## Week 1 – Surprising The World

Scripture Readings: Colossians 4:2-6 and 1 Peter 3:15-16

Background Reading: Surprise the World Chapters. 1 & 3

### Introduction

Why does the word ‘evangelism’ cause some people so much anxiety? Do you get images of door-knocking or approaching strangers in shopping malls? Does it make you feel like you’re being turned into a reluctant recruitment officer for the church?

Should faith-sharing really be anxiety producing?

In his book Surprise the World, Michael Frost puts it this way:

“When gifted evangelists tell the rest of us that we should behave like gifted evangelists too it has a debilitating effect. We look at confident, articulate, theologically trained evangelists preaching in our churches and hear their stories of sharing the gospel on the back of a napkin in a restaurant or on a plane, and then we hear them tell us that we too can (and indeed, should) do what they do and we freeze! We know we can’t do what they do.” (p.6-7)[[1]](#footnote-0)

* Do you feel that way?
* Are we all meant to be little Billy Grahams? Or have we been getting it wrong?
* What exactly does the Bible say about evangelism?

Let’s see what both Paul and Peter say as they encourage their churches to share their faith. *(Re)read Colossians 4:2-6 and 1 Peter 3:15- 16*

### Main Teaching

You’ll note in these passages there’s a kind of two-pronged approach to evangelism assumed. Let’s look at those two prongs:

**1. Evangelists Should be Bold**

Firstly, Paul clearly seems to think that there are certain people in the church who are gifted evangelists. And obviously Paul places himself in that category in the Colossians passage we read. It seems Paul thinks gifted evangelists could be either:

a) local (like Timothy – see 2 Tim. 4:5) or trans-local (like himself).

b) leaders in local churches (see Eph 4:11) or just members of churches.

For these people Paul asks his churches to pray for two things:

* opportunities (“pray... that God may open a door for our message...”)
* clarity (“Pray that I may proclaim it clearly...”).

And here is a challenge for our church. *Have we identified the gifted evangelists in our midst?* Are we praying that our evangelistic leaders will have opportunities to share Christ? And are we praying that those evangelists will be clear in the way they talk about Jesus?

But it doesn’t appear that Paul believes all Christians bear the responsibility for that kind of bold proclamation to which he is called. While evangelism is an essential gifting for all churches, it isn’t a gifting given to every believer. Otherwise, he would have encouraged the Colossians to pray for opportunities and clarity for themselves as well. He doesn’t. He asks something slightly different from them.

This leads us to look at Paul’s second prong of evangelism. What does he think the rest of us should be doing to share Christ with others?

Firstly, Paul calls on evangelists to be bold, and secondly...

**2. The Rest of us should be Questionable**

Yep, I said questionable! Well, I didn’t say it, Paul did. Listen:

“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” (Col. 4:6)

While Paul sees the gifted evangelist seizing opportunities and boldly proclaiming the Gospel (as Acts clearly shows him doing), it appears he thinks the contribution that the average believer will make to evangelism is to answer the enquiries of unbelievers.

And Peter agrees:

“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, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.” (1Pet. 3:15-16)

In Surprise the World, Michael Frost says,

“The believers’ function then was to pray like crazy and to conduct themselves, in word and deed, in such a way as to provoke unbelievers to question their beliefs and enter into an evangelistic dialogue.” (p.5)[[2]](#footnote-1)

* While the evangelists are making the most of every opportunity, the primary contribution the rest of us make to the work of evangelism is to answer questions!
* To be questionable. Intriguing. Surprising.
* That’s why Michael Frost called his book Surprise the World. It’s only when we’re surprised or intrigued that we ask questions.
* Here’s the central issue to consider: we’re doing it all wrong if no one ever asks us any questions about our lives. If our lives look pretty much like any other respectable law- abiding citizen, what’s so intriguing about that?

Now let’s bring those two prongs together, but change the metaphor. Because the gifted evangelists and the rest of us are the two halves of the biblical approach to evangelism. They are...

**1. Like the Two Blades of a Pair of Scissors**

The biblical model of evangelism then is for church leaders to:

a) identify, equip and mobilize gifted evangelists (with gifted evangelistic leaders taking the primary responsibility),

b) inspire all believers to live questionable lives.

