

Learning Evangelism from Jesus: Imitating His “Outreach Personality” and His Outreach Program

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Learning Evangelism from Jesus: Imitating His Personality and His Program

What would Jesus do? On that intriguing question revolves Charles Sheldon’s classic novel, *In His Steps*. A handful of Christian men and women pledge to walk in Jesus’ steps, asking themselves at each critical juncture of their lives, “What would Jesus do if he were in this situation?” Looking at things from that perspective can sometimes be a bit speculative (because we cannot know for sure in every situation what Jesus would do), but it can also provide us with some insight we might never have had. Why not ask that question in the area of evangelism: What would Jesus do? For example, if Jesus were placed into an exploratory mission field today, be it a home mission or a world mission, what would he do? Or, if Jesus were called to serve an established congregation in the WELS that had no evangelism program to speak of, what would he do? What would be his first step? What kind of plan would he introduce? Would he start by creating a committee or would he just do the work himself?

A thorough reading of the Gospel accounts reveal two things in particular: 1) Jesus’ “outreach personality” and 2) his outreach program. As Christ’s ambassadors, as jars of clay to whom he has entrusted the ministry of his gospel, we would do well to imitate both his personality and his program in the area of outreach. Let the reader understand this at the outset: Jesus’ personality traits and his outreach plans are gleaned from the descriptive passages of the Gospels, the passages that detail for us what Jesus did during his ministry of outreach. Because they are not prescriptive passages, they should not be considered as some New Testament law that must be followed. As free people, bound by no law, we can, however, profit from putting into practice what we learn from Jesus’ example in the area of evangelism.

No one would dare argue if I contended that Jesus was a master evangelist, who never has been, nor ever will be, equaled, to whom no one can compare. No human being, no angel from heaven will ever be the evangelist Jesus was. There can be no question that evangelism was a big part of Jesus’ life on earth; but we also know that his work involved much more than the proclamation of the gospel. In Mark 10:45, Jesus tells us of the important task that lured him from the glories of heaven to the humility of earth—“*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” Jesus came to announce the good news as our Prophet and then to give his life as our Priest. We might profitably ask ourselves this question: which task was more important or more urgent, the work as Prophet or Priest? The truth is that both were equally important. If he did not proclaim himself as the Word from God, the Lamb of God, then who would ever know or believe in him as he was nailed to the tree? By the same token, if he only proclaimed and did not offer his life for the sins of all nations, then whatever faith his words created would be useless and all people would remain in their sins, condemned to spend an eternity apart from the presence of the Lord.

Jesus would have been doing a disservice to his work as our Priest if he failed to proclaim himself as the Savior; he would also have been doing a disservice to his work as our Prophet if he refused to sacrifice his blood for the sins of many. And don’t you know that the devil placed the temptation before Jesus to neglect the work of his prophetic office, trying to convince him that the work of evangelism wasn’t that important compared to the work of dying for all? But though tempted in every way to neglect some portion of his work, Jesus never fell prey to the lies of the Liar. If he at all desired to put aside the tiring work of spreading the gospel, Jesus could easily have justified himself before men. He did have other work to do, important work, urgent work that demanded his time and his attention. But Jesus made no excuses and uttered no complaints about the immense tasks the Father had placed before him, even though the devil was there at every moment with temptations galore.

Jesus had received no formal training in evangelism, providing another legitimate excuse for him to leave the work of evangelism to others. But though he was tempted to leave the work of evangelism undone, he

faithfully presented the gospel at each and every opportunity. Jesus didn't wait until he was well-established and well-respected in the community, he immediately applied himself to the preaching of the gospel. He didn't wait until he could establish an evangelism committee; he didn't sit back and wait for people to come to him. Before there were any disciples, we read in Mt. 4:17, "From *that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."* In the face of Satan's temptations, Jesus' "outreach personality," if you will allow me to use that phrase, led him to actively involve himself in the work of evangelism.

