

# Sharing Life, Sharing Faith

## Discussion #1

### I. Introduction to Program

#### A. Review of Program Ideas and Goals

In a recent sermon, Pastor Bolland talked about the happiness and joy we have through the grace of God. He contrasted this with the joy, or lack thereof, that we see in the efforts made in the “pursuit of happiness”. **We have something truly wonderful here, and let us never forget how hungry others are to know what we know, to know that in God there is no longer fear, but love and peace.**

Remember also that the premise of this program is not to put pressure on ourselves or others. We are not trying to “pick a target” and make that person a “project”. Rather, we will learn how to pray and ask God to give us opportunities to share our faith, to recognize those opportunities when they are given to us, and to provide us with the confidence we need to share our faith.

Pastor Bolland has said that the idea of evangelism is not in “shuffling the chairs”, i.e., bringing in people who already belong to other churches. Although they are certainly welcome, this program is geared toward sharing our faith with people who are not Christians, and who do not know His grace. For that reason, we will not be spending a lot of time learning about what other Christian denominations believe, but learning how best to bring the message to those who have never heard it.

To put it simply, evangelism has to do with conversion, not recruitment. In other words, the aim of the church's evangelist proclamation is not to convince the unbeliever to join up, but to bring him to **baptismal death and resurrection**. It is not the work of the church to entice, manipulate, or coerce the unbeliever into participation. St. Paul says it well in **II Corinthians 4:3**, **But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.**<sup>1</sup>  
(Pastor Don Kirchner)

#### B. Group Structure

Pilot Group, Leader, Assistant Leader, and Host.

#### Bible Study:

##### Proclaiming the Gospel Message

1. The Great Commission of Jesus

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:18-20)

2. The gospel message is for **everyone**.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. **(John 3:16-18)**

This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe. **(I Timothy 4:10)**

3. Not everyone who hears the word will believe.

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. **(Mark 16:15-16)**

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. **(Matthew 23:37)**

4. There are many people searching for spiritual truth who have not heard this gospel message.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. **(Matthew 13:44-46)**

5. Honest spiritual searchers have this promise from God:

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. **(Matthew 7:8)**

6. How do they hear the word?

For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile-- the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" **(Romans 10:12-15)**

We have the right conception of our eternal election only if we ever and firmly bear in mind how it actually occurred in eternity, namely, not without regard to the means, or absolutely, but in such a way as to provide for the preaching of the Gospel and the operation of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel for the generation of faith.<sup>2</sup>

(Francis Pieper)

## B. Key Point

**God wants everyone to hear the gospel, believe and be saved.** He may provide opportunities for us to share our faith and give us the words we need, but ultimately He does all the work. **It's not up to us.**

## III. Overview of Doctrine of “Vocation”

### A. Definition of Terms

1. The term “vocation” comes from the Latin word for “calling”. The Scripture is full of passages that describe how we have been called to faith through the gospel and how God calls us to a particular office or way of life.

He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. **(II Thes. 2:14)**

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ-- their Lord and ours: 'Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **(I Cor. 1:1-3)**

Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. **(I Cor. 7:17)**

2. If you look up “Vocation” in the index of the Book of Concord, it simply says “See Calling”.
3. The Greek word for “Church” used in the New Testament is ekklesia (**ἐκκλησία**) which is from the word **ἐκ**, “out” and the verb **καλεῖν**, “to call”. So this literally says that the church is “the called out ones”.
4. What we do in our day-to-day life may seem mundane and boring, but in actuality it is holy calling from God.

Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody. **(I Thess. 4:11-12)**

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, **(Col. 3:23)**

## B. Thoughts regarding the Doctrine of Vocation

We all shouldn't try to do the same work. Rather, each one should pay attention to his own responsibilities. Otherwise, we cannot be of one mind and one heart. We must allow the works to be varied so that each person can remain with what God has entrusted to him. We should simply do the work at hand.<sup>3</sup> **(Martin Luther)**

What makes a person a Christian is not holding to a particular set of moral beliefs; rather, it is faith in Jesus Christ, which, indeed, can be imposed on no one. Being Christian is not a matter of behaving rightly; rather, it is a matter of being forgiven for behaving wrongly.<sup>4</sup> (or, more specifically, “for being who we are, sinful, fallen creatures” – **Rev. Richard A. Bolland**)

God is working through what we do in vocation. We are merely His instruments. When we realize that, we can relax.<sup>5</sup>

The Christian doctrine of vocation approaches these issues in a completely different way. Instead of "what job shall I choose?" the question becomes "what is God calling me to do?" Our vocation is not something we choose for ourselves. It is something to which we are called.<sup>6</sup>

Not only do we not choose our vocation, but strictly speaking, we do not find our vocation, as if it is something unknown, awaiting us in the future. Further, our vocation is already here, where we are and what we are doing right now.<sup>7</sup> **(Dr. Gene Veith)**

The idea of vocation goes back further than the New Testament. There are numerous examples from the Old Testament as well. We see how Moses and Aaron are called to two distinct offices. We see Abraham's calling and promised of blessings for all nations. We see it specifically in Samson's story, and how he was set apart even before his birth for his vocation as a life-long Nazirite.

