**ADVANCING THE GOSPEL**

**Outline**

1. The Gospel
2. Communicating the Gospel
3. The Purity of the Gospel
4. The Growth of the Gospel
5. Personal Application for Advancing the Gospel

***(Optional Studies)***

1. The Insider
2. Dealing With Our Fears
3. The Lost

**INTRODUCTION**

Our Navigator calling is “to advance the Gospel of Jesus and His Kingdom into the nations through spiritual generations of laborers living and discipling among the lost.” This statement of calling roots our ministry in the soil of the lost and broken people of our world and flows out of what God has been saying to us from Scripture.

Our calling is also in harmony with God’s desire that His people live in the world for the sake of those who don’t know Him among all the nations (ethnos – peoples).

*He says: “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6)*

*“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.” (Isaiah 61:1-4)*

*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” (Matthew 9:36-38)*

1. **THE GOSPEL**

What exactly does the Bible mean by “the Gospel”? In this opening chapter, we will explore the meaning of the Gospel, and seek to better understand what the Gospel is (and what it is not).

* 1. **What is the Gospel?**

The Greek word translated “Gospel” (euangelion), appears 77 times in the New Testament. For each of the references given below, record your observations as they relate to the Gospel. Then use your observations to answer the questions below.

* 1 Corinthians 15:1-8
* Philippians 1:5, 7, 12, 27; 2:22; 4:3,15
* 1 Thessalonians 1:5; 2:2, 4
* 2 Thessalonians 1:8
* 2 Timothy 1:8,10; 2:8
* Matthew 9:35-38
* Mark 1:14-18
* Luke 8:4-15
	+ 1. What is the Gospel?
		2. What certainties are connected with the Gospel?
		3. What other characteristics does the Gospel have?
		4. How does the gospel change my perspective on life and its purpose, my  relationship with others, my priorities?
		5. What am I to do with the Gospel?

* + 1. What is the power of the gospel in me?
		2. What are the places in my heart where I don’t believe the gospel?

*For further study*:

Use a concordance or Bible software to look up every mention of the word Gospel” in the Bible. Read the verse in its context and make note of what it says. Use your findings and continue answering the questions above.

* 1. **The Gospel According to Romans**
		1. Read through Romans 1–8. On separate paper, note those things you learn about the Gospel.
		2. Pray and meditate through Romans 6-8. What is God saying to me? What does this say about my identity in Christ and my life in Him?

*For further study:*

Do an inductive study on the book of Romans. Create an outline of the book, and map out Paul’s thinking of what the Gospel is. Come up with key passages and verses to help someone understand the Gospel, using the book of Romans.

* 1. **Defining Terms**

Define the following terms (using a Bible dictionary) and find Scripture references for each of them. In the “So what?” column, write down what this term means to your life and understanding of the Gospel.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Definition** | **Scriptures** | **So What?** |
| **Adoption** |  |  |  |
| **Atonement** |  |  |  |
| **Conversion** |  |  |  |
| **Forgiveness** |  |  |  |
| **Grace** |  |  |  |
| **Guilt** |  |  |  |
| **Justice** |  |  |  |
| **Justification** |  |  |  |
| **Mercy** |  |  |  |
| **Reconciliation** |  |  |  |
| **Righteousness** |  |  |  |
| **Shame** |  |  |  |
| **Sin** |  |  |  |
| **Sinful Nature** |  |  |  |
| **Wrath of God** |  |  |  |

1. **Communicating the Gospel**

How was the Gospel communicated? How did Jesus and those in the early church present the Gospel to others? How can we go about sharing the Gospel with others?