The pastor who is called to explore a certain area is particularly blessed, because he doesn't have the responsibility to nurture a large number of souls. He has one job placed before him: to find souls that are lost and dying and lead them to the ever-living and ever-loving Savior, who promises to give life to all who believe in him. The pastor of the large congregation, however, may feel that his responsibility lies in nurturing the souls under his care. That's true—that is his responsibility; that is his call. But Jesus sets a wonderful example for his undershepherds, by refusing to yield the temptations of the Serpent, to leave the work of evangelism to others with more time. As Jesus didn't say, "The work of evangelism is the job of my people, not mine," so the pastor will see evangelism as his work, as an area in which he wants to be deeply involved. Think about it—if Jesus had been uninterested in the work of evangelism, the disciples would never have become involved. Therefore, no matter how large the congregation and how full his schedule may be, the pastor will want to follow in his Savior's footsteps and share in the work of seeking the lost, rather than seeking excuses and reasons to let the work of evangelism get lost. Truth be told, it was only natural for Jesus to share the gospel with those outside of the kingdom of God. Jesus' "outreach personality," his unique personality traits, are characteristics that the pastor will ask the Spirit to grant in richest measure, so that he might demonstrate them in his ministry.

Jesus' "Outreach Personality"

Jesus' personality, it almost goes without saying, was a perfect "10." Because he was born without sin, because sin never infected his life or his character, Jesus had a perfect personality for reaching out with the gospel. A closer look at ten of Jesus' personality traits will help to explain why Jesus took part in evangelism, though it was not the primary purpose for which he had come into the world. Those ten personality traits will commend themselves to every individual either serving in or desiring the office of overseer.

Jesus couldn't help but share in the work of evangelism because he had a *compassionate heart*. When Jesus saw a crowd gathering to hear him, "*he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.*" He "*εσπλαγχνισθη επ αυτους,*" "was moved with compassion for them." In his stomach he felt for these people. He couldn't stand the idea that they would be left on their own, to fend for themselves, to find their own way to heaven. The thought that they would end up in hell upset his stomach and tore him apart. Since he knew hell to be absolute separation from God, where there is no peace or joy, he wasn't willing that they should spend eternity there.

When he was trying to convict the rich young ruler of his guilt before God, Jesus listed the commandments. If the young ruler had understood the chief purpose of the law, that God had given the law to reveal the sinfulness of all mankind and their desperate need for a Savior, he would have begged Jesus for forgiveness. Instead he told Jesus that he had kept all of the commandments since he was a boy, and therefore he was worthy of God's love. Jesus would have rightly been appalled at that self-righteous statement, but instead we read, "*Jesus looked at him and loved him*" (Mk 10:21). In true compassion, Jesus was not willing that this man should hold to his sinful ideas, but rather that he come to the knowledge of the truth. Jesus' compassionate heart led him to reach out to others.

Evangelism starts with the heart—it started there with Jesus. Filled with compassion for those who would perish, Jesus involved himself in outreach. Evangelism that we carry out in the 1990's that doesn't start in the heart is starting in the wrong place. Evangelism that starts in the desire to increase the financial base of the congregation is not what God desires. Outreach that is motivated by the District Mission Board's desires is starting in the wrong place. Instead, the shepherd under Christ will have a heart filled with compassion for those who are walking the wide road to destruction. Seeing souls headed for hell will afford no pleasure to Jesus' ambassador; indeed, it will make his stomach turn. The pastor with a compassionate heart will take an active

role in reaching out to the dying, regardless of how many other things are begging for his attention. Compassion is a powerful thing, a wonderful personality trait that we pray God will grant us all in abundance.

Jesus' labors at reaching out to the sick were fueled by his *humble heart*. If there was ever an individual who could say that his needs were more important than others, it was Jesus. No one will ever carry on a more important work than Jesus did; no one will ever be as important as Jesus is. But though he was better than everyone he met, because he was sinless and because he was carrying out a more important work, he never let that show. He could have closed his mouth and said nothing. Though he properly could have asked for service from others, he came to serve (Mk. 10:45). When he shared with others the gospel of the kingdom of God, he was performing a great service for those who should have been serving him. Jesus' humble heart, part of his "outreach personality," made him see others as more important to the Father of the heavenly lights than he was.

