

INTRODUCTION

This is the third message in the series "Evang-YOU-lism: Share your story, Share your faith. Our theme for this series is found in Psalm 96:2, "Each day proclaim the good news that He saves."

The word evangelism means, "to announce good news." We watch the television news and read the newspapers, but have you noticed the bad news always gets the headlines? Actually, I enjoy reading the newspaper, but my favorite sections are the sports and comics. And sometimes you can find funny things in a newspaper in the classified ads. These are five actual classified ads:

1. Experienced sitter will care for children. Fenced yard, meals and smacks included.
2. Dog for sale; Eats anything and is fond of children.
3. Dinner special: Turkey \$8.95; Chicken or Beef \$7.95; Children \$5.00.
4. Registered Great Dames for sale.
5. Antique desk for sale for lady with thick legs and large drawers.

The Gospel means "good news." And this month, I'm highlighting three different ways that you can share your faith: going; showing; and sowing. In this message we'll focus on showing the Good News through acts of kindness.

In Matthew 5-7, Jesus shared what is often called "The Sermon on the Mount." I've been to the very spot where Jesus taught, and it's not really a mountain; it's more like a hill. It should be called the Sermon on the Hill, and Jesus shared it with people we could call hillbillies. Compared to the sophisticated religious professionals down in Jerusalem, the people in Galilee were considered country bumpkins. The disciples were called ignorant and unlearned men. Yet Jesus challenged these common people to be salt and light.

Matthew 5:13-16. Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

Jesus uses two powerful word pictures to challenge us to make a difference in our world. He calls us to be salt and light. Salt was used as a preservative for fish and other meat. The salt slowed the process of decay. We live in a culture that is getting more and more rotten by the day and it's our job to preserve a sense of morality. Salt stings, and for many people in our culture, we are considered to be an irritating influence. We're the ones who say killing a pre-born child is murder. We're the ones saying God's only definition of marriage is between a man and woman till death.

And that irritates some people.

But we must speak the truth in love and maintain our sense of moral saltiness or we will become like tasteless, useless salt.

Jesus also called us the light of the world. Salt speaks of our character, and light speaks of our testimony. Salt works from the outside in and it disappears in the process. But light works from the inside out and it must be visible to be effective. We live in a culture that is not only getting more and more rotten; it's getting darker and darker. We can't hide our testimony under a bowl; we must let our light shine. As the song says, "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine!"

Jesus said we shine our light by performing acts of kindness that point people to God. Let's learn four liberating truths about Evang-SHOW-lism: Sharing your faith through acts of kindness.

1. The easiest way to share your faith is through acts of kindness

Three pastors started meeting in an accountability group. They finally got to know each other well enough to admit their greatest hidden sin. One pastor said, "Don't tell my congregation, but I'm hooked on prescription drugs." The second one said, "Don't tell my congregation, but I'm a compulsive gambler." They looked at the third one and said, "I hate to admit it, but I'm addicted to gossip and I just can't wait to get out of here!"

We all tell stories but sometimes our stories are gossip or stories about things that don't really matter. There's a hymn called, "I love to tell the story" and it has been called "the gossip's theme song." But the most important story you can tell is your faith story—how Jesus changed your life. But most Christians are intimidated about the idea of confronting someone with a gospel presentation.

Years ago, I was certified in an evangelism program called Evangelism Explosion written by Dr. James Kennedy. It involved memorizing a fifteen-minute script using questions, scriptures, and explanations. To get certified I had to memorize the entire presentation and take a test. I passed, and God has honored that program.

My favorite story about Evangelism Explosion is that on one of our trips to Russia in the 1990s. I was carrying some Christian books for the pastors to have translated into Russian. On our way through customs in Moscow, they examined these books. The agent could speak a little English, and when he pulled out the Evangelism Explosion book he asked, "What's this?" He had no clue what the word evangelism meant, but he recognized the word explosion! I tried to explain that it wasn't a book about making bombs. He let me go, but he confiscated the book. At least I hope he read it!

