9Marks Healthy Church Study Guides are a series of six- or seven-week studies on each of the "nine marks of a healthy church" plus one introductory study. These nine marks are the core convictions of our ministry. To provide a quick introduction to them, we've included a chapter from Mark Dever's book *What Is a Healthy Church?* with each study. We don't claim that these nine marks are the most important things about the church or the only important things about the church. But we do believe that they are biblical and therefore are helpful for churches.

So, in these studies, we're going to work through the biblical foundations and practical applications of each one. The ten studies are:

- *Built upon the Rock: The Church* (the introductory study)
- *Hearing God's Word: Expository Preaching*
- *The Whole Truth about God: Biblical Theology*
- *God's Good News: The Gospel*
- *Real Change: Conversion*
- *Reaching the Lost: Evangelism*
- *Committing to One Another: Church Membership*

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- *Guarding One Another: Church Discipline*
- *Growing One Another: Discipleship in the Church*
- *Leading One Another: Church Leadership*

Each session of these studies takes a close look at one or more passages of Scripture and considers how it applies to the life of the whole church. So, we hope that these studies are equally appropriate for Sunday school, small groups, and other contexts where a group of anywhere from two to two-hundred people can come together and discuss God's Word.

These studies are mainly driven by observation, interpretation, and application questions, so get ready to speak up! We also hope that these studies provide opportunities for people to reflect together on their experiences in the church, whatever those experiences may be.

Do you know any really good evangelists? I do. And I'm certainly not one of them.

Some people seem to be able to turn any conversation to Jesus. It doesn't matter if the conversation is about food, the weather, taxes, football, or anything else under the sun—they can get from zero to the gospel in about 5.9 seconds. Yet is it only those people who are called to evangelize? The first session in this study looks at the question, who should evangelize? The answer? Every Christian.

Yet too often our responsibility to evangelize inspires fear rather than excitement, guilt rather than joy. So in order to make sure we're evangelizing for the right reasons, the second session asks, why should we evangelize?

Another reason evangelism can seem intimidating is that we don't really know how to do it. Sessions three through five explore the question, how should we evangelize?

Finally, one great encouragement to our evangelism is that Jesus's evangelism plan is a whole lot bigger than you or me. In fact, it's as big as our local churches. According to Scripture, local churches have a powerful role to play in evangelism, not only by proclaiming the gospel, but also by displaying the gospel in our life together.

The gospel is the best news in the world. Let's jump in and think about how to share it with others.

AN IMPORTANT MARK OF A HEALTHY CHURCH: A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF EVANGELISM

BY MARK DEVER

(Adapted from chapter 9 of What Is a Healthy Church?)

In other volumes in this series, we have described healthy churches as marked by expositional preaching, biblical theology, and a biblical understanding of the gospel and conversion. That means when churches don't teach the Bible and sound doctrine they become unhealthy.

What does an unhealthy church look like? It's a church where the sermons often veer into cliché and repetition. Worse yet, they become moralistic and me-centered, and the gospel is recast as little more than spiritual "self-help." Conversion is viewed as an act of human resolve. And by varying degrees, from bad to worse, the culture of the church is indistinguishable from the secular culture surrounding it.

Such congregations do not herald the tremendous news of salvation in Jesus Christ, to say the least.

EVANGELISM SHAPED BY UNDERSTANDING OF CONVERSION

As we turn in this volume to consider another important mark of a healthy church—a biblical understanding of evangelism—it's worth

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considering how much our view of this mark will be shaped by our understanding of the previous ones, especially conversion.

On the one hand, if our minds have been shaped by what the Bible teaches about God and how he works, as well as by what it teaches about the gospel and what sinful human beings ultimately need, then a right understanding of evangelism will generally follow. We will attempt to spur on evangelism principally through teaching and meditating on the gospel itself, not through learning methods for sharing it.

I am always heartened by how new Christians seem innately aware of the gracious nature of their salvation. You may even have heard testimonies in the last few months that confess that conversion is the work of God (Eph. 2:8–9). “I was totally lost in sin, but God. . . .”

On the other hand, if what the Bible says about God’s work in conversion is left to the side in our churches, then evangelism becomes our doing whatever we can to produce a verbal confession. One sign that a church may not have a biblical understanding of conversion and evangelism is that its membership is markedly larger than its attendance. Such a church should stop and ask why its evangelism produces such a large number of members it never sees yet who feel secure in their salvation. What did we tell them that discipleship in Christ means? What did we teach them about God, sin, and the world?

For all members of the church, but particularly for leaders who have the responsibility of teaching, a biblical understanding of evangelism is crucial.

WHAT IS EVANGELISM?

According to the Bible, Christians are called to care, to plead, and even to persuade unbelievers (2 Cor. 5:11). Yet we are to do so by “setting forth the truth plainly,” which means renouncing “secret and shameful ways” (2 Cor. 4:2 NIV).