The importance of a humble heart cannot be overstated when it comes to gospel outreach. No pastor can afford to think of himself as better than others, as more worthy to receive the benefits of the gospel. The pastor who thinks that is lying to himself, because he is a sinner who deserves nothing from God, and yet has received everything. With a humble heart, the shepherd will see that those who are outside of the family of God are those for whom God yearns, whom God eagerly desires to have in his family. As he recognizes that gospel truth, he will put himself in a position to serve as many as he can with the precious message of sins forgiven through Jesus' holy, precious blood.

Jesus' heart was not only compassionate and humble. Jesus also had an *impatient heart*, compelling him to share the message of life. Understand that it was not a sinful impatience; rather, his heart was impatient in a positive way. Because he saw that night was coming, when no one could share the message of the gospel, Jesus was not interested in letting time slip on by without the message being spread. Knowing that eternity in hell was waiting in the wings for those who refused to believe, Jesus felt an urgency and a compulsion to share the gospel. In Jn 4:4, we hear that Jesus had to go through Samaria. "ἔδει," "*it was necessary*," that he go through Samaria. There were no laws that compelled him to go that way. But he was compelled by his impatient heart, a heart that didn't want to wait for someone else to bring the gospel to the woman at the well. Again, in Jn 9:4, Jesus says, "ἐμε δεῖ ἐργαζέσθαι τὰ ἔργα τοῦ πεμψάντος με," (ἐνε is the reading to be preferred.) "*It is necessary for me to be working the works of the one who sent me.*" Because Jesus was impatient when it came to sharing the power of God (the gospel) with people, he felt this urgency and compulsion. Never did Jesus rest on his laurels and pat himself on the back. Instead he says, "*I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also.*" Jesus uses the word "ἔδει" again, to illustrate the importance of the task, thereby validating his "impatience" in waiting for others to spread the message.

The modern-day evangelist will need the same type of "impatient" heart as Jesus had. Evangelism does not start with a committee meeting once a month. Instead, outreach is the natural result of a heart that feels it is a necessity to get out and share the gospel with others. That sense of urgency will compel the pastor to become active in the work of outreach, even though no one in the congregation might join him at first. The shepherd's example, in word and in action, will gradually influence his people, filling their hearts with the same salutary "impatience."

Jesus not only had a heart for evangelism, he also had *active feet*. Because of his willingness to go at the work alone, without the assistance of an evangelism committee, he pushed his feet to their limit, going everywhere he could to share the saving message of the kingdom. Luke tells us, "*After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God (8:1).*" His active feet kept him moving throughout his brief earthly ministry. From one village to the next, from big city to open country, Jesus' feet led him to more and more people who needed to hear the gospel. Because he was a messenger of glad tidings, his active feet were recognized as beautiful feet by all those who came to faith through the words of his mouth. Though his heart compelled his feet to move on, we need to remember that Jesus had to labor at keeping his feet in action. Moving about regularly, putting his feet to the pavement was hard work. Jesus said as much to the Jews when he made this comment: "*My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.*"

Active feet are feet that regularly move the evangelist into a situation where he can present the way of salvation. No matter how compassionate and humble the evangelist may be, if he is not active in getting out to call on people, he is failing to carry out the great commission that God has given to each of his children. There will always be the temptation to put off until tomorrow what should be done today in the area of outreach. After all, no one will know if you have been making evangelism calls or not. But if the pastor has active feet, imitating the “outreach personality” of Jesus in working daily for the advance of the gospel, his feet will be recognized as beautiful.

Jesus’ feet brought him into many different situations, where he could dramatically alter the life of an individual. But were it not for his *open mind*, he would never have placed himself into half of those situations. Take the woman at the well in John 4 as an example. Because she was a Samaritan, Jesus would have been doing the politically and socially correct thing if he avoided her, if he turned the other way when she came to draw water from the well. Avoiding her would also have been recognized as correct because she was not only a Samaritan, she was a woman. But Jesus’ open mind wouldn’t let him think that way and allow those common prejudices to color his thinking. Instead he crossed cultures, reached out to her in love and talked with her, though she was recognized as his cultural inferior. In John 8, Jesus defended the woman caught in adultery and shared with her the gospel of forgiveness. He could easily have looked at her as his spiritual inferior, because she was. But Jesus’ mind, open to the fact that she was one for whom he would pour out his priceless blood on Calvary’s high mountain, led him to proclaim her free from the condemnation she deserved.

