

Are We Up to the Job of Evangelism?

by Alistair Begg

Alistair Begg discusses the complexities of evangelism and the importance of education, cultural context, and personal testimony in effectively sharing the gospel.

Duration: 57:28

Scripture: Genesis 1:1, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Evangelism"

Description

In this video, the speaker discusses the approach to evangelistic preaching in his church. He explains that they have specific outreach cycles where they focus on presenting the gospel in a way that addresses the questions of unbelievers while also edifying believers. These cycles involve preaching at all services for a month and encouraging church members to invite their friends. At the end of these cycles, they invite unbelievers to study the life of Jesus through one of the gospels in the homes of church members. The speaker also emphasizes the importance of avoiding poor evangelistic preaching and instead following the example of effective preachers like Tim Keller.

Transcript

The ground rules are fairly straightforward. Obviously, you can ask any question that you choose, and we can answer any question that we want. And if they happen to intersect, then, you know, that'll be fine.

Otherwise, we'll go. I think we pause just for a moment and ask God's blessing on this time, too. God and Father, thank you so much for a nice lunch.

Thank you for the safety and security of this place, even though the weather is as inclement as it is outside. Thank you for the sense of partnership and joy and encouragement that we sense in the company of each other, fellow foot soldiers, as it were, in the Army of Jesus, seeking to, as enlisted men, give ourselves wholeheartedly to the task entrusted to us. We pray that as we have the opportunity to think along the lines of these questions now, that you will grant both clarity and a rightful sense of brevity, and that it may be a meaningful time.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. I'll just take these questions as they come.

Obviously, I'll look at them. Some of them I'll shuffle, but please don't take it personally if your question doesn't come up. This has your name on it, Vaughan.

I don't know why, but we can start with you. If the gospel is to be proclaimed by simple but gifted men, as you advanced, why does the evangelical church insist on requiring so much education to qualify one as a pastor? On the one hand, the gospel is very, very simple. I was converted when I was 18, and I first explained the gospel within days of hearing the gospel, and I didn't need to go away for years and years of education to do that.

So you don't have to be a brilliantly trained person to be an evangelist. The gospel is very, very simple, but it's also extremely complex. This whole book is about the gospel, and we need leaders who understand the whole counsel of God, and who are not week by week just explaining A, B, C, D, a very, very simple gospel at heart.

And to enable the whole church to engage with art and speak the simple gospel in a way that makes sense, you need really well-educated pastors. Now, the danger is what we do, I think, is sometimes take people from a particular culture, perhaps especially, I'm just thinking of the British context, from maybe a working-class culture, and we recognise gifts in them, and we take them away and educate them for a very long time in a completely different culture, and then we're surprised that they actually can't go back into that culture. Now, that is an issue, and I think, for me, the issue is not that we shouldn't educate them, but on occasions we need to think of flexible ways of educating people so that we can minister the gospel to the whole spectrum of society, and not just have educated pastors for educated people, but we're also thinking how can we reach those who are from different educational backgrounds, but we need training and reflecting the whole counsel of God.

Do you want to take a stab at that as well? Only that, as Warren pointed out, act to teach implies a certain level of facility in the material that is taught, as well as an ability to teach anything. So, pastors, teachers need to know the truths of God, the deep truths of God, and able to handle the Word of God carefully. Because of our cultural distance from the first century, it is essential that modern people study a lot to understand the Bible in its own context.

So, it's not as if it's rocket science. People often say to me, you know, why do you have to know Greek and Hebrew and all that? And I just say, it's not nerdy, it's not academic. All you're doing is you're trying to know Greek, as well as a 16-year-old sitting in Corinth listening to Paul's letter read out.

You're just trying to get to that ability. And most of us who have studied Greek only ever get to about a 16-year-old ancient Greek's ability. I just had to 14.

But it requires effort to get to that basic level. Well, for what it's worth, I think perhaps in the question there is the whole notion of the way in which pastors are discovered and called. And from my limited experience here, I wonder whether the questioner doesn't have in mind the way the average church writes, for example, to someone like myself saying, we have an opportunity for a new pastor, and we wonder if you have any recommendations, and let me tell you what we're looking for.

And then in the way they lay out the requirements, they at least create the possibility for missing possible candidates, because it's driven perhaps a little too much by educational expectations, rather than by a sense of the call of God, not absent from education, but just starts at the wrong point, if you know. And my observation, again, of time here in America--I don't know whether others would concur with this--but I think that once a fellow's done, for example, an engineering degree or a good degree in accountancy and obviously has a facility, an intellectual grasp of things, the ability to reason and to work things through, his time may be far better spent with a more limited form of theological study than in going through the routine

of the average Master of Divinity program, as I observe them here in the States. And I think that's why, for example, I'm very keen on the work of the Proclamation Trust, not in place of doing the academics, but in recognizing that a lot of people who've gone through the hoops and had their tickets stamped are actually not any closer to understanding how to deal with a passage of the Bible and how to teach it.

