

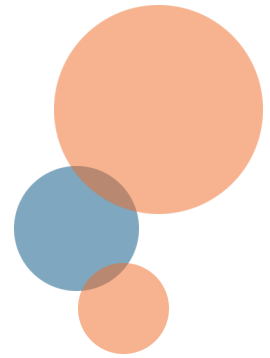


NEIL HUDSON

Evangelism in a Post-Truth World

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EVANGELISM IN A POST-TRUTH WORLD

Session 1: Setting the Scene

1. Introduction: What's the Problem that we are Addressing Today?

We suspect that some Christians are losing confidence in sharing the good news of Jesus with non-Christian friends and family. In part that may have to do with Christians feeling that they are now living as a minority in a cherished pluralistic culture and because of this social context the sense that Christianity is 'True' is increasingly difficult to hold to, or persuade others about.

The aim is to help us to build people's confidence in their own ability to share the gospel with others.

HOW WILL WE BEGIN TO ADDRESS THESE ISSUES?

1. We will explore the nature of the Gospel.
2. We will reflect on our own personal stories to try and discern any significant patterns.
3. We will touch on some of the cultural themes that are prevalent in our social context.
4. We will touch on strategies that may be helpful for ourselves and for those we minister with.

This is the first of a series of sessions on evangelism where other aspects of this part of our discipleship will be covered, so inevitably there will be issues NOT covered today that will be covered in other sessions.

2. A Starting Point

All of these conversations are about people living different lives, facing different issues, asking different questions. In all our generalising, it's important to keep on remembering that before we speak, we need to listen. Otherwise evangelism becomes commodified.

IN TWO'S IN BREAKOUT ROOMS (8 MINUTES)

Reflect on your conversations with the two people who are not-yet Christians.

- What questions do they have?
- How open are they to the Christian faith?
- What is appealing about Christianity to them?
- What are the barriers for them?
- What would help you share the gospel with them?

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3. Some Definitions

3.1 THE VOCATION OF THE CHURCH: MISSION

We are involved in mission because Jesus was. He was sent and so are we. Jesus is Lord of all creation, the earth belongs to him.

‘He is the landlord, and we are his tenants. The earth is his property, and we are stewards of it, accountable to him for what we do on and with it.

So our mission is to the ends of the earth and until the end of the world - for all time and space on this planet. All disciples, all followers of Jesus are mandated to obey this self-replicating instruction.’

Here are Your Gods, Christopher Wright (IVP 2020)

Wright outlines our mission as including:

1. Building the church through discipleship and evangelism.
2. Serving society through compassion and justice.
3. Stewarding creation through godly use of resources in ecological care and through work and vocation.

Here are Your Gods, Christopher Wright (IVP 2020)

3.2 THE ACTIVITY: EVANGELISM

The mission of the church has to keep all these elements present, but in reality evangelism feels the most challenging.

Our task as leaders is to engage in evangelism ourselves, give confidence to others to be involved and to create contexts in which it can happen through the church community.

‘To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gifts of the Spirit to all who repent and believe.

Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God.

In issuing the gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus still calls all who would follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify themselves with his new community.

The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into

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his Church and responsible service in the world.’

(1 Corinthians 15:3,4; Acts 2:32-39; John 20:21; 1 Corinthians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 4:5; 5:11,20; Luke 14:25-33; Mark 8:34; Acts 2:40,47; Mark 10:43-45)

The Lausanne Covenant, www.lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant.

ON CHAT:

- What do you appreciate about this definition?

- Is there anything you might have wanted to add to it?

BREAKOUT ROOMS: (15 MINUTES)

In three’s share your stories of when faith became real for you. Try to aim for three to four minutes each and take notes of what you each said in these categories then use the rest of the time to bring together some of the most significant themes on a single sheet.

1. What made the Christian faith compelling to you at this time?

2. Who explained what it meant to be a Christian?

3. Did you become a Christian because of a felt need at the time, or because of its internal logic, or for some other reason?

4. Looking back what seemed to be most significant at this time?

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³Based on N.T. Wright, Paul and the Faithfulness of God (London: SPCK: 2013) 518, 523-524.

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Session 2: A Culture that is LONGING for Something

4. The Social Context: A Post-Truth Society

'Post-Truth' was The Oxford English Dictionary's 'word of the year' in 2016. It refers to the tendency of society to accept that objective facts are less influential in shaping opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.'

www.theguardian.com/books/2016/nov/15/post-truth-named-word-of-the-year-by-oxford-dictionaries

Where do you see evidence of us living in a 'post-truth' society?

Discuss some of the temptations that living in a post-truth world present to those engaged in evangelism.

4.1 WHAT HAPPENS TO FAITH?

A couple of specific suggestions:

1. As the world increasingly becomes secular, we accept that faith is limited to private belief.

It is the easiest way to deal with the complexity of a world that looks askance at people of faith. People do not stop believing, they simply stop believing that it has any direct connection to their public life. A personal faith becomes a private affair. Christian disciplines are privatised and located in the domestic or leisure periods of people's lives. Evangelism withers and dies. It's a challenge for those in the public eye. Tracy Ullman's sketch highlights the issue with searing accuracy.

To read and watch another time: <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/tracey-ullmans-as-a-christian-sketches-whats-she-getting-at/105415.htm>.