Having an open mind is a prerequisite characteristic for the one who would share his faith with others. If the evangelist searches to find someone who is truly worthy of receiving the gospel message, God assures him that he will search forever. Keeping in mind that there is no difference among those outside of the family of God, that all are equally guilty regardless of their lifestyle, the pastor will gladly seek out any and all who do not belong to the Church that the Lamb purchased with his blood. Therefore, those souls who are poverty-stricken here on earth, even those souls whose bodies have been infected with the AIDS virus and all souls whose lifestyles fall short of the perfection God requires are all souls whom the evangelist will try to convert through the power of the gospel.

Every evangelist will call on the name of the Lord for the open mind that Jesus had. But perhaps an even more striking characteristic of Jesus’ “outreach personality” was his *persistent* spirit. Because Jesus was true man, he grew tired just as we do. In fact, he drove himself to exhaustion. But though he was tired, he never let that be an excuse to stand in the way of reaching out to another lost soul. In John 4:6, moments before he began to talk with the woman at the well, John reveals to us that Jesus was tired from the journey. John says that Jesus was “κεκοπιακως” a perfect participle from “κοπιαω,” which means, “to grow weary from work.” The perfect participle emphasizes the state of being, that Jesus was utterly exhausted and was feeling the effects of it at the time. Jesus was tired out physically, because his feet had led him here, there and everywhere to spread the gospel. But Jesus was also tired out mentally, because already at this time the Pharisees had become upset with him and the persecution was about to begin. Though he was exhausted and could have used a break, his persistent spirit caused him to speak with the woman.

Perhaps a more striking example of Jesus’ persistent spirit is to be found in his dealings with the Pharisees. Since Jesus knew what was in a man (Jn 2:25), he knew what the Pharisees felt about him. He knew how they wanted no part of him, how they looked at him as a low-life who couldn’t possibly be the Messiah that they were awaiting. Though he knew that their hearts were set against him and wanted no part of him, yet Jesus continued to work with them. He preached the law to them on any number of occasions so that he might excite in their hearts a recognition of sin. Though his efforts fell on hard hearts who resisted the Holy Spirit, yet Jesus never gave up on them. That is persistence.

The evangelist who wishes to imitate the personality of the Master Evangelist will seek out the lost with a persistent spirit. Let it be said at the outset that the demands of the parish ministry will wear out even the most talented and organized pastor. But that need not be a reason to put evangelism on the shelf or to hand it off to someone else. The persistent spirit of the minister of the gospel will direct him through those tired times and lead him to continue in his quest to share the message of sin and grace with others. When the work of outreach

is producing no visible results, which Jesus tells us to expect in the Parable of the Sower and the Seed, the evangelist will not be bothered. His persistent spirit will lead him to present the message time and again, though that message may seem to fall on deaf ears. Blessed with that persistent spirit, the work of outreach will be the daily task of the evangelist, regardless of how tired he may be.

A persistent, untiring spirit is an essential component of Jesus' "outreach personality." But that persistence was tempered by his *discerning mind*. When Jesus recognized that he would run into problems, he avoided them. In John 4:3, we hear that the Lord made a wise decision about the use of his time. When he learned that the Pharisees had heard about what he was doing, and knowing how they would feel about his success, Jesus left Judea and went back once more to Galilee, via Samaria. When his persistent spirit could have caused the loss of his life before the proper time (humanly speaking), his discerning mind directed him to a more beneficial and productive use of his time. In other words, Jesus was a good (perfect!) steward of his time.

The pastor whose time for outreach is limited by various other concerns and responsibilities must have such a discerning mind. While he cannot look into people's hearts to see what they believe and their reaction to the gospel, he does have to make a value judgment about where they stand at the time, whether they are receptive to hearing more about the Savior, or if they are lukewarm or maybe unreceptive. The pastor's persistent spirit will certainly not allow him to forget about those who are outwardly unreceptive, but his discerning mind will direct him to spend the first part of his time reaching out to the one who is at least willing to listen to what he has to say.