And so either before they go or when they finish, they're looking for an opportunity to have that modeled for them in a way that will make them effective at the very aptitude for teaching that their task demands. And implicit in that is the notion that it's only God, ultimately, who sets people apart to gospel ministry. It's only God who makes these individuals.

Seminaries don't do them, and theological institutions don't do them. So we're not relying on that. John Dixon, you said last night, Monday, that, A, you were an energetic proclaimer of Christ in your teens, B, you were demotivated by systematic training in evangelism, and C, you were re-energizing by deconstructing your approach.

My question is twofold. A, B, C, D. Ah, I think we'll forget that one. I'm tired.

Ah, we'll chuck that one, don't you think? No, it's good. Oh, well, it's a good question. I haven't heard the question yet.

No, I know. It sounded like the sort of thing I might say. I don't think you were as clear as that.

I'm sure, I'm sure. Was your early enthusiastic evangelism partly, at least, from your natural outgoing personality, and two, for those who are more reticent or less bold, could some type of equipping for conversational evangelism be helpful to spur them on? Yes and yes. Okay, right.

I tried to qualify what I said a couple of times, that I'm not criticizing courses in particular, that particular course or any course. Many have been helped, and I do think, you know, a reticent person who doesn't really know what to say can be helped by a course, as long as the emphasis in the course is on conversational rather than monologic, to invent a word, monologic explanations of the gospel. But I'm all for it.

Go for it, and mix it up. Don't just focus on one, because, you know, you don't want believers thinking that there's only one presentation of the gospel. I mean, there is.

It's in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, but, you know, leaving that aside, there's not one modern presentation of the gospel. Okay, there's another one that really starts with you, although it'd be nice for Vaughan maybe to go first. Why have the basic biblical doctrines of Christological monotheism been obscured by the other motivations to preach the gospel? What has caused the church to forget about this foundational motivation and resort to other less significant motivations? This is obviously tied to... I can't answer that question.

Vaughan was asleep during that. No, I was listening very carefully. I wonder whether part of it is it's not shocking to us.

We're just so used to the fact that there is one God, because we've come from a Christian culture. It's been proclaimed over many generations. It's only just beginning to be shocking, I think, to the younger generation that has really been schooled from about 35 under.

They've been schooled in Britain in pluralism, and the assumption is that if there's a God, they probably don't believe in many gods. I think there's one God in lots of different forms, or expressed in different forms, and so it is shocking now to say there is one God, but for those 35 plus, it's kind of in the bloodstream. It's not surprising, but it is radical when you put that against our culture, and I wonder whether we need to get out more, because if we got out more and engaged with non-believers, it is deeply shocking, and then we'd see the implications of this unbelievable, no, it's not unbelievable, it's wonderful, but this wonderful truth, there is one God, and you put that against the way people think, suddenly that drives you to evangelism.

I wonder if the question is also trying to get at why historically in the church, why sociologically in the church has this, what I describe as the primary rationale for evangelism, been in the background, and these other ones about, you know, Jesus means so much to me, so I share him, people are going to hell, so I try and rescue them, come into the fore. I don't know the answer historically sociologically, but you know, I wonder, or perhaps I should put it this way, in my own case, whether this is true nationally, internationally, I don't know, but in my own case, it was the demise of my Arminian days, as I described them last night, and the rise of my sense of the full sovereignty of God that gave me eyes to see that in Scripture, the thing that pushes you toward evangelism is not fundamentally any human need, it is God's unique worthiness that promotes evangelism. Perhaps there's a cultural parallel to my personal experience, in that those who have been known for evangelism, and active in evangelism, have not been from the Reformed camp.

I keep hearing about people from Reformed evangelical churches who aren't involved in evangelism, because you know, God's elected them, so don't worry about it. That's a caricature, I guess, but I wonder if that's part of it, that I could just be making that up. Alastair, am I just making that up? No, I don't think so.

I think there is a kind of warped understanding of things that makes people feel that if they're too overt in their approach, and in the wideness of the offer of the gospel, that maybe some of the non-elect will be converted. We would really hate for that to happen. But staying on that high level, two questions here about evangelism, traditional evangelism in the church.

Is there a place in local church evangelism for evangelistic meetings? If so, how should such meetings be presented? How should the church look for response to the gospel? And sort of along with that, what are your thoughts about extending public invitations from the traditional walk the aisle, come forward to contemporary inquiry rooms, signing a card, etc.? I'll start with you, Yvonne. I was brought up in the David Watson era. I remember going to guest services where Archbishop Cogan gave the address, and it was a very standard pattern.

