INTRODUCTION

Have you ever personally led anybody to faith in Jesus Christ? I remember the first guy that I ever had the great privilege of leading to Christ. I was in the 10th grade, and it was guy who was in my study hall. We used to have a study hall class where you went to the library for a whole period. I took one of these Campus Crusade for Christ questionnaires. It was called a religious survey, and it was a witnessing tool where you told someone, “I'm taking a religious survey. Would you fill it out for me?” And it asked questions about what they believed about God. The last question said: If somebody could tell you how you could accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, would you like to find out how?”

This guy's name was Charles Jocelyn. He was on our football team, and I remember he was left-handed. I talked with Charles in the conference room in the library of my high school and he took 15 minutes to fill out the survey. And then he came to the last question and he wrote, “yes.” I couldn’t believe it!

And then at the bottom of the survey were The Four Spiritual Laws, so all I had to do is just lead him through that. I read the Laws: God loves you and has a plan for your life. Sin has separated us from God. Jesus has come to pay the price for our sins. And when we receive Jesus in our life, he forgives our sins. Then I led him in a sinner's prayer. And he came to know Jesus Christ. I walked out of that study hall period so excited. And if you have ever led anybody to faith in Jesus Christ, you know the joy and the excitement of doing it.

Have you ever led anybody to Jesus Christ? A more important question is: Have you never even shared the gospel with somebody? It is not our job to win people to Christ. God wins them to Christ; it is our job to share the message. And that's what Paul's talking about: how to share the gospel. First Corinthians 9:15-27 says:

But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me, for I would rather die than allow anyone to deprive me of this boast. 16 For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!17 If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. 18 What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make full use of my rights as a preacher of the gospel. 19 Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 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. 21 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. 22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. 24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. 26 Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. 27 No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

I. THE SACRED PRIVILEGE OF SHARING THE GOSPEL

Paul says, I love to preach the gospel. And he says, there are people who have the right to get paid for it. In other words, “I have a right as an apostle to be paid for sharing the gospel.” We read over in the book of Philippians that one of the reasons he wrote the book is to thank the church at Philippi for the generous gifts they had sent to him in prison. He's just talking about the sacred privilege it is to share the gospel. Is it a privilege to you? Or is it something that you feel is a burden or drudgery? Do you say, “It's something I feel like I ought to do. And when I don't do it, I feel guilty.” Loosen up, friend! It is a great privilege. And in this message we're going to learn how to do it.

Paul uses three pictures of the kind of person God uses to share the gospel.

1. Humble servants (9:19)

Paul seems egotistical because in verse 15 and 16, he talks about boasting. But then he says, “But I cannot boast, because if I stop preaching, I will die.” If you want to be an effective person who shares the gospel, take the attitude of being a servant to those people that you share with. That’s what a servant does, like a waiter in a restaurant. A waiter comes up and says, “May I help you?” If you have a certain attitude about sharing the gospel, it'll go a long way. Did you know where the largest church in the world is? In Seoul, Korea. They have about 300,000 members. In South Korea, about 60% of the population are committed Christians. For example, they get up at 4:00 AM every morning and pray for three or four hours. You know how they win people to Christ? By being a servant. All of these Korean ladies in that church have such a servant mindset. Let's say these ladies live in an apartment complex. And they find that there's a lady in an apartment complex who's not a Christian. They will go to people like her who are not Christians and become their maids free of charge. They'll cook food for them. They'll wash their clothes. They'll clean their apartment. That lady will ask, “Why are you doing this for me?” And they will say, “Because we love you. And Jesus loves you. And we want you to come to Christ.” And did you know that that ministry of servanthood
is winning thousands upon thousands? The members are servants to those who aren't Christians. And Paul said, “I came as your servant sharing the gospel. I didn't even want to get paid for it. I was a slave.”

2. A compelled volunteer (9:16-17)

Paul says, “I am compelled to preach.” Paul says I'm doing it voluntarily, but I'm compelled to do it. Do you feel compelled to share the gospel with other people? You know what the prophet Jeremiah said? He said, “I try to stop sharing. But when I stop sharing, it is like a fire in my bones and it burns. And I've just got to do it or I'll die if I don't do it.” That's what Paul said. How about you? If you don't share the gospel, does it literally hurt you?

