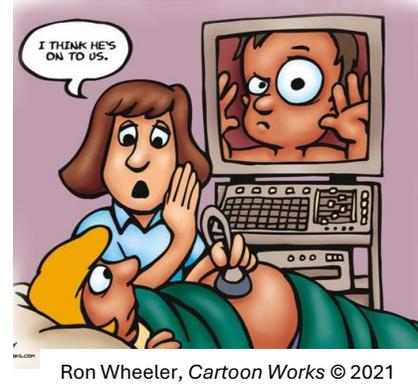


EVANGELISTIC METHODS

Lesson 4

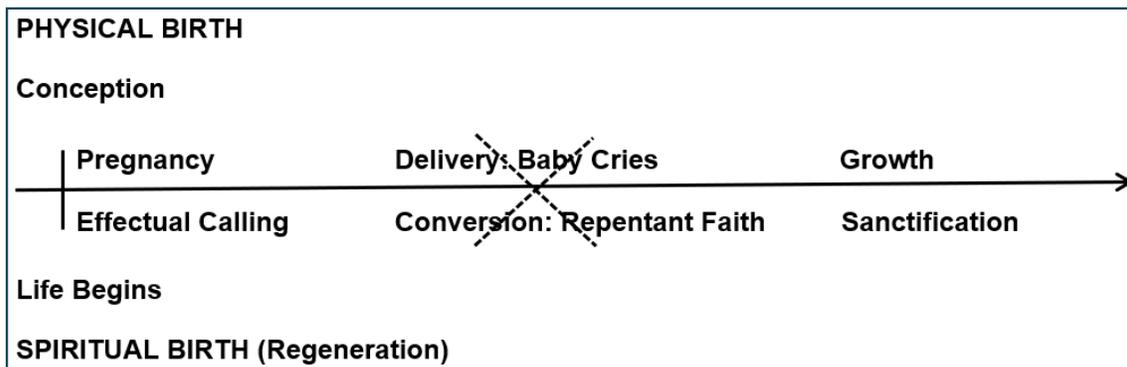
Our Spiritual Birthline and the Gospel

- When it comes to evangelism and apologetics, Christians can tend to forget all the work God did in effectually calling them to himself prior to the day they believed and confessed that Christ is Lord and Savior. We cannot dismiss our personal histories.
- Some Christians are tempted to run from their pre-converted pasts, as if the shame is too great. But a proper understanding of the gospel means you do not dwell on the past, but you are able to speak of your past in light of God’s mercy which has made you a new creation. We can speak of our sinful pasts if it serves the advancement of the gospel, the good of our neighbor, and God’s glory. Let us consider how to better think about our pasts in light of our spiritual births.



Two Birthlines

- “There is a common practical error in the minds of many Christians in regard to this matter. They seem to think that nothing has any relation to the conversion of the sinner, but that which immediately preceded this event; and the Christian is ready to say, I was awakened under such a sermon, and never had rest until I found it in Christ; making nothing of all previous instructions and impressions.”¹
- *The Effectual Call*: While our day of conversion was and is necessary, God *had also been* at work breaking into our lives and signaling to us the need for Christ. We know that for those who are elect, salvation will happen.



Smallman writes:

The key is to remember that the time when we cry out, in prayer or confession (conversion), is a result of what God has been doing through the effectual call. People often think of their conversion as the beginning of their spiritual lives. But the birthline diagram is a reminder that new birth is really a process, with conversion as a response to the call of God.²

¹ Archibald Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 2-3.

² Smallman, Steve. *The Walk* (Philipsburg: Crossway, 2009), 93.

- Regeneration is mysterious. You must have John 3:16 and John 3:8. Jesus said to Nicodemus, “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).
- The work of the Spirit inevitably compels us toward our crisis moment of conversion (repentant faith). How can anyone, except God, understand God’s working in and around the sinner’s soul?
- This is the mysterious work of effectual calling, but when we come to genuine faith (repentant faith), we begin to look back and see our past with different lenses. We begin to see God’s purposes retrospectively working throughout our entire lives.
- “The implantation of spiritual life in a soul dead in sin is an event the consequences of which will never end. When you plant an acorn, and it grows, you do not expect to see maturity; much less the ends of the majestic oak, which will expand its boughs and strike deeply into the earth its roots.”³
- We don’t get to see that seemingly mysterious growth underground. We entrust that work to God. Kuyper wrote, “This divine act is wrought in a man at different ages; when no one can tell. We know from the instance of John the Baptist, that it can be wrought even in the mother’s womb.”⁴
- Jesus and the Apostles understood this work of God. They engaged with people in the here and now, in the midst of their current situations, not knowing their pasts but knowing that they had a past that very much mattered to God. He had been at work from the day of their birth, from the mysterious moment of the first implantation of the acorn of the gospel, to the day of their confession that Jesus is Lord and Christ, and even to the day those acorns grew to be full grown oaks of righteousness.