If all believers are leading the kind of lives that evoke questions from their friends, then opportunities for faith sharing abound and chances for the gifted evangelists to boldly proclaim are increased.

Michael Frost puts it this way:

“I think gifted evangelistic leaders bear the responsibility to equip their congregations to be able to tell others about Jesus, but that the opportunities for faith sharing will emerge from questioning unbelievers. Gifted evangelistic leaders should be training their congregations to speak about Jesus conversationally when questioned about how they deal with suffering, or why they spend their vacation serving the poor, or why they’ve opened their home to refugees, or why they’re fasting during Lent, or why they’ve made career choices that allow them to contribute to the greater social good.” (p.6)[[3]](#footnote-2)

* How questionable is your life?
* Does it look just like your neighbors’ lives?
* Is there anything intriguing or surprising about it at all?
* If not, then we leaders haven’t done a good job in helping you.

**2. How Can We be More Questionable?**

Let’s consider making it a project to be more surprising to our neighbors.

Frost suggests five ways we can all live more questionable lives, but today I just want to look at one of them.

*Blessing others.*

In church we use the term “bless” a lot, but have you ever considered what it really means? Way back, in Old English, it comes from the term, “to add strength to another’s arm.”

Therefore, to bless another is to build them up, to fill them with the encouragement for them to increase in strength and prosperity.

When we bless others we surprise them. In our busy world, when people are running from one thing to the next, the simple decision to add strength to another’s arm is intriguing.

Here are three ways we can bless our unbelieving friends and neighbors:

* **Words of Affirmation:** This is the simplest way to bless someone. Send them a note, write them an email, text them. Send them some words of affirmation and encouragement. “I can live for two months on a good compliment.” – Mark Twain. “A word of encouragement is like oxygen to the soul.” – Michael Frost
* **Acts of Kindness:** Bless others by doing them a favor or providing some kind of practical support – cut an old lady’s lawn, babysit an exhausted couple’s kids, help a neighbor move.
* **Gifts:** I’m talking about totally random gift-giving. Nothing blesses someone more than an unexpected gift.

You might have thought I was going to say provide a meal for someone. That would definitely bless them, but next week we’re going to look at the surprising power of eating together, so we’ll save that until then.

In Surprise the World, Michael Frost urges us to undertake the challenge of blessing three people every week – at least one of whom is not a member of your church; at least one whom is a member of your church; and the third can be from either category.

* Do you think you could do that?
* Would you pray with me that God might reveal three people we could bless either with a word of affirmation, an act of kindness or a gift?

And remember the words of Paul and Peter we read earlier. They say in our dealings with outsiders we should “be wise..., full of grace..., seasoned with salt..., gentleness and respect.” When we do this, people will be intrigued by our motivations. And that’s when we get to speak about Jesus, the one who taught us to bless others.

### Conclusion

In his book, Discover Your Mission Now, Dave Ferguson recounts reading a doctoral thesis entitled “Blessers versus Converters.” The researcher looked at two teams of short-term missionaries that visited Thailand with distinctly different missional strategies.

The team referred to as the “blessers” went with the intention of simply blessing people. They saw their mission as being, *to bless whoever came their way in whatever practical ways they could.* On the other hand, the “converters” went with the sole intention of converting people and evangelizing everyone they encountered. The researchers found that the “blessers” also had almost 50 times as many conversions than the “converters!”

When we live unexpected lives (which clearly includes the blessing of strangers), we find ourselves being questioned by others. Then, we have the best opportunity for sharing the hope of Christ within us.

Let’s pray together.

(Pastor - If you would like to order Michael Frost’s book, *Surprise the World,* to distribute to your church as you preach the series,you can do so [HERE](https://www.navpress.com/search?keyword=Michael+Frost), or by copying and pasting this link into your browser: [www.navpress.com/search?keyword=Michael+Frost](https://www.navpress.com/search?keyword=Michael+Frost) )

1. Taken from *Surprise the World: The Five Habits of Highly Missional People* by Michael Frost. Copyright © 2016. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Available at [navpress.com](http://navpress.com/). Michael Frost is also the author of *Keep Christianity Weird: Embracing the Discipline of Being Different* (NavPress © 2018) and *Hide This In Your Heart: Memorizing Scripture for Kingdom Impact* (NavPress © 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Ibid, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Ibid, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)