So Manoah asked him, "When your words are fulfilled, what is to be the rule for the boy's life and work?" **(Judges 13:12)**

In the Bible, we hear about the impressive and heroic acts of our ancestors in the faith. Along with these, we also hear about the humble, unpleasant, and distasteful work they had to do. This should comfort us whenever our everyday work bogs us down.<sup>8</sup> **(Martin Luther)**

## C. Special Vocation of Pastor

The vocation of the Pastor is a special office indeed. Not that it is more meritorious than any other vocation. God acts and is hidden in other vocations as well. But the pastoral office serves not just the world but God's spiritual kingdom. Christ is active in the pastor's work in a **saving way, giving the pastor's words and ministry eternal consequences**. This is not just mystical symbolism but plain fact. A pastor's obligation is to preach not his own opinions but the Word of God. His goal is to be a clear channel for the Word of God.<sup>9</sup> **(Dr. Gene Veith)**

What are the implications of the Pastor's vocation in relation to ours?

## Summary

Our vocations are holy callings from God. God works through us in our various vocations. He hears our prayers, and gives us opportunities to share our faith with our friends, and helps us recognize those opportunities. **While He prepares us to share our faith, He is also preparing those others to hear the message through us.**

## IV. Informal Exercise

Each month we will do a short sharing exercise. Because we will be opening our hearts to each other when we discuss our faith, please remember to be sensitive to each other and not talk about what is said here outside the group.

See page 7 for today's exercise.

## V. Provide notebooks and journal

These notebooks are for each of us to use as a personal journal. Throughout the month, when you have thoughts about sharing your faith through your vocation, write those thoughts down. Start noticing the people that you contact, and listen for signals that they are seeking for spiritual truth, and write down any impressions you have. Pray for opportunities, and write down any opportunities that do come your way.

Bring your journals back to class with you each month. Part of our sharing exercises will be to discuss our experiences from our journals. However, they are for your own private use, and you only need to share the parts that you would be comfortable sharing. So do not be afraid to write your innermost thoughts. If you feel that someone's confidentiality would be violated by sharing your thoughts with the group, feel free to use pseudonyms.

We will also keep a group journal about the opportunities we are given, so that we can all refer to them and learn how better to recognize and respond to them. By discussing the situations and people we contact, we can give insight and help each other to better recognize and respond.

## VI. Next Month's Discussion Topics

1. Bible study: **The Truth vs. False Teachings/Teachers**
  - A. The Scriptures as the source of Truth
  - B. Recognizing false teachings in our world
2. **The "Post-Modern" worldview**
  - A. What it is
  - B. How it pervades all aspects of our society and culture
  - C. The effect it has had on Christianity.
  - D. How to respond effectively

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<sup>1</sup> Kirchner, Rev. Don, as posted on Lutherquest Discussion Group 10/4/02, Topic “Outreach Methods”, <http://www.lutherquest.org>

<sup>2</sup> Pieper, Francis, “Christian Dogmatics”, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO, Volume III, pg. 476

<sup>3</sup> Luther, Martin, “Faith Alone”, © 1998 World Bible Publishers, Iowa Falls, Iowa, pg. “March 18”

<sup>4</sup> Veith, Dr. Gene Edward, “God at Work”, © 2002 Crossways Books, Wheaton, IL pg. 99

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pg 152

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pg 47

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pg 57

<sup>8</sup> Luther, Martin, Op. Cit. pg “April 10”

<sup>9</sup> Veith, Dr. Gene Edward, Op. Cit. pp 122-123

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## **Sharing Life, Sharing Faith**

### Scenario Exercise #1

This exercise is to help us express some of our thoughts about our faith to each other on a one-on-one basis. The idea is not to be perfectly articulate and persuasive, but simply to enjoy the free expression of what's in our hearts.

Pick a number out of the jar, and find the person with the same number you have.

Each person will have a chance to respond, so decide which person will answer the first question. The other person pretends to be somebody who is not a believer, but who seems to be interested in hearing what other people believe. Your response to the question can be as long or as short as you would like.

Remember that the goal is to initiate a conversation and to share your faith, not to convince the other person that you are right. Spend at least as much time listening as you do talking!

#### **Question #1**

I notice you go to church every Sunday. I always thought that you can worship God in nature just as well as sitting in a building somewhere. What is it about going to church that keeps you going there?

#### **Question #2**

I think I'm a pretty good person. I've never hurt anybody intentionally, and I think I've done a lot of good things in my life. If there really is a God, I think he would judge us for the good that we've done. From what I know of you, I think you are a fine person too. So you probably don't have anything to worry about either. So does it really matter whether or not you believe in Jesus, or even in God?

#### **Summary**

Discuss with the group and impressions or observations you gained from these conversations.