The past years I've been in the States, sorry to make this a second question, but there is a broad, just so you know if you haven't come across it, the idea that the local church is really no place for evangelism at all, that you only come in here to be edified, and you scatter to evangelize. And so evangelistic preaching has often been devalued and lost. And then this question asks, you know, he in fact uses the word revivals, which has a connotation all of its own.

You make sense of all of that? I think there's a lot there. In general terms I do, and I'm going to come back to these kind of things in my next two talks, but in general terms I think we should be preaching the gospel whenever the people of God meet, because the gospel is what builds up believers and what converts non-believers. So I think it's a bit of a false distinction.

We'd always preach the gospel. This whole book is the gospel of God. But the question is whether it's right I'm taking ever to have that as the primary focus of a particular meeting or sermon in church.

And that is my background. So 20 years ago when I was first converted, I think in British evangelicalism most of our evangelism was focused on the guest service. And in some churches it would be morning for the believers, evening would be the guest meeting.

Some churches would do that week by week, others, my own church included, occasionally. I still think there's a place for that. In Britain it's less and less of a place, because by and large the unconverted are not coming to church.

If you've got a church-going culture, which much of America still has, certainly far more than Britain does, then week on week you're going to assume that there'll be quite a significant number who've never really responded to the gospel but are in church. We still get that at Christmas. So we make up a huge amount of Christmas.

That's when non-churchgoers will come. But increasingly we've seen that actually we've got to get out and our main evangelism needs to be outside of the church. And it's interesting, isn't it? Jesus says, go and make disciples.

And we've changed the go into a come, and we keep on saying come to church. That might work in a church-going culture. It isn't working.

In Britain those who come to church who are not Christians would be older folk for whom it's just part and parcel of what they do, and yet might not be converted. And by and large Asians. So Asian students come.

We find every week at St Deb's there are Chinese students who come. They arrive in Britain, and there's this spiritual vacuum they've got. They want to find out more about Christ.

And if we want to reach the Asians, church is a key place to do it. And we must be giving them an opportunity to respond. For the Brits, we've got to get out there and do other things, and I'll be talking about that later.

That's sort of one aspect of the question. John will answer all the others. John doesn't even remember the others.

I agree with what Vaughan said, and the Australian scene is pretty similar. And just to give a practical example, in my own church our evangelistic, our public evangelism usually goes like this. A couple of times a year I will preach at all the services on a Sunday, the four services on a Sunday, for a month.

And in that month I'm doing talks with a focused gospel presentation, and addressing in a particular way the questions that my people's unbelieving friends are asking. But I'm very conscious that it's not pitched at them in a really sort of awkward way, and that it is edifying to believers, very obviously so. We call these outreach cycles.

Twice a year we'll do these three or four weeks of bring your friends. We find that people really do bring their friends. If they forget the first week and they come, they go, oh that would have been perfect for Auntie Jo.

Next week Aunty Jo's there. And Aunty Jo hearing that goes, actually that was quite intelligent, I might come next week. And we find that by the time you get to week four in these series, our congregation has nearly doubled.

The punchline of all the services in the outreach cycle is why don't you investigate this? This is so important. Why don't you come to one of our homes and just study with us the life of Jesus through one of the gospels, one of the biographies of his life. And at the end of these three or four week outreach cycles, we will generally have 20, 30, sometimes 40 unbelievers signed up to read Luke's gospel with us in the home of someone over beautiful food and drink and great conversation.

And we've trained up a whole bunch of people to lead people through Luke's gospel in order to do that. How that answers the question, I'm simply saying, I'm not a great believer in the one-off outreach service or in the seeker service, but using the actual service in that focused way I still think has importance, even in a culture like Australia where church attendance is about 4%. Just listening to you both, I'm reminded of Tim Keller answering this question or a similar question.

And in typical Callierian form, he let us all know that he had five groups of people in his mind as he preached. And he was able to articulate each group and explain how he read certain literature in relationship to group one, group two, group three, and group four. And that as he preached, whatever he was preaching, he was thinking purposefully at certain points along the way about bringing in group three or whoever represented group three, the disillusioned, the unhappy, the dejected, the whatever.

And he'd thought there will be people there like that. There will be disenfranchised people. And he says that that's the way he approaches it so that no matter what he's teaching, no matter where he is in the Bible, he's wanting to recognize the diversity of the group that he's addressing and deal with it in that way.

And I think there is a real skill in that. It's not a skill that many of us possess, but there are good examples of it. Most of these people know Dick Lucas because he was here at our conferences in the past, and we've seen him in this culture, but no one has ever really seen him at his game unless they've seen him with those businessmen in the city of London.

And his ability to reach into that mindset is just so perfectly suited. So I think my only comment on it would be that we can only do what we're constituted to do, and also we can only work within the ethos of the congregation that we have. And we have to determine whether we want to encourage our people to be the kind of people who are saying, you know, John Dixon and Vaughn Roberts are really worth listening to.