* 1. **Examples of the Gospel Communicated**

Fill in the chart using the passages of Scripture given.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **John 3:1-21** | **John 4:1-42** |
| **The Messenger** | *Who was the messenger? What was their relationship to the audience? Their posture/attitudes towards the listener? How did they handle the scriptures?* |  |  |
| **The Audience** | *Who was the audience? What is known about their:**- Culture**- Religion**- View of God**- View of self* |  |  |
| **The Gospel Communicated** | *What was communicated? Which aspects of God’s character were emphasized? Why? What barriers were there to the Gospel? What was the response to the message?* |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Mark 7:24-30** | **Acts 2:14-36** |
| **The Messenger** | *Who was the messenger? What was their relationship to the audience? Their posture/attitudes towards the listener? How did they handle the scriptures?* |  |  |
| **The Audience** | *Who was the audience? What is known about their:**- Culture**- Religion**- View of God**- View of self* |  |  |
| **The Gospel Communicated** | *What was communicated? Which aspects of God’s character were emphasized? Why? What barriers were there to the Gospel? What was the response to the message?* |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Acts 17:16-34** | **Acts 25:33-26:32** |
| **The Messenger** | *Who was the messenger? What was their relationship to the audience? Their posture/attitudes towards the listener? How did they handle the scriptures?* |  |  |
| **The Audience** | *Who was the audience? What is known about their:**- Culture**- Religion**- View of God**- View of self* |  |  |
| **The Gospel Communicated** | *What was communicated? Which aspects of God’s character were emphasized? Why? What barriers were there to the Gospel? What was the response to the message?* |  |  |

* 1. **Pulling it Together**
		1. Look over your discoveries from the examples in Scripture. What patterns emerged?
		2. What were some of the similarities in the way the Gospel was presented?
	2. **For Thought and Reflection**
		1. Reflect on how the gospel has been communicated to you and how you responded. What was appealing about it? What was not appealing or perhaps confusing?
		2. What most motivates you in sharing the gospel?

* + 1. What barriers do you find within yourself in communicating the Gospel?

*For further study:*

*Additional passages considering how the Gospel was communicated:*

* *Acts 7*
* *Acts 13:13-41*
* *Acts 16:7-31*
* *Acts 17:2-7*
* *Acts 28:17-31*
1. **THE PURITY OF THE GOSPEL**

Paul and Barnabas set out on their first missionary journey in AD 46 or 47. Their journey lasted about 18 months and took them into the regional cities of Galatia. In each city they preached the Gospel that God had revealed to Paul. There was no difference between Jew and Gentile. For both, justification was by faith in Christ apart from the law.

* 1. **Through Galatians**

Not everyone agreed with Paul’s understanding of the Gospel. Some men, probably from Jerusalem, retraced Paul and Barnabas’ route for the purpose of correcting Paul’s gospel by “completing it”. The letter to the Galatians is Paul’s reasoned, but also emotional, response to their mission.

Read through the book of Galatians. On separate paper, make note of your observations, especially regarding the essence of the Gospel, and ways that its purity was being compromised.

* 1. **In Summary**

The purity of the Gospel is under constant threat by those who seek to mix it with human rules and traditions. The Gentile world couldn’t understand the Gospel as long as it came wrapped up in Jewish tradition. In a similar way, whenever we add to the Gospel, we subtract from its purity. When this happens it ceases to be a Gospel for all the nations.

* 1. **Thinking it through for Yourself**

Do you see any similarities between the Galatians and yourself in terms of how you view, understand, and apply the Gospel to your life?

* 1. **Take it to your City**

What have you learned about presenting the pure gospel in various ways so that it is clear and attractive to different people?

1. **HOW THE GOSPEL GROWS**

*The advancement of the Gospel is a crucial component of our Navigator calling. But how does this happen?*

*Although a lot of what Paul and his team did was in response to the social and religious context of their day, we can still draw valuable lessons for our times by understanding how the Gospel grew in the decades following Christ’s ascension.*

* 1. **Natural Expansion**

In Acts 2-11 we read how the Gospel expanded among a group of people who were ready to hear the message. Acts 2:5 identifies the crowds gathered in Jerusalem as ‘God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.’ They were a prepared audience and they responded quickly to the preaching of the Gospel. Perhaps all of this growth would have remained within Jerusalem had it not been for the persecution of the church that accompanied Stephen’s stoning (Acts 8:1).