Evangelism, in other words, is not about doing everything we can to get a person to make a decision for Jesus, much less about imposing our views. Attempting to force a spiritual birth will prove

to be as effective as Ezekiel trying to stitch dead, dry bones together to make a person (Ezekiel 37) or as likely as Nicodemus giving himself a new birth in the Spirit (John 3).

Furthermore, evangelism is not the same thing as sharing a personal testimony. It's not the same thing as presenting a rational defense of the faith. It's not even doing works of charity, though all three of these things may accompany evangelism. Nor should evangelism be confused with the results of evangelism, as if to say we've only successfully evangelized when a conversion follows.

No, evangelism is speaking words. It's sharing news. It's being faithful to God by presenting the good news that we discussed in chapter 8—that Christ, by his death and resurrection, has secured a way for a holy God and sinful people to be reconciled. God will produce true conversions when we present this good news (see John 1:13; Acts 18:9–10). In short, evangelism is presenting the good news freely and trusting God to convert people (see Acts 16:14). “Salvation comes from the LORD” (Jonah 2:9 NIV; cf. John 1:12–13).

HOW TO EVANGELIZE

When I evangelize, I attempt to convey three things to people about the decision that must be made about the gospel:

- The decision is costly, so it must be carefully considered (see Luke 9:62).
- The decision is urgent, so make it soon (see Luke 12:20).
- The decision is worth it, so you want to make it (see John 10:10).

This is the message we need to communicate personally to family and friends. This is the message we need to communicate corporately as a whole church.

There are some excellent resources in print about evangelism. For considering the close connection between our understanding of the gospel and the evangelistic methods we use, I recommend Will Metzger's *Tell the Truth* (InterVarsity, 2002), Iain Murray's *The Invitation System* (1991), and *Revival and Revivalism* (Banner of Truth, 1994), as well as my own *The Gospel and Personal*

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Evangelism (Crossway, 2007) and Mack Stiles's *Marks of the Messenger* (InterVarsity, 2010).

Another important mark of a healthy church, then, is a biblical understanding and practice of evangelism. The only true growth is the growth that comes from God and through his people.



WEEK 1

WHO SHOULD EVANGELIZE?

GETTING STARTED

1. *What drew you to this study on evangelism?*

2. *What are you hoping to get out of these six sessions on evangelism?*

MAIN IDEA

The Bible calls all Christians to share the good news about Jesus's death and resurrection with those who don't believe in Christ.

DIGGING IN

At the outset of this study on evangelism, we should begin by defining what "evangelism" is and isn't.

What Is Evangelism? Evangelism is telling others the good news about what Jesus Christ has done to save sinners and calling them to repent of their sins and believe in Jesus.

In order to do this you must tell others that:

- God is holy (1 John. 1:5). He is the creator of all things (Gen. 1:1).
- All people are sinners who deserve God's righteous, eternal wrath (Mark 9:48; Rom. 3:10–19; Rev. 14:11).
- Jesus Christ, who is fully God and fully man, lived a sinless life, died on the cross to bear God's wrath in the place of all who would believe in him, and rose from the grave in order to give his people eternal life (John 1:1; Rom. 3:21–26; 1 Cor. 15:20–22; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 7:26).
- The only way to be saved from eternal punishment and be reconciled to God is to repent of sin and trust in Jesus Christ for salvation (Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21).

This is the gospel, the good news about Jesus Christ. Evangelism

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is simply telling others this basic message and calling them to repent of sin and trust in Christ. On the other hand, evangelism is not:

- **Personal testimony.** Talking about what God has done in your life may encourage Christians and intrigue non-Christians. And there's certainly a place for this *in* evangelism. But simply sharing about what God has done in your life isn't necessarily evangelism. Evangelism is telling others about what Jesus Christ has done to save *every* sinner who will *ever* turn from their sin and trust in Jesus.
- **Social action.** When we care for the poor, defend the defenseless, and work for a more just society we may commend the gospel, but we haven't yet shared it. Evangelism is telling others the gospel. Contrary to the opinion of some, that can't be done without words!
- **Apologetics.** Defending the faith against unbelievers' objections can lead to evangelism, but apologetics is not evangelism. Apologetics is a useful tool, but if we're not careful it can actually distract us from evangelism, which is telling the good news about Jesus Christ.
- **The results of evangelism.** We *can* share the gospel. We *can't* make anyone believe it. Thinking that we haven't evangelized unless people have been converted is a serious error that can cripple Christians with a sense of failure and guilt. But if we recognize that our job is merely to tell others the good news about Christ and call them to repent and believe, we are liberated to simply preach the gospel and pray for God to change hearts.