And therefore, if they are worth listening to because they have a facility with the Bible, then it is definitely worth your effort to work at bringing your work friend or your colleague to this service, because you have a confidence that these men will not let you down. And I think one of the reasons that evangelistic preaching has gone south is because there's so much poor evangelistic preaching, and the congregation said, I couldn't bring anybody there. That's going to be so dreadfully embarrassing.

And then it falls back on us. Come back to the cliches, back to the same old things, back to talking down to the non-Christians, saying unkind things about people, and eventually just driving folks away instead of bringing them in. Can I just add to that, Alistair, that what you say of Tim Keller, I just think perfectly illustrates something I said in my talk, that really you don't need techniques, you know, to listen to Tim Keller's advice about the five people he has in his sermon, and just go, okay, I'm going to have those five people.

It's not the point. It's not the point Alistair's making. It's not the point Tim Keller makes.

Tim Keller is a guy who is empathic. He loves these five people. So they're in his mind as he's preparing his sermon.

See, you know, if you're compassionate toward the world, you're just going to be doing that naturally. That's good. Someone asked a question here about adaptability.

In our efforts to be adaptable and change our line of approach in reaching the lost, how can we avoid the dangers of dumbing down or sugarcoating the gospel? Wouldn't individuals like Rick Warren and Bill Hybels and others in the seeker-sensitive movement say that this is just what they're doing? Me? Yeah, why not? You spoke about adaptability though, brother. Well, yeah, but that doesn't mean I know anything about it. I think it's a question of starting point and presentation.

So when Paul talks about adaptability, he's talking about presentation, partly. He's prepared to eat with Gentiles, rather than just keep to kosher law and so on. So that's about where you are and how you do it, as much as it's about what you say.

In fact, that's primarily about where you are and how you do it. And I think there's an awful lot we need to be thinking about in terms of adaptability, and I'll be coming onto this later today, that if our only evangelistic strategy is come to us and this is the way we do it, we might reach certain kind of people. But I wonder whether we're thinking enough about the range of different communities and people groups in our areas and think, well, if I wanted to have a sort of Keller approach and think of five, not just personality, but five cultural types, how would we reach them and would we do it like this? And would they come to this area at this time? Would they respond to this kind of style? It's not about content at that stage.

There is a content issue though, and for me that is starting point. At the beginning as I'm preaching, I want to connect with people. I believe the gospel has the answers to all the basic fundamental deep questions of life.

So there are all sorts of places I could start. If I'm speaking to an older person in Britain, I can assume that they probably believe in God, they probably believe that Jesus is something to do with God and may even be the son of God, and they have a sense of morality connected to the Ten Commandments, I guess, and of sin, although they might not use that word. And so very likely guilt is something that I can tap into, conscious guilt, and a sense they want to be right with God and they've tried throughout their lives.

So I might go straight in at that kind of level. If I'm speaking to the younger generation in Britain, I can assume none of those things, and I'm not going to be starting with guilt, and with the basic question, I assume you all want to know God and you feel you've fallen short of his standards, let me tell you how you can, because that, for most of them, is not where they're at. So I might start somewhere else, with just this sense that there must be something more.

I've been doing some mission speaking in a university recently, and amazingly, because the university authorities banned the student movement from meeting, the Christian movement from meeting, they had to be in a marquee in February, very cold February, out and about. They couldn't hire any university premises. And the result was that far more people came.

You've got national publicity, this thing, because of discrimination against Christians. And we found a lot of Muslims came, and a lot of atheists came. And I preached the gospel time and time again.

I think every meeting I spoke, I'd meet an atheist afterwards, and they'd say something like this, I have no need for God in my intellectual thinking, I've thought it all through, and there is absolutely no need for God intellectually for me. And then I would say, well, why are you here? And they'd say, well, something in me tells me there must be something more than this. And so for someone in their 20s, I might tap into that as a beginning.

But the basic ingredients, the Lordship of Christ, the coming judgment, the cross, sin, all those things are going to be there. It's a question of starting point and packaging. Long answer, simple question.

It's a helpful answer, thank you. Alistair, you said what he said in your sermon this morning, that in the very passage in which Paul is pleading or explaining his policy of adaptability, he uses the word evangelion and evangelism over and over and over again. And then he concludes by saying, it's all for the gospel.

That's it. It's adaptability for the gospel. It's not adaptability so that we get along.

It's not adaptability for church growth. It's adaptability for the sake of the gospel. So the gospel has to remain front and center.

And I think that summarizes it between the two, doesn't it? That we're not adapting to people in order to be well liked by them or to increase the numbers that join us, but that our adaptability is to handle the variety of approaches. Somebody asked me how I finished. There's a question in here.