It is hard to be discerning when you aren't paying attention to what is going on around you. Jesus' discerning mind was the direct result of his *open eyes*. In everyone that he met, Jesus saw a priceless, precious soul, someone who had sinned and needed a Savior. Though Jesus could have put on blinders and simply answered the requests of those who came to whom, yet Jesus looked for ways to impact the lives of people with the gospel. He encouraged his disciples, "*I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.*" (Jn 4:35) His eyes saw things that no one else did, opportunities that others would never have noticed because they were so engrossed in their own life that they couldn't be interested in the lives of others. In John 9, his open eyes saw a blind man, and recognized that he had the chance to share with him the truth that he was the Son of Man who would give his life for men. In Luke 19, Jesus saw tiny Zacchaeus in the tree and said to him, "*Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.*" While others may have seen him with their physical eyes, Jesus saw him through the open eyes of an evangelist, as one for whom he would place himself on the cross. Because he saw Zacchaeus as one for whom he would offer his blood on Calvary's altar, Jesus couldn't help but go out of his way to present to him the grace of God in the face of man's sin.

Open eyes are important for every Christian who endeavors to take part in the mission of Christ's Church. The pastor especially will want to see people as God sees them, as immortal souls with whom God wants to be in fellowship. No matter how large or small the congregation may be, the temptation will always present itself: to close your eyes to everyone but the members of the church. The pastor with open eyes, on the other hand, will look for individuals that he might bring to the Savior's waiting arms, one by one. Open eyes help the pastor to see the faces of guests as he greets them at the door; open eyes will enable him to read the name and address of those who came to the church for a service who are without a church home; open eyes will fix in his mind those whom he has met briefly and may be in need of spiritual guidance in the near future; open eyes will be with him in whatever things he pursues in his spare time, so that he might see ways to influence others with the dynamite of the gospel.

Because Jesus' eyes were open, he also had, as part of his "outreach personality," *open hands*. Please do not understand that to mean that Jesus was looking for hand-outs. He wasn't. His hands were open in this sense, that he was willing to let himself be found by the people and also willing to give of whatever he had for their benefit. Think of all the times when he tried to get away from the people, so that he could be with his disciples or to spend time alone in prayer. But when the people came looking for him, he went to them and loved them. In Matthew 14:35-36 we hear that "*when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to him and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.*" Jesus could have refused to grant anything to those who came

to him, but his hands were open, ready to share with them according to their needs, whether that meant healing them or providing for them.

The pastor with open hands will not tie his hands to his desk chair in his office when someone comes to the door; his open hands will instead open the door and offer a friendly handshake to the person standing there. Open hands come in handy when someone is down and out and needs food and clothing or some spare change for the bus. No, the ministry of the gospel is not a social ministry, but open hands can demonstrate the love of the Savior, love that will give the pastor an opportunity to share the gospel. I think it's safe to say that every pastor has been taken for a fool by someone looking for a hand-out; but what is the loss? If through open hands the evangelist can find a way into the person's life, those open hands have served a noble purpose, the purpose for which they were created.

All of the nine previous characteristics are secondary to the tenth attribute of Jesus' perfect "outreach personality:" his *open mouth*. All of the other characteristics lead to this most important trait. Jesus could rightly have kept his message to himself—as he did in the mocker Herod's presence—but instead he opened his mouth for all to hear the wonderful message of his substitutional redemption. In order to pave the way for the gospel, Jesus was compelled to do the foreign work ("opus alienum") of preaching the law to sinners. When the rich young ruler (Mk 10) came to Jesus clinging to his righteousness with all his might, Jesus held the law up before him as a mirror. When he refused even then to see his sin, Jesus said to him, "*One thing you lack,*" he said. "*Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.*" (Mk 10:21) Jesus said those words for the benefit of the young man, because he so wanted him to be saved, in hopes that he might realize that in his heart was not total commitment to God, but rather the things of this world. In dealing with the woman at the well (Jn 4), Jesus first had to cut her with the law before he could apply the sweet suave of the gospel. He called to her attention her sinful past, that she had had five husbands and that the man she was with was not her husband. His open mouth was prepared to preach them into hell, so that he might lead them from the hell that they deserved to see the glory of the life that was theirs as a gift. Jesus never started reaching out to the lost just to increase the size of an earthly church; he was, instead, seeking the increase of the Church. Those who desire to build large churches need not preach the condemning law of God. Those, however, who share Jesus desire for the growth of the Holy Christian Church will present clearly the law that holds all men accountable to their Maker and damns them to eternity in hell.