Why does Paul share the gospel? The same reason we should share the gospel. This is not in this text, but over in 2 Corinthians five, he says things “the love of Christ constrains me.” That word “constrains” means “it grabs me.” God has loved us. And because he showed his great love to us when Jesus died on the cross, that ought to grab you and compel you to share. But in that same chapter, Paul is saying he shares because God loves him, but then he adds, “But also because I know the terror of the Lord.” He says, “I know that there's a hell. I know that there's judgment to come. And because of that, I try to persuade men.” And so Paul was a volunteer, but he was a compelled to volunteer. Jesus Christ has pointed to every one of his children, and he says, “I need some volunteers to share the gospel.” But then he says—you, you, you, you....you must be a compelled volunteer!

3. Faithful stewards (9:17)

Let's look at it from a different angle in verse 17 where he talks about simply discharging the trust “committed to me.” You know what a “trust” is...it's a financial word. Let's say that someone dies, and they leave a large inheritance of money to a child who must be 18 before he gets the money. That money is taken to a financial institution. And it is often put into a trust fund. Now the banker or whoever is managing that trust fund tries to use it wisely. They make it grow. They try to guard it. It is not their money. They don't take it and spend it on themselves. No, absolutely not. They guard it jealously, and they try to invest it wisely. Now the Bible says, that's what the gospel is to us. God has said, “Here are the unsearchable riches of the gospel. And I entrust it to you. You're to manage it. You're to share it. You're not to spend it frivolously. You're not to waste it. You're to be a good steward.” And what does that mean? It means you give it away; you share it; you invest it in the lives of other people.

It is a sacred privilege to share the gospel. Have you shared it this past week? Have you shared it this past month? Have you shared the gospel with somebody this entire year?
II. THE SUCCESSFUL PRACTICE OF SHARING THE GOSPEL (9:19-23)

Paul shows us a good model. They key is, “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means, I might save some…”

There are three principles that we see in this passage of scripture that can help you become a successful personal evangelist:

1. The principle of relationships

Paul says, “To the Jews, I became as a Jew. To the Gentiles, I became like a Gentile. To the weak, I became weak.” In other words, he says, evangelism flows along relational lines. Dan Owens from the Luis Palau Evangelistic Association talked with our church about bridge building. And that is called relational evangelism. There are two basic kinds of personal evangelism. One is called confrontational evangelism and that's okay. There are times to use confrontational evangelism when you talk to a stranger about the gospel. You “confront” them with the truth of Christ about a heaven and a hell, etc. But what I think is much more effective is what Paul is referring to here: relational evangelism. He says, “You know what I've done throughout my life? I have built relationships with people so that when they came to a place of need in their life, there was a relationship established.” This was so they could turn to Paul and say, “What is different about your life?”

To lead somebody to Jesus is pretty simple. Start building a relationship with somebody who's not a Christian. Target them. Do you know anybody at your job or in your school? You know they're not a Christian, so just target them for the next nine months and love them. Try to be their friend. Build a relationship with them so they can trust you because the time will come when you can tell them about Jesus Christ. You remember what happened to the apostle Paul in Acts 16? When they were escaping from prison in the middle of the night, it was obvious that Paul already had some kind of relationship with the Philippian jailer. He had been there for quite some time. And so when the Philippian jailer came to a time in his life when he needed some help, he turned to Paul. That night he said, “Sir, what must I do to be saved?” They already had the relationship. He wasn't a stranger to Paul. When you build a relationship with somebody, and they enter a desperate time, chances are they're going to come to you.