I think I put it on the ground, not because I didn't like it, but I thought it was worthy of going on the ground in relationship to some of the other questions, but I'll come to it now. Someone said, how did I finish the conversation with Carla, the Dutch Reformed lady, when she said, you know, I don't believe that God is out there. I believe he's in here.

Well, we talked about that. And we talked about the resurrection. We talked about the incarnation.

We talked about the birth, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus. And we talked about the question, is Jesus the person he claimed to be? Or is he a madman? Is he a bad man? Or is he the God-man? In other words, I did what Schaeffer did. He goes always to the resurrection.

Schaeffer's apologetic was always there. Didn't matter where you started with him. He always wanted to say, well, let's ask the question if Jesus is alive.

If he's alive, we have a conversation. If he's dead, the whole thing's a waste of time, and we might as well have another round of pudding or whatever. But here's the fascinating thing.

The conversation took place. And I don't know if I said this, but this week, my wife and I had an email from Carla and from Fritz inviting us to come and visit them in Austria and saying that they had already plugged into the Truth For Life website, and that in driving away from the lunchtime encounter, they were trying to guess what I was, that I would speak that way about Jesus. And they had truthforlife.org, and they looked at that, and they said, it's maybe something to do with radio or television.

He's probably a technician. Because I am a very technical person, and people pick that up. And so they were completely flabbergasted that when they went on the website to discover that my caller was turned around the wrong way.

And the other thing is, well, with the three dental students, we got on the chat of, well, here's Milan, look at all these people. Where are they all going, and what are they all doing? Do you have a view of the world that can answer the big questions? Who am I, where did I come from, where am I going, and does it matter? That was our conversation. Well, they said, well, what do you think the reason for life is? I said, well, I believe, you know, the shorter catechism, essentially the purpose is this, that God made us for himself, and so on.

And the parting shot from one of the girls was, well, listen, are you suggesting to me then that if this is the purpose, as you have outlined it, that my purpose in life, and I have a purpose, I want to be a dentist, I want to be a useful member of society, and everything, are you saying that my purpose is irrelevant? And just at that, leaning against the wall was a bicycle, because I didn't want to say, no, it's, yes, it's, no, I didn't know what to say. And I said, well, I said, do you see the bicycle here? They said, yes. I said, well, that bicycle can be used, you can use that as a clothes horse, if you want.

You can hang your laundry on it, if you choose. It's a valid use of the mechanism, but it's not the reason for its creation. And if you want to ride out into the countryside and enjoy the beauty of that, then you will use it for the purpose for which it was made.

And so I said, God has made you for a unique and special purpose. And she said, okay, and walked away. But who knows? I didn't throw it on the floor, there's the question.

I threw it on the floor now. Preparation and reading. Pastor Begg mentioned in the beginning of the conference the importance of organizing quotes, illustrations, etc., for ready reference.

What are some practical ideas, suggestions for organizing and ready referencing this type of material? You both must do a lot of that, don't you? Do you have any good tips? I have a filing cabinet. And about 25 different topics and everything that comes my way. Fortunately, my congregation is always cutting things out of the newspaper, magazines, and putting them in my in tray.

And fortunately, I have a PA as well who trolls all sorts of media to find me relevant. And whether that's helpful or not, I have no idea, but that's what I do. Not much to add except that I actually write on a computer phone, and you probably do it in a computer way, but rather than putting it in the filing cabinet, I find things just get lost there.

If I see anything that I think that could be usable, I immediately think, now if I was looking for something under this, if I was to put this under any heading, what would it be? And if I've got a heading there already, I should just keep it in the I will write about three times a year. I'll spend a bit of time just writing that in. I use pen and ink.

And that just reminds me it's there, and then I'm much more likely to use it. So I tend not to think, oh, I need something on meaninglessness, which is one of my sections, or hedonism, and then all sorts of Christian doctrines as well. And then look.

More likely, as I'm preparing, I say, oh, there was that story, or there was that quote. And then I think, now where would I have that? And I know immediately where to find it under the appropriate heading. Good.

That's largely my approach has been a combination of that, too. And you can never start soon enough. And more simply, I don't think, than simply take an alphabetized, expandable file, if nothing else.

And the first quote that you find from the New York Times on humanism, you tear it out. And if humanism is it, then you put it in under H. And my approach to it over the years has been that I have taken and filed all of the sermonic material from Genesis to Revelation. And where there is a clear and obvious subject, then I tie the sermon material to this master file, so that if you go in under Grace, you'll find that there are quotes there that if they are short enough, they're actually written in.

If they're longer, you've got the page reference in the place in the Bible. If it's a piece out of a magazine, it will have been photocopied and added. And so it just builds up a big compendium.