Evangelism Explosion is a good plan, but it's not for everyone. There's too much memorization, and it can come across as a sales pitch. Evangelism Explosion may be the most difficult kind of personal evangelism. But on the other end of the spectrum, sharing acts of kindness is the easiest kind of personal evangelism. It's called Servant Evangelism.

God's Word calls us to be kind. "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32) And as we learned by singing our fruit song, kindness is one of the nine flavors of the fruit of the Spirit.

About twenty-five years ago Pastor Steve Sjogren wrote a book called *The Conspiracy of Kindness*. The motto of Servant Evangelism is that "Small Things Done with Great Love Will Change the World."

Steve planted a church in Cincinnati, Ohio. For decades Cincinnati had the nickname of "America's most unfriendly city." Steve started the church by his members going out every Saturday doing intentional acts of kindness from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. His church members would stand at a busy intersection in the city. When cars are stopped they offer free bottles of cold water. Attached to the bottle is a "kindness card." It says, "God is in love with you. This is to show you God's love in a practical way." On the back of the card is a map to the church, website, and phone number.

They started getting creative about ways to show kindness. They offered free car washes. Steve and some of his men would get cleaning supplies and clean the public toilets at gas stations and stores. Steve called these men his "Kindness Rambos." (That dates his book).

Does servant evangelism work? Today more than 7,500 people attend Steve's church in Cincinnati, and they have twenty-two churches planted in other cities. Steve says almost every Sunday a church member comes up to him with tears in his or her eyes and says, "Oh Pastor I remember that Saturday when someone from the church gave me a bottle of water in Jesus' name. God is so good!"

Servant evangelism is an effective way to share your faith. It's the EASIEST way to point people to God—and it's fun!

2. Loving kindness reveals God's heart to others

People who are far from God often have a faulty understanding. They think IF God exists He is like a senile, ancient grandfather with a long white beard in a rocking chair somewhere near the edge of the universe. Or they think God is an angry and capricious deity who delights in bringing pain and suffering on people. Or they imagine God is like a cosmic cop with a bunch of impossible rules, and He's just waiting to slap the heavenly cuffs on you for doing wrong.

But we know better. We know that God is like a Father who considers every person as a precious creation. He is a God of loving-kindness. And some people think Christians are people who dress up in fancy clothes once a week and go into a big building and perform some kind of secret ritual, kind of like a religious masonic lodge. Or they view Hollywood's version of the crazed religious fanatic with a big Bible in one hand and a Texas chain saw in the other.

But kindness gives people a true picture of God and of Jesus-followers. The night before He went to the cross Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35) The only mark of a Christian is love. It isn't a cross or a Bible or distinguishing mark—it's love.

And because we have been shown kindness from God, we should show kindness to others. The key Bible passage behind servant evangelism is Romans 2:4 which says, "...God's kindness leads you toward repentance."

Steve Sjogren is correct. We should be involved in a conspiracy, a conspiracy of kindness. Here's a list of ten attitudes and actions to get you started:

1. Smile at someone.
2. Lend a helping hand.
3. Affirm someone.
4. Send a thank you note.
5. Give the gift of music.
6. Bake something and share.
7. Draw someone a picture.
8. Call and check on someone.
9. Include someone new.
10. Be cheerful.

What if I asked you to come up on this platform right now and tell everyone here how to accept Christ? Could you see yourself doing it? I know many of you could do it, but probably most of you would be a little intimidated. That's evangelism.

Imagine getting in your car with a partner and driving to a neighborhood in Tyler. You start at one end of the street and start ringing doorbells. For people who are home and answer the door, you say, "Could I take a few minutes to tell you how Jesus has changed my life?" That's evangelism.

Or can you see yourself sitting beside someone you just met in a coffee shop or on an airplane and reading a gospel tract to them, like *The Four Spirit Laws*? That's evangelism.