Jesus' open mouth was filled with not only bitter law, but with the sweet gospel. When he knew that the individual was crushed under the weight of her sins, Jesus assured her that her sins were forgiven and she was at peace with God, through his work as her vicar. To the woman who had been caught in adultery Jesus said, "*Then neither do I condemn you.*" (In 8:11) Though she deserved God's anger, she was receiving God's love; though she deserved to be separated from God, she was brought to peace with him. The words that Jesus spoke to Nicodemus have often been called the "gospel in a nutshell." Those familiar words of John 3:16 are the sweetest gospel: "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*" Pure gospel asks nothing from man, nor does it require something of man; instead it proclaims what God has done, as a fact. Jesus never asked Nicodemus for a decision; he never required that the woman at the well do something to show that she was truly worthy of the gospel. When Jesus proclaimed the gospel of God's love, he spoke clearly, demonstrating that eternal life was God's gracious gift to men, though men had nothing in them that made them worthy to receive it.

The evangelist will open his mouth the way Jesus did: preaching the law that rejects men as sinners and preaching the gospel that declares men to be saints, for Christ's sake. Nothing else is fitting for the evangelist. When the law is not preached, then the prospect feels no need for the gospel. When the law is preached but the gospel is proclaimed in an unclear way, the prospect will be confused and might be led to despair and reject God as unable to solve the problem. As Jesus took no pleasure in preaching the law, but only in presenting the gospel, so will it be with Christ's evangelists. The incredible message of God's love, and not God's hatred over sin, will be the dominant theme in the evangelist's work.

Jesus' Outreach Program

Because of his “outreach personality,” starting with his compassionate and humble heart, Jesus couldn't help but establish an outreach program. Though he never set up an official set of goals and objectives, with policies and plans clearly laid out for all to see, yet there are four “P's” that played a major part in his outreach program. The first “P” is *Prayer*. “*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.*” (Mk 1:35) Prayer played a primary role in Jesus' outreach program. Asking God for strength to continue, for compassion for the lost, for dedication to the task, Jesus spent an incredible amount of time in prayer. He recognized that his ability and willingness to carry out a program of evangelism depended on his Father. Whenever Jesus found time, he prayed; in fact, Jesus made time for prayer. He separated himself from the tasks at hand, refusing to allow the urgent to take the place that the important deserved. Luke tells us that “*One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.*” (Lk 6:12) We might properly ask what the Son of God had to bring to his Father that he himself couldn't handle. Jesus recognized how important it was that he was in constant communication with his Father.

The High Priestly Prayer of John 17 gives us some idea of the content of his prayers and their role in his outreach program. In verse 3 he prays, “*Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*” With those words Jesus was asking his Father to grant success to the work that he was doing, that more and more might learn to know the true God and the life that he gives through his Son. The success of any of his outreach endeavors was entirely dependent upon the blessing of the Father who gives only good and perfect gifts.

But the prayer doesn't end there. He goes on to intercede on behalf of his disciples, saying in verse 15, “*My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.*” Knowing that they would face persecution and rejection, knowing that their spirits would tire of the work, Jesus asks his Father to be with the disciples and give them the strength and the willingness to fend off the attacks of the devil and boldly proclaim the truth of the gospel, in direct contrast to the lies of the devil.

Jesus goes on to pray for all believers, saying in verse 23: “*May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*” Implicit in this prayer is a prayer that the disciples' preaching of the gospel might produce rich fruits, so that more and more people might believe and be joined as one Church. When the Lord has granted success to the ministry of the disciples, then an even greater number of believers might testify of the goodness of God.