Acts 11:19 tells us that as these Jewish believers were scattered through the surrounding regions, they shared their new faith with fellow Jews and Jews who had adopted the Greek language and customs (Greek = Hellenists). Although the Gospel was advancing geographically, apart from a few exceptions through Peter (Acts 10) and Philip (Acts 8), it was still confined culturally to Jews.

* 1. **The Apostolic Team**

It took the emergence of the “apostolic team” to break the Gospel out of the Jewish world and into the nations (different people groups). The word “apostle” means “sent one.” Many English translations use a capital “A” to speak of the original 11 disciples and Matthias– the men Jesus selected to be with Him and specially trained by Him. However, the word also is used to refer to a wider group of people. People like Paul, Barnabas, Andronicus and Junias are all referred to as “apostles.” They were mobile. They crisscrossed the region of what is now the Middle East and Southern Europe planting the Gospel and establishing the faith of those who believed.

* 1. **The Mobile Teams**

What characterized the ministry of these “mobile teams?” Look at the following passages to discover some of their characteristics:

* + 1. Acts 13:1-5
		2. Acts 15:36
		3. Acts 18:1-6
		4. Romans 15:17-29
		5. 1 Corinthians 9:19-22
		6. 2 Corinthians 10:13-16
		7. Choose five words or phrases to describe the ‘“apostolic ministry.”
	1. **Local Believers and the Advancement of the Gospel**

The litmus test of Paul’s apostolic ministry was what the local believers did with the Gospel planted in their midst. On several occasions Paul links the phrase “not in vain” to his ministry. He uses the Greek word “kenos.” When applied figuratively the word means “useless, for no purpose, or without effect.”

Read through the following scriptures. What did Paul want to see happen in and through the lives of local believers to conclude that his ministry in a city or region had fulfilled its purpose?

* + 1. Romans 12:14-21
		2. Philippians 2:14-16
		3. 1 Thessalonians 1:8
		4. 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5
		5. 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12
		6. Titus 2:5
		7. Titus 2:10

*It was up to the local believers to carry the Gospel through life and speech into their existing family, social and economic networks. They were insiders to this world.*

* 1. **Compare/Contrast Apostolic and Local Ministries**

Use this chart to compare and contrast the respective contribution of the apostolic and local teams to the advancement of the Gospel. Two examples are listed to get you started.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Apostolic**  | **Local Expansion**  |
| *Outsiders to the culture/place*  | *Insiders to the culture/place*  |
| *Mobile*  | *Permanent*  |
|  |  |
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This contrast between “apostolic” and “local” approaches is described in Colossians 4:2-6.

* + 1. What did Paul (the apostle) ask the local believers in Colossae to pray for him?
		2. What does Paul exhort them to do?
	1. **In Summary**

Paul’s apostolic team worked together to take the Gospel to the nations. The fruit of their labor, the local believers in a city, bore the ongoing responsibility to carry the Gospel into a people group. These two expressions of the church, the mobile and the local, were vital to the advance of the Gospel. They needed each other to fulfill their shared calling to advance the Gospel to the nations.

Often, we make two common mistakes when we fail to understand this distinction between these two types of teams:

First, we teach and expect the local laborers to minister as apostles in their current environment (school, neighborhood, jobs, hobbies, recreation, etc.). When this happens the laborer often loses rapport with those he or she is trying to minister to and becomes discouraged in the process. After a while they no longer believe it is possible to labor fruitfully among the lost.

Secondly, a staff team that needs to minister in an apostolic manner attempts to implement their mission the same way a team of insiders would. When this happens the outcomes are slow and discouraging. New initiatives are not taken.

The effect of these two mistakes is the same: ***no generational ministry***!

