

Messy Evangelism Framework

New Creation Compromise

The Church is to authentically attest to the reality of the new creation that Christ inaugurated as its first fruit, yet it frequently adopts natural thinking and emulates the world. One such area of compromise is evangelism and how the gospel is framed and presented.

An Ignored Truth

Not only are many current evangelistic practices unbiblical, but they also sadly mischaracterize the Christian life and faith as being *transactional*. That is, the relationship between God and humans is understood in terms of a transaction between two beings in which each has his responsibility and each obtains appropriate benefit from the interaction. God obtains human creatures who “glorify” Him by obeying Him and meeting His standard for them (i.e., His “law”). These humans, in turn, obtain “eternal life” and the heavenly blessings that attend it.

Scripture itself admonishes believers to guard against the notion that true faith can be divorced from active and aligned expression (James 2:14-26). In this passage, several hyperbolic illustrations are put forth to show the absurdity and worthlessness of faith devoid of works. Rightly understanding and living out this truth, though, was a struggle for James’ original audience, and this struggle has continued ever since. (Hence, Luther believes that James’ letter is an “epistle of straw” that promotes righteousness through good works and doesn’t belong in the New Testament canon.)

And though modern evangelicalism isn’t guilty of “works righteousness,” it has worked very hard in its efforts to “reach the lost.” Many Christians and Christian ministries labor distributing tracts, serving the poor and homeless in shelters and soup kitchens, or traveling to third-world countries to minister to the people by building schools, water systems, hospitals, etc. Much work is done in the name of Christ, but often without much spiritual fruit and with the workers left frustrated and disillusioned. In the end, sincerity, diligence and perseverance aren’t enough; the gospel of Jesus the Messiah - rightly understood, proclaimed and lived out - is God’s power unto salvation. *Evangelism is simply bearing witness to the “good news” of God’s triumph in Jesus and the new creation He has inaugurated. And if the gospel heralds God’s new creation in Christ, it isn’t a “salvation formula” that can be recorded on a tract; it must be manifested in living witness.* The Christian community is the present form and extent of God’s new creation, so that Christians proclaim the gospel as those who embody it, and not just personally, but as members of Christ’s body in which He has His fullness. The Church is the evidence of the “good news” it holds out to the world.

Messy Evangelism - Making it Plain

Evangelism, then, isn’t a matter of communicating information and trying to convince a person to accept it as true. Evangelism is confronting people with the living God who is known in the person and work of Jesus, and in those who share in Jesus’ life. It is about Person-to-person (divine to human) encounter facilitated by the Spirit. But all human beings are inherently estranged from God, which makes genuine evangelism “messy.” As this word is used elsewhere in various settings, let us define its meaning in this specific context in relation to evangelism:

- Messy evangelism emphasizes *relational intimacy* - I in you, you in me, seeking to establish an organic, ongoing relationship where *authentic* and *mutual* life-sharing can occur.
- Messy evangelism holds the view that the believer *is* missional (being) by redemption and new nature rather than *does* mission (transactional) as a dedicated task/chore for an allotted time (e.g. mission trip)
- Messy evangelism does not compartmentalize discipleship and evangelism, delineating them as separate assignments and responsibilities. Rather, as Scripture supports, the Spirit, who began an effectual, renewing work in the believer (Philippians 1:6), continues to bring him to maturity through the Body, which is self-edifying through love (Ephesians 4:15-16).

Seeing the Big Picture

Zooming out and examining evangelism through the lens of redemptive history, we quickly see the root issue for the various views and approaches to evangelism that misalign with Scripture’s own perspective. In many cases, Christians are simply unfamiliar with much of the biblical text, and so really don’t know how to put the pieces together. Even more, many churches and Christians foster the idea that the Bible is fundamentally concerned with the matter of “getting saved” in preparation for “going to heaven,” so that this becomes the lens through which its various texts are read. Following this natural line of thought, the goalpost in our evangelism becomes a massive “soul-winning” campaign operated as economically and efficiently as possible, treating the Body as a bottom line.

However, when the Scripture is allowed to speak on its own terms, it is immediately apparent that it is telling a story that begins with the creation of the world, moves through the history of the Israelite people, reaches its climax with the person and work of Jesus, the Israelite, and culminates with the renewal of all creation. As the True Israelite, Jesus' own life and ministry testified to the patience, long-suffering, and "messy" life-sharing that were not only distinctive hallmarks of a new, emerging community of believers abiding in Him, but also vital to its organic growth and continuance in a hostile world. Further, Paul grasped and lived out the importance of transparency and intimacy in his own purposeful shaping of a young Timothy (2 Timothy 3:10-15), deeply understanding that true evangelism is a *committed* and *expected* investment of time, energy, and resource, seeking only kingdom dividends.

Countering Compromise

Once we acquire the proper evangelistic "glasses," we realize that many perceived engagement barriers or excuses have no Scriptural basis. The list below provides four of the most common perceived barriers and counter perspectives rooted in redemptive-historical principles to be internalized by the redemptive historian.

