

"GUIDELINES FOR EVANGELISM"

(Acts 28:17-31)

(Chuck Swindoll)

Those earliest apostles, prophets, and evangelists like Peter, Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and Timothy were true pioneers. Called by God, equipped by the Spirit, and motivated by the gospel of Jesus Christ, they set out to do what no one had attempted before. They left the comforts of the familiar to carry the gospel to unfamiliar people in foreign lands with alien cultures—from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and even to the ends of the earth (1:8). Not knowing what to expect or how to prepare, they muddled their way through the first missionary journeys. In the end, they established a paradigm for evangelism and missions many follow today.

From their example of evangelism and missions throughout the book of Acts, I want to conclude this study with three guidelines for disciple-making ministries.

Guideline 1: *Start with the people most familiar to you.* When entering a new area, the apostles usually approached their fellow Jews in the synagogues first. This was not simply for theological reasons—"to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16; cf. Acts 3:26; 13:46)—but for practical reasons as well. Their kindred bond in Abraham established an immediate trust. Their shared Hebrew culture made communication easier. Their shared worldview gave them fewer theological obstacles to overcome. Most importantly, converts from this familiar group could facilitate communication with the less familiar groups in their community and help Paul and Barnabas establish trust more effectively.

Today, all of us have circles of family, friends, colleagues, or neighbors who are like us in many ways. We share similar language, culture, values, and even daily routines. When it comes to evangelism and missions—carrying out the great commission—we may not be able to cross the world, but all of us can cross the street. Start in your own "Jerusalem and Judea." Share the love of Christ and the message of the gospel with those you know and those who know you.

Guideline 2: *Learn everything you can about the people you intend to reach.* When the apostles had been cast out of the synagogues, or if they entered a place where there was no Jewish population, they tried to communicate with the Gentile population as best they could. In doing so, they drew on knowledge learned through open interaction with people they would normally not understand, overcoming prejudices and setting aside cultural obstacles.

Paul's sermon on Mars Hill during his second missionary journey shows how he could use this knowledge of many cultures, religions, and values to his advantage (17:22-34). He got to know his audience to better understand their worldview. He began his address by establishing rapport, commending them for their interest in spiritual matters, and affirming points of agreement. He then drove his message straight for the gospel. Many still rejected his preaching, but not because he was unprepared or unclear.

When we step out beyond our own "Jerusalem and Judea," we enter uncomfortable territory. But it need not be insurmountable or unreachable. Like Peter and Paul, we too can learn how to minister cross-culturally. To do so, we need



to learn how others think, what they think, and why. We need to find points of contact, connections that give us a platform to share our story and to introduce them to the great story—the saving work of Jesus Christ. Only when we learn to listen well will we be able to speak well.

Guideline 3: *Go as far as God will lead you.* It's often said that "where the Lord guides, He provides." It may sound cliché, but it's true. We've seen God's guidance and provision in the ministries of Peter and Paul, Barnabas and Silvanus—from Jerusalem and Judea, throughout Samaria, even to Rome and beyond. This divine provision didn't always come as material support in the form of cash or supplies. In fact, Paul always provided opportunities, opening doors for evangelism before crowds and kings. He steered the missionaries into places they would never have gone on their own. And He provided them with the right ministry partners at the right times in the right places.

As we seek to serve the Lord beyond our own Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and even in the remotest parts of the earth, we should step out in faith as God leads, trusting that He will never lead us astray and knowing that, like those earliest missionaries in the book of Acts, where He guides, He also provides. Whether you're the one going or the one sending, never lose sight of God's own vision for reaching those at the ends of the earth.