And added to that, and I'm not as committed to this as I've been, and I go in spurts with it, bit like exercise. But when I read a book, and I was saying to Yvonne, we were talking about an author called P.D. James, who's a crime novelist, an English lady. And I was so fascinated by her books, and I wanted to read something of her autobiography.

Found this autobiography to be totally fascinating. So I completely indexed the whole book. So the book has words written all the way through the book.

And I will now give that book to my secretary, and I'll ask my secretary to go through the book and add all of those observations about death, about a humanistic funeral, about taking walks, about beauty, about all kinds of things that all come out of the material. And if you do that with your books, and you index your books, then you've at least got a chance of finding stuff. If you don't do it, you'll spend hours of your life saying, I know I read that somewhere.

And you're going around like a crazy person looking for the stuff. So whatever your system is, and obviously I'm a pen and pencil fellow still myself, my younger colleagues have got this all flying around the world with the internet and stuff. And I really admire them, but it takes me twice as long to fool around with that stuff.

There are demons in my laptop. I don't have a really theology of demonic activity, except as it relates to computer technology. Can I just add that if you ask your congregation to help you, you'll find you have a lot of stuff.

Ask them to find stuff that they've come across that relates to various themes. It'll do two things. It'll give you a stack of material.

It'll also help you understand what your congregation is troubled by out there in the world. Someone asked the question, where can I order or purchase Matthias Media material in the US? There's a young man here. Where are you, Matthias man? Stand up just for a moment.

This young gentleman here is now in the United States to launch the Matthias Media USA mechanism, and they should go on what website? Matthiasmedia.com, and everything will flow from there. Terrific stuff. If you have not gone on this website, it really is very, very, very good material.

Absolutely. Biblically solid, trying to reach the world. I have a vested interest.

They published the first few of my books. They really are great people. There's a question here about inner city work.

Why do we in America not see the inner cities of America as a mission field in the same way as we do in other countries? I suppose I should have to answer that question. I think increasingly we do. There have been some classic illustrations of that.

Jim Boyce at 10th Press stayed in the inner city, and Phil Riken is there with the express purpose of reaching Philadelphia downtown with the peculiar problems and opportunities that are there. Tim Keller is a classic illustration in Manhattan, albeit of a different mechanism, but still the same thing. There are people in Atlanta who are doing the same thing.

Many of our African American pastors are heavily committed to inner city and urban work. There are some classic illustrations of that as well. Certain cities lend themselves to it more than others.

Also, we have to be true to the calling that we've received. I'm a city boy. I was brought up in Glasgow, brought up in a large city, and I love cities.

I haven't actually been called to the city. This isn't exactly the city out here. I'm jealous of those who have opportunities that are within the span of a university context or being able to reach out to people in a way that makes perfect sense.

I'm not a fan of people driving distances out from the suburbs into the city to doff their hats to urban ministry and part their cars as far away from any potential difficulty as they can and give the impression that they're really interested in the place and then hasten home as fast as they can before it gets dark because they're really scared to death of the whole deal. I think if we're going to do inner city ministry, urban ministry, we do it from there. If God had called me to that or does call me to that, then I'll be happy to do that.

But I do think that increasingly, people are thinking about the cities, especially as people are able to move back into cities. I guess it varies from place to place. Australia, England, comments at all? I don't know what the scene is here, but in England, evangelical strength is in the middle classes.

I think we have to do much more thinking in terms of the adaptability, not of our message, but of our pragmatics. It's hard. I think if we transplant the kind of things that work well in our middle class areas and simply do the same in the inner cities, they won't work.

We've got a lot more thinking to do. Could you walk us through your service planning process and describe a typical order of service at your church? Well, I'm not actually involved in that because I don't lead any of our congregations. It's a slightly strange setup, which again, I might say more on later.

But in general terms, the sermon drives everything and so we'll choose what we're going to preach on and that will set the theme. It's a bit of two things. One, that drives things, but there's a certain structure, which I suppose is partly because of my Anglican background and partly out of conviction.

So we'll have a very simple liturgical base and that means we always say a prayer of confession and that will be a corporate prayer of confession because we want people to remember the gospel. And so an acknowledgement of sin and a declaration of God's forgiveness comes early on and often we'll have some kind of creedal statement. It'll vary, whether it's the Apostles' Creed or simply reading together Philipians 2, 5 to 11 or some scriptural creedal statement.

And then the music serves the truth. We're not putting it in there just because people expect to sing and that just fills a bit of time, but it'll link to the theme of either the gospel or the passage that we're preaching on and we'll underline that. It's a teaching opportunity as well as an opportunity to praise Almighty God, that in a nutshell.

Do you have an evening service as well? We do and we actually have seven congregations and so we have one afternoon, three evenings and three mornings, four mornings. It's complicated in different settings. Again, I might say more about it later.