Writing Your Spiritual Birthline: An Example

- It is of value to do an exercise in keeping with this teaching. As if you would speak about our own spiritual birthline, reflect on the first years of your life, and so on in segments. I do not want you to simply explain facts about your past. For instance, consider the basic facts of my life here:

Example A: Up to 20 Years

- Born Framingham, MA 1981
- Second to last of 7 children (2 half-siblings)
- Grew up in an independent Baptist church plant
- Attended small town public school
- Attended college in Pennsylvania
- A better reflection is how living in Massachusetts impressed upon me truths about God (moral culpability), the truth of my need for the gospel.
- How did those experiences interface with the word of God? What we want to look for in our past are those lessons and signals that God impressed upon us in different ways. We need to realize that *all of those events, influences, jobs, and people* are meaningful because providentially God put them there. They are, in part, God-designed for our good.

Example B: Up to 20 Years

- My father grew up attending a church, hearing the gospel but not convinced of it. He married at 18. His first wife, an alcoholic, deserted him to raise their two kids on his own (2 and 3 yrs. of age, my

³ Ibid., 22.

⁴ Kuyper, Abraham. *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941) 295.

half-brother and half-sister). He professed Christ after her desertion. I saw the challenge as my two half-siblings wrestled with childhood abandonment throughout their teenage years, trying to accept a mother-in-law, frustrated with our father's failures and weaknesses, who himself struggled with excessive alcohol consumption.

- My family grew up members of an independent Baptist church while we attended public school. I learned firsthand what it meant to be an outsider as a Christian when I was, at times, openly mocked for my faith. How I was taught in church and how school friends lived were often in conflict with what I read and was taught in the Scriptures. I also became like the company I kept in my later high school years, given over to licentious behavior. I stumbled into college yet God graciously, and slowly exposed many of my rebellious, hypocritical dispositions.
- In college I met three Christians, Jonny Na, Dae Yoon, and John Bombaro, who all challenged some of my core assumptions about the Scriptures...

Your Life's Spiritual Story

Before you were born...

Up to 20 Years...

Up to 40 Years...

Up to 60 Years...

Up to 80+ Years...

Methods of Evangelism

Tim Challies writes:

It is not difficult for a Christian to know if he has, indeed, evangelized. He has done so if he has proclaimed the message of sin, death, Savior and forgiveness. If he has done this he has evangelized successfully. He cannot and must not evaluate his efforts in the light of who responds to the message. [We can liken] the evangelist to the mailman. The mailman has fulfilled the obligation of his job when he has delivered the mail to me. The measure of success in his job is to carefully and accurately deliver the message. How I respond to the letters I receive is none of his concern. And the same is true of the evangelist. He faithfully delivers the message and leaves the results to God.⁵

Preaching

- The most supported method of evangelism is the work of the preacher, who as an evangelist, persuades the congregation of the necessity of the gospel. Al Mohler, writing about preaching in corporate worship, says this:

True worship always proclaims the gospel, the good news of what God has done in Jesus Christ. It proclaims the work of Christ, and it centers in the cross. With the apostle Paul we say, "In the cross of Christ we glory." We proclaim liberty to the captive, and grace and pardon to all who believe in his name.⁶

- We need a resurgence that sees the invitation to church as an excellent way to evangelize.
- "Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "**Come and see**" (Jn 1:45-46).
- If converted Jews can invite unbelieving Jews to hear Jesus' gospel, converted Gentiles can invite unbelieving Gentiles to hear Jesus' gospel.

Tract Evangelism

- This method personally gives an up-to-date track (pamphlet) that explains the gospel. The most notable is *The Four Spiritual Laws* (designed by Bill Bright, 1956, Campus Crusade for Christ [Cru])
 1. God loves you and created you to know him personally (Jn 3:16; Jn 17:3)
 2. Man is sinful and separated from God, so we cannot know him personally or experience his love (use a diagram to explain)
 3. Jesus Christ is God's only provision for man's sin. Through him alone can we know God personally and experience God's love
 4. We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know God personally and experience God's love (Jn 1:12)
 - We receive Christ through faith (Eph 2:8-9)

⁵ Challies, Tim. "Calvinism and Evangelism" September 8, 2008. www.challies.com. Accessed March 19, 2025.