The primary role of prayer in Jesus' outreach program is worthy of imitation by those who desire to serve in the office of the holy ministry. It has often been said that Martin Luther spent hours in prayer each morning. He recognized that he was absolutely dependent upon God for every blessing, that he needed to receive strength from the Lord, or he would bring it all to destruction. The pastor will want to spend time in prayer and in meditation on God's saving truths. Jesus was not lying when he said, “*I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*” (in 15:5) The evangelist needs time in the word on his own so that his faith may be fed and he may be rejuvenated for the task that lies before him. During that daily time that the pastor has scheduled for study and prayer, he will want to flood the throne of all power and grace with his petitions. The pastor who has a heart for evangelism will also pray for the members of his congregation, that the Lord would grant them the characteristics of an “outreach personality,” so that they might fearlessly proclaim the name of the Lord in whatever way they are witnessing. Trusting that God wants his kingdom to come to all people and that he desires all to be saved, the pastor will also pray that God would give success to the words of those who witness to the love of the Savior each and every day. Jesus himself directs each pastor to pray for more pastors, saying in Matthew 9:38, “*Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.*”

The second “P” in Jesus' outreach program is *Preaching*. Jesus started the outreach program on his own, without the aid of his disciples. He preached the good news of God, saying, “*The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!*” (Mk 1:15) Preaching the kingdom of God means proclaiming to all that there is but one way to get into heaven—through the one chosen in eternity to give his

life as a ransom for all. By repeating that message on any number of occasions, he led the disciples to realize how badly people needed to know about this Savior, because those who looked elsewhere for salvation were looking in the wrong direction. By proclaiming the signs of the end of the world (Mt 24), he emphasized that the end of the world was near, and that all men should be called to repentance. Without jumping down their throats and condemning them for not being out proclaiming the Word, Jesus instead led them to see how crucial it was for them to be actively involved in the outreach program. In Luke 15, he motivates them to reach out for the lost by showing how glad God is when just one sinner is converted and brought into the fold. In verse 7 he says, *“I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”* Verse 10 emphasizes the thought, when Jesus says, *“in the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”* By picturing for them how happy God is when one soul is grafted into the family of God, Jesus was leading his disciples to see how important and God-pleasing the work of outreach is.

The importance of preaching in a pastor’s program of outreach cannot be overstated. When the pastor is convinced that there is but one way to heaven, through faith in Jesus as the Savior, he will proclaim to his hearers that simple message. Through his preaching, over a period of time and with the blessing of the Holy Spirit, he will be able to lead his people to see how important it is to get out into the community and into the world with the gospel. The pastor’s preaching will do more than touch on the importance of getting out with the message. He will also demonstrate how high a privilege it is that God would use sinful human beings to carry his message; what an awesome privilege it is to be the Holy Spirit’s tool in leading someone to repentance, which causes the angels in heaven to sing and rejoice; what an opportunity each Christian has to give to others what he has freely received from God. When the pastor does not “harp” on the area of outreach, but frequently points to the importance of outreach and the joy that is involved, he is imitating the preaching of the Savior.

The third “P” in Jesus’ outreach program is *Preparing* saints for service. Because he knew that he would not be with them forever, Jesus wanted to prepare all his followers to serve as his witnesses, so that the work of the gospel might go on forever. Recognizing that his Father had given different people different gifts, all to be used for the common good and for the spread of the kingdom, Jesus trained different groups to serve in different ways in the area of outreach. Those who would not serve well in an organized outreach effort he sent into their own personal mission field, to tell those who were close to them what great things God had done for them. In Mark 5, after healing a demon-possessed man, Jesus told him, *“Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”* This man would serve best, because of his past, in the area of personal evangelism, witnessing to what Jesus had done for him, and how merciful he was.