1. *Do you have any questions about what evangelism is?*

Now that we've established what evangelism is and isn't, let's consider a few texts that speak to *who* should evangelize. Acts 8:1–4 gives us a window into the early church's evangelism:

¹ And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. ³ But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them

to prison. ⁴ Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

2. *Who was scattered by the persecution in Jerusalem (v. 1)?*
3. *Who went about preaching the word, that is, the good news about Jesus (v. 4)?*
4. *What does this tell us about the early Christians' understanding of who should evangelize?*

In Matthew 28:18–20, after rising from the dead, Jesus leaves his eleven disciples with a final charge:

¹⁸ All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

5. *What does Jesus command his followers to make (v. 19)? What does that mean?*
6. *Of whom are we to make disciples (v. 19)?*
7. *What are all the things that making disciples involves (vv. 19–20)?*
8. *To whom does this “Great Commission” apply? Who’s responsible to carry it out? Explain your answer from the text itself.*
9. *Why is Jesus’s presence with us especially comforting as we go and make disciples of all nations (v. 20)?*
10. *Have you ever considered before that all Christians are responsible to evangelize? What’s your initial response to that?*

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11. Have you ever heard someone say they were not obligated to evangelize? What kind of reasons do they give? Why would Satan love to get people to think this way?

12. How can you fulfill the Great Commission as part of your daily discipleship to Christ? Give specific examples.

PERSONAL NOTES

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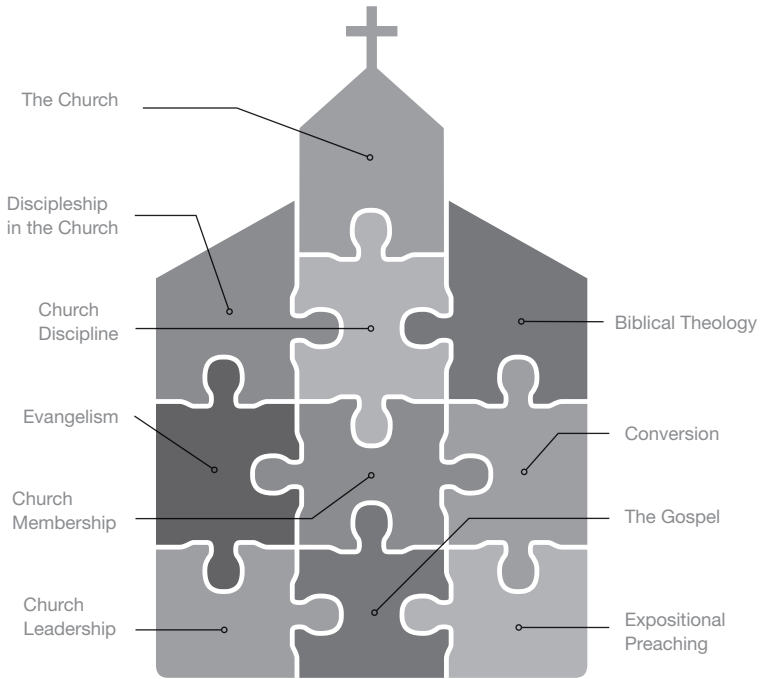
Building Healthy Churches

9Marks exists to equip church leaders with a biblical vision and practical resources for displaying God's glory to the nations through healthy churches.

To that end, we want to see churches characterized by these nine marks of health:

- 1** **Expositional Preaching**
- 2** **Biblical Theology**
- 3** **A Biblical Understanding of the Gospel**
- 4** **A Biblical Understanding of Conversion**
- 5** **A Biblical Understanding of Evangelism**
- 6** **Biblical Church Membership**
- 7** **Biblical Church Discipline**
- 8** **Biblical Discipleship**
- 9** **Biblical Church Leadership**

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**9MARKS HEALTHY CHURCH
STUDY GUIDE SERIES**

This series covers the nine distinctives of a healthy church as originally laid out in *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* by Mark Dever. Each book explores the biblical foundations of key aspects of the church, helping Christians to live out those realities as members of a local body. A perfect resource for use in Sunday school, church-wide studies, or small group contexts.





EVANGELISM.

The Bible calls all Christians to share the good news about Jesus's death and resurrection with those who don't believe in Christ. Yet this task can often seem daunting. This study helps participants have the right perspectives on evangelism and shows them how to share the good news with others.

"I am unaware of any other tool that so thoroughly and practically helps Christians understand God's plan for the local church. I can't wait to use these studies in my own congregation."

JERAMIE RINNE, Senior Pastor, South Shore Baptist Church, Hingham, Massachusetts

"Rich exposition, compelling questions, and clear syntheses combine to give a guided tour of ecclesiology—the theology of the church. I know of no better curriculum for generating understanding of and involvement in the church than this."

RICK HOLLAND, Senior Pastor, Mission Road Bible Church, Prairie Village, Kansas

"I have used these guides for the last year at my own church and appreciate how easy they are to adapt to my own setting. Highly recommended!"

MICHAEL LAWRENCE, Senior Pastor, Hinson Baptist Church, Portland, Oregon

9MARKS HEALTHY CHURCH STUDY GUIDES are a series of ten 6–7 week studies covering the nine distinctives of a healthy church originally laid out in *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* by Mark Dever. This series explores the biblical foundations of key aspects of the church, helping Christians to live out those realities as members of a local body. Conveniently packaged and accessibly written, the format of this series is guided, inductive discussion of Scripture passages and is ideal for use in Sunday school, church-wide studies, and individual or small group contexts.

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