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2. We limit ourselves to offering a therapeutic gospel and respond to felt needs and so 'tailor' the gospel to these sorts of issues:

You are loved unconditionally;

Your life can matter and make an impact;

You can find self-esteem;

You can become part of something exciting.

The Therapeutic Gospel, D. Powlison

<https://www.9marks.org/article/therapeutic-gospel/>

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BREAKOUT ROOMS IN THREE'S: (8 MINUTES)

- Do you recognise elements of this therapeutic gospel in your own story?
- Is it right to dismiss the benefits of salvation totally?
- What's the problem with the therapeutic gospel?

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5. And Yet ... What Bridges for the Gospel are offered in a Post-Truth Culture?

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James Smith reflecting on Charles Taylor's work, *A Secular Age*, writes:

He points out that our world is not about fundamentalist atheism vs religion, there is a much murkier middle ground, the 'haunted age', an age in which we are surrounded by the ghosts of the gods we once worshipped. But 'faith is fraught; confession is haunted by an inescapable sense of its contestability. We don't believe instead of doubting; we believe while doubting. We're all Thomas now.'

How (not) to be secular: Reading Charles Taylor, J.K.A. Smith (Eerdmans 2014)

The 'hauntedness' of the age includes a search for experiential meaning and community.

5.1 WHAT 'THE NONES' HAVE IN COMMON WITH THE RELIGIOUS

A desire for Sense

- Fulfilment.
- Connection.

To watch on another occasion: [Ted Talks: Religion After Religion: Millennials in a Post-Religious Age | Paul Robertson.](#)

To read on another occasion: [New Religions for a Godless World, Tim Challies.](#)

5.2 'SPIRITUAL HAUNTEDNESS' IN EXTREME TIMES: EXEMPLIFIED IN THE MANCHESTER VIGILS, MAY 2017

We have developed familiar liturgies. We gather together, we light candles, we sing, we say 'terrorism won't win', we declare our hopes that evil will not have the last word, we offer prayers to who-ever.

Our response can be: all you hope for is true and real and contains a deeper mystery. There is a light that shines in the darkness and the darkness will never overcome him.



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5.3 SPIRITUAL HAUNTEDNESS IN POP CULTURE: SONIC CATHEDRALS

The Style:

The significance of 'Big Music': grand, sweeping, serious.

'So even though soul isn't something you readily associate with Coldplay, I think this is the direction they're pushing in: they're just more querulous, more abstract, even less sexual. They're not evangelicals – they're meeker and more doubting – but you don't need to name the higher power behind the Big Music for the emotional effect to be felt. And so it's no surprise that there's been a resurgence in this strain of epic pop recently, as a possible reaction to a constant background noise about music's loss of value, its reduction to commodity status. Borrowing the tactics and longings of religion is a great way to telegraph meaning – even if it makes for hollow art.

When I see religious art, I tend to admire it but not connect with it on any gut emotional level. As an atheist, I see a stained-glass apocalypse, and I can coolly reconstruct the awe, excitement, and fear that might have bubbled up in the medieval mind. But I can't feel it. And the same – for all its beauty – goes for gospel. But the Big Music – deploying the emotion of religion within an aesthetic I do relate to – can sometimes push buttons I don't necessarily want pushed. At its frequent worst, it triggers the same disgusted flight-impulse a TV preacher might. At its rare best, though, it makes me want to believe.'

[Sonic Cathedrals: How epic rock has turned into secular gospel, and what that says about us, Tom Ewing, \(October 28, 2011\)](#)

To watch on another occasion: [Coldplay - Fix You \(Glastonbury Festival 2016\)](#)



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Session 2: A Culture that is LONGING for Something

IN BREAKOUT ROOMS: (12 MINUTES)

- Have you seen examples of this longing for spiritually in your context?
- Did your conversations with 'your' two people reflect any of this?
- How does being reminded of living in a spiritually haunted age encourage evangelism?
- What is the role of the church community in this?
- What can evangelism look like in a spiritually haunted age?

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Session 3: Evangelism in Covid-Days

Mission from Below

1 PETER 2:13-3:22

For Peter, mission is the action of a 'royal priesthood'. The question he answers is how this is to be practised. Peter proposes a policy of submission as a subversive mode of mission.

2:13-2:15 Submission to 'every human authority' so that 'by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of the foolish.'

2:18-2:20 Submission of slaves to masters. There are times when their masters act unjustly. The responses of the slaves are not to be determined by the actions of masters. When slaves are mistreated, Peter argues that it is 'commendable before God' (v20) because they will find themselves in the same position as their saviour.

3:1-6 Wives are enjoined to submission to their non-believing husbands so that the religion of the household can be changed.

3:7 Husbands are (unexpectedly) encouraged to act 'in the same way'... The passage begins with Peter directing his readers to a posture of submission, and after weaving the story and teaching of Jesus' sufferings into the context of his readers' situations, leads them to the Christological climax of resurrection and ascension, 'with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.' (v22)

IN BREAKOUT ROOMS: (20 MINUTES)

- What have your experiences of evangelism been this year through the lockdown?
- What has been encouraging?
- What has been discouraging?
- What have you learnt?
- What new possibilities have come to light?
- What encouragement can we take from our stories for the times we have felt discouraged?

Each group appoint someone to give a 120 second feedback outlining the most significant reflections to the whole group.

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