Or can you see yourself sitting a meal with family or friends and sharing your faith story in a relaxed, natural way? That's evangelism. Can you see yourself sitting at your computer communicating with someone around the world who accessed the Global Media Outreach website looking for truth about Jesus? I mentioned this ministry in my novel. We have members of our church who share their faith through online evangelism. Over the past 10 years 100 million people around the world have accepted Christ through online evangelism.

But let me show you another picture. You might not think so, but shoveling snow is also evangelism. It's a picture of servant evangelism. If you don't believe it, I'll prove it to you a little later in this message.

Of course in East Texas, we don't have much snow. Can you picture yourself practicing servant evangelism by doing some of these acts of kindness? Mowing a neighbor's yard; raking their leaves; washing their car; paying for a stranger's lunch at a restaurant (leave a big tip); At a fast food drive-through, pay for the car behind you pull up to the window. Put a \$10 bill in a plain

envelope and place it under the windshield wiper of the dirtiest, oldest car in a parking lot. Come up with your own ideas to show God's love through acts of kindness.

3. Kindness can be the key to unlock a closed heart

Because there is so much crime and hatred in our world, people have become cynical and skeptical. We are so afraid of being conned or scammed we don't trust any stranger anymore.

That is a real handicap when we are trying to share the love of Christ with people. They think we have an ulterior motive. Before you can give people the Word of God, you must show them the Love of God to soften or open their hearts. Before you target their mind, target their heart.

In Acts 16, Paul and Silas arrived in the Macedonian city of Philippi. On Saturday they went outside the city to the Gangites River and started friendly conversations with the women who were washing their clothes. He started sharing Christ with them. In Judaism, men and women are segregated, but Paul showed kindness to these women. The Bible says, "One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message." (Acts 16:14) Lydia was a successful businesswoman. She had an interest in God, but her heart was locked. As she heard Paul speaking, God unlocked her heart. The next verses say she and her household were baptized; no doubt right there in the river. Then Lydia turned around and showed kindness to Paul and Silas, she invited them to stay in her home. She became a leader in the church in Philippi.

There are multitudes of people around us just like Lydia. Their hearts are locked from the Gospel. But kindness can unlock a closed heart. Kindness doesn't just tell them God loves them; it SHOWS the love of God.

A church in Fairfield, Ohio practices these intentional acts of kindness and a few days ago the pastor received the following note from a lady named Nicole: "I just got back from McDonalds on Nilles Road in Fairfield. It's Christmas Eve and I literally counted change from couch cushions and my car to buy some lunch for my son. When I got to the window the lady there told me that the man in front of me had paid for my food, and asked that she give me this card. It was a card for The Vineyard Church.

That man in front of me didn't know that I was a single mom, or that I'm not exactly the best, most sin-free person in the world. He just wanted me to know that God loved me. I needed this more than he could have possibly known. Regardless of what I get for Christmas this year, I will consider that reminder the best gift. Since he drove off before I could thank him personally, I just wanted to thank the church he came from for everything you do."

4. Deliberately plan kind deeds that point people to Jesus

It's important that you plan your acts of kindness so God gets the glory. Jesus said people would see your good works and "glorify your Father in heaven." The early disciples were very careful to announce that their kindness was done in the name of Jesus. The Apostle Peter saw a crippled

beggar near the Temple gate and he said, "I don't have any silver or gold, but I'll give you what I do have. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." And God's power was released and the man was healed.

Later they were asked by the officials to explain what happened. Peter's response was, "If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed... It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed." (Acts 4:9-10)

There is a movement in America called Random Acts of Kindness. That's great, but the problem is that unless that act points someone to God, then the person performing the act is the one who gets the credit. Even if it's an anonymous act of kindness, it celebrates the idea of human goodness. The American Atheist movement has billboards in every major city that say: "No god? No problem. Be good for goodness sake."

Their message is that everyone is basically good at heart, and we don't really need God. That's the religion of humanism. But the Bible teaches that the human "heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9 KJV) Even bad people can do good things occasionally, but there is none good but God. Random Acts of Kindness can't save America; our only hope is through a relationship with Jesus. Servant evangelism isn't about *random* acts of kindness; it involves *intentional* acts of kindness in Jesus' name.