⁶ Mohler, Al. *He is Not Silent* (Moody: Chicago, 2008) 35.

- We receive Christ by personal invitation [explain The Self-Directed Life v. The Christ-Directed Life] and experience the new birth (Jn 3:1-8; Rev 3:20)
- Pray the sinner's prayer
- Talk about growth (holiness)
- Talk about attending a bible-believing church

Lifestyle Evangelism

1. Live faithfully and people will see the gospel in one's life (false gospel)
2. Live faithfully and people will ask about God (false premise; low view of sin since man does not seek God)
3. Live right and God may use it as a signal to the watching world.
 - Glorify God in your mortal bodies and the world will see your good works. God may use it as an inquiry about your life. (e.g. story of Glenn Coughenour)

Service "Servanthood" Evangelism

- Popularized by Steve Sjogren's *Conspiracy of Kindness* (2010, Vineyard) and Alvin Reid's manual, *Servanthood Evangelism* (1999, Southern Baptist), this approach uses simple acts of kindness, or service, for evangelism.
 1. Doing the service *is* the gospel event itself (false gospel)
 2. The service leads to opportunities to share the gospel (good)

Event Evangelism

- This method establishes an event where the gospel is offered at some point (e.g. Billy Graham crusades, Christianity Explored, Alpha, speaker-dinners, concert, drama, festival)

Confrontational Evangelism

- Often an intentional interaction with a stranger in public (street evangelism). Usually, tracts are handed out.
- The most notable training: *Evangelism Explosion*, D. James Kennedy in 1962 developed this method of confrontation with dialogue wherein there are two "diagnostic questions" to determine an unbeliever's spiritual health as a platform for an evangelistic conversation:
 1. Have you come to the place in your spiritual life where you can say you know for certain that if you were to die today you would go to heaven?
 2. Suppose that you were to die today and stand before God and he were to say to you, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" what would you say? (One then explains the gospel in terms of grace, man, God, Christ, and faith.)

Friendship Evangelism

- This method seeks to befriend an individual, often through the interests they possess. You gain their trust so that they open the door for you to share the gospel.

Felt-Need or Needs-Based Evangelism

- This method focuses on understanding the felt need in the unbeliever's life which is ultimately superficial or self-serving. You utilize this "need" as leverage to share the gospel that addresses that need. This can be done either on an individual basis or a community basis.
- The caution/error is when the felt need eclipses the gospel. God doesn't always remove our sufferings or weaknesses after coming to faith in him. The gospel is to be priority.

Have Children

- This is a natural method for those who are married. Have children. Adopt children. And raise them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.



Analysis of Methods

- We ought to test any method to measure its submissiveness to Scripture.
- Where the method fails to be in line with Scripture, we need to be honest and seek reform.
 1. Avoid bait-and-switch tactics. Christians are to be forthright people. Evangelism is open and honest in the how. If we invite someone to an event with a niche speaker (a tech guru) who will make an invitation to the gospel, then tell your friend just that. No hoodwinking!
 2. Avoid glaring contradictions that distort the depravity of man's sin, the urgency of repentance and faith, and salvation in Christ *alone*.
 3. Avoid the pragmatic approach which says, "It's faithful because it works." For instance, the individual or church exalts their method based upon some greater number of "conversions" or "baptisms." At worst, they may be culpable of creating false converts. Or they have forgotten that God is the Savior, not the method.
 4. Avoid vilifying those who practice different methods, especially if it's faithful and not your preference. The one who criticizes others for their evangelistic methods, and yet doesn't evangelize at all, may very well be liable for the greater sin.
- As long as they don't corrupt the gospel, what's the big deal with how they do it? Paul writes that we are to "no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, *by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.*"
- Evangelistic methods can fall prey to human cunning and deceitfulness.
- Where the method is not very much in line with Scripture, let us give thanks for the gospel going out, give a humble critique, but remain humble enough to not throw out the baby with the bathwater.
- Remember Paul, who openly criticized the preachers who mocked his methods which led to his imprisonment, still says:

"Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, *whether in pretense or in truth*, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice..."(Phil. 1:15-18, *emphasis mine*).