



Christian Life Fellowship
Becoming fully devoted followers of Christ



The Value of Expanding

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Introduction:

This morning we are going to talk about the core value of expanding. Let me start by asking a question. What do you think of when you think of *expanding*? When we talk of expanding, for church purposes, we are talking about growth and evangelism in the kingdom of God. If there was one thing that happened to the church after it was born on the Day of Pentecost it was that it expanded. In order to expand, your vision and focus has to be beyond yourself.

We expand through evangelism. Our mission's statement based on Acts 2:42-47 says this. The mission of Christian Life Fellowship Church is..... ***"to reach all people within the greater Mayville, Wisconsin area and the world with the hope of Jesus Christ, compelling those who do not follow Christ to do so and challenging those who do follow Christ to become fully devoted and Spirit-filled in following Him, expressing their devotion through evangelism, preaching, teaching, worship, prayer, healing, fellowship and the Biblical cultivation of a God centered family and community as demonstrated in Acts 2:42-47"***.

One of the ways we express our devotion to God is through evangelism. Evangelism means I share my faith with others. People might doubt what you tell them, but they cannot doubt your personal experience or witness. A term often used in the New Testament to describe the message of Christianity is the Greek word *euangelion*, which means "good news." Our English word *evangelism* taken from that word simply means "sharing the good news".

Evangelism can be defined as the ways to awaken or reawaken personal faith in Christ. God and evangelism are synonymous. Jesus came to evangelize, to seek and to save the lost. We cannot be devoted followers of Christ without sharing the same heart that God has for those who don't know Him. In defining what it means to be a follower of Christ, one has to include the component of sharing the good news with others.

Some Christians regard themselves as spiritual consumers: the church is a place where their own spiritual needs can be met. Although this is a primary purpose, Christianity is so much more than being only about you. Some people get upset by the color of the carpet, or the length of the sermon, or that we didn't sing their favorite song in church. If our focus becomes those things instead of reaching the hearts and souls of people, we have our focus in the wrong place. Let's remember that there is a world outside these four walls to reach. There is a purpose for which we have been redeemed and it is much grander than just to warm a pew on Sunday morning. It includes expanding the kingdom of God in the hearts and minds of people. In light of the eternal destiny of people, focus on personal preferences pales.

As one studies the New Testament, it is surprising how little is written there about how we evangelize. There is more than one way of doing this. Sharing the good news was the natural outcome of Christians being Christians. As Christians journey through life, they share their faith naturally and in the process invite others to follow Jesus. In the class we did earlier this spring called “How to share your faith without fear,” we discussed that it is our job to share, it is God’s job to convict and bring to life the truth we shared. It is not our job to save anyone. Whether we realize it or not, everything that we do communicates something about our faith to those who are not yet followers of Christ.

Followers of Christ have something to share with other people, not because we are different, but because we are *no different*. Our concerns and struggles are the same as other people; the difference is that in the midst of the struggle, Jesus is present.

I. Be prepared to acknowledge Christ before men.

Matthew 10:32-33:

"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven."

Jesus was very plain here that our acknowledgement of Him before others is part of our purpose. When we do acknowledge Him before others, Christ says proudly to our Father, “Look there is a follower, that one shares our heart, that one shares our passion, they belong to my kingdom.” In the same regard, if we reject Him before men, Jesus will also choose to disown us to the Father.

Here at CLF, one of our core values is to expand through evangelism. Don’t keep it to yourself. We choose what we share, when we share it, and with whom we share it. When I find something useful, reasonable, needed, and valuable, I want to share that with others. The same principle is true of expressing our faith to those around us who need to find His joy, peace and forgiveness.

When Jesus visited the synagogue in his home village of Nazareth, he declared his purpose, quoting from the Old Testament book of Isaiah.

Luke 4:18-19: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

The poor, the prisoners, the blind and the oppressed were those who Jesus especially was anointed to share the gospel. His message and teaching did not focus simply on those who were already His followers. No, He took his message into other people’s territory. He did not invite people to come to places where he felt safe and they felt threatened. He went to the beach, to the market, to the city streets. When He got there, he did not set up evangelistic events. He was simply there, sharing in the life of whatever was happening and *listening*. Even when it was obvious what people needed (for example, at the pool of Bethesda in [John 5:2-9](#)), Jesus asked questions in order to empathize more effectively with other people. Effective evangelism begins when those who follow Christ’s example listen and don’t speak.

In response to what he heard, Jesus most often told stories. Stories do not present ready-made answers. They create a space in which people can interact and respond in their own ways. Evangelism is about creating a space for God to work in people’s lives.

Jesus gave a simple invitation: “Follow me.” There was no organization to join and he laid down no preconditions. He accepted anyone who would follow and in the process often caused offense to religious people, who felt he was too easygoing. The task that we have been left as Christ-followers is simple. He told us to take the gospel into the entire world and that is what we should be doing. There are people you influence that I never will, and people I influence that you never will. We have to keep a clear focus that those around us need to hear about Christ. Our focus can be distracted, it can become clouded and it can be skewed by our surroundings.

II. Be prepared to give an answer for your hope.

1 Peter 3:15: But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

Friends, it is our responsibility as followers of Christ to set Him apart as Lord. A Lord is one you are submitted to, one who gives direction, one whom you serve, not one who serves you. If you have set Christ as Lord in your life, then you also need to be ready to answer everyone who asks you to give you a reason for your hope. The approach for answering the question they ask is vital. It is to be with gentleness and respect. When you consider the life of the Apostle Paul, you see that he became what was needed to reach a great number of people who were ready to make a decision about Christ.

III. Be prepared to look beyond yourself to others.

John 4:35: “Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'. I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.”

Our eyes have to perceive those around us who are ready for harvest. If my focus is only on myself, on my barn, my tools, my implements, etc., the harvest in the field is at risk of being lost. A farmer checks his fields to see when they are ready for harvest and when he sees the condition of the grain, then he goes after the harvest. Harvesting greatly depends on the perception and awareness or sensitivity to the conditions of the grain.

Conclusion:

So here is the challenge:

- Be prepared to acknowledge Him before men.
- Be prepared to give an answer for your hope.
- Be prepared to look beyond yourself to others.
- Be prepared to do what is needed to relate to others.

The Martyr's Oath

IV. Be prepared to do what is needed to relate to others.

In your service to Christ as Lord, be willing to become whatever you have to, so that some might be influenced to decide to follow Christ.

1 Cor. 9:19-22:

“Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.:

Paul sets an example here in writing to the Corinthians, that he did whatever he needed to do. People cannot relate to us unless they know we understand the path which they walk. The Apostle reveals to us his heart as a devoted follower of Christ. St Paul reveals to us the purpose in becoming what he could to as many as possible. It was so that some might come to know Christ.

The Old Testament prophet, Ezekiel, put himself in the same position as Paul did. He shared the same attitude when he sat by the river of Chebar and there he wept. In order to effectually touch other human beings, we have to be willing to relate to others.

Today I stand as a dead man. I declare that in Jesus Christ, I am saved by His blood, and thus I am dead to sin, and no longer dead in my sin. Today I stand and declare that I surrender my will and my life to His will and His life.

I shall go where He sends me, without asking questions. I shall go to whomever He sends me, without seeking fame. I shall preach to everyone, even if they hate me. I am an Ambassador of the Cross, and must deliver the message.

I shall pour my life out to reach my family, my friends, my neighbors and my city. I embrace the shame of the Cross, and I fear nothing but God. I welcome suffering, shame, persecution, beatings, imprisonment and death, but I will not be silenced.

If I am killed, I pray that my blood should be a harvest for souls.

This is my city. I dare not do less