Jesus also prepared a group of 72 to serve as canvassers, to go ahead of him by town and prepare them for his coming. He gave them a simple task, so that they wouldn’t be overwhelmed and would feel competent in carrying out the work. In Luke 10 we hear Jesus giving them detailed instructions regarding how they are to react to rejection. Because he gave them a manageable task for their spiritual maturity, they came back overjoyed that they had been included in the work. When they reported with joy the power they had over the demons, Jesus took the opportunity to teach them the true reason for joy, the reason that alone compels the sharing of the gospel, when he said, *“However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”* (Lk 10:20)

The “elite” group of witnesses that Jesus spent many hours teaching and equipping was the 12 apostles. Where he may have taken volunteers for the 72, he chose these 12 and designated them apostles. (Lk 6:13-14) These were the ones that he determined would serve as the evangelists of the early Christian church. He sent them out on evangelism calls with a chapter full of instruction (Mt 10). Because more was being asked of them, he had to give them more detailed instruction. He outlined for them their task: to preach the message that the kingdom of heaven is near (Mt 10:7). He directed the scope of their work: to go to the lost sheep of Israel (Mt 10:6). He gave them specific direction on how to act (Mt 10:9-16). Knowing that they would be afraid to face opposition, he gave them the assurance that the Holy Spirit would give them the words to say (Mt 10:20). By letting them go out into the field, Jesus was seeing to it that they would be able to function as his witnesses when he left them to go to his rightful place in heaven. When their mission was done, he gave them an

opportunity to report all that they had said and done, so that he could give them further encouragement and guidance—“*The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”*” (Mk 6:30-31) Ever mindful of the well-being of his evangelists, concerned that he would not burn them out, Jesus spent time in debriefing. They could always learn more about the work in which they would spend their lives; and it was time that Jesus considered important.

The pastor will do well to recognize that he will not be in the same place forever, because a call may take him elsewhere or the Lord may take him to be with him in heaven. In either case, the pastor needs to consider it his responsibility to train his people for the work of outreach. The pastor will frustrate himself when he fails to keep in mind the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, that the body is made up of many parts, each with their own gift and function for the common good. Some members of the congregation may not be gifted to work in an organized outreach effort. But they still need to be trained and encouraged to witness to the faith that the Holy Spirit has created in their heart. By whatever means necessary, the pastor will seek to demonstrate to all of his parishioners, be they young or old, how they fit into the work of outreach.

He who would imitate Jesus’ outreach program would seek to train volunteers in the area of canvassing. Canvassing can be an easy way to get many people involved in outreach and determine from their work in canvassing whether the Head of the body has given them special gifts in this area. But canvassers will be frustrated if they are not trained and if they feel they are receiving no guidance from the pastor. It is better for the trainer to give his trainees too much instruction than to leave them on their own, to fend for themselves.

The pastor, who is well aware of the gifts the Lord has given to a select few, will take them under his wing and give them specialized training in how to give a clear law-gospel presentation. They will not be volunteers; instead, as those who will serve in the stead of the church, at the church’s direction, they will be called, even if that call is limited in scope to 6 months. As a called witness, the individual will need continual encouragement and repeated guidance in evangelism methodology. Recognizing that these called witnesses are affected by the time demands of this world, the pastor will seek to find ways to offer them rest, so that they will not be burned out, but eager to serve the Lord in this important area.

The fourth “P” of Jesus’ outreach program is *Promotion*. Because the disciples were yet weak in their understanding, Jesus frequently had to review for them his purpose in coming into this world. The Father of lies was infiltrating their hearts and seeking to rob them of their willingness to serve the Lord in the area of outreach. By pointing them to the lack of outward results, the devil would lead them to believe that their work was in vain, that they might just as well give up. By pointing them to look at themselves and their inadequacies, the devil could lead them to give up on the work of evangelism. Since he knew the devil’s tricks, Jesus promoted the work, continually stressing its importance. Jesus told them, “*And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.*” (Jn 15:27) Because they had learned from Jesus and had witnessed his life, they were well-equipped to serve as his witnesses, regardless of what the devil would say.

The pastor dare never think that his outreach program is flying smoothly and needs not be considered or promoted. Because the devil is ever active in the lives of Christians everywhere, the evangelists need to be assured that God has, through the blood of his Son, equipped them with everything good for doing his will. There will always be doubts whether the work of outreach is worthwhile, considering the outward results. But when the devil brings that lie to the forefront, the minister of the word needs to point his people to God’s promises about the effectiveness of his word, that it will never return to him void.

Jesus was the master evangelist, from whom we can learn much in the work of evangelism. May the Spirit of God grant to each of us a double share of Jesus’ “outreach personality” that we may imitate him in this all-important work of outreach!