Jesus said even the smallest act of kindness performed in His name is noticed in heaven. He said, "Anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward." (Mark 9:41) Jesus said if you do your acts of kindness to be seen of men, then the only reward you'll ever receive is the applause of men. But if you do your acts of kindness in Jesus name, you will receive your reward in heaven.

There is a man in our church who goes on an annual Christmas spree. But it's not a spending spree; it's a kindness spree. First he goes to the bank and gets a lot of cash. Then he divides the cash up into about 30 plain envelopes. Then he goes to the Dollar Stores, Big Lots, and Super One. He just walks up to a person and hands them the envelope. He says, "Merry Christmas. This gift is given in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." Then, he walks away. He says it is his favorite part of the Christmas season.

So, you may be thinking, "How can I perform acts of kindness in Jesus' name that point people to God?" Next Sunday I'll be talking about sowing seeds of the Gospel. When you arrive for worship you'll be given seven or eight SOW GL cards, about the size of business card. That stands for Show Our World God's Love. On one side the card will say, "God is in love with you. This act is to show God's love in a practical way." On the back will be Green Acres' name and website.



You can have seven or eight cards, then you can duplicate as many as you want. Then when you pay for someone's meal at a restaurant or fast food, just leave the card. When you give away a bottle of water, give them the card with it. That way, you're shifting the credit away from you and pointing it toward Jesus and His church.

CONCLUSION

Servant evangelism is the simplest and most effective kind of evangelism. Pastor Mike Thomas tells the story of his Grandmother Miller. She had lost two husbands to death, and became bitter toward God. Her two husbands had left her financially independent, but she had a mean streak and never shared with her family. Eventually, she married a third man, and she still didn't want to have anything to do with God.

Some of her grandchildren became Christians but she chided them for being religious fanatics. She told Mike's sister, "When I was a kid I did the baptism thing, read the Bible, and went to church—but I got over it! You need to do the same."

But to Grandmother Miller's great displeasure, a church was built across the street from her house.

Here's how Mike describes what happened: "She constantly called the church and griped about cars parked in front of her house. She threatened to have them towed. Visits from the pastor were met with the refrigerator treatment. 'He's just after my money!' She raged. One winter day a thick blanket of snow covered Grandma's large driveway. Shoveling snow is hard work, and neither Grandma nor my step granddad could tackle that amount of snow. Without asking permission the pastor from the church came over and shoveled the snow from the drive. Amazingly, this one act of kindness melted the icicles on Grandma's heart and washed away many decades of bitterness. The next night, she and my grandfather attended revival services at the church and were gloriously saved."

So, go ahead and start thinking creatively about ways to show God's love through intentional acts of kindness in Jesus name. Start your acts of kindness this week, and next week, we'll equip you will your SOW GL cards and we will start planting thousands of seeds of the good news in East Texas!

OUTLINE

1. The easiest way to share your faith is through acts of kindness.

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."
Ephesians 4:32

2. Loving kindness reveals God's heart to others.

Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." *John 13:34-35*

3. Kindness can be the key to unlock a closed heart.

"One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message." *Acts 16:14*

4. Deliberately plan kind deeds that point people to Jesus.

"If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed... It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed." *Acts 4:9-10*

— MESSAGE DISCLAIMER —

These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations and/or use material that is not under copyright. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material stimulate your own Spirit-driven preparation—*it is never intended as a substitute for your own study of Scripture.*

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, it is good scholarship (not to mention the right thing to do) to cite the source. If you are teaching, you may simply preface your remarks by saying something like: **“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”** This simple citation also applies to any work you may publish, too, as I routinely publish my material in books that are protected by copyright.

This careful effort on your part may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you. I trust you will find that additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners.

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
Green Acres Baptist Church
Tyler, Texas*