Barrier	Response
Time ▾ I know I only have 30 seconds with this person, who I more than likely will never see again. So I either opt for no engagement or seek to generate a rapid, genuine conversion.	The story the Bible tells is a historical account of human history - not as a series of random and disjointed circumstances and events, but as it is the outworking of God's eternal design for His creation that has mankind at the center. The history recounted in the Bible is the history of redemption – the history of God's work in redeeming, restoring, and perfecting His creation unto the goal for which He created it. Further, to restore authentic humanity and relational intimacy, extensive life-sharing (I in you, you in me) must occur, an organic, unique process without time constraints.
Ignorance ▾ I'm not a pastor, a "gospel expert." I don't feel equipped, or secure enough to articulate the truths of the gospel in a simple, approachable, and digestible fashion.	The creation account makes it clear: God's intended function for all His image-bearers was for them to be priest-kings. As part of their priestly service, they are to mediate and reflect the Lord's presence over all creation. That charge and great responsibility ultimately find their fulfillment in Christ's church (1 Peter 2:9), "people of God" that Peter assertively proclaims are equipped to "declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."
Fear ▾ I have a certain reputation that I want to uphold. I'm scared that I'll be wrongly perceived as a zealot, extremist, or bigot. I'm paralyzed by the thought of being disliked, marginalized, mocked, or perhaps even disowned by those I'm closest to.	Sadly, the "gospel" that many believers present with their lives and lips is incongruent with the authentic humanity and true "life" bound up in Christ. As Christians come to rightly see and understand Scripture as a rich story of redemptive history, it naturally reorients their methodology and message. No longer is the Bible promoted as a recipe book for our best life or a collection of feel-good bedtime fables. No longer is the emphasis on "getting saved" and making preparations for "going to heaven." Rather, the believer is wholly consumed with conveying through love the cosmic scope of God's wondrous redemption for the entire created order, leaving no room for worry or angst.
Indifference ▾	A lack of compassion or concern for those outside the faith is a foreign concept to Scripture. The assumptions

I know I am saved and going to heaven. I trust completely in the Lord. People are hateful, stubborn, and dismissive it seems now more than ever. They don't appear to have an appetite for the things of God, so why bother them?	noted at left also enable us to continue to live isolated lives as believers, a lie against the one-Spirit union that we now cherish as members of Christ's Body. We, who once possessed no hope or life, have graciously been adopted as "sons in the Son" into an eternal family, one not based on distinction, privilege, heritage, or any other natural standard. Thus, we are spurred on to actively engage the world in this present evil age, calling all people to authentic life.
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Scenarios and Scripts

Although countless scenarios arise that present an opportunity to engage both believers and non-believers in faith conversations, the majority of them, due to the lack of redemptive-historical perspective, devolve into transactional encounters. The table below provides common (not exhaustive) encounter durations and strategic scripts/frameworks that can facilitate an exchange that pushes an individual toward a genuine interaction with or deeper understanding of the God of Scripture and His story.

Encounter Duration	Script
Short (< 2 min engagement)	<p>Hi/Hey/What's up, my name is _____. I run into a lot of folks who have heard and either embraced or rejected an incomplete or outright false idea of who God is and the real story that the Bible tells.</p> <p>I'm not sure what your own experience is here, but I wanted to know if you would be open to going on a bit of a journey with me over the next several weeks to learn who God truly is and how the grand story that the Bible tells all fits together?</p> <p>[Not interested - thank them for their time] [Yes - Present connection card]</p> <p>Great! There is a weekly podcast on YouTube called The Road from Emmaus. I'd like you to use this web address or the QR code (point to info on card) to check out the show, starting with the first episode. Each one is only about 30-40 minutes long. I ask that you commit to listening to the first 4 episodes with me. After each episode, I'd like you to e-mail me ONE question you have here (point to e-mail) so we can keep an open dialogue about these things the next month and see where it goes. Sounds good?.</p> <p><i>We strongly discourage initially providing personal cell phone numbers, home addresses, or meeting in-person until you feel you've gained sufficient background context on the individual. However, we leave the ultimate decision to your discretion.</i></p>
Moderate (5-10 min engagement)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the short script and organically integrate it into the conversation at a strategic point • If possible, use any insights gleaned from the brief engagement with the person to tailor the

	<p>short script to resonate further</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As face time in this instance is a bit longer, commit to providing additional context that the person may require about this unique evangelistic approach or the purpose of the podcast
Extended (>20 min engagement, i.e. getting coffee)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the short script and organically integrate it into the conversation at a strategic point • As face time in this instance is considerably longer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Probe to gain insights into pain points and tensions that color the person's perception of God and the Bible in general. ◦ Use all these insights gleaned from the extended engagement with the person to tailor the elevator framework to resonate further ◦ Commit to providing additional context that the person may require about this unique evangelistic approach or the purpose of the podcast

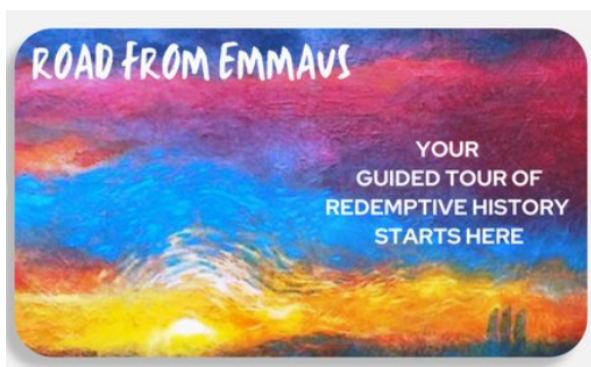
Engagement Resources

Please take the following steps to secure copies of the connection card noted in the Scenarios and Scripts session:

- 1) Download both parts of the conversation card in a format that best supports modifications on your end:
 - PNG format - [front](#) and [back](#) } | JPG format - [front](#) and [back](#) | GIF format - [front](#) and [back](#)
- 2) Go to your preferred business card vendor either onsite (Staples, etc.) or virtually (vistaprint.com, etc.)
- 3) Follow their provided guidance for uploading and modifying a **STANDARD 3.5" x 2" card, ROUNDED**
- 4) Once the name and e-mail address sections have been updated, preview the card for accuracy and final look
- 5) Select card finish, paper quality, and desired quantity to meet your given budget and evangelistic focus

See final product example below:

FRONT



BACK