All right, that's good. Do you want to add anything? Just to offer a different perspective, we at our church also have creeds, confessions. We also lift them either from the prayer book or from scripture itself.

There are a number of really good creeds that the early Christians said and they're in the New Testament, so they're good to say. We deliberately don't choose the songs to go with the sermon. I understand completely that a lot of churches do that, but our rationale is we see every part of the service, the psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, the prayers as teaching in and of themselves.

I personally don't want everything to zero in on my 20 minute, half an hour message. I see that as a central and important part of a larger gathering for edification. It's just a different perspective.

The way we operate here is that the praise and the preaching hopefully have some points of intersection. But my view of praising God as it relates to the teaching of the Word of God is that it's almost like flowers in a garden. I like random gardens.

I like wildflowers. I like the variegated nature of a woodland scene. I think I like it more than the pristine structure of an English country garden, where all the greens are in one place, all the blues are in another, and so on.

I think personality-wise, that sort of relative chaos that is represented in the woodland scene is something that I can really cope with. Then I have violent visceral reactions to it and retreat to two weeks of very structured times, get that out of my system and go back to the woodland. I'm helped in this and aided in this by some of the most long-suffering people you've ever met in your life, who think I'm a complete idiot and have justification for feeling that way.

But together, somehow or another, we're working out our own salvation with fear and trembling. I do every so often say to myself, I think we may be missing some significant elements. We have to be very careful that we devote ourselves to the reading, to the public reading of Scripture.

We have to be very careful that there is a Trinitarian dimension to what we're doing, that it's not so Christologically focused that we lose sight of the fact that our structure is to be Trinitarian. I often try and work the general confession into my own prayer, just for the very reason that you are identifying it. But it's something that is in a constant state of re-evaluation, at least for me.

It's just an idea that we introduced a year and a half ago. If we're preaching a series through, say, a New Testament book like Ephesians, we will at the same time have an Old Testament, what we call an Old Testament reading series. So, we'll start 1 Samuel and the person will get up and say, oh, we're going to be reading 1 Samuel for the next couple of months.

Here's the context, bang, reads 1 Samuel 1. It doesn't have anything to do with the sermon. But next week, they're going to hear 1 Samuel 2. And the reader just gets up and says, you remember last week, X, Y, Z, this week, da-da-da, reads 1 Samuel 2. And we just plot along like that. If we happen to be preaching through an Old Testament book, perhaps it's 1 Samuel, we'll be reading Galatians and Ephesians, whether or not it relates to the sermon.

Just because we want people, the public reading of Scripture, we want that to be central to what we're doing. But we want people to hear these books in order. And I think that whole lectionary approach to things, which is the legacy of Anglicanism at least, has so much to be said for it when it is married to a vibrant form of Christianity.

But the problem with lectionary is, it's Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Sunday, Sunday reading. I'm talking about Sunday by Sunday. I understand.

There are a couple of questions here that are related to the whole emergent church issue. I don't know where you fellows are in interacting with the stuff that's here. What do you do when church leadership embraces the emergent church movement and you don't? From your perspective, is George Barna right about the revolution? I don't know if you've seen this book by Barna, *Vibrant Believing Christians Who Aren't Connected to a Local Church*.

Can you speak briefly about the evils of postmodernism and thinkers who are unorthodox in regard to biblical Christianity, like Brian McLaren, who is part of the emergent church movement. Are either of you able to comment on that at all? He's the only one up here holding a Bible. I've never read Brian McLaren, and we have our own Brian McLaren's in Britain, but they're slightly different, and so I couldn't comment on him.

I mean, the emerging church thing will differ from country to culture. In England, there are aspects of it that are good, and there are aspects of it that are deeply concerning. And we have a big thing in the Church of England, fresh expressions is the big mode, and we've got to have fresh expressions of church.

And part of that is postmodern, and you give people what they want, and you soften the gospel, and that must be no, no, no, no, no. But part of it is a deep desire to reach people who are not being reached by traditional forms of church. And we tend to assume that our traditional forms of church have been handed down by the scriptures, and they haven't.

There's an awful lot of culture in how we do church, and it's very, very difficult to discern what is cultural about this, and what is principle and biblically driven. And it seems to me we must be willing to adapt the cultural elements for the sake of reaching those who are not being reached by traditional church. And in that regard, we're involved in the kind of fresh expressions movement.

We're doing different things. So one of our congregations is in a home, and we found that certainly within the estate just down the road from us, I mentioned it last night with the four who were baptized recently, we've been doing work with the folk on the estate, working class, predominantly single parent home, big social problems. And we've been doing a lot of work with them over many years, just loving them and trying to interact, doing a lot of kids' work, lots of relationships, and gradually one by one a few people converted.