And they're going to say, “What must I do to cope with this difficult experience?” Jesus built relationships throughout his life. The Bible says they called Jesus a friend of sinners. He associated with drunkards and tax collectors. And that made the Pharisees so upset! But there are still some Christians today who say, “I don't dare develop a relationship with a non-Christian. I'm afraid they'll contaminate me. I'm afraid that they'll affect me.” If you develop a friendship with a lost person, with the expressed intent to one day lead them to Jesus Christ, you always keep...
that guard up. You never become like they are. You're praying that they'll become as you are! Relational evangelism works. Do you know somebody right now that maybe you could just develop a friendship with? I once asked our church to write down the names of some people who, as far as you know, are not Christians. And I realized I don't know a whole lot of non-Christians. My friends are all on the staff, or they’re members of the church. The people that I'm close to, as far as I know, they're all Christian. I don't have any non-Christian friends. That caused me to want to start looking around at my interests...like golf or flying...and see if there are some guys I could maybe develop a relationship with who aren't Christians that I can write down on my card. Do you have five people you could write down right now? If not, be thinking about who you can list.

2. The principle of flexibility
You must be willing to change and to be flexible. When you're rigid when it comes to evangelism, you will fail. And that's what Paul says, “I'm not rigid to the Jews. I was like a Jew. To the Gentiles, I was like a Gentile. To the weak, I was like the weak so that I could win them to Jesus. Have you ever heard the beatitude that says “blessed are the flexible for they shall not be bent out of shape”? If you want to win people to Jesus Christ, you better be flexible, bendable, and moldable. I am not talking about compromising your convictions. I'm not talking about changing the message of Jesus Christ one bit. What I am talking about is changing your method, changing your strategy, to win people to Jesus. Jesus did that. In John chapter three, a Pharisee named Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night. We call that Nick at Night, kids! Jesus entered into a very deep theological discussion with this Pharisee. He said you must be born again. You must be born of the flesh, and you must be born of the Spirit. But in John chapter four, he's talking to a woman at the well about living water. He didn't use the same method with Nicodemus that he used at the woman at the well. If you want to lead people to Jesus Christ, don't be so rigid; be flexible.

3. The principle of adaptability
Principles two and three are related. Adaptability means being willing to adapt and change as the need requires. Paul is saying, “There are times that I acted one way, but there are times I acted another way. Is that situational ethics? Well, no, because everything he did was right, but he's saying sometimes it's appropriate to do something...and sometimes not. Paul says he was not under the Law, but there was a time he still followed a Jewish vow and shaved his head, according to the book of Acts, so as not to offend others. Although he wasn't under the law, there came a time when it required that Timothy be circumcised. Although he didn't think that it would matter in his Christianity, he did it so it wouldn't offend other people. Paul says, “I'm willing to adapt as the need requires.”
Do you want to be successful in leading people to Jesus Christ? Try those three principles. Build some relationships, be willing to change, and design your approach according to the situation.

CONCLUSION

When I was pastor, there was a boy in our youth group who wasn't very athletic, but Brad loved the Lord. He was interested in leading some of his friends to Christ, and he did exactly what I suggested you do. Brad targeted a guy in his school who was an outstanding track star and who later got a track scholarship to a big school. He knew that this guy was sort of a loner, and as far as he knew, he wasn't a Christian. So you know what Brad did? He asked this track star, “Would you mind if I ran with you some morning? What time do you run?” He said 5:00 AM. Brad said, “I'll see you at the track tomorrow morning.” Brad was not a very tall guy or a very thin guy, but he wanted to love that guy to Jesus, so he showed up at the track the next morning at 5:00 AM and ran with him. It just about killed him. Brad said that he was taking about two strides for every stride that track star was taking. He said he couldn't move the next day. But he was there at 5:00 AM anyway. They made about one lap and the guy lapped Brad. And finally the track star said, “Brad, why are you doing this? You're not training for a race or anything. And I can tell you don't enjoy this. Why are you doing this?”

And Brad said, “To tell you the truth. I just want to develop a relationship with you to get to know you and tell you about Jesus Christ.” The track star replied, “Did you mean you were willing to come out here and run just to do that?” Brad said, “Yes.” So the guy said, “Well, let's sit down and you tell me what you got to say.” To make a long story short, Brad led him to Jesus. There are many ways to win people to Jesus Christ. And one of the ways may be getting up at 4:00 AM and killing yourself on the track. Thankfully, there are a lot of other ways to do it as well. Find somebody and ask God to lay somebody on your heart who doesn't know Jesus and develop a relationship with them.
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