* 1. **Thinking it through for Yourself**
		1. What did the apostolic team do that the local ministry could not do?
		2. What could the local ministry do that the apostolic team could not do?
	2. Take it to the City
		1. What are you doing to help your friends in the city to share the Gospel right where they are?
1. **PERSONAL APPLICATION FOR ADVANCING THE GOSPEL**

What has God revealed, clarified or affirmed regarding my:

CALLING (Who I am in Christ, Who we are as Navigators)

CONVICTIONS (What I know and believe)

CHARACTER (Who I’m becoming as I follow and imitate Christ)

COMPETENCIES (What skills I already have and/or need to develop)

CONTRIBUTION (How I minister and serve- now and/or in the future)

What additional step(s) is God prompting me to take as a result of this study in any of these 5 areas?

1. **THE INSIDER (Optional Study)**

What happened after the apostolic team left town? How would the Gospel continue to advance? The apostolic team established a beachhead – a foundational generation. This generation had inside access to families, neighborhoods, places of work and social networks. The believers in this generation were insiders. It was up to the local believers to take the Gospel into a place. They were the key to the ongoing movement of the Gospel.

*“...the great mission of Christianity was in reality accomplished by means of informal missionaries... chattering to friends and chance acquaintances in homes and wine shops, on walks and around market stalls. They went everywhere gossiping the gospel and they did it naturally... and with the conviction of those who are not paid to say that sort of thing.” – Michael Green*

* 1. **Jesus and the Insider**
		1. Jesus had a lot to say about how we should relate to unbelievers. Reflect on the following passages and note your observations.
			1. Matthew 5:13-16
			2. Matthew 5:43-47
			3. Matthew 13:24-30
		2. Jesus lived what He taught. He gained a reputation among the religious establishment for being good friends with some very lost people. Jesus, the One who was without sin, moved freely among those who were sinners. He did not demand that people change in order to be with him socially.

What do you observe about the attitudes and actions of the major characters in the following passage?

* + - 1. Matthew 9:9-13
			2. Mark 2:13-17
		1. Jesus asked some people to drop all they were doing, leave their families and “follow Him.” But was everyone called to this way of following Jesus? Explain.
			1. Mark 5:18-20 J
			2. John 4:28-30; 39-42
	1. **The Insider and the Epistles**

The first generation of believers in the pagan city of Corinth faced many challenges. It was tempting to resolve these tensions by withdrawing from relationships. In fact, these believers wondered if spiritual transformation meant relational and physical relocation. They wrestled with the question, “What should the new believer do?”

* + 1. What did Paul want to see happening in and through the local Insiders?
			1. 1 Corinthians 7:12-24
			2. Romans 12:8-10
			3. Galatians 4:19
			4. 1 Corinthians 5:9-13
			5. 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12
			6. Colossians 1:3-6
		2. What does the Insider need from the apostolic team?
			1. Acts 15:36
			2. 2 Corinthians 12:14-18
			3. Philippians 1:21-26
	1. **In Summary**

More often than not, when people become Christians, the church or other believers encourage them—either directly or indirectly—to make radical changes in their relational world. As a result, that’s often the last their old friends will see of them. But by withdrawing from relationships, they exchange one of their best assets—their strategic field position—for a far more difficult one. The insider has now become an outsider. If our Navigator calling is to become a reality, we must do a better job than this. Insiders are vital to our calling, and we must convey that.

* 1. **Thinking it through for Yourself**
		1. Why are Insiders vital to the Great Commission? What do Insiders need to flourish and be fruitful?
	2. **Thinking it through for Your City**
		1. Does your current strategy of ministry validate or erode the idea of being an Insider?
1. **DEALING WITH OUR FEARS (Optional Study)**

Whenever God asks us personally to respond in faith to His promises, we are confronted with the reality of our fears. In order to lead others in implementing our Navigator calling, we must deal with our fears. Along with its derivatives—anxiety, stress and worry—fear conspires to make life uncomfortable. Fear is contagious and can paralyze and imprison not only us, but those we seek to lead and influence. Living out of our fears can keep us from passionately pursuing our God-given calling.

* 1. **What do we do with our Fears?**

We all have fears. They are not necessarily abnormal or wrong. It is not the absence of fear, but our response to fear that is crucial. With God’s help we can move through our fears to a place of boldness and obedience.