But they came to us on a Sunday, and culturally it was chalk and cheese, and they weren't finding they could connect very easily. They didn't stick. And we had to think, how are we going to, first of all, edify these folk who've been converted, but are not being able to be integrated into our very culturally very different scene? We can either change what we were doing on a Sunday, but to change in a way that would be adaptable for them would have meant absolute revolutionary change, which would have made it very hard to reach the people we were reaching, or to build up the people we were building up.

And we felt we had to start again. And so we've started a tiny congregation in a home. It's based on a meal.

And so they come round, there's a meal every week. And in the context of a meal, totally relaxed, nothing formal about it, there'll be Bible teaching, and there's a very gifted guy who will speak for 25 minutes, but in a way that's engaging. There's a bit more dialogue going on than there would be in our setting.

They now do sing. We have a CD player, and they'll sing along to the words on the screen played onto the wall. 15 people come.

I think there'd be some who'd say, well, this just isn't church. And when I first started thinking about it, this didn't seem right. But actually, I think it's much closer to the kind of things that were going on in the New Testament.

And I wouldn't always do that. And for most people, actually, in Britain, they're still more likely to be reached in a different setting than in a home. But we've got to think radically, and not assume that something that might come under a kind of emerging church fresh expressions label, because of the bad things that are associated with that, must be all bad.

And the discernment is trying to work out what is good and right. Even from those we disagree with on theological things, what have they latched onto that we can learn from, rather than just sticking with what we've always done, which will reach some, but won't reach everyone. Do you have on the tip of your tongue, the concerns? Or do you have to reach for them? Well, in Britain, there are concerns, but I think the American scene is a bit different.

But in Britain, the kind of postmodern approach is such that it's trying to engage with people, and rather than thinking, look, we know what the gospel is, and we're trying to work out how best to communicate to them. The kind of language now is, we've got to learn what the gospel is by engaging with them. And they kind of tell us what, the non-Christian tells us what the gospel is.

It's a very adaptable message. And I want to say what I said earlier. How we present it needs to be adapted, but the message itself, we can't compromise on.

And there are concerns that things like the teaching of penal substitution within that whole movement, that's gone. And today, people can't cope with a God who's ever angry, and so we just don't mention the judgment of God. Because if you get rid of the judgment of God, you get rid of penal substitution.

It doesn't make sense unless God is God of justice. There's open theism. Open theism is in the background, and it's not simply in the emerging church movement that's hitting the kind of mainstream.

Very much in the established church. Look, it just comes back to what we said before. Emerging churches that are adapting in order to promote the gospel are fantastic.

Emerging churches that are adapting in order to relate to the culture invariably lose the gospel. So they're no longer churches. And I think what makes it most alarming is that if the folks don't have a solid grasp of the gospel to begin with, and they're enamored with the methodology, then it's almost predestined for chaos.

Or perhaps even worse, if the person has turned away, for example, from the question of what was a revolution in Lloyd-Jones's life, James Denny in the death of Christ and Dale on the atonement. I mean, Keith could tell us he won't embarrass the people, but he could tell us that one of these churches here not too far from us in a neighboring state took lines out of their hymns because there is such an emphasis in some of their hymns, especially as it relates to the cross, on the wrath of God, that the wrath of God was satisfied. And they removed, they excised that from the singing of the song.

They said not because they didn't believe in the wrath of God, but because they believed that it was harmful to people to be confronted with the thought of the wrath of God, and therefore they ought to just take it out because it was a sort of offensive and unnecessary concept, especially when they are adapting themselves to the mindset of the people who are coming. Well, my personal view is that you can't have it both ways, that to remove it is to remove it. And if you believed it, you wouldn't remove it.

And the paradox is, if we are really devoted to the gospel of Jesus, we are actually going to be radical, right? Yeah. Jesus' whole ministry was scandalous from beginning to end because of his desperation to save people and to promote the kingdom. The kingdom is coming.

And so it was because of those realities that he wined and dined with sinners. Well, that was outrageous. That was the most liberal, disgusting, emerging church kind of thing a Pharisee could think of.

But Jesus did it because of the gospel. So for us traditionalists, there's also a message that actually the more committed to the gospel you are, the more radical you will be in your servanthood of others. Well, I mean, that's a good note on which to finish.

There are other questions, but there will be another time for questions. And in order to be true to you and allow you to get out and enjoy this beautiful afternoon, get on the golf course, etc., we should probably stop. Pardon? Chalk and cheese? Who said it? You said it? Vaughn, it's an English expression.

You can't know what it means. If you ever find out what it means, it's a form of Gnosticism. Do you want to tell them? It's okay.

I feel one could, in sport, he demands an interpretation of my strange tongue. It means two things that just don't have anything to do with each other, but don't mix. Probably.

Two nations divided by a common language. Maybe three. Three, yeah.

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