* + 1. What do you observe from the passages below about overcoming fear?
			1. Psalm 34:4
			2. Isaiah 6:1-12
			3. Acts 4:23-31
			4. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5
			5. Ephesians 6:19-20
			6. Philippians 1:19-26
			7. Colossians 4:2-6
			8. 1 John 1:7
		2. What do you observe in the following passages about human weakness and the Gospel?
			1. 2 Corinthians 4:7-12
			2. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10
	1. **Thinking it through for Yourself**
		1. What are some fears that you have encountered in responding to advancing the Gospel? How have you or will you deal with them?
		2. What would it look like to lead boldly in advancing the Gospel?
	2. **Thinking it through for Your City**
		1. Where is courage and boldness currently needed for both your staff team and for the 20s in your ministry?

**SUMMARY AND APPLICATION**

What has God revealed, clarified or affirmed regarding my:

CALLING (Who I am in Christ, Who we are as Navigators)

CONVICTIONS (What I know and believe)

CHARACTER (Who I’m becoming as I follow and imitate Christ)

COMPETENCIES (What skills I already have and/or need to develop)

CONTRIBUTION (How I minister and serve- now and/or in the future)

What additional step(s) is God prompting me to take as a result of this study in any of these 5 areas?

1. **THE LOST (Optional Study)**

As we consider the importance of sharing our faith, one aspect to keep in mind is the condition of those to whom we are going. This motivated Jesus. We see His heart in the following passage:

*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." Matthew 9:36-38*

Sometimes it is easy to become frustrated, angry or intimidated by lost people. It may be helpful to realize that they are living exactly how we should expect them to live – given the state they are in and what they believe about God.

* 1. **The Condition of the Lost**

List all the things these passages say about our friends who do not have faith. What do these things look like in their lives? Do you think they are aware of their condition?

* + 1. Isaiah 53:6
		2. Isaiah 61:1-2
		3. Acts 26:18
		4. Ephesians 2:1-3
		5. Ephesians 2:11-12
	1. **The Predicament of the Lost**

Look at the following passages and write down your observations about both the present and future problems those without Christ are facing.

* + 1. Isaiah 64:6
		2. Isaiah 59:1-2
		3. Acts 4:12
		4. Romans 3:23
		5. 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9
		6. Revelation 20:11-15
	1. **God’s Heart for the Lost**

What do the following passages say about God’s heart for those who do not know Him?

* + 1. Matthew 9:36

* + 1. Matthew 18:14
		2. John 17:20-21
		3. Isaiah 61:1-3
		4. Ezek.18:23
		5. 1 Tim.2:3-4
		6. John 3:16
		7. Romans 5:8
		8. Luke 19:41-44
	1. **In Summary**

The people we know who do not have faith are in a very bad place - both now as they live without the life God desires for them and forever when they slip into eternity without knowing Christ. God cares deeply about them and desires them to be saved.

* 1. **Thinking it through for Yourself**

What is your honest heart response as you think about the lost? How can your response become more like God’s heart? Which of the above passages particularly grips your heart as you consider the lost?

* 1. **Thinking it through for Your City**

Is there a city activity that would expose us to lost people in the city or allow us to serve the lost in some meaningful capacity?

**CONVICTION CAPSULE ON THE GOSPEL**

*A belief is something you hold, a conviction is something that holds you.*

**My Definition**

In your own words define the Gospel (20 words or less).

**I Believe**

Write at least five statements communicating what you believe about the Gospel and why (include Scripture).

**If-Then**

Write at least five “if-then” statements that show how your walk with God and your life as a believer will reflect what you believe about the Gospel. (i.e.: If I believe that God loves and forgives me, then I will love and forgive others.)

**My Life Examples**

(Give two examples) My life has been consistent with these truths about the Gospel in that...

(Give two examples) My life has been inconsistent with these truths about the Gospel in that...

**Passing It On**

“I would communicate this